

Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy

John McLeod

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How to do Qualitative Research

The perspective on qualitative inquiry presented in this chapter differs from the focus of earlier chapters. Previous chapters introduced and discussed the major 'schools' or 'genres' of qualitative research, for example phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography and grounded theory. The intention now is to propose that all of these approaches are variations on what is basically a single way of knowing. This chapter suggests that there may exist a *generic* qualitative method. By considering the practicalities and pragmatic decision-making involved in such activities as creating a qualitative text, and developing a position in relation to the phenomenon of interest, it can be seen that the different 'brand name' approaches to qualitative research in fact share a common set of procedures and inquiry strategies. It may be helpful to regard qualitative research as comprising a basic common or generic method out of which different traditions (such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography and grounded theory) have emphasised particular aspects for their own purposes. This position is consistent with the idea that qualitative research *as a whole* represents a significant movement within the social construction of knowledge in contemporary society (see Chapter 1).

The idea of a generic method is likely to be more popular with students than with expert researchers. Those who have spent years developing expertise in approaches such as grounded theory or phenomenology tend to be highly aware of the differences between what they do and the ways in which other qualitative researchers operate (even researchers who might claim to use the same approach). Most experienced qualitative researchers are either academics or affiliated to academic institutions. There is a strong 'argument culture' within the academic world, characterised by attacking and defending positions, building allegiances and so on. The 'argument culture' is driven by the economic and social rewards associated with 'distinctive' or 'original' ideas (yet what is original in human science?), by the competitive habits of men, and probably by many other factors. The point, in relation to qualitative research, is that it is much more interesting for academics to debate difference than it is to work toward consensus. Indeed, it would be argued by many academics that it is only through critical debate that knowledge can advance.

However, students undertaking qualitative research for the first time are in a quite different situation. For the most part, students carrying out

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This chapter differs from previous ones in that it introduces and discusses the generic method of phenomenology. The intention now is to focus on what is basically a generic method of decision-making. There may exist a *generic* method of decision-making and pragmatic decision-making text, and development. In fact, it can be seen that research in fact share a common ground. It may be helpful to regard the generic method out of the context of hermeneutics, ethnography, and other particular aspects for their own sake. The idea that qualitative research is different within the social sciences (see Chapter 1).

Qualitative research is popular with students. Over recent years developing interest in phenomenology tend to increase. They do and the ways in which they do. Researchers who might be interested in qualitative researchers. There is a strong tradition characterised by attacking the status quo. The 'argument' towards associated with the human science(s), by many other factors. The research is much more interesting. It is only through the work toward consensus.

For the first time are students carrying out

research studies function within strict time limits. In the space of perhaps one academic year, a student may need to select a research topic, design and carry out a study, and write up the findings. Usually, students are more interested in the topic than the method. But if a student decides to use a qualitative method, then he or she is faced with some very hard decisions. Which method to use? Grounded theory? Phenomenology? Discourse analysis? And then – how to choose between them? To read enough about grounded theory, phenomenology or discourse analysis in order to get to the point of being able to make an informed choice would in all likelihood take longer than the whole time available to complete the research project. In practice, most students end up using the method that their supervisor has used in his or her research. Often, this arrangement works well enough, resulting in an acceptable dissertation or thesis, but it forestalls the spirit of inquiry of students in relation to method. The issue of methodological choice does not arise.

For both students and experts, there are a number of advantages associated with the idea of a 'generic qualitative method':

- It makes it easier for new researchers to get started.
- It de-mystifies qualitative research, and thus encourages more people to use qualitative methods.
- Researchers are more able to be flexible in relation to the challenges arising from their engagement with a topic – there is more freedom to adopt the role of *bricoleur*.
- It makes explicit the skills, personal qualities and support structures necessary for effective qualitative work.
- Researchers are forced to think about, and justify, *everything* they do – it will not be possible to claim validity and rigour merely through following a pre-determined 'package' of procedures.
- Qualitative researchers will be required to become familiar with the overarching philosophical and political factors that shape methodological choices.
- Increasing rapprochement and dialogue between existing qualitative genres is developed.

These advantages are particularly significant in relation to qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy. There are few active qualitative researchers within the therapy research arena, and (one would hope) it is in everyone's interest to find ways of working more closely together.

The account of a generic method presented in the following section depicts qualitative research in three sections. First, there is a list of the main researcher activities and strategies associated with qualitative work, presented in terms of a series of steps. The aim is to convey a sense of what people *do* when they do qualitative research. The second section reviews the *repertoire* of ways of collecting and analysing qualitative data, and

writing up findings, that a competent qualitative researcher might seek to acquire. Third, there is a discussion of some of the core images or organising principles that can be employed to give coherence to a research study.

The elements of a generic qualitative method

Some of the main features of the structure of a generic approach to qualitative research are summarised below. The set of procedures that is described is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to map out in general terms what is involved in doing a qualitative study. Also, the procedures are described as if for someone contemplating undertaking qualitative research for the first time. Experienced researchers tend to have developed their own style and do not usually spend time considering methodological choices, or engaging in background reading on the philosophy of science, to any great extent.

1 *Choosing the topic.* The researcher or research team selects a topic or area of inquiry which is perceived as personally meaningful and engaging. If the study is to be successful, the topic must be capable of stimulating the imagination, energies and 'need to know' of the researcher or research team.

2 *Identifying the audience.* It is also helpful to commence research with some idea of the intended *audience* for the eventual study. There are probably five primary audiences for research:

- **the researcher.** Some research is carried out to answer 'burning questions' that have emerged for the researcher himself or herself in the course of his or her life and work. The criteria for success in 'personal' research are based around personal development, fulfilment, the enhancement of a personal sense of understanding, or a catalyst for action.
- **colleagues.** Much research in counselling and psychotherapy is stimulated by questions arising within therapy agencies or organisations, or peer networks. This kind of research aims to provide information and insights that will make a practical difference to co-workers.
- **academics.** Many research studies are carried out in universities by people taking Masters or Doctoral qualifications, and so the requirements and expectations of an academic audience may be salient. Research aimed at academic readers needs to be methodologically rigorous, and well-informed by the theory and previous research. The practical and personal criteria that are relevant to personal and peer audiences (usually) carry much less weight with an academic audience.
- **managers and policy-makers.** Research which seeks to influence either

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local or national policy-making must be sensitive to the policy 'agenda' of this particular audience, and have a good sense of the kinds of evidence that this constituency would find credible and convincing.

- **clients and service users.** Research that aims to communicate directly with users of therapy services needs to be designed around the requirements of publications that users would read, and the types of question that users would find relevant.

Each of these audiences or research consumers has a slightly different set of interests, and a different set of requirements around communication formats, use of technical language, tolerance for methodological detail, etc. The 'fitness-for-purpose' of a piece of research depends largely on having a clear idea at the outset of the nature of the eventual audience (or audiences) for the final product.

3 *Developing a greater awareness of the topic.* An initial phase of informal, personal research, reading and consultation to sensitise the researcher to the contours of the phenomenon and the available possibilities for access to appropriate informants or sources of information.

4 *Formulating a research question.* The formulation of an initial, open-ended research question. Qualitative research does not aim to 'test' hypotheses, but to describe, analyse and interpret the construction of aspects of the social world.

5 *Keeping a personal research journal.* Maintaining some kind of personal research journal or 'memo' system designed to capture personal and intuitive dimensions of the process of 'meaning-making' as they occur. It is usual to begin this log with an account of the researcher's presuppositions and expectations, written *before* beginning systematic fieldwork or data collection.

