Data analysis during data collection

> Openness to transformation means openness to *the local contingencies* that complicate one's agenda and may even force one to reset or abandon one's priorities. The contingencies of field inquiry are not to be viewed only as obstacles to one's inquiries but as opportunities to learn which inquiries are the ones that really matter. These contingencies should be celebrated, for they are where all real discoveries lie (Liberman 1999: 50).

'Can you help me? I am conducting a qualitative study and have collected all my data on topic X and I'm not sure what to do with it now. How should I analyse it?' This is my version of an occasional, but regular, request that appears on some of the qualitative email lists I subscribe to. This sort of request typically comes from a novice qualitative researcher, newly subscribed to the list. The answer to this question is that if you have been collecting your data carefully you have already begun to analyse the data. Hopefully the person has already begun to think about what they are interested in and what issues those data have raised. This provides the beginning of data analysis.

Data analysis in most qualitative research begins during data collection. This practice is consistent with the theory of data analysis discussed in Chapter 1 that emphasised the dialectical, or hermeneutic, relationship between theory and data. This chapter reviews the practicalities of integrating data analysis and data collection. Many texts on qualitative data analysis begin their discussion with what to do *after* data have been collected. If data

analysis begins only after the data have been collected, re-searchers will have missed many valuable opportunities that can be taken only *at the same time* as they are collecting their data. This is particularly the case if you are using the methodology of grounded theory. However, it also applies more generally to most other research methods that are interpretive, inductive and exploratory.

Waiting until after data have been collected to begin data analysis can lead to some significant problems during data analysis. If researchers leave the decision about what sort of data analysis they want to conduct until after they collect their data, they may have precluded, or made difficult, certain types of data analysis. For example, it is difficult to conduct a narrative analysis if the researcher asks short, directed questions that cut off the interviewee. Further, during data analysis the researcher will typi-cally discover and notice unanticipated issues that have arisen early in the data collection. If data analysis is left until afterwards these issues will not be noticed during data collection; they will therefore not be pursued during the data collection and cannot be pursued in any depth during the data analysis.

This chapter does not attempt to review all possible methods of data collection. There are numerous books that have described these processes well, and interested readers are referred to books such as Kellehear (1993), Mason (1996), Daly et al. (1997), Denzin (1997) and Rice and Ezzy (1999). Rather, this chapter focuses on conducting data analysis while the data collection is being undertaken.

Integrating data collection and data analysis

The integration and interpenetration of data collection and data analysis is practised by a number of qualitative research traditions, including ethnography (Rosaldo 1989), participatory action research (Nelson et al. 1998) and grounded theory (Strauss 1987). Simultaneous data collection and data analysis builds on the strengths of qualitative methods as an inductive method for building theory and interpretations from the perspective of the people being studied. It allows the analysis to be shaped by the participants in a more fundamental way than if analysis is left until after the data collection has been finished. Renato Rosaldo describes the method of interpretive ethnographers as follows:

> Ethnographers beginning research with a set of questions, revise them throughout the course of inquiry, and in the end emerge with different questions than they started with. One's surprise at the answer to a question, in other words, requires one to revise the question until lessening surprises or diminishing returns indicate a stopping point (Rosaldo 1989: 7).

Theoretical questions, and answers, are shaped and reshaped in an ongoing dialogue with the experience or subjects being studied. Rosaldo began his research of Ilongot subsistence farmers in the Philippines, searching for an explanation for what motivated them to headhunt. He did not accept their claim that it was an expression of their rage associated with bereavement and looked for some other, 'deeper', reason. However, as his fieldwork progressed, and with his own experience of bereavement following the death of his wife due to an accident, Rosaldo came to understand both what the Ilongots meant by rage in bereavement, and shifted the focus of his questioning from headhunting to the experience of bereavement. Examining the implications of his data for his research questions *during* his fieldwork led Rosaldo to modify his research questions, which in turn provided him with a much more sophisticated understanding of the experience he had set out to study.

One of the central canons of grounded theory is that data collection and data analysis are interrelated processes (Glaser &
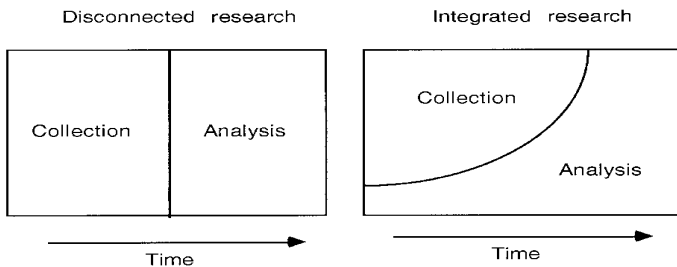

Figure 3.1 Relationships between data analysis and data collection
(Adapted from Lofland & Lofland 1971: 132.)

Strauss 1967; Becker 1971; Strauss & Corbin 1990): 'In grounded theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected' (Corbin & Strauss 1990: 6). In grounded theory, data collected early in the research process are used to guide the questions that are asked as the research progresses. Data gathered early in a research project guide both the formulation of concepts and the sampling process (a technique referred to as theoretical sampling, described below). Grounded theory is conducted this way because it is assumed that researchers will not know all the important research questions, sampling dimensions or theoretical concepts before they begin collecting data (see the section on grounded theory in Chapter 1). The research questions, the sampling frame and the theoretical concepts are discovered only while the data are being collected:

> Each investigator enters the field with some questions or areas for observation, or will soon generate them. Data will be collected on these matters throughout the research endeavour, unless the questions prove, during analysis to be irrelevant. In order *not* to miss anything that may be salient, however, the investigator must analyse the first bits of data for cues. All seemingly relevant issues must be incorporated into the next set of interviews and observations (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 6).

Examining data right from the beginning of data collection for 'cues' is what makes grounded theory 'grounded'. It is also the foundation of inductive theory building. Data collection is guided either by preconceived theories and ideas about what is important, or data collection is guided by the cues that present themselves during the data collection process. As was argued in Chapter 1, a sophisticated understanding of theory building recognises that interpretations are a product of both previous understandings and the influence of events in the world. Ethnography, hermeneutics and grounded theory all emphasise this interweaving of theory and data.

Postmodernist and poststructuralist thought can be seen as at least partially consistent with this understanding of the interpenetration of data collection and analysis (Becker & McCall 1990; Denzin 1997). Postmodernists argue, for example, that research reports should be seen more as contributions to ongoing conversations about a research issue rather than as final analyses of 'the truth' (Lather 1993). It could be argued that the postmodernist point that

preexisting theory and interpretations influence the data collection process is simply a more sophisticated way of describing what grounded theorists have been doing for some time. Game (1991) argues that mainstream sociology and poststructuralist practice seem incompatible because sociology emphasises objectivity, and the independence of the researcher, whereas poststructuralist semiotics emphasises the interpenetration of meaning and experience. While this criticism is true of much sociological research, particularly the demographic and statistical research characteristic of mainstream American sociology, it is not an accurate analysis of qualitative sociological research, particularly research within the interpretive or symbolic interactionist tradition. As Becker & McCall (1990) observe, symbolic interactionists emphasise that, in order to understand social life, researchers must examine the meanings that shape the processes of interaction. The situated, interpretive and processual emphasis of symbolic interactionists has many similarities to the practice of poststructuralists. There are, however, some significant differences between these two approaches, for example in relation to their understanding of the role of political and ethical questions in the research process (see the discussion of rigour in Chapter 2). Nonetheless, they both argue that research practice should explicitly combine the processes of data collection and analysis.

The aim of qualitative research is to allow the voice of the 'other', of the people being researched, to inform the researcher. The finite nature of human perception means that researchers always choose to focus on one or another aspect of a phenomenon. The voice of the participant, rather than the voice of the researcher, will be heard best when participants not only provide the data to be analysed, but when they also contribute to the questions that frame the research and contribute to the way the data are analysed. One way of achieving this is by ensuring the interpenetration of data collection and data analysis.

Techniques for integrating analysis and collection

This section describes a number of practical techniques that can be utilised alongside qualitative interviewing to begin the data analysis process. Long interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection utilised by qualitative researchers, both as a method on their own and as part of other methods, such as ethnography or

participatory action research. Here I do not describe the techniques of interviewing: there is a wide variety of excellent books that describe in detail the method and process of long interviews (Holstein & Gubrium 1995; Rubin & Rubin 1995). Rather I describe a number of techniques that can be utilised during data collection, using interviewing as an example, that facilitate the concurrent analysis of data while they are being collected (see text box below).

Techniques for data analysis concurrent with early data collection

- Team meetings and peer debriefing.
- Checking interpretations with participants.
- Transcribing, reading and coding early data.
- Writing journals and memos.

Team meetings and peer debriefing

In 1997 I led a team of three researchers interviewing people living with HIV/AIDS about how they understood their future (Ezzy 2000a). After each researcher had conducted one or two interviews we had a team meeting to discuss our progress. One member had interviewed a person with hepatitis C. While discussing this interview it became apparent that co-infection with hepatitis C significantly influenced the experience of living with HIV/AIDS. A question about hepatitis C was therefore added to our theme list after the first few interviews. In this way, the interview theme list was updated continually during the data collection for this project as new topics and new emphases were identified in the interviews and then discussed in team meetings. Most of the data analysis for this project was conducted after the interviews were complete. However, discussing the research while data collection was being conducted allowed a preliminary analysis of the data. As a consequence the research was able to adapt and include previously unanticipated dimensions of the experience of living with HIV/AIDS.

Anselm Strauss is perhaps one of the most accomplished collaborative qualitative researchers of the twentieth century (Maines 1991). As such, his discussion of team meetings as part of the research process is worth reading carefully if you are involved in a collective qualitative project (Strauss 1987). Strauss

suggests that team meetings should be taped, transcribed, and included in the memo files of the research project. Strauss identifies four main benefits from team meetings. First, discussing the data of the research stimulates ideas about its meaning and significance. Second, some issues that arise during the discussion are elaborated and developed that provide additional depth of complexity and quality of analysis to the research. Third, the issues raised may lead to team members choosing to follow up issues through new data collection, the addition of questions to the research schedule, or reviewing data collected earlier for an analysis of the issues raised. Finally, team discussions may inform the writing up of the project, particularly if they are transcribed. Regular team discussions force researchers to confront common research issues and encourage a focus on similar lines of inquiry. The development of a shared analytic framework during data collection makes writing up team research considerably easier. Using team meetings to work the tensions between individual interests and the team project can lead to a healthy development of both: 'In terms of the forward thrust of the entire project team discussions not only ensure commonality of perspective, but also the possibility of individual growth and a measure of autonomy in the further pursuit of ideas: pursuit—it is important to emphasize—within the common framework of analysis' (Strauss 1987: 139). Backett-Milburn and associates' (1999) reflection on a collaborative feminist research project similarly points out that negotiation and compromise is required if the differences between team members' interests and positions are to lead to a stimulating synergy rather than dispiriting arguments.

