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This Book and How to use it

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Introduction

This book is all about qualitative methods in psychology and how these methods can be applied to help answer research questions. The first thing to note about the book's title, of course, is the focus on 'doing', that is, learning how to conduct research studies that use qualitative methods. There are numerous other books that focus on qualitative approaches in psychology; however, they tend to focus on theory rather than practice. The second thing to note is that we are concerned with doing qualitative research 'in psychology', so our aim is to provide a text for psychologists, psychology students and anyone else interested in understanding how qualitative research methods are used within psychology. This introductory chapter is best seen as a brief introduction to qualitative methods in psychology followed by a guide on how to get the best out of the various sections of the book.

Divided into four parts – formulating research questions; conducting qualitative research; qualitative analysis; and writing up qualitative reports – the chapters that make up this text reflect the logic, procedures and practices surrounding the whole process of doing qualitative research in psychology. You can see, with a quick glance through the part and chapter headings, that every stage of the whole process is given due consideration. Certainly, by paying considered attention to all sections of the book you will be in an excellent position to understand exactly what to do to conduct a study employing qualitative methods. The most significant feature of this book, however, is the specifically designed accompanying data set produced to enhance your understanding of what can be achieved through the use of the various different methods. The teaching and learning ethos we adopted for this book reflected our recognition that it is often difficult – particularly for students of psychology, where quantitative methods tend to predominate – to see precisely what one or other specific qualitative method might accomplish when trying to answer or address a research question.

Our response to this problem was to produce a set of video-recordings of informal interviews, with accompanying full transcriptions, on an everyday topic – friendship – and make these available in an accessible format (online). Then, through a detailed outline and description of four qualitative methods, we highlight the nature of the different approaches, the procedures they use, the theoretical perspectives they adopt and the distinct forms of analysis they employ. Thus a major feature of this text is the four chapters in Part 3 where the same data set (the interviews on friendship) is analysed from each of the four qualitative methods: Discourse Analysis; Grounded Theory; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; and Conversation Analysis.

Needless to say, of course, carrying out a small portion of the analysis on a set of interviews would not constitute a full or complete qualitative research project. So, it is important to begin to see the links between each section of the book and recognise that an appropriately conducted qualitative research project or study will contain elements from all of the chapters. Before outlining some important links between the various parts and chapters, we provide an overview and some background to qualitative methods in psychology.

Background to qualitative methods in psychology

Although the use of qualitative methods in psychology has increased dramatically in recent years, there is in fact a long history of such methods being employed in the discipline. In clinical psychology, for example, we find the clinical case-study, the important place of supervision practices as well as examples of observational and participant-observational studies. Likewise, in developmental psychology there is a long history of diary studies, observational methods, single-case studies of children and research looking at children in naturalistic surroundings (e.g., playgrounds). Other examples are to be found in the discipline: in personality research we have personal construct methods such as repertory grid analysis; in applied psychology, verbal protocol and related forms of content analysis; and in ergonomics, qualitatively based methods such as usability analysis.

However, apart from the clinical case-study, which some indeed have described as a form of narrative analysis (Schafer, 1981), the application and use of the methods described above (e.g., observational methods using time-sampling procedures) lent themselves to quantitative summary analysis – that is, counting, comparing and drawing statistically defensible inferences from these procedures. In other words, these are all methods that psychologists recognise as similar procedures within the same methodological enterprise – one that emphasised the empirical foundations of social science. Since the early behaviourists, psychology had been somewhat sceptical, or even scathing, of any scientific method or procedure that might suggest an over-reliance on interpretation or subjectivity (e.g., introspection). This has been the case within the discipline since the early twentieth century. However, the situation has gradually changed, especially since

the early 1980s, with the emergence and predominance of discursive or language-focused qualitative methods – the ones described and used in this book.

There are a number of reasons behind the gradual introduction and use of qualitative methods that have language or discourse as the main focus, and that bring to the fore forms of analysis which are both interpretative and empirically grounded. These can be summarised as:

 (i) indications of a 'turn-to-language' in psychology;
 (ii) the critique from within social psychology of the epistemological foundations of social–cognitive perspectives and the emergence of discursive psychology;
(iii) criticisms from within cognitive psychology regarding the limits of the experimental laboratory (e.g., ecological validity);
(iv) The influence of other social science disciplines where interpretative qualitative methods are more common (e.g., sociology, social anthropology).

