4

Coding 1: The Basic Ideas

NOW THE FUN STARTS! We are going to show you how to develop grounded theory from the interview transcripts, using a procedure called coding. The term coding can be misleading; it suggests a routine mechanical process, whereas developing theory is anything but mechanical. However, because the term coding is firmly established in the grounded theory literature, we will use it as well.

What exactly is a theory? Although volumes have been written on this question, our working definition is straightforward:

> A theory is a description of a pattern that you find in the data.

For example, many of our research participants experienced the fathering role as strained and conflictual. We incorporated this into our theory of how men reconstruct the fathering role, and described it as role strain.

Our coding method is based on the premise that no one is smart enough or intuitive enough to read a series of transcripts and immediately see the patterns within them. In order to overcome this limitation, the coding method is a procedure for organizing the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organizational structure. By using our coding method you will be able to discover patterns that you cannot see

directly in the massive amount of text that you are faced with when you begin to analyze your transcripts. You will then develop your theory from these patterns.

This chapter explains our overview of the coding procedure. The next chapter will teach you the detailed mechanics of coding. We will use the Haitian father interview data to illustrate our coding procedure.

Adrift in a Sea of Data: Your Experience at the Start of Data Analysis

After you finish reading all of your transcripts, you will almost certainly feel overwhelmed by the data, simply because there is so much text to deal with. You will be struggling with two main issues. The first issue is that you are likely to think that *everything* is important. You will be afraid to choose any one thing to focus on, because you will be worried about leaving something out.

Many beginning researchers become stuck at this stage. They are unable to do anything because they assume that there is "one right way" to interpret the data. They are so afraid that they will not be able to find that "one right way" that they cannot begin the coding process. They cut and paste various parts of the transcripts. They call in their research advisers for help with what to do next. In short, they are immobilized.

We have found that the best way to work through this paralysis is to remember that your interpretation of the data will be only *one* of several "right ways" in which the data can be interpreted. We will elaborate on this point in chapter 8, when we discuss the reliability and validity of data analysis in qualitative research.

For now, however, we will simply say that you must be able to support your interpretation with data (i.e., examples of text), so that other researchers can understand your way of analyzing it. If your interpretation is supported by the data, then it is valid, even if there are other ways to interpret the same data. For example, many of the Haitian fathers told us that they had no regrets about becoming a father. This may mean either that the rewards of being a father were so great that they exceeded the negatives, or that the men were denying the negatives. (Or, of course, it could mean both, or something else altogether.) As a theorist you are free to make either interpretation, provided that you can support it with further textual evidence.

Assuring beginning researchers that there is not one right way (i.e., the truth) that they must discover seems to loosen up the paralysis and allow them to begin coding.

The second issue is that beginning researchers, in addition to believing that *everything* is important, simultaneously find it hard to see how *anything* in the interviews bears on their research concerns. This is partly because of the sheer volume of text, but also because the research participants were addressing their *own* concerns, rather than *yours*.

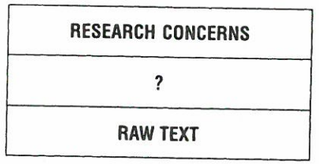
For example, our research concern was to understand the men's subjective experience of being a father. However, when the men responded to our questions, they talked about religion and their church. Our job was to find the connection between their concerns and our concerns. This bridge is often not apparent when we first begin to read the transcripts. We find it helpful to let go of our research concerns somewhat, and focus on what the fathers are telling us. Ultimately, our organizational framework should provide the abstract bridge between our concerns and theirs.

It may happen that the participants have concerns that do not prove to be related to yours. When this happens, it is important to include the participants' concerns even if you do not understand them. If they do not fit into your theoretical framework, those ideas can form the basis of your next research project. If you are truly interested in the subjective experience of the participants, it is their concerns rather than the researchers' that must take center stage.

This is an important point, particularly for researchers doing qualitative research for the first time. Many of our students become quite upset as they begin to analyze their data, because the data do not support the theories that they learned in their training, often theories that we ourselves have taught them. They think that they have done something wrong, and expect us to be angry with them. On the contrary, we think they have done something right, and are delighted. So don't worry if you find your ideas changing as you analyze your data. It's a common occurrence in data analysis, and a sign that the process is going well.

This issue is not just something that happens to beginning researchers.

Figure 4.1



We ourselves have had this experience in our recent work with Latino fathers. We interviewed these fathers to see if we could extend what we had learned about Haitian fathers to other immigrant groups. The questions that we asked the men had to do with their experience of being a father. However, they wanted to talk about something different, namely their experience of being an immigrant. They told us that they were caught between two cultures: They were no longer comfortable with being traditional Latino fathers, but they also didn't want to give up their culture entirely and become Americanized. These participants had to create a hybrid culture, blending elements of each. We came to call this process creolization, and are currently investigating how it comes about.

Although we were ultimately happy with this outcome, initially we were upset about having to rethink our ideas, and embarrassed about not having known any of this in advance. Only later did we realize that having to reformulate our research concerns was not proof that we had failed as researchers, but rather proof that we were succeeding.

In making the point about flexible research concerns, we have jumped somewhat ahead of ourselves, so let us return to what happens as you begin to look at your data for the first time. When you begin any project, you will probably fluctuate between feeling that you must include everything in your data analysis and fearing that nothing really is directly relevant to your research concerns. We characterize this stage as "finding yourself adrift in a sea of data."

Less metaphorically, you will experience a gap between your research concerns and your data, that is, the interview transcripts, as depicted in Figure 4.1. The rectangle at the top of the figure represents your research concerns; the rectangle at the bottom represents your interview transcripts. The question mark in the middle represents the gap between them, in other words, the difficulty in seeing how your interview transcripts bear on your research concerns. Determining how to bridge the gap is the question that we will address in the next several chapters.

When we began to analyze the Haitian fathers' data, we were faced with about 50 pages of interview transcripts, a quantity of text that we considered quite substantial. As we read through the interviews, we felt overwhelmed by the foreignness of what the men were telling us. For example, many of them said that it was necessary to spank children in order to form children's sense of right and wrong, which was foreign to our way of thinking about child rearing. It was as if we had entered a different country, and in a sense we had. Although we were sure that the interview text related to our research concerns, we found it hard to see how.

Swimming to Shore: Small Steps toward Understanding the Data

The central idea of coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on the previous one. That way you do not have to immediately see the connection between the raw text and your research concerns; you only have to see as far as your next step. Having taken that step, you will be able to see further and take the step after that one.

You can think of the steps of coding as a staircase, moving you from a lower to a higher (more abstract) level of understanding. The lowest level is the raw text and the highest level is your research concerns.

The steps in grounded theory coding are:

Research Concerns
Theoretical Narrative
Theoretical Constructs
Themes
Repeating Ideas
Relevant Text
Raw Text

We will explain each of these shortly.

When we report our own research, we present the results in an outline form that shows the repeating ideas, themes, and theoretical constructs. Table 4.1 illustrates the one we constructed for the data in the Haitian

Table 4.1
Repeating Ideas, Themes, and Theoretical Constructs for the Haitian Father Study

I. Bicultural Gender Role Strain
  A. Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father
    1. My dream was to look like my father.
    2. There is no inch of laziness in my father.
    3. I love the way my father treated my mother.
  B. Dissatisfactions with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood
    4. My father never said I love you.
    5. Adults do not play.
    6. When they say your father is coming, you run inside.
    7. My father took care of other children and didn't care much for me.
II. Constructing a More Gratifying Definition of Fatherhood
  A. Definition of a good father
    8. My job is to look over the family, being a provider, a protector.
    9. You're not a boss for the children, you're more like a friend.
    10. You have to be there whenever the child needs you.
    11. You call your kid and say I love you.
    12. Jesus was my role model.
  B. An enhanced sense of self
    13. It has changed you; it has reconstructed you.
    14. You're looking at the children growing; it is beautiful.

This is the same as Table B.2 of the Haitian fathers' paper (Appendix B).

Fathers Study. For example, repeating idea number 1 is "My dream was to look like my father." Repeating idea 1, together with repeating ideas 2 and 3, form theme A: *Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*. Theme A together with theme B form the theoretical construct I: BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN. Theoretical constructs I and II allow us to create a theoretical narrative about the subjective experience of the Haitian fathers. (Note that the convention we employ here is to use quotes for repeating ideas, italics for themes, and caps for theoretical constructs. We follow this convention throughout the book.)

Incidentally, the terms we use in this book to describe the steps are different from the language we used in the paper. The Haitian Fathers article (Appendix B) was written in an earlier phase of our project. At that time, we used the term "text-based categories" instead of repeating ideas, and "sensitizing concepts" instead of themes. Our most recent language is, we think, more user friendly.

How the Coding Procedure Works

Relevant Text

The best way to show how the coding procedure works is to take you through the process we used to develop the theoretical construct BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN. You will see how we developed our theory from raw text, without knowing in advance where the coding procedure would take us.

The first thing we did was to cut the text down to manageable proportions so that we were less overwhelmed by it. We did this by reading through the text with our research concerns in mind. Text that is related to your specific research concerns is called *relevant text*. We kept only the relevant text and discarded the rest, which made the text easier to work with.

For example, one section of relevant text was:

> AG: Sometimes we cannot go to our father and say to our father, "You know something, I love you."
>
> F: Yeah, it is part of our culture. For me especially, even though I never heard such a word from my father's mouth such as "I love you." The way they act to us and the way they deal with us makes me feel that definitely this guy loves me.
>
> L: I tell you my father also never uttered the word "I love you" . . . But you knew he did. I make corrections in my own family. I must repeat to my children, I love them, I do not know, every several hours. Maybe every one hour.

At this point we did not know exactly where we were going with this text. However, we thought that the men's feelings about their own fathers must be related to their feelings about themselves as fathers. Therefore, we thought that this text was potentially important.

Repeating Ideas

Having selected the relevant text, we noticed that different research participants often used the same or similar words and phrases to express the same idea. These ideas are called *repeating ideas*, and they shed light on our research concerns.

For example, in the relevant text above, AG, F, and L all expressed the idea that their own fathers did not express love and affection. They said this in the language summarized as repeating idea number 4 in Table 4.1: " My father never said I love you." We assumed this idea was important because so many of the fathers in the study expressed it.

