1 Introduction: qualitative data analysis in context

This chapter discusses the following issues:

- The notion of analysis in qualitative research work
- The nature of qualitative enquiry
- Theory and qualitative enquiry

Introduction

The 'success' of a research project is very much contingent on the analysis of data: on working with data to *achieve something interesting* and perhaps even *important* in relation to the substantive focus of a research project; on successfully relating such findings to an academic or professional field; on being able to *say something* through engagement with the data and using it to reflect not just on the particular setting being explored, but ideally, to create some generalizable or at least 'generally interesting' finding or idea that can be taken forward in other contexts.

In spite of its importance, the analysis of data remains one of the most difficult aspects of social research to discuss. There is something very nebulous about analysis, which somehow seems to evade tight description. Where very detailed descriptions of analysis are given, they tend to be offered in relation to a particular example of analysis – i.e. in relation to some problem or context – or in terms of a particular approach to doing analysis, like grounded theory, or narrative analysis, or phenomenological description. Such very specific accounts of analytic work can be alienating for researchers, who can find it hard to relate their interests to working contexts that are very different from their own, or to ways of doing research with which they are unfamiliar. The problem here is not that exemplifying analysis or showing how particular

approaches work is not helpful; they most certainly are. The difficulty is that doing so is not *sufficient*, as in their specificity such descriptions may not demonstrate more generally how analysis in different contexts, with different kinds of data, and drawing on different conceptual languages might proceed. Researchers, particularly new and inexperienced researchers, often want clear guidance on how to work with data, but the complex relation between analysis and context, research topics, theory, the everyday contingencies of doing research, the dispositions of the researcher and so on, mean that analysis resists prescriptive codification, which makes the provision of clear and generalizable guidelines hard to provide.

This book is about the ways in which data analysis relates to, impacts on and develops from the other aspects of social research practice; it is about analysis and data work as a feature of qualitative social research, and the intersection of research *problems*, *specific* approaches *to social research* and research *data*. We do not prescribe a mechanism or template for doing data analysis. Rather, we want to consider the ways that the work that people do with data relates to the other components of social research work. We want to encourage an approach to analysis that is not just about techniques for dealing with data, but is also about thinking through the relation between a particular research setting and problem, and the literary and theoretical context of research. Through this approach, we hope to provide a nuanced picture of the relationship between analysis and social research practice in general.

In this book we will be discussing particular approaches to data analysis, and working through some of the key issues related to data work. We do this not, we hope, in a dogmatic way, but as a means of showing how analysis can work when particular strategies and foci are adopted. We have attempted to address all phases in the research process, from the development of a question or research focus through to the writing and presentation of research. In each phase we have emphasized the processes of working with data, and more specifically an analytic engagement with data.

In addition, we have looked at specific forms of data, such as documents, interviews, observations, video and audio data, and explored some of the general strategies and concerns running through the processes of qualitative data analysis, such as transcription and representation of data and the identification of themes in data. In all cases, we have sought to present and discuss *data work* and *the process of analysis* in the context of specific approaches to research or specific projects.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves… Let's start by thinking a bit more closely about the notion of analysis in relation to qualitative research, as it is from this that our thesis will begin to take a little more definite form.

What is qualitative data 'analysis' anyway?

Data analysis is an aspect of research practice that seems to create significant confusion for those new to, or working outside, qualitative research paradigms. Most areas of research work are quite intuitively grasped – generally speaking, people seem to have little trouble imagining what a literature review might involve, or what research design

or writing-up are, and data collection is usually quite unproblematically understood. That is not to say that there is nothing complicated about any of these things, or that people are always right in their assumptions, but at least the general purposes of those activities, and the kinds of things that researchers might get involved in when they engage in them can be understood to some extent, or at the very least, they can be guessed at with some degree of accuracy. Very often, the issue of analysis seems to be quite different, and is seen to be rather mysterious to students, not only in terms of the practices that allegedly comprise it, but also in terms of the general aims behind it.

In the contexts of more quantitative forms of work, analysis is a little easier to conceptualize. We can point to the ways that different statistical tests work, and to some of the mechanisms for organizing data so that those tests can be performed, and that often seems to satisfy as some kind of explanation for what analysis involves. The notion that analysis will produce an explanation of the relationship between variables is also usually regarded as giving some idea as to the purposes of such analysis. In qualitative analysis, though, things are much more murky, and there are few tangible practices that can be discussed as features of work that 'constitute' analysis. It is also often unclear, it seems, what the purposes of analysis are and what the outcomes ought to look like. It is not uncommon for students to express the idea that there is some kind of secret that they haven't been let in on in relation to qualitative analysis – some set of tricks or ways of working that they haven't yet been told about.