For the solo researcher, peer debriefings can provide similar benefits to team meetings. Peer debriefing is 'the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind' (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 308). Spall (1998) suggests that peer debriefing should be conducted at crucial junctures during the research and that it has three main benefits. First, it makes the researchers more aware of the influence of their personal values and theoretical orientations on the collection and interpretation of the data. This point also includes discussions of issues that may be ethically or legally problematic. Second, debriefing sessions provide researchers with an opportunity to explore

and test their theories and interpretations of the data through discussion with a colleague familiar with their discipline. Finally, debriefing allows researchers to discuss problems with, and planning of, the methodology.

Below is an example of how debriefing can inform the research process. It is a personal communication in response to a paper I have published on the experience of unemployment (Ezzy 2000b). Although it is not the result of a debriefing session, it elegantly illustrates the sort of information that a debriefing can provide to the researcher. In her response to my paper, Henshaw discusses the different ways in which respondents portrayed themselves in interviews. Some told stories describing themselves as in control, others recounted victim narratives. In the paper I point out that some respondents reported telling different types of stories to different audiences. However, I do not really explore the question of what type of 'audience' I, the researcher, might have been for the participant:

> In short, you have not relayed to the reader the exact context of who you are in relation to your interviewees, nor indicated how they might have viewed you. For example, if you were perceived to be 'an authority from an important university', your interviewees might have had a vested interest in presenting themselves in the best possible light. On the other hand, you might have been a complete stranger and provided them with a great deal of space to represent themselves in whichever way they wished . . . Therefore, because you have not made the relationship (i.e., yourself as the context) between you and your participants quite clear enough, the reader has some confusion about where to situate the veracity of your observations (S. Henshaw, personal communication).

Henshaw's criticism of my paper is justified, and in response I could provide more information about how I presented myself, as an interviewer, to the interviewee. Unfortunately Henshaw's analysis came after the paper was published, but it nonetheless illustrates the value of obtaining peer debriefing not only on draft papers but also on all aspects of the research process. Research reports, including journal articles and books, are a contribution to an ongoing dialogue and debate within academic, political and participant communities. Understanding does not come only from individual researchers locking themselves away and reflecting on their data. The responses of others to our interpretations are a

central part of the process of developing a trustworthy account. Team meetings and peer debriefings provide a valuable opportunity to begin this dialogue with other researchers early in the research process.

Checking interpretations with participants

Later in this chapter I discuss the suggestion that research participants should be included in all aspects of the research process. Feminists and participatory action researchers have pointed out that this has important emancipatory political implications for the research process. However, it also provides a mechanism for developing the dialogue with the research participant that is at the heart of the qualitative research process. Whether or not participants are involved from the beginning, in the design of the research or as members of a steering committee, it is important to consider how evolving interpretations of the data can be checked with participants. Lather and Smithies (1997) asked participants to read drafts of their research reports. In my own research I try to integrate data collection by checking my evolving interpretations with participants.

The aim of a good in-depth interview is to obtain the story or interpretation of the person being interviewed. From this perspective it is important not to try to suggest to the person how you, as the interviewer, might expect them to respond. This is not an argument for being neutral, it is an argument for ensuring that the interviewer genuinely listens to the voice of the interviewee (Rice & Ezzy 1999). However, during a long interview I typically begin to develop my own summary of the interviewee's experience. I begin to place the person's experience in the emerging theory that I have about the issues being studied. Towards the end of my interviews I often ask people about this interpretation that I have developed of their experience. This serves as a check on whether I have understood what they are saying. For example, in my study of unemployment and mental health I identified a link between a number of factors. People who felt confident about the future, even though unemployed, also typically expressed dissatisfaction with the job they had left or lost, and were financially secure at least for the short term. This positive orientation to unemployment was a product of both the person's social location and a product of the type of story he or she told about the

experience. The following extract is an example from one of my interviews that illustrates how I examined this link by discussing it with one of my participants at the end of the interview. Gail was a single mother in her forties who had been working full-time as a teacher, but who also had a contract to write a book. She saw her time of unemployment as an opportunity to finish writing her book.

Doug:	Can I just check with you if my understanding is correct?
Gail:	Sure. [Laughs]
Doug:	It seems to me that you were a little bit frustrated with the work you were doing at the hospital.
Gail:	Yeah, frustrated a lot, not a little bit.
Doug:	When the position finished and they redeployed you, you wanted to get out. Financially it is attractive to you because you have got the redundancy package.
Gail:	Reasonably attractive. Don't let's get carried away too much with the value. It is not that much money.
Doug:	And that you feel moderately financially secure for a short while?
Gail:	[Laughs] Yes, a very short while.
Doug:	But more importantly, you feel confident that you can get work in the future if you need to support yourself financially.
Gail:	Yeah, but that could be a false confidence, don't forget.
Doug:	I mean, do you feel confident or not?
Gail:	Well, if I worry now about not getting a job, I am going to start applying for jobs now and put all my energy into looking for another job, which will deflect from my work on my book. So whether I am using denial so that I don't worry about it or whether I am confident about it probably doesn't matter very much at all. Let's just say that I am confident!
Doug:	I understand.

This extract elegantly illustrates the usefulness of this sort of checking with the participant. It demonstrates that Gail is aware of several different possible interpretations of her current experience. She could begin to worry about the future. This would lead her into searching for another job and, as a consequence, she would not be able to finish her book. However, she has chosen instead to interpret her situation in a way that provides her with

some self-confidence. Checking my interpretation of her experience with her at the end of the interview brought out the nature of her experience in a clearer light than would otherwise have been the case.

Some researchers advocate returning transcripts of interviews to interviewees for checking (Mason 1996). This may be a useful strategy for checking details of the interview. A similar strategy is to send participants summary vignettes that the researcher has prepared from their interviews (Lather & Smithies 1997). A summary vignette, through the process of selection, contains preliminary data analysis. Checking a summary vignette with a participant allows the participant to engage with the researcher as they are doing their data analysis. The participant may point to under- or overemphases and suggest complexities that were not originally envisaged.

Transcribing, reading and coding early data

There is a temptation—that should be resisted—when conducting long interviews to leave transcribing the interviews until after data collection is complete. This is particularly the case if the researcher has some funds allocated to having the tapes transcribed. It is easier to leave transcription to be organised all at the one time. However, there is considerable value to be obtained from researchers themselves transcribing the first couple of interviews they conduct before conducting the remaining interviews. First, this allows interviewers to observe themselves in action, which can be both painful and enlightening. As I transcribed my first interview, I remember saying to myself: 'Did I really say that?'. It was a painful experience as I noted how I cut the participant off in the middle of an account, and completely missed a cue on an important issue. Second, transcribing the interview takes considerable time, and encourages detailed reflection on the issues of the research. I also began jotting down notes and ideas about theories and concepts while transcribing the interview. Transcription served as a preliminary form of data analysis. I began to make links between the experience of the participants and concepts and theory. Irvine (1999), in her exemplary study of Codependents Anonymous, describes a similar process during her fieldwork utilising participant observation. Note-taking fed directly into the process of data analysis.

> In the initial stages of my fieldwork I developed simple codes from my notes from meetings. At first I coded what appeared to be parts of the meeting, such as 'Setting up', 'Leading', 'Speaking' and 'Sharing'. Before long I began to develop more sophisticated codes within each of these coded categories. For example, within 'Speaking' and 'Sharing', I developed codes for 'Dysfunctional Childhood', 'Abuse', 'Hitting Bottom' and 'First Steps in Recovery', among others (Irvine 1999: 13).

These codes were then compared against ongoing observation, so that Irvine's theoretical coding scheme developed alongside her data collection. The two-way process of data collection and data analysis allowed Irvine both to develop a more sophisticated theoretical model and to collect data that were relevant to her research questions and evolving theoretical scheme. Coding is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, but it is important to underline the value of beginning the coding process during data collection.

Journals and memos

> Write [your fieldnotes] as lushly as you can, as loosely as you can, as long as you put yourself into it, where you say 'I felt that' (though not to too great a degree). And as loose as that lush adverbalized prose is, it's still a richer matrix to start from than stuff that gets reduced into a few words of 'sensible' sentences . . . you've go to start by trusting yourself and writing as fully and lushly as you can (Goffman 1989: 131).

Many researchers advocate developing a sophisticated filing system from the beginning of data collection as the foundation of the data analysis process (Lofland & Lofland 1971; Strauss & Corbin 1990). This filing system can include a variety of memos or journals on the practicalities of conducting fieldwork and emergent interpretations of the significance of data collected for the project as a whole. Journals and memos are a systematic attempt to facilitate the interpretive process that is at the heart of qualitative research. Understandings, interpretations and theories do not emerge from data through some mechanical process. They are a product of researchers thinking and talking about their research. Keeping a journal and regularly writing memos encourages

researchers to reflect routinely on their emerging understanding of the data.

Writing memos is particularly central to grounded theory, as it forms the foundation of the emergent coding scheme. Strauss defines a theoretical memo as 'writing in which the researcher puts down theoretical question, hypotheses, summary of codes, etc.—a method of keeping track of coding results and stimulating further coding, and also a major means for integrating the theory' (1987: 22). Most grounded theorists write memos regularly, typically from the beginning of the research project, as part of both data collection and data analysis, which occur concurrently.

Looking back over my journals and memos from several research projects, there is a pattern in how they develop that is similar to the pattern described by Strauss (1987). My journals begin with questions, suggestions about what I expect to find, and ideas for reading. They move through notes that remind me of people I should talk to about my findings, suggestions for sampling, detailed discussions of particular interviews, and thoughts about how particular books I was reading might relate to the interview material. They also contain attempts to develop categories and concepts, linking these to particular participants or observations. Towards the end of the journal I begin to focus more on the structure of the analysis as a whole and how particular cases might fit into, or suggest modifications to, this structure.