Other repeating ideas we discovered were:

"Adults do not play."
"When they say your father is coming, you run inside."
"My father took care of other children and didn't care much for me."

These are repeating ideas 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Table 4.1.

In this illustration the repeating ideas occur *within* groups, that is, they are ideas expressed by research participants in the same group interview. However, repeating ideas can also occur *across* groups, that is, they can be expressed by research participants in different group interviews. This is important, because if the ideas were only expressed within the same group, it is possible that the group process influenced people to say things they didn't really mean. The fact that repeating ideas occur across groups argues against this possibility.

Themes

At this point we were beginning to understand the fathers, because we could find groups of repeating ideas that had something in common. We call what they have in common a *theme*. A theme is an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas. In this case the theme was that the men were dissatisfied with some of the ways that their own fathers had treated them. We later discovered that their fathers were simply behaving according to the traditional Haitian fathering role, so we called the theme *Dissatisfaction with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*.

Another theme we discovered was *Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*. Just as there were aspects of the traditional Haitian fathering role that the men did not like, there were also aspects of the role that they admired. In this theme, the men expressed their admiration for their father's strength, responsibility, and hard work. The theme includes repeating ideas 1, 2, and 3 in Table 4.1.

Theoretical Constructs

We were now getting closer to our research concerns. In the same way that we organized the repeating ideas into themes, we organized the themes into larger, more abstract ideas. We refer to the abstract grouping of themes as *theoretical constructs*.

The two themes just mentioned were grouped into the theoretical construct called BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN. This theoretical construct expressed the men's conflicting feelings toward different aspects of the traditional Haitian fathering role. The men admired some of what their fathers did, and wanted to emulate them. But they were dissatisfied with other things that their fathers did, and wanted to make changes.

When we began trying to develop theoretical constructs that linked our data to psychological theory, we realized that we needed to know more about Haitian culture. We turned to Haitian social science journals and read about Haitian family structure. We learned that Haitian fathers were very patriarchal, stern disciplinarians who maintained emotional distance from their children. This description contrasted with the progressive cultural construction of nurturing fatherhood in which the father is emotionally close to his children, involved in both caretaking and play. Although the nurturing father role is not yet being enacted by a majority of fathers, it is a mainstay of contemporary cultural ideology about fathering in the United States (LaRossa, 1988).

We then reviewed the data in light of these two theoretical frameworks: the traditional Haitian fathering role and the U.S. nurturing father role. Many of the men told us that they were afraid of their fathers because their fathers used to beat them. They also told us that their fathers had never expressed affection for them, or played with them. This information fit the description of the traditional Haitian father role. The men also told us emphatically that they did not want their children to fear them. They wanted to be a friend to their children, and to be emotionally close to them. These wishes fit the description of the nurturing father role.

However, when these same men were asked directly whether they would use corporal punishment with their own children, they replied that they would, because they believed that spanking was an important form of discipline. We were struck by the incompatibility of these two responses. On the one hand, the men wanted to use a form of discipline that was

typical of the traditional Haitian father; on the other hand, they did not want their children to feel the same way about them as they had felt about their own fathers. They wanted their children to be emotionally close to them, a goal characteristic of the U.S. nurturing father.

The inconsistency in their belief system, involving two elements that were mutually contradictory, reminded us of the concept of gender role strain as developed by Pleck (1981, 1995). Pleck pointed out that gender roles are impossible to fulfill successfully because they contain idealized versions of human behavior. For example, attempts to be "masculine" or "feminine" cause individuals psychological strain. There was a similar incompatibility between the Haitian fathers' desire to use corporal punishment as a form of discipline and their desire to not have their children fear them. When we thought about this contradiction it seemed to be driven by cultural differences between Haitian fathering and nurturing U.S. fathering. Thus, we named our theoretical construct BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN. An added virtue of this name is that it connected our work with the developing concern with multicultural studies (See Sue & Sue, (2000)).

Theoretical Narrative

Finally, we organized our theoretical constructs into a theoretical narrative, which summarizes what we had learned about our research concerns. The narrative is the culminating step that provides the bridge between the researchers' concerns and the participants' subjective experience. It tells the story of the participants' subjective experience, using their own words as much as possible. However, it also includes the researchers' theoretical framework by including the theoretical constructs and themes in parentheses throughout the narrative. Weaving together subjective experience and abstract concepts brings together the two very different worlds of researcher and participant.

For example, the theoretical construct BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN told us that in becoming a father, the Haitian men had to integrate the traditional Haitian fathering role and the modern U.S. fathering role. They had to keep what they liked about their own fathers, and revise the rest. We put this in a theoretical narrative as follows.

When our Haitian American research participants were thinking about becoming fathers, they had to decide what kind of a father they wanted to be. Naturally, they had their own father in mind in making this decision. Here is the story of how it happened.

The decision about what sort of a father they wanted to be was difficult because they felt conflicted about their own father (BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN). On the one hand, there was a lot about him that they admired (*Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*). They admired how responsible, hard working, and strong he was; and that "there was no inch of laziness in him." Some of them admired how good a husband he was, and "loved the way he treated their mother." For these reasons, they wanted to be a father like he was; "their dream was to look like their father."

On the other hand, there were aspects of their father that they did not like (*Dissatisfactions with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*). They did not like how emotionally distant he was; how "he never said I love you." Nor did they like his strictness; "when they heard that their father was coming, they ran inside." Also, they were troubled by his sternness; as the saying has it, "adults do not play." Some of them were troubled by the fact that their fathers had children from multiple marriages; "he took care of other children and did not care much for me."

We have come a long way. We began adrift in a sea of data, and ended with a theoretical narrative that bridged the gap between research concerns and raw data. We did it using the text itself, without knowing in advance where we were going. You can do this too, as you will see.

5

Coding 2: The Mechanics

Phase 1: Making the Text Manageable

THE NEXT THREE CHAPTERS explain the mechanics of coding—the step-by-step process used to transform the raw text of your transcripts into a theoretical narrative. Our coding procedure has six steps, which are shown in Table 5.1. The six steps are organized into three phases that we have named:

MAKING THE TEXT MANAGEABLE
HEARING WHAT WAS SAID
DEVELOPING THEORY

Each phase deals with a different level of analysis. In the first phase, MAKING THE TEXT MANAGEABLE, you work at the level of the text itself. This is a filtering process, in which you choose which parts of your text you will include in your analysis, and which parts you will discard. In this phase you use your research concerns (Step 1) to select relevant text (Step 2).

In the second phase, HEARING WHAT WAS SAID, you work at the level of the subjective experience of the research participants. The participants may be interviewed in groups, which is our research strategy, or individually, which is the strategy of other investigators. Either way, in this phase

Table 5.1

Six Steps for Constructing a Theoretical Narrative from Text

MAKING THE TEXT MANAGEABLE
1. Explicitly state your research concerns and theoretical framework.
2. Select the relevant text for further analysis. Do this by reading through your raw text with Step 1 in mind, and highlighting relevant text.
HEARING WHAT WAS SAID
3. Record repeating ideas by grouping together related passages of relevant text.
4. Organize themes by grouping repeating ideas into coherent categories.
DEVELOPING THEORY
5. Develop theoretical constructs by grouping themes into more abstract concepts consistent with your theoretical framework.
6. Create a theoretical narrative by retelling the participant's story in terms of the theoretical constructs.

you organize the relevant text into repeating ideas (Step 3) and organize the repeating ideas into more general themes (Step 4).

In the third phase, DEVELOPING THEORY, you work at a more abstract level to group the themes into more general concepts, which we call theoretical constructs (Step 5). Finally, you use the theoretical constructs to create a theoretical narrative (Step 6).

Although we present the steps sequentially, the coding process is not a linear movement from Step 1 to Step 6. Rather, as you code you will find yourself going back and forth between steps. As you become more and more familiar with the data, you will realize, for example, that a repeating idea that you originally coded as reflecting one theme, actually makes more sense grouped with the repeating ideas under a different theme. Or you might decide that two separate themes could be collapsed into a third, more comprehensive theme. Thus, the process of coding is complex and requires patience. We present these steps as a linear progression only for ease of exposition.

In these chapters we will explain how to do the analysis "by hand," that is, by using a word processing program. In Appendix A we will explain how to carry out the same procedures using a qualitative data analysis program. We recommend that you do your first data analysis by hand, so that you can get the feel of the operations involved. Then, later on, you can learn to do the analyses using the computer program.

This chapter will deal with the first phase of data analysis, MAKING THE TEXT MANAGEABLE.

Step 1: Explicitly State Your Research Concern and Theoretical Framework

Your Research Concern

As the first step in looking at the data of a new project, even before you begin actually reading the text, we recommend that you write down your research concern and your theoretical framework on a piece of paper.

> Your research concern is what you want to learn about and why.

Keep this paper in front of you as you begin to read the transcript and think about selecting relevant text.

This exercise may seem superfluous, as you have just finished collecting data, presumably with your research concern in mind. However, we find this exercise to be extremely helpful. Faced with a sea of text, most of us are filled with anxiety. With so much material to choose from, deciding what is important to code and what can be omitted is a daunting task. This is especially true for the beginner, but it also happens to the more experienced qualitative researcher. Therefore, the simple act of explicitly stating your research concern focuses you on what you want to know and why. We have found that this calms anxiety because it becomes a blueprint for making coding decisions.

As you begin to read the text, everything seems important, and it seems impossible to omit anything a participant has said. On the other hand, if you include everything, the amount of data will become unwieldy. With your statement of research concerns in front of you, you can check a portion of text against your statement. Is that particular piece of text relevant to your broad research concerns? If it is, it will be easier for you to decide to include it. If it is not, you will be more likely to feel comfortable about excluding it.

At this point you might find that the text contains something important, but unrelated to your research concern. Remember that research concerns are more inclusive and general than research questions or research hypotheses. Therefore, it is less likely that something your research participants consider important will be unrelated to your research concern than if you were focused on a hypothesis about the specific relations between two variables.

Our research concern, for example, was to learn more about men's fathering experience. This concern grew out of the fact that traditional psychology had focused almost exclusively on the mother-child dyad, and the role of the father in the child's life had been neglected. There was little research on fathers and the father-child relationship. Our research concern, therefore, was quite general.

