

interviewing relationship, and thereby the quality of the interview, is affected and sometimes seriously limited by social inequities. At the same time, individuals committed to equity in research can find a way first to become conscious of the issues and their own role in them. They can then devise methods that attempt to subvert those societal constraints. In the process they may end up being able to tell their participants' stories in a way that can promote equity.

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## Analyzing, Interpreting, and Sharing Interview Material

Research based on in-depth interviewing is labor intensive. There is no substitute for studying the interviews and winnowing the almost 1 million words a study involving 25 participants might yield. (Each series of three interviews can result in 150 double-spaced pages of transcript.) In planning such a study, allow at least as much time for working with the material as for all the steps involved in conceptualizing the study, writing the proposal, establishing access, making contact, selecting participants, and doing the actual interviews.

### MANAGING THE DATA

To work with the material that interviewing generates, the researcher first has to make it accessible by organizing it. Keeping track of participants through the participant information forms, making sure the written consent forms are copied and filed in a safe place, labeling audiotapes of interviews accurately, managing the extensive files that develop in the course of working with the transcripts of interviews, and keeping track of decision points in the entire process all require attention to detail, a concern for security, and a system for keeping material accessible. One goal of this administrative work is to be able to trace interview data to the original source on the interview tape at all stages of the research. Another is to be able to contact a participant readily. The simple act of misfiling a written consent form from a participant upon whose material a researcher wants to rely heavily can create hours of extra work and unnecessary anxiety.

The best description I have seen of file management for a qualitative research study is in Lofland (1971). Although there is no one right way to organize the research process and the materials it generates, every moment the researcher spends paying attention to order, labels, filing, and documentation at the beginning and in the formative stages of the study can save hours of frustration later.

### KEEPING INTERVIEWING AND ANALYSIS SEPARATE: WHAT TO DO BETWEEN INTERVIEWS

It is difficult to separate the processes of gathering and analyzing data. Even before the actual interviews begin, the researcher may anticipate results on the basis of his or her reading and preparation for the study. Once the interviews commence, the researcher cannot help but work with the material as it comes in. During the interview the researcher is processing what the participant is saying in order to keep the interview moving forward. Afterward, the researcher mentally reviews each interview in anticipation of the next one. If the interviewer is working as part of a research team, the team may get together to discuss what they are learning from the process of the interviews.

Some researchers urge that the two stages be integrated so that each informs the other. (See, e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984.) They would have interviewers conduct a number of interviews, study and analyze them, frame new questions as a result of what they have found, and then conduct further interviews.

Although the pure separation of generating from analyzing data is impossible, my own approach is to avoid any in-depth analysis of the interview data until I have completed all the interviews. Even though I sometimes identify possibly salient topics in early interviews, I want to do my best to avoid imposing meaning from one participant's interviews on the next. Therefore, I first complete all the interviews. Then I study all the transcripts. In that way I try to minimize imposing on the generative process of the interviews what I think I have learned from other participants.

However, I do not mean to suggest that between interviews, interviewers avoid considering what they have just heard in order not to contaminate the next interview. In fact, I live with the interviews, constantly running them over in my mind and thinking about the next. Others may want to be even more explicit. For example, one doctoral candidate with whom I work explained:

After listening to and transcribing the interview, I made a list of the follow-up questions I hoped would be included in the next interview. . . . Hav-

ing gone over the tape prior to the session, it was fresh in my mind and I was able to reassess the type of information I was getting and write questions to guide me in the next session. (L. Mestre, personal communication, May 7, 1996)

### TAPE-RECORDING INTERVIEWS

I have no doubt that in-depth interviews should be tape-recorded; however, the literature reflects varying opinions on this point (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Briggs, 1986; Hyman et al., 1954; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1989). I believe that to work most reliably with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study. The primary method of creating text from interviews is to tape-record the interviews and to transcribe them. Each word a participant speaks reflects his or her consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). The researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual words is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant. Although inevitably the researcher's consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, that consciousness must interact with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible.

Tape-recording offers other benefits as well. By preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data. If something is not clear in a transcript, the researchers can return to the source and check for accuracy. Later, if they are accused of mishandling their interview material, they can go back to their original sources to demonstrate their accountability to the data. In addition, interviewers can use tapes to study their interviewing techniques and improve upon them. Tape-recording also benefits the participants. The assurance that there is a record of what they have said to which they have access can give them more confidence that their words will be treated responsibly.

It may seem that the tape recorder could inhibit participants, but my experience is that they soon forget the device. Some interviewers, afraid that a tape recorder will affect the responses of their participants, use the smallest, least intrusive one they can find. Sometimes they sacrifice audio quality in doing so. I use a tape recorder with a separate microphone because I have found that some recorders with built-in microphones can muffle the sound and make transcribing an agony. I also do a test of how well the recorder is picking up the sound of the participant's and my voice before I start the actual interview. It is frustrating to interview someone for 4½ hours only to be unable to decipher the audiotape later. (See Yow,

1994, pp. 50–52, for an excellent presentation of many technical details interviewers must consider.)

### TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEW TAPES

Transcribing interview tapes is time-consuming and potentially costly work. It can be facilitated by using a transcribing machine that has a foot pedal and earphones. Nonetheless it will normally take from 4 to 6 hours to transcribe a 90-minute tape. If possible, the initial transcriptions should be made using a computer-based word-processing program. Later, when researchers sort and refile material, having the interviews in computer files will prove highly efficient and labor saving. Interviewers who transcribe their own tapes come to know their interviews better, but the work is so demanding that they can easily tire and lose enthusiasm for interviewing as a research process.

Doctoral students ask me if there is a substitute for transcribing the entire interview tape. My response is yes, but not a good one. It is possible to listen to the tapes a number of times, pick out sections that seem important, and then transcribe just those. Although that approach is labor-saving, it is not desirable because it imposes the researcher's frame of reference on the interview data one step too early in the winnowing process. In working with the material, it is important that the researcher start with the whole (Briggs, 1986). Preselecting parts of the tapes to transcribe and omitting others tends to lead to premature judgments about what is important and what is not. Once the decision is made not to transcribe a portion of the tape, that portion of the interview is usually lost to the researcher. So although labor is saved in this alternative approach, the cost may be high.

The ideal solution is for the researcher to hire a transcriber. That, however, is expensive, and the job must be done well to be worth the effort. If interviewers can hire transcribers, or even if they do the transcriptions themselves, it is essential for them to develop explicit written instructions concerning the transcribing (Kvale, 1996). Writing out the instructions will improve the consistency of the process, encourage the researchers to think through all that is involved, and allow them to share their decision making with their readers at a later point. Although a transcript can be only a partial representation of the interview (Mishler, 1986), it can reflect the interview as fully as possible by being verbatim. In addition, the transcriber should make note of all the nonverbal signals, such as coughs, laughs, sighs, pauses, outside noises, telephone rings, and interruptions, that are recorded on the tape.

Both the interviewer and the transcriber must realize that decisions about where to punctuate the transcripts are significant. Participants do not speak in paragraphs or always clearly indicate the end of a sentence by voice inflection. Punctuating is one of the beginning points of the process of analyzing and interpreting the material (Kvale, 1996) and must be done thoughtfully.

A detailed and careful transcript that re-creates the verbal and non-verbal material of the interview can be of great benefit to a researcher who may be studying the transcript months after the interview occurred. (For further discussion of transcription, see Mishler, 1991.) Note the care and precision with which the following section of an interview audiotape was transcribed. The interviewer is studying what it is like to be a communications major in a large university. Here she is asking the participant about financing her college education:

INTERVIEWER: Uhm, what does that experience mean to you?

PARTICIPANT: The fact that I spent so much money or that my parents like kind of rejected me?

INTERVIEWER: Both.

PARTICIPANT: Uhm, the fact that I spent so much money blows my mind because now I'm so poor and I'm. I can't believe I had so much, I mean I look back [slight pause] to the summer and the fall and [slight pause] I know where my money went. I mean, I was always down the Cape and I'd just spend at least \$50 or \$60 a night, you know, 3 or 4 nights a week. And then when I did an internship in town I was always driving in town, parking, saying "who cares" and I waitressed three shifts a week so I always had money in my pocket. So it was just, I always had money so, I never really cared and I never prepared for the future or never even considered that my parents wouldn't be there to foot the bill like they'd always been. And I wasn't really aware that they [pause] that they [slight pause and voice lowers] were becoming insulted. (Reproduced from Burke, 1990)

### STUDYING, REDUCING, AND ANALYZING THE TEXT

As one can see, in-depth interviewing generates an enormous amount of text. The vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages have to be reduced to what is of most importance and interest (McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Wolcott, 1990). Most important is that reduc-

ing the data be done inductively rather than deductively. That is, the researcher cannot address the material with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wishes to match the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text.

