

## **ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING QUALITATIVE DATA**

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### **Abstrak**

Tulisan ini membahas tentang Analisis dan interpretasi data kualitatif. Untuk menganalisis dan menginterpretasi data kualitatif harus dimulai dengan sebuah pemahaman tentang pemaknaan apa adanya yang diistilahkan dengan “katakan apa adanya”. Kajian ini selanjutnya membutuhkan data otentik dari seluruh konteks dengan cara menunjukkan makna yang cukup dari data yang diperoleh. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisis dan diolah dengan logis berdasarkan informasi yang diterima dari informan sebagai kunci utama dari penelitian tersebut untuk menentukan keakuratan data dan interpretasi.

**Key words:** Analysing, Interpreting, Qualitative.

### **A. Introduction**

The four core questions associated with analysing any qualitative data are: what do we notice? why do we notice what we notice? how can we interpret what we notice? how can we know that our interpretation is the 'right' one? In this discussion, we shall explore the implications of these questions when analysing material produced with defended subjects. The above question and answer took place during the second interview. Our exploration of the four core questions will proceed through a series of stages. Coffey (1996) states that analysing qualitative data will start with a critical look at the 'tell it like it is' common-sense approach, continue with an illustration of the importance of using evidence from the whole context and end by showing how adequate meanings can only be produced from data by utilising theory and by using reflexivity. While Jack (1993:381) explains that the steps involved in conducting a qualitative research study are not as distinct as they are in quantitative research: they often overlap and are sometimes even conducted concurrently. All qualitative studies have a distinct starting and ending point. But, before we take you through our analysis, write down what you noticed in the above account, and why; then compare both with what follows.

One reason for these failures of noticing is the commitment to allowing informants their voice, to tell (us) how it is (for them). Since most of us offer accounts of our lives which accentuate consistency and suppress contradiction, in the interests of producing a coherent, rational self, the 'tell it like it is' interviewer, in effect, reproduces such a self. In other words, data analysis is driven by the rationalising self-descriptions of informants, which are also the touchstone for judging the correctness of any interpretation. Within this self-justifying circle, in which the interviewee serves as both data and interpretative check, the failure to notice inconsistencies, contradictions, changes of tone and other textual interruptions is necessarily endemic.

## **B. Discussion**

As we shall see in this discussion, according to Coffey (1996) this approach would overlook some phases in analysing data:

### 1. Evidence: the whole context

The question of what can be done to make the best and most effective use of best evidence is something that has remained problematic for those in the field of qualitative research. Since the mid-1980s there have been many attempts to try to combine qualitative findings in ways that are useful and informative, most notably the work of Noblit and Hare (1988). They further explain that however, most attempts to date have resulted in approaches that are specializations, complex and refined in both application and technique, and for many are difficult to adopt.

While some evidence of attempts to integrate qualitative information appear earlier than the 1990s, real movement in the integration of qualitative information was catalyzed late in that decade by the provocatively titled publication of Noblit and Hare's classic text, *Metaethnography*. We recommend formalizing an assessment of each finding for credibility based upon whether it is (a) supported by clear data, (b) credible in the context, or (c) unsupported with evidence.

There are many advantages of adopting qualitative research synthesis to integrate qualitative evidence. In the following few paragraphs, we highlight several key advantages of the approach:

- a. Qualitative research synthesis provides a methodologically grounded approach to making sense of existing research.

Traditional literature reviews have not been as effective at integrating information as arguably they could have been. One of the reasons is that there are few guidelines or processes for conducting literature reviews effectively. This dearth has led to imprecision in approaches and even faulty interpretations. The process of qualitative research synthesis, on the other hand, is methodologically rigorous. It mirrors the processes of original research,

including rigorous sampling, analysis, and reporting. It also requires providing some measure of establishing the plausibility of the synthesis and the findings. This rigor helps to control for biases and to avoid errors of interpretation.

b. Qualitative research synthesis can help scholars make connections between studies

One difficulty with primary qualitative research is that often little connection is made between studies. Even early proponents of the method were worried that studies would become ‘little islands’ unto themselves, never to be linked or revisited (Glaser and Strauss, 1971: 181). Qualitative research synthesis targets this very problem by viewing results from multiple qualitative studies together in an attempt to see the larger picture that they reveal when viewed together.

c. Qualitative research synthesis can help scholars see gaps and omissions in the literature base

When scholars delve deeply into an existing literature base, they gain a sense of what has been done and what is yet to be done. This is arguably never so true as when using qualitative research synthesis, which unlike traditional literature reviews, begins with a specific research question. Scholars searching to answer a question with existing information become acutely aware of where the gaps and omissions are, not only topically but also methodologically – and they begin to have a clearer sense of how to fill those gaps.

Qualitative research synthesis enables researchers to summarize existing studies in ways that are informative to policy makers and practitioners, and also enables the knowledge gained through such studies to be more widely available to others. It is an approach that is methodologically grounded and rigorous since it seeks to answer a specific research question through combining qualitative studies that use thick description and that are located in broadly the same tradition.

There are various ways in which we want to argue for the importance of the whole in understanding a part. For the moment, though, we wish to focus on the most straightforward meaning, namely, that of using the whole of the data we produced relating to the cases to assist to see what other pieces of evidence there were which might help resolve the issue of whether the person was brilliant, or awful, or something else again. According to Ritchy (2003:12) evidence from qualitative research can be used to deepen understanding of society and its individual communities, and some requirements for its reporting. Evidence based on direct observation and collected in an objective and unbiased way are key tenets of empirical research.

## 2. Utilising theory

We have already seen how the 'tell it like it is' approach to social science research is committed to representing interviewees' voices, a commitment which, as we argued above, eliminates any meaningful distinction between description and theoretical interpretation. We have also argued that this commitment would tend, in Person's interviewee did not? The answer is to be found in our theory of the defended subject in which the crucial motivation for investment in particular discourses is the need to defend oneself against feelings of anxiety. All interpretative work, however sociological, requires a theory of the subject, though it may be implicit rather than explicit. Let's see how our principle of the defended subject makes better sense of Tommy, remembering that our notion is not narrowly psychoanalytic but psychosocial.

Before looking at the evidence for this, we need to mention briefly the relation between respect and respectability. There is, of course, a connection as implied by the shared root, but there is also an important difference. As with the different way respectability connotes for men and women, with sexual status crucial for women's respectability, the difference between respect and respectability also implicates gender. Ritchy (2003:49) argues that In certain respects these are the most 'naturalistic' of the generated methods in that they allow participants a high degree of freedom to shape and order the reconstructions in their own way. The term encompasses study of a range of different types of material, both written and spoken, including life and oral histories, biographical and autobiographical accounts and 'documents of life.

## 3. Using reflexivity

According to Savin (2010: 66), a 'wide and robust concept of reflexivity should include reflecting on, and being accountable about personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research and specifically about our data analysis processes'. Reflexivity lies at the heart of critical research. It involves 'working with subjectivity in such a way that we are able to break out of the self-referential circle that characterizes most academic work' Utilising our particular theory of the subject has enabled us to answer two conundrums posed by Tommy - his idealisation of his past and hostility to sister Kelly - and to connect these to his investment in an estate-based version of respect.

However, this would have been less easy had I (Tony, since I was the interviewer) not also deployed my own subjectivity to assist the analysis. Using reflexivity in this way can serve both to guard against bad interpretations and to assist with good ones. What distinguishes between good and bad use of reflexivity is obviously a vexed question for social science. Clinical psychoanalysis has been facing this question for longer, having acknowledged the impossibility of scientific objectivity earlier. What I wish to demonstrate in

this section is how certain biographical similarities assisted my noticing and hence our analysis.

Catherine (2009:115) explains that the analysis of qualitative data is useful to produce an interview summary form or a focus group summary form which you complete as soon as possible after each interview or focus group has taken place. This includes practical details about the time and place, the participants, the duration of the interview or focus group, and details about the content and emerging themes.

There are many different types of qualitative data analysis. The method you use will depend on your research topic, your personal preferences and the time, equipment and finances available to you. Also, qualitative data analysis is a very personal process, with few rigid rules and procedures. The first is formats for analysis. To be able to analyse your data you must first of all produce it in a format that can be easily analysed. This might be a transcript from an interview or focus group, a series of written answers on an open-ended questionnaire, or field notes or memos written by the researcher.

It is useful to write memos and notes as soon as you begin to collect data as these help to focus your mind and alert you to significant points which may be coming from the data. These memos and notes can be analysed along with your transcripts or questionnaires. The second is the qualitative continuum. It is useful to think of the different types of qualitative data analysis as positioned on a continuum. At the one end are the highly qualitative, reflective types of analysis, whereas on the other end are those which treat the qualitative data in a quantitative way, by counting and coding data. These are the different types of qualitative data analysis as positioned on a continuum.

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the interview take place? Was the venue suitable?

Does anything need to be changed for future interviews?

How easy was it to establish rapport? Were there any problems and how can this be improved for next time?

Did the interview schedule work well? Does it need to be altered or improved?

What were the main themes which arose in the interview?

Did any issues arise which need to be added to the interview schedule for next time?

Is the interviewee willing to be contacted again? Have I promised to send any information or supply them with the results or a copy of the transcript?

Fig.1. Interview summary form

Date : \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_  
 Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Duration: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Group: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Diagram of seating plan with participant codes:

Where did the focus group take place? Was the venue suitable?  
 Does anything need to be changed for future focus groups?  
 How many people took part and who were they? Did they work well as a group or were there any adverse group dynamics?  
 What can I learn from this for the next group?  
 Did the interview schedule work well? Does it need to be altered or improved?  
 What were the main themes which arose during the focus group? Does anything need to be added to the interview schedule for the next focus group?  
 Are any of the participants willing to be contacted again?  
 Have I promised to send any further information or the final report to anyone

Fig. 2. Focus group summary form.

The third is thematic analysis. When data is analysed by theme, it is called thematic analysis. This type of analysis is highly inductive, that is, the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher. In this type of analysis, the data collection and analysis take place simultaneously. Even background reading can form part of the analysis process, especially if it can help to explain an emerging theme.

#### 4. The problems of fragmenting qualitative data

We have already discussed the tendency to remain descriptive in qualitative data analysis. Here we want to identify the methodological - as opposed to theoretical - reasons for this. We contrast the fragmenting of data with the Gestalt principle and use an example to show how we achieved a holistic interpretation of the interviews we conducted with Ivy Walters (Tommy's mother). Faced with a mass of unstructured data, the urge of any researcher is understandably to break these down using some kind of system. The most common system is the code and retrieve method. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 22) comment: 'strategies that are dependent on coding the data and using the codes to retrieve analytically significant segments of data . . . [are] a common starting point for researchers . . . The fragmentation of data

implied in the coding strategy often leads researchers to overlook the form of their data.

We recognise that people cannot be totally known, much less that such can be elicited in two interviews. At its simplest, as we show above, our 'whole' is all we have accumulated relating to a particular person who took part in the research. As well as the transcripts from both interviews, we have our memories of our meetings with that person, the notes we took after the first meeting and subsequent interviews and also, where more than one family member was interviewed, what was said about our participant by others. For Ivy, we have all of these sources of data. But this definition refers to an external reality. Perhaps we can appreciate better the Gestalt principle if it is understood also as the internal capacity for holding those data together in the mind. CAQDA offers increasingly sophisticated ways of not holding the data as a whole in the mind, precisely because it affords ways of holding it outside the mind. Although it provides a powerful capacity to make links,<sup>12</sup> these links are stored outside the mind and retrieved, from the computer, in smaller parts.

#### 5. The importance of keeping the whole in mind

While the above stresses the importance of creativity and intuition (important features of subjectivity), it is not advisable to sit and wait for a bolt of inspiration! We used two structured ways of summarising a whole case for further reference: completing a two-page pro forma and writing a pen portrait. We will illustrate the way in which this helped us to grasp the form of Ivy's account below. The pro forma consisted of categories ranging from standard biodata to comments on themes and ideas that emerged from the whole reading. During the reading of all the raw data we had, we took notes and possibly highlighted significant extracts from it. From these we filled in the pro forma. The difference between the notes (which we also kept in each person's file) and the pro forma is that the notes were a way of amassing descriptive detail, while the summary was used to begin to convey some kind of whole. The pen portrait aimed to write something which made the person come alive for a reader. It would be largely descriptive and provide enough information against which subsequent interpretations could be assessed. In a way, a pen portrait serves as a substitute 'whole' for a reader who will not have access to the raw data but who needs to have a grasp of the person who figures in a case study if anything said about him or her is going to be meaningful.

#### 6. Making a link

This was how far our summaries had got us in understanding Ivy. In Gestalt terms, you could say that there were lots of unconnected elements that came - bottom-up fashion - from the data, but that there were many missing links, links which could provide the 'form' to Ivy's account. The puzzle of her

unaccounted nervous breakdown made us notice something in a part of the text that was ostensibly an answer to our question about whether Albert, her husband, was a worrier too. A key link could be made in consequence:

Ivy: And I used to say 'Oh, I'm not going out, people will be talking about me, 'er [daughter Fiona] being pregnant.' He [Albert] used to say 'Let 'em talk about you, while they're talking about you, they're leaving somebody else alone.'

Wendy: [laugh] Is that one of the reasons you didn't like to go out?

Ivy: I weren't frightened 'cos I used to show off if anybody said owt.

I mean when Fiona were took in 'ospital, er, I 'ad a right go at one of doctors there . . . And when she were in 'ospital, when she'd 'ad our Jonathan - I went - she wouldn't - I couldn't keep away. I 'ad to be there all the time. And I went in one day and she were crying. I said 'What you crying for?' She said er, 'Two of women have just said - aye that's 'er what's not married.'

Ivy makes a link between people talking about Ivy and Fiona's pregnancy. The link is her fear of this, although she does not say so directly. In other words, Ivy provides both the link and its emotional explanation. She does this unwittingly by free association. Her own relationship to this knowledge is difficult though. When the interviewer picks up on the suggested connection by asking 'Is that one of the reasons you didn't like to go out?', Ivy contradicts the previous unwitting suggestion with 'I weren't frightened.' The evidence Ivy provides for this is that she would 'show off' or 'have a right go' in situations where people were talking about Fiona. After the incident recounted above when two women upset Fiona by talking about her unwed status, Ivy had Fiona moved to a different ward. To us this is supportive evidence of the initial link between agoraphobia and Fiona's pregnancy: further defensive reactions against the anxiety of her daughter's status as a young unmarried mother. Another piece of evidence supporting our interpretation is that Jonathan's illegitimate status is even now routinely evaded by the fact that, at least to us, he is referred to as a brother by Kelly and Tommy.

## 7. From single to multiple links

We now have a psychosocial proposition about Ivy, namely that her own identity is invested in respectability. If this is so, it will cast light on other information in the text, imbuing significance into parts of her account and making new links. For this purpose, we will use the example of Ivy's admission that she and Albert were never married, an admission that she purposely introduced during the second interview:

Ivy: I've never been married me, you know.

Wendy: Aha. I didn't know.



Ivy: I meant telling ya last week. No. I got in with Albert when I were 18. And I stopped - 'e's the only man I've ever 'ad. And they didn't like it, me mum and dad, because I weren't marriedY But I changed me name by deed . . . I 'ad it all changed and all me kids is in Walters and I'm in Walters. But I weren't bothered about that, we were 'appy. And 'e were good. But the trouble was, 'e was already married . . . And 'e never 'ad any children to 'er. And I 'ad nine to 'im didn't I? But I don't regret it, don't get me wrong. But no I've never, ever been married. And I'm not ashamed on it. Furnished with the proposition that Ivy is invested in sexual respectability for her daughters, this extract is rich with significance. She had upset her parents' ideas of respectability by having a sexual relationship with a married man (who was also 15 years older), in a parallel way to Fiona's later behaviour. At 18 she stopped. Whatever it was she stopped doing, she censors the telling of it to the interviewer.

One possible meaning is that she then stopped (stayed) with Albert. Alternatively, the association with what comes next could suggest that what she stopped doing was going with other men. We have no further evidence of the possibility that she was having sex with them, a possibility which she is quick to contradict by her claim that Albert is 'the only man I've ever 'ad' (an oft-repeated claim). Given her worries about sexual respectability, it would be likely that she would claim this whatever the truth of her early sexual behaviour. It is not clear at what point she became pregnant with her first child; whether he was still living with his wife, for example. This might easily explain their decision to live together. The act of changing her name by deed poll to his name enabled her in effect to masquerade as married from then on. We learned elsewhere that only the two eldest children knew this secret, right up until Albert died. Here, as in many other places in the transcripts, she emphasises what a good husband Albert was. She claims that she 'weren't othered', 'don't regret it' and is 'not ashamed on it', all in the space of a few sentences (and again elsewhere), yet the fact that it was secret appears to contradict the idea that she wasn't ashamed. This interpretation is supported by our initial proposition about Ivy's concern with sexual respectability for her daughters. We also found examples in the text which suggest that this still concerns her. Since her husband died when she was 49, she has not entered into another relationship, a fact which she repeats with pride, but no hint of regret: ' 'e were a good 'un. I've never 'ad anybody since. Nobody can come and do that on me, and that's a lot to say.' In this claim, Ivy's pride appears to be linked to the fact that nobody could accuse her of unrespectable sexual behaviour.

### **C. Conclusion**

For the purposes of this discussion, which is methodologically orientated, we are not analysing this extract with a particular research question in mind, but going back to more preliminary questions of technique with regard to analysing qualitative data. By whole we do not imply 'total'. Rather, we

wish to emphasise the importance of holding on to all of the accumulated data or material when interpreting a part, both that produced by the interviewee and that which such material sparks off in the interviewer.

New material or a different interviewer could lead to the production of further links or new Gestalts. Since we know that Ivy tended to portray things in extremes, it helps us to be cautious about her factual claims: 'never stopping in once' might just mean going out frequently. Though we hope our notion of the psychosocial defended subject is clear by now, it is important that you, the reader, remember (a) not to confuse it with traditional Freudian psychoanalysis since it owes more to post-Freudian developments, especially those inspired by the work of Melanie Klein, and their stress on intersubjectivity; and (b) to hang on to the other link to the social, the one inspired pre-eminently by the work of Foucault with its emphasis on power / knowledge / discourse (see Henriques et al., 1998).

This was for Jonathan, the child of her older sister, Fiona, who was taken into the family when Fiona was regarded as incapable of taking care of him herself. He was called a 'brother' by Ivy and Albert's children, though in fact he was a nephew. Similarly, his neighbour Sean, a friend since schooldays, remains 'a smashing lad' despite a whole host of anti-social and criminal behaviour which Tommy catalogued: in his case, being 'ignorant' excused him (see Hollway and Jefferson, 1999). We use the example of the respectable working-class man, not just because we wish to talk about Tommy, but also because the original idea of the respectable working classes, being blind to issues of gender, assumed men as the benchmark. We should also note Tommy's clear preference for the term 'respect' in what follows; in discursive terms, his investment in being positioned as 'respected' (not respectable). We note in passing that the extract is littered once again with Tommy's characteristic tendency to idealise his childhood, as evidenced in words like 'fantastic', 'brilliant' and 'unbelievable'. Given the very different biographical trajectories of Tommy and me (Tony), I found it hard at first to reconcile the idea of 'being known' with 'respect'. I felt that it was a depleted notion of respect. This seems to be an example of a countertransference blinding me to Tommy's world, but which Wendy was able to notice. This is an example of the use of triangulation of our two perspectives on the data.

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