However, it is always possible that some important information will be unrelated to your research concern, and that you will erroneously exclude it in the early stages of coding your data. For example, we did not realize the importance of religion to the Haitian fathers when we coded the first focus group transcript. However, if an idea is really important, it will be mentioned by more than one participant, and in more than one group. Thus, it is likely to be selected as the coding proceeds. When we realized the pervasiveness of references to religious ideas in the Haitian transcripts, we went back and coded as relevant all of the text that talked about the importance of religion in the men's lives.

Another safeguard against missing important but unexpected data is that each transcript is coded by more than one person. In our project, four people code each transcript. This procedure makes it likely that at least one of the coders will realize the importance of data that the others may have missed. We also use an outside consultant who is a member of the subculture that we are studying. For example, we sent out sample transcripts of our gay fathers focus groups to gay and lesbian psychologists who were experts on gay and lesbian parenting. We asked them to code the transcripts independently, and compared their organization of the data with ours.

Finally, we always present the repeating ideas and relevant text to our participants and ask them if we have gotten their stories right. The ensuing discussions always significantly improve our understanding of the data. Bearing in mind these corrective measures helps decrease our anxiety about the selection process, and encourages us to plunge into the data.

Your Theoretical Framework

In addition to explicitly stating your research concern, you should explicitly state your theoretical framework.

> Your theoretical framework is the set of beliefs about psychological and social processes with which you approach your research study.

Your theoretical framework may be organized and detailed. You may be a Marxist, and/or a Freudian, and/or a Piagetian, and/or a feminist. Alternatively, your theoretical framework may be less explicit, for example, humanism. In either case, it is important for you to realize that you do have a theoretical framework that influences what you choose to include and exclude from your analyses. In effect, your theoretical framework determines your biases. Stating it explicitly will force you to acknowledge your lack of "objectivity," and will help you read the text in a more focused way.

Our theoretical framework, for example, is social constructivist and feminist. We believe that gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Moreover, our point of view is that the traditional gendered division of labor in parenting roles, that is, father/breadwinner and mother/caregiver, is oppressive to both men and women. Our bias is the belief that both responsibility and power should be shared more equitably. This framework led us to read our text for clues about how men might become more emotionally responsive and responsible fathers.

As you carry out the steps of coding, you will have many thoughts and ideas about what your data mean and what your project is about. We recommend that you keep a record of these ideas, either in a research journal or a computer file, or whatever works for you. These ideas will be important in organizing your data analysis and theorizing.

Step 2: Select the Relevant Text for Further Analysis

As we mentioned, when you start analyzing your text, you will quickly find that you have more than you can possibly use and you need to cut down the mass of raw text to manageable proportions. You do this in Step 2, by selecting relevant text.

> Relevant text refers to passages of your transcript that express a distinct idea related to your research concerns.

The method for selecting relevant text is simple and direct. All of your transcripts should be files on your computer. When you encounter a passage that contains an idea relevant to your research concerns, use the highlighting function in your word processing program to underline the passage. Continue reading until you encounter another passage that contains relevant material, and underline that. Continue in this way until you have worked through all of the transcripts in your study. If you are more comfortable working with hard copies of transcripts, this is an equally valid way of proceeding.

Table 5.2
Illustrative Heading for Analysis of Relevant Text

Haitian fathers
Focus group 2
Coder: Carl Auerbach
Relevant Text—page 1
January 24, 2003

When you are finished, you will have used your research concern to select the relevant wheat from the irrelevant chaff in your transcripts. The underlined passages are the relevant text. Copy only the underlined passages into separate files, one for each focus group (or for each individual, if you are doing individual interviews). Save the files in your larger project folder. Create a separate file for each focus group (or individual interview) transcript.

You will have to keep track of a lot of text and coordinate input from many research collaborators, so maintaining careful and detailed records is very important. Make a header that includes the project, the group, the date you created the file, and the person who did the selection. Qualitative research coding is done by multiple coders, so you will want to be able to distinguish each person's work. If you are keeping memos, record them with the text. For each item of text include the speaker and the transcript page number.

For example, the heading of your relevant text for a particular focus would appear as shown in Table 5.2.

Each coder would create his own files reflecting his selections of relevant text for each of the four focus groups. Similarly, each coder would independently organize the relevant text into a list of repeating ideas.

You may be asking yourself: How do I decide what is relevant? The answer is that there is no rule. Relevance is subjective. Passages are relevant

if they seem so to you. Keep in mind the following concerns when you read a passage:

> Does it relate to your research concern?
> Does it help you understand your participants better? Does it clarify your thinking?
> Does it simply seem important, even if you can't say why?

If the text meets any of these criteria, highlight it. These instructions are, admittedly, vague. However, once you try it you will see that you can do it. In fact, as you continue to read the transcripts and become more and more familiar with the data, you will develop a sense of what is important and what is not. (We again point out that our methods focus on what was said. Alternative methods of data analysis focus on how things were said, or what was not said. If you are interested in learning more about these methods, a good place to begin is with the work of Silverman (1993)).

Underlining relevant text can be done in two ways. You can do it quickly and impressionistically, without much conscious thought, trusting that the meaning of what you are doing will be clear at the end. Or you can be more deliberate, writing a memo to yourself in your research journal each time you underline a passage. Use the memo to record why you thought that particular selection was important and any thoughts or ideas stimulated by the text. The method you choose depends on your cognitive style.

In our case, Louise prefers to work quickly, to highlight and see what emerges at the end. Carl, on the other hand, works more slowly. He mulls over each passage, letting his thoughts emerge. Sometimes he reads the transcripts out loud to himself. He usually writes a memo for each selection. Below we illustrate the memo method. However, you can dispense with the memos if they do not work for you.

An example will clarify what is involved in selecting relevant text. Read through the text of Table 5.3, which is a segment of a transcript from the Haitian father data. In the table, the relevant text is underlined and bracketed. The excerpt begins with the moderator's question about becoming a father. Then L responds, then AG, then L again.

Table 5.3

Transcript and Underlined Relevant Text from the Haitian Father Data

Moderator: What was the first time you thought about being a father, and what did you think it would be like? Did you have any models or reference points?

L: Actually [the first time I thought about becoming a father was very early in my life. Probably I, I guess because of my upbringing—as I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me. I never went out with a girl without thinking that this is the girl I could possibly marry.] Therefore, I always had it in my mind what it would be like. Well, I did not have strong views of what I would be like, what I had was knowing that I would be good toward the people I'd be dealing with. I did not know how I'd be that first time but I knew I would be a loving father. I did not have a picture of how I was going to be but I just knew I was going to be good toward the people . . . So . . .

AG: To me I would say it is very different. When I left my country and I came here in 1983, [I was scared to become a father. As a Christian I was afraid not to meet the proper woman to become my wife in order to become a father. When I met my wife and realized that she was a Christian and looking behind at how my father raised us, I decided to become a father at that time.] [Fortunately, I had my father as an example I would say. He has been with my mother since I was little, and I would say he is still an example for me.]

L: Mine would have been a combination of people. My father would definitely be one of those people because [my father was a very good father. He is a guy who has justice; you cannot make him tremble in front of situations.] He sits, analyzes, and comes to a conclusion. There are several pastors in my life I have come to admire, in the way some of them were. They also play a part, in that it is going to be a combination of people. My father was the strongest role model, but he was not the only person who played the role.

Source: Zizi, 1996, p. 170.

The first relevant text (RT#1) is in L's first response. It is shown, underlined, below.

> L: [The first time I thought about becoming a father was very early in my life. Probably I, I guess because of my upbringing as I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me. I never went out with a girl without thinking that this is the girl I could possibly marry.]

Our memo for RT#1 reads:

> Being a father is a serious matter, because it is connected with being religious.

The remainder of L's response did not seem to us to contain any more ideas relevant to our research concerns, so we did not underline any other text. If you see another important idea here, it does not mean that you are wrong and we are right. Qualitative research involves an inescapable element of interpretation, and different readers can reasonably disagree. The main issue is that each coder's interpretation must be transparent (understandable) to other coders. We will say more about this when we talk about reliability and validity.

RT#2 occurs in AG's response.

> I was scared to become a father. As a Christian I was afraid not to meet the proper woman to become my wife in order to become a father. When I met my wife and realized that she was a Christian and looking behind at how my father raised us, I decided to become a father at that time.

RT#2 connects being a father with marrying a Christian woman, and therefore with religion. Our memo for RT#2 reads:

> Fatherhood connected with religion

RT#3, also in AG's response, is:

> Fortunately, I had my father as an example I would say. He has been with my mother since I was little, and I would say he is still an example for me.

This expresses the idea that one's own father serves as a model that one strives to emulate. The memo reads:

> One's own father as a model to emulate

RT#4 is in L's second response.

> my father was a very good father. He is a guy who has justice; you cannot make him tremble in front of situations.

The memo reads:

> Expresses his admiration for his father.

This is similar to AG's desire to emulate his father, in RT#3.

Now you should try it. Table 5.4 gives an excerpt from another transcript. Read through the excerpt and do your own underlining for relevant text. When you are finished, compare your selection with ours, which we give in Table 5.5.

Table 5.4

Transcript for You to Underline Relevant Text

Moderator: What did you think it was going to be like?

J: I thought it was going to be an innovative experience. If I could say that, something you actually have the power to influence your personality in a very young mind to do some good. So I think it would be like being from a military background, creating a human being for the profit of society.

C: I could say the moment I met my wife, I thought about being a father. As my first girl friend, I thought eventually I would be married to her. To me it became obvious that I would be a father as a married person. I thought it was going to be a difficult job, a 24-hour job because there is no such thing as part-time fatherhood. I think it takes your whole being mentally and physically. Your presence in the house, in the home is very necessary at all times. My kids—they have it, God bless them they have it. I thought it was going to be a unique experience—you do not learn it in college or anywhere else.

DE: It is on-the-job training.

C: Right!

Moderator: Did you have any role model or reference point?

C: Yes, yes when I think about the days of my youth I can see my father and his dedication. The love that he has shown, and his hard-working style and his honesty. All that left a serious imprint on me. My dream was to look like my father. Everybody saw in him a model. His credibility was something that everybody I would say envies, that type of person he was. They love him—people would give him money to save because they knew he would not spend it. So, I always thought that it would be in my best interest to be like him.

Source: Zizi, 1996, p. 221.

Table 5.5

Our Selections of Relevant Text from Table 5.4

Moderator: What did you think it was going to be like?