At the same time, no interviewer can enter into the study of an interview as a clean slate (Rowan, 1981). All responses to a text are interactions between the reader and the text (Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1982). That is why it is important that the researcher identify his or her interest in the subject and examine it to make sure that the interest is neither unhealthy nor infused with anger, bias, or prejudice. The interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself.

### Marking What Is of Interest in the Text

The first step in reducing the text is to read it and mark with brackets the passages that are interesting. The best description I have read of this aspect of the winnowing process is Judi Marshall's (1981) "Making Sense as a Personal Process." She acknowledges that what she can bring to the data is her sense of what is important as she reads the transcripts. She expresses confidence in being able to respond to meaningful "chunks" of transcript. She says that she recognizes them when she sees them and does not have to agonize over what level of semantic analysis she is doing. She affirms the role of her judgment in the process. In short, what is required in responding to interview text is no different from what is required in responding to other texts—a close reading plus judgment (Mostyn, 1985).

Marshall also talks about the dark side of this process: that time when, while working with interview data, you lose confidence in your ability to sort out what is important, you wonder if you are making it all up, and you feel considerable doubt about what you are doing. You become worried that you are falling into the trap of self-delusion, which Miles and Huberman (1984) caution is the bane of those who analyze qualitative data. Marshall (1985) calls it an anxiety that you learn to live with.

It is important that researchers acknowledge that in this stage of the process they are exercising judgment about what is significant in the transcript. In reducing the material interviewers have begun to analyze, interpret, and make meaning of it. The interviewer-researchers can later check with the participants to see if what they have marked as being of interest and import seems that way to the participants. Although member-checking can inform a researcher's judgment, it cannot substitute for it (Lightfoot, 1983). That judgment depends on the researcher's experience,

both in the past in general and in working with and internalizing the interviewing material; it may be the most important ingredient the researcher brings to the study (Marshall, 1981).

Although I can suggest some of the characteristics that make interviewing texts meaningful to me, there is no model matrix of interesting categories that one can impose on all texts. What is of essential interest is embedded in each research topic and will arise from each transcript. The interviewer must affirm his or her own ability to recognize it.

There are certain aspects of individual experience and social structure to which I respond when they appear. I am alert to conflict, both between people and within a person. I respond to hopes expressed and whether they are fulfilled or not. I am alert to language that indicates beginnings, middles, and ends of processes. I am sensitive to frustrations and resolutions, to indications of isolation and the more rare expressions of collegiality and community. Given the world in which we live, I am sensitive to the way issues of class, ethnicity, and gender play out in individual lives, and the way hierarchy and power affect people (Kanter, 1977). I do not, however, come to a transcript looking for these. When they are there, these and other passages of interest speak to me, and I bracket them.

Even when working with a research team, I give little instruction about marking what is of interest in a transcript other than to say, "Mark what is of interest to you as you read. Do not ponder about the passage. If it catches your attention, mark it. Trust yourself as a reader. If you are going to err, err on the side of inclusion." As you repeat the winnowing process, you can always exclude material; but materials once excluded from a text tend to become like unembodied thoughts that flee back to the stygian shadows of the computer file, and tend to remain there. (See Vygotsky, 1987, p. 210.) Despite my open instruction about marking transcripts, I have often found considerable overlap among my colleagues in what we have marked.

### SHARING INTERVIEW DATA: PROFILES AND THEMES

One goal of the researcher in marking what is of interest in the interview transcripts is to reduce and then shape the material into a form in which it can be shared or displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Reducing the data is a first step in allowing the researchers to present their interview material and then to analyze and interpret it (Wolcott, 1994). It is one of the most difficult steps in the process because, inevitably, it means letting interview material go.

I have used two basic ways to share interview data. First, I have

developed profiles of individual participants and grouped them in categories that made sense. Second, I have marked individual passages, grouped these in categories, and then studied the categories for thematic connections within and among them.

### Rationale for Crafting Profiles

Although there is no right way to share interview data, and some researchers argue for less reliance on words and more on graphs, charts, and matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1984), I have found that crafting a profile or a vignette of a participant's experience is an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview material to analysis and interpretation. The idea comes from Studs Terkel's *Working* (1972).