6 *Developing awareness of method.* Reading and consultation designed to sensitise the researcher to different qualitative approaches that might be taken in relation to the particular topic of interest. Inevitably, this process will include looking at specific methods texts such as Strauss and Corbin (1990) or others cited in earlier chapters of this book. But what is more useful is to spend some time reading philosophy, and reading research papers. Personal investment in reading about philosophical issues and perspectives relevant to the pursuit of qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to develop an overview or 'conceptual map' which makes it possible to evaluate the claims of competing qualitative genres. A recommended core 'philosophy of qualitative research' reading list would comprise Crotty (1996), Hammersley (1993), Polkinghorne (1988, 1995), Rennie (1998a, 1999, 2000c, 2000d) and Sass (1988). A useful book which offers a review of contemporary debates in the philosophy of social science

is Fay (1996). The edited collection by Hoshmand and Martin (1994) provides a series of accounts by well-known qualitative psychotherapy researchers of the philosophical, pragmatic, and personal considerations that shaped their choice of method. The papers in a Special Issue of *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* by Etherington (1996), Grafanaki (1996), Riches and Dawson (1996) and Walsh (1996) are useful in terms of getting 'inside' the experience of doing qualitative research in counselling. It is also essential to read actual qualitative research articles, to gain a sense of the type of research 'product' that would be appropriate, attractive or exciting for you as a researcher. In reading research papers for this purpose it is important to keep the focus less on the substantive content and more on the method, keeping in mind the three questions outlined in Chapter 1 – How was the research done? What is the social context of the study? How relevant are the findings for practice? It is worth keeping in mind that there is a much wider choice of interesting qualitative research papers in social science and health journals than in psychology, counselling and psychotherapy journals. The ideal is to find a paper that can function as a 'model' or 'image' for the research that is being planned. The topic of the 'model' paper may be irrelevant, but its approach to participants, methods of analysis, and style of presenting findings can usefully act as a preliminary guide. Finally, this phase of background reading on method should encompass material on *ethics* and *validity* (see Chapter 11).

7 *Choosing an approach.* Following the process of reading and consultation described in the previous section, the researcher is ready to espouse a 'posture' or orientation in relation to the inquiry process. This will either comprise a decision to orient the research within a mainstream research 'genre' (e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis) or a choice to develop an approach which reflects an individual 'bricolage'.

8 *Deciding on techniques of data collection and analysis.* The choice or creation of a method for collecting material relevant to this question. There are many different ways of collecting qualitative data or 'text', and many different approaches to analysis. An outline of the existing repertoire of available data collection and analysis strategies is provided below.

9 *Finalising the research plan.* Although a preliminary research plan may have been formulated at the beginning of the project, it is only at this point that the researcher can have a detailed specification of how he or she will collect, record and store data, negotiate informed consent and safeguard confidentiality, and analyse findings. In many research settings, a detailed plan needs to be submitted for external approval, for example to an ethics committee or doctoral supervision committee.

10 *A period of immersion in the phenomenon.* Making a space within the researcher's life that will allow thorough immersion in the project for a

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period of time sufficient for processes of incubation, uncertainty and chaos, discovery and critical appraisal to take place. In other words, the researcher must be able to *concentrate* on the research task. This is the stage where 'data' is collected, through interviews or other methods, and then analysed. The importance of the researcher's immersion in, and commitment to, the research process is given special emphasis by Moustakas (1967, 1990a, b; Douglass and Moustakas, 1985) in his writing on the topic of *heuristic* research methods. Moustakas argues that it is essential that researchers engage in the equivalent of a personal 'journey of discovery', which draws upon all their resources and capacity to know and learn. A similar conception of the degree of personal focus that is required in good qualitative research can be found in Glaser (1978). Both writers point out that qualitative discoveries cannot be forced: there is always a degree of waiting and patience, and a requirement for a readiness to be surprised. When planning qualitative research, it is necessary to be realistic about the amount of time that it may take to arrive at a satisfactory end-point. Typically, a descriptive study can be carried out in around six months. However, achieving a convincing conceptualisation of the material may take much longer, perhaps as long as two years.

11 *Compiling the research text.* Collecting qualitative data through interviewing or other techniques (see below), and then bringing this research material (interview transcripts, observational notes, memo entries, etc.) together into a research text.

12 *Refining the method of analysis.* Developing a set of rules and procedures that will prevent premature closure on the process of analysis and interpretation, and ensure that all sections of the text are sufficiently included in the analysis.

13 *'Condensing' the research text.* Constructing a descriptive summary of what has been 'found' in the text to provide an initial overall sense of what seems to be 'there'.

14 *Analysing: comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of the research text.* Carrying out a more detailed analysis of the text, or selected portions of it, in order to develop a more fine-grained understanding and to generate, if possible, new insights or 'discoveries'. Ideas and hypotheses generated during the course of the study, and recorded in memos or in a learning journal, provide one of the sources of analytic categories at this point.

15 *Checking.* Continuing the analysis beyond the point of boredom by continually checking the adequacy of the framework of understanding that has emerged, for example by seeking counter-examples, checking constructions with informants or colleagues, reflecting on findings in relation to the

'quality criteria' associated with the posture or genre that has been adopted, etc.

16 *Writing*. Collating, condensing and authoring the several pieces of writing that have accumulated during the research process (e.g., memo and journal entries, sections of transcript, lists of themes and categories, etc.) into a report, paper or thesis. An important task within this stage is that of constructing a 'summary representation' of the new understanding of the phenomenon that has been achieved, to make it easier for future researchers to build on the findings of the study.

17 *Theorising*. Depending on the nature of the report or paper, the process of writing may also include an interpretive discussion of the theoretical implications of the study, and a review of how the findings confirm or bring into question the results of previous studies of the topic or phenomenon.

Throughout these steps, a qualitative researcher will normally seek opportunities to test out parts of the work (the interview schedule, the analysis of the first interview, the emerging analytic framework, etc.) with a range of audiences, such as supervisors, research support group members, strangers on trains, informants, their nearest and dearest, and so on. Researchers working in teams or research groups may be continually engaged in this kind of support, validation and co-construction. Also, throughout the research the inquirer needs to be ready to deal with a range of emotional reactions associated with the work. Qualitative researchers report a variety of difficult feelings. There can be feelings of *dependency* arising from the experience of largely relying on others (informants, contacts, gatekeepers) for the successful completion of a task that has great personal significance. Many researchers encounter almost unbearable *anxiety* around being in 'impossible' situations where the normal everyday rules of interaction do not appear to apply. Most researchers dip in and out of feelings of *depression*, *despair* and *confusion* triggered by the anticipation and fear that nothing will be found, and that the research (and the researcher) are worthless and incompetent. Finally, qualitative researchers often feel *anguish* and *guilt* at the prospect of betraying the trust of informants (Josselson, 1996b). It is important to recognise these emotions (along with more welcome feelings of elation following discovery) as being intrinsic to *good practice*, rather than as indicative of personal shortcomings. A research journal, colleagues, supervisors and personal therapy can be effective vehicles for working through such emotions. The point, of course, is not to get rid of the feelings, but to learn from them. Just as the therapist's countertransference operates as a rich source of information about the client and the state of the therapeutic relationship, the researcher's feelings give clues to what is *most important* in the research situation. It is also essential to understand the potential connections

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between these emotions and the conduct and analysis of the research. For example, have some informants been avoided and others sought out because they, respectively, are anxiety-provoking or welcoming? How do the feelings evoked by an interviewee shape the categorisation and analysis of the interview transcript material?

Acquiring a repertoire of qualitative research skills

Perhaps the principal distinguishing feature that marks off 'research' from other types of writing about the experience of counselling and psychotherapy is that research always makes reference to a body of 'data'. These data are the primary evidence upon which conclusions are supposedly based. In principle, the 'data' are publicly available. For example, occasionally a student submitting research for a PhD or Masters may be asked to show the examiners their fieldnotes or interview transcripts. Very occasionally, researchers re-analyse data collected by others. Forms of writing that are not based on a publicly accessible set of data are not normally considered to constitute 'research'. So, for instance, psychoanalytic and other clinical case studies that are based on the therapist's selective recall of sessions, would not normally be viewed as 'research'. On the other hand, hermeneutic historical studies, such as Cushman (1995), where the original sources are open to re-analysis by others, *are* viewed as 'research'. The collection of data following rational, publicly verifiable principles is a cornerstone of the liberal democratic ethos that informs work in the social sciences. In the absence of 'data', truth claims are inevitably based on authority. Only when the 'books' are open and 'above board' can free debate take place (Gergen, 1997).

However, the concept of 'data' does not sit comfortably within qualitative research. Data are 'the things that are given', and the use of the term within science probably originates in the Enlightenment empiricist philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume, who talked about a 'sense datum' – the raw information that impinges on sense organs such as vision or touch. The basic idea appears to be that a sense datum contains uninterpreted (and therefore unprejudiced) information about a reality that is 'out there'. In contemporary usage, 'data' has come to mean an array of information, as in 'data set' or 'data bank'. Data are 'bits' of information that can be collected and stored. In both the empiricist and contemporary meanings of data there is an assumption of neutrality: data are intrinsically valid and it is up to us to draw the correct conclusions from them.

In qualitative inquiry there are no 'data' of this type. The information or 'material' that we collect comprises different kinds of accounts of experience and events. The process of collecting this material is inevitably personal and collaborative to a greater or lesser extent. For example, the

process of participating in a qualitative interview involves a meeting of two people and the formation of a relationship. It is a conversation in which 'understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us'. The stuff we piece together is not 'given' but is 'constructed'. Qualitative researchers construct representations of aspects of social life. These constructions usually take the form of written texts. Note the difference between a 'text' and a 'data set'. The former is multi-voiced and narratively structured. The latter is logically and numerically structured.

The influence of psychology on counselling and psychotherapy research has meant that even qualitative researchers can often fall into the trap of regarding their work as *data collection* (like picking apples from a tree) rather than text construction (like writing a story).

In this section, a number of different strategies for constructing qualitative texts are reviewed. The phenomena of counselling and psychotherapy are complex, elusive and sensitive; it is important to recognise that there are many ways in which these phenomena can be approached. Each of these approaches highlights and emphasises certain aspects of the phenomenon in question, and downplays others. The notion of researcher as '*bricoleur*' (see Chapter 8) can be seen as an attempt to create assemblages of methods that are both practicable and do justice to the topic. Whatever method is used it operates in a subtle fashion to *position* the researcher in relation to the field of inquiry. Wolcott (1992) has suggested that research is an act of *posturing*; the investigator adopts a particular posture or attitude concerning his or her assumptions about people and knowledge.

There are many ways of gathering qualitative accounts. In qualitative social science and psychotherapy research, at the moment, there is a tendency to operate as though semi-structured interviews and open-ended written accounts were the only feasible methods of inquiry, applicable to all circumstances. An (incomplete) list of methods is given in Table 9.1. Here it can be seen that there are many ways of collecting 'data' about the process and outcome of therapy.

The majority of published qualitative studies of counselling and psychotherapy are based on the analysis of texts collected through interviews or open-ended questionnaires. It is important to be aware that there are many other techniques that can be employed. Even within the area of interviewing there are a number of alternative creative strategies that are worthy of consideration. For some purposes, it can be effective to collect informants together into a 'focus group'. The use of focus groups allows a group of research informants to interact with each other, and generate useful qualitative data not only in response to the researcher's questions, but through spontaneous dialogue with each other. There are a number of books around that offer guidelines on how to carry out focus group interviews Greenbaum, 1998; Krueger, 1994; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1998; Vaughn et al., 1996). There is also an expanding literature on the

Table 9.1 *Methods for creating qualitative texts*

Interviews
open-ended
semi-structured
individual vs. group
recall interviews
think-aloud protocols
Questionnaires
Observation
participant observation (ethnographic)
non-participant
Transcripts of naturally occurring talk
Personal documents
Public documents
Projective techniques
Experiential/personal methods

application of focus groups in research on therapy-related topics (Bristol and Fern, 1996; Herman et al., 1996; Powell et al., 1996; Rodriguez et al., 1998). A useful variant of the focus-group method is *Nominal Group Technique* (Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975), which combines focus-group and brainstorming strategies. A method that is being increasingly widely used to enable larger samples of participants to comment on themes identified in focus groups is the *Delphi* technique (Fish and Busby, 1996; Delbecq et al., 1975). This method involves sending out by mail lists of key statements derived from interviews or group sessions, and asking participants for their comments, amendments and ratings. Examples of therapy studies using the Delphi technique are Heath et al. (1988) and Neimeyer and Norcross (1997). In other research situations, rather than the mere asking of questions, it can be productive to use various props and devices to facilitate the interview. The method of Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) has been described in the context of the work of David Rennie (Chapter 6) and Robert Elliott (Chapter 8). With IPR, the client or therapist listens to an audiotape or watches a videotape of the therapy session and is invited to stop the tape whenever they recall what they had been experiencing during the actual therapy session. This approach, which derives from the work of Kagan (1980, 1984), is an excellent method for generating rich accounts of the moment-by-moment experience of therapy process (Barker, 1985). Another method for augmenting interviews is to use the *think-aloud protocol* technique (Ericsson and Simon, 1984; Fonteyn et al., 1993; Smagorinsky, 1994). Here, rather than asking an informant to report on their memory of how they carry out a task, the researcher sets up a simulation of the task itself and invites the person to give a 'running commentary' while they are performing. For example, Sandell and Fredelius (1997) were interested in the ways in which both therapists and policy-makers prioritised patients for psychotherapy, and

asked their research participants to 'think aloud' while reading case material and deciding which cases should receive subsidised therapy. Their data was analysed through ratings and statistics, but in principle could have been approached using a qualitative method such as grounded theory or ideal type methodology. The use of *projective techniques* is currently unfashionable in psychology, despite strong evidence for the value of this method (McClelland, 1980). A projective technique invites the participant to respond to an ambiguous stimulus. The assumption is that the person's response functions as a 'projection' of their deepest attitudes and motives (Hingley, 1995). Compared to questionnaires, there are two advantages to projective methods. First, the person is not as aware of the meaning of their response, and is more likely to respond freely rather than offer a socially desirable answer. Second, the projective approach stimulates creativity and playfulness, and brings an additional dimension to the research being undertaken. A useful account of the application of projective techniques in qualitative research can be found in Branthwaite and Lunn (1983). A further method that has a long history within qualitative research is the use of *personal and official documents*, such as diaries, letters, memos, case notes, leaflets, etc. (Allport, 1942; Macdonald and Tipton, 1993). An advantage of these sources is that they have not been created for research purposes, and are therefore free from any influence from the investigator. Counselling and psychotherapy are activities that generate significant amounts of personal and official documentation. Until now, this source of qualitative text has been largely ignored by researchers. Another important method for collecting data that has been neglected in therapy research has been *participant observation* (see Chapter 5). In recent years, some social scientists have developed an approach in which, in effect, researchers observe, record and reflect on their own involvement in a situation. This method of *experiential research* has not been applied within the field of counselling and psychotherapy, but clearly has a huge potential contribution to make. Examples of experiential research can be found in the writings of Carolyn Ellis and her colleagues (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Ellis et al., 1997; Kiesinger, 1998). A powerful example of the use of experiential research in counselling can be found in Etherington (2000).

Analysing qualitative texts: a repertoire of methods

The aim of this section is to consider the different ways in which qualitative text can be analysed. Just as there exists a repertoire of techniques for generating qualitative text, there also exists a repertoire of techniques and strategies for facilitating the process of finding meaning. However, it is essential to recognise that analytic procedures do not, in themselves,

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while reading case studies of psychotherapy. Their value in principle could be as grounded theory. Grounded theory techniques is currently valued for the value of this approach. It invites the participant to explore the person's attitudes and motives. There are two advantages to this approach. First, it offers a way rather than offer a framework. Second, it stimulates a new dimension to the application of projective techniques. In Branthwaite and others' work within qualitative research, such as diaries, interviews, and focus groups (1942; Macdonald and others), they have not been free from any influence. They are activities that require documentation. Until now, they have been ignored by researchers. This has been neglected in the past (see Chapter 5). In the grounded theory approach in which, the researcher's own involvement has not been applied, it clearly has a huge potential. Qualitative research can be a challenge for colleagues (Ellis and others, 1997; Kiesinger, 1997). Qualitative research in coun-

generate themes and categories. Meaning emerges from qualitative text from the active engagement of the researcher with that text, from his or her drive to know and understand. Methods of analysis can provide a structure and a framework that ensures, as far as possible, that all aspects of the text are given due weight. Following a set of analytic procedures can be useful in avoiding premature closure, forcing oneself to look as closely as possible at the text, and as a reminder of the goals of the inquiry. But 'findings' can only be 'found' by someone who is actively searching.

The notion that the process of analysis begins only when all the data is collected and securely stored in a computer arises from the quantitative research tradition. In quantitative research, there is little point in analysing statistical data until all the numbers are in, because the whole analysis would need to be carried out all over again with the whole data set. Also, the goal of objectivity in, for example, experimental research would demand that the researcher resists analysing data until the experiment has been completed, to avoid the danger that his or her knowledge of early trends in the data might introduce an unconscious bias over the remainder of the experiment, through seeking to 'pull' the results in a particular direction. However, these considerations do not apply in qualitative research. In qualitative work, the main tool of inquiry is the researcher. If it is accepted that the researcher is a person continually engaged in sense-making and finding meaning, then it follows that the process of analysis and interpretation of qualitative material (notes, transcripts, documents) takes place all the time. Some qualitative researchers set aside a period of time for 'analysis', following the phase of 'data collection', and assume that this is when analysis happens. It is better to regard such a period as an opportunity to pull together the various strands of analytic understanding that have emerged during the course of the study, and then to check them as systematically as possible against the material, in a search for counter-examples, deviant cases and new or more aptly phrased categories.

It is not possible in the space available here to provide an exhaustive list of all the different analytic procedures that have been devised by qualitative researchers over the years. The aim instead is to offer examples of some contrasting techniques, to illustrate the range of alternatives that can be considered when planning or conducting a research study.

Writing memos and jotting down ideas throughout the course of the research

Many insights seem almost just to 'arrive' at odd times, for example when walking along a road. Other ideas can arrive when interviewing, or when transcribing. Sometimes these ideas turn out to be of little value,

Methods

ways in which qualitative research is conducted. A repertoire of techniques is available. However, it is not, in themselves,

because they do not apply to other informants, or because they are triggered by a book the researcher has recently read, or a movie that he or she has seen, rather than by the actual research. But there are other times when fleeting ideas may turn out to be vital elements of the subsequent analytic framework.

Constructing a preliminary descriptive summary of the material as a whole

One of the primary tasks of qualitative research is to *describe* the phenomenon or social process that is the focus of the research. The other tasks, according to Wolcott (1994), are *analysis* and *interpretation*. A key idea in hermeneutic approaches to inquiry is that of moving back and forth between the whole text and detailed parts of the text. An understanding of detailed parts is always informed by the context provided by the text as a whole. At the same time, the detailed analysis of sections of the text may result in new ways of seeing the meaning of the whole text. It can be useful to anchor this process of moving back and forth by writing a tentative, preliminary statement which seeks to capture the initial sense of *all* the material that has been collected (or that has been collected up to that point). For example, in a study which comprises a series of interviews, it can be helpful to compose a 500-word narrative summary of each interview, covering the main themes and the overall impression gained by the interviewer.

Organising / segmenting the text into discrete meaning units

Although it is important to develop a sense of the meaning of the text as a whole, good qualitative work always depends on being able to open out the meanings associated with small segments of the text. It is only by forcing oneself to get beyond the initial 'common-sense' reading of a text that the qualitative analyst can generate the type of new insights that make this work worthwhile. While it is quite possible to 'expand' the meaning of text through a process of intuitive immersion and reflection, most researchers find it both helpful and necessary to decide in advance on the 'meaning units' around which they intend to build their analysis. In earlier chapters, it could be seen that, for instance, empirical phenomenologists examined the meaning of short statements, while, by contrast, narrative-analytic researchers focused on the meaning of whole stories as units. Grounded theory is an approach that embodies considerable flexibility around the length and structure of meaning units (words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs). Conversation analysis typically takes a short sequence of con-

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versational turns as the principal unit of analysis. The intention in all of these approaches is the same, which is to apply a systematic method of 'segmenting' the text, of dividing it into workable bits whose meaning and properties can be closely examined.

Labelling, coding and categorising meanings

Once the text has been segmented into some kind of 'meaning units', the researcher is faced with the crucial task of making some statement about what these units might actually *mean*. All qualitative research involves attributing meaning to segments of text. It is here that the tension between phenomenology and hermeneutics is most acute. Qualitative researchers influenced by phenomenology seek to describe meaning in terms of what the statement or piece of observed behaviour might mean *to the informant*. Interpretive approaches to qualitative research mainly seek to give meaning in terms of the cultural meaning systems (or theory) of the researcher/inquirer, rather than that of the informant. Grounded theory has largely adopted a stance that integrates both of these strategies, in being open to meanings arising from informants *and* those generated by the analyst. In practice, the tension between hermeneutic and phenomenological meaning-making strategies is more a matter of emphasis than an absolute dichotomy. Within the hermeneutic research tradition, the notion of 'fusion of horizons' (see Chapter 2) implies that the horizon of understanding of the researcher should be expanded and changed by contact and engagement with the horizons encompassed by the text. Similarly, few phenomenological researchers would argue that research which focuses on the experience of another person can ever be wholly free from being shaped by the pre-suppositions and language of the inquirer. One of the central arguments of this book is that qualitative research *always* involves a synthesis of phenomenological and hermeneutic 'ways of knowing'. It is significant that Comprehensive Process Analysis (Chapter 8), a qualitative model that reflects a sophisticated appreciation of these issues, purposefully opens a space for parallel consideration of the texts produced by both 'participants' (the client and therapist) and researchers. The practicalities of meaning categorisation represent another set of choices for qualitative researchers. Some researchers write their category notes on double-spaced, wide-margin copies of the text. Others prefer to copy these notes on to file cards that can be sorted within boxes. There are also several software packages that facilitate the coding of qualitative text. Examples of the strategies adopted by qualitative researchers during coding and categorising can be found in the methods texts introduced in previous chapters. Whatever system is adopted, it is essential that the researcher should be not only painstaking and thorough in recording categories, but should also be as playful,

imaginative, creative and sensitive as they can in generating all the *possible* meanings implicit in segments of text.

Sifting and ordering: identifying themes and patterns

In most research studies, the consequence of engaging in categorising or coding meaning units is a massive expansion of the text. Where before there might have been 200 pages of interview transcript, there is now a confusion of annotated transcript, computer files, file cards or post-it notes containing category phrases along with information about the segments of text to which they refer. It is probably important for qualitative researchers to allow this process of expansion to continue to a point of frustrated, overwhelmed despair. When the previous 'fore-understanding' or structure of meaning of the researcher dissolves or 'unfreezes' in the face of the complexity of the text, the opportunity for discovery opens up. However, the moments of discovery that a researcher records in his or her memos or personal journal, or which arrive during data analysis, require to be documented, checked and explained so that they can be communicated to other people. The grounded theory notion of 'constant comparisons' captures well the experience of taking each interpretive category and checking it against as many other segments of the text, and other categories, as possible. The key questions include: Does this category apply in all cases? In what ways do counter-examples change the meaning of the category? Does the way that the category is phrased accurately capture the meaning that is being conveyed? Are there other categories with similar meanings – when these similar categories are placed side by side does another, overarching category emerge? What happens when the meaning of the category is 'imaginatively varied' – is it possible to imagine its limits or its opposite? For many qualitative researchers, the stage of sifting and ordering is made easier by finding ways to display the categories in some kind of visual form. Patterns in the material can often be 'seen' more clearly by laying out file cards on a table, pegging them to washing lines, mapping them on large pieces of paper or whiteboards, or moving them around a PC screen. A very useful source of ideas in relation to this aspect of analysis is Miles and Huberman (1994).

Deciding on the main theme or storyline

Qualitative analysis is fundamentally holistic in nature. Good qualitative analysis looks at the text from all possible angles, and seeks to capture a sense of what the *whole* of it might mean. Some qualitative research writing aims to capture and convey this sense of an overall, holistic,

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understanding of a topic. Phenomenological research and, to some extent, ethnographic research, usually attempts to lay before the reader a comprehensive descriptive account of whatever aspect of the social world has been studied. By contrast, other qualitative approaches (grounded theory, the discursive approaches, hermeneutic research, some ethnographic work) adopt a strategy of illuminating the topic by exploring it from one specific vantage point. It is common in qualitative research to generate a research text and analysis that can then be 'mined' or written up in terms of different themes. The work of David Rennie into the client's experience of therapy exemplifies this strategy. Rennie (1990) started with a report which conveyed an overall sense of his analysis as a whole. However, this overview was followed by a series of papers reporting on specific themes within the material, for example client deference (Rennie, 1994a), the client's experience of resistance (Rennie, 1994c) and so on (see Chapter 6 for details of this body of work). There are several advantages in writing up qualitative research from a series of thematic perspectives or following different 'storylines'. The first advantage is that it is easier to do justice to the data, because there is more space available to include quotes and examples relating to particular aspects of the data, rather than the data-set as a whole. Second, it is easier to develop a theoretical discussion of the material, and link it up to previous research, when there is a narrower focus for discussion. Third, concentrating on discrete themes within the material is more likely to yield papers which practitioners will experience as offering them specific, applicable knowledge.

'Ideal type' or vignette analysis

Qualitative research has been dominated by methods, such as grounded theory and phenomenology, that seek to extract common or general categories across all informants or sources. In counselling and psychotherapy, on the other hand, practitioners are faced on an everyday basis with the task of responding to individuals, or developing strategies or policies appropriate to sub-groups of clients. Qualitative research that is case-study based is clearly relevant to an understanding of processes and dynamics occurring in individual clients, but says little about properties of aggregates of clients. An analytic approach which combines the sensitivity of the case study method with the possibility of generalisation involves using the notion of *ideal types*. The proposal that social life could be understood through the analysis of 'ideal types' is attributed to the sociologist Max Weber, and appears to have been mainly employed by German psychotherapy researchers (Frommer et al., 1996; Kuhnlein, 1999; Tress et al., 1997; Wachholz and Stuhr, 1999). The approach relies on a process of comparing and combining case descriptions until an irreducible set of

distinct case patterns emerges. This procedure is in effect a qualitative version of cluster analysis. These studies are all based on a method of ideal-type analysis devised by the German qualitative researcher Uta Gerhardt, whose work does not seem to have been translated into English. Brief introductory accounts of the method can be found in Flick (1998: 234–5), in Wachholz and Stuhr (1999: 331–2) and in Stuhr and Wachholz (2000). Similar approaches to working with combinations of individual case configurations have been reported by Cummings et al. (1994) and Miller et al. (1997). The Miller et al. research group describe their method as structured around the construction of representative case *vignettes*.

Writing

The final stage of any qualitative study involves compiling a written report in the form of an article, book or dissertation. Although some qualitative researchers have experimented with alternative forms of dissemination, including drama, performance art, video and poetry, these vehicles have up until now not been received particularly well. The work of writing qualitative research is difficult. All qualitative researchers struggle with what has been called the 'crisis of representation', the challenge of conveying on paper the richness of understanding that the researcher has developed, and the various 'voices' of informants. Qualitative research does not lend itself easily to publication in the standardised formats (Introduction–Method–Results–Discussion) and scientific rhetoric-systems employed by most journals in counselling and psychotherapy. The task of writing for scientific publication is even more difficult when the researcher wishes to include reflexive first-person writing. The outcome of these various difficulties is that the majority of qualitative research papers in counselling and psychotherapy are not at all easy to read, particularly for practitioners. This is problematic given the aspiration and belief of most qualitative psychotherapy researchers that their work has the potential to become more relevant for practice than statistical research has ever been (Morrow-Bradley and Elliott, 1986). In writing qualitative research, there are some basic rules to be followed:

- The research should be written in a form that will communicate with practitioners.
- The report should include enough qualitative research text to allow readers to develop their own interpretation of the material.
- The procedures through which the researcher collected and analysed the material should be clearly explained.
- It is helpful to describe the context of the study, including not only the 'pre-understandings' of the researcher but also the social and institutional environment in which the research took place.

- At the end of the report it has been found that research is standing allowing to be co

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- At the end of the Analysis or beginning of the Discussion sections of the report it is useful to include a 'summary representation' of what has been found. The presence of a summary representation gives future researchers into the topic a set of preliminary hypotheses or understandings against which they can compare their own findings, thus allowing a cumulative, 'joined-up' body of understanding of the topic to be constructed.

Issues associated with writing qualitative research have been discussed by Ellis and Bochner (1996), Wolcott (1990) and McLeod (1999a). This question is also explored further in Chapter 11.

Consensual Qualitative Research as a generic method

One of the most significant evolutions in qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy during the 1990s was the development by Clara Hill and her research group at the University of Maryland of a guide for conducting qualitative research (Hill, Thompson and Nutt-Williams, 1997). This group has been one of the most productive research teams in the world; their method of *Consensual Qualitative Research* (CQR) has generated several papers in prestigious journals (Hayes et al., 1998; Hill, Nutt-Williams et al., 1997; Knox et al., 1997; Ladany et al., 1997; Rhodes et al., 1994).

CQR is explicitly based on ideas and principles drawn from grounded theory, Comprehensive Process Analysis, Giorgi's empirical phenomenology, and feminist values concerning open collaboration and respect. It is probably fair to describe CQR as an integrative approach rather than a *bricolage* (Chapter 8), since it is not intended that it should be adapted to the circumstances of specific studies. The method is a team-based approach, in which a small group of four or five researchers collect and analyse data. Their analyses are checked by an independent external *auditor*, who has the task of challenging collusive interpretations and avoidances. There are three broad stages of data collection and analysis:

- 1 Responses to open-ended questions from questionnaires or interviews for each individual case are divided into domains (i.e., topic areas).
- 2 Core ideas (i.e., abstracts or brief summaries) are constructed for all the material within each domain for each individual case.
- 3 A cross analysis, which involves developing categories to describe consistencies in the core ideas within domains across cases, is conducted. (Hill, Thompson and Nutt-Williams, 1997: 523)

These stages are described in detail, with examples and practical hints, in the 'Guide' (ibid., 1997). It is suggested that, as well as its research

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applications, the experience of using the method functions as a useful addition to the training of counsellors and psychotherapists.

One of the areas in which CQR diverges from classic grounded theory and phenomenological approaches is in the pre-selection of domain categories, on the basis of a review of the literature, *in advance* of engaging with the actual data. Hill, Thompson and Nutt-Williams (1997) describe their initial set of domain categories as a 'start list' (Miles and Huberman (1994), and consider that its use is necessary as a means of managing the 'overwhelming amounts of data typically collected in qualitative research' (Hill et al., 1997: 543). This aspect of the method, together with the built-in requirement to achieve group consensus on category descriptions and labels, has the effect of perhaps restricting the 'discovery-oriented' potential of the method. It is probably fair to suggest that papers using CQR are strong on comprehensive, convincing description, and weak on the generation of exciting new conceptual frameworks. Nevertheless, the method represents a robust and highly practical addition to the range of qualitative methods of therapy research currently in use. The thoughtful integration of ideas from 'brand name' methodologies such as grounded theory and phenomenology mean that CQR can be viewed as a truly generic approach.

A significant feature of CQR is that, unlike other qualitative approaches, it has spawned its own critical literature. The 'Guide' was first published as a 'major contribution' in *Counseling Psychologist*. This is a journal in which each issue includes a major article followed by a series of brief commentary papers. The lengthy Hill, Thompson and Nutt-Williams (1997) paper was therefore published alongside commentaries from Hoshmand (1997) and Stiles (1997), with a concluding rejoinder from Hill, Nutt-Williams and Thompson (1997).

The input of Stiles (1997) to this debate is well worth reading in its own right, as an exploration of some of the basic methodological issues in qualitative inquiry. Stiles points to a number of ways in which the procedures outlined by Hill, Thompson and Nutt-Williams (1997) import the assumptions of quantitative methods around sampling criteria, role of theory, nature of consensus and the goal of objectivity. At the heart of Stiles's critique is the view that:

truths about human experience are not fixed and known (or not known) by individuals but rather emerge and evolve in dialogue. A corollary is that the sort of interviews proposed by Hill et al. (1997) – seeking responses in standard categories – runs a risk of eliciting mainly conventional understandings. (Stiles, 1997: 589)

The tension between 'dialogical' and 'conventional' understandings cuts through the whole field of qualitative inquiry. Good work inevitably possesses a dialogical character, and, to use another phrase of Stiles (1997), offers a kind of *permeable* knowing that is flexible and receptive.