J: I thought it was going to be an innovative experience. If I could say that, something you actually have the power to influence your personality in a very young mind to do some good. So I think it would be like being from a military background, creating a human being for the profit of society.

C: I could say the moment I met my wife, I thought about being a father. As my first girl friend, I thought eventually I would be married to her. [To me it became obvious that I would be a father as a married person.] I thought it was going to be a difficult job, a 24-hour job because there is no such thing as part-time fatherhood. I think it takes your whole being mentally and physically. Your presence in the house, in the home is very necessary at all times. My kids—they have it. God bless them they have it. I thought it was going to be a unique experience—you do not learn it in college or anywhere else.

DE: It is on-the-job training.

C: Right!

Moderator: Did you have any role model or reference point?

C: [Yes, yes when I think about the days of my youth I can see my father and his dedication. The love that he has shown, and his hard-working style and his honesty. All that they left a serious imprint on me. My dream was to look like my father.] Everybody saw in him a model. His credibility was something that everybody I would say envies, that type of person he was. They love him—people would give him money to save because they knew he would not spend it. So, I always thought that it would be in my best interest to be like him.

Here is our reading of the second excerpt. We found no relevant text in J's response.

The relevant text in C's response:

> To me it became obvious that I would be a father as a married person.

and our corresponding memo:

> Being a father is the obvious and natural consequence of marriage.

The short responses of DE and C did not contain relevant text.
RT#6 comes from C's next response.

> Yes, yes when I think about the days of my youth I can see my father and his dedication. The love that he has shown, and his hard-working style and his honesty. All that they left a serious imprint on me. My dream was to look like my father.

The memo:

> C admires and desires to emulate his own father.

These ideas were also expressed in RT#3 and RT#4.

6

Coding 2: The Mechanics

Phase 2: Hearing What Was Said

IN THIS CHAPTER we will consider the second phase of data analysis, HEARING WHAT WAS SAID. In this phase you will gain more access to the subjective experience of the research participants, by organizing the relevant text into repeating ideas (Step 3) and the repeating ideas into themes (Step 4).

Step 3: Discover Repeating Ideas by Grouping Together Related Passages of Relevant Text

Working on Each Transcript Separately

As you select the relevant text you will notice that different research participants are often expressing the same idea, sometimes with the same or similar words. These are called *repeating ideas.*

A repeating idea is an idea expressed in relevant text by two or more research participants.

Repeating ideas are the beginning building blocks from which you will eventually assemble a theoretical narrative.

In Step 3 you systematically search the selections of relevant text for repeating ideas. You first identify the repeating ideas in each separate transcript (from the focus groups or individual interviews, depending on your methodology). Then you combine the repeating ideas from all of the transcripts into a composite list for the entire research sample. As principal investigator, you first do this by yourself, and then combine your work with that of other coders.

1. Begin by opening the file that contains the list of relevant text for Group 1 (or Individual 1). Then create a new file that will become the list of repeating ideas for Group 1.

2. Now highlight and copy the first selection of relevant text from your relevant text file to your repeating ideas file. We call this first selection the *starter text.*

   a. Read through the entire list of relevant text selections, keeping the starter text in mind.
   b. Each time you encounter an idea that seems related to the starter text, highlight it and copy it into the repeating idea file. As you do so, you might want to make a note about *how* the two selections of text seem related. If you made memos, move them with the text selections.
   c. Read down the list until you have highlighted and moved all the relevant text related to the starter.
   d. After you have grouped together all of the selections that seem related to the starter text, return to your original list of relevant text. Highlight and move the first selection of text that you did not group with your original starter text. This new selection becomes your next starter idea, and you then read down the list of relevant text, highlighting and moving all the selections that relate to this starter. You repeat this procedure until you have grouped together as many of your relevant text selections as possible into your repeating idea file.

Table 6.1 gives you an example of a master list of relevant text, and Table 6.2 shows that same text grouped into two repeating ideas.

Table 6.1

Sample List of Relevant Text from the Haitian Father Research

(a) The first time I thought about becoming a father was very early in my life. Probably I, I guess because of my upbringing as I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me. I never went out with a girl without thinking that, this the girl I could possibly marry. (L, p. 170)

Being a father is a serious matter, because it is connected with being religious.

(b) Fortunately, I had my father as an example I would say. He has been with my mother since I was little, and I would say he is still an example for me. (AG, p. 170)

One's own father as a model to emulate.

(c) My father was a very good father. He is a guy who has justice; you cannot make him tremble in front of situations. (L, p. 170)

Expresses admiration for his father.

(d) I was scared to become a father. As a Christian I was afraid not to meet the proper woman to become my wife in order to become a father. When I met my wife and realized that she was a Christian and looking behind at how my father raised us, I decided to become a father at that time. (AG, p. 170)

Fatherhood connected with religion.

(e) Yes, yes when I think of the days of my youth I can see my father and his dedication. The love that he has shown, and his hard-working style and his honesty. All that they left a serious impression on me. My dream was to look like my father.

Admires and desires to emulate his own father.

(f) To me it became obvious that I would be a father as a married person. (C, p. 221)

Being a father is the obvious and natural consequence of marriage.

Source: Zizi 1996.

Table 6.2

Sample List of Relevant Text Selections Grouped into Repeating Ideas

Haitian fathers
Focus Group 2
Coder: Carl Auerbach

Repeating ideas
January 24, 2003

Repeating Idea #1—Something about religion

(a) The first time I thought about becoming a father was very early in my life. Probably I, I guess because of my upbringing as I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me. I never went out with a girl without thinking that, this is the girl I could possibly marry. (L, p. 170)

Being a father is a serious matter, because it is connected with being religious.

(d) I was scared to become a father. As a Christian I was afraid not to meet the proper woman to become my wife in order to become a father. When I met my wife and realized that she was a Christian and looking behind at how my father raised us, I decided to become a father at that time. (AG, p. 170)

Fatherhood connected with religion.

Repeating Idea #2—Using one's own father as a role model

(b) Fortunately, I had my father as an example I would say. He has been with my mother since I was little, and I would say he is still an example for me. (AG, p. 170)

One's own father as a model to emulate.

(c) My father was a very good father. He is a guy who has justice; you cannot make him tremble in front of situations. (L, p. 170)

Expresses admiration for his father.

(e) Yes, yes when I think of the days of my youth, I can see my father and his dedication. The love that he has shown, and his hard working style and his honesty. All that, they left a serious impression on me. My dream was to look like my father.

Admires and desires to emulate his own father.

Orphan text.

(f) To me it became obvious that I would be a father as a married person. (C, p. 221)

Being a father is the obvious and natural consequence of marriage.

Source: Zizi 1996.

As you can see, in Table 6.2, relevant text (a) was our starter text. We grouped (d) with it because they both related to the importance of religion. In this particular transcript, those were the only text selections related to religion. Thus, after grouping them together, we started again with selection (b) as our new starter text, and looked for other selections to group with it. We grouped selections (b), (c), and (e) together because they related to using their own fathers as positive role models.

We refer to selection (f) as an "orphan" because it does not go together conceptually with any other text selections. After we have grouped together as many relevant text selections from all of the transcripts as possible, we will decide whether to include or discard orphans.

We always use rather pedestrian language to name our repeating ideas when we first group text together, and thus named repeating idea #1 "Something about religion." Then we peruse the text selections looking for an excerpt from the text that we can use as the repeating idea. Using the participants' own words is more evocative of their subjective experience.

In Table 6.2 we underlined two sentences that we eventually used to name the two repeating ideas: 1. "I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me"; and 2. "My dream was to look like my father." These statements capture the meaning of the text in the fathers' own words. Sometimes you choose the name of a repeating idea as you go through each transcript. You might keep changing the name as you encounter quotes that seem more evocative than your first choice. Sometimes you do not decide on a name until you have gone through all of your transcripts and you have constructed your master list of repeating ideas.

You continue going through your list of relevant text for Group 1 until you have assigned all the relevant text to a repeating idea, or at least as much of it as you can. Because you have highlighted all of the text that you used, you can easily see what text is left over.

Having gotten this far, you will have more of a sense of how the text goes together than you did when you started. Also, several problems may arise, which you can use your newly developed sense of the text to resolve.

Orphans

After you have worked through the list of relevant text, you may be left with some relevant text segments that did not get repeated. You have several choices about what to do with these selections. You can discard the text as unimportant; you can search your transcripts again to try to find text that goes with your solitary text; or you can decide the text is important even if you cannot find other text with which to group it. Sometimes it is important to reflect differences in experience as well as commonalities. Thus, it may be important to report that only one person had a particular experience. Because qualitative research is not focused on quantity, individual differences have an important place in this paradigm.

Ideas Too Broad

When you go back and inspect your list you may find that you have too many items in a group, and can see fine distinctions between items that you originally grouped together. In this case break up your larger group into two smaller groups, each expressing a different repeating idea.

Ideas Too Narrow

Alternatively, you may find that your groups are too small; that you made too many distinctions and have too many ideas. In this case, merge two (or more) groups into a larger one.

Second Thoughts

You may read over your list and find some relevant text that you thought belonged in one place belongs somewhere else. Make the changes. Remember, it's your theory.

When you have worked through the first transcript, create repeating ideas for each of the other transcripts. You may find that the ideas from one group alter your understanding of ideas from the other groups. Make a note of this in your research journal.

Creating Your Master List of Repeating Ideas

3. We now resume the material on page 55. After you have used as much as you can of the relevant text from all of your transcripts, combine the list of repeating ideas for each group into a file that reflects the master list of repeating ideas for the project. Go through this list idea by idea. When ideas are exactly the same, combine them into your final list. If ideas are

similar, combine them as well. In the process you may have to rethink your groupings.

Just as you found orphaned relevant text, you may find a repeating idea in one transcript that does not appear in any of the transcripts of the other groups. Again, you have to make a judgment. If an idea that occurs in only one group seems important for your understanding of the phenomenon, you may decide to keep it. If it does not seem important, discard it. If you do not know what to do, set it aside temporarily and come back to it in later stages of data analysis.

How many repeating ideas should you come up with? There are no hard and fast rules, but we have found that something in the neighborhood of 60 is a workable number, with a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 80. The number that you actually come up with will depend on your cognitive style. If you tend to see fine distinctions everywhere, then your list will probably be large and you will have to reduce it. If you tend to think in broad patterns and see things as similar, then your list will probably be smaller and you will have to expand it. Again, try for about 60 ideas, with the understanding that you can go back and revise if it becomes necessary in later steps.