Not all interviews will sustain display in the form of a profile. My experience is that only about one out of three interviews is complete and compelling enough to be shaped into a profile that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, as well as some sense of conflict and resolution. Other interviews may sustain what I call a vignette, which is a shorter narrative that usually covers a more limited aspect of a participant's experience.

A profile in the words of the participant is the research product that I think is most consistent with the process of interviewing. It allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis. (See Dey, 1993, pp. 30–39, for an excellent discussion of the question, "What is qualitative analysis?") We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say. Although the interviewer can never be absent from the process, by crafting a profile in the participant's own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness.

Profiles are one way to solve the problem the interviewer has of how to share what he or she has learned from the interviews. The narrative form of a profile allows the interviewer to transform this learning into telling a story (Mishler, 1986). Telling stories, Mishler argues, is one major way that human beings have devised to make sense of themselves and their social world. I would add that telling stories is a compelling way to make sense of interview data. The story is both the participant's and the interviewer's. It is in the participant's words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said. Mishler provides an extended discussion of interviewing and its relationship to narratives as a way of knowing, and I strongly recommend it both for his own insights and the further reading that he suggests. (Also see Bruner, 1996, chaps. 6 & 7, for an

important discussion of the role of narrative in constructing reality in the field of education.)

What others can learn from reading a profile of a participant is as diverse as the participants we interview, the profiles we craft and organize, and the readers who read them. I have found crafting profiles, however, to be a way to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates.

### Steps in Crafting a Profile

Crafting profiles is a sequential process. Once you have read the transcript, marked passages of interest, and labeled those passages, make two copies of the marked and labeled transcript. (The labeling process is explained later in this chapter.) Using either the capabilities of a word-processing program, a dedicated qualitative analysis program, or even a pair of scissors, cut and file the marked passages on one copy of the transcripts into folders or computer files that correspond to the labels you devised for each passage. These excerpts will be used in the second, thematic way of sharing material. It is important never to cut up the original transcript because it serves throughout the study as a reference to which the researcher may turn for placing in context passages that have been excerpted.

From the other copy of the transcripts, select all the passages that you marked as important and put them together as a single transcript. Your resulting version may be one third to one half the length of the original three-interview transcript.

The next step is to read the new version, this time with a more demanding eye. It is very difficult to give up interview material. As you read, ask yourself which passages are the most compelling, those that you are just not willing to put aside. Underline them. Now you are ready to craft a narrative based on them.

One key to the power of the profile is that it is presented in the words of the participant. I cannot stress too much how important it is to use the first person, the voice of the participant, rather than a third-person transformation of that voice. To illustrate the point for yourself, take perhaps 30 seconds from one of your pilot interviews. First present the section verbatim. Then craft it into a mini-narrative using the first-person voice of the participant. Next try using your voice and describing the participant in the third person. It should become apparent that using the third-person voice distances the reader from the participant and allows

the researcher to intrude more easily than when he or she is limited to selecting compelling material and weaving it together into a first-person narrative. Kvale (1996, p. 227) points out the temptation for researchers to expropriate and to use inappropriately their participants' experience for their own purposes. Using the first-person voice can help researchers guard against falling into this trap.

In creating profiles it is important to be faithful to the words of the participants and to identify in the narrative when the words are those of someone else. Sometimes, to make transitions between passages, you may wish to add your own words. Elsewhere you may want to clarify a passage. Each researcher can work out a system of notation to let the reader know when language not in the interview itself has been inserted. I place such language in brackets. I use ellipses when omitting material from a paragraph or when skipping paragraphs or even pages in the transcripts. In addition, I delete from the profile certain characteristics of oral speech that a participant would not use in writing—for example, repetitious “uhms,” “ahs,” “you knows,” and other such idiosyncrasies that do not do the participant justice in a written version of what he or she has said.

Some might argue that researchers should make no changes in the oral speech of their participants when presenting it to an audience as a written document. I think, however, that unless the researcher is planning a semantic analysis or the subject of the interview itself is the language development of the participant, the claims for the realism of the oral speech are balanced by the researcher's obligation to maintain the dignity of the participant in presenting his or her oral speech in writing.

Normally, I try to present material in a profile in the order in which it came in the interviews. Material that means something in one context cannot be transposed to another context that changes its meaning. However, if material in interview three, for example, fits with a part of the narrative based on interview two, I may decide to transpose that material, if doing so does not wrench it out of context and distort its meaning. In making all these decisions, I ask myself whether each is fair to the larger interview.

An important consideration in crafting a profile is to protect the identity of the participant if the written consent form calls for doing so. Even when transcribing the interview, use initials for all names that might identify the participant in case a casual reader comes across the transcript. In creating the profile itself, select a pseudonym that does justice to the participant. This is not an easy or a mechanical process. When choosing a pseudonym, take into consideration issues of ethnicity, age, and the context of the participant's life. Err on the side of understatement rather than overstatement. If a participant would be made vulnerable were his or her

identity widely known, take additional steps to conceal it. For example, change the participant's geographical location, the details of his or her work—a physics teacher can become a science teacher—and other identifying facets of the person's experience. The extent to which an interviewer needs to resort to disguise is in direct relation to how vulnerable the person might be if identified. But the disguise must not distort what the participant has said in the interview.

The researcher must also be alert to whether he or she has made the participant vulnerable by the narrative itself. For example, Woods (1990) had to exercise extreme caution because, if her participants were identified, they might be fired from their teaching positions. Finally, the participant's dignity must always be a consideration. Participants volunteer to be interviewed but not to be maligned or incriminated by their own words. A function of the interviewing process and its products should be to reveal the participant's sense of self and worth.

### Profiles as a Way of Knowing

I include in the Appendix two examples of profiles. The first is an edited version of a profile developed by Toon Fuderich (1995), who is doing doctoral research on the child survivors of the Pol Pot era in Cambodia. She interviewed 17 refugees who had come to the United States to start a new life. The profile presented is of a participant called Nanda who was 28 at the time of her interview and worked part time in a human services agency. In a note to her paper, Fuderich indicated that in order to present the material clearly, she eliminated hesitations and repetitions in Nanda's speech. She also removed some of the idiosyncrasies of Nanda's speech and made grammatical corrections while at the same time remaining “respectful of the content and the intended meaning of the participant's words” (Fuderich, 1995).

I hesitated to include the profile of Nanda because I was afraid readers would think in-depth interviewing is only successful when it results in the kind of dramatic and heart-rending material Fuderich shared in Nanda's profile. I was concerned that potential researchers, especially doctoral candidates, would hesitate to try the process if their research areas seemed to them, in comparison, to be mundane.

As Nanda's profile reveals, in-depth interviewing is capable of capturing momentous, historical experiences. I wanted to both reveal that capability and share Fuderich's work, which seemed to me so compelling. However, in-depth interviewing research is perhaps even more capable of reconstructing and finding the compelling in the experiences of everyday life.

As a second example, therefore, I include in the Appendix an edited version of a profile developed by Marguerite Sheehan (1989). (For other examples of such profiles, see Seidman, 1985.) This profile resulted from a pilot study Sheehan conducted of the experience of day-care providers who have stayed in the field for a long time. (See Chapter 3 for a description of her interview structure.)

The profile presented is of a participant, Betty, who is a family day-care provider. She takes care of six children in her home every day. Most of the children are in "protective slots," that is, their day care is paid for by the state. Their parents are often required to leave them in care because the children either have been or are at risk of being abused or neglected.

Sheehan presented a version of this profile to our seminar on In-Depth Interviewing and Issues in Qualitative Research. In her final comments, she wrote:

Betty had many other things to say that I was not able to fit into this report. She talked quite a bit about how her daughter and husband were involved in the Family Day Care whether through their physical presence or their interest in the children. She told me more stories about individual children and families that she worked with. I was impressed with how she identified at different times with both the children and the parents and how she had to let go while still remaining involved with them. Betty was often nervous and worried that she was not saying the "right thing." She told me that this was the first time that anyone had asked her about the meaning in her work. (Sheehan, 1989)

Betty's profile tells an important story in her own words. It may not have the life-and-death drama of Nanda's profile, but it captures compellingly, I think, the struggle of a day-care provider from which anyone interested in day care can learn.

As both Fuderich and Sheehan have pursued their research, they have interviewed additional participants. If they choose to do so, they will be able to present a series of profiles grouped together around organizing topics. In addition to the profiles' speaking powerfully for themselves, the researchers will then be able to explore and comment on the salient issues within individual profiles and point out connections among profiles. For example, in the profile of Betty, the issues of how people come to the work of day care, the preparation they have, the support they are given, the effect of the low status and genderized nature of the work, the relatively unexplored subject of working with the parents, and the issue of child abuse, to name several, are raised. In Nanda's profile, issues inherent in the traumas of history, being a refugee, learning English as a second

language, and the tensions and complexities of acculturation are raised, among others.

Each researcher would be able to make explicit what she has learned about those subjects through the presentation of the profiles and also through connecting those profiles to the experience of others in her sample. By telling Betty's story of her everyday work in her own words, Sheehan is setting the stage for her readers to learn about the issues involved in providing day care through the experiences of a person deeply involved in that work. By telling Nanda's story, Fuderich is inviting readers to both bear witness and begin to understand the factors influencing resilience among those who, as children, survived the Cambodian genocide, which is the subject of her dissertation study.

## MAKING AND ANALYZING THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

A more conventional way of presenting and analyzing interview data than crafting profiles is to organize excerpts from the transcripts into categories. The researcher then searches for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes. In addition to presenting profiles of individuals, the researcher, as part of his or her analysis of the material, can then present and comment upon excerpts from the interviews thematically organized.

During the process of reading and marking the transcripts, the researcher can begin to label the passages that he or she has marked as interesting. After having read and indicated interesting passages in two or three participants' interviews, the researcher can pause to consider whether they can be labeled. What is the subject of the marked passages? Are there words or a phrase that seems to describe them, at least tentatively? Is there a word within the passage itself that suggests a category into which the passage might fit? In Sheehan's transcript, some of the labels for the passages included in the Appendix might be "background of provider," "support groups," "parents," "impact on family," "abuse," and "parents."

The process of noting what is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into appropriate files is called "classifying" or, in some sources, "coding" data. (See Dey, 1993, p. 58, for a critique of the term *coding* as applied to qualitative research.)

Computer programs are available that will help classify, sort, file, and reconnect interview data. By telling the computer what to look for, the program can scan large amounts of data quickly and sort material into

categories according to the directions. (See Dey, 1993; Weitzman & Miles, 1995, for introductions to the use of computer programs in qualitative data analysis and reviews of specific programs.)

For those who choose to work with either a dedicated analytical program or even a word-processing program, I suggest caution in doing significant coding or editing on screen. I recommend working first on a paper copy and then transferring the work to the computer. My experience is that there is a significant difference between what one sees in a text presented on paper and the same text shown on screen, and that one's response is different, too. I have learned, for example, that it is foolish of me to edit on screen, because I invariably miss issues that are easily evident to me when I work with a paper copy. I would not recommend relying on reading an interview text on screen for the process of categorizing material. Something in the mediums of screen and paper affects the message the viewer retrieves (see Marshall McLuhan, 1965, for an early and influential commentary on this process).

At this point in the reading, marking, and labeling process it is important to keep labels tentative. Locking in categories too early can lead to dead ends. Some of the categories will work out. That is, as the researcher continues to read and mark interview transcripts, other passages will come up that seem connected to the same category. On the other hand, some categories that seemed promising early in the process will die out. New ones may appear. Categories that seemed separate and distinct will fold into each other. Others may remain in flux almost until the end of the study (Davis, 1984).

In addition to labeling each marked passage with a term that places it in a category, researchers should also label each passage with a notation system that will designate its original place in the transcript. (Dey, 1993, points out that many dedicated analytical computer programs will do this automatically.) I use, for example, the initials of the participant, a Roman numeral for the number of the interview in the three-interview sequence, and Arabic numbers for the page number of the transcript on which the passage occurs. Later, when working with the material and considering an excerpt taken from its original context, the researcher may want to check the accuracy of the text and replace it in its full context, even going back to the audiotape itself. The labeling of each excerpt allows such retracing.

The next step is to file those excerpts either in computer files under the name of the assigned category or in folders. Some excerpts might fit reasonably into more than one file. Make copies of those and file in the multiple files that seem appropriate.

After filing all the marked excerpts, reread all of them file by file.

Start sifting out the ones that now seem very compelling, setting aside the ones that seem at this stage to be of less interest. At this point, the researcher is in what Rowan (1981) calls a "dialectical" process with the material (p. 134). The participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is responding to their words, concentrating his or her intuition and intellect on the process. What emerges is a synthesis of what the participant has said and how the researcher has responded.

