

Suddenly, they find themselves in the presence of the perfect conversational partner, someone who is prepared to forsake his or her own "turns" in the conversation and listen eagerly to anything the respondent has to say (Stebbins, 1972). This characteristic of the qualitative interview leads to other benefits, including the opportunity to make oneself the center of another's attention (Ablon, 1977; Von Hoffman and Cassidy, 1956), to state a case that is otherwise unheard (Leznoff, 1956; Wax, 1952), to engage in an intellectually challenging process of self-scrutiny (Merton and Kendall, 1946), and even to experience a kind of catharsis (Gorden, 1956: 159). Together, these advantages suggest that there are for most respondents benefits to compensate for the risks of the qualitative interview.

Issue 9: Multimethod Approaches

The long qualitative interview for the study of contemporary North America should not be used in isolation. For all its perspicuity in certain matters, it is a perfectly unreliable, even misleading, guide in other respects. Or, to put this another way, the realities that the long qualitative interview can report are not the only realities with which the social scientist must contend (Trow, 1957: 35). Within the qualitative domain, there are several options at the investigator's disposal. Each of these has certain advantages. When some kind of participant observation is possible, it has dramatic advantages, as the anthropological investigator is well aware. It can deliver data that are beyond the conscious understanding or implicit grasp of even the best intentioned respondent. Indeed, it is in some cases the only way to obtain reliable data.¹¹ Focus groups can also be useful, particularly when respondents promise to be more forthcoming with the stimulus or the safety of a group of fellow respondents.¹² When the research project demands more rigor in the investigation of matters of belief and action than the long interview can provide, "repertory grid" analysis may be useful.¹³ Research objectives may also call for life histories,¹⁴ case studies,¹⁵ protocols,¹⁶ and the diary method.¹⁷

The qualitative researcher must also be prepared to take full advantage of quantitative methodologies. As it now stands, many qualitative researchers are disinclined to use quantitative methods. There is no question, however, that, especially in highly heterogeneous, complex societies, these methods are indispensable. Unfortunately, the

literature that demonstrates how this most difficult of multimethod bridges can be constructed is not abundant.¹⁸

These nine issues are germane to every qualitative researcher. They have a particular relevance for the investigator who wishes to do qualitative research in his or her own society. Each of them represents another aspect of a great methodological challenge: How can one do qualitative research in a society that consistently frustrates the investigator's full and intimate access to the lives of his or her respondents. The next section of the book seeks to systematize the points made here, and to offer a model of inquiry for the long interview.

3 THE FOUR-STEP METHOD OF INQUIRY

For purposes of exposition, this section divides the circle of qualitative methods in two directions. The east-west axis separates two domains: analytic data and cultural data. The north-south axis separates two domains: review processes and discovery processes. Together, the axes divide the qualitative research circle into four quadrants, each of which represents a separate and successive step in the research process. The quadrants are:

- (1) review of analytic categories and interview design
- (2) review of cultural categories and interview design
- (3) interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories
- (4) interview analysis and the discovery of analytical categories

These stages can be organized into a "four-step" pattern that shows their sequence and the nature of their interaction.

Step 1: Review of Analytic Categories

The first step of the long qualitative interview begins with an exhaustive review of the literature. Some researchers have taken qualitative methods as license to ignore the scholarship that bears on their investigation. They contend that qualitative methods are so powerfully and uniquely illuminating that they take the investigator

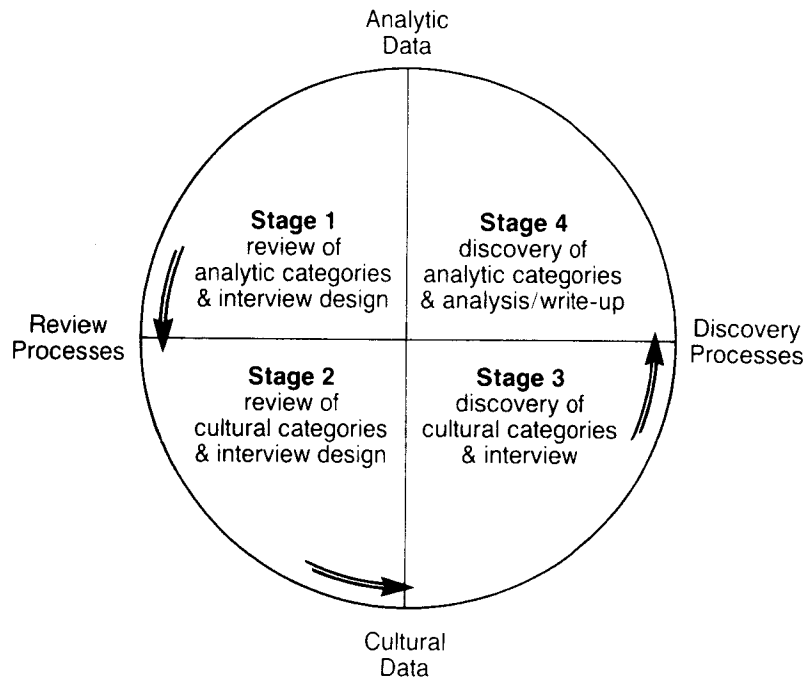


Figure 1: Long Qualitative Interview: Four-Part Method of Inquiry

“where no one has gone before.” This, they contend, makes the existing literature an irrelevance (and, at worst, a positivistic distortion). This strategy may well be ill advised. It denies qualitative researchers the benefit of previous research, and threatens to isolate them from the scholarly community. The only ghettos qualitative researchers have to fear in the present day are those they create for themselves.