The memo on Michelle (see text box, p. 73) is an example of how theory and categories for data analysis emerge during the writing of memos during data collection. The memo was written quite soon after the interview, probably after I had transcribed the tape. In the memo I develop an emerging theory of what factors might influence how people respond to losing their job. The theory is not fully developed; it is after all only a memo early in the research. But it contains an indication of the theory I later developed of the different ways that people respond to job loss (Ezzy 2000b). In contrast to the interview with Gail reported earlier, Michelle was distressed, and the memo suggests that this might be linked to the importance of working among her friends and the pleasure she found in her last job. However, the memo also suggests that she was not as distressed as some other interviewees (one of whom was suicidal) and links this to her being active, not having friends at her last workplace, and being financially supported by her parents.

Michelle: a memo

A very unpleasant job loss—no notice:
    — implication that she was worthless
    — enjoyed the work
    — stopped her obtaining her traineeship certificate.
But:
    — no friends at last workplace
    — involved in dancing and public speaking and this helped
      (cf. journal page 7).
    Note that all her important friends are working. This contributes to the maintenance of her own understanding of work as central to her future. The social construction of identity.
    Working is also central to her understanding of a satisfying future, even if she has children at some stage.
    Unemployment leads to a loss of direction (interview transcript page 3).
    Depressed, angry and frustrated, but not suicidal.
    Kept spirits up by active job search, regular activities such as dancing and public speaking, which provide a sense of achievement.
    Financially dependent on parents. This means she survives financially, but wants the financial independence provided by work.
(From my journal for my study of unemployment Ezzy 2000b).

Qualitative data analysis is an *interpretive* task. Interpretations are not found—rather they are made, actively constructed through social processes. Data collection in qualitative research is not something easily separated off from data analysis. Researchers make many choices during data collection that are integral to how the data are analysed and will be analysed—choices, for example, about what or who to sample, what to ask, what to pursue, and what to ignore. These choices are a product of the researcher's developing interpretation of the phenomena being studied. This interpretive task is the beginning of, and integral to, qualitative data analysis. The interpretive process of analysing qualitative data includes: team meetings and peer debriefing; checking interpretations with participants; transcribing, reading and coding early data; and writing journals and memos. These, along with a variety of other

procedures, are ways of building an interpretation of the phenomena through a dialogue with the phenomena and with other people's interpretations of the phenomena. Qualitative researchers should aim to make the interpretive process explicit and integral to their research, right from the beginning of the research.

Sampling and saturation

The most important point about sampling, as it relates to qualitative data analysis, is that the sample is purposeful. The two most common, and undesirable, sampling techniques employed in qualitative research are convenience samples and snowball samples (Patton 1990). The main disadvantage with these methods is that the only rationale is ease or convenience. A purposeful sample is one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants, or places to observe, or events, that relates to the research questions. A wide variety of sampling techniques have been documented in a number of qualitative methodology texts (Miles & Huberman 1994; Rice & Ezzy 1999). A sample that aims for maximum variation, for example, would be most useful if the aim of the research was to document the variations and patterns in a particular phenomenon. Another sampling technique might focus on extreme or deviant cases in order to illustrate processes that would otherwise be difficult to observe. The important point is that the reasons for the sample are clearly related to the research questions. Theoretical sampling, used by grounded theorists, illustrates this link between sampling choices and research questions.

In grounded theory, the units of analysis are sampled on theoretical grounds (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990). This means that the sample is not defined prior to the research but as the theoretical dimensions emerge during the research. For example, during my research on unemployment I developed a theory that the level of distress experienced by an unemployed person was strongly influenced by the level of financial distress. This theory was developed out of interviews with people on relatively low incomes with and without significant debt. Among these people the level of debt correlated with the level of distress, and formed a central part of their talk about why they were or were not distressed. That is to say, while being poor is not pleasant, it is much more tolerable if you have no debt and have no-one else who is financially dependent on you. I had also interviewed wealthy unemployed

people who were not distressed and were living quite comfortably on their income. To examine this proposition more fully, I sought out unemployed people who had a high income while unemployed and also had a sizeable financial debt or considerable financial obligations, such as a large dependent family. These people were distressed both financially and more generally, despite their relatively high level of income. Interviews with them underlined that it was not the absolute level of income but the level of income relative to financial obligations that caused distress. The earlier interviews had also indicated that this was the case, but the theoretical sampling procedure made the argument even stronger. Sampling conducted on theoretical grounds resulted in a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of financial distress experienced by unemployed people.

Theoretical sampling stops when the researcher decides the study has reached saturation. The idea of theoretical saturation was first formally described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This idea appears to have had its source in Everett Hughes, who advised his students to keep interviewing until they did not hear anything new (Hintz & Miller 1995). To be able to do this requires, of course, that researchers are analysing their data as they are collecting it, otherwise it would be very difficult to identify when saturation had been achieved. This advice has implications both for the sample size and for the types of units sampled. Strauss (1987) observes there will always be new issues that can be pursued. However, data collection has to end at some point, and in theoretical sampling this point is decided on theoretical grounds, as a consequence of concurrent data analysis and data collection.

Including participants in all aspects of the research

Feminist theory highlights the centrality of relationships to the research process: 'Research is an inherently relational process that involves shared stories, actual bodies, and real voices' (Way 1997: 704). Relationships necessarily involve power differentials: 'The prominence given within feminist methodological literature to the importance of understanding what methods "do" both to research participants and to research "findings" has been very important in reconstituting knowledge-claims and in helping to develop a more democratic social science' (Oakley 1998: 725). A more democratic research practice is typically achieved by formally involving the researched as participants in the research process.

Drawing on participatory methodologies, some feminists have included research subjects as co-researchers in their projects. The aim of making subjects co-researchers is to avoid exploiting the 'subjects' and to empower women to research issues that concern them. Lather and Smithies (1997), for example, refer to their 'subjects' as participants or contributors to their research. Rather than taking 'control' of the data once the interviews were completed, they included their participants in the writing process as an 'editorial board' (Lather & Smithies 1997: 215).

Participatory research and feminist research share many objectives and have been utilised together (Maguire 1987). Participatory research developed in response to a similar desire by researchers in developing countries to include participants in the research process (Yeich 1996). Brydon-Miller reports that it was first used in the early 1970s 'by Maria Lissa Swantz to describe work then being conducted in Tanzania that drew on the knowledge and expertise of community members in creating locally controlled development projects' (1997: 658). The research attempts to include participants at every stage of the process: 'They participate in a process of developing research questions, designing research instruments, collecting information, and reflecting on the data in order to transform their understanding about the nature of the problem under investigation' (Nelson et al. 1998: 884).

Morrow and Smith report that during their qualitative focus group study of sexual abuse survivors they invited some participants to become co-analysts during the data analysis phase of the research: 'The 4 coanalysts (termed participant-coresearchers) continued to meet with Morrow for more than a year. They acted as the primary source of participant verification, analysing video-tapes of the group sessions in which they had participated, suggesting categories, and revising the emerging theory and model' (Morrow & Smith 1995: 26).

Involving participants as co-researchers can be challenging, for feminists and non-feminists alike. Not only does it question the traditional presumed expertise of the academic researcher, it requires innovations in data gathering, analysis and writing (Olesen 1994). This can be particularly problematic if, for example, the researcher and the researched do not share similar political objectives, such as a commitment to feminist emancipation.

Formally involving participants as co-researchers is not simply a response to political concerns but also part of a practice that aims

to hear the voice of the other, to use the hermeneutic turn of phrase. Feminist methods emphasise the need to 'hear voices', and this draws attention to the human connection: 'to the relationship between speaker and listener, to the possibility of different languages, and thus to the potential for misunderstanding or mistranslation as well as to the ability of people to see and to speak about themselves and the world in more than one way' (Gilligan, quoted in Way 1997: 705).

The extent to which participants are involved in research varies considerably. Many qualitative researchers ask participants to read transcripts of interviews, others include participants on steering committees or as part of a consultative process in designing the research. The degree of involvement reflects, in part, the political orientations of the researcher, and the political objectives of the research. I argue that there are no universally correct standards for acceptable levels of participant inclusion in research projects. My point is that the past practice of reducing the role of participants to merely providing information in interviews will probably provide neither the most useful data nor the optimum political outcomes. The extent of involvement of participants has now become a question that each researcher must address in developing a research plan and practice.

Summary reflections

Most qualitative researchers do not presume to know all their research questions before they start data collection. Additional research questions can be discovered and researched only by conducting data analysis, even if this is of a very preliminary kind, during the process of data collection. Many qualitative researchers do not know the dimensions along which they will sample for their data. These dimensions can be discovered only by conducting preliminary data analysis during data collection, and thus following the practice of theoretical sampling. Many qualitative researchers seek to include participants in all aspects of the research process. Participants can only suggest additional, or different, research questions; or suggest alternative sources of data, if they are provided with, and/or included in, preliminary analyses conducted during the process of data collection.

Qualitative data analysis is a process of interpretation. Data are not interpreted *after* they are collected. Although interpretation

does happen after data collection, data collection *itself* is an interpretive process. Choices about what to ask and who, or what to sample, are products of interpretive understandings. If the researcher conducts systematic data analysis during data collection, then the process of data collection will be guided not only by the researcher's preexisting interpretations but also by the emerging interpretations of participants.

Conducting data analysis during data collection results in a more sophisticated and subtle analysis of the data. The interpretive process begins when the researcher begins to reflect on his or her research. From this moment data analysis begins, and should be systematically conducted. Doing so will make for an easier, richer, more subtle and more useful analysis.

Further reading

Interviewing

Holloway, W. and Jefferson, T. 1997 'Eliciting narrative through the in-depth interview' *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 53–71.
Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. 1995 *The Active Interview*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. 1995 *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Journals and memos

Mason, J. 1996 *Qualitative Researching*, London, Sage.
Strauss, A. 1987 *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. 1990 *Basics of Qualitative Research*, London, Sage.

Empirical studies with good descriptions of their data analysis methodology

Irvine, L. 1999 *Codependent Forevermore: The Invention of Self in a Twelve Step Group*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Lather, P. and Smithies, C. 1997 *Troubling the Angels*: *Women Living with HIV/AIDS*, Boulder, HarperCollins.

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Sampling

Luborsky, M. and Rubinstein, R. 1995 'Sampling in qualitative research' *Research on Aging*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 89–113.

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Coding data and interpreting text: methods of analysis

> Traditional research designs have considerable limitations . . . A sort of sympathetic magic seems to be involved, the assumption being that if you go through the motions of science then science will result. But it hasn't . . . Understanding of ordinary behavior has not accumulated; distance has (Erving Goffman, quoted in Manning, P. 1992: 141).