The critical reception of qualitative research grounded theory, published a set of commentaries from of qualitative research negotiating the boundaries to identify different and necessarily congruent group being critical of research studies existence of at least of adopting certain positive spin-offs

The achievement of qualitative research

If it were true that application of phenomenology, conducted in accordance with this chapter. This is not her group using CQR product of a generation regard their approach rather than as deconstruction of studies which have made significant contributions in counselling and psychotherapy

The first of these This research concerns therapists and clients particular interest in alternative treatments. The Methods section touches on a variety of science and culture work within a 'thematic'. He suggests a conscious version of 'out our lives' (1997) manner in which

The critical reception offered to the 'Guide to conducting consensual qualitative research' was no more hostile than the response would be if a grounded theory, discourse analysis, or phenomenology research team had published a set of guidelines to their approach in a journal which invited commentaries from adherents of alternative approaches. The methodology of qualitative research is inevitably contested. It is always a matter of negotiating the best path in the circumstances. While other researchers can identify different emphases, these positions may be right for them, but not necessarily congruent with the overall aims of the researcher or research group being criticised. The value of CQR is evident in the many successful research studies that have been completed using this perspective. The existence of at least the beginnings of a critical debate over the implications of adopting certain analytic procedures and not others is one of the positive spin-offs of the development of generic approaches.

The achievements of a generic approach to qualitative research

If it were true that the best qualitative research resulted only from the application of well-established methodologies such as grounded theory or phenomenology, then it would be hard to find good examples of research conducted in accordance with the set of general principles outlined in this chapter. This is not the case. The body of work produced by Clara Hill and her group using CQR, discussed in the previous section, can be viewed as a product of a generic method. However, it may be that these researchers regard their approach as a contender for a new 'brand name' methodology, rather than as describing a set of principles. There are also many examples of studies which do not make any claim to follow a specific, named method, but have made substantial contributions to the field of qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy. Three such studies are summarised next.

The first of these studies is a research monograph by O'Neill (1998). This research comprises an analysis of interviews carried out with over 90 therapists and clients around the issue of 'negotiating consent'. O'Neill's particular interest was in the ways in which therapists told clients about alternative treatments, and how clients received this information. The Methods section of this monograph is elegantly written and argued, and touches on a variety of methodological sources in psychology, social science and cultural studies. However, O'Neill resists any pull to locate his work within a specific approach, referring to his analysis merely as 'thematic'. He suggests that 'qualitative analysis is a somewhat more self-conscious version of the meaning-making in which we all engage throughout our lives' (1998: 45). The O'Neill study is notable for the effective manner in which the author allows the voices of informants to be heard,

and yet at the same time abstracts from these voices a more general set of themes which are then examined in terms of their implications for practice.

Another piece of research that can be viewed as following a generic approach is a book by Lott (1999). This study concerns the emotional bond that can develop between women and their therapists. Lott, with her co-worker Marie Cohen, received 274 open-ended questionnaires back from female therapy clients, and carried out 120 interviews. The findings are presented in a style which makes effective use of personal, reflexive material, and are discussed in relation to relevant theoretical and research literature. This book opens up new understandings of the intensity of client experiences, and has important practical implications for both therapists and users of therapy. One of the most interesting aspects of the book arises from the fact that its author is *not a researcher*. Deborah Lott is a writer on medical issues who had been in therapy and was driven to find out more about her (and her friends') experiences in therapy. She comments on her research role in these terms:

I felt certain that I could write a book that no therapist could write because as a journalist I would be freer to ask the hard questions, freer to question the basic assumptions that underlay the field, freer to explore the disagreements between the various schools of thought. (Lott, 1999: 9)

From the point of view of academic researchers there are a number of limitations of the Lott (1999) study that concern the level of detailed information supplied, sample characteristics, analytic procedures, validity checks, etc. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that her work makes a significant contribution to the literature on the client's experience of therapy, and generates a variety of insights that could be pursued in further research. The quality of the study lies not in its formal adherence to a 'method', but in the commitment and integrity of the investigator, her positioning outside of the therapy establishment ('free to ask the hard questions'), and her capacity to write in such a way as to allow her informants to 'speak for themselves'.

A third example of the use of a 'generic' approach to qualitative research in psychotherapy is a paper by Roberts (1996). In this study, interviews were carried out with eight partners/spouses of clients undergoing psycho-dynamic therapy. Roberts was interested in the 'perceived repercussions' on the partner of their spouse/partner being in therapy. Although this paper was published in a leading research journal (*British Journal of Psychiatry*), no details of how the interview data were analysed were given. Findings were presented in terms of 'common themes'. There is also an interesting discussion of the impact of the research on participants. Despite (or because of?) the absence of methodological detail, this paper is a fine piece of work, which opens out new understandings of a neglected area of inquiry.

It may be significant that the book was published as a result of the space afforded by the journal to describe his own experience. The summary description allows sufficient exposure to be convinced of the basis of what he has written. The author followed a similar approach. He may have perhaps cited a 'named' researcher to publish a 'generic' approach to the method a narrow

Images of qualitative research principles

The final section of the book considers the steps and strategies involved in the consideration of the various images of qualitative research. The researcher tends to have espoused in qualitative research a core images, as

The scientist

The dominant image of qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy is that of the researcher, not the client, in a sense of claiming to be 'true'. However, the emphasis on the 'truth' of the informant's experience is an edge that is not shared by the single knowable truth. The confirmation of the scientist image of western mo-

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It may be significant that the studies by O'Neill (1998) and Lott (1999) were published as books rather than in the form of research articles. The space afforded by a book or research monograph allows the author room to describe his or her method in detail without the need to give it a summary description such as 'grounded theory'. Book-length accounts also allow sufficient examples and quotes to be provided, so that the reader can be convinced of the validity of both the argument and the evidence on the basis of what he or she can actually read, rather than on the basis that the author followed a particular method. Finally, journal reviewers and editors may have perhaps fallen into a habit of expecting all qualitative papers to cite a 'named' method. At the present time the best (or only) way to publish a 'generic' qualitative paper in a research journal may be to give the method a name.

Images of qualitative inquiry: some organising principles

The final section of the chapter moves away from discussion of specific steps and strategies involved in doing qualitative research, to a consideration of the overall understanding that a qualitative researcher might possess concerning what they are doing. There exist a number of different *images* of qualitative research. The work of any individual qualitative researcher tends to be intelligible in terms of the image or images he or she has espoused in relation to their research role. For anyone beginning qualitative research for the first time, it can be helpful to adopt one of these core images, as a means of giving coherence to their investigative style.

The scientist

The dominant image that informs the practice of qualitative researcher in counselling and psychotherapy is that of the scientist. Few qualitative researchers, nowadays, explicitly refer to the notion of objectivity, in the sense of claiming to produce knowledge that is 'factual' or 'objectively true'. However, the language of 'consensuality' and 'convergence', emphasis on the 'rigour' of methods and procedures, or a lack of acknowledgement that 'findings' are co-constructed (between researcher and informants), all indicate that the researcher believes that there exists a single knowable 'truth', and that he or she possesses the means of securing that truth. The absence of any apparent interest in discovery, as opposed to the confirmation of already known truths, is another reflection of the scientist image. The image of the scientist is deeply embedded in the fabric of western modern cultures, and conveys to many people a person whose

work is honest, dispassionate, balanced, rational and makes a significant contribution to social well-being and progress. There are, however, other meanings of 'science', which apply in particular to the rationale for qualitative research:

Shortly after the turn of this century . . . two distinct perspectives on social inquiry were in competition. The quantitative tradition, with its realist orientation, was based on the idea of an independently existing social reality that could be described as it really was. Truth was defined as the correspondence between our words and that independently existing reality. Common to this perspective, which allowed that facts were separate from values, was . . . a 'God's Eye' point of view. The interpretive tradition, based on an idealist temperament, took the position that social reality was mind-dependent in the sense of mind-constructed. Truth was ultimately a matter of socially and historically conditioned agreement. Social inquiry could not be value-free, and there could not be a 'God's Eye' point of view – there could only be various people's points of view based on their particular interests, values and purposes. (Smith and Heshusius, 1986: 5)

This passage highlights the implications for qualitative researchers of embracing the image of the scientist. As qualitative researchers, do we accept that, within our field of inquiry, facts can be 'separate from values'? Do we aspire to a 'God's Eye' perspective?

The embodied witness

God might be believed to possess an all-seeing, all-knowing view of things. A quite different view of things is obtained from the perspective of ordinary mortals, who feel their way around a physical, ground-level world. An alternative to a 'God's Eye' image of the position of the researcher can be found in a wonderful essay by the feminist social scientist Donna Haraway (1988), which argues that researchers should be aiming to develop *situated knowledges*. Rather than 'the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (p. 581), which represents an attempt to create a 'total' or 'totalizing' knowledge, 'I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere . . .' (p. 589). This 'view from below' is always from a specific, embodied person and place. It contributes to the science and politics of 'interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood'. Haraway makes the point that situated knowledge makes it possible to steer a middle course between objectivity and relativism. The objectivity of the 'view from above' is, for Haraway and many other researchers and scholars in the social sciences, at best an illusion and at worst a form of control. On the other hand, the relativism, the 'view from

nowhere', associated with relativism, is equally misleading.

Relativism is a problem. The 'equality' of relativism is the embodiment of relativism, and it is everywhere and nowhere. Science. But it is not that the possibility of relativism (1988: 584)

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Art as a method

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nowhere', associated with some forms of radical social constructionism, is equally misleading and dangerous:

Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The 'equality' of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization . . . both deny . . . location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both 'god tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science. But it is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests. (Haraway, 1988: 584)

Only from a 'partial perspective' is it possible to 'see well': 'vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful' (p. 583).

Art as a metaphor for qualitative research

Gaining an overall sense of what qualitative researchers do, and what they produce, can be facilitated by considering debates and developments in a different area of endeavour – art. It is possible to look at a qualitative research paper or monograph as a form of *representation* of the world. Visual art, similarly, offers representations of the world. In both cases, someone (the researcher or the artist) has *constructed* the representation that is being presented, even though (at least usually) the audience is invited to ignore the 'frame' around the work and somehow 'enter' it as if it were a region of reality. The different genres of qualitative inquiry can be likened to various genres of visual art. Traditional ethnographic research produces a big-canvas picture which seeks definitely to capture the complexity of a social group. A painting by Brueghel, such as *The Wedding Feast* renders visible the way of life of a community. A grounded theory study is along the same lines, but on a smaller scale. A grounded theory paper presents a highly realistic picture of people *doing something*. Phenomenological research, on the other hand, resembles a hyper-real slice of reality, a highly distilled and densely detailed single image, perhaps similar to the approach taken by artists such as Van Gogh or Manet. Narrative analysis seeks to produce a richly textured canvas in which more general human meaning is conveyed through the depiction of an image from a single life, as in a Rembrandt portrait. A hermeneutic study may appear, at first glance, as if it portrays a scene from everyday life, but on closer examination the depiction of figures in the scene can be understood as evoking and symbolising mythic themes. Other forms of qualitative research increasingly depart from the realm of representational art, and appear to have affinities with trends in modern art. For example,

Comprehensive Process Analysis comes over as a kind of dismantling, a sculpture which looks like a piece of engineering, in which an everyday object is taken apart, but given an evocative and poetic title. Conversation analysis is almost like works of art in which a mundane object, such as a soup can, is blown up to the point where the texture of the image becomes visible. Discourse analysis goes further in this direction, by seeking to subvert the viewer's perception of everyday events and images, by stripping them of meaning. The new experiential research (e.g., the work of Carolyn Ellis) is similar to some contemporary art (Tracy Emin, Gilbert and George) in which the artist's life becomes the work of art. The relationship between psychoanalysis and modern art is well known, and there are many artists whose work give visual form to the kind of effect Freud and others achieved through psychoanalytic case studies. The art of Francis Bacon is an example. Here, a seeming portrait of an individual is distorted by forces of desire and animalism.

These examples of ways in which art might be taken as a metaphor for qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy are not based on any deep scholarly knowledge of art history. Interested readers may find some satisfaction and pleasure in selecting other pieces of art that, for them, operate more appropriately as metaphors for pieces of qualitative research with which they are familiar.

There have been two trends within the history of art which appear particularly relevant for those pursuing qualitative research. The first trend can be characterised as a fracturing of genres. Continually, groups of artists find new ways of making art. Genres that have emerged in recent times include: pop art, minimalism, performance art, installation art and many others (Archer, 1997). There is an acceptance of pluralism and diversity within the art world that social scientists might do well to follow. Although there may be continual cries of public outrage at the latest 'nonsense' that artists produce, the category and meaning of 'art' appears to be broad enough to incorporate whatever artists do. Successful art does not seem to depend on following the procedures of a pre-existing genre, but of continuing to find new ways of 'making art', however that might be achieved. The second major trend has been in relation to notions of what is 'real'. Anyone viewing a Constable landscape would take it for granted that this is what the landscape being represented did actually look like. Anyone viewing Kandinsky's *Sea Battle* (1913) would not assume that the picture was attempting to record what a battle actually looked like, but was instead seeking to convey something of the meaning or 'essence' of the experience of battle. There are genres of art, such as Surrealism, which play around with the notion of what is real. Letting go of the idea that visual art is either a painting or sculpture that is supposed to represent what something really looks like appears to have enriched art, and has opened up possibilities for aesthetic knowing. Here, again, is an idea that has resonance in qualitative social science, particularly in qualitative psychotherapy

research. The conventional view in much qualitative research is that the researcher's account faithfully represents a world. Artists have shown that this is not so, and depend on realism.

The metaphor of research is often understood as *ways of seeing*, and it is appreciated that any one among many alternative pieces of art depends on the work. For example, a painting can be understood not only in terms of 'beauty', but of reinforcement (Berger, 1972: 47). For viewers of art works, it is those which prevail that are reproduced. Also, the social function of art (Benjamin, 1970). As sacred objects found in a painting, one would not expect it to be easily reproduced, and the 'seeing' the *Mona Lisa* has been in the seventeenth century. A work of art is 'a work of tradition' (1970: 10). The tradition, and the evidence of the case of psychoanalysis. Freud and his followers have created a psychoanalytic culture, and the majority of people who have heard Freud and his followers. One can imagine the meaning for such a contemporary audience. The method, other forms of papers are published, and be understood and sometimes be quite different from the circle of people who are involved. The implicit, oral knowledge transfer to the primary may find meanings.

Finally, one of the ideas is that in art there

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research. The conventions of scientific method have resulted in an emphasis in much qualitative research on various forms of convergent validity. Researchers have sought to demonstrate that what they are writing faithfully represents a set of real events or experiences 'out there' in the world. Artists have shown that there are truths and knowings that do not depend on realism.

The metaphor of research-as-art allows qualitative research to be understood as *ways of seeing* (Berger, 1972). An understanding of art involves appreciating that any form of art constructs what it represents; it is one among many alternative ways of seeing. For Berger, the meaning of a piece of art depends on the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. For example, the European tradition of painting nude women must be understood not only as a way of expressing timeless values such as 'beauty', but of reinforcing gender relations: '*men act and women appear*' (Berger, 1972: 47). This relationship changes over time. For example, viewers of art works may hold ideas about gender that are different from those which prevailed in the era in which a painting was originally produced. Also, the social location of art has shifted significantly over time (Benjamin, 1970). Art-works previously existed as single copies, as almost sacred objects found in churches or the homes of the rich. To see a painting, one would need to travel to visit it. Now, of course, images are easily reproduced, and art has become a commodity. The experience of 'seeing' the *Mona Lisa* is quite different today from how it would have been in the seventeenth century. As Benjamin puts it: 'the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition' (1970: 217). The 'imbeddedness' of qualitative research in tradition, and the effects of changes in that tradition, can be observed in the case of psychoanalytic case studies. The early case studies written by Freud and his followers were largely read by those who participated in psychoanalytic culture. These studies enjoyed limited circulation, and the majority of people who read them were those who had been analysed, or had heard Freud and other psychoanalysts talk at international congresses. One can imagine that these case studies would have had a quite different meaning for such readers than they might have for the much wider contemporary audience exposed to critiques of psychoanalysis, ideas about method, other forms of therapy, and so on. When qualitative research papers are published in books and journals they become a commodity, to be understood and used in a myriad of ways. These understandings can sometimes be quite different from the meanings that the research holds for the circle of people who worked together to produce it in the first place. The implicit, oral knowing that develops in the process of research may not transfer to the printed page. Alternatively, the reader of the printed page may find meanings denied or overlooked by the researcher.

Finally, one of the basic differences between art and qualitative research is that in art there exists a community of critics and art historians who

function to comment on, and review, the meaning and significance of artworks. These people exist because there is a public willing to pay for their services. Ordinary people consume art by purchasing work, visiting exhibitions, reading books. Quite often, the views of art critics and historians are reported in newspapers and on television – this is not wholly an elite academic specialism. The presence of the art criticism industry produces a shared language for talking about art. It also contributes to the existence of a group of informed consumers, who form a supportive audience for artistic productions. This exists in qualitative research in the social sciences, never mind within the much smaller domain of qualitative studies of therapy. The effect is that we are denied opportunities to learn how to read well, and to reflect on how to write better. Some of the implications of this fact are discussed by Czarniawska (1998).

Qualitative inquiry as relationship

Different approaches to qualitative research can be distinguished through the way they represent the relationship between self and other, knower and known. The grounded theory approach primarily acts as a vehicle for the other's experience. The aim is to help the reader to understand a previously unmet other. The stance of researcher is that of facilitator of communication from silenced/unknown group to dominant group. Phenomenology looks instead at categories of experience that all of us participate in – anger, loneliness, learning, being understood. The goal seems to be to see oneself in others, to understand self through understanding others. There is, following Husserl, an implied universalism in phenomenology, whereas grounded theory is implicitly local. A hermeneutic approach is much more a way of exploring or negotiating the relationship between self and other. It can involve a questioning of the self, as the experience of difference is allowed to challenge previously held assumptions (the 'fusion of horizons'). Discourse analysis places the knower in a very privileged position of seeming to 'know better' than anyone else, to the extent of being able to tell the rest of us how we do what we do. It reveals the basis of our tricks and magic. The 'other' in discourse analysis is not a specific named other, but comprises 'people in general', who are playing the same old games of gender and social class domination. The self is one of a group of insiders who have the ability to see through all of this, but do not disclose their own preferred positions (Haraway's 'view from nowhere'). Narrative analysis seems to adopt a relationship of celebrating and affirming the story of the other, but in a somewhat one-sided manner, with little or no space for the active engagement of the 'other'. These are just some of the 'images of relationship' that exist within different genres of qualitative

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research. The issue of the relationship between researcher and research participant/informant is of special significance to researchers in the area of counselling and psychotherapy, because it mirrors debates surrounding the preferred relationship between therapist and client. In the research domain, the relationship between researcher and audience/reader provides an additional source of alternative 'images of inquiry' (see Gergen, 1997).

Qualitative inquiry as conversation

In thinking about what it is like to do qualitative research, it may be helpful to look at it as something like a *conversation*. Anyone who is a counsellor or psychotherapist is a participant in a slow, endless conversation about how best to understand relationships, how to help, what we mean by 'change', what the good life consists of, and so on. These are big topics for conversation. Research feeds into these conversations. When we carry out research interviews we are engaging in a particular type of conversation. Reporting findings at a conference is another type of conversation. The great thing about good qualitative research is that it can shift the ground of the conversation. It allows something to emerge.

We say that we 'conduct' a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders than the led. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that it allows something to 'emerge' which henceforth exists. (Gadamer, 1975: 383)

The philosopher Richard Rorty (1980) argues that scientific knowledge, in the human sciences, is not a matter of holding up a 'mirror to nature', but is better understood as being like participating in a conversation. The choice of qualitative method is a conversation, taking place not only between individuals but between the traditions and value systems within which people live. There is a 'big', overarching conversation going on between the proponents of qualitative research styles associated with the stages/phases identified by Denzin and Lincoln: the 'authoritative voice' of the traditional era; the 'rational, systematic voice' of the modernist era;

and the 'multiple voices' of the postmodern era. But then at the same time there are local conversations taking place between colleagues, or between students and supervisors.

Researcher as journalist

The idea of being described as a producer of *journalism* would be abhorrent to the majority of qualitative researchers. Journalists have a poor image for many people: intrusive, selective in the use of information, interested more in boosting circulation than in the pursuit of truth. Nevertheless, journalism plays an important role in a democratic society, in facilitating public debate over issues, and providing members of the public with information through which they can make decisions. Denzin (1997), one of the leading figures in qualitative social science, has written persuasively about 'merging ethnography with journalism', drawing on the concept of 'public journalism' developed by Charity (1995). The image of the qualitative researcher-as-journalist brings into the foreground the role of research in raising public awareness, and promoting a form of textuality that turns citizens into readers and readers into persons who take democratic action in the world' (Charity, 1995: 83). Making the link between research and journalism also encourages a willingness to take seriously what journalists have to say about therapy. For example, important contributions to the understanding of the experience of clients in therapy have been made by Dinnage (1988) and Lott (1999), both journalists. The image of researcher-as-journalist also introduces the question of what journalists do well, which is to write in such a way as to reach substantially larger audiences than those who read qualitative research. There is a great deal that researchers can learn from journalists about effective writing.

Researcher as storyteller

Some people describe qualitative research as 'narrative' research, because it produces narrative accounts of the world, rather than statistical/quantitative accounts. This use of the term 'narrative' has not been employed within this book, because it involves too broad a sense of what might be considered as narrative. There is much to be gained from sticking to a more specific concept of narrative, which equates with the act of storytelling. The psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) has offered a distinction between 'narrative' and 'paradigmatic' ways of knowing. Narrative ways of knowing are based on storytelling. Stories organise and convey our experience of the world in a manner that integrates action over time,

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characterisation, emotion, morality and social context (McLeod, 1997). Stories are concrete, located in an actual time and place, and specific. Paradigmatic knowing, on the other hand, consists of abstract conceptualisation, the construction of systems of thought built out of 'factors', 'variables', 'laws' and 'rules'. Paradigmatic knowing does not refer directly to specific instances, but makes generalised statements. Bruner (1986) argues that, although both narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing are essential elements of human intelligence, conventional science, including psychology and social science, has in the past tended to concentrate more on the development of paradigmatic generalisation than on the construction of 'good stories'. The rise of qualitative research can be viewed as part of what has been termed the 'narrative turn' in philosophy and social science; since the 1970s, there has been an increasing acknowledgement in these fields of the importance of narrative knowing. However, as suggested earlier, to describe qualitative research as 'narrative' research is misleading. Many qualitative researchers seek to generate paradigmatic frameworks for understanding. A clear example of a paradigmatic approach in qualitative research can be found in the grounded theory use of *categories*. An essential contribution to understanding the role of stories and narrative in qualitative research has been made by Polkinghorne (1995). He makes a contrast between research which collects informants' stories, and then analyses them in terms of paradigmatic general concepts (as in grounded theory), and research which may collect stories and other forms of information from participants but uses this data to tell a story (as in case-study research or Riessman's narrative analysis). Polkinghorne (1995) perhaps draws too definite a distinction between these broad research strategies. There are some examples of qualitative research, such as the work of David Rennie (Chapter 6) where findings are presented in the form of an interplay between narrative (stories) and paradigmatic (categories) forms. Nevertheless, the underlying point to Polkinghorne's (1988, 1995) argument is that, one way or another, qualitative research involves a sensitivity to stories. Qualitative researchers can be seen as story-gatherers and storytellers.

The multiple images of qualitative research: ways of knowing and the limits of method

In the preceding sections some recurring images that have informed the work of qualitative researchers have been discussed: all-seeing deity, embodied witness, artist, person-in-relationship, participant in a conversation, journalist, storyteller. These images help to *position* the work of qualitative researchers in relation to society (e.g., insider vs. outsider) and make it possible, I hope, to see some of the work in a fresh light.

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The primary aim of this chapter has been to point out the limitations of method. Good qualitative research does not derive from following a procedural recipe-book. There is no *method* that produces interesting and useful qualitative findings. Qualitative research is a matter of applying the sense-making capabilities that we already possess in an organised and careful manner. An awareness of *methodological* issues and debates provides researchers with a necessary perspective on the work. Methodology lays out the choices and the implications of these choices, in relation to the adoption of alternative research approaches and strategies. Method locks the researcher in to one approach and one point of view from the start. Once a study has been completed, readers will want to know about the method that was used to generate findings, because this information makes it possible to understand and appreciate the meaning of a study. But this account can be assembled at the end. Good qualitative research is a matter of imagination, creativity, courage, personal integrity, empathy and commitment. Method is just the means of channelling these qualities.

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