4. Name your repeating ideas. You may have found evocative quotes to name some of your repeating ideas as you were coding each transcript. Or you may choose the names at the point when you create your master list. Your goal is to choose a short quote that captures the essence of each repeating idea in a dramatic and emotionally vivid way. A good way to find a name is to go through your list and read the relevant text out loud. You may find a phrase that jumps out at you by virtue of its emotional impact, and that will be the name of the repeating idea.

Sometimes you may find that you need to combine two quotes, or give a slight paraphrase. That is fine. If nothing in the text seems to fit, then just give a brief statement of the idea. Remember that you are striving for both emotional impact and accuracy.

For example, we saw in Table 6.2 two repeating ideas composed from relevant text. The first repeating idea, "My dream was to look like my father," expresses how admiration for one's own father leads to a desire to emulate him. The second repeating idea, "I was brought up in Church and it was always a serious matter to me," expresses the connection between religious morality and fatherhood.

The Collaborative Coding Process

We believe that all research should be conducted in groups rather than in isolation, particularly when doing qualitative research. We find that it is ideal to work in groups of four—two students and two more experienced researchers. Each coder goes through the process we have described above. Then the person primarily responsible for the project, the principal investigator, goes over all four sets of coding.

This process makes it more probable that we will not have overlooked any important ideas. Even if one or two of the coders has missed some important repeating ideas, using input from four people usually insures that no important ideas are lost.

After the principal investigator has decided on the repeating ideas from the master list, the results are presented and discussed with the other coders. The other coders may not agree completely with the organization; however, they must be able to see the rationale that the principal investigator used to include each piece of relevant text under each repeating idea. In other words, the organization of the data must be "transparent."

This process often requires that the data be reorganized. As the master list is discussed, someone on the team will undoubtedly identify text that does not reflect the particular repeating idea under which it has been coded. That text segment will then have to be included under a different repeating idea, or discarded altogether. If it is coded elsewhere, including it with other text segments might mean changing the name of a different repeating idea so that it will be inclusive of the new text segment. This reorganizing and refining of the data requires patience.

When you have finished with this phase, congratulate yourself! You have completed the most difficult and labor-intensive part of the coding process. You have immersed yourself in the text, and acquired an enormous familiarity with the text, almost to the point of memorization. This will prove invaluable as you go on to develop theory.

Step 4. Organize Themes by Grouping Repeating Ideas into Coherent Categories

In the next step, you organize the repeating ideas into larger groups that express a common theme.

A theme is an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas have in common.

For example, a theme in the Haitian father data is:

Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father

It includes the three repeating ideas:

"My dream was to look like my father."
"There is no inch of laziness in my father."
"I love the way my father treated my mother."

Another theme is:

Dissatisfactions with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood

It includes the four repeating ideas:

"My father never said I love you."
"Adults do not play."
"When they say your father is coming, you run inside."
"My father took care of other children and did not care much for me."

These themes are shown in Table B.2 of the Haitian fathers article (see Appendix B). You will follow the same procedure for discovering themes that you used to create your master list of repeating ideas.

1. Begin by opening the file, which contains your master list of repeating ideas. Then open a new file that will be your *themes.*

2. Now direct your attention to the first repeating idea on the printed list, which we will call the ***starter idea*** for the first theme.

Read through the repeating ideas list, keeping the starter idea in mind. Each time you encounter an idea that seems related to the starter idea, highlight it and copy it onto the theme list. As you do so, make a note of how it seems related to the starter idea (if you like using memos).

Read the list of repeating ideas until you have selected and copied all the repeating ideas similar to the starter, and therefore to each other. In each case, make a note about the conceptual similarities you identified.

Table 6.3
Master List of Repeating Ideas

(a) "My dream was to look like my father."
(b) "My father never said I love you."
(c) "You have to be there whenever the child needs you."
(d) "We are co-workers in the field of God."
(e) "Adults do not play."
(f) "There is no inch of laziness in my father."
(g) "When they say your father is coming, you run inside."
(h) "My father took care of other children and did not much care for me."
(i) "I love the way my father treated my mother."
(j) "You call your kid and say 'I love you.'"

The group of repeating ideas you end up with will define the first theme. The similarities you have recorded in your notes suggest the conceptual basis of the theme.

As an example of how to discover themes, consider the small list of 10 repeating ideas given in Table 6.3. They are the first seven items of Table B.2 in Appendix B, plus three others, given in a scrambled order.

Begin by directing your attention to repeating idea (a) "My dream was to look like my father," which will be the starter for the first theme. Then, keeping (a) in mind, read down the list until you encounter idea (f) "There is no inch of laziness in my father." (a) is similar to (f) in that both express the men's admiration for their own fathers.

Continue reading again until you encounter idea (i) "I love the way my father treated my mother," which expresses the men's admiration for their fathers' behavior toward their mothers, and is therefore similar to the other two. At this point you have come to the end of the list and have discovered the group of repeating ideas that define the first theme. Having selected the repeating ideas for the first theme, highlight and copy them from your list of repeating ideas file into the themes file.

Construct your second theme from the repeating ideas list in the same way. Direct your attention to the first repeating idea that was not included in the first theme. This will be the starter idea for your second theme. Then read through the list, selecting all the repeating ideas similar to the second starter. This group of ideas defines your second theme.

Before you read further, try to construct the second theme, starting with repeating idea (b) "My father never said I love you."

Here's what we did. We began with repeating idea (b) in which the men expressed dissatisfaction with their fathers' absence of affection. We then included repeating idea (e) "Adults do not play," in which the men expressed dissatisfaction with their fathers' being strict, stern figures. Next we included (g) "When they say your father is coming, you run inside," in which the men expressed dissatisfaction about how fearful they were of their fathers. Finally, we included (h) "My father took care of other children and did not much care for me," in which some of the men expressed dissatisfaction that their fathers had children with many women. This group of four repeating ideas defined our second theme.

Continue going through your list of repeating ideas until you have assigned all of them to a theme. Several questions may be occurring to you as you do this exercise. How do you know when repeating ideas are sufficiently similar to express a common theme? How do you know what that theme is?

There is no formula for answering these questions. Some ideas for themes emerge from your literature review. For example, when we read the research on Haitian families in Caribbean journals, we found that the authors described the Haitian father as a remote disciplinarian, and the Haitian husband as someone who frequently had children with women other than their wives. Thus, when the men in our study complained about these aspects of their fathers ("My father never said 'I love you'"), the information was familiar to us. Similarly, we are therapists, so when the men also reported admiring their fathers ("My dream was to look like my father"), we were not surprised that they had both positive and negative feelings about them. We used this conceptual framework of emotional ambivalence, of positive and negative feelings about their fathers, to identify abstract patterns among the repeating ideas.

As you go through the procedure, you will grow to understand the research participants and their subjective world. As this happens, you will find that themes will emerge from the data.

After you have grouped together as many repeating ideas as you can, clear up any loose ends in the same way that you did with the relevant text. Deal with orphans by deleting them, incorporating them into a theme you already have, or going back to your raw text to find more repeating ideas that connect with them. If your themes are too broad or too narrow, make changes accordingly. If you have second thoughts about your list of themes, reorganize it until you are satisfied.

How many themes should you have? Although there is no hard and fast rule, we suggest reducing the number of repeating ideas by a factor of 3 or 4, resulting in from 10 to 20 themes, with an average of 15.

3. The next step in the process is to name your themes. While you were grouping the repeating ideas, you had thoughts about the abstract patterns that pulled those ideas together in your mind. Name the themes with an easily understood phrase that expresses this common thread. Keep these ideas simple, and avoid jargon. The research participants should be able to recognize the themes as something they might have said.

For example, as Table B.2 (Appendix B) in the article shows, we named our first theme *Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father.* This theme captures how the men admired the way their own fathers fulfilled aspects of the traditional Haitian fathering role.

Similarly, the theme *Dissatisfactions with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood* captures how the men were unhappy with some aspects of the traditional Haitian fathering role. Most prominently they were dissatisfied with their fathers' emotional distance and sternness, and wanted to treat their own children differently.

As you struggle with naming your themes, you may decide that your repeating ideas need some revision. It is not unusual at this point to go back and change several repeating ideas and relevant text in order to conform to your new understanding of the data. Many students feel very discouraged when this happens. They thought they had completed the repeating ideas phase and moved on to theme creation. Now they feel as if they are back at square one. If this happens to you, do not lose heart. It is actually a positive step, because it means that you are learning about your participants' subjective experience in a more nuanced way. This is the point of your research!

In our project, we always develop our themes independently and then meet to discuss them as a team. This discussion may result in even more reorganization. Again, we may not ultimately agree on the themes; however, the principle investigator must be able to justify her or his organization to the team.

4. Finally, check your work with a consultant. In our view, this should

be a member of the culture you are studying who is not involved in the research project. In the Haitian fathers study, we used a female psychology graduate student whose family was originally from Haiti, and a Caribbean psychologist who was an expert on cross-cultural research on fathers. In our research on gay fathers, we used two psychologists who were established researchers on gay and lesbian families, both of whom were gay.

Using members of the culture is crucial because of the racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia that are endemic in our culture. You can either ask your consultants to code a small number of transcripts independently and compare your coding to theirs, or you can bring your organization of the data to the consultant, and ask for feedback. As in previous steps, having to explain and justify your work to someone else will improve your thinking. Make whatever changes result from this discussion, and continue until you and your consultant are satisfied.

7

Coding 2: The Mechanics

Phase 3: Developing Theory

IN THIS CHAPTER we will consider the third phase of data analysis, DEVELOPING THEORY. In this phase you will organize the themes into abstract concepts called theoretical constructs (Step 5), and then use the theoretical constructs to construct a theoretical narrative (Step 6).

Step 5: Develop Theoretical Constructs by Organizing Themes into More Abstract Concepts

The next step is to organize your themes into more abstract groupings that we call theoretical constructs.

> A theoretical construct is an abstract concept that organizes a group of themes by fitting them into a theoretical framework.

Theoretical constructs move the analysis from the description of subjective experience found in repeating ideas and themes to a more abstract and theoretical level. Once you have developed your theoretical constructs you will understand your themes more deeply, because you will see how they fit into a larger theoretical framework.