Let us consider each of these factors that have influenced the emergence of qualitative methods in psychology.

(i) The 'turn-to-language' in psychology. Within psychology, the study of language had traditionally been dominated by the early work of Noam Chomsky on grammar, the emergence of an experimentally focused psycholinguistics, and the view that language should be considered very much as an individualistic, formal, object-like entity, simply serving cognitively based thought processes during communication. However, within the social sciences and the humanities and in disciplines such as English, Social Anthropology, Sociology and Linguistics this view of language had been supplanted by an approach – or one should say a variety of different perspectives – which focused very much on language as an organic social practice. This 'turn-to-language' placed centre-stage the study of collective discursive practices and represented the philosophical questioning and critique of modernism found in the writings of Derrida, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Merle-Ponty, Husserl, and others. For the most part psychology appeared unaffected by such developments outside the discipline but gradually – and particularly from within social psychology – researchers began to consider the implications of this approach to language (Billig, 1990; Edwards & Potter, 1993). Social psychology itself (in Europe) began to differentiate into experimental social psychology and discursive social psychology.

The important point to recognise is that this 'turn-to-language' is not meant to describe the interest within cognitive psychology and cognitive science with language as a formal object, but instead the increasing focus on understanding all those social practices which make up discourse as action – one could say, with the function and meaning of discourse as language use in everyday life.

(ii) Critique of social cognition and the emergence of discursive psychology. A second theme, which has had a bearing on the kinds of qualitative methods now found in psychology, was the emergence of discursive psychology. Dissatisfied with the pre-theoretical assumptions of information processing psychology, a number of notable criticisms of the dominant cognitive orientation of the discipline began to appear

(Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1997). Emphasising the socially constructed nature of theory, methods and research in psychology, these writers outlined an approach to science and scientific research, which highlighted the fact that the whole enterprise is always a set of interdependent contextualised social practices. They argued that psychological research should focus on what people actually say and do – *not* with trying to discover whatever might lie 'behind' people's actions and interactions. Studying people in context, and recording and analysing in detail how they make sense of, construct, and describe their social worlds, became the primary research focus.

(iii) Real-world relevance and ecological validity. Alongside the developments taking place in social psychology, within cognitive psychology in the 1970s and 1980s there was growing disquiet over the extent to which results from relatively artificial experimental situations could be generalised to what happens in the real world. Ulrich Neisser coined the term 'ecological validity' to draw attention to the fact that all too often it was very hard to tell if what happened under controlled experimental conditions necessarily approximated to other situations. As he put it,

> the concept of ecological validity has become familiar to psychologists. It reminds them that the artificial situation created for an experiment may differ from the everyday world in crucial ways. When this is so, the results may be irrelevant to the phenomena that one would really like to explain. (Neisser, 1976, p. 33)

Although the debate over whether experimental studies should develop procedures whereby the correspondence between what happens in the laboratory and outside of it could be formally established began to dissipate by the late 1990s, the metaphor of ecological validity had gained credibility in the discipline. Increasingly, people – particularly those in applied branches such as occupational, clinical and health psychology – began to move away from an over-reliance on experimental design and associated procedures as necessarily being the most appropriate way to answer a particular question.

(iv) The influence of other social science and humanities disciplines. Also important was the influence that came from those disciplines closest to psychology in the social sciences. Within sociology, qualitative methods have had a long and distinguished history where many now common procedures first originated (e.g., participant observation studies and narrative analysis). The qualitatively focused work of sociologists such as Ervin Goffman and Harold Garfinkel have had considerable influence, not least through the work of the ethnomethodologists responsible for some of the earliest studies employing conversation analysis. Likewise, in sociolinguistics the work of the critical discourse analysts has influenced contemporary research in discursive psychology, and field-study and ethnographic work from within social anthropology has also proved influential. Arguably, the lesson that has been learned from seeing how, when, and why these disciplines have employed qualitative methods is that psychologists began to recognise how procedures sensitive to the task of detailing, describing and analysing people's sense-making practices

could be employed in realisably formal ways. And most importantly, the strategies and procedures that made up these methods could be employed in the service of producing research findings that were logical, defensible and accountable.

All the above factors have together influenced the emergence of qualitative methods in psychology. Alongside quantitative approaches, qualitative methods are now an essential part of the research methods that psychologists employ. The aim of this book is to help you learn how to use them successfully so as to answer the kinds of questions psychologists often ask, as well as highlighting the possibility that the practice of qualitative research can encourage asking novel types of research questions.

How is the book structured and why?

The book is divided into sections reflecting four questions asked by many students (Figure 1.1).

Part 1 focuses on the whole business of formulating research questions, particularly on qualitative research in psychology, the theoretical underpinnings of the methods used and the topics, themes and issues addressed. In **Part 2** we move to the pragmatics of actually doing qualitative research: what is involved in collecting data of many different kinds; how interviews are conducted; and the significance of thinking through ethical issues which warrant careful and considered attention when using these particular methods. The next section of the book, **Part 3**, describes four qualitative methods in detail and shows you how analysis will differ not only because of the questions you might be asking, but also because of the specific analytic focus the approach has. Finally, in **Part 4** we highlight how you would write up a qualitative method report in psychology, one that summarises the research you have carried out according to conventions and formats appropriate to the discipline.

Q1: What kind of research questions are asked by psychologists who use qualitative

methods?   **[Part 1; chapters 2 & 3]**

*Q2: How do you conduct qualitative **research**?*   **[Part 2; chapters 4, 5 & 6]**

*Q3: What is qualitative **analysis**?*   **[Part 3; chapters 7 to 11]**

Q4: How is qualitative research written-up in report form? **[Part 4; chapters 12]**

Figure 1.1   Questions students ask.
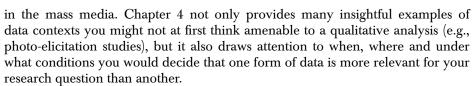
How might I read this book and why?

First of all, before you make a start on Part 1, it makes a lot of sense to know what you are doing; that is, what kind of theory and perspective have you adopted simply by just thinking up a possible question? Cath Sullivan sets the scene for you in Chapter 2 by sketching out the background assumptions that underscore psychological inquiry in the social and natural sciences. In other words, when you want to understand something and research a relevant topic it can help a great deal if you recognise what 'knowing' something entails (epistemology). All too often researchers simply rush into doing something without taking a little time to be clear about what they are doing. Here you will learn how the ideas underlying research in psychology have particular implications for the kind of methodologies that are typically used. In this chapter you will see how background philosophical views inform different theoretical perspectives in psychology and how this impacts on the research focus that is developed and the types of questions that are asked. Once you recognise the kind of theory and outlook you have adopted, the next stage is to find out much more about the topic.

In Chapter 3 we find Rachel Shaw describing how you go about finding things – what is already known about something, who might have researched it, what sorts of methods did they use? Most importantly, you want to be sure that the question you want to ask is worthwhile, will contribute to our growing knowledge of a topic, and needless to say, not be a question that somebody else has already answered. Of course, doing a literature search is something you would carry out no matter what methodology you were using; however, there are specific issues relevant for qualitative work which are key to understanding how to make sure your research is appropriately focused. In this chapter we learn how to recognise high quality work in a particular area, how to develop strategies for searching out relevant findings as well as seeing what is involved in carrying out a review of a relevant area. Without going through these very essential steps it is very difficult to know whether what you set out to do is really the most appropriate and relevant research question you might want to ask.

This brings us logically to Part 2 of the text and three chapters focusing on how you conduct qualitative research – what is involved in data collection; what kinds of data might you wish to obtain; how do interviews work and how might you go about conducting some; what particular ethical issues and challenges are there in doing qualitative research; and what sort of steps would you take to ensure the highest level of respectful engagement when working with participants doing qualitative research? Beginning with consideration of data collection in Chapter 4, Sarah Riley and Stephen Gibson provide a succinct overview of the numerous sources available to you when seeking to collect data for a research topic using a qualitative method. From the start they ask you to think carefully about what exactly 'data' is, and what typical forms of data do we find in qualitative research. There is indeed a wide range: from interviewing to focus-group work, from data you might collect from the Internet to studies involving visual data, from recording everyday naturalistic contexts to a whole range of data that comes from research

in the mass media. Chapter 4 not only provides many insightful examples of data contexts you might not at first think amenable to a qualitative analysis (e.g., photo-elicitation studies), but it also draws attention to when, where and under what conditions you would decide that one form of data is more relevant for your research question than another.

One context frequently used for collecting data is the informal interview. As Siobhan Hugh-Jones reminds us in Chapter 5, one of the best ways to find out things about people is to talk to them! Here you will learn about different types of interviews, how to think through preparing to conduct one, what is involved in using different types of questions and many other key elements involved in using this procedure for qualitative research. Often, of course, it is quite difficult to recognise what is involved in running a successful interview – successful in the sense that you are able to elicit from the interviewee rich and detailed information regarding how they understand and perceive the specific topic you might be interested in. So, whilst recognising that there is never anything quite as good as interview practice for learning what might work, Chapter 3 provides numerous very insightful pointers about how to proceed as well as what you should try to avoid doing. Furthermore, Siobhan Hugh-Jones has been able to utilise the opportunities afforded by the data set produced for this book – using extracts from the recorded and transcribed interviews – thus highlighting some of the best, as well as the occasionally less good, examples of question strategies adopted by interviewers.

Conducting any kind of research in psychology will inevitably involve a close consideration of ethics: ethical issues, given the very nature of doing research with fellow-human participants; and ethical procedures, that is, thinking through all that is involved in trying to ensure that the research practices minimise any potential harm or discomfort for all participants, researchers included. It is always important to recognise that the emphasis should be on 'potential' discomfort, as a researcher cannot second-guess exactly what that might mean for any participant. Simply going through an ethics 'check-list' doesn't somehow absolve a researcher from thinking through how procedures might be improved. Research involving human beings will always present distinct and challenging ethical issues and dilemmas. Given the nature of continually changing – and one would hope developing – cultural attitudes concerning research practices and procedures, then ethical guidelines and protocols should be seen as procedures that can always be improved.

Ethical practices, procedures and protocols surrounding the conduct of research using qualitative methods have their own particular challenges. In Chapter 6 Nigel King provides a comprehensive overview of the various ethical procedures and protocols you would go through in practice – including some insightful examples of ethics application forms, participant information sheets, feedback forms and guidelines about how to consider potential ethical issues in qualitative research. Whilst many such guidelines and issues apply equally to quantitative studies in psychology, Nigel points out the particular ethical dimensions associated with qualitative research. For example, there is often more personal engagement in terms of time spent with participants, there can be specific issues with personal information

and confidentiality, and the nature of the data collection methods might preclude specifying all procedures in advance of actually doing the research. There are also different sorts of risks and challenges for both participants and researchers doing qualitative research. It will become clear why engaging with ethical practices and procedures is not simply a case of ticking the right boxes, but rather, thinking through all the issues involved in a careful and considered way.

The next and main section of the book, Part 3, turns to the question of qualitative analysis and here the provision of a carefully designed data corpus comes into focus. As noted earlier, the contributors to this volume wanted to make sure that readers unfamiliar with qualitative methods could, through the provision of readily available interview data, begin to see very clearly how each methodology formulates a distinct type of qualitative analysis. We recognised that not only is it difficult to collect high-quality interview material suitable for detailed analysis, but it can also be rather hard to recognise precisely how, and why, different methodologies approach data analysis in the manner they do. Thus, Part 3 begins first with a detailed outline of the interview bases data set produced for the book, followed by each of four chapters (8 to 11) where the selected methodologies describe the forms of analysis that would typically be conducted on such data. Given that within psychology there are a relatively large number of different qualitative methods, the rationale for choosing the ones described in this book was based on a survey of UK Department of Psychology teaching practices, which identified the most commonly used approaches (Forrester & Koutsopoulou, 2008). These approaches are Discourse Analysis (DA), Grounded Theory (GT), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Conversation Analysis (CA).

Using a common data set in this way, you will see how each method has a particular theoretical orientation to the data, asks distinct types of questions and provides forms of analysis unique to the methodology used. In each chapter, and in order to get an overview idea of the distinct type of analysis and transcription each methodology employs, a short extract from the data corpus has been selected, with contributors highlighting the focus of their chosen methodology. This is really valuable to the beginning student who initially may find it rather difficult to grasp how each methodology has a distinctive approach to data analysis. One thing that will quickly become clear is that qualitative analysis cannot somehow be forced or rushed – there is no 'quick fix' involved in doing any of these forms of analysis – and taking time over the analysis is very important. At the same time qualitative analysis is also extremely interesting and very rewarding to do.

The first chapter in Part 3 provides the background detail to the data set produced for the book and available on-line through the Psychology Network (see the website address in the Preface). This data set represents five semi-structured interviews of student interviewees discussing friendship with different interviewers, and talking through what they understand by the term friendship and what it means to them. The data set is produced as digital video files (in Quicktime.mov format), split into segments of approximately 15 minutes each, alongside accompanying audio files and full transcriptions. Produced as a teaching and learning resource by the TQRMUL Network group, this corpus provides the data extracts, which are then analysed in the subsequent chapters.

Here you will benefit from recognising the specific challenges and issues in collecting this data set, for example, by comparing some of the suggestions and issues regarding interviewing and data collection in Chapters 5 and 6 with how we actually collected the data. The typical steps one goes through are spelled out or indicated. It will also be helpful for you to look carefully at the details regarding the participants, the interview schedule, and the forms of transcription employed. This would help your own data collection procedures or, alternatively, provide background detail were you to be using the data set as a primary data resource for your study.

Turning, then, to Chapter 8, the first of the analysis chapters, Sally Wiggins and Sarah Riley introduce you to discourse analysis (DA), and to two distinct approaches within that field: Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) and a discursive psychological approach. At some risk of oversimplification, in discursive psychology the focus is on what is being said, and with understanding the way in which people's accounts are constructed in and through the talk they produce. Here the steps taken in a DA-based analysis are spelled out: collecting and transcribing data; coding for themes; analysing patterns of such themes; and using example extracts for analysis. Complementing this approach to some extent, for FDA, talk is understood as bringing into being the nature of what we are talking about, talk constructs the objects/subjects that we 'know', giving us a place from which to understand ourselves and our world. The FDA analysis indicates how people position themselves in their own identities, drawing our attention to the modernist perspective of the self that Foucault articulated: drawing attention to the fact that talk does things, and we produce ourselves in and through talk. It will become clear that doing the analysis and writing it up are very closely interrelated.

Moving from a discursive methodology to one sometimes described as interpretative, Chapter 9 outlines the main ideas of grounded theory (GT) through a considered analysis of selected extracts. As the approach indicates, what is central to this methodology is that a 'theory' we might have about a topic or issue should be 'grounded' in the data we collect from people, primarily when they are being interviewed about whatever the topic is. One sense of this is that a GT approach wouldn't necessarily begin with a review of existing literature, but instead through collecting data at the outset. You will also see that a carefully considered cyclical procedure is employed in GT with the examination of data transcripts, the production of memo-writing, analysis and reflexive consideration of interpretation 'cycling' through stage-by-stage. Normally conducted on a 'case-by-case' basis, Alasdair Gordon-Finlayson takes the reader through a typical analysis, where throughout there is a constant sense of enquiry and engagement with the material. This chapter provides a lucid and engaging description of how you would go about using the GT approach for your analysis.

Our third approach, interpretative pheneomenological analysis (IPA), makes up Chapter 10, where Rachel Shaw first reminds us of the phenomenological background to IPA – emphasising that the focus of the method is on how people make sense of their experiences. IPA is essentially an idiographic approach, which focuses on the individual level of a person's experience – in other words, it is very much concerned with the fine-detail of an individual's meaning-making, and how

we can study this. This in-depth approach to the study of an individual is becoming an increasingly popular qualitative methodology in psychology, sometimes used to complement associated quantitative work. Here you will learn that in doing an IPA analysis there is a close interdependence between processes of description and interpretation, keeping a reