RETHINKING
METHODS IN
PSYCHOLOGY

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

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Concluding word

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

PART I
THE SEARCH FOR MEANINGS

2 Semi-Structured Interviewing and Qualitative Analysis

Jonathan A. Smith

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

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

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

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

This chapter is written from this middle position. It is assumed that what a respondent says in the interview has some ongoing significance for him or her and that there is some, though not a transparent, relationship between what the person says and beliefs or psychological constructs that he or she can be said to hold. This approach can be described as adopting a phenomenological perspective (see Giorgi, 1992). At the same time it is recognized that meanings are negotiated within a social context and that therefore this form of interviewing is also drawing on, or can be seen from, a symbolic interactionist position (see Denzin, 1995).

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

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

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

How are semi-structured interviews different from structured interviews?

The structured interview

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

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

Sometimes the investigator will provide the respondent with a set of possible answers to choose from. Sometimes the respondent is allowed a free response which can then be categorized. Thus, in many ways, the structured interview is like the questionnaire; and indeed the two overlap to the extent that often the interview simply consists of the investigator going through a questionnaire in the presence of a respondent, the interviewer filling in the answers on the questionnaire sheet based on what the respondent says.

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

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

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

Semi-structured interviews

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

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

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

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

Constructing the semi-structured interview schedule

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

Stages in producing the schedule

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

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

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

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

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

Constructing questions

A few pointers to constructing questions:

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

   **Bad**: Do you agree that the prime minister is doing a bad job?
   **Better**: What do you think of the prime minister's record in office so far?

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


### Table 2.1 Interview schedule: patient's experience of renal dialysis

**A** Dialysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can you tell me the brief history of your kidney problem from when it started to you beginning dialysis?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could you describe what happens in dialysis, in your own words?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What do you do when you are having dialysis?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you think about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How do you feel about having dialysis?</td>
<td>prompt: some people – relief from previous illness, a bind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If you have to describe what the dialysis machine means to you, what would you say?</td>
<td>prompt: what words come to mind? what images? do you have a nickname for it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B** Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. How would you describe yourself as a person?</td>
<td>prompt: what sort of person are you? most important characteristics: happy, moody, nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Has having kidney disease and starting dialysis made a difference to how you see yourself?</td>
<td>prompt: if so, how do you see yourself now as different to before you started dialysis? how would you say you have changed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. What about compared to before you had kidney disease?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What about the way other people see you: members of your family?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What about the way other people see you: friends?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What about the way other people see you: other people?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What about the way other people see you: public?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What about the way other people see you: private?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What about the way other people see you: personal?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C** Coping

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

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

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

A strategy often employed in this type of interviewing is to try to encourage the person to speak about the topic with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible. This point can be seen as a development of the requirement to ask neutral rather than leading questions. One might say that you are attempting to get as close as possible to what your respondent thinks about the topic, without being led too much by your questions. Good interview technique therefore often involves a gentle nudge from the interviewer rather than being too explicit. This aspect of the methodology runs counter to most of the training received for more orthodox psychology methodologies.

Thus you may well find that in the course of constructing your schedule your first draft questions are too explicit. With redrafting these become gentler and less loaded but sufficient to let the respondent know what the area of interest is and recognize that he or she has something to say about it. It may be useful to try out possible questions with a colleague and get his or her feedback on level of difficulty and tone.

Sometimes this redrafted question will be insufficient to elicit a satisfactory response in the interview. This may be for various reasons – the issue is a complex one or the question is too general or vague for this particular participant. To prepare for this you can construct prompts which are framed more explicitly. Indeed some of your first draft questions may be able to act as these prompts. You do not have to prepare prompts for every question, only those where you think there may be some difficulty. So, for example, after question 4 in the dialysis schedule there is a prompt to remind the interviewer to ask about each of these domains. After question 8 a prompt is provided in case the respondent has difficulty with the main question itself.

Thus the interviewer starts with the most general possible question and hopes that this will be sufficient to enable the respondent to talk about the subject. If the respondent has difficulty, says he or she doesn’t understand, gives a short or tangential reply, then the interviewer can move to the prompt which is more specific. Hopefully this will be enough to get the participant talking. The more specific-level questions are there to deal with more difficult cases where the respondent is more hesitant. It is likely that a successful interview will include questions and answers at both general and more specific levels and will move between the two fairly seamlessly. If an interview is taken up with material entirely derived from very specific follow-up questions you may need to ask yourself how engaged the respondent is. Are you really entering the personal/social life world of the participant or are you forcing him or her, perhaps reluctantly, to enter yours?

**Funnelling** is a related technique. For certain issues it may well be that you are interested in eliciting not only the respondent’s general views but also his or her response to more specific concerns. Constructing this part of the schedule as a funnel allows you to do this. Thus in Table 2.2 the first question is attempting to elicit the respondent’s general view on government policy. Having established that, the interviewer then probes for more specific issues. The general point is that by asking questions in this sequence you have allowed the respondent to give his or her own views before funnelling him/her into more specific questions of particular
concern to you. Asked in the reverse sequence, the interview is more likely to produce data biased in the direction of the investigator’s prior and specific concerns. Of course when answering the first question the respondent may also address the targeted issue and so make it redundant for you to ask the more specific questions subsequently.

Having constructed your schedule, you should try to learn it by heart before beginning to interview so that when it comes to the interview the schedule can act merely as a prompt, if you need it, not a crutch to which you have to constantly refer. (For more on constructing schedules, see Berg, 1989; for more on funnelling, see Guba and Lincoln, 1981.)

**Conducting the interview**

Semi-structured interviews generally last for a considerable amount of time (usually an hour or more) and can become intense and involved, depending on the particular topic. It is therefore sensible to try to make sure that the interview can proceed without interruption as far as possible, and usually it is better to conduct the interview with the respondent on his or her own. At the same time, one can think of exceptions where this would neither be practical nor sensible. Where the interview takes place can also make a difference. People usually feel most comfortable in a setting they are familiar with, for example in their own home, but again there may be times where this is not practicable.

**The course of the interview**

It is sensible to concentrate at the beginning of the interview on putting the respondent at ease, to enable him or her to feel comfortable talking to you before any of the substantive areas of the schedule are introduced. Hopefully then, this positive and responsive ‘set’ will continue through the interview.

The interviewer’s role in a semi-structured interview is to facilitate and guide, rather than dictate exactly what will happen during the encounter. If the interviewer has learnt the schedule in advance, then he or she can concentrate during the interview on what the respondent is saying, and occasionally monitor the coverage of the scheduled topics. Thus the interviewer uses the schedule to indicate the general area of interest and to provide cues when the participant has difficulties, but the respondent should be allowed a strong role in determining how the interview proceeds.

The interview does not have to follow the sequence on the schedule, nor does every question have to be asked, or asked in exactly the same way of each respondent. Thus the interviewer may decide that it would be appropriate to ask a question earlier than it appears on the schedule because it follows from what the respondent has just said. Similarly how a question is phrased, and how explicit it is, will now partly depend on how the interviewer feels the participant is responding.

The interview may well move away from the questions on the schedule and the interviewer must decide how much movement is acceptable. It is quite possible that the interview may enter an area that had not been predicted by the investigator but which is extremely pertinent to, and enlightening of, the project’s overall question. Indeed these novel avenues are often the most valuable, precisely because they have come unprompted from the respondent and, therefore, are likely to be of especial importance for him or her. On the other hand, of course, the interviewer needs to make sure that the conversation does not move too far away from the agreed domain.

A few tips:

1. Try not to rush in too quickly. Give the respondent time to finish a question before moving on. Often the most interesting questions need some time to respond to and richer, fuller answers may be missed if the interviewer jumps in too quickly.

2. If the respondent is entering an interesting area, minimal probes are often all that is required to help him or her to continue, for example: ‘Can you tell me more about that?’ Or more specific probes may be appropriate in certain circumstances, for example, to tap affect: ‘How did that make you feel?’ or to focus on awareness: ‘What do you think about that?’

3. Ask one question at a time. Multiple questions can be difficult for the respondent to unpick and even more difficult for you subsequently, when you are trying to work out from a transcript which question the respondent is replying to.

4.Monitor the effect of the interview on the respondent. It may be that the respondent feels uncomfortable with a particular line of questioning and this may be expressed in his or her non-verbal behaviour or in how he or she replies. You need to be ready to respond to this by, for example, backing off and trying again more gently, or deciding it would be inappropriate to pursue this area with this respondent. As an interviewer you have certain ethical responsibilities towards your respondent. (For more on interviewing, see Burgess, 1984 and Taylor and Bogdan, 1984. For discussion of some of the ethical issues involved in interviewing, see Batchelor and Briggs, 1994.)
Tape-recording

It is necessary to decide whether to tape-record the interview or not. Generally I would recommend taping because of what is lost if you do not have this audio record. Obviously a tape-recording allows a much fuller record than notes taken during the interview. It also means that the interviewer can concentrate on how the interview is proceeding and where to go next rather than laboriously writing down what the respondent is saying.

Tape-recording does have its disadvantages. The respondent may not feel happy being taped and may even not agree to the interview if it is recorded. Transcription of tapes takes a very long time, depending on the clarity of the recording and the level of the transcription.

It is important not to reify the tape-recording. While the record it produces is fuller, it is not a complete, 'objective' record. Non-verbal behaviour is excluded and the recording still requires a process of interpretation from the transcriber or any other listener. However, personally, I think the benefits of tape-recording so outweigh the disadvantages that I would never consider doing this sort of interviewing without taping it.

Assuming you do decide to tape and transcribe the interview, the normal convention is to transcribe the whole interview, including the interviewer's questions. Leave a wide enough margin on both sides to make your analytic comments.

Qualitative analysis

There is no one correct way to do qualitative analysis. This section aims to give some very basic suggestions to help you get started, but you will need to find a method for working with the data that suits you. I suggest you read this section in conjunction with Kathy Charmaz's chapter on grounded theory (Chapter 3), which is written from a broadly similar perspective and includes some detailed instances of qualitative analysis.

The assumption here is that the analyst is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world. This may be in the form of beliefs and constructs that are made manifest or suggested by the respondent's talk or it may be that the analyst holds that the respondent's story can itself be said to represent a piece of his or her identity (Smith, 1995b). Either way, meaning is central and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than take some measure of frequency. This involves the investigator engaging in an interpretive relationship with the transcript. While one is attempting to capture and do justice to the meanings of the respondent, to learn about his or her mental and social world, those meanings are not transparently available, they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation. This dual aspect of analysis is captured in the term 'interpretative phenomenological analysis', which I use to describe the way I work (Smith, 1991, 1994a, 1995a).

Looking for themes

Depending on the nature of the project, you may be faced with just one transcript from a single respondent or you may have conducted interviews with a number of participants. Either way, I would suggest, if you are new to qualitative analysis, that you look in detail at one transcript before moving on to the others. This follows an idiographic approach to analysis, beginning with particulars and only slowly working up to generalizations (see Smith et al., 1995a).

So let us begin with one transcript. I will move on to the case of multiple respondents subsequently. As with preparing the schedule, analysis is an iterative process. You will need to read the transcript many times and each reading is likely to throw up new insights. The following is a suggested sequence to follow when analysing, but as stated above it is only a suggested outline for the simplest form of analysis procedure. It is not intended to be prescriptive and should be adapted to the particular case. Also, this is presenting a set of procedures. These are ways of helping to make the analysis more manageable. The analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages.

1 Read the transcript a number of times, using one side of the margin to note down anything that strikes you as interesting or significant about what the respondent is saying. Some of these comments may be attempts at summarizing, some may be associations/connections that come to mind, others may be your preliminary interpretations.

2 Use the other margin to document emerging theme titles, that is, using key words to capture the essential quality of what you are finding in the text.

3 On a separate sheet, list the emerging themes and look for connections between them. Thus you may find that some of them cluster together, and that some may be regarded as master or superordinate concepts. Do some of the themes act as a magnet, seeming to draw others towards them and helping to explain these others? You may also find that during this process you come up with a new master theme that helps to pull together a number of the initial categories you had identified. As new clusterings of themes emerge, check back to the transcript to make sure the connections also work for the primary source material - what the person actually said. This form of analysis involves a close interaction between you and the text, attempting to understand what the person is saying but, as part of the process, drawing on your own interpretative resources. You are now attempting to create some order from the array of concepts and ideas you have extracted from the participant's responses.

4 Produce a master list of themes, ordered coherently. Thus the process outlined above may have identified five major themes which seem
to capture most strongly the respondent's concerns on this particular topic. Where appropriate, the master list will also identify the subthemes which go with each master theme.

5 Add an identifier of instances. Under each master theme you should indicate where in the transcript instances of it can be found. This can be done by giving key words from the particular extract plus the page number of the transcript. It may also help to code the instances in the transcript with an identifier. Level and type of coding depend on the size of the project and on your own way of working.

Some of the themes you elicit will be governed by, and follow closely, questions on your schedule, but others may well be completely new. Some of these may be because the respondent has tackled the subject in a different way from how you had anticipated. Other themes may be at a higher level, acting as pointers to the respondent's more general beliefs or style of thinking and talking. For example, the topic under discussion may be attitudes towards public transport but what emerges from the transcript is a sense of the respondent's generally left-wing political leanings and a self-deprecatory style of presentation. These emergent themes may force you to think about the focus of your project and take it in a slightly different direction. Again, remember analysis is a cyclical process - be prepared to go through the stages a number of times, dropping a master theme if a more useful one emerges.

Levels of analysis

While analysing, think about what sort of level or type of explanation is emerging. What sort of argument would you want to make about this person's responses? Possibilities might be as follows:

1. **Classification/typology.** You may find that you are able to present the range of views a participant has about a particular subject or a typology of the different explanatory styles the respondent uses.

2. **Development of theory.** You may be able to use the themes that have emerged to begin to produce your own theory about, or explanation for, the respondent's position, drawing on examples from the respondent's answers as evidence (see Charmaz, Chapter 3, this volume, on grounded theory).

3. **Complexity/ambiguity.** At a more detailed level, you may decide that the most important finding that emerges from your analysis is the complexity of a particular theme, and wish to explicate that complexity. It may be that the person's views on this topic are more detailed and complicated than envisaged. It may be that they appear contradictory or ambiguous and you may decide that is the most important aspect to capture in your write-up. (See Billig et al., 1988, for examples of this type of work.)

4. **Life history.** It may be that the participant's own life story is the most significant or interesting aspect of the data and you may therefore wish to write this up as a narrative life history (see Plummer, Chapter 4, this volume, for more on this).

In general, the level and type of explanation should emerge in tandem with the analysis, rather than be imposed on it.

**Continuing the analysis**

A single respondent's transcript may be written up as a case-study in its own right or you may move on to analyse interviews with a number of different individuals. If you do have a number of individuals' transcripts to analyse, then analysis can proceed in a number of ways.

One possibility is to use the master theme list from interview one to begin your analysis of the second interview, looking for more instances of the themes you have identified from interview one but being ready to identify new ones that arise. Or you can begin the process anew with interview two, going through the stages outlined above and producing a master list for this second interview. If this alternative route is followed, the master lists for each interview could then be read together and a consolidated list of themes for the group produced. Again the process is cyclical. If new themes emerge in subsequent interviews, they should be tested against earlier transcripts. Perhaps the new themes can enlighten, modify or become subordinate to a previously elicited one.

The system outlined above works well with, for example, up to five or six participants, where the number is small enough for one to be able to have an overall mental picture of each of the individual cases and the location of themes within them. I have presented it here because it is a fairly simple method to use organizationally and because I tend to the view that researchers new to qualitative methodology should develop skills with a small data set before attempting projects with a much larger number of respondents. Also, even when the data set is larger, the above procedure can be used on a small subset of the cases in order to generate themes which can then be searched for in the complete set.

If one is working with a larger number of respondents, then the analysis system may have to grow, because it will not be possible to retain mentally an overall sense of all the links between individuals and themes. A number of systems are possible. I will just sketch one here and then direct the reader to some useful guides which are now available.

Assuming you have produced a master list of themes from five interviews and now wish to look at a further 15 cases, you can proceed as follows:

1. Produce a code for each theme - either a key word or an abbreviation.
2. Go through each additional transcript in turn and look for the occurrence of each of the themes. Every time a theme is found, use the code to mark its location in the margin alongside the text.
3. Photocopy the coded transcripts and put the master copies to one side.
Take the first photocopied transcript and cut out each segment of text which has been coded, along with the identifying theme code. Before each cutting is made, mark it with a location indicator (for example, A2 representing interview A, page 2) so that every cutting can be traced to its original context. Repeat this for all the transcripts.

Rearrange the material by code; that is, put together all occurrences of each theme. In practice this will usually mean placing all cuttings for a particular theme in a folder. It is then easy to reconstruct all the relevant material for each theme.

Refine the categorization. Examine each theme in turn and use the raw material to define more clearly what the theme is. One should also make comparisons across themes. Perhaps new higher-order themes will emerge, linking the originally disparate material. Again this process is iterative and creative. A number of explorations of the material may end up producing an entirely new, but more integrated and higher-order, set of themes.

Produce an index of themes, summarizing in which cases the theme can be found and how to locate instances of it.

The final set of theme files, along with the index, is then an equivalent to the master list of themes discussed earlier. Hopefully it has organized the relevant raw material from the data in a coherent, conceptual and manageable form to enable one to move to writing up the project.

There is a tension implicit in this process. The more one organizes the material by code or category, the further one is moving from the individual transcripts which generated the themes. It is useful, therefore, as one moves to higher-order constructs to remind oneself at regular intervals of the personal biographies, individual narratives and local interview contexts from which the concepts were derived and which help, ultimately, to make sense of them.

A presentation of method can appear to tend to the mechanical. I have deliberately presented qualitative analysis as a set of procedures in order to encourage psychologists new to qualitative work to try it. However, qualitative analysis is not mechanical; what will determine the value of the analysis produced is the quality of the interpretative work done by the investigator. So it is important to be systematic but it is also important to be analytical, creative (and hopefully insightful).

A number of computer software packages are now available to assist with qualitative analysis. (Indeed various functions on standard word-processing packages can be employed.) These packages can be useful, but it is important to see them as a tool to aid the analysis rather than as something to do the analysis for you (see Dey, 1993; Fielding and Lee, 1993; Tesch, 1990).

Qualitative researchers often try to reach this stage in their project before completing their literature search — guided by the themes that have emerged during the analysis. As has been suggested, unpredicted themes usually emerge during analysis so that the project's area of focus can shift as you are working. Thus, even if a comprehensive literature search had been conducted earlier, it is likely that it will have to be supplemented subsequently, as the new themes that have arisen in the analysis are followed up. Some qualitative researchers are also wary of allowing too complete an immersion in the existing literature to influence too strongly the way in which they interview and analyse respondents' data (see Charmaz, Chapter 3). Therefore different researchers take different positions on the amount of literature that should be read before the empirical investigation begins.

There are a number of useful treatments of the process of qualitative analysis (Burgess, 1984; Ely et al., 1991; Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Tesch, 1990). Because each approach is slightly different, I would encourage readers to look at a number of these before embarking on a large qualitative project. This will help you to formulate the best way of working for you. (See also Miles and Huberman, 1984, for a useful introduction to the use of matrices in qualitative analysis.)

Writing up

This section is concerned with moving from the master themes (in the form, for example, of a table or a set of indexed files) to a write-up, in the form of a report for publication or submission for a degree, for example. In one sense the division between analysis and writing up is a false one, in that analysis continues during the writing phase.

We are now concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account. What are the interesting or essential things to tell our audience about this/these respondent(s)? How does what we have found illuminate the existing work? There is more flexibility to writing up a qualitative study than a psychological experiment. This section points to some of the options.

Introduction

Here are two possibilities. Either this can be a short introduction to the substantive area and your research question because, consistent with a phenomenological position, the data you obtain from the respondent are prioritized and only related to the existing literature later in the report. Or, having analysed the data and read the appropriate literature, you may decide to summarize where the existing work had got to before your study, as in a conventional experimental report.

It is useful to include in the introduction some reference to the theoretical background to qualitative research methods. For example phenomenology or symbolic interactionism. (See, for example, Smith et al., 1995b.)
Method

You should provide the reader with enough information to be able to see how you conducted your study. Outline each stage of the process: how the idea was conceived, how the schedule was constructed, selection of respondents, conducting the interview, analysis. You may wish to include your interview schedule as a table or in the appendix.

Analysis/Results/Discussion

This is the most important section (or sections — see below). This is where you will try to convince your reader of the importance/interest of your respondents' stories and your interpretative analysis of them. The type of results section you write will obviously be influenced by the level of analysis you settled on earlier. Thus the results may take the form of a presentation of the typology of responses that emerged during the analysis or represent your theory to explain the respondents' answers. What you are doing here is using the table or index of themes as the basis for an account of the participants' responses. Whichever level of analysis emerged, this section will take the form of your argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support your case. Good qualitative work clearly distinguishes between what the respondent said and the analyst's interpretation or account of it. Again this process is iterative. Keep thinking as you write, because your interpretation is likely to become richer as you look at the respondents' extracts again.

The level of detail of this section can vary. Usually the thematic account is prioritized and uses the verbatim extracts to elucidate or exemplify each theme, as part of a clearly constructed narrative argument. Sometimes, however, you may wish to present a closer textual reading of certain extracts. This may be particularly appropriate if the level of analysis is mainly concerned with complexity or ambiguity. In this case it may be that key extracts will be more foregrounded in the organization of the write-up and will be followed by sections of detailed interpretative reading.

Qualitative reports again have considerable flexibility in the relationship between results and discussion. Sometimes the themes are presented together in one analysis section while a separate section is devoted to exploring their implications in relation to the existing literature. In other cases each theme is taken in turn and linked to the existing work at the same time. There is also flexibility with regard to section headings, for example results or analysis, analysis and/or discussion, depending on the particular slant you are taking and the emphasis you are making.

Reflection

As suggested at various points in the chapter, it has been written from an interpretative phenomenological position. From a phenomenological perspective, I am concerned to foreground my respondent's accounts of his or her psycho-social world. At the same time, my access to those accounts depends on my own conceptual framework as well as the interpretative work I bring to the project. It also depends on other factors which may have influenced the interaction with the respondent.

Therefore it can be useful to look explicitly at the factors which may have influenced the project at each stage and each level. One possibility (and again I stress this is a possibility not a prescription) is, after you have completed the formal analysis, to conduct your own informal inquiry on how the project was conducted. Go through the various documents you have produced — schedule, transcript, list of themes, write-up — and ask yourself a set of questions, for example:

1. The interview as interaction. Did I follow principles of good interview practice as, for example, suggested in this chapter? Are there any indications that my interview style affected the respondent adversely, for example suggestions of anxiety or boredom? Could my gender or age or ethnic group have affected the responses? What would count as evidence of that?

2. The investigator's conceptions and preconceptions. How have my own background, concerns and interests affected the project at its various stages? How might somebody else have gone about it, for example what questions might they have asked, how might they have interpreted these passages differently?

This self-reflection can be carried out to varying degrees. You may use it to assure yourself as a quality control indicator for a particular interview. Or you may wish to modify parts of your write-up in the light of it. You may even wish to document this self-reflection as a section in the written report, that is, as an account of your own part in the construction of the project and its results.

For further discussion of related questions around the issue of validity in qualitative research, see Henwood and Pidgeon (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Stiles (1993) and see Reason and Heron (Chapter 9, this volume). For further treatment of the process of writing up qualitative research, see Plummer (Chapter 4, this volume).

Suggestions for further reading

Qualitative methodology has generally been neglected by mainstream psychology. Thus, at present, you are unlikely to find details of qualitative approaches in standard psychology methods textbooks. And, until very recently there have been few books on qualitative approaches written by and for psychologists. This is now beginning to change (see, for example, Banister et al., 1984; Hayes, forthcoming; Richardson, forthcoming). By contrast, other social sciences have tended to be more accommodating to qualitative approaches and there are a number of well established texts...
written by sociologists or other social scientists. Given that the arguments for qualitative approaches are often essentially social scientific ones rather than peculiarly psychological, at this stage, until more dedicated psychology texts are available, the particular discipline of the author may be of less importance. At the same time I would want to reiterate that, in my view, qualitative approaches do have a particularly valuable part to play specifically in psychological research (Smith, 1995a).

I have referred to specific references as appropriate in the chapter. Two useful general texts on qualitative approaches, both devoting chapters to the stages in an interview project and then also considering other methods, for example participant observation and the use of personal documents, are Burgess (1984) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984). Perhaps the first general or mainstream psychology methods text to give a proper hearing to qualitative approaches is by Robson (1993), which accessibly introduces qualitative and quantitative methods alongside each other. A qualitative approach in current psychology which has been more thoroughly documented is discourse analysis. See Potter and Wetherell (Chapter 6, this volume).

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3 Grounded Theory

Kathy Charmaz

This chapter addresses the question that most beginning qualitative researchers ask: ‘How can I gather good data and then what should I do with them?’ Starting out on a qualitative research project is an exciting challenge but can be a daunting venture. You can learn to do good qualitative research. Sometimes students and professional social scientists alike believe that an insightful qualitative study only results from the researcher’s extraordinary talents. They are wrong. Good qualitative research results from hard work and systematic approaches. That means gathering enough data, synthesizing them and making analytic sense of them.

Grounded theory methods provide a set of strategies for conducting rigorous qualitative research. These methods make the strategies of gifted qualitative researchers explicit and available to any diligent novice. Using grounded theory methods expediates your research, enables you to develop a cogent analysis and stimulates your excitement about and enjoyment of doing research. This chapter will help plan your data collection and give you strategies for handling your data analysis.

In the following pages, I introduce the grounded theory method and show how a novice can apply its basic procedures. Throughout the discussion, I illustrate points by drawing upon my recent social psychological study of experiencing chronic illness. To begin, I provide a short discussion of the logic of grounded theory to explain its basic premises and strategies and to locate it within qualitative research more generally. Next, I discuss data collection objectives and strategies to show how to generate useful data. Then I move on to coding qualitative data and describe how creating categories early in the research shapes subsequent data collection. A discussion of memo-writing follows because it is the crucial intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers. Finally, I compare the procedures of the grounded theory approach with traditional logico-deductive research design to clarify their differences.

The logic of grounded theory

Defining grounded theory

What are grounded theory methods? They are a logically consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures aimed to develop theory. Grounded theory methods consist of a set of inductive strategies for