As an illustration of how theoretical constructs work, consider the theoretical construct BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN. We will show you how we developed it, but for now just take it as given. BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN groups together the two themes—*Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*, and *Dissatisfactions with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*. Note that the construct does not simply redescribe the two themes, but also fits them into an abstract theoretical framework. It groups the two themes together as displaying the men's internal conflicts about the traditional Haitian fathering role. That is, BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN describes how the men feel positively about some aspects of the traditional fathering role, and negatively about other aspects.

Developing theoretical constructs will challenge you as a researcher. You are probably used to doing research based on theories taken from the literature and which, therefore, were developed by someone else. In developing theoretical constructs, however, you will have to develop your own theories or apply the theories you already know in a new and creative way. The experience is both difficult and rewarding.

How you use the literature of your field in developing theoretical constructs falls on a continuum.

#1. At one extreme of the continuum, you cannot use much prior research literature because relatively little is known about your sample, or because prior research was biased and simply wrong about the experiences of your participants.
#2. In the middle of the continuum, you do not have a definite body of literature in mind when you analyze your data. However, as you analyze your data you recognize how theories in the literature can be used to make sense of your themes. In this case you use the literature to develop your theoretical constructs.
#3. At the other extreme of the continuum, you begin the research knowing which literature and theoretical constructs you intend to apply to your data. In this case you use your data to elaborate, refine, or validate theories in the literature.

When you investigate a research concern for the first time, you will probably be at level #1 or level #2. That is, after you have collected your data you will be able to use some amount of the theoretical literature to make sense of your findings.

In this chapter, therefore, we will teach you how to bring the literature of your field to bear on the data you have collected. In a later chapter we will cover level #3, in which you use qualitative research to expand and refine specific ideas or theories already in the literature.

The procedure for creating theoretical constructs from themes has the same form as the procedure for creating themes from repeating ideas. However, the mechanics of the process are easier to carry out since you work with a relatively small number of themes. On the other hand, it is more difficult conceptually because you work at a more abstract level.

The steps for developing theoretical constructs from themes are described below. Their numbering corresponds to that for developing themes from repeating ideas.

1. Begin by opening the file that contains your list of themes. Then open a new file for your list of *theoretical constructs.*

2. Now direct your attention to the first theme. This will be the starter theme for the first theoretical construct. Read through the list of themes with the starter theme in mind. Each time you encounter a theme related to the starter, highlight it and copy it into your theoretical constructs file. You should also make a note about the connection between it and the starter. Continue reading down the themes list until you are finished.

The group of themes you end up with defines your first theoretical construct. The connections you have recorded in your notes are clues to the organizing principle for the construct.

Now develop your second theoretical construct from the reduced list in the same way that you developed the first one. Continue in this way until you have worked through the entire list of themes. It is less acceptable to have orphan themes than orphan ideas, which you may have had at an earlier stage. You have already decided that all of the repeating ideas and themes are important. Thus, you must continue to organize your themes until you develop theoretical constructs that include all of them. This may mean that you have to reorganize your repeating ideas into a different set of themes. Again, do not feel discouraged. You are just getting to know your data better.

As an example of how to develop theoretical constructs from themes,

consider the list of 5 themes given below. They are the themes from our Haitian fathers paper, assigned a letter of the alphabet for reference. We present them in a scrambled order, so that you may get some sense of the process.

(a) *Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*
(b) *An enhanced sense of self*
(c) *Definition of a "good" father*
(d) *God makes all things possible*
(e) *Dissatisfaction with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*

We begin with starter theme (a) *Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*. Then we read down the list until we encounter theme (e) *Dissatisfaction with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*, and recognize that (e) goes together with (a), our starter theme. The connection between (a) and (e) is that they both express the men's attitudes toward the traditional Haitian fathering role. In fact, they express conflicting attitudes: (a) shows a positive attitude, and (e) a negative one. We record this observation in our notes, to be used when we are ready to name the first theoretical construct.

At this point we have gone through the working list of themes, and have discovered the group of themes that define the first theoretical construct.

The remaining themes on our list were:

(b) *An enhanced sense of self*
(c) *Definition of a "good" father*
(d) *God makes all things possible*

The starter theme for our second theoretical construct was (b) *An enhanced sense of self*. We read down the list until we encountered (c) *Definition of a "good" father*, and grouped (c) with (b). The connection between (b) and (c) is that they are both concerned with reconstructing the traditional Haitian fathering role. Theme (c) describes features of the reconstructed role and theme (b) describes the enhanced sense of self that resulted from enacting the new role. These observations were used in naming the second theoretical construct.

At this point we have finished reading through the list of themes, and discovered the themes that define our second theoretical construct.

In our case, we had an additional theme, (d) *God makes all things possible*. We kept this theme on our final list because we thought the issue of religion was of theoretical importance, even if we only had one theme to support it. Were we to do the data analysis again, knowing what we know now, we would have gone back to our data and created other themes to go with it.

3. Name your theoretical constructs. When you were grouping the themes you had thoughts about the organizing principles that hold the themes in each group together. Now you have to draw on the literature and your general knowledge to find a theory or concept that explains this organizing principle. The name of the theoretical construct should use the language of the theory on which you draw.

At this point your theoretical framework begins to organize the data in a very concrete way. Our social constructionist framework led us to think about gender roles from a gender role strain paradigm, originally developed by Joe Pleck (1981). This paradigm proposed that definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed by cultural ideology, rather than by biological givens. As men and women try to conform to these cultural norms, they experience a great deal of psychological strain because the norms are rigid, and often contradictory. For example, masculinity ideology requires men to be both aggressive in their professional lives and emotionally responsive to their families. The strain paradigm proposed that it is stressful for young boys to develop both the empathy required to be emotionally responsive in intimate relationships and the ruthlessness necessary to be physically and professionally aggressive.

When we listened to the Haitian fathers talk about having both positive and negative feelings about their fathers, we immediately thought about how having both sets of feelings would generate emotional stress in the men. This made us think about the gender role strain paradigm.

We also knew a little bit about acculturation theory at this point. We knew that immigrants experience strain as they attempt to integrate both their culture of origin and the host country's culture. We thought that the first group of themes reflected ambivalent *personal* feelings about their fathers, as well as a conflict between two cultural models of fatherhood: the

traditional Haitian fathering role, and the nurturant fathering role they were exposed to in the United States. Thus, we merged the concepts of gender role strain and acculturation strain into the theoretical construct of BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN.

In retrospect, we have come to believe that the theoretical construct of role strain is particularly relevant to the way that all men are experiencing transformations in the fathering role, and therefore we have developed it further in our later work.

We did less well with a name for the theoretical construct that comprised the two themes *Definition of a "good" father* and *An enhanced sense of self*. We named the theoretical construct CONSTRUCTING A MORE GRATIFYING DEFINITION OF FATHERHOOD. This name, which is not very abstract or theoretical, simply describes how the two themes fit together.

Our research concern was to understand how men could change from defining fathering almost exclusively in terms of providing financial resources to his family, to becoming more emotionally connected fathers. Thus, we were thinking about theories of change. As psychologists, we were trained in behavior modification theory which has shown that positive reinforcement is the most effective way to change behavior. Therefore, we assumed that in order to change an old role, men had to define for themselves a new and more gratifying role. We saw the theme *Definition of a "good" father* as describing the new role the men defined for themselves, and saw the theme *An enhanced sense of self* as describing the satisfaction (positive reinforcement) they derived from enacting the new role. In retrospect, we would have grouped these themes somewhat differently.

At this stage in our study of fathering, we also began to develop a general theoretical model for how roles change. We were already thinking of the construct of ROLE STRAIN as describing the necessary motivation for change. By this we meant that an individual must feel some kind of stress or dissatisfaction with his behavior in order to be motivated to change. Contemporary research on fathers had documented how emotionally isolated fathers felt from family life (Snarey, 1993). We also had incorporated the idea that a person had to have some reinforcement for making the change. This was reflected in the construct, DEFINING A MORE GRATIFYING ROLE. LaRossa (1997) and others have described how the nurturing father role offers men a sense of intimacy and emotional connection with their children that many men find rewarding.

We began to ask ourselves what else had to be present in order for role change to occur, and hypothesized two additional constructs: FACILITATING IDEOLOGY and SOCIAL SUPPORT. FACILITATING IDEOLOGY described a set of beliefs from which the new role was constructed. Ideology prescribes the behavior associated with the new role. SOCIAL SUPPORT described support from others in coping with the difficulties and anxieties associated with adopting a new role.

We had no definite thematic support for either of our hypothesized constructs. However, they made sense to us and we included the orphaned theme *God makes all things possible* as tentative support for FACILITATING IDEOLOGY. In addition, we made a note to ourselves to pursue both new constructs in our future research. We will say more about this when we discuss research aimed at developing preexisting theory.

4. Finally, as before, verify your work with consultants, and make whatever changes emerge from the feedback they give you. In our case, we spoke with a Haitian student at Yeshiva University who helped us understand the change of the fathering role better. We also spoke with a colleague, JaiPaul Roopnarine, who helped us explicitly connect our work to the more general topic of immigration and acculturation.

Step 6: Create a Theoretical Narrative by Retelling the Participant's Story in Terms of Theoretical Constructs

In the sixth and final step, you pull together all the work you have done so far in order to address the research concerns that led to your study. You do this with a device called a theoretical narrative.

> A theoretical narrative describes the process that the research participants reported in terms of your theoretical constructs. It uses your theoretical constructs to organize people's subjective experience into a coherent story. It employs people's own language to make their story vivid and real.

The process of data analysis is so comprehensive that by the time you reach this stage, you probably have almost memorized the text. However, when we are "organizing data," we often become too abstract and theoretical. You have spent a great deal of time attempting to make sure that

each relevant text segment actually reflects the repeating idea under which it is coded and that all of the repeating ideas actually relate conceptually to the way you organized the themes. Paradoxically, this emphasis on consistency and organization may have caused you to lose touch with the participants' subjective experience. Creating the theoretical narrative will cause the text to come alive for you, and you will understand the research participants and their lives even better. In addition, you will integrate the subjective world of people's experience with the abstract world of theory.

You create a theoretical narrative by organizing your constructs into a *personal story* that describes the subjective experience of your research participants. In this way it contrasts with more traditional research conclusions that are usually written from a more distant, "scientific" stance.