Some commentators regard this sorting and culling as an entirely intuitive process (Tagg, 1985). It is important, however, that researchers also try to form and articulate their criteria for the winnowing and sorting process. By doing so, they give their readers a basis for understanding the process the researcher used in reducing the mass of words to more manageable proportions.

I do not begin to read the transcripts with a set of categories for which I want to find excerpts. The categories arise out of the passages that I have marked as interesting. On the other hand, when I reflect on the types of material that arouse my interest, it is clear that some patterns are present, that I have certain predispositions I bring to my reading of the transcripts.

When working with excerpts from interview material, I find myself selecting passages that connect to other passages in the file. In a way, quantity starts to interact with quality. The repetition of an aspect of experience that was already mentioned in other passages takes on weight and calls attention to itself.

I notice excerpts from a participant's experience that connect to each other as well as to passages from other participants. Sometimes excerpts connect to the literature on the subject. They stand out because I have read about the issue from a perspective independent of my interviewing.

Some passages are told in a striking manner or highlight a dramatic incident. Those are perhaps the most troublesome for me. They are attractive because of their style or the sheer drama of the incident, but I know that I have to be careful about such passages. The dramatic can be confused with the pervasive. The researcher has to judge whether the particular dramatic incident is idiosyncratic or characteristic (Mostyn, 1985).

Some passages stand out because they are contradictory and seem decisively inconsistent with others. It is tempting to put those aside. These in particular, however, have to be kept in the foreground, lest researchers exercise their own biased subjectivity, noticing and using only materials that support their own opinions (Kvale, 1996, p. 212). The researcher has to try to understand their importance in the face of the other data he or she has gathered (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The process of working with excerpts from participants' interviews, seeking connections among them, explaining those connections and build-



ing interpretative categories is demanding and involves risks. The danger is that the researcher will try to force the excerpts into categories, and the categories into themes that he or she already has in mind, rather than let them develop from the experience of the participants as represented in the interviews. The reason an interviewer spends so much time talking to participants is to find out what *their* experience is and the meaning *they* make of it, and then to make connections among the experiences of people who share the same structure. Rowan (1981) stresses the inappropriateness of force-fitting the words of participants into theories derived from other sources.

There is no substitute for total immersion in the data. It is important to try to articulate criteria for marking certain passages as notable and selecting some over others in order for the process to have public credibility. It is also important to affirm your judgment as a researcher. You have done the interviewing, studied the transcripts, and read the related literature; you have mentally lived with and wrestled with the data, and now you need to analyze them. As Judi Marshall (1985) says, your feeling of rightness and coherence about the process of working with the data is important. It is your contribution as the researcher.

## INTERPRETING THE MATERIAL

Interpreting is not a process researchers do only near the end of the project. Even as interviewers question their participants, tentative interpretations may begin to influence the path of their questioning. Marking passages that are of interest, labeling them, and grouping them is analytic work that has within it the seeds of interpretation. Crafting a profile is an act of analysis, as is presenting and commenting upon excerpts arranged in categories. Both processes lay the ground for interpretation. (I am using Wolcott's (1994) distinction between the words *analysis* and *interpretation*. I think Wolcott offers a solid approach to working with interview data in his thoughtful explication of the terms *description*, *analysis*, and *interpretation*. In this book, I have used the phrase *sharing the data* instead of Wolcott's *description*.)

In some ways, it is tempting to let the profiles and the categorized, thematic excerpts speak for themselves. But another step is appropriate. Researchers must ask themselves what they have learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts, marking and labeling them, crafting profiles, and organizing categories of excerpts. What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants they interviewed? How do they understand and explain these connections? What do they

understand now that they did not understand before they began the interviews? What surprises have there been? What confirmations of previous instincts? How have their interviews been consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How have they gone beyond?

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Maxwell (1996) address these questions with a practical suggestion: When you have identified passages that are important but the category in which they fall seems undefined or its significance is unclear, write a memorandum about those passages. Through your writing about them, about how they were picked, about what they mean to you, the properties and import of the category may become clear. If you write such memoranda about each of the categories you have developed and about the profiles you have crafted, the process of writing about them will lead you to discover what it is you find important in them both individually and relatively.

Much of what you learn may be tentative, suggesting further research. In the early stages of our study of student teachers and mentors (Fischetti, Santilli, & Seidman, 1988; O'Donnell et al., 1989), we began to see evidence in the language of the student teachers we interviewed that tracking in schools was affecting how they were learning to become teachers. That led O'Donnell (1990) to conceptualize a dissertation study on the impact of tracking on learning to become a teacher.

