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Chapter 12

Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis & Discourse Analysis

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, readers should understand:

- The main tenets of content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis;

- The assumptions of, approaches within, and applications of these methodologies;

- The stages of analysis in studies using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis;

- How to conduct content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis in relation to the same text;

- How to evaluate studies using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis;

- The potential pitfalls of the three approaches.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides overviews of content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The assumptions of, approaches within, and applications of these methodologies are described. The analytic stages that content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis share are outlined. A guide on how to do these analyses is provided. Quality assurance issues, potential pitfalls and ethical concerns associated with using these approaches are described. This chapter also shows how these three techniques can be used as part of a broader methodological toolkit by psychologists.

Content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis are important approaches in psychology. They share many commonalities – not least their focus on qualitative material, their attempt to reveal 'patterns' in datasets, and the stages that facilitate a high-quality analysis. Yet, there are also differences between them. None of them are used in a homogeneous or uniform way by researchers. Their implementation may depend upon the theories and epistemology adopted by the researcher (see Chapter 1). The analytic stages characterising these approaches described in this chapter are not unanimously followed by researchers – some may be omitted, while others may be added. It is also worth noting that, while most researchers using these methods focus on linguistic material, many also use them to analyse other forms of non-linguistic data, such as visual images (e.g. Nerlich & Jaspal, 2014).

The main objective of this chapter is to provide clear guidance to students interested in gaining an overview of how content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis can be used for analysis. The convergences and divergences between content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis are explored. This chapter is not intended to be a prescriptive guide for using these approaches as it is acknowledged that different aspects of them will be used in different empirical contexts. Indeed, in my own research (e.g. Jaspal, 2012, 2018), I have used these approaches in often unconventional ways in order to address complex research questions in the areas of identity, sexuality and health. A key objective of this chapter is to make these three approaches accessible to students and to enable them to think critically and creatively about all three and then be able to take full advantage of them in their own research.

Content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis all offer to provide a rich, fine-grained understanding of any given phenomenon but they do this in slightly different ways. Some methodologies within the qualitative paradigm have specific philosophical commitments (see Chapter 1). For example, interpretative phenomenological analysis has a commitment to phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), and grounded theory to constructivism (Charmaz, 2006). Conversely, the three analytic approaches discussed in this chapter can be used flexibly in that the analyst is able to draw upon theoretical and epistemological tenets creatively in order to guide, and enrich, their analysis. Moreover, the approaches may also be used in conjunction with a broad range of theories.

12.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS

In essence, all empirical research includes some form of content analysis – after all, when we analyse data, whatever the form of data analysis - we are trying to understand its content. At a basic level, content analysis aims to describe the main content in a dataset. It is often in psychology focused on what is being communicated (in talk, images, film), to whom, and with what effects (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Content analysis can be quantitative or qualitative or a combination of both (Breakwell, 2013). It is considered a quantitative approach when it is used principally to enumerate the occurrences of any given phenomenon in a dataset. For instance, the researcher might be interested in counting the number of times a particular term or sentiment appears in a text and in measuring the frequency of co-occurrence

between this term and others in the text. Yet, even when the purpose is not to count the number of occurrences of a particular phenomenon in a text, there is often an element of quantification. Reports describing research using content analysis tend to include expressions like 'most participants', 'the majority of participants' or 'several participants' when referring to the prevalence of the content they are describing – such statements rely on quantification.

Like qualitative methods, content analysis consists of a subjective interpretation of the *content* of qualitative data, which results from a systematic categorisation of these data into codes, patterns and themes (Breakwell, 2013). Essentially, the analyst organises a large corpus of data into smaller categories, which reflect the content of the data or text (see Box 12.1 on coding schemes). These categories are developed by the researcher. Sometimes it is very easy to see how they have developed from a particular statement made by the participant. For instance, if a participant states that going into town at night makes him feel anxious and then proceeds to describe the elements and triggers of this anxiety in considerable detail, the analyst may assign this content to the category 'anxiety'.

[Start key concept summary box]

Box 12.1 Coding Schemes

The coding scheme is a set of principles that will guide your analysis, ensuring that you remain focused on what really matters. The coding scheme is essentially the same for studies using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis in that the same principles apply. However, the 'patterns' that you subsequently develop may differ, depending on which method of data analysis you use. In Section

12.5.7, the processes of developing and implementing a coding scheme are described.

[End key concept summary box]

On the other hand, the content category may be derived by piecing together a series of statements made by the participants. For instance, a participant may not explicitly mention that they feel anxiety when going into town but at different points in the interview they may describe behaviours that are indicative of anxiety, such as feeling unable to concentrate, sweating, experiencing heart palpitations, when thinking about the prospect of going into town at night. Bits of information, scattered across an interview, can be pieced together in order to develop the content category 'anxiety'.

The content categories developed, such as 'anxiety', are brought together as part of the broader content analysis. Potential relationships between these categories are considered, which in turn may give rise to a superordinate content category. Crucially, it is the coding scheme – developed by the researcher on the basis of the original research questions – which guides the analysis (see Box 12.1). For instance, in an interview about the impact of living with HIV for psychological wellbeing, it is foreseeable that the participant will talk not only about this specific issue but also about their relationships with others, their physical health, the medication that they take and so on. While interesting and peripherally relevant to the main research question, this information will not constitute the primary focus of the coding scheme. Rather, the coding scheme will be oriented towards identifying codes that shed light specifically on how the experience of HIV is influencing

psychological wellbeing in the participant. Box 12.2 provides an illustrative study that used content analysis.

[Start illustrative study box]

Box 12.2 Content analysis in action

López et al (2012) explored the content of Internet reviews about primary care physicians in the US. They wanted to find out what patients say about their doctors. In their 712 online reviews on two websites, they identified three content categories and codes:

- Interpersonal Manner (empathy, friendliness, helpfulness, trustworthiness, dedication of time to patients, ability to put patients at ease, ability to listen, ability to explain, and longevity of relationship with physician).

- Technical Competence (knowledge, attention to detail, efficiency, clinical skills, tendency to follow up, referral, perception of poor decision-making, perception of successful treatment, awareness of complementary alternative medicine).

- System Issues (staff, appointment access, appointment waiting time, practice context, practice health information system, practice location, costs associated with the healthcare, negative perception of healthcare, method of doctor selection).

Each code was developed on the basis of a variety of statements made in the reviews. For instance, patient statements like 'He is always very knowledgeable' led to the code 'Knowledge'; 'You can expect his treatment to be right to the dime' led to the code 'Clinical Skills'; and 'She was always on the ball with all her inquiries and

test and test….and yes!' resulted in the code 'Follows up'. Collectively, these codes (along with various others) culminated in the content category 'Technical Competence'.

By using content analysis, the authors were able to shed light on the content of patients' perceptions of their primary care physicians, enabling them to identify the positive and negative aspects of patient engagement with their physicians. A key point to remember is that subjective interpretation of the statements, codes and then the construction of the content category is central to content analysis. Yet, despite the clearly qualitative approach to interpreting the findings, the authors did also quantify to some extent, noting for instance that 63% of the reviews were positive.

[End illustrative study box]

When researchers describe the content analysis they have done, it often sounds elegant and the many decisions that the researcher has had to make at all stages of the study are no longer visible. It is worth thinking about the sorts of things a researcher does have to consider when collecting and interpreting data using content analysis. The exercises at the end of this chapter help you to see the complexities involved in all three approaches.

12.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In their seminal article, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) describe thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. A good starting-point in the definition of thematic analysis is actually the definition of 'themes' – the major building-blocks of a thematic analysis. At the broadest level, a theme is an observable pattern of meaning across a dataset which is shaped by an interrogation of what the data are telling us in relation to the original research question(s).

What makes a 'theme'? As in content analysis, there is often a temptation to quantify the preliminary codes and to make a decision about whether these codes constitute a theme on the basis of their prevalence across a dataset. This approach is actually inconsistent with thematic analysis because it diverges from the qualitative focus of thematic analysis and is perhaps more aligned with content analysis. Rather, the 'keyness' of the codes can be ascertained by returning to the original research question. For instance, if your research question was 'How do people cope with relationship breakdown?' you might focus on codes relating to coping strategies, rather than on the feelings evoked by relationship breakdown. In short, codes relating to coping strategies would be more 'key'. In most cases, the research question is concerned with describing the entire dataset and the analyst will seek to describe patterns of meaning that appear to be prevalent across several, though perhaps not all, sources (interviews, newspaper articles etc). Box 12.3 presents a study using thematic analysis.

[Start illustrative study box]

Box 12.3 Thematic analysis in action

Jaspal and Nerlich (2017) conducted a thematic analysis of UK newspaper representations of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which at the time was a relatively novel biomedical approach to preventing HIV infection. They used social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988), which describes the development of social knowledge, to inform their analysis. They were interested in how PrEP was represented but also the rhetorical techniques used to substantiate these representations. The authors found three main themes that reflected the principal ways in which PrEP was depicted in the media:

- PrEP as a hugely positive biomedical development in HIV prevention science;
- PrEP as a weapon in the battle against HIV/AIDS, which could decisively eradicate the virus and syndrome;
- risk, uncertainty and fear in relation to PrEP and the possibility that it might fail.

The researchers were interested in the social context (represented in newspaper coverage) in which individual and public perceptions of PrEP might later develop. On the basis of their thematic analysis they suggested two emerging *social representations*, namely the hope representation which constructed PrEP as a positive development in the 'battle' against HIV and a competing risk representation, which constructed it as a medical, social and psychological setback in this battle, particularly for gay and bisexual men who are at high risk of infection.

[End illustrative study box]

Thematic analysis is often used with a realist epistemology, that is, 'to theorise motivations, experience and meaning in a straight-forward way' (Braun & Clarke,

2006). Realist epistemology assumes that language is a relatively clear window into individual cognition and motivation and that, through a sophisticated, attentive, and contextualised scrutiny of participants' accounts, the analyst is able to ascertain how the participant thinks and feels about any given phenomenon. For instance, in their study of coping with psychological stress among Black men who have sex with men who are living with HIV, Bogart et al. (2017) identify two superordinate themes and several sub-themes which reportedly describe the coping strategies of their participants.

- Under the superordinate theme 'discrimination events', they found the following subthemes: 'interpersonal discrimination', 'institutional discrimination' and 'traumatic discrimination'. These themes summarised participants' reported experiences of discrimination at distinct levels, with the assumption that these experiences have adversely impacted wellbeing to the extent that forms of coping are initiated.

- Under the superordinate theme 'coping', the following subthemes were discussed: 'avoidance', 'external attribution', 'social support' and 'self-advocacy'. Some of these strategies are deemed to be maladaptive and others more adaptive.

The realist epistemological stance adopted in the study enables the analyst to present the coping strategies as being real and capable of alleviating the psychological stress assumed to be experienced by participants on the basis of what they say in the interviews.

In short, thematic analysis is used to derive themes, or patterns of meaning across a dataset. This analysis can be undertaken in different ways - using either realist or

social constructionist epistemologies. In some cases, the analyst may wish to draw

on *both* epistemologies to realise the benefits of both. Thematic analysis is a flexible

approach and, thus, potentially at risk of being misunderstood. Therefore, it is

important to be clear about how you have used thematic analysis and what you have

done in order to develop your themes. Box 12.4 outlines what is necessary to do in

an example thematic analysis. The various stages of analysis applicable to thematic

analysis are further described in Section 12.5.7

[Start real-life example box]

Box 12.4 Real-life example – thematic analysis

Imagine you want to know how people an adverse event in childhood can affect a

person's psychological wellbeing in adulthood. You might decide to conduct a focus

group with survivors of childhood trauma and to analyse the data using thematic

analysis, that is, to understand the *themes* in their accounts of how their adverse

childhood experience has impacted them psychologically in adulthood. You would

need to do the following:

- Look for thoughts and feelings in relation to one's adverse childhood

  experience, e.g. 'When I think about my experience as a child, I feel sad and

  lonely.'

- Note your interpretation of what the participant thinks and feels on the basis

  of what they say, e.g. although the participant may not describe their feelings

  explicitly, it may be possible to discern what they think and feel on the basis

  of the language they use and connections between the things they say. We

  might call this interpretation a 'code'.

- Piece together examples of thoughts and feelings in relation to one's adverse childhood experiences to form a broader observation about this, e.g. 'I feel sad and lonely', 'I feel unable to form meaningful relationships', and 'I don't care about myself' might lead to the broader observation that the participant experiences psychological distress. We might call this observation a 'theme'.
- Bring together relevant themes from the focus group to form what we might call a 'superordinate theme'.

[End real-life example box]

12.4 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Like both content analysis and thematic analysis, discourse analysis is a methodological approach with various branches, each with a distinct set of foci (see Burr, 2003). Two important discursive approaches in psychology are discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Coyle, 2016). Discursive psychology can be said to present a more fine-grained, micro-level analysis of language – it asks what participants are *doing* with their talk. For example, by saying 'I am not being racist but…' and then making a remark that could be construed as being racist, the speaker is anticipating this accusation, dispelling the accusation before it is made and therefore presenting himself/ herself as non-racist. This is an example of what people can 'do' with their talk.

Conversely, Foucauldian discourse analysis emphasises the primacy of power structures in enabling us to talk and think in the ways that we do. This approach is concerned with contextualising discourses in particular social and historical settings,

because it is these social and historical conditions that make available particular discourses which are subsequently drawn upon by people as they think and communicate. It asks how discourses construct its subjects. As Willig (2008, p. 112) indicates, the discourse emerging from these power structures 'facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when'. Box 12.5 summarises some of the epistemological debates surrounding discourse analysis.

[Start 'Key Debates' box]

Box 12.5 Social Constructivism and Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is rooted within a social constructionist epistemology and, thus, regards language as constructing, rather than reflecting, psychological and social reality. Discourse analysis embodied a significant critique to realism with the publication in 1987 of the Potter and Wetherell book *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour.* Realism proposes that language constitutes a fairly accurate window into cognition, affect and experience. Potter and Wetherell argued that language should be viewed as the medium that is used by people to *construct* particular versions of the reality they are experiencing. Discourse analysts do not necessarily deny that an objective reality exists but rather they indicate that research methods in psychology cannot allow us to access this reality. The important research question for the discourse analyst is how language is being used to construct reality. There are some practical examples that can illustrate the relevance of discourse analysis. For instance, imagine you are creating a profile on your dating website. You might populate your profile with information that presents you in a positive light and that may be at variance with what you think you 'really'

are. Discourse analysis is principally concerned with the social constructions that people create with the language they use.

Burr (2003, p. 202) conceptualises discourse as a 'systematic, coherent set of images, metaphors and so on that construct an object in a particular way'. Social actors draw upon the vast range of linguistic resources available to them in order to present particular versions of social reality. Crucially, intention and motivation are not usually the focus of discourse analysts. In other words, the task of the discourse analyst is to explore how social actors discursively construct reality and the functions that these constructions perform in particular social, cultural and historical settings. [End 'Key Debates' box]

Box 12.6 presents a summary of a study using discourse analysis. The object of this study was to examine how Muslims were being represented in the Australian press and how this could be used to justify discrimination.

[Start illustrative study box]

Box 12.6 Discourse analysis in action

Quayle and Sonn (2009) conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis of the construction of Muslims in the mainstream Australian print media and identified the following three discourses:

- 'The good nation' whereby Australia and Australia were constructed as tolerant, accepting and welcoming, implicitly locating the 'problem' in the 'unassimilable other', namely Muslims.

- 'Racism is repulsive but so is self-loathing' which highlights the construction of criticism of Australia's track-record on race and immigration as an unpatriotic, disloyal act, thereby seeking to silence dissent.

- 'It's not race, it's culture stupid': an attack on multiculturalism, which serves to deny racism, to de-legitimise claims of racism, and to locate the true problem in multiculturalism as a 'failed policy'.

Taken together, these discourses provide a social context in which some forms of Islamophobic prejudice may be made to appear reasonable. These discourses can facilitate the utterance of statements and engagement in behaviours which, in one way or another, make Muslims in Australia feel unwelcome, ostracised and even demonised. They allow people who make such statements and engage in such behaviours to deny the accusation of racism and to position their statements and behaviours within the realm of normalcy. To this extent, Foucauldian discourse analysis can be said to possess an 'action orientation' (Coyle, 2016).

[End illustrative study box]

Quayle and Sonn (2009) did not present any theoretical framework for their work. However, often theory will drive the structure of discourse analysis. This allows the potential psychological and social impact of discourses to be explained in terms of the theoretical model chosen. For example, Jaspal (2014) used discourse analysis and social representations theory in research on the anti-Zionist rhetoric used in the English-language Iranian press. He argued that the press discourse shapes public social representations. One of the limitations of some discourse analysis studies is

that the analysis remains focused solely on the context studied, rather than the

bigger picture.

Box 12.7 presents an illustration of the generation of discourse analysis codes and

discourses.

[Start real-life illustration box]

Box 4.3 Discourse analysis of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

Imagine you want to know how the Israel-Palestinian conflict is represented in the

print media. You might decide to collect newspaper articles published just before

and after a key event in the history of the conflict, such as the Second Intifada, and

to analyse the data using discourse analysis, that is, to understand the *discourses*

surrounding the conflict and the broader social and political meanings (impacts) that

these discourses generate. You would need to do the following:

- Look for descriptions of Israel, Palestine and the conflict with a particular

  focus on the linguistic features of these descriptions, e.g. 'Israel is

  perpetrating acts of terrorism' or 'Palestine is perpetrating acts of terrorism'.

- Note your interpretation of these descriptions focusing in particular on what

  the descriptions and their linguistic features are *doing* in the text, e.g. by

  referring to the actions of Israel/ Palestine as 'terrorism', the article

  constructs them as illegitimate, illegal and malevolent. We might call this

  interpretation a 'code'.

- Piece together the emerging codes to form a broader observation about this,

  e.g. 'Construction of Israel/ Palestine as illegitimate', 'Past acts of violence',

and 'Non-commitment to peace' might lead to the broader observation 'De-legitimisation of Israel/ Palestine'. We might call this observation a 'discourse'.

- Do this in relation to each article and then bring together relevant discourses from each one.

The various stages of analysis applicable to this approach are described in Section 12.5.7.

[End real-life illustration box]

12.5 HOW TO DO CONTENT ANALYSIS, THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

There are common stages in the execution of any qualitative empirical study and, to that extent, the following steps are suggested in relation to conducting a content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The stage model spans the student's initial engagement with the general research topic to composition of their final research report.

- Stage 1: Develop high-quality research questions

On the basis of a rigorous review of the existing literature in your research area, develop appropriate research questions (Chapter 1 covers the development of research questions). The research questions addressed in studies using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis may differ in focus, although there are certainly overlaps. Your research questions should always come first and these inform the methods of data generation and analysis you use.

- Stage 2: Data access

Having developed research questions, you will need to select an appropriate method of data generation so that you can collect data that will enable you to address your original questions. Interviews, focus groups, written responses to a questionnaire, personal diaries, conversations between people in naturalistic contexts are just some examples of data capture methods. Some of these methods have been described in this volume (see for example Chapter 10 on interviewing and focus groups). Content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis can be used to analyse a wide range of data types, including individual interviews, focus groups, newspaper articles, social media posts, visual images and many others. The method of data capture will depend on the research questions. For instance, if your research question was 'How is extreme weather presented visually to the public?' you might reasonably decide to collect a range of images of weather occurring in various media. This would require you then to find some measure of how extreme the weather in these images is. You could use weather experts. You could use text attached to the image that signals severity. You could ask a sample of the lay public. The point is that choosing the data that you access and collect for analysis may entail filtering and selection which will itself involve the use of other methods. You need to be able to justify your choices of data source and type before you proceed to an analysis.

Say you were interested in exploring the media's representation of British Muslims in the immediate aftermath of the bombings on the London Underground on July 7

2005 (Kelsey, 2015). First, you would need to make a decision about the specific period of reporting you were interested in (e.g. the bombings and their immediate aftermath or longer term). Second, you would then need to identify relevant keywords, such as 'London Underground bombings', 'Muslim(s)' and 'Islam' and collate all of the newspaper articles mentioning either of these terms during the time period of interest. You might choose to conduct your search using LexisNexis® (https://www.lexisnexis.com/ap/academic/form_news_wires.asp), which is a large database of public-records information, including newspaper articles. You can indicate the keywords, or combinations of keywords, and specific time period that you are interested in. In order to conduct a content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis of this dataset, you would need to ensure that you have access to the content of the articles that are of interest – in most cases, this would be the main body of each article, but this may also include the article headline, the images used, or the comments that are left by online readers.

Interviews are frequently used to collect data for content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. If using interviews, in order to construct a dataset that lends itself to such analysis, you would need to ensure that it is linguistically 'rich' and that participants are given ample opportunity to talk at length. The interview schedule would need to be semi-structured and open-ended and allow for elaborate responses from interviewees. The interviewer might need to use probes during the interview in order to elicit rich data that include metaphors, similes and other linguistic features that are of interest to the analyst. It is noteworthy that such linguistic features may be of lesser importance to the content or thematic analyst than to the discourse analyst.

In short, it is important to collect data that will allow you to conduct the right sort of analysis for your research questions (see Chapter 7 which discusses the challenges of accessing data from some sources or in some contexts).

- Stage 3: Present your data in a format that lends itself to analysis

Once the data have been collected, for instance through a series of interviews, they will need to be presented in a format that lends itself to analysis. For instance, interviews need to be transcribed before they can be analysed using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. There are several different types of dataset, such as newspaper articles, political speeches, conversations between people in naturalistic settings and others. This section focuses on one of the more common types of data generation – recorded interviews and what is described here echoes what is said in Chapter 10.

You should listen to the entire recording before beginning to transcribe, as this will help you to (re-)familiarise yourself with the data and to understand the nature and complexity of the data. This in turn will provide you with a sense of how long your transcription will take and possible challenges that you may face. For instance, you will find out whether there are sections of the recording that are difficult to hear and how prevalent this is. It is important to plan ahead and to calculate the length of time your transcription is likely to take. Transcription can take a lot of time – a one-hour interview typically takes at least 4 hours to transcribe and it can take longer if the interview material is, for instance, complex or difficult to hear.

For relatively short interviews (lasting up to 2 hours), it is a good idea to install a free transcription software package on your computer. Express Scribe Transcription Software is one of several free packages that can be downloaded onto your computer (https://www.nch.com.au/scribe/). This particular software enables you to listen to, rewind, fast-forward and pause the audio recording during transcription. However, this does require you to have recorded the interview using a digital recorder and to be able to transfer the file onto your software using the appropriate file type.

It is good practice to transcribe the entire recorded interview without missing out any sections, even if prima facie some sections appear to be irrelevant to your research questions. This is important because you must conduct your analysis with the entirety of your documented interaction with the participant in mind. Before you begin to transcribe the interviews, you will need to make a decision about the level of detail to be included. It is good practice to include as much information as possible, including non-verbal data, such as laughter or smiling and pauses during speech. This will enable you to conduct a more thorough and nuanced analysis. For instance, say you were interviewing a man about his experience of relationship breakdown and, after making the statement 'it almost killed me', he chuckled. It would be vitally important to record this non-verbal act as it clearly impacts on the meaning of the statement 'it almost killed me' – it might mean that he is being ironic or hyperbolic.

Although all qualitative research using an interview design has an interest in language, discourse analysis is particularly focused on the way in which language is used and, thus, for research using that approach it is good practice to include as

much detail as possible. Below is an example of a good transcription – from a study of coming as out gay and Muslim:

I first realised I was gay when, when (.) I was 12. I knew I was different but couldn't, I couldn't er, you know, pinpoint what it was but I just er, I knew that I was (0.3) different. It took me years to admit it that I was gay and er when I did it was pretty hard (.) because like I knew < > I was sinning against God basically yeah, sinning against God. Sounds crazy now ((laughs))

By using the Jefferson Transcription System, you will be able to add significant detail to your transcript. In the extract above, '(.)' denotes a short pause while '(0.3)' denotes a pause of three seconds. Moreover, '< >' indicates that the pace of speech has slowed down. All of this information enables the reader to appreciate the significance of the data and your analytic interpretations. It is especially valuable if your data are re-analysed by someone else for any reason.

- Stage 4: Select the method of data analysis that you will use

The research questions that are derived from a rigorous review of existing research in any given area should govern the choice of method of data analysis. Each method should be viewed as a tool in the toolkit of psychology and the priority must be to use the approach that is best suited to addressing the research questions. The first part of this chapter has indicated some of the assumptions, approaches and applications associated with content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse

analysis. It is clear that not all of them would be appropriate for all research questions.

It is worth focusing on a concrete example. Imagine you wanted to research what older people think about asylum seekers in the UK. In order to address this research question effectively, you would need to identify the beliefs and value judgements of older people in relation to asylum seekers. Given that you would use a realist epistemological approach, viewing language as a window into belief and cognition, and wish to examine the *content* of older people's attitudes, content analysis might appear to be a particularly useful method of analysis.

As part of the broader research project, you might also be interested in how asylum seekers are represented in the print media, which is known to constitute an important source of societal information concerning society and politics. In order to address this research question, you might opt for discourse analysis given that the approach enables the researcher to 'unpick' reality and to identity the broader social discourses which are created and to which people can orient when thinking and talking about asylum seekers.

You could argue that Stages 3 and 4 described here should be reversed in order – the method of analysis chosen on the basis of your research question perhaps should then determine your data presentation strategy. In fact you might say the choice of analytic approach should be Stage 2 since it shapes both data collection and presentation. In practice, the sequencing of Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 is not static. Their relationship is recursive: to refine a piece of research it will be necessary to go around the loop of considering Stages 1-4 and making modifications possibly several times.

- Stage 5: Familiarise yourself with the data

Analysts have varying levels of familiarity with the data when they embark upon the analysis. They may have conducted the data collection themselves, in which case they will already be familiar with the data. Similarly, in some cases, the analyst has been involved in the transcription of the interviews and thereby acquires an additional layer of familiarity with the data. During the transcription, the analyst may notice aspects of the data that shed light on the research questions. Some analysts were not involved in the original data collection or transcription process and, thus, their first encounter with the data would be when looking at the transcripts for the first time. In order to acquire familiarity with the data, it is advisable for the analyst to study each dataset (i.e. the transcripts, newspaper corpus, images, video feeds, etc.) at least once. During this process, the analyst may note down in the left-hand margin of each data piece initial analytic observations about its content. These initial observations will focus on data elements that appear to be relevant to the research questions.

- Stage 6: Develop and apply your coding scheme

Drawing on both the research questions and the initial analytic observations made during the process of familiarising yourself with the data, you will develop a coding scheme in order to undertake the analysis. Your coding scheme is essentially 'breaking down' your research questions. You are asking much more specific questions in your coding scheme that will in turn enable you to address your original research questions.

It is worth focusing on a specific example - imagine you had conducted an interview study of gay Muslim men and that your research questions were:

- How do gay Muslim men feel about their religion and sexuality?

- How do gay Muslim men cope with potential threats to identity?

Having considered the research questions and preliminary analytic observations, you might develop a coding scheme incorporating the following questions:

- Are you using any particular theoretical framework to guide or inform your analysis? If so, are there aspects of that framework that you need to apply as you undertake the analysis? Given the focus on identity threat, you might decide to deploy Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986, 2015) and to focus on examples of identity principles (e.g. continuity, self-esteem, self-efficacy) that appear to be challenged in participants' accounts.

- Is there evidence of particular feelings and emotions being expressed by participants in the interviews? Are these feelings and emotions expressed explicitly in relation to religion and/ or sexuality, specifically? If not explicitly, is there an implicit connection?

- Do participants appear to be expressing particular feelings and emotions under specific social and psychological conditions? For instance, do they feel distress when they think about *both* religion and sexuality simultaneously?

- Is there any evidence of engagement in behaviours designed to reduce the level of threat experienced?

- Under which social and psychological conditions do participants appear to be engaging in particular coping behaviours? For instance, do participants deny

that there is a problem when they feel that they have nobody to speak to about their problem?

This coding scheme might provide a useful starting-point but it is important to remember that the coding scheme is subject to change. As you undertake the analysis, you may discover additional important connections that you had not previously foreseen and these new connections may lead to the addition of novel coding principles. Furthermore, there may be an interesting use of language, such as metaphors, in the dataset, which leads you to focus on how that particular use of language is manifested across the dataset. You will now be in a position to begin the data analysis by using your newly developed coding scheme. At this stage, it is necessary to generate the initial codes, which address the questions listed above.

There are several ways in which initial codes can be recorded. For instance, provided that you have inserted line numbers in your transcript, you may decide to record your codes in a separate document, making clear references to the page and line numbers that relate to your code. Alternatively, provided that you have used double-space in your transcript, you may decide to insert text in another colour in between the lines of text that you are interested. An especially useful approach is to utilise the left-hand margin of each document (e.g. interview transcript, newspaper article) and for these codes to be placed close to the actual raw data that have led to the particular code. This enables the analyst to link the original codes (and then, patterns) to the original raw data. There are now many computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) platforms to help with this process (especially when returning to data, joining codes, visualising the overlap in material between

particular codes and so on (see for example, https://www.maxqda.com/qualitative-analysis-software).

- Stage 7: Identify 'patterns' in the data

Once the initial codes have been noted, it is important to identify 'patterns' in the data. Pattern is a neutral term that is used in this chapter to refer to content categories, themes and discourses in content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis, respectively. It will be necessary to explore potential connections between codes in order to form such patterns. The search for patterns will be guided by the coding scheme that was developed as this keeps the analyst focused on the original research questions.

In this section, the relationship between codes and patterns is described, put simply, individual codes (e.g. 'anxiety', 'fear', 'worry', 'nervousness') will be collated by the researcher to create a meaningful pattern (e.g. 'decreased psychological wellbeing'). Two points must be noted: first, the researcher will actively piece together codes that are relevant to one another to create the pattern and, second, in doing so, the researcher will be guided by the original research questions. Although it is the researcher who creates the codes and patterns, sometimes this can be done in collaboration with research participants who may be invited to provide approval of the researcher's analyses or indeed to input into the formation of codes and patterns at an earlier stage of the analysis (see Boylorn, 2008).

Imagine your research question is: how do international students feel about moving abroad to attend university? There may well be codes concerning thoughts about university (e.g. 'increased employability', 'novel experiences' and 'broadening

friendship groups') but these codes would probably not be the focus and it is those

codes concerning *feelings* that would be pieced together to create the pattern (in

this case, 'decreased psychological wellbeing'.)

There is no 'one size fits all approach' to the development of patterns in the

data. In some cases, one of the codes will be especially key to both the dataset and

to the research questions and, thus, become a pattern (i.e. content category, theme

or discourse), with other codes providing further support and context to this theme.

Returning to the example of the interview study of gay Muslims, the code

'internalised homophobia' could be construed as a 'pattern' on the basis of the

following codes: 'low self-esteem'; 'self-disgust'; and 'endorsement of anti-gay

attitudes'. The participant may be experiencing low self-esteem and self-disgust in

relation to his sexual orientation, which could indicate his internalised homophobia.

On the other hand, the negative social attitudes concerning homosexuality, which he

himself has endorsed, are the source of his internalised homophobia. Put simply, the

researcher may bring these three codes together and develop a pattern (i.e. content

category, theme or discourse), which they refer to as 'internalised homophobia'.

In other cases, using the coding scheme, the analyst will piece together

several codes in order to develop an overarching theme that addresses the original

research questions. For example, in the interview study of gay Muslims, the

following codes may be observed: 'denial of sexual orientation'; 'cognitive focus on

religion'; 'desire to change sexual orientation'. When viewed together, these codes

might give rise to the overarching pattern 'deflection strategies for coping'. It is

noteworthy that the process of building patterns necessarily involves the reduction

of the data to broader content categories, themes or discourses with some

inevitable loss of detail. Indeed, while 'deflection strategies for coping' tells us something important about the data and provides some response to the research questions, there are some interesting and important codes sitting beneath this pattern. In order to retain the focus on detail, it is possible to develop 'sub-patterns' (sub-categories, sub-themes, sub-discourses), which can be described in the final research report.

The final point to make about the development of patterns in the data is that it must be undertaken carefully. This process requires greater detachment from the data and 'higher-level' thinking than the generation of initial codes, which is much more data-focused. When developing patterns, the analyst will be focusing principally on the initial codes that have been generated, rather than the raw data. The risk is that one's patterns may become distant from the original data and that patterns may be drawn whose rationale is hard to decipher when the analyst returns to the raw data.

The patterns that are developed may amount to speculation on the basis of the initial codes. When the analyst composes the research report and begins to reproduce the raw data to illustrate the patterns, they may find that there is a mismatch between the raw data and the conclusions drawn (i.e. the patterns). Therefore, during the development of patterns, it is important to review the emerging patterns against the raw data, and to ensure their accuracy and that the analysis does not depart from the data. This may lead you to re-think some themes or to discard them altogether if, for instance, there does not appear to be sufficient data in support of the pattern. At the end of this process, you will end up with

several patterns (that is, content categories, themes or discourses, depending on the approach you are using).

- Stage 8: How do the cross-case 'patterns' relate to one another?

When each data piece (e.g. interview transcript, newspaper article, political speech) has been individually analysed and patterns developed for each one, you will need to begin to look at patterns across the dataset as a whole. The same process applied to a data piece (e.g. interview transcript) is applied to the entire dataset. This will result in the creation of 'superordinate' patterns (i.e. content categories, themes or discourses), which reflect the content of the dataset in accordance with the research questions.

In some cases, a pattern is selected from one of the data pieces as a superordinate pattern, because it appears to be key to the entire dataset and other patterns may become subordinate to it although they are used to support and substantiate the emerging superordinate pattern. For instance, in the interview study on gay Muslims, the pattern 'deflection strategies for coping' may be selected as superordinate theme on the basis of the following individual themes observed across the whole dataset: 'self-isolation'; 'inability to self-disclose'; and 'fear of loss of relationships'.

You will finish stage 8 with a final set of superordinate patterns. There are two key considerations for completing this process successfully. First, it is important that the superordinate patterns are grounded in the data and, thus, you will need to compare the emerging patterns against the dataset and be able to substantiate them with

extracts from the data. Second, the superordinate patterns must tell a relevant and coherent story about the phenomenon under investigation. You can assess the relevance of the story told by your superordinate patterns simply by returning to both the coding scheme and the original research questions. Do your superordinate patterns appear to provide responses to both the coding scheme and, crucially, the research questions?

Coherence can be assessed in different ways. You may be using a particular framework and replicate the chronology or structure of that framework in the narrative in your analysis. For instance, Identity Process Theory postulates that identity is threatened, which in turn initiates coping strategies. You may decide to follow a particular chronological order, which, in the case of gay Muslims, may focus on individual awareness and self-identification, followed by coming out to other people, and the construction of a public identity.

Traditional concepts of 'reliability' and 'validity' associated with quantitative research methods do not necessarily apply to research using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis. However, there are ways of ensuring that your analysis is *credible* (see section 12.6 below). First, it is good practice to reflect on the potential personal biases that may have shaped your findings. Are there particular aspects of your own identity and thinking that may have led to particular interpretations of the data? Second, were other people involved in the analysis or can others be involved to 'sense check' your findings and question any potentially idiosyncratic interpretations? This can help to curb any excessively idiosyncratic interpretations that may have resulted from your own identity and thinking. Third, as indicated above, it is possible to involve participants in the data analysis to ensure

that your interpretations are 'approved' by those individuals who have been researched. Fourth, it is advantageous, though not always possible, to engage in data triangulation, which refers to the use of additional methods to confirm or complement the findings of your research using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis.

- Stage 9: Represent your findings

The final stage of the research process is to represent your research findings effectively. This may take the form of a university assignment, dissertation, conference paper, journal article, for example. There are two key considerations for producing a research report.

First, it is essential to produce a high-quality, robust and transparent method section, in which the rationale to use content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis is made explicit. Far too often, a particular approach is selected by the student without any clear explanation. The best way to convince the reader that an approach has been used because it is suitable is to give specific reasons, which might include the epistemological stance of the approach, the value of content categories, themes or discourses, and, above all, reference to the research questions.

Second, it is vital that the patterns that are outlined in the findings section are clearly and consistently exemplified using extracts from the data. This is important because it is one of the key criteria used for assessing the accuracy and quality of a qualitative analysis. Simply reporting a finding without providing actual examples from the data might be deemed to be a sweeping assertion by the analyst

whose accuracy is difficult to determine. There is, however, a fine line between providing sufficient evidence that a pattern is a legitimate one, on the one hand, and reproducing masses of qualitative data, on the other hand. You must remember that every document in which you represent your findings will have a word limit and that you must leave sufficient space for the actual analysis.

As indicated in Stages 6 and 7, it is important to retain a clear link between the emerging patterns and the raw data. You would be best advised to list a series of quotes or extracts from the dataset under each pattern that you identify. When you compose your research report, however, you will need to take a decision about which of the quotes or extracts to use. It is customary to use those extracts that best illustrate the pattern under discussion and that you deem to be vivid and compelling. It is probably best practice to indicate explicitly the overall prevalence of the tone/ semantics of the extract in the broader dataset in order to avoid misleading the reader into believing that it is more or less prevalent than it actually is. Transparency is key. However, the necessity or desirability of indicating the prevalence of the 'tone of an extract' or of a particular theme depends on whether 'more prevalent' is equated with 'more important'. If the focus is on mapping the diversity of positions taken, then single instances may be indicative of the existence of that diversity. If it is clear at the outset that this is the perspective being taken there is no question of misleading the reader and no need to attach a qualifier to indicate prevalence. Again, the point is that it is important to be clear one way or another when reporting your conclusions.

At the end of this chapter, there is an exercise (Exercise 4) for you to do. It provides

an extract from an interview and asks you to conduct three analyses of the same

extract – using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis in turn and

following the steps laid out above. A commentary and suggested analytic profiles

are provided.

1

12.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Yardley (2000) has described four flexible principles as a guide for assessing the quality of a qualitative analysis, all of which are applicable to the three methods described in this chapter. These include:

- *sensitivity to context* – the analyst must demonstrate awareness of the dominant theories, previous empirical literature, social and cultural context in which the research has been conducted, and of participants' perspectives when undertaking the analysis;

- *commitment and rigour* must be evident from the research report. There must be in-depth engagement with the topic area through acknowledgement of previous research and how one's own research is positioned within that broader literature. The methodological approach must be very clearly described and a strong rationale presented.

- *transparency and coherence* - the data collection, analysis and presentation of findings must be characterised by transparency and rigour. It is important to present a sufficient level of detail (i.e. extracts from the data) in order to demonstrate commitment and rigour. It is good practice to acknowledge the subjectivity that underpins qualitative research and to make clear one's 'speaking position', that is, to acknowledge elements of one's identity that might have impinged on the data analysis.

- *impact and importance* – the analyst must demonstrate the importance of the research questions and the impact of the research findings, which can be defined in different ways. The research questions must purport to fill a gap in knowledge that has been identified in the literature review. The research

findings must have well-defined empirical, theoretical and/ or practical implications. For instance, the findings may challenge an existing theoretical paradigm in psychology or they may shed light on a given psychological phenomenon in a new population.

It is noteworthy that practically all of these points are captured in the aforementioned section describing the various stages of the research process. They are applicable to all three of the methods described in this chapter. Researchers using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis should seek to incorporate them into their own analyses.

12.7 POTENTIAL PITFALLS

All research methods have limitations, and none is perfect. This is one of the reasons that researchers are increasingly embarking upon multi-methodological research projects that span the full spectrum of quantitative and qualitative methods. In such projects, the aim is often to provide triangulation of research findings.

The three approaches described here can and should be used flexibly. They are all part of the psychology toolkit that can enable us to find out what we need to know. Content analysis may not take content at face value; discourse analysis can be used to explore psychological processes, not least because discourses form the basis of understanding and behaviour; and themes can tell us about both what is going on in the mind and in society. Yet, individual researchers sometimes use these approaches in ways that can limit their usefulness because they make conservative assumptions about what can and cannot be explored using a given method.

Content analysis is a very useful method for assessing the content of a dataset. In general, the approach generates broad content categories, which are reported in order to explicate the content of the dataset. A possible limitation is that content analysis tends not to focus on the linguistic content of the dataset, thereby limiting its capacity to shed light on the 'how?' question, rather than the 'what?' question. The analyst is generally concerned with providing insight into the content, rather than the internal mechanisms, of any given psychological phenomenon. Moreover, consistent with a realist epistemology, content analysis may be used in a way that suggests it takes at face value the content of a dataset. The researcher might not conduct a critical analysis of the kind that discourse analysis purports to do, for instance.

Discourse analysis has undoubtedly made important contributions to psychology. Its epistemological grounding in social constructionism is both a benefit and a limitation. The benefit lies in elucidating the social and historical conditions under which particular identities, perceptions, emotions, and behaviours become possible. What are the discourses that have led a gay identity to be possible? Which discourses of climate change become available to the public? How is racism legitimised in the press? However, some researchers have not taken full advantage of discourse analysis because they do not use the approach to say anything about actual perceptions, emotions or behaviours. They use the approach as if the sole scope of discourse analysis is to examine only *social constructions* of these psychological phenomena. When used in this way, discourse analysis alone does not enable the analyst to ascertain how gay men perceive their identity, how climate change is regarded, or actual attitudes towards ethnic outgroup members, for

instance. While useful, discourse analysis in this form tells just one dimension of the story and, when used alone, less about psychological phenomena. These factors need not be intractable limitations if the researcher is willing to use the approaches flexibly and creatively to address their questions.

12. 8 ETHICAL ISSUES

Like other methods, empirical studies using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis all entail the same ethical considerations concerning *inter alia* the acquisition of informed consent from research participants, clarity in relation to the participant's right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason, and clear ways of minimising any risk – be it physical or psychological – to participants. These ethical considerations would be true of any study regardless of the method used (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of ethical issues in research).

12.9 CONCLUSION

Content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis are very useful methodological approaches. There is much diversity in how each approach is used and much flexibility in terms of the theoretical and epistemological stances the analyst can take. Traditionally, qualitative methods like the ones discussed in this chapter have been presented as 'pilot work' which facilitates the 'real research' which is quantitative. Thankfully, such attitudes are now waning and qualitative approaches increasingly enjoy the same status as quantitative methods.

It is useful to think of content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis as tools within the necessarily varied toolbox of psychology. The correct tool

is selected for the particular action required. In other words, the choice of method of data analysis must be driven by the research questions, rather than personal preference or the level of competence with a particular approach, for instance. After all, it is possible to learn new methods and to collaborate with other researchers who are more experienced users of a particular method that may be useful for your study. Both can be enormously enriching for both the research project and the researcher's own professional development.

Yet, one of the greatest strengths of these three methods also presents a significant challenge for researchers: their flexibility. While the approaches are flexible, an 'anything goes' attitude must be avoided at all costs. The choice of method of data analysis must be clearly defined. The analytic steps taken must be systematic and logical. The analysis must be interpretative rather than merely descriptive. When used competently and creatively, content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse can enable us to answer some of the most important questions in psychology and beyond.

12.10 EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Exercise 1

Imagine you have been assigned the task of ascertaining what young adults think about Brexit. Design a content analysis study, with appropriate research questions, a method for data generation, a coding scheme for analysing your data, and a data analysis plan.

Suggested features of answer

Possible research questions include 'What are dominant attitudes towards Brexit?' and 'What do young people think about Brexit?' It is suggested that students select interviews or focus groups to conduct the study and that they produce a coding scheme that taps into perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in this population. The initial stage of analysis will focus on generating codes, which will subsequently be pieced together to create content categories.

Exercise 2

If you wanted to identify the discourses surrounding climate change in communities living in Southern England, what would be your research question and what methodology would you use to address it? Design an interview study of local residents with appropriate questions, a method for data collection, a coding scheme for analysing your data, and a data analysis plan.

Suggested features of answer:

Possible research questions include: 'What are dominant discourses concerning climate change in communities on the South coast?' and 'How is climate change constructed by communities living on the South Coast?' It is suggested that students select interviews or focus groups to conduct the study and that they produce a coding scheme that taps into descriptions, views and understandings of climate change in this population. The initial stage of analysis will focus on generating codes, which will subsequently be pieced together to create discourses.

Exercise 3

Look for the transcript of a speech delivered by a politician and conduct a discourse analysis guided by the research question 'How does the politician construct their position as legitimate?'

Suggested response to the Exercise:

It is suggested that students will produce a coding scheme that taps into potentially controversial areas of the speech, which could be challenged by others, as these areas are likely to require legitimation on the part of the politician. The coding scheme will require a focus on linguistic techniques like the use of metaphors, similes and juxtapositions. The initial stage of analysis will focus on generating codes, which will subsequently be pieced together to create discourses.

Exercise 4

Below there is an extract from an interview with Janet, a transgender women living with HIV who is describing her identity. Using the steps described in this chapter, conduct three separate analyses of this text – using content analysis, then discourse analysis and then thematic analysis. When you have conducted your three separate analyses, consider the following questions:

- What are the similarities and differences between the results your analyses have produced?

- What can one approach tell you that another cannot?

- What is the benefit of data triangulation?

1   I would say definitely errm a proud transgender woman, erm what I think

2   the concept of transgender should be, erm I think that a lot of

3   misconceptions and misunderstanding of what transgender is or what

4   transgender should be and it's a day- we live a life nowadays where to

5   each their own, to each their own path, to each their own decisions. Uh I

6   live my life daily as a full blown woman. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen

7   circumstances I was born with a penis. Am I happy with it? No. Am I doing

8   what I have to do in order to be happy? Yes, I am. Um now there's so

9   much taboo and so much tabloids and so much things going on about

10   trans women and when I started transitioning I started at the age of- at

11   the tender age of 15, and um I think I just had- I just mean- I think I was

12   blessed enough to have the support of my family. That kind of moulded

13   me into becoming an independent woman in the sense of I have my own

14   business, I do work, I have seminars, I do everything to do with work wise

15   where most people from when you tell them you are trans the first thing

16   that goes through their head 'Okay, you're a prostitute, you're an escort'

17   or 'you do drugs' or 'you do this or you do that' um [inaudible] not that,

18   at the end of the day I don't judge people, who am I to judge? But I think

19   it's really terrible that people look down on us, or even when I first got

20   diagnosed with HIV I was hammered about if I was an escort and I'm like

21   no, this is a situation where I am in a relationship for 5 years and he's the

22   one cheating outside and brought it home to me, that's how I ended up

23   getting diagnosed. It was not a situation of me being an escort or

24   whatever the case may be, so yeah as I say when I see myself I see a

25   proud, transgender woman, what I think a transgender woman should be

26   um [pause] I'm proud to say that I'm transgender. Some people, when I

27   say it, they watch me like 'What? You're lying' or they'll be like, 'You're

28   not serious' and I'll be like 'Yeah' and you know I mean I don't go around

29   bawling out 'Hey everybody, guess what? I'm transgender' but if you ask

30   me I'll tell you it's none of your business I'll tell you I go ahead about my

31   daily life, but yeah I would definitely say that describes me.

Factors to be addressed in your answers to this exercise:

Although there are significant overlaps in the outcomes of research using content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis, you will have discovered that there are also possible differences.

- Content analysis

The content analyst is typically interested in describing the components or *content* of a given phenomenon, such as the individual's beliefs or perceptions. Thus, a possible research question using the approach is: *What are the key markers of transgender identity?*

In attempting to identify relevant codes that shed light on the key markers of transgender identity, the analyst might end up with the following list:

- In line 2, Jane perceives transgender women to be misunderstood and misconceived – 'perceived misunderstanding'.

- In line 5, she describes herself as living as a 'full blown woman' – 'complete woman'.

- In line 11, she describes the components of being an 'independent woman'

- In lines 2-4 and 13-15, she manifests a 'rejection of stigma'.

- In lines 22-24, Janet describes herself in terms of a 'conventional woman' which elicits shock from others.

These codes refer to Janet's perceptions about her transgender identity. A key content category is that of *identity pride* in that the participant clearly attempts to

derive a sense of pride on the basis of her transgender identity and rejects stigma that might undermine her identity pride.   Using content analysis, we are able to identify the *contents* of identity.

- Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis enables the analyst to identify patterns in data that shed light on psychological processes. Using thematic analysis, we might wish to address the following question: *How is transgender identity perceived?*

A key theme in this account is that of *perceived stigmatisation of transgender identity*. This theme consists of the following 'codes':

- In lines 2-3 and 7-8, Janet notes the social stigma that is appended to transgender identity – both in public discourse and in the media.

- In lines 13-14, she notes specific stereotypes of transgender women which concerns sexual behaviour, sex work and drug use in order to substantiate her view that there is social stigma in relation to her gender identity.

- Janet does not approve of the stigmatisation of transgender women, which she refers to as 'terrible' (lines 15-16), but does attempt to challenge these stereotypes in her interactions with others.

- She describes personal traits and activities, which she perceives to be positive, such as having her own business, working hard and being non-judgmental. By possessing these traits, Janet is able to feel more positive about her transgender identity and to challenge the stereotypes from others, as she does not fit these stereotypes.

This thematic analysis might lead us to conclude that Janet perceives her transgender identity to be stigmatised and that she attempts to resist this stigmatisation psychologically so that she can embrace it.

- Discourse analysis

Discourse analysts focus on how psychological phenomena are *constructed* in text, that is, how they are depicted and the broader social ramifications that these depictions can have. Using discourse analysis, we might ask the following question: *How is transgender identity constructed?*

There appears to be a *discourse of authenticity as a woman* in relation to her transgender identity. Janet substantiates this discourse in the following ways:

- she constructs herself as a 'full blown woman' (line 5) and an 'independent woman' (line 11).

- In lines 5-6, she refers to the biological sex assigned to her at birth as being the result of 'unforeseen circumstances', thereby reducing its relevance in her life. This serves to increase the authenticity of her identity as a woman.

- Janet draws on common understandings of 'independence' by noting that she owns her own business, is in employment and delivers seminars to audience, demonstrating not only her independence but also the notion that others are perhaps dependent on her expertise and contribution.

- She acknowledges, but rejects, in relation to her identity, the stereotypes attributed to transgender women, namely that they are involved in sex work, drugs and other stigmatised activities.

- Janet also anticipates and challenges potential views about the source of her infection, namely that this might be the result of sex work or drug use. Janet acknowledges these stereotypes about transgender women but distances herself from them, which in turn accentuates the discourse of gender authenticity as a woman.

On the basis of this extract, the discourse analyst might conclude that Janet mobilises a discourse of authenticity as a woman as she constructs her transgender identity. She appears to challenge the stereotypes and views that could lay the foundations for a stigmatised transgender identity, herself acknowledging the existence of these stereotypes. Janet constructs a particular *version* of transgender identity which creates the conditions for identity pride. Crucially, this version is one that is characterised by independence, family support, and 'non-culpability' in relation to her HIV infection.

The three techniques appear to produce similar conclusions, especially in relation to identity. The main difference lies in the *focus* of the findings, that is, the starting-point. Content analysis has a focus on content, thematic analysis on thematic structures across the dataset, and discourse analysis on social construction. Yet, there is no reason why these approaches cannot take a broader perspective on the data they are used to analyse. This is demonstrated in the examples above.

FURTHER READING

GLOSSARY

coding scheme;

content category;

data;

data triangulation;

discourse;

inductive analysis;

deductive analysis;

social representations theory;

theme;

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