The quantitative, and functionalist, research designs that Goffman refers to as 'traditional' are still present today. Influenced by positivism and the attempt to be 'objective' and 'scientific', many research designs systematically distance the researched from the researcher. As a consequence the researcher is much less likely to 'hear' the 'voice' of the participants. It is relatively easy to conduct a quantitative survey, or a group of one-off qualitative interviews, with a group of participants. It is easier to publish the results of a quantitative survey, takes less time to analyse, and will probably further the career ambitions of the researcher more effectively, depending on his or her disciplinary background. It is much harder to spend time with people listening to their voices, understanding their perspectives and sharing in their problems. Such research is harder to publish, takes more time and energy to conduct, and is often devalued when it comes to career progression. However, this sort of research provides a much more sophisticated understanding of the issues, will facilitate the formulation of more effective policy, and is politically and ethically sensitive.

The problem of overemphasising 'scientific' procedure, and as a consequence using inappropriate methodology, is well illustrated in Tanya Luhrmann's (1989) anthropological ethnography of magic and Witchcraft in contemporary England. The Witch magicians studied by Luhrmann engaged in a variety of magical practices in which they attemped to change physical realities through magical techniques. Luhrmann says that 'the point of the study was to understand how [someone] . . . could come to treat apparently outrageous claims as sensible topics for discussion' (1989: 17). Prior to Luhrmann conducting her research, her participants had been studied by a sociologist, who had handed out questionnaires with categorical questions, and acted as if he was an expert who knew more about the subject than his participants. Questionnaires with fixed response questions are good 'scientific' technique. However, in his quest to follow correct technique this sociologist had completely misunderstood the nature of Witchcraft, and his research report was derided by the Witches as equivalent to an observational study of trees that concluded trees do not grow.

Qualitative researchers study meaning. The quality of research into meanings and interpretive processes can not be assured simply through following correct procedures. Interpretations and meanings are situated. A method applicable to one research situation will be inappropriate in another. Qualitative research is demonstrably trustworthy and rigorous when the researcher demonstrates that he or she has worked to understand the situated nature of participants' interpretations and meanings. The quality of qualitative data analysis depends on following well-thought-out procedures, and on ensuring that these procedures reveal the structures of understanding of participants.

Luhrmann reports that in order to understand the magical practices of Witches she decided that she had to try to share their subjective experience: 'I decided that I would understand magic best if I did what people did to become magicians'. She read, studied and practised magic with a variety of Witches in England. Luhrmann did not hide the fact that she was conducting qualitative research, and this did not worry her participants because she worked hard at fitting in with them. She did not tape-record her conversations or pass out questionnaires, which she thought would only damage her acceptance among the groups in which she participated. She was more interested in

understanding the experience of these Witch magicians than in ensuring that she systematically followed a procedure. Luhrmann wanted to understand: 'what it felt like to have a tarot reading, how magicians argued for their practice, what they meant when they said that they "saw" the Goddess. I did not see a complete or representative set of magicians . . . but I did gain considerable participatory insight into the way some people found magic compelling' (1989: 17).

While following correct procedures does not necessarily produce trustworthy qualitative research, this does not mean that qualitative research, and qualitative data analysis in particular, should be completely unsystematic. Phillip Manning identifies three distinct methodological practices in Erving Goffman's work: '(1) metaphor; (2) unsystematic observation; and (3) systematic observation' (1992: 141). The strength of Goffman's analyses lies in his ability to move between practices that provide interpretive understanding, such as metaphor, and practices that provide convincing evidence, based on systematic observations. This mixture of practices is an art that results in research that is both evocative, in the sense that it produces new insight, and convincing, because it rests on systematic research.

This chapter reviews four analytic strategies: content analysis, thematic analysis and grounded theory, narrative analysis, and cultural studies methodology. Clearly these do not exhaust the possible analytic strategies available to qualitative researchers. There are a number of other analytic strategies described in the literature, including phenomenological methods (Moustakas 1994) and conversation analysis (Potter 1996). I have focused on the most commonly utilised methods, aiming to provide an overview of the variety and extent of the available analytic strategies. Discussion of each analytic strategy focuses on practical examples from published research.

Content analysis

Content analysis is the most deductive of all forms of data analysis discussed in this chapter. Deductively derived theory and deductively driven data analysis work 'down' from preexisting theoretical understandings (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The categories of analysis are developed through logical deduction from the preexisting theory. In this way preexisting theory is tested against empirical

data. Content analysis begins with predefined categories. Thematic analysis, discussed below, allows categories to emerge from the data.

For example, feminist theory argues that the oppression of women is partly the product of a culture that systematically presents stereotyped images of men and women. From this general theory, categories can be deduced of what constitutes stereotypical images of men and women. A content analysis to test this theory could, for example, examine images of men and women in popular magazines, counting the number of times images of men and women conform to stereotypical roles. A content analysis of Australian popular magazines that employed precisely this method found that popular magazines are 'still presenting stereotyped gender roles, lifestyles, and body management' (Ring 1997: 3).

Content analysis, as with any other form of data analysis, begins with the identification of the population from which units are sampled. A sample is then drawn, typically using some form of stratified sampling (Rice & Ezzy 1999). For example, an American study of representations of masculinity in school textbooks identified children's reading books utilised in schools as their population (Evans & Davies 2000). Evans and Davies then sampled, or selected, two series of children's textbooks published by two different publishers. They then selected first-grade, third-grade and fifth-grade books to provide a distribution of ages of intended readers.

Content analysis next defines the units of analysis and the categories into which these will be placed. Evans and Davies used characters in the stories as their units of analysis. Before their analysis they developed an 'instrument' for categorising the characters based on a inventory developed for classifying personality traits in children's stories. They identified eight stereotypical masculine traits and eight stereotypical feminine traits and developed definitions of these traits *before* beginning their analysis. For example, Evans and Davies define the stereotypical masculine trait of aggression as 'actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; imparts hostile feelings' (2000: 261). Similarly, they define the stereotypical feminine trait of *affection* as 'openly expressing warm feelings; hugging, touching, holding'.

Data analysis involves reviewing each unit of analysis and categorising it according to the predefined categories. The occurrences are then counted and comparisons made, often using statistical or quantitative methods. Evans and Davies reviewed each

character portrayed in the stories and identified which of the sixteen traits they portrayed. They then tabulated their results. They found, not surprisingly, that males were portrayed with the stereotypically male characteristics and females with the stereotypically female characteristics. For example, 24 per cent of the male characters demonstrated aggression, compared to only 4 per cent of the female characters. Similarly, 33 per cent of the female characters demonstrated affection, against only 18 per cent of the male characters. Chi-square statistical tests were used to demonstrate the statistical significance of these differences.

The final stage of content analysis is the interpretation of results. Results are compared with the predictions of the pre-existing theory and conclusions for the theory are drawn. In Evans and Davies' case, while very few female characters demonstrated aggression, a significant number of male characters demonstrated affection. This might suggest that, while children's fiction does present stereotypically gendered characters, there are examples that counter the stereotypes. However, this is not the case. Here Evans and Davies resort to a form of thematic analysis, because they identify themes in their data that they had not specified prior to conducting their research. Specifically, they noticed that whenever a male exhibited feminine traits, he did so as part of some socially unacceptable behaviour. Boys who exhibited feminine traits were 'sissy' and derided for showing too much interest in domestic chores, or for wanting to play with girls, or for expressing an interest in quiet play rather than aggressive play. In short, Evans and Davies (2000) report that masculine stereotypes in American schoolbooks are portrayed in the same manner they were twenty years ago. This analysis of gender stereotypes is consistent with Gergen's (1992) content analysis of best-selling American autobiographies, but contrasts with Jagger's (1998) content analysis of dating advertisements, which found that gender stereotypes may be changing with body image and lifestyle choice may now be more important than previously central financial and occupational attributes.

Content analysis is a useful way of confirming or testing a pre-existing theory. When the research question is clearly defined and the categories of analysis have been well established by preexisting research, content analysis may be an extremely useful method of data analysis. It is not, however, a very useful way of building new theory.

Content analysis

- Identify categories prior to searching for them in the data.
- Select the sample to be categorised and identify units of analysis.
- Count, or systematically log, the number of times the categories occur.

  (Adapted from Kellehear 1993.)

As the example from Evans and Davies suggests, when new theories or interpretations are required the researcher typically requires a more inductive methodology such as thematic analysis. To explain that masculine characters with apparently feminine traits were not representatives of a new masculinity but derided male 'sissy' characters, Evans and Davies utilised thematic analysis to identify the category of sissy male inductively from the data.

Content analysis assumes that the researcher knows what the important categories will be prior to the analysis. It restricts the extent to which the data are allowed to 'speak' to the researcher. Put another way, it severely limits the extent to which the 'other' can have a voice as part of the research process. For this reason, in qualitative research content analysis tends to be used in conjunction with other forms of data analysis that are more inductive and sensitive to emergent categories and interpretations.

Content analysis can be useful as a stage of data analysis as it allows the relevance of preexisting theory to be tested, and it can be used as a way of assessing the applicability of a theory that emerges during thematic or content analysis. Grounded theorists sometimes use content analysis in this way (Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Strauss, for example, reports that emergent hypotheses are 'checked out' or 'verified' (1987: 16) during the analysis both through searching for new data and through going back over old data and recoding them according to the new categories. This is, of course, a variation on content analysis.

The skills acquired through learning to conduct content analysis form the basis of many of the skills of the more inductive forms of research, such as thematic analysis and semiotics. The novice qualitative researcher should first learn, and become thoroughly familiar with, the principles of content analysis. This will provide a solid foundation for successfully completing other forms of qualitative analysis.

Coding in thematic analysis and grounded theory

'In short, coding is the process of defining what the data are all about' (Charmaz 1995: 37). Coding in thematic analysis and grounded theory is the process of identifying themes or concepts that are in the data. The researcher attempts to build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded. Theory emerges through this coding process. Coding links the data to an emergent theory. In this section I use my own research with people with HIV/AIDS to illustrate the various types of coding typically utilised in thematic analysis and grounded theory.

Coding is an easy process that most people have already performed. For example, as an undergraduate I used to use a simple coding method when I was writing undergraduate essays. I would start preparing to write the essay two or three weeks before it was due, reading all the relevant chapters and articles. Then, typically on the night before it was due, I would start writing the essay by reading through all my notes. I would usually have two or three pages of notes on each reference, and perhaps a dozen different references. As I was reading through my notes I would notice that there was a discussion of the same topic in two different readings. So I would call this topic number 1. For example, in an essay about the experience of unemployment, I found several readings focusing on the different stages that unemployed people go through after losing their job (Ezzy 1993). As I continued reading through my notes I would notice other common themes or topics. A number of studies of unemployment, for example, focused on the secondary 'functions' of employment that are lost when a person becomes unemployed. I would code this topic number 2. Eventually I would assign most of my notes with codes that linked them to one or another of my topics. After my first reading through I would go back and find the uncoded bits of notes and try to work out whether they fitted into my existing topics or required a new topic, or could be left out of the essay. Next I would write down all my topics on a piece of paper and rearrange them until I thought I had an argument. I would then write my essay based on the list of topics and my coded notes.

Perhaps you write essays differently? It doesn't really matter. What I want to demonstrate is that coding and categorising is something most people have already performed in tasks as simple as writing notes in the margins of books and articles. Coding in

qualitative data analysis is more complex than this, partly because most qualitative researchers work with much larger sets of data. However, the process is similar. The initial identification of topics, often referred to as open coding, is exploratory, looking in the data for codes. As the coding scheme becomes more developed new forms of coding, referred to as axial and selective coding, are used that enable the development of an argument, or central story, around which the research report is organised.

Thematic analysis is part of the early procedures of data analysis in grounded theory, but grounded theory goes beyond thematic analysis. The term 'grounded theory' should be used only to refer to studies in which data collection and data analysis are conducted concurrently alongside theoretical sampling and other techniques distinctive of grounded theory, such as the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Green observes that many published qualitative research papers routinely parrot the phrase that 'the data were analysed during grounded theory' (1998: 1064). This suggests that a sophisticated procedure has been followed. However, Green points out that results presented in the paper often suggest that the data analysis has utilised only thematic analysis and not the sophisticated methodology of grounded theory: 'Unfortunately, what follows may be merely an account of some key themes in the data, with brief textual quotes in illustration, and sceptical readers remain unconvinced that quali-tative analysis is anything other than journalistic reportage' (Green 1998: 1064). The more straightforward procedures of thematic analysis may be appropriate for some studies, but it is important that the researcher clearly identify which data analysis methods have been utilised.

Both thematic analysis and grounded theory employ similar techniques for analysing data. One difference between the two is that grounded theory utilises theoretical sampling in which emerging analysis guides the collection of further data (see the discussion of sampling in Chapter 2), and this is not done in thematic analysis. Grounded theorists have also developed a sophisticated methodology for the development of codes, particu-larly in relation to the development of core codes during selective coding, and again this is not necessarily done in thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be employed either as part of a grounded theory analysis or for the analysis of data that have already been entirely collected. In this section I discuss the practice of coding

qualitative data, initially reviewing grounded theory and thematic analysis together where they share similar methodologies, then moving to a discussion that focuses on the more sophisticated techniques unique to grounded theory.

Thematic analysis aims to identify themes within the data. Thematic analysis is more inductive than content analysis because the categories into which themes will be sorted are not decided prior to coding the data. These categories are 'induced' from the data. While the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined. This means that this form of research may take the researcher into issues and problems he or she had not anticipated.

A clear example of thematic analysis is provided by Crisp (2000), who designed a qualitative study of persons with disabilities focusing on their interaction with health and rehabilitation professionals. He was particularly interested in examining the different ways people with disabilities respond to, and perceive, health and rehabilitation professionals. Crisp recruited 35 disabled people whom he interviewed using a semi-structured format; he then transcribed these interviews. Within the parameters of his general research question Crisp inspected the data, using thematic analysis techniques, to develop a typology of responses to rehabilitation professionals. The categories of analysis were not defined prior to the analysis, but emerged during the analysis. Crisp reports that at the beginning of his data analysis the 'data was inspected to elicit the conditions that underlie life events, interactions with others, strategies and tactics that are adopted by respondents, and consequences. It was initially coded openly by scrutinising interview transcripts line by line or word by word; by looking for in-vivo codes, terms used by respondents; and by making comparisons for similarities and differences between events and incidents' (2000: 358).

The first stage of coding during thematic analysis and of grounded theory is often described as *open coding*, as suggested in the quote from Crisp in the previous paragraph. Glaser describes open coding as a way to 'generate an emergent set of categories and their properties' (1978: 56). More specifically, Strauss and Corbin describe open coding as 'the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data' (1990: 62). Orona puts it more graphically

when she suggests that 'coding each line is the guts' of grounded theory (1990: 1249).

For example, during my research with people living with HIV/AIDS (Ezzy 2000a), as I read through my data the first time, I made notes in the margins beside the following lines from my interviews:

> 'I have only got a couple of years to go . . .'
> 'I was determined to live for ever . . .'
> 'The future was I was dying.'
> 'The future is still unknown to me . . .'
> 'The life expectancy was anything from 5 to 10 years . . .'
> 'That was living for the moment.'
> 'I was just waiting around to die . . .'

The notes in the margins of the interview transcripts highlighted the importance of the future and planning, and how a changed understanding of the length of their life had affected participants. As I read through these marginal notations I noticed a theme emerging about how people thought about time. I then relabelled all these lines with the code 'temporality' and wrote a memo to myself noting that the code 'temporality' could be further broken down depending on differences in the way people were oriented towards the future. That is to say, I noted an emergent theme of time. All the interviews contained a similar theme linked to their concern about how people living with HIV/AIDS understood the temporal nature of their lives. I named this theme with the code 'temporality'. Some people were confident, expecting that they would live out a normal lifetime. Others expected to die soon, and were angry or depressed as a consequence. A third group of participants expected their life to be shorter, but had accepted this and celebrated the life that they had (Ezzy 2000a).

Open coding often involves considerable experimentation. At first I experimented with the code 'future orientation'. However, I realised that the issue was not just how people thought about the future but included how people felt about the present, given what they expected to happen in the future. I experimented with a variety of conceptual labels, or categories, or codes (all these words mean the same sort of thing), until I found codes that seemed to fit the data.

This process sounds very straightforward. However, it is anything but straightforward. It requires considerable effort and

reflection. Orona reports that 'In the beginning, I literally sat for days on end with the transcribed interviews spread out before me, absorbing them into my consciousness and letting them "float" about' (1990: 1249). She wrote memos, talked about them with friends, and explored any ideas that came to her.

One of the strengths of this form of grounded theory is that it relies on hunches and intuition, or creativity, nuance and detail (Orona 1990). The process is not linear or clear. Rather, it is often confusing, frustrating and somewhat chaotic. This is both its weakness and its strength. It leads to new ways of understanding as new ideas are put together or participants' interpretations are seen in new light. However, it is also difficult, time-consuming and demanding of energy.

The process of 'constant comparison' is one of the central methods utilised by grounded theorists in developing and identifying codes. Strauss and Corbin describe the process of constant comparison as integral to the coding process: 'As an incident is noted, it should be compared against other incidents for similarities and differences' (1990: 9). Comparisons allow data to be grouped and differentiated, as categories are identified and various pieces of data are grouped together. Through the comparative process, events that at first seemed entirely unrelated may be grouped together as different types of the same category, or events that seemed similar may be categorised differently. For example, one participant's discussion of 'living for the moment' at first seemed quite unrelated to another participant's discussion of his plans to buy a house. However, as temporality was explored as a possible category, these events were compared and identified as different aspects of the same category.

Codes have properties, and these properties have dimensions (Strauss & Corbin 1990). For example, the code 'temporality' has the properties of how people feel about the future and how they feel about the present. How people feel about the future varies along a dimension. Some despaired because of the loss of their future, others were more philosophical about the uncertain nature of the future, and others were confident of a long future. Exploring the properties and dimensions of a code can lead to the code being broken into two separate codes, or it might lead to its being amalgamated with a similar code.

Varying the units of analysis can be an important strategy during open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest experimenting

with coding lines, sentences, paragraphs and whole documents. In my own research I moved between coding lines, paragraphs, interactional events, narratives about episodes, and the structure of the interview as a whole. Printing out interview transcripts with very wide margins, preferably in landscape orientation, makes this sort of coding much easier.

The next step in coding is described as *axial coding* by Strauss and Corbin. Axial coding involves 'specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the consequences of those strategies' (1990: 97). The aim of axial coding is to integrate codes around the axes of central categories. Orona describes the transition to axial coding, saying that there came a point where she 'felt' that she had to stop reading the transcripts of interviews with participants and instead read all her own notes and memos carefully: 'For several days, I sat wading through the notes and placing them into what I felt were the major categories, which by then, had been abstracted to a higher level. Thus "silent partner", "helper", and "neighbours" had been abstracted to the level of *social relations*' (Orona 1990: 1249). She finally identified four major themes: social relations, reciprocity, moral obligation and temporality.

There is some debate among grounded theorists about the nature and value of axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue for the value of axial coding, whereas Glaser (1978) argues that it is a process that restricts the inductive, or grounded, nature of theory building. According to the formalised method of axial coding developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), among others, axial coding should focus on the four dimensions of context, strategy, processes and consequences. This focus on dimensions suggests a particular way of constructing data analysis that focuses the coding process on the relationship of codes to the analytic 'whole' (Schatzman 1991). The danger, of course, is that in constructing 'dimensions' the analyst may decide to focus on issues related to his or her interests rather than issues that concern the participants. In her review of this debate, Kendall (1999) describes how her data analysis became misdirected in precisely this way and developed serious problems as a consequence. Kendall's problems appear

to have arisen as a consequence of beginning axial coding too early in her analysis rather than as a product of the specific methods of axial coding itself. Whichever approach is taken, Kendall's review of the issues demonstrates that the most important advice for the qualitative data analyst is to 'not become wedded too early to what looks obvious' as central categories or themes of the research (1999: 753).

In my study of people living with HIV/AIDS, the central theme of temporality was coded axially as I identified other codes associated with the various types of temporal orientations. That is to say, people who were confident about the future tended to be healthy, have good networks of friends, believed that medicine would solve the problems of HIV, and were making decisions in their lives based on this confidence in the future. On the other hand, people who despaired about the future tended to have experienced illness, were socially isolated, felt that medicine did not have the answers to HIV/AIDS, and found it difficult to plan their lives very far into the future.

Finally, *selective coding* (Strauss & Corbin 1990) or *theoretical coding* (Glaser 1978) involves the identification of the core category or story around which the analysis focuses. Crisp reports that in his analysis 'More selective coding occurred later when major themes emerged . . . [and after they were identified] core categories were repeatedly verified or revised after re-checking the transcribed interview data, and after asking the respondents whether they accepted (in everyday language) these accounts of themselves' (2000: 358).

In my own analysis of stories of living with HIV/AIDS, the core category was 'temporality' (Ezzy 2000a). I identified three different temporal orientations: some people confidently expected a normal lifetime; other people expected a short life, and were angry or depressed about this; and a third group were uncertain how long they would live, but decided to enjoy what time they had left. These temporal orientations were linked to a variety of other codes, including whether people felt in control of their life, whether they were religious, and whether their values were self-centred or communally oriented. In other words, the code 'temporality' provided the central code around which all the other codes were fitted. 'Temporality' also provided the central 'story' of my research report and of the theory that I developed to account for the different ways in which people with HIV/AIDS respond to their diagnosis.

Coding finishes when the researcher is satisfied that the theory is saturated. Morrow and Smith explain that in their analysis 'Codes and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until saturated—that is, until analysis produced no new codes or categories and when all of the data were accounted for in the core categories of the grounded theory paradigm model' (1995: 26). Note that saturation refers to the relationship between the codes and the emerging theory. It will always be possible to discover new information in the data, but saturation is achieved when the coding that has already been completed adequately supports and fills out the emerging theory.

Coding in grounded theory and thematic analysis

• Open coding:
  — Explore the data.
  — Identify the units of analysis.
  — Code for meanings, feelings, actions.
  — Make metaphors for data.
  — Experiment with codes.
  — Compare and contrast events, actions and feelings.
  — Break codes into subcategories.
  — Intergrate codes into more inclusive codes.
  — Identify the properties of codes.
• Axial coding:
  — Explore the codes.
  — Examine the relationships between codes.
  — Specify the conditions associated with a code.
  — Review data to confirm associations and new codes.
  — Compare codes with preexisting theory.
• Selective coding:
  — Identify the core code or central story in the analysis.
  — Examine the relationship between the core code and other codes.
  — Compare coding scheme with preexisting theory.

A sophisticated approach to coding during grounded theory mixes both inductive and deductive methods. Codes do not emerge from the data uninfluenced by preexisting theory. As argued in Chapter 1, the process of theory building involves an ongoing dialogue between data and theory. It is, however, very difficult to balance the emergent nature of codes in grounded theory against the influence of preexisting theory. Glaser

observes that in grounded theory 'we do not have to discover all new categories nor ignore all categories in the literature that might apply in order to generate a grounded theory. The task is, rather, to develop an emergent fit between the data and a pre-existent category that might work' (1978: 148). The process of developing an 'emergent fit' involves negotiating between categories that emerge through data analysis and knowledge of categorical schemes utilised in relevant literature and theory. The aim is to avoid the knowledge of existing theory's forcing the analysis of the data into these preexisting categories. Through a process of comparison of emergent categories with preexisting categories, new and more sophisticated understanding of the experience can be developed. Emergent codes may be named so as to be consistent with preexisting theory. However, as existing theory is integrated in the constant comparative process utilised by grounded theory, as Wuest observes, this process 'more often results in modifying and building the emerging theory such that it fits both the new data and the relevant concepts from the existing theory' (2000: 55).

In my study of people living with HIV/AIDS, the emergent category of temporality resonated with a number of existing studies that examined the temporal nature of chronic illness (Frank 1995; Davies 1997). In my final report (Ezzy 2000a), these preexisting conceptual frameworks were explicitly integrated with my own emergent theory of the role of temporality in shaping people's understanding of living with HIV/AIDS. My data were coded inductively, and as I coded I included preexisting theory as part of the constant comparative process. The research report, therefore, becomes part of an ongoing intentional dialogue about how to understand the different ways that people experience and live with HIV/AIDS.

Coding is the process of disassembling and reassembling the data. Data are disassembled when they are broken apart into lines, paragraphs or sections. These fragments are then rearranged, through coding, to produce a new understanding that explores similarities, and differences, across a number of different cases. The early part of the coding process should be confusing, with a mass of apparently unrelated material. However, as coding progresses and themes emerge, the analysis becomes more organised and structured. Careful coding allows the researcher to move beyond preexisting theory to 'hear' new interpretations and understandings present in the data.

Narrative analysis

In contrast to the qualitative sociology, mainstream academic psychology has rarely examined the person as a whole. Statistics disaggregate the individual into measurable attributes. Similarly, the traditions of grounded theory and thematic analysis, through the use of cross-case comparisons, tend to disaggregate individuals, focusing on codes and categories rather than people as the units of analysis. In contrast, narrative analysis refers to the whole of a person's account. The parts of the story become significant only as they are placed within the context of the whole narrative.

The emphasis on whole people and whole narratives represents a radical change of focus. First, it emphasises that the nature of an event or belief is not to be found in the event or belief itself, but in the relationship of the event or belief to a broader interpretive framework or narrative. This places 'purpose' at the forefront of interpretation (Freeman 1984). If a researcher wants to understand the meaning of something, he or she must locate the event or belief in a broader narrative that defines its purpose, and therefore its significance. Narrative analysis identifies the broader interpretive framework that people utilise to turn meaningless events into meaningful episodes that are part of a story leading out of the past and into the future.

Plot is one of the central characteristics of a story. Plot is a literary term for the structure of a narrative, derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* (Martin 1986). Narrative theory applies this literary analysis of plots to the study of action, arguing that lives are narrated in the same way as literary texts (Ricoeur 1984). A succession of apparently unrelated events are configured into a whole, a story with meaning, by the plot of a story. Plots explain the point, or purpose, of the events discussed (Ricoeur 1985). 'A fundamental way we create sense is by shaping the "one thing after another" character of on-going action into a coherent narrative structure with a beginning, middle and end' (Mattingly 1994: 812).

Second, the emphasis on narrative embraces a situated relativity and points to the 'in-process' nature of interpretations. Plots are not fixed by the events they describe, but are situated constructions, or acts of reading (Ricoeur 1984). Between the poles of objectivism and relativism, narrative analysis embraces the situated and continually transforming nature of interpretations and self-understanding: 'Ricoeur . . . understands the construction of narrative identity as a

process that is constantly open to review. As such, it is the poetic resolution to the hermeneutic circle' (Joy 1993: 296). We all tell stories about our lives, but these stories are always open-ended. History and identity are not fixed constructs, but neither are they completely flexible and malleable. Rather, they are somewhat stable, but continually reinterpreted as we have new experiences and tell new stories about ourselves, our past, and the world around us.

Stevens and Doerr (1997) provide an excellent example of the use of narrative theory to examine the response of women to being informed of a diagnosis with HIV. Drawing on long interviews with 38 HIV-positive women, they identified sections of the transcribed interviews that reported the women's responses to their diagnosis. Their methodology is summarised in the text box below.

One narrative analysis method: Stevens and Doerr's study of HIV narratives

1. Identify the story to be examined—in this case, the participant's account of being told she had HIV.
2. Analyse the context and content of each story, particularly focusing on understandings and feelings.
3. Examine how the women described the consequences and aftermath of the diagnosis.
4. Compare and contrast the stories. Search for similarities and differences in the structure of the story plots.
5. Examine the effects of background variables such as gender, age, health status, and time since diagnosis, to see whether these are related to earlier identified patterns.
6. Examine the transcripts for sections that illustrate the types of stories identified.

(Summarised from Stevens & Doerr 1997.)

Stevens and Doerr (1997) identify three types of narratives. *Epiphany* narratives described the HIV diagnosis as a revelatory event through which the women found a new meaning to their life, producing major changes to the way they lived. *Confirmation* narratives described the HIV diagnosis as a discovery of something the women already suspected, and as such it did not change their lives significantly. These narratives tended to be emotionally muted, with a tone of resignation. Finally, *calamitous* narratives described the event of diagnosis as a shock in which the women felt they had been given a death sentence, responding with fear, anguish and

intense emotions. The trauma of the diagnosis violently disrupted their previous self-narratives and took these women by surprise. These three narrative types are different ways of plotting an HIV diagnosis. They link the event of an HIV diagnosis into a series of episodes, past and future, that give it meaning and significance. The responses are not, however, fixed. It is possible, for example, for a calamitous narrative to be replaced with an epiphany narrative due to some other experience.

The calamitous narrative type is well illustrated by an interview conducted with a woman with HIV as part of a study of people living with HIV/AIDS in Australia conducted at the National Centre in HIV Social Research at La Trobe University (McDonald et al. 1998; Ezzy 2000a). This selection illustrates the nature of the narratives Stevens and Doerr describe. 'Sarah' was 36 years old when she was interviewed. She was married to 'Matt' and worked part-time. She was infected with HIV about ten years ago, when she was 26 years old, prior to her relationship with Matt. However, she did not find out she had HIV until about a year before the interview:

> I was tired and run down and da da da da, and went off to the doctor and said look I think I might be pregnant. He said the pregnancy test is negative but we'll do a blood test to make sure. I said fine. I said look while you're at it, a guy I was seeing died last year, could you run an HIV test. Pregnancy test came back negative and the HIV test came back positive. So, I had been telephoned at work, told by the doctor over the phone telling me the result had come back positive but it could be a mistake, you'd better ring your husband because he'll probably have it if you do have it, and you'd better get in here today. So, I had to ring Matt. And he's a plumber, he's at work, and I'm saying you've got to come with me to the doctor's today. What is it—I can't come today. And I had to say, you know, the AIDS test has come back positive. It couldn't have. So, we both went down to the doctor's. I'm crying, Matt's just in shock. We're sitting at the doctor's. The doctor said oh well this is my first case, I don't know what to say to you. There's really no treatment. It will be a very short life span. There's no way known you can have children. You're looking pretty good at the moment but you've had it off this guy for as long as you think you had, you won't be . . . I was the doctor's first patient. He couldn't understand that people, in a wealthy middle-class suburb get HIV. People don't get it from this area. Particularly heterosexual women. So, he just couldn't cope. They rushed through Matt's blood test. And his blood test came back negative. That often it is the case that the husband will be negative da, de, da. So that was sort of the initial sort of shock.

This narrative links a past (a previous relationship) with a social location (white heterosexual woman) and the response of others (the doctor's terrifying prognosis) to explain the trauma and shock of this woman's diagnosis with HIV. There are a variety of treatments for HIV/AIDS currently available, although they do not guarantee a healthy life. The doctor's incorrect information fed into a plot of the events that described the movement from a good life, through the trauma of diagnosis, to an anticipated difficult life. The event of diagnosis takes on meaning as a consequence of its placement in a story about this woman's life. The plot of her story is of HIV as a calamity. The events of her life are made sense of—are interpreted—within this broader narrative frame.

Narrative analysis contains a very broad range of methodologies for identifying narrative structure, and Stevens and Doerr's approach is only one among many. For example, Bamberg's (1997) edited collection contains a wide selection of narrative analysis methodologies, including a statistical cognitivist approach to narrative, an ethnomethodological conversation analysis, a functionalist linguistic study, a cross-cultural interpretive approach and a life span study. Each of these studies utilises different methodologies: some statistical, some metaphoric, some interpretive, they also draw on different theoretical paradigms, from psychological cognitivism, through linguistic theory, to hermeneutics. Riessman (1993) also provides a useful overview of several narrative analysis methods. In this short introduction I have attempted only to describe two approaches that are widely utilised in qualitative social research.

For qualitative social researchers, one of the strengths of narrative analysis is that it provides a constructive way of doing social research that engages with, rather than denies, the epistemological, ontological and methodological issues raised by contemporary social theory. Narrative analysis, as it is typically utilised in social research, draws on the hermeneutic theory of philosophers and moral theorists such as Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1988), Taylor (1989), MacIntyre (1995) and others (see the discussion of hermeneutics in Chapter 1). The implications for qualitative methods have been explored by a number of authors, such as Polkinghorne (1988), Bruner (1990) and Riessman (1993). Some feminist researchers have similarly drawn on narrative analysis as part of a feminist response to the crisis of legitimation and representation (Personal Narratives Group 1989; Chase 1996; Richardson 1997). Bell's

study of women with cancer provides an excellent illustration of this link between a sophisticated theory and the practice of narrative analysis:

> Sociological theorists are questioning the possibility of producing accurate knowledge about social life as well as how to account for the ways knowers produce knowledge: What constitutes knowledge? What constitutes a subject? What constitutes action, agency, power, or resistance? *Narrative analysis is a particularly strong way of addressing these questions* (Bell, S. 1999: 347, emphasis added).

Susan Bell (1999) utilises narrative analysis in her study of women with cancer as a consequence of their mothers' exposure to DES, a drug prescribed to prevent miscarriage. She reports that at first she began her study by trying to distance herself from the women she was interviewing. She strove for 'objectivity'. Bell did not tell her participants about her own life or commitments, and strove to select women who would not know her. However, as she become more involved in her study she become uncomfortable about the attempt to distance herself from her participants, objectifying them as objects of scientific inquiry. Influenced by feminist theory and narrative analysis, she began to be more open about her own commitments and experiences with her subjects. Her interviews became more conversational and reciprocal.

Bell's methodology differs from Stevens and Doerr's in that Bell is *less* concerned with identifying the overall plot of the narrative through an examination of *what* is said. Rather, Bell focuses on *how* the story is told. She examines narrative techniques such as the use of repetition, metaphors, phrasing, and the imagery of the story. Rather than providing cross-case comparisons, Bell examines two specific narratives in detail. Bell uses her analysis to show how the narratives of the two women she describes are integrated with broader cultural narratives (see text box, p. 100).

Narrative analysis is attractive to Susan Bell for two reasons. First, narrative analysis explicitly addresses the role of the interviewer in the construction of interview responses: 'In my interpretation of Molly's and Deborah's experiences I explore how my social position helped to construct the interview context, the production of narratives about their experiences, and my interpretation of the contexts and narratives' (Bell, S. 1999: 354). Contemporary research on long interviews has highlighted that interviews are not places where an interviewer goes and collects

accounts that were preexisting in the participant's head. Rather, interviews are places where meanings, interpretations and narratives are co-constructed (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). To try to be objective, to try to avoid influencing the interview, is fruitless. Rather, the researcher should be explicit about his or her role in the interview process. Narrative analysis facilitates precisely this explicit analysis of the role of the interviewer in the construction of the interview narrative.

One narrative analysis method: Bell's study of cancer narratives

1. Identify narrative segments in the interview transcripts.
2. Examine word choice, phrasing, imagery and structure of clauses.
3. Focus on the telling of the story: how do people explain what they did, or what happened?
4. Examine how the stories relate to each other.
5. Look for connections between the personal accounts and broader cultural and political processes.
6. Locate yourself, as the researcher in the analysis and the construction of the stories.

(Summarised from Bell, S. 1999.)

Narrative analysis does not attempt to identify the one true interpretation of participants' stories. Rather, the goal is to identify the cultural and social context that facilitates the everyday practice of telling stories about oneself and one's world: 'Understanding the meaning and significance of a story requires understanding how it is communicated within or against specific cultural discourses and through specific narrative strategies and linguistic practices' (Chase 1996: 55). Narrative theory explicitly engages with the complexity of the world and the finite nature of human understanding. Human action is too complex to ever discover a final set of laws to describe it. Humans are situated, and can never know everything. As Josselson puts it: 'narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life' (1995: 33).

Second, narrative analysis allows Bell to connect the narratives of individual women to the more general political context: 'Their narratives display the ways these women connect their individual life experiences to changing social and structural conditions in the

context of the women's health movement' (Bell, S. 1999: 353). Narrative analysis allows the researcher to be explicit about the political and cultural location of both the narratives of participants and the researcher. This is precisely the point of Mills' (1959) argument, that social researchers need to grasp the link between sociopolitical processes and individual biography. Narratives exist at a variety of 'levels'. Personal narratives told in fleeting encounters such as interviews contain, represent and misrepresent narratives that an individual may hold for a considerable time, and narratives that broader sections of a community may share and may be embedded in more general cultural processes. Bell summarises her research, pointing to how her analysis links precisely these dimensions:

> My interpretations of the interview narratives show how two DES cancer daughters' perceptions and interpretations are mediated through the cultures surrounding them, how they live within and in tension with systems of domination, how their individual biographies are connected to the structural conditions in which they originate, and how their narratives are jointly produced by researcher and subject. These interpretations show how narrative analysis can demonstrate and explain the production of knowledge (Bell, S. 1999: 385).

Narrative analysis refers to a wide range of analytic methodologies. I have illustrated the practice of two of these in this section. On the one hand, Stevens and Doerr's methodology focuses more on the structure of the story, on *what* is said. The methodology they utilise is similar to, and expands on, the analytic strategies of grounded theory and thematic analysis. A side range of narrative studies have utilised similar methodologies (Gergen 1988; Bruner 1990; Mattingly 1994; Frank 1995). On the other hand, narrative analysis, as conducted by Bell, shifts the focus of the research from *what* participants say to *how* they tell their stories. This involves 'attending to the cultural, linguistic, and interactional contexts and processes of storytelling' (Chase 1995: x). This concern with broader cultural and political context is shared by cultural studies and is discussed in the next section.

Cultural studies and semiotics

> Postmoderns subvert the authority of modernist metatheory with a rhetorical conception of science . . . They do so by focusing on

the *how* rather than the *what* of knowledge, its poetic and political enablements rather than its logical and empirical entailments (Brown 1991: 190).

In 1997, McGuigan reported that it 'remains difficult to see quite what cultural studies amounts to methodologically' (1997: 1). This is because cultural studies is both eclectic, drawing on a wide range of method from other disciplines, and diverse, with a wide variation in methodologies that makes it difficult to identify that which is common to cultural studies. In this section I focus on cultural studies research as it is relevant to the practice of qualitative data analysis. McGuigan's (1997) book provides an excellent overview of the methodologies of cultural studies more generally.

Cultural studies has recently taken a 'turn' towards qualitative methodology. Early cultural studies focused almost exclusively on the 'text' of a television program, film or writing. This textually determinist model provides no room for an examination of how audiences dialogue with the 'text', nor does it conceive of interpretations as constructed intersubjectively. However, more recent cultural studies practitioners have recognised that 'textual meanings do not reside in the texts themselves; a certain text can come to mean different things depending on the interdiscursive context in which viewers interpret it' (Ang 1996: 38).

Interpretation in cultural studies

- Data, or the text, are interpreted in the light of broader cultural and social systems.
- What is missing from the text is as important as its manifest content.
- Preexisting theory is used to interrogate and interpret data.
- Analysis is conducted to reveal the operation of power in cultural life.
- Some researchers rely on rhetoric and aesthetics to persuade readers of the authenticity of their work, largely ignoring issues of systematic observation and analysis.
- The results of data analysis are not framed as scientifically validated truth, but as historically located, subjective and relative.

Cultural studies locates the interpretation of data within an analysis of broader social and cultural processes. Influenced by structuralism, it examines not only the manifest content but also the 'deep structure' of a text, or data: 'One must pay attention to both, looking not only at classification systems, but also at what is implied, what is not spoken, what is "really meant"' (Lamont & Wuthnow 1990: 290). Another way of saying this is that a semiotic or cultural analysis of magazines, television programs and transcribed discussions about these cultural artifacts by audiences takes the researcher outside the data. It examines the relationship between the 'data' and broader social and cultural frameworks. Cultural studies tends not to call this process 'data analysis', or 'coding', but 'interpretation', or 'reading'. This interpretive emphasis contrasts with the focus on detail and nuance character-istic of thematic analysis and grounded theory. Data are not dissected so much as contextualised. This contextualisation is not found in the data, but is drawn from a more general analysis of social and cultural processes, often informed by critical theory or feminism:

> The aim of cultural studies is not a matter of dissecting 'audience activity' in ever more refined variables and categories so that we can ultimately have a complete and generalizable formal 'map' of all dimensions of 'audience activity' . . . Rather, the aim, as I see it, is to arrive at a more historicized and contextualized insight into the ways in which 'audience activity' is articulated within and by a complex set of social, political, economic and cultural forces (Ang 1996: 42).

This analytic emphasis is often linked to a strategy of data analysis, or reading, that examines both what is *not* present in the data as well as the manifest content. To put this another way: qualitative data analysis facilitates the identification of differences in inter-pretations and experience among people, events and interactions. Thematic analysis and grounded theory use codes to attune the researcher to the structure of these differences in the lives of participants. Cultural studies is also interested in these differences, but from the perspective of locating their meanings interpretively within broader social, cultural and political contexts.

For example, McKinley (1997) utilises cultural studies methodology to examine how people talk about the prime-time soap *Beverly Hills 90210*. Reflecting the influence of cultural

studies' move towards ethnography, McKinley's data are not the 'text' of the program itself but the 'text' of talk about the program among 36 young women, obtained during interviews and transcriptions of talk while they were watching the program. McKinley describes how young women watch and talk about *90210* as part of a process of gender enculturation. She argues that the women actively work at constructing an understanding of gendered identity as part of their talk about this television soap. Her method of data analysis, or interpretation, explicitly 'works' the relationship between the empirical data, or text, and more general theories of cultural practice and social structure. While she describes her research as an 'empirical testing of poststructuralist theory' (McKinley 1997: 5), her analytic strategy is more complex than simply analysing data using thematic or content analysis and comparing the results with preexisting theory. Rather, the preexisting theory enters into the very way that McKinley conducts her interpretation of her data:

> The [interpretive] questions became, what female identities were seen as appropriate and/or encouraged as viewers talked about *90210*? What options were hidden? And what identities were made so natural that they were accepted as real and immutable? . . . poststructuralist feminist [theory] led me to analyze the talk about females with an eye towards ways it did—or did not—perpetuate the values of patriarch and capitalism, and to ask what the role of the television text was in generating and guiding—or not guiding—this talk (McKinley 1997: 8–9).

Unlike the methods of grounded theory, cultural studies explicitly integrates theoretical questions as part of the data analysis process. This is for two reasons. First, cultural theory locates interpretations within more general cultural and social processes. Talk about *90210* among McKinley's small group of women is informed by, and representative of, processes of 'hegemonic patriarchy': 'Time and time again, I heard viewer talk working to explore identities that challenge the patriarchal definition of womanhood, then retreating to close down these alternate possibilities and reestablish a conservative status quo' (McKinley 1997: 9).

Another way of describing this analytic strategy is suggested by Barthes' (1967, 1972) distinction between three orders of signification. Drawing on Saussure, the process of signification draws an

analytic distinction that differentiates signs into two component parts of *signifiers*: the physical object such as a printed word, image or person and the *signified*, which is the mental concept or word that refers to the signifier (Fiske & Hartley 1978). The words 'female identity' are the signified that refers to the signifier of actual women. The first order of signification includes self-contained references, or the manifest content. Talk about female identity in *90210* would be analysed as simply indicative of how the women understood the relevance of the program for their self-identity. Talk about female identity is taken to indicate the actual lives of women. This is the level at which much qualitative interpretation tends to operate, or at least begin. The second order of signification refers to meanings that derive from the way society values and incorporates signs into a range of cultural practices and meanings. Female identity, both as signifier and signified, in contemporary society is typically associated with passivity, heterosexuality and subservience to men. The third order of signification links these general cultural references into a 'comprehensive, cultural picture of the world, a coherent and organized view of the reality with which we are faced' (Fiske & Hartley 1978: 41). The talk about female identity is now understood as part of a more general patriarchal and capitalist society. Cultural studies is most interested in this third order of signification.

Second, cultural studies is integrally political, asking questions about power and power relations that require a more general theoretical frame. Grossberg puts this forcefully, arguing that cultural studies is 'not about interpreting or judging texts or people, but about describing how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture, how they are empowered and disempowered by the particular structures and forces that organize their lives' (Grossberg 1998: 67). For example, British cultural studies has been deeply influenced by Stuart Hall's (1980) argument that cultural studies is worthwhile only for its contribution to a political radicalism. From this perspective, culture is analysed in terms of its relationship to existing social inequalities linked to class, race and gender. In British cultural studies analysis focused on how the messages of culture, such as television programs or popular novels, either supported or confronted these forms of inequality. The analytic concern was not with the 'message' of the text but with the significance of these messages for broader political issues. A television program that *did not* contain any mention of gender

inequalities could therefore be analysed as contributing to the on-going nature of the oppression of women. There is some debate among cultural theorists about the value of Hall's position, although even the more pragmatic approaches retain a commitment to artic-ulating the political dimensions of their research: 'The ambition of cultural studies is to develop ways of theorizing relations of culture and power that will prove capable of being utilized by relevant social agents to bring about changes within the operation of those relations of culture and power' (Bennet 1997: 52).

In America, cultural studies has mingled critical theory with pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, in a tradition of which C. Wright Mills is emblematic (Denzin 1992). Mills' (1959) argument that sociology has a responsibility to conceptualise other possible ways of organising society, while often ignored within sociology, has been taken up within cultural studies. As Calhoun puts it: 'Cultural studies seeks . . . to explore the ways in which our categories of thought reduce our freedom by occluding recognition of what could be' (1995: xiv).

While cultural theorists recognise participants as active construc-tors of their lives, in a significant way participants are determined, or overdetermined, by broader social processes. Denzin considers that '[the participant] does not understand the historical forces that shape everyday biographical life. Only the analyst understands these forces' (1997: 236). In this sense, it is impossible to analyse people's self-understandings on their own terms. In order to make sense of a text or action, these must be translated into theoretical terms. This is precisely what McKinley does in her analysis of women's talk about a television soap: 'Gathering and analyzing empirical evidence of the ways the microprocesses of hegemony play out in talk about the show have led me to conclude that such talk is implicated—for better or worse—in the reproduction of dominant notions of female identity' (McKinley 1997: 235).

Interpretation in cultural studies is often more reflective of Goffman's first two analytic strategies of metaphor and unsystem-atic observation than of his third method of systematic observation. Paul Smith observes that British cultural studies, while committed to empirical research, has tended to eschew an emphasis on systematic methods, criticising these as overly 'positivist', and instead using methods that have more in common with the aesthet-ics of literary and art criticism: 'Traditional issues of measurement and methodology have become displaced in favor of innovative,

virtuoso interpretations of media texts, youth sub-cultures, popular music lyrics, etc.' (Smith, P. 1998: 10). In contrast to the more systematic ethnography of Willis (1977), cultural theorists such as Hebdige (1979) drew on a more creative and semiological approach to cultural analysis, as exemplified in his book *Subculture*. Hebdige's work draws on a variety of eclectic sources for data and aims to produce a sensitivity to the complexity of youth subculture through the use of metaphor and models. As McGuigan puts it, his work reflects a 'poststructuralist fascination with the play of signifiers and [moves] away from "experience"' (1992: 101).

The analytic method of cultural studies contains an unresolved tension between a theoretical emphasis on analytical deduction and an empiricist inductivism. Lamont and Wuthnow (1990) point out that American cultural studies has emphasised the role of observation and empirical induction, and this is linked to a rejection by some to the radical politics characteristic of British cultural studies. European cultural studies has emphasised theoretical deduction as primary in generating new theory and interpretation, and this is often linked to a more explicit commitment to engaging with the political implications of their analysis:

> Cultural studies has in general been more willing than sociology, with its strong universalising bent, to grant that knowledge may be inherently perspectival—or to put it differently, may be both limited and enabled by the knower's historical, cultural, and social access to the world, including the world of intellectual traditions—and more eager to explore the links between knowledge and social domination (Long, 1997: 15).

Cultural studies challenges the naive inductivist empiricism of some grounded theorists. If all interpretation is from a perspective, then it is pointless to pretend that preexisting theory, or the value commitments of the researcher, have not shaped the research process. This does not make empirical research irrelevant, as some critics argue. Drawing on the theory developed in Chapter 1, I argue that it is still important to engage in systematic empirical research, and that the methods of grounded theory have considerable value in assisting this process. However, cultural theorists problematise the politics of the interpretive process, asking from whose perspective, and for whose benefit, the interpretation has been conducted. This is a question that cannot be avoided if it is

accepted that all interpretation is unavoidably political. These points were taken up in detail in Chapter 2. Ang summarises the implications of taking this interpretive approach in her description of the aim of research: 'It is not the search for (objective, scientific) Truth in which the research is engaged, but the construction of *interpretations*, of certain ways of understanding the world, always historically located, subjective and relative' (Ang 1996: 46). The emphasis on the historical and subjective nature of the products of research in cultural studies also leads to an emphasis on the role of the author, and researcher, in producing the research. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Compared to the sophistication of the semiotic techniques utilised to study cultural texts, cultural studies has applied surprisingly unsophisticated methods to analyse letters, transcripts of interviews and ethnographic data (Nightingale 1993). This does not just refer to the sometimes 'thin' nature of interpretations based on barely described, and often significantly attenuated, evidence and analytic methods (McEachern 1998). Early attempts at ethnography in cultural studies often also ignored the role of the researcher in the research process.

'What occurs, then, in the absence of rigorous ethnographic observation and description, when the techniques of ethnography are divorced from ethnographic process, is a co-opting of the interviewee's experience of the text by the researcher, and its use as authority for the researcher's point of view' (Nightingale 1993: 153). This point is almost exactly the same as Glaser's (1978) point about the danger of qualitative researchers forcing their data into the categories of preexisting theories. Radaway admits to the probability that her own research was shaped in this way when she suggests that 'my initial preoccupation with the empiricist claims of social science prevented me from recognizing fully that even what I took to be simple descriptions of my interviewees' self-understandings were mediated if not produced by my own conceptual constructs and ways of seeing the world' (1991: 5). As Radaway's quote suggests, to make this point does not require a return to a naive empiricism. To argue for the importance of rigorous method does not require the abandonment of the more general political and theoretical orientations of cultural studies. It does, however, require that the researcher take equally seriously the voices of participants and the researcher's own voice. This can be achieved through a combination of rigorous method and explicit engagement with more general political and

theoretical issues. Radaway suggests that if she were to revisit her research, 'I would attend more closely to the nature of the relationship that evolved between the Smithton women and me by describing the interviews themselves in greater detail and including representative transcripts from them' (1991: 5).

Cultural studies reminds us that qualitative research is an interpretive process. Interpretations are always situated, historical, subjective and political. Researchers that ignore these aspects of the interpretive process will produce an analysis that falls into predictable traps. Ignoring the situated nature of research leads to claims about the generalisability of results that are less than convincing. Ignoring political dimensions of the research leads, by default, to a politics of conservatism. Cultural studies also reminds us that interpretation is as much an art as a systematic process. It is arguable that some cultural studies researchers have ignored systematic analytic procedures to their loss. However, it is equally arguable that adherence to systematic method may give some qualitative researchers a confidence that is unfounded. Qualitative researchers should aim for a balance between systematic observation, unsystematic observation, and metaphor. As with Goffman's research, the correct mixture of these methods leads to research that is both evocative, in the sense that it produces new insights, and convincing, because it rests on systematic research.

Summary reflections

> Description demands model-building and models always distort; there is no clear window on a different culture. However, the attempt to build an account sensitive to interpretive limitations may provide a powerful understanding of the phenomenon (Luhrmann 1989: 14–15).

Each of the analytic strategies described in this chapter is a way of summarising and interpreting 'data'. The aim is not to discover, finally and objectively, what is 'out there'. Rather the aim is to engage with the data as 'other', as a participant in a conversation in which the researcher also participates. This does not mean, however, that anything goes methodologically. Systematic and rigorous data analysis strategies are both better at hearing the voice of the 'other', and provide a stronger position from which to contribute to the ongoing politically imbued conversation in which we live.

Further reading

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