The last stage of interpretation, then, consistent with the interview process itself, asks researchers what meaning they have made of their work. In the course of interviewing, researchers asked the participants what their experience meant to them. Now they have the opportunity to respond to the same question. In doing so they might review how they came to their research, what their research experience was like, and, finally, what it means to them. How do they understand it, make sense of it, and see connections in it?

Some of what researchers learn may lead them to propose connections among events, structures, roles, and social forces operating in people's lives. Some researchers would call such proposals *theories* and urge theory building as the purpose of research (Fay, 1987). My own feeling is that although the notion of grounded theory generated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) offered qualitative researchers a welcome rationale for their inductive approach to research, it also served to inflate the term *theory* to the point that it has lost some of its usefulness. (See Dey, 1993, pp. 51-52, for a useful critique of the casual use of the word *theory*.)

The narratives we shape of the participants we have interviewed are necessarily limited. Their lives go on; our presentations of them are framed and reified. Betty, whose profile is in the Appendix, is still working out her relationship to child care. Nanda is still living out her life in the

United States. Moreover, the narratives that we present are a function of our interaction with the participants and their words. Although my experience suggests that a number of people reading Betty's or Nanda's transcripts separately would nevertheless develop similar narratives, we still have to leave open the possibility that other interviewers and crafters of profiles would have told a different story. (See Fay, 1987, pp. 166-174.) So, as illuminating as in-depth interviews can be, as compelling as the stories are that they can tell and the themes they can highlight, we still have to bear in mind that Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy pervades our work, as it does the work of physicists (Polanyi, 1958). We have to allow considerable tolerance for uncertainty (Bronowski, 1973) in the way we report what we have learned from our research.

Every research method has its limits and its strengths. In-depth interviewing's strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover the interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context.

In-depth interviewing has not led me to an easy assessment of the possibilities of progressive reform through research (Bury, 1932; Fay, 1987). It has led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the amazing intricacies and, yet, coherence of people's experiences. It has also led me to a more conscious awareness of the power of the social and organizational context of people's experience. Interviewing has provided me with a deeper understanding of the issues, structures, processes, and policies that imbue participants' stories. It has also given me a fuller appreciation of the complexities and difficulties of change. Most important and almost always, interviewing continues to lead me to respect the participants, to relish the understanding that I gain from them, and to take pleasure in sharing their stories.

## Two Profiles: A Cambodian Survivor of the Pol Pot Era and a Long-Time Day Care Provider

### NANDA—A CAMBODIAN SURVIVOR OF THE POL POT ERA

*Toon Fuderich*

Before the war, . . . we had a very large extended family . . . a lot of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. I am one of four children. I have an older brother and a younger brother and sister. My family was quite well-off. My father had his own business; my mother owned a grocery store; my paternal grandparents owned a flour mill. My father was well respected in our village. He was a handsome and intelligent man who valued education highly. He always told us about the importance of getting an education.

I was 8 years old when Pol Pot took over Cambodia . . . forced labor camps were established throughout the country. People were forced to leave their home to work in these camps. When the war broke out, Khmer Rouge soldiers came to our village. They told us that they came to free us from the oppressive government. They told us not to worry about anything and that everything will be fine. But nothing was fine. It was all a lie. They killed innocent people. The educated professionals like doctors, businessmen, teachers were the first to be killed. It was just horrible.

Every day the soldiers organized a meeting to re-educate the villagers. The meeting usually runs from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Everyone had to attend except for those who were gravely ill. . . . One day just before my father left for the meeting, a group of soldiers came for my father. My mother was already at the meeting. I was the only one left at home at the time. They entered our house. Ransacked the whole place (long pause) took everything . . . Then my father was led outside, his hands were tied behind his back. I was so frightened, but decided to follow them.

I hid behind a cupboard and tried to peer through a small crack to see my father. The soldiers accused my father of betraying his country. My father kept saying to them "I love my country. I have children. I love my

My husband has a different shift. He is glad when he comes home. He likes to stay at home. Me, I'm cooped up in the house. I want to get out. Now we do one weekend with the kids and one weekend we do something [together]. He works in a jail. We sit together. He tells me about the jail. I tell him about day care. We both look at each other and say, "We're crazy. Let's do something. Let's get away." (Sheehan, 1989)

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