We will illustrate how to write a theoretical narrative by interspersing our instructions with excerpts from the Haitian father narrative. This should make the abstract instructions more comprehensible.

1. Begin your theoretical narrative by describing your research concerns.

> When our Haitian American research participants were thinking about becoming fathers, and when they became fathers, they had to decide what sort of father they wanted to be. Naturally, they had their own father in mind in making this decision. Here is the story of how it happened.

2. Then describe your first theoretical construct as it applies to your research participants. Break down the construct into its thematic experiential components, using the language of the repeating ideas to make the experience vivid and real. Using the repeating ideas tells the story in your participants' own words. We put the theoretical constructs and the themes in parentheses directly in the narrative so that the reader can see clearly how we are grounding the narrative in the data. Also, we put the repeating ideas in quotes, because they represent the research participant's own words.

> The decision about what kind of father they wanted to be was difficult because they felt conflicted about their own father (BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN). On the one hand, there was a lot about him that they admired (*Praising aspects of the traditional Haitian father*). They admired how responsible, hard working and strong he was: "There was no inch of laziness in him." Some of them admired how good a husband he was, and "loved the way he treated their mother." For these reasons, they wanted to be like their father: "Their dream was to look like their father."
>
> On the other hand, there were aspects of their father that they did not like (*Dissatisfaction with aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood*). They did not like how emotionally distant he was; how "he never said I love you." Nor did they like his strictness: "When they heard that their father was coming, they ran inside." Also they were troubled by his sternness; as the saying has it, "adults do not play." Some of them were troubled by the fact that their fathers had children from multiple marriages: "Took care of other children and did not care much for me."

3. Do this for each of the constructs. When you are done you will have told the research participants' story in terms of both their own words and the theoretical constructs.

The narrative style should talk about the research participants in the third person (they), and be addressed to a literate academic audience, not necessarily to specialists in your field. It may help you get into people's experience if you initially write the narrative in the first person (I), and then later convert it into the third person.

This completes our theoretical narrative for the first construct. Now we do the same thing for the second construct, CONSTRUCTING A MORE GRATIFYING DEFINITION OF FATHERHOOD. You might want to try doing this yourself before reading our description.

> When they became a father, they wanted to be a father in a new way, one that was more gratifying than the old way (CONSTRUCTING A MORE GRATIFYING DEFINITION OF FATHERHOOD).
>
> They defined what it meant to be a good father by keeping what they liked about the old role and changing the rest (*Definition of a "good" father*). They wanted to do what their fathers did; to look after the family, to be a provider and protector. However, they wanted to be less authoritarian, "less like a boss to their children and more like a friend." Also, they wanted to be more emotionally connected and demonstrative, less strict and stern. They wanted to "be there when the child needed them," and "always say 'I love you.'"
>
> When they tried to imagine how to be a loving father, they thought about

Jesus as a loving image of God. This identification with Jesus helped them to become a more affectionate and emotionally connected father: "Jesus was my role model."

The result of being a father was that they grew as a person (*An enhanced sense of self*). They were changed, reconstructed as a more responsible adult. They also derived enormous pleasure from being a father: "I watched my children grow and it was beautiful."

The theoretical narrative concludes your study and also points you toward the next study. It summarizes where your research has taken you, leads you to reformulate your theoretical framework and research concerns, and focuses your attention on what you are not yet clear about.

In our case, the theoretical narrative moved us from the somewhat general research concern with the subjective experience of fatherhood to the more definite concern with how men are redefining the fathering role. It gave us a conceptual framework in terms of the four theoretical constructs. Finally, it set us on a new path, of elaborating our constructs by a process of theoretical sampling.

8

Convincing Other People

The Issues Formerly Known as Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

YOU HAVE JUST USED our data analysis procedure to construct a theoretical narrative. How should you evaluate the work you have done? Qualitative and quantitative methodologies answer this question differently.

Quantitative methodology tries to exclude subjectivity, interpretation, and context from scientific practice. It requires that data analysis procedures be "objective" and that theories be universally applicable. The requirements of objectivity and universality are translated into statistical concepts. Objectivity corresponds to the statistical concepts of ***reliability and validity***, and universality corresponds to the statistical concept of ***generalizability***.

As qualitative researchers we strongly disagree with the quantitative approach to evaluating research. We believe, instead, that subjectivity, interpretation, and context are inevitably interwoven into every research project. Furthermore, we believe that these elements of research practice are essential and should not be eliminated even if it were possible to do so. However, we agree with quantitative methodologists that standards for evaluating research are essential. We do not think that qualitative research is an area in which "anything goes."

In this chapter we will recommend standards for evaluating research that are consistent with the qualitative research paradigm, and therefore take into account subjectivity, interpretation, and context. In place of the quantitative concepts of reliability and validity, we suggest the qualitative concept of *justifiability of interpretations.* In place of the quantitative concept of generalizability we suggest the qualitative concept of *transferability of theoretical constructs.* You should know, however, that there are many different qualitative approaches to these issues. For alternatives to ours, you can consult Smith and Deemer (2000).

Pursuing the Unreachable Ideal: A Skeptical Look at Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

When you studied the concepts of reliability, validity, and generalizability in statistics or research design courses, they were probably presented to you in the language of mathematics and statistical theory. Such a formal presentation is certainly necessary for learning how to do statistical computations. In focusing on the mathematical details, however, students often lose sight of the philosophical issues involved in these concepts. Because it is precisely the philosophical issues that we want to explore, we will deal with the concepts simply, without the mathematical details.

In the discussion that follows, we are going to assert that more is claimed for the statistical tools of reliability, validity, and generalizability than they actually deliver. We will show you that these tools can work only in an ideal situation that does not, and indeed cannot, obtain in practice.

The Trouble with Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important criteria for evaluating quantitative research because they are intended to assure the reader that the measuring scales are objective. Objectivity is difficult to define precisely; generations of philosophers have devoted their lives to the task with no end to their labors in sight. For our purposes, however, the definition is straightforward: Objectivity simply means the absence of subjectivity. If our measuring scales are objective then we are studying the phenomenon as it really is, excluding our subjective biases about what we would like it to be.

What is the connection between objectivity, reliability, and validity? We begin considering this question by defining reliability. The way to determine whether a scale is reliable is to administer it twice. If the numerical score you get from the second administration of the scale is the same, or almost the same, as the numerical score you got from the first administration, then the measure is reliable. Conversely, if the numerical scores on the first and second administrations are wildly different, then the scale is not reliable. For example, if you measure satisfaction with fathering and get a value of 7 the first time and a value of 6.5 the second, then the satisfaction with fathering scale is reliable. But if the first value is 7 and the second value is 2, then the scale is not reliable.

The reliability of a scale is a *necessary* condition for the scale to be objective. If you get a value of 7 the first time you measure something, and a value of 2 the second time you measure it, you clearly do not know the true value of what you are measuring. If you have no understanding of a response's true value, you are free to impose your subjectivity on it, and to say that its value is whatever you would like it to be.

However, the reliability of a scale is not a *sufficient* condition for the scale to be objective. Imagine, for example, the "measurement task" of asking someone the question "How are you?" The first time you take the measurement (i.e., ask the question), they respond "fine." The second time you take the measurement, they also respond "fine." Your "scale" is clearly reliable, because you got the same "measurement value" when you administered it both times. However, the reliability of the answer hardly proves that the person is indeed fine. It is equally likely that he is simply being polite.

For a scale to be objective it must not only be reliable, it must also be *valid.* A scale is defined as valid if it measures what it claims to measure. Thus, a scale of satisfaction with fatherhood is valid if it measures how satisfied fathers *really* are, as distinct from how satisfied they *say* they are. (Many texts distinguish between different kinds of validity—face validity, construct validity, predictive validity—but for our purposes we will stick with the basic definition.) The fact that a scale is valid proves that it is objective, because if the scale measures what it claims to be measuring, then your subjective desires will not influence the value of the measurement.

The problem with validity arises when we consider how we might determine whether a scale measures what it claims to be measuring, and is therefore valid. To appreciate the problem, imagine that you are doing

research on satisfaction with fatherhood. While planning your research, you discover that there is no scale for measuring father satisfaction and so develop your own. Having developed your scale, you need to prove that it is valid. How might you do this? To prove that your newly developed scale of fatherhood satisfaction is valid, you must compare the results of your scale with the true value of father satisfaction. However, you do not know the true value! In order to know the true value you would have to already possess a valid scale, but a valid scale is precisely what you are trying to develop. It would seem that there is no way to develop a valid scale for the first time, for what would you validate it against?

We refer to this problem with reliability and validity as "pursuing the unreachable ideal." The phrase is intended to express the idea that developing a first valid scale requires comparing it with another valid scale, and that this second valid scale must have been developed by comparing it with a third already valid scale, and so on to infinity. Because of this problem, we suggest that you be skeptical about the concept of validity in the social sciences.

The Trouble with Generalizability

Generalizability is an important criterion for evaluating quantitative research because it is intended to assure the person who reads the research report that the theory derived from the research is universally applicable. A universally applicable theory is one that applies to everyone in the population you are concerned with, and is not dependent on idiosyncratic characteristics of the people you used to develop the theory. This is important for people who want to use the research. If they know the theory is universally applicable, then they can apply it to new situations with confidence.

Before going further, we must define the concept of ***representative sampling***. The definition applies to research in which an investigator wants to learn about an entire population, but is not able to study all of it. Instead, he studies only a group of people selected from the population—a sample. His sample is representative of the population if the distribution of characteristics of the sample is the same as that of the population. Clearly, the investigator must obtain a representative sample if he wants to develop a generalizable, universally applicable theory.

As an illustration of these concepts, imagine that we do a study to investigate whether fathers in the United States are more likely to relate well to their sons or to their daughters. (We use this example only to make a point. We would not do this type of research because we do not think generalizations like this are helpful to understanding the subjective experience of the individual.)

The population we are concerned with is all U.S. fathers. Despite our interest in all U.S. fathers, our time and money are limited, so we sample a large group of New York fathers from a variety of ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes. These fathers, we discover, all on average, prefer sons and daughters equally. What can we conclude from this study? Clearly, our sample is unlikely to be representative of all the fathers in the United States, since New York fathers probably differ from fathers in other parts of the country in important ways. Because we did not obtain a representative sample, we cannot generalize our results and develop general theory. It is quite possible that rural, Midwestern farming fathers, unlike New York fathers, do prefer their sons to their daughters.

This situation is unsatisfactory. Researchers want to develop generalizable theories, so they must be able to prove that their samples are representative. However, a problem arises when they try to do so, a problem similar to the one arising with validity. To appreciate the problem, imagine that you have done a study of Haitian fathers and find that the fathers *in your sample* prefer their sons to their daughters. How can you determine whether your results are generalizable? To determine this you must prove that you have a representative sample. That is, you must rule out the possibility that you inadvertently selected a research sample with some special characteristics, or that your results were produced by some special factor or circumstances of which you are unaware.

But how can you rule out these possibilities? This is where the problem arises. In order to assure yourself that you have a representative sample, you must do your study with a second, larger sample and see if you get the same results as you did the first time. However, even getting the same results will not settle the matter, because the same question can be asked about the second, larger sample. For example, we could include Midwestern farming fathers in the second sample, but those results might not apply to Hawaiian fathers or Alaskan fathers. This will lead you to study a third, even larger sample, and so forth.

Ultimately, the logic of the argument requires that you study every conceivable Haitian father in every conceivable relevant circumstance. This requirement is, of course, impossible to meet. Just as with validity, proving that your results are generalizable involves you in the pursuit of an unreachable ideal. Thus, we suggest that you be skeptical about the concept of generalizability.

Why Doesn't Everyone Say This?

At this point, you might be wondering why, if our criticisms are correct, people still use the concepts of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Statisticians would respond to our criticisms by admitting that our points are correct, but would argue that we exaggerate their importance. They would admit, in connection with validity, that the true score is a hypothetical abstract entity that is inferred, rather than directly observed. They would similarly admit, in connection with generalizability, that the population is inferred, rather than directly observed. Where we part company with the statisticians is that they believe the inferences are valid, whereas we consider them unjustified.

We do not ask you to accept our argument uncritically. Indeed, if you have the inclination, you should look into these issues further and make up your own mind. What we do ask of you is to recognize that reliability, validity, and generalizability are not completely solid guarantees of trustworthy research in the social sciences. Rather, they require you to accept assumptions that are not immediately self-evident and are, in fact, somewhat problematic. Having persuaded you of at least this much, we ask that you be open to the idea that qualitative research can be as trustworthy as quantitative research.

Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater Part 1: Justifiability as an Alternative to Reliability and Validity

Although we have just cautioned you about making too much of reliability and validity, we believe that quantitative researchers are right to insist on distinguishing between justified and unjustified application of our subjectivity. We think it is justifiable, even inevitable, for a researcher to *use* his subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting data. However, it is not justifiable for him to *impose* his own subjectivity in an arbitrary manner, that is, in a way that is not grounded in the data. Unjustifiable use of subjectivity is, in effect, interpreting data based on the researcher's prejudices and biases, without regard to the participants' experience.

Here are examples of justifiable and unjustifiable uses of subjectivity in interpretation. From our feminist perspective, the Haitian fathers in our studies were expressing their dissatisfaction with some aspects of traditional masculinity in terms of the way in which it is prescribed in the traditional fathering role. Although this interpretation is influenced by our subjective, feminist perspective, we nevertheless regard it as justified, because it is based on data.

For example, traditional masculinity ideology requires men to be stoic and emotionally inexpressive. The Haitian fathers described their fathers as emotionally distant disciplinarians who never played with them. They complained that their fathers never said "I love you." We see these statements as two examples of the way that traditional masculinity was expressed in the traditional Haitian fathering role. The men in our study, unlike their fathers, stated that they wanted to be "friends" to their children, and to tell them often that they loved them.

We might have gone further in our interpretation and claimed that the men in our study were repudiating all aspects of traditional masculinity. This perspective matches our bias because we believe that traditional masculinity has negative consequences for both men and women. However, nothing in the data suggested that the Haitian fathers were rejecting traditional masculinity altogether. Rather, some data suggested that there were certain aspects of traditional masculinity that the men embraced.

For example, several of the men referred to themselves as "gods within their families." This perspective reflects the male dominance explicit in traditional masculinity ideology. If we had suggested that the men were relinquishing a commitment to male dominance, we would have been imposing our subjective desires on the data, thereby distorting the experience of our research participants.

Consequently, we need criteria for distinguishing between justifiable and unjustifiable ways of using subjectivity to interpret data. The criteria

that we use are called transparency, communicability, and coherence (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each of these criteria involves making use of other people to check against the tendency to impose one's own subjective biases on the data analysis.

Transparency

For your data analysis to be justifiable it must be *transparent.* This means that other researchers can know the steps by which you arrived at your interpretation. It does not mean that other researchers need to agree with your interpretation; only that they know how you arrived at it. This book is aimed at making our data analysis procedure transparent. If you follow our steps, and keep a record of what you have done, you are guaranteed to produce a transparent analysis.

As an example of transparency, consider our theoretical construct of BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN. We have shown you how it was built up out of two themes: ***Praising aspects of traditional Haitian fatherhood***, and ***Dissatisfaction with traditional Haitian fatherhood.*** We have shown you, too, how these themes were built up out of repeating ideas, which in turn were derived from relevant text. At each step of the process, we explained our procedure, so that you could know exactly what we did.

You may not agree that our organization of the data is the best framework for understanding the Haitian fathers that we studied. However, you can see how we arrived at our organizational framework. We hope you will agree that the relevant text segments are included within the appropriate repeating ideas; that the repeating ideas are grouped into themes in an understandable way; and that the theoretical constructs correctly identify patterns among the themes. If our interpretation of the data is transparent, it means that it is justifiable; that we did not simply make it up to suit ourselves.

Communicability

For your data analysis to be justifiable it must also be ***communicable.*** This means that your themes and constructs can be understood by, and make sense to, other researchers, and to the research participants themselves.

Again, this does not mean that other researchers would have come up with your constructs, or agree with them. It only means that what you have done can be understood.

You can determine whether your themes and theoretical constructs are communicable by trying to explain them, and seeing if you succeed. You do this by describing it to other researchers and to your research participants. If they understand what you are saying, then the construct is communicable. If they do not, then you must go back to the drawing board.

Using the Haitian fathers as an example, we know that our construct of BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN is communicable because we have successfully explained it, both to other researchers and to our research participants. Other researchers recognized instances of role strain in their own lives, and because we have based our work on the participants' own words, they can understand the experience of our research participants. When we described our theoretical constructs to the research participants themselves, again because we used their own words as much as possible, they recognized themselves in what we said about them and acknowledged that we captured their experience.

Coherence

For your data analysis to be justifiable, it must be *coherent.* This means that your theoretical constructs must fit together and allow you to tell a coherent story. This does not require that the story you develop be the only possible one, but rather that your story helps to organize the data. Our data analysis procedure helps you produce coherent ideas by developing constructs that fit into an organized theoretical narrative

For example, our two theoretical constructs, BICULTURAL ROLE STRAIN and CONSTRUCTING A MORE GRATIFYING DEFINITION OF FATHERHOOD, fit together into an organized narrative that describes how the men reconstructed the traditional Haitian fathering role. In this case, the two theoretical constructs are reciprocally related. The role strain is the motivation for constructing a more gratifying definition of fatherhood; and the more gratifying definition reduces the tension associated with role strain. At this point, it may help you to reread the theoretical narrative in chapter 7 to see, in more detail, how the two constructs fit together.

Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater Part 2: Transferability as an Alternative to Generalizability

Our point about reliability and validity also holds true for generalizability. We think that quantitative methodology is wrong to insist that theories be generalizable and universally applicable. Indeed, this criterion led quantitative methodology to ignore gender differences and cultural diversity. However, we think that quantitative methodology is right to insist that theories be applicable to people other than the particular sample on which they were developed. The question is how to balance the two requirements of simultaneously extending beyond your sample and respecting cultural diversity. It seems impossible to do both at the same time; the two requirements seem incompatible.

For example, although the Haitian fathers in our sample experienced *bicultural* gender role strain, it seems unlikely that fathers born in the United States will experience the same kind of bicultural gender role strain. This would seem to imply that our results are applicable only to Haitian fathers. In other words, in our efforts to respect cultural diversity, we developed a form of role strain so specific to Haitian fathers that it cannot be extended to any other group.

These two requirements are not really incompatible because different levels of grounded theory analysis do different things. The more abstract level of theoretical constructs extends beyond the sample, whereas themes and repeating ideas are culturally specific. Thus, we do not expect fathers born in the United States to experience *bicultural* gender role strain in the same way that the Haitian fathers did. However, because the issue of gender role strain is a more general one, we do expect fathers born in the United States to experience some sort of role strain. Not surprisingly, we have found BICULTURAL GENDER ROLE STRAIN in Latino immigrant fathers, although the content of that strain was somewhat different than the strain that the Haitian fathers were experiencing.

Thus, the theoretical construct of role strain potentially extends beyond the sample of Haitian fathers; whereas the themes and repeating ideas, the *specifics* of the role strain, vary from culture to culture. In this way, it is possible for theory developed within a qualitative design to extend beyond a specific sample and also to be culturally specific.

We need a term to describe theoretical constructs that can be extended beyond a particular sample and yet respect cultural diversity. We do not want to call them generalizable, because that term does not quite capture what we are after. The term we will use is *transferable*. The theoretical constructs you develop in grounded theory are transferable, in that you can expect the more abstract patterns that they describe to be found in different subcultures. The specific content of those patterns, in contrast, will depend on the specific subculture being studied.

If a construct is truly transferable, it will serve as a guide for investigating a new sample. When you try to apply a theoretical construct to the new sample, you should find that the theoretical constructs you developed in one study will help you understand the subjective experiences of the participants in the new sample. However, the constructs usually do not apply automatically. As you try to apply the constructs you will also find yourself extending their meaning and developing them further. This is an example of theoretical sampling. As you include more samples, you refine theory.

For example, when we began studying Promise Keeper fathers, we assumed that the role strain construct developed with the Haitian fathers was transferable, and therefore would apply to the Promise Keepers. Our goal was to understand specifics of role strain in the Promise Keepers, and to compare it with the role strain that the Haitian fathers were experiencing. We will develop this point further in the next chapter, in which we discuss our research with the Promise Keeper fathers.

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New York University Press
New York and London