In this brief section we would like to work through the notion of analysis in relation to qualitative research as a means of creating some kind of response to this general lack of clarity. We will start by thinking about the general usage of the term 'analysis'. As we note in Chapter 2, many of the terms in social research have some counterpart meaning in non-research discourse, and it may therefore be useful to explore this meaning in order to create a more specific meaning that relates to qualitative social research. The New *Oxford English Dictionary* defines analysis as follows:

> Detailed examination of the elements or structure of something, typically as the basis for discussion or interpretation.

Here, the emphasis is on the exploration of the 'structure' of 'things'. Clearly, what 'elements' or 'structure' might mean depend on what the 'something' refers to; there is nothing specific here whatsoever as an account of what analysis is. The *context* in which the term 'analysis' is used and the '*things*' to which it is directed are crucial to understanding what analysis might refer to. All we get from this definition is something about the examination of structure. Does this idea give us much purchase on the work of social researchers? A researcher may look at the structure of an opinion, of consciousness, of personnel in an organization, of a legal process, of communication, of experiences, of attitudes, of stories, of pictures, and so on. A part of examining structure might involve trying to understand how that structure works. This could entail explicating the **constitutive components**, looking at the **roles** of those various components, or examining the **relationship** between them. It might also call for some element of **evaluation** of the components, which could be in simplistic 'good'/'bad' or 'effective'/'non-effective' terms, but might be in a more complex and exploratory way. It might, though, be more straightforward and simply involve a **description** of those structural elements.

While this definition throws up some ideas, there is nothing tangible here – nothing that we can point to and say 'that is what you do when you do analysis'. How does one do this 'examination of the elements of a structure', and what do we mean by 'structure' anyway? The problem here is, again, the absence of an understanding of a context in which analysis operates or an issue to which analysis is directed. But that is quite a useful step: we can begin to see that particular context and issues are key for gaining a sense of what analysis means.

So what about social researchers? How do they define this notion of analysis in relation to their work with data? Does analysis take on a more certain and definitive shape when used in this domain? Marshall and Rossman define qualitative data analysis in the following way:

> Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes. (Marshall and Rossman, 2006: 154)

The reference to *relationships* and *themes* here implicates an interest in structure, as in the previous more generic definition of analysis. In Marshall and Rossman's view, analysis involves using generalized themes to look at the relationships between components of a data set. Indeed, this kind of thematized comparative work is at the heart of a number of distinct approaches to qualitative data work (see, for example, Miles and Huberman, 1994; Glaser and Strauss, 1999[1967]; Boyatzis, 2008). Now, there are some techniques and procedures that we can point to here. We can describe the ways that codes can be used to categorize data, and the types of operation that researchers might perform in order to interrogate the relationships between their codes. We can discuss the difference between codes that are created prior to the analysis of data, and those that are created from data. We might also think about the ways that computers can be used as a means of facilitating such work. All of this is important, and we will deal with these matters in some detail (particularly in Chapters 8 and 11).

However, although this gives us some idea of what analysis might entail, there is a real problem with thinking of this as *constituting* analysis. To begin with, not all researchers think about analysis in these kinds of ways; this kind of 'thematized analysis', as we describe it, is not, for example, a good way to think about how conversation analysis or critical discourse analysis works. The limitation here is that while it may be broadly appropriate to describe some of what people in these areas do as being concerned with comparing data through themes, this description doesn't tell you much about the nature of the interests that drive the enquiry. Concentrating on the processes of generating a theme, in these quite procedural ways, doesn't explain why the theme is of interest in the first place. This problem is not just limited to disciplines like conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis, though, but is a much more general issue. Analysis is always *about* something or *of* something, and the *thing* that it is 'about' or 'of' is fundamental for understanding how that analysis works. In other words, thinking about analysis in a decontextualized and 'general' way and about 'procedures' to analysis does not really solve the problem of how to explain how analysis works or what it is all about.

Let's look at another definition, this one from Harry Wolcott:

> …analysis refers quite specifically and narrowly to systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships… (1994: 24).

This definition comes from a distinction Wolcott makes between 'description', 'analysis' and 'interpretation', which represent three components of qualitative work. Wolcott does not suggest that these are clear and mutually exclusive categories, but merely that it can be useful to make a distinction between them. **Description** involves producing an account that stays close to the original data. The general aim in producing descriptions is to create a narrative that presents the original data in a motivated way (i.e. that operates as a description for a particular purpose). **Analysis** involves going beyond these largely descriptive iterations and systematically producing an account of 'key factors and relationships among them' (Wolcott, 1994: 10). Again, we see some similarity with the previous discussion of themes and generalized statements here. Finally, **interpretation** involves trying to give sense to the data by creatively producing insights about it. A crucial difference between analysis and interpretation as used by Wolcott is that the former is constrained and conservative, and is bound by the data, while the latter is inventive and creative and less empirically cautious (Wolcott, 1994: 23).

Wolcott describes the relationship between these three elements of qualitative work through the analogy of a see-saw or 'teeter-totter'. Description is the central part of the balance, and analysis and interpretation are the two opposite poles of the stem that balance on it. Researchers rest their analysis and interpretation (as defined above) on their description, and can give more or less emphasis to one or the other by raising or lowering one or other side of the see-saw. Wolcott's description, and the distinction itself, is a very interesting and influential way of demarcating the activity of 'analysis' in the context of qualitative research, as against analysis in any other domain of activity. It draws attention to some of the different features of data work – of ordering or *rendering* data in particular ways; of systematically working through data in a comparative manner; of using the data to 'say something' in a more general way.

Wolcott's work is useful, then, for illustrating how difficult it is to talk about this thing we call 'data work'. These types of distinction and analogy are all attempts to give some slightly more definite shape to these practices, such that novices, outsiders, or those we wish to convince can have a better idea of what this business is all about. Through some clarification and manipulation of language (and we do not mean to imply anything negative by using the idea of 'manipulate'), Wolcott specifies some distinctive enterprises that can be pointed to as 'the business of qualitative analysis'. For all its successes – and it is undoubtedly a very important text – Wolcott's definitions of description, analysis and interpretation as distinctive practices are a little too nebulous for helping people to understand what they might do when they undertake *their* analysis.

But we have a problem then. We have said that analysis is always contextual, and that it is very difficult to talk about in general terms away from the specifics of a setting and problem that *constitute* the analysis. The limitations that we have pointed to in Wolcott and in accounts of thematized analysis are their *generality*. Now, it is clearly impossible to address every empirical setting and conceptual problem, so how

are we to talk about analysis in a meaningful way? Other than examples of analysis in practice, what can we use as a means of illustrating how analysis works and, indeed, what analysis is? The Wolcottian and thematic approaches to meta-description of analysis represent one way of doing this, and they work and are useful up to a certain point. In this book, though, we wish to try out another way of talking about analysis, one that involves going 'back to basics', for want of a better expression, and thinking about the ways in which analysis relates to other kinds of social research work. We want to talk about analysis in the context of other social research practices.

Contextualized analysis

But we have still not yet provided a definition of what we mean by analysis in the context of qualitative research. This is because the contexts, problems, questions and issues that constitute analysis are necessary parts of the definition of what analysis is. Any generic definition will be so general as to be of no particular help in defining it, and will likely result in the types of confusion that we have identified. If this is considered too much of a cop-out, then we would like to offer 'using data to deal with some problem, issue or other' as a definition.

A part of what we would like to accomplish with this book is to provide something of an account of how analysis relates to the other practices of social research – what we call *contextualized analysis*. Our definition of analysis is about the relationship between data and conceptual problems, and our aim is to explore this relationship as a feature of all social research work. We are interested in looking at the ways in which researchers use this basic issue of the relationship between 'data' and 'problem' throughout their research as a means to, or *as an aspect of*, undertaking their research work. Our basic thesis is that one way to think about *data analysis* is as one component of a broader analysis of a problem in relation to data. What we hope to shows through this book is that when analysis is considered in this more general way, it becomes clear that the distinction between data work and other types of work is in many ways unhelpful, and is part of the reason why people find qualitative analysis so opaque. The situated approach to analysis helps to show, for example, how research problems are developed through data work; how literature is used to construct research problems and to think about and even work with data; how research plans and designs are produced and worked through in relation to data and the analytic work it is supposed to do; how 'gathering' data through research always involves a simultaneous analysis of that data. When viewed like this, 'data' and 'analysis' becomes much less abstract, and more tightly integrated into research as a whole.

But this may raise a question: there may be nothing different about it *conceptually* and at this general level, but surely there is something distinctive about data work as a *set of practices*? Surely there is something that constitutes data work? Well, the answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. We will show through this book that, in fact, when you reflect on the research process many of the problems that people face when thinking abstractly about data work disappear, as the issues to which analysis is directed become much more visible. However, the practices of dealing with data are different from, say, dealing with literature or planning a research project, and there is a lot to say about the

particular things that get done during data work. In addition to working through our approach to contextualized analysis, then, we will also be addressing some key issues related to data work, such as the use of computers in relation to research, the ways that audio and video data can be handled, and the issues of transcription in qualitative enquiry. Given what we have said about the contextual nature of analysis, our discussion of these matters is not in any sense complete. We could not possibly show, for example, how *all* researchers ought to analyse or deal with their video data or what a good transcription should look like. Our discussions should be taken as restricted (how could they be otherwise?), and as offering ideas and illustrations rather than firm and generalizable methods of working.

But what we have said so far does not take account of the fact that when people talk about qualitative data analysis, they often do so in relation to some more or less formal 'approach'. Discourse analysis, thematic analysis, rhetorical analysis, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, critical incident analysis, semiotic analysis, cross case analysis, grounded theory analysis. ethnographic analysis – these are just a few of the terms that are often used when talking about qualitative data work. This extreme diversity, and the wide range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives that feed into it are another one of the reasons why qualitative analysis is so difficult to address or to make sense of. Wolcott provides a list of more than 50 different distinctive approaches to analysis (1994: 27), many of which could easily take up a book in their own right. It would be impossible for this or any book to provide a thorough guide to this immense body of work. While we will be looking in detail at a number of them, our purpose in doing so is to exemplify the ways that particular forms of analysis direct enquiry and data analysis. In this way we hope to raise people's interests in enquiring about different approaches or modes of analysis, and to encourage an attitude of critical reflection in relation to them. This should not be seen in any way to retract or distract from our arguments about the situated nature of qualitative data work. On the contrary, it is precisely by working with data in *context* that the relevance or otherwise of these diverse perspectives and approaches becomes evident.

We hope that these opening pages have provided some clarity as to our purposes and general approach. But there are a few more issues to clear up before we launch into the more focused discussions of the book's constituent chapters. In particular, we would like to say something about the process of qualitative enquiry in general, and about the role of theory within that process.

The notion of 'qualitative' in qualitative data analysis

Already in this opening chapter we have been implying and occasionally actively using a distinction between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research, and qualitative and quantitative data analysis. However, providing definitions to support this well used distinction is a notoriously difficult thing to do (see Snape and Spencer, 2003). A part of the difficulty is that the methodological debates, epistemological positions and research practices to which the distinction pertains are not easily divided into two separate camps,

but are areas of discourse that have a complex relation to one another. It is common for the aims of qualitative research to be defined in the following ways:

Examining the construction of meaning
Understanding the details of peoples' lives or frames of reference
Reflecting on the role of the researcher in the generation of data

The practices of qualitative research are often described as being *flexible*, *iterative*, *naturalistic*, and as resulting in *thick descriptions* that are *reflexive* about the ways in which research data is constructed. All of these characterizations are appropriate as general descriptors, but they hide significant variations.

As the 'other' in the dichotomy, quantitative research is often described as involving an interest in the correlation between variables, and with the uses of scientific methods and statistical procedures to generalize findings – we have described it that way ourselves earlier on in this chapter. Again, though, such definitions invariably gloss different practices, methodologies and commitments, and oversimplify a complex interplay of ideas and traditions. It is, then, a characteristic of the labels 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' that they perform crude glosses. They divide up the social research community in a way that many researchers would not themselves choose. With this caveat in place, we will invariably, and frequently, make use of the loose distinction implied by these terms.

Box 1.1   Key concepts in qualitative research

Reflexivity is a key issue in social research that refers to the process of reflecting on the role of the researcher in the construction of meaning and, critically, of *data*. The 'reflexive turn' has been particularly visible in ethnographic research, and is exemplified nicely in the writing of Clifford and Marcus (1986) and of Clifford Geertz (1990).

Thick description is a term made famous by Clifford Geertz (1973) and involves the production of rich descriptions that outline the details of the contexts of people's actions and practices so that they become intelligible in their own terms.

The phrase **naturalism** is particularly difficult to define as it refers to a set of debates about the socially constructed nature of the social world and the implications of these characteristics for social research practice. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a very influential paradigm for thinking about these issues that draws attention to the multiplicity of perspectives in social life, their negotiated character, and the requirement for *contextual* explanation and understanding.

Quantitative data is usually thought of as that which can be coded numerically for the purposes of statistical analysis. By this definition, qualitative data can be characterized as 'everything else'. It is common for quantitative research to produce some qualitative data (i.e. things that can't be numerically coded, like descriptions

of experiences), and for qualitative research to generate data that can be described numerically and analyzed statistically. Such data forms are often entirely complementary, and illustrate the oversimplicity of the qual/quant distinction. Indeed, the difference is often not actually in the data itself, but in the uses to which it is put (on this point, see Wolcott, 1994: 4). In writing a book about qualitative analysis we are, by implication, focusing on the 'everything else' that is left over from numerical analysis.

In spite of the title, this book is not just aimed at 'qualitative researchers', but is relevant to all forms of social research. Our aim is to explore the relationship between data and research problems in general terms, and to create an orientation to data work as a continuation of this same problematic rather than *just* a matter of searching for data manipulation and organization *techniques*. While the use of statistical tests are a part of what researchers might do when dealing with their numerical data, they are not the beginning and the end of the matter of analysis. Another way to put this would be to say that '*analysis* involves deciding what counts as variables in the first place, on making sense of any relations that may be found between variables, and on relating statistical findings to research questions and concepts'. While our concern is not with numerical data and statistical analysis, the conception of analysis that we develop throughout this book is as relevant to 'quantitative' researchers as it is to 'qualitative' ones.

Describing the research process

A common way to conceptualize and describe social research is as a linear process, where researchers move from a research topic, through various stages of research (literature review, research design, data 'collection', 'data analysis') to the production of a written research report (see Figure 1.1). This conception has a strong resonance with research practices in the physical sciences, where pre-formulated hypotheses are subjected to empirical examination, with the aim of either proving or disproving the theorized relation presented in the hypothesis.

In the social sciences, however, this model is not a very good description of the real-world practices of research. All social research (and not just 'qualitative' research) is iterative in the sense that the 'stages' are best conceptualized as 'forms of work' that
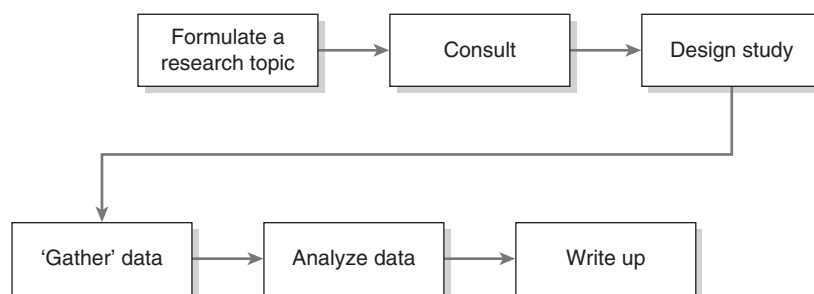
Figure 1.1   A linear model of the workflow in social research
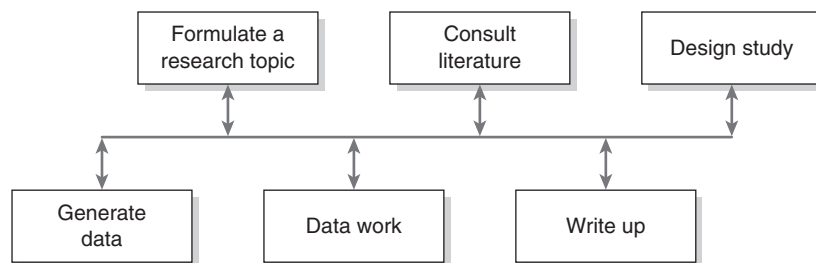
Figure 1.2   A Slightly more realistic depiction of the workflow in social research

mutually inform each other. If this were to be represented visually, it might look something like the process depicted in Figure 1.2. Researchers can move from analyzing data, to consulting literature, to collecting more data, to designing an alternative approach to data collection, to writing, back to analyzing data, and so on.

But, the movement through the research process is by no means entirely non-linear either. Researchers do start research because they have a topic of enquiry, however vague that may be, and typically begin the process by trying to specify that interest further, usually with reference to existing studies. Similarly, researchers cannot really start collecting data until they have a broad sense of the types of data that they require and the ways they are to be used to address the research topic. Perhaps the best way to think about the research process is as being *orientated towards* the model implied in Figure 1.1, but with an awareness that it will never quite work out like that.

Figure 1.2 also involves some visual *mis*representation of the actual practices of social research. Indeed, it illustrates the problems in using diagrammatic forms to represent complex and difficult-to-codify processes. While researchers may concentrate on one particular aspect of their work more than others at any given time, it is not typically the case that the other aspects are in abeyance while they do so. Researchers usually work on more than one of these aspects of work consecutively (and sometimes all at the same time). This does not mean that there are no phases to research – as we have seen, some practices do logically precede others – but these phases are not as distinct and transparent as is commonly presented. The diagram shown in Figure 1.2 disrupts the conventional representation of research as a linear process of distinct phases. It signals an interaction between, and an interdependency of, elements in the research process, but cannot meaningfully represent or map a process that, in practice, can be realized in a multiplicity of ways.

To depict the research process in this way suggests a question:

Q: If research is not entirely linear, how do researchers know what to do next?

In other words, if there is no clear pattern involved in research work, then how do researchers work their way through the various tasks that they have to do? As we suggested above, the main referent for all research practice is the relationship between *data* and *research topic*. Researchers decide what to do next on the basis of

the challenges they are facing in relating these two aspects. This book is directed towards showing how this process works in real-world research situations.

The relationship between theory and analysis

In addition to the types of terminology we introduced earlier (interpretation, themes, description), **theory** is a phrase that is very closely associated with the kinds of things that get done when undertaking analysis. Like analysis, though, there is nothing precise about the term, or particularly generalizable about it as an activity. It is perhaps its lack of clear shape that make it, like analysis, such a difficult topic or area for so many social researchers.

In many instances, researchers work within defined theoretical fields, which are constituted in a range of commitments or interests that are shared by a community of scholars and researchers. This 'general perspective' may be definable as a broad academic discipline (like social psychology or sociology or human geography or philosophy), or some more specific genre within a wider discipline, such as ethnomethodology, or Jungian psychoanalysis, discursive psychology, or phenomenology (although to describe such collective commitments as 'genres' is to imply a subject relation that the members of those communities may not themselves accept). Often, however, such general categories will not be particularly useful descriptors of the very specific theorizations that authors produce and with which they work.

Just like the term 'analysis', 'theory' is so varied in the manner in which it is understood and realized in practice that it is extremely hard to discuss in any generalized sense. We might describe the role of theory as involving:

- Categorizing – creating groupings of particular aspects of the social world
- Describing – providing new ways of characterizing some feature of the social world so as to draw attention to particular characteristics of it
- Comparing – juxtaposing features of the social world
- Interrogating – problematizing the taken-for-granted aspects of data
- Generalizing –moving from particular empirical domains to more general understandings or claims.

But this list is *extremely* partial: theory can act as a tool in analysis, as a means of working with data in some *particular* and *motivated* way. That is to say, theory is an important aspect of analysis and is constituted in the working out of particular problems in specific circumstances and in orientation to defined intellectual commitments and practical obligations. As such, the list provided above can only operate as a very general heuristic device for demonstrating *some* of the ways that analysis might function.

One of the implications of the contextual character of theory is that it is extremely hard to discuss in *decontextualized* terms. The process of theory work as an aspect of

analysis makes most sense when it is seen *in action*. In this book, we provide a number of examples of the ways in which theory acts as a motivated move towards data. In some instances these examples are situated within recognizable and defined approaches, and in other instances they are not. These sorts of examples are not arguments for 'how analysis should be done', but are merely exemplifications of how analysis through *those* perspectives and *those* contexts, and in relation to *that kind of data*, might work. The generalizable feature of these examples is that they all involve working with concepts and particular theoretical positions in relation to data. In other words, they represent a working out of theory in the context of real-world data.

Some common areas of concern in relation to theory

'Theory' is a very common area of anxiety for social researchers: three of the most common questions that are often raised in relation to theory are:

- Do I need theory to analyze my data?
- I don't have a theory – how do I get one?
- Do I have to do grounded theory?

There are no simple answers to any of these questions, which all pertain to the relation of theory to data and the role of theory in analysis, but it may be useful to provide some reasonably direct responses to the questions at this point:

Do I need theory to analyze my data? Whether or not theory is *necessary* very much depends on the context of a given research project. Policy-orientated research will often not involve any explicit theoretical work, but there are probably very few examples of qualitative postgraduate work in the social sciences that do not include a strong orientation to, and use of, theory. This answer draws attention to the fact that social research is characterized by a number of *genres*, and that 'what counts as analysis' is genre-specific. While in some instances theory might not be *necessary*, the academic community generally regard it as offering opportunities for more insightful engagement with data. The absence of an explicit reference to, or incorporation of, theory often results in a rather descriptive and impoverished analysis.

I don't have a theory, how do I get one? Theory is developed through research, both in the critical examination of a body of literature and through the close examination of data. However, it is usually better to think about the ways in which very specific *theoretical components* may be used for analyzing data than to worry about the requirement of having 'a theory', which can sound rather daunting.

Do I have to do grounded theory? The term 'grounded theory' is heavily associated with qualitative research, but it is by no means a necessary component of qualitative analysis. The prevalence of the term does lead some people to assume that 'theory

work' in qualitative research *is* grounded theory, but this is not the case. In fact, grounded theory is a rather ambiguous term, which can refer to something extremely specific and to nothing much in particular, depending on how it is being used. Where researchers are interested in undertaking grounded theory, it is important to be clear about what *exactly* is meant by the claim.

In this book we address all of the above themes in detail.

The structure of the book

Chapters 2–12 of this book deal with distinctive features of research work. The thread that runs through all of the chapters is the demonstration of the ways in which the orientation to the relationship between data and research topic features as a general issue in social research and the notion of 'analysis' as a general feature of research practice.

Chapter 2 looks at the roles of theory in social research, and demonstrates the various ways in which theoretical concepts can be used in and produced through research. We distinguish between two approaches to theorization – top-down and bottom-up theory – that operate as potentially complementary strategies for developing conceptual resources that enable data to 'speak'. In Chapter 3 we turn our attention to the processes of orientating to the 'discursive spaces' of research and the ways in which an opening-up to, and interrogation of, literature can help researchers to specify and develop particular analytic concerns and interests. Chapter 4 explores the process of design and shows how the concern with generating data in order to deal with a particular research topic functions as a means of creating effective and analytically rich research strategies.

Chapter 5 is the first of two chapters to focus on data *generation* and looks at the ways in which documentary sources can be put to work in research, and the particular analytic roles that they can play. Chapter 6 explores the various practices of, and issues in, interview- and observation-based research, and the processes of using these methods to create topically focused and relevant research materials.

Chapter 7 moves on from this to explore approaches to transcription, and illustrates how such modes of representation – or as we describe it, *re-presentation* – form central tools in the process of data work. Chapter 8 outlines some of the key characteristics of what we describe as 'thematic analysis', and shows how these can be put to work in the schematized coding of various forms of data. Following this, Chapters 9 and 10 looks at approaches to analysing images, text, videos and sound. These chapters use examples from semiotics and conversation analysis as a means of demonstrating the potential value of such data forms and of showing how particular concepts and theoretical concerns can be used in data work.

In Chapter 11 we discuss the various roles that computers can play in the analysis process, and explore the ways in which particular packages and strategies of use can impact on the ways that qualitative researchers work with data. Chapter 12 reflects on the ways that researchers can effectively work through their analysis in the context of writing and other presentational media and contexts. The final chapter draws together the key themes that we have discussed in this book.

Recommended further reading

Geertz, C. (1990) *Work and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. In spite of the title, this book has much to offer to all qualitative researchers as it provides an elegant discussion of the implications of the reflexive turn for social science practice.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage. This text has become a classic, giving an account of the debates and implications of the notion of 'naturalistic' inquiry in qualitative research.

Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (2nd edn). London: Sage. Silverman is an important author in qualitative research methods. Students usually find Silverman's work very accessible. Like Wolcott, Silverman's work is interesting as it quite clearly comes from a distinctive perspective (interactional sociology), and often exhibits the concerns and interests of this particular approach. See, for example, his descriptions of the use of naturalistic data.

Wolcott, H. (1994) *Transforming Qualitative Data: Descriptions, Analysis and Interpretation*, London: Sage. Wolcott's theorization of analysis provides a very interesting account of the distinctive practices of qualitative data work.