A good literature review has many obvious virtues. It enables the

investigator to define problems and assess data. It provides the concepts on which percepts depend. But the literature review has a special importance for the qualitative researcher. This consists of its ability to sharpen his or her capacity for surprise (Lazarsfeld, 1972b). The investigator who is well versed in the literature now has a set of expectations the data can defy. Counterexpectational data are conspicuous, readable, and highly provocative data. They signal the existence of unfulfilled theoretical assumptions, and these are, as Kuhn (1962) has noted, the very origins of intellectual innovation. A thorough review of the literature is, to this extent, a way to manufacture distance. It is a way to let the data of one’s research project take issue with the theory of one’s field.

It is, however, also true to say that preconceptions can be the enemy of qualitative research. As we have noted in the preceding section, it is easy for the researcher to take for granted the very things that are supposed to be the object of research. Some are even prepared to argue that a literature review creates preconceptions, and should therefore be avoided (Rennie et al., in press). But the benefits of the “preconceptions” that spring from the literature review are, perhaps, much greater than their costs. Or, to put this another way, a good literature review creates much more distance than it collapses.

Literature reviews, after all, are not simple exercises in idea collection. They are also critical undertakings in which the investigator exercises a constant skepticism. They are, in fact, a kind of qualitative analysis. They search out the conscious and unconscious assumptions of scholarly enterprises. They determine how these assumptions force the definition of problems and findings. The good literature review is a critical process that makes the investigator the master, not the captive, of previous scholarship.

The second purpose of the literature review is to aid in the construction of the interview questionnaire. It begins to establish the domain the interview will explore. It specifies categories and relationships that may organize the data. It helps to indicate the larger factors that direct respondent testimony. It helps to determine what the respondent should ask about and what he or she should listen for. By the end of the review, the investigator should have a list of topics for which questions must be prepared.

In sum, the first step of the four-step method of inquiry offers both a review and a “deconstruction” of the scholarly literature. It establishes a

first survey of the ground upon which the interview will be conducted. It establishes an inventory of the categories and relationships that the interview must investigate.

Step 2: Review of Cultural Categories

The second step of the qualitative circle consists in the review of cultural categories.¹⁹ This is where the investigator begins the process of using the self as an instrument of inquiry. We have noted above that deep and long-lived familiarity with the culture under study has, potentially, the grave effect of dulling the investigator's powers of observation and analysis. But it also has the advantage of giving the investigator an extraordinarily intimate acquaintance with the object of study. This acquaintance gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight that few ethnographers working in other cultures can hope to develop. This is an exceptional analytic advantage and the long qualitative interview must be prepared to harness it as fully as possible. All of the remaining stages of the inquiry process are designed to do this, but the issue is especially pertinent in this second step.

The object of this step is to give the investigator a more detailed and systematic appreciation of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest. It calls for the minute examination of this experience. The investigator must inventory and examine the associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic in his or her mind (Merton et al., 1956: 4). What is its place in daily life? Who does it involve, according to what schedules, for what putative and actual purposes, with which consequences? What assumptions about the world does the topic rehearse? How does it play out received understandings about how the world is constituted? The object is to draw out of one's own experience the systematic properties of the topic, separating the structural from the episodic, and the cultural from the idiosyncratic. One useful strategy here is to recall an incident in which the topic at hand was caught up in an episode dramatically at variance with one's previous experience and social convention. There is no better time to glimpse expectations and assumptions than when they are violated. The ordinary and taken-for-granted is thrown suddenly into relief (Agar, 1983a).

For a research project on the cultural properties of personal possessions and domestic space, my cultural review consisted of an

examination of what I owned, how I had come to own it, how I would react to its loss. This led me to see that my own patterns of possession storage and display still reflect and declare a kind of "I'm not here for long" sentiment that survives my peripatetic youth. This, in turn, made me more sensitive to contrasting patterns of object storage and display on the part of my respondents.

I also examined my domestic circumstances, and this process led me to see that in North American homes, kitchens and living rooms are almost always mediated by a dining room, or dining room space. As I thought about this it occurred to me that for the purposes of formal entertainment these three spaces are segregated into the following activity bundles: (1) food + no sociality (i.e., the kitchen), (2) food + sociality (i.e., the dining room/area), (3) sociality + no food (i.e., the living room). This made me more sensitive to how respondents conceived of domestic spaces and the nature of the sociality that took place within them.

There are three purposes to the cultural review. The first is to prepare for questionnaire construction. It is an opportunity to identify cultural categories and relationships that have not been considered by the scholarly literature. Once identified, these categories and relationships become the basis of question formulation. What should I look for? How will it be configured? What will be connected to what? What is the best and least obtrusive way to ask about it? And most important: What questioning strategy would most certainly elicit what I know about this subject?

The second purpose of this step is to prepare for the "rummaging" that will occur during data analysis. The interviewer examines cultural categories and their interrelationship, preparing the templates with which he or she will seek out "matches" in the interview data. The investigator listens to the self in order to listen to the respondent.

The third purpose of this strategy is to establish the "distance" that has been referred to throughout this book. Only by knowing the cultural categories and configurations that the investigator uses to understand the world is he or she in a position to root these out of the terra firma of familiar expectation. This clearer understanding of one's vision of the world permits a critical distance from it.

The second step of the "four-step" method seeks, then, to engage the investigator in two processes: familiarization and defamiliarization. Without the first, the listening skills needed for data collection and

analysis are impoverished. Without the second, the investigator is not in a position to establish any distance from the his or her own deeply embedded cultural assumptions.

It is worth emphasizing that this cultural review is not feckless, dreamy introspection. Individuals raised in other research traditions are encouraged to treat their own experiences as bias and to set them aside. In the qualitative case, however, this material is the very stuff of understanding and explication. It represents vitally important intellectual capital without which analysis is the poorer.

With this review complete, an additional source of categories and relationships, this time cultural ones, have been identified and the inventory of these categories and relationships is now complete. It is now time to move to the third step, and the construction and implementation of the interview itself.

Step 3: Discovery of Cultural Categories

QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTRUCTION

Before the interview can begin, the questionnaire must be formalized. The first step is an easy one. It is the construction of a set of biographical questions with which to open the interview. These biographical questions, an example of which are given in Appendix A, allow the investigator to ascertain the simple descriptive details of an individual's life. Collecting these details in this way helps both to cue the interviewer to the biographical realities that will inform the respondent's subsequent testimony and to make sure that all of this material is readily at hand during analysis. Combing through interview testimony to work out biographical matters can be time consuming and difficult.

But genuinely qualitative questions are not so easily or mechanically identified. There are two general principles important to the remainder of the questionnaire construction. The first begins with the recognition that the first objective of the qualitative interview is to allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms. The investigator seeks to keep as "low" and unobtrusive a profile as possible. In the case of question formulation, it is crucially important that questions be phrased in a general and nondirective manner. The objective here is to "spring" respondents, to move them to talk without overspecifying the substance or the perspective of this talk. In no instance may a question supply the terms of the answer it solicits. These opening, nondirective questions

have been aptly named "grand-tour" questions (Spradley, 1979: 86-87; see Werner and Schoepfle, 1987: 318-343).

Once "grand-tour" testimony is forthcoming, it is relatively easy to sustain it in an unobtrusive way. The simplest way of doing so is through the use of "floating prompts" through the careful exploitation of several features of everyday speech (Churchill, 1973; Dohrenwend and Richardson, 1956). Simply raising one's eyebrow (the "eyebrow flash," as it is called in the paralinguistics literature) at the end of the respondent's utterance almost always prompts him or her to return to the utterance and expand upon it. A slightly more conspicuous device is simply to repeat the key term of the respondent's last remark with an interrogative tone. (Respondent: "So me and my girl friends decided to go out and get wrecked." Interviewer: "Wrecked?" Respondent: "Yeh, you know, really, really blasted.") If these techniques are not effective, the interviewer can be more forthcoming ("What do you mean 'blasted' exactly?") but not more obtrusive ("Do you mean 'intoxicated'?").

The object here is to watch for key terms (such as "wrecked" and "blasted") as they emerge from the testimony and to prompt the respondent to say more about them (Emerson, 1987: 75; Lazarsfeld, 1972a). Floating prompts allow this in a relatively unobtrusive, spontaneous way. Used in combination, grand-tour questions and floating prompts are sometimes enough to elicit all of the testimony the investigator needs. However, it is frequently the case that the categories that have been identified in the literature review and the cultural review do not emerge spontaneously in the course of the interview. In these cases, the investigator must be prepared to take a more "proactive," and obtrusive position. In these instances, the investigator must resort to "planned prompts."

Planned prompts are especially important when topics belong to the realm of the self-evident or the imponderable. The purpose of this second category of prompts is to give respondents something "to push off against." It is to give them an opportunity to consider and discuss phenomena that do not come readily to mind or speech. Perhaps the most important planned prompt is the "contrast" prompt (e.g., what is the difference between categories "x" and "y"?). These contrast questions should be restricted first to terms that the respondent has introduced. Only when these have been exhausted should the investigator introduce terms culled from the literature and cultural reviews. These planned prompts should be placed in the interview at the very end of each question category, so that they are not asked until, and unless, the

material they are designed to elicit has failed to surface spontaneously.

Another planned prompting strategy is "category" questions. These are questions that allow the investigator to account for all of the formal characteristics of the topic under discussion. For instance, when what is being investigated is an activity or event, the investigator will want to determine how the respondent identifies each of its many aspects. Most of these will drift into the testimony in response to grand-tour questions, but many will go accidentally unconsidered. The investigator will want to know how the respondent defines the event's key actors, central action, dramatic structure, important props, necessary audience, ascribed roles, designated critics, social significance, cultural significance, and the consequences of good and bad performances. What does not emerge from grand-tour testimony must be gone after. (Naturally, the dramaturgical metaphor will be kept out of questions, and permitted into analysis only by written invitation.) Each topic category has a bundle of formal properties that must be anticipated in the construction of the questionnaire.

Another planned prompting strategy is to ask respondents to recall exceptional incidents in which the research topic was implicated. (The recitation of these incidents will sometimes surface on their own accord, and the investigator must be quick to develop them.) In these cases, a counterexpectational reality has already helped to pry the respondent away from his or her assumptions. What the investigator must do is to help the respondent report the results of this new distance. What was most striking about the incident? Why, precisely, was it surprising? What, exactly, did it contradict? Questions of these kind give the respondent an opportunity to glimpse expectations that are normally concealed from them. They also create new opportunities for the investigator. When the surface of social life is broken open by a "strange event," cultural categories and relationships prove suddenly visible.

A third planned prompting procedure is "auto-driving." This technique is highly obtrusive but, in some cases, extremely useful. The respondent is asked to comment on a picture, video, or some other stimulus, and to provide his or her own account of what they see there (e.g., Wax and Shapiro, 1956; Whyte, 1957). Normally, it is the investigator who prepares the stimulus material. In my own investigation of the cultural properties of North American homes, I have, for instance, used photographs showing different styles of interior design. These prompts proved provocative of useful data (McCracken, 1987, 1988a). A useful variation of this is to have the respondent prepare his or

her own stimulus (a video of their homes, or a diary of their summer vacations, for instance) and then have them provide a commentary. Auto-driving is a useful prompting strategy because it helps to both foreground and objectify aspects of the respondents' experience that are otherwise difficult to bring into the interview.

Almost invariably the interview that satisfies these several conditions proves to be very long. In exploratory research, interview periods of two or three hours are common. The present author has been involved in six-hour interviews (divided into two three-hour or three two-hour segments), and the literature reports interviews as long as eight hours (Gross and Mason, 1953). Without long interview periods, it is impossible to let the respondent tell his or her own story and explore key terms in substantial chunks of unconstrained testimony. Happily, even respondents with dramatic constraints on their time prove willing to participate in these long interviews.

The final questionnaire, then, will consist in a set of biographical questions followed by a series of question areas. Each of these will have a set of grand-tour questions with floating prompts at the ready. It will also consist in planned prompting in the form of "contrast," "category," "special incident," and "auto-driving" questions. With this questionnaire in hand, the investigator has a rough travel itinerary with which to negotiate the interview. It does not specify precisely what will happen at every stage of the journey, how long each lay-over will last, or where the investigator will be at any given moment, but it does establish a clear sense of the direction of the journey and the ground it will eventually cover.

Choosing respondents is the final order of interview preparation. It has already been noted that these respondents are not a "sample," and that their selection should not be governed by sampling rules. There are, however, a few rules of thumb. Respondents should be perfect strangers (i.e., unknown to the interviewer and other respondents) and few in number (i.e., no more than eight). They should not have a special knowledge (or ignorance) of the topic under study. Most important, the selection of respondents is an opportunity to manufacture distance. This is done by deliberately creating a contrast in the respondent pool. These contrasts can be of age, gender, status, education, or occupation.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Once the questionnaire is complete, the interview may begin in earnest. The opening of the interview has an important pragmatic

burden. Whatever is actually said in the opening few minutes of the interview, it must be demonstrated that the interviewer is a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest. Understandably, respondents are not keen to reveal very much about themselves, or to take a chance with an idea, if there is any risk of an unsympathetic response (Rogers, 1945). Respondents must be assured that the potential loss-of-face that can occur in any conversation (and that we devote considerable energy and attention to avoiding in every conversation) is not a grave danger in the present one. The way in which to signal this benign attitude is to use the body postures and facial gestures that signal assent (Cannell and Axelrod, 1956; Palmer, 1928). It is better here to appear slightly dim and too agreeable than to give any sign of a critical or sardonic attitude.

The second way to create this atmosphere of face-safety is to make the opening questions simple, informational ones. A few minutes of idle chatter at this stage is welcome, for it gives the respondent a chance to see what the market will bear and what it will forgive (Berent, 1966). This is an important time to reassure the respondent because it is in these opening stages that he or she sets his or her defenses. The biographical data questions can serve this purpose.

Once the preliminaries are completed, the interviewer must deploy the grand-tour questions, and the "floating" and "planned" prompts. He or she must take care to see that data are collected for all of the categories and relationships that have been identified as important. But in addition to these categories and relationships, the respondent must also be prepared to identify and cultivate data on categories and relationships that have not been anticipated.

The interview is, in effect, the third source of information at the investigator's disposal. The literature review and the cultural review begin the search for categories and relationships. But, plainly, it is the interview itself that is the most important opportunity to pursue this search. It is also the most challenging. The respondent encounters salient data in the midst of a very crowded and complicated speech event. There is virtually no opportunity for unhurried identification or reflection. There is also the pressing knowledge that this opportunity will never come again. What the investigator does not capture in the moment will be lost forever. This is a challenging occasion because mistakes are both easy to make and impossible to rectify.

Capturing data on the wing, and capturing it whole, takes patience

and care. The investigator must relinquish certain of his or her anxieties to the questionnaire, and let it guarantee the appearance of certain questions and the general character of the interview. What is required of the investigator within this structure is to listen with great care. It is a measure of the sheer difficulty of the listening process that qualitative interviewers frequently speak of the qualitative interview as being extraordinarily draining (even as many respondents, as we have noted, find it highly stimulating).²⁰

The investigator is listening for many things. The first objective is key terms. When these terms appear in the testimony of the respondent, they must be patiently pursued. What are the assumptions, the companion terms, and the interrelationships of the term? The investigator listens for all of this, and when it is not forthcoming in response to grand-tour questions works out the logical possibilities, one by one, with the prompts at his or her disposal.

But the interviewer must also listen for many other things, including impression management, topic avoidance, deliberate distortion, minor misunderstanding, and outright incomprehension, taking, in each case, the necessary remedy to deal with the problem (Briggs, 1986; Douglas, 1976; Salamone, 1977). When the respondent is deliberately avoiding a topic, the strategy must be to see whether it can be approached more obliquely, or in terms of another, less threatening, idiom. In my own experience, I have observed respondents suddenly discover that they were saying more about themselves than they wanted to. In these cases, I seek to provide the respondent with a conversational gambit with which to change the topic. Politeness and strategy recommend this course. If the investigator insists on taking advantage of inadvertent testimony, the respondent is likely to respond by refusing any further intimacy.

It is also necessary to look down conversation avenues to glimpse what might lie ahead, and when the way appears blocked or unpromising, consider alternative strategies for getting at topics. This can be difficult. It may look, at first, that the respondent who has been asked to talk about his childhood home has changed the topic when he suddenly begins to talk about the baseball games he went to with his father. But one must let the respondent talk on for a moment. For what appears to be an abrupt change of topic may be a simple and important piece of clarification. In this case, home and baseball games may prove to be linked, because, for this respondent, home is mother's domain existing in contradistinction to father's world of sports. It is essential then to permit the respondent to follow his or her own lead.

It is also true, of course, that some respondents will jump topics with the frequency of a cheap phonograph needle. When respondents engage in "topic-splicing" and "topic-gliding" they must be gently returned to the topic of interest. This, too, should be done with only as much obtrusiveness as is absolutely necessary.

Finally, the interviewer must listen for implications and assumptions that will not come to the surface of the conversation by themselves, and think of ways of unearthing them. Some important data will never appear as such. The investigator can only know of their existence because they are indexed by the presence of other terms and meaning constellations. The careful listener must be listening not only for what exists in the interview but also what this material points to in the mind of the respondent. This is one of the most difficult strategies to formalize, for it comes usually in the form of an intuition. The investigator is suddenly aware that if the respondent thinks "x," he or she should also think "y."

In all this activity, the investigator must also remember to give the respondent plenty of room to talk. Once respondents have been brought within sight of the topic, they must be allowed to "go" wherever they wish. It is impossible to tell, in advance of careful analysis, whether (and how) what they are saying bears on the topic. The objective here is to generate enough testimony around these key terms that there will be sufficient data for later analysis. It is frequently only this subsequent period of reflection that will enable the investigator to see the connection and find the match.

It is sometimes difficult to elicit information in the quantity and the detail that is necessary for this subsequent analysis. A technique that can be useful for both the interviewer and the respondent is that of "playing dumb" (Becker, 1954). This is a variation on the calculated dimness referred to above. From the interviewer's point of view, the value of this strategy is that it helps to prevent glib assumptions. When the interviewer does not think in great leaps, it is easier to observe the small steps that make up the path of assumption. But this strategy also has a salutary effect on respondents. They respond with enthusiastic generosity when it appears the interviewer is not very worldly, knowing, or experienced; when he or she is a little "slow on the uptake." (Qualitative researchers who present themselves as university professors will find their respondents alarmingly quick to accept this self-characterization.) Respondents come to the investigator's aid with elaborate detail and exposition. They do so with the assurance that they will not be charged

with belaboring the point—the penalty exacted in normal conversation. In my own case, I have encouraged respondents to give me an elementary treatment of the banking system (on the quite accurate grounds that this system is a perfect mystery to me) and have been rewarded with astonishingly useful (and bizarre) data.

In sum, the third step of the long qualitative interview consists of the careful construction of the questionnaire and the creation of biographical data questions, grand-tour questions, and "floating" and "planned" prompts, including in the latter category "contrast," "category," "special incident," or "auto-driving" strategies. The interview itself will open with a carefully contrived section in which respondent anxieties are laid to rest. The grand-tour questions and prompting strategies are then set in train and the interviewer must labor to identify key terms, minimize respondent distortion, choose the most promising avenues of inquiry, and listen for material that is indexed by respondent testimony but not made explicit in it. All of this activity must be set in a generous time-frame in order to let respondents tell their own story in their own terms.

Step 4: Discovery of Analytic Categories

The analysis of qualitative data is perhaps the most demanding and least examined aspect of the qualitative research process (Miles, 1979: 595; Piore, 1979). The following scheme intends to be mechanistic and indeterminate in roughly equal proportions. It prescribes a very particular scheme for the investigator to follow in the treatment of data. It suggests some very particular strategies for the consideration of this data. But it also leaves certain aspects of observation and analysis unspecified. The exact manner in which the investigator will travel the path from data to observations, conclusions, and scholarly assertion cannot and should not be fully specified. Different problems will require different strategies. Many solutions will be ad hoc ones.

There are several preliminary technical considerations to be dispatched. Interviews must be recorded on tape (and in some cases videotape). Interviewers who attempt to make their own record of the interview by taking notes create an unnecessary and dangerous distraction. A verbatim transcript of the interview testimony must be created. This transcript should be prepared by a professional typist using a transcribing tape recorder. Investigators who transcribe their own interviews invite not only frustration but also a familiarity with the data

that does not serve the later process of analysis. Transcribers must be carefully cued and supervised so that the transcripts are indeed "verbatim" records, and not excerpted or summarized versions of the original tape. Transcription should take place on a word processor, so that both a hard copy version of the interview and a machine-readable file are created.

The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informs the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular. The investigator comes to this undertaking with a sense of what the literature says ought to be there, a sense of how the topic at issue is constituted in his or her own experience, and a glancing sense of what took place in the interview itself. The investigator must be prepared to use all of this material as a guide to what exists there, but he or she must also be prepared to ignore all of this material to see what none of it anticipates. If the full powers of discovery inherent in the qualitative interview are to be fully exploited, the investigator must be prepared to glimpse and systematically reconstruct a view of the world that bears no relation to his or her own view or the one evident in the literature.

There are five stages to the analysis process. Each of them represents a higher level of generality. The first stage treats each utterance in the interview transcript in its own terms, ignoring its relationship to other aspects of the text. The treatment of each useful utterance creates an observation. The second stage takes these observations and develops them, first, by themselves, second, according to the evidence in the transcript, and, third, according to the previous literature and cultural review. The third stage examines the interconnection of the second-level observations, resorting once again to the previous acts of literature and culture review. The focus of attention has now shifted away from the transcript and toward the observations themselves. Reference to the transcript is now made only to check ideas as they emerge from the process of observation comparison. The fourth stage takes the observations generated at previous levels and subjects them, in this collective form, to collective scrutiny. The object of analysis is the determination of patterns of intertheme consistency and contradiction. The fifth stage takes these patterns and themes, as they appear in the several interviews that make up the project, and subjects them to a final process of analysis. These five stages are summarized in Figure 2.

This five-stage process inscribes a movement from the particular to the general. The investigator begins deeply embedded in the finest

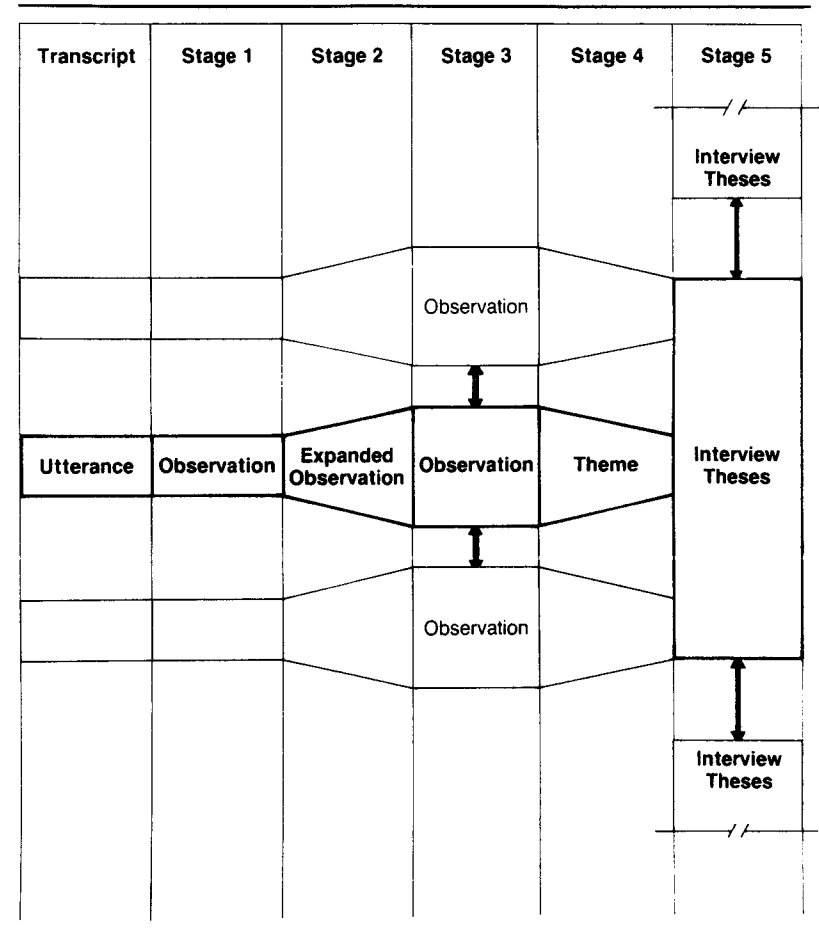


Figure 2: Long Qualitative Interview: Stages of Analysis

details of the interview transcript and, with each successive stage, moves upward to more general observations. Analytic advantages aside, this scheme has the additional virtue of creating a record of the processes of reflection and analysis in which the investigator engaged. Such a record has recently been identified as a condition of the qualitative reliability check (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 51), a matter to which we shall return in the next chapter.

In the first stage of analysis the investigator judges individual utterances with little concern for their larger significance. At this stage,

what is important are the "intensive" relations of the utterance, the meanings contained within its range of implication. No attention should be paid to the utterance's "extensive" relations, the relationship its bears to other utterances. At this stage, the investigator acts much like an archaeologist, sorting out important material from unimportant material with no attention to how the important material will eventually be assembled.

The object of first-stage analysis is to see whether one can treat the utterance as an entranceway. One wants to go through the utterance into the assumptions and beliefs from which it springs (Geertz, 1976). There are several strategies that can be exercised here. The first stage of analysis consists of a "mannered" reading of the transcript. The investigator must put off "readerly" acts of meaning construction. He or she must come to the text with a certain disingenuous wonder, refusing to supply the assumptions and understandings with which we are normally so quickly and unconsciously forthcoming. It is useful, for instance, to take metaphors literally. When the respondent speaks of being "blasted," it is worth taking this figure of speech at its face. Is the person violently and suddenly destroyed by heavy drinking? Plainly not. Well, is the social person in some sense so destroyed? Perhaps so. If so, what does this tell us about the sensation and the intention of the act of "blasting"? Another strategy is to supply assumptions. If my respondent insists that "x" is "y," what else might he or she suppose about the world? If, for instance, drinking is an activity in which certain social conventions and creatures are destroyed, what does this tell me about the nature of the conventions and creatures, and the respondent's relation to them?

This is where the investigator must use the self as an instrument. The investigator must read interview testimony with a very careful eye both to what is in the data, and what the data "sets off" in the self. Attending to the self as carefully as to the data in the interview, the investigator will hear a stream of associations evoked by the stream of utterances. This associational activity is a treasure-trove of illumination. Again and again, the investigator recognizes what is being said, not because the utterance has been successfully decoded but because a sudden act of recognition has taken place. A little voice within the investigator says, "Oh, sure, I know what that is." Just as often, what the utterance activates is not the investigator's own experience but his or her imaginative capacity to glimpse the possibility of alien meanings. In this case the little voice says, "How interesting, it's almost as if he/she is saying. . . ." Carefully monitored, the associational activity of the self

will deliver insights into the nature of the data. This "intuition," as it is sometimes called, is indeed the most powerful (if most obscure) of the analytic devices at our disposal (Berreman, 1966: 349).

This is also where the investigator uses the matches from the literature and culture reviews that were prepared in the first two stages of the research process. In this somewhat less obscure undertaking, the investigator takes the conclusions of the academic literature and culture review, using them as templates with which to search out the systematic properties of the interview data.

As the investigator works through the data, certain avenues that appear to go right to the heart of the matter will emerge. The parts of the interview that present themselves in this manner should be marked as such, but the investigator must resist the temptation to follow them and neglect other possibilities. Beware premature closure! The investigator must be prepared to postpone generalities for later stages of the analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1965).

The second stage of analysis has three stages within it. The investigator continues to develop each observation created in the first stage. The object here is to extend the observation beyond its original form until its implications and possibilities are more fully played out. When this is complete, observations are related back to the transcript. Each observation is a kind of lens with which the transcript can be scanned to see whether any relationship or similarity suggests itself. When this is complete, the observations are examined, one in relation to the other. A keen eye must be kept for all logical relations, not only those of identity and similarity, but those of opposition and contradiction as well. All of the templates created at early stages of the research process should still be in play.

In the third stage, observations are once again developed on their own accord, and, now, in relation to other observations. By this time in the analytical process, the main focus of interest has shifted away from the main body of the transcript. Reference is now made to this transcript only to confirm or discourage developing possibilities. The object of study is the observations and the pieces of text from which they sprang. This examination of earlier observations will give rise to a further set of observations. By this time, a process of refinement should be taking place. A field of patterns and themes should be rising into view. Moreover, the field of constraint should now be richer and clearer. By this time, the investigator should be speculating in a better organized, more exacting context. As this speculation goes forward, general

properties of the data should be emerging. The general outlines of the interview should now be apparent.

The fourth stage is a time of judgment. Some of the passages of the interview will by this time become surrounded by comments and these comments will have generated comments of their own. These coral-like formations are the place to which the investigator may return and sort out the general themes implicit there. What has been allowed to multiply profusely must now be harvested and winnowed. At this point the investigator is not thinking about how the general point bears on any of the other parts of the interview. He or she is working only within each formation to draw out and lay bare the general theme.

Once all the themes are identified in this manner, a decision must be made as to their interrelationship. Some of these themes will be redundant, and the best formulation should be chosen while the others are eliminated. The remainder can then be organized hierarchically. One or two themes will be the chief points under which the remainder of the themes can be subsumed. There will be a set of residual themes that remain. These are extremely important and valuable pieces of your argument. Observe carefully whether any of them contradict any of the themes that have been identified, or the hierarchy into which these themes have been organized. Those that are not useful in this way may be discarded.

The fifth stage calls for a review of the stage-four conclusions from all of the interviews that have been undertaken for a project. It is time to take the themes from each interview and see how these can be brought together into theses. It is here that a process of transformation takes place in which the cultural categories that have been unearthed in the interview become analytic categories. By this time one is no longer talking about the particulars of individual lives but about the general properties of thought and action within the community or group under study. Furthermore, one is no longer talking about the world as the respondent sees it. One is now talking about the world as it appears to the analyst from the special analytic perspective of the social sciences. Fully possessed of general and abstract properties, the investigator's observations are now "conclusions" and ready for academic presentation.

STEP 4 AND THE USE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

There is a simple way of mechanizing the five-stage process through the use of computer technology. In this method, the investigator

examines the transcript with a personal computer and word processing software. When an observation suggests itself, the investigator types this observation directly into the transcript immediately following the utterance that inspired it. Sophisticated word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word and Word Perfect, allow the investigator to mark these inserted passages and to suppress them easily in screen, disk, or print versions of the file. This gives the investigator access to both the pristine text and a record of his or her observations situated in the text exactly where they suggested themselves.

The first stage of analysis will leave the investigator with the original transcript and a set of observations. The next stage of analysis examines the first set of observations in situ and inserts the meta-observations they inspire alongside them in the transcript. To prepare for the third and fourth stages, however, it is worthwhile to take advantage of the "mark and copy" functions of the word processor, copying all of the observations and the utterances that occasioned them into a new file. This represents a great act of reduction. It removes from consideration all parts of the transcript that have not given rise to an observation, and leaves the investigator with a much simpler record for third-stage analysis. Using this new file only, the investigator generates the next set of observations and records them in the file. The original transcript is now only consulted when some special point must be clarified. (This is easily done with the word processing program that allows split-screen access to two files simultaneously.) For the fourth stage, an entirely new file may be created that is then filled with the most general points that have emerged in the foregoing analysis. This file should be a tidy package of limited themes. The final stage calls for the creation of a file that contains the fourth-stage treatments from each interview.

It is worth adding here that computers can also make themselves useful as a means of searching interview transcripts. It is possible, for instance, to ask the computer to identify every passage in the interview testimony in which two words, or word clusters, appear within a specified number of words from one another. For example, the computer can identify all of the passages in which the word "father," "dad," "my old man," "pop," or "papa" appears within, say, 15 words of the word "holidays," "camping," "summer," "vacation," "the camper," or "the cottage." This possibility should open up certain interesting observational strategies for those who have their interviews transcribed to a machine-readable file. On the whole, I have preferred the more "organic" approach suggested in this book, treating passages as they

appear in the interview text. But I have used the index and search software program called "Zyindex" for "final check" purposes to ensure I have not neglected a key passage.²¹

As a final point, this account of the long qualitative interview has assumed that data collection and analysis will take place in two separate and successive stages. This approach is especially useful when the research objective has a relatively narrow focus. However, when research objectives are somewhat more general, it is sometimes useful to resort to a "tiered" pattern of interviews. In this case, the investigator interviews respondents in successive groups. After the first group is interviewed, data analysis is undertaken in order to narrow objectives and refine questions. The second group is then interviewed, and a further narrowing and refinement takes place. The final set of interviews is permitted to inquire about very particular matters. This design strategy is especially useful when qualitative methods are being used for "exploratory" purposes. But it has the additional virtue of allowing data collection and analysis to intermingle. Glaser and Strauss (1965) suggest that this intermingling (which occurs naturally in participation observation projects) is an aid to analysis, giving the investigator an opportunity to engage in a process of "constant comparison."

In sum, the final step of the long qualitative interview calls for the careful verbatim transcription of interview data. Working with the data in this form, the investigator undertakes five stages of analysis. The first of these locates the investigator securely in the fine details of the interview, while the last advances him or her to general scholarly conclusions. In this ascent, the investigator moves from data to observations and from these to meta-observations and from these to still more general observations, keeping a careful eye throughout on the data, the observations, and the literature and culture reviews. At each stage investigators employ what they know about the topic at hand, even as they glimpse possibilities that are entirely new to them. Thus do the cultural categories of the interview data become analytic categories and assume the character of formal scholarly conclusions.

4. QUALITY CONTROL

How does the investigator ensure the quality of his or her own qualitative research? How does the user of this research treat it with

confidence? These are questions to which there are still only general and imprecise answers. This chapter suggests one of the strategies by which quality may be assessed.

Much of the difficulty surrounding this question stems from the tendency to judge qualitative research by quantitative standards. As we noted above in our discussion of Issue 3, it is important to keep the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research visible and clear. In the first, categories take shape in the course of research, whereas in the second, they are fixed from the beginning. In the first, the analyst uses his or her methods to capture complexity and to search out patterns of interrelationship between many categories. In the second, the analyst looks, instead, for a very precise relationship between a limited set of categories. The first is designed to elicit testimony that the respondent has difficulty articulating with ease and clarity. The second seeks to ask different, more precisely answerable, questions. In the first, the investigator is an instrument of investigation. In the second, the investigator is the deliberately dispassionate operator of a piece of finely calibrated methodological machinery. Finally, the qualitative tradition offers explanations that take us "back stage" in the culture in question, to let us glimpse assumptions and categories that are otherwise hidden from view. It is not intended to capture issues of distribution and generalization. It tells us what people think and do, not how many of them think and do it.

As thoroughgoing, dramatic, and obvious as this difference is, many social scientists periodically forget themselves, and apply quantitative standards to qualitative inquiry. This is mistaken but not entirely surprising. For the qualitative traditions have not developed all the quality controls they might have. This is one of the key points on which they have not quite yet put their house in order. My suggestion, following the inspiration of Evans-Pritchard (1961: 26), is that we take the conservative course and ally ourselves with the research communities that have the longest and most distinguished qualitative research tradition. I suggest that we should turn to the humanities and adopt their standards of interpretation and quality control.

The research traditions in the humanities are all long practiced in the judgment of interpretive efforts and materials. While theoretical orientations come and go, there is an extrasystemic and logical foundation for the evaluation of what is good and what is bad explanation. Indeed, theoretical orientations come and go precisely because a new perspective or "paradigm" is seen to satisfy the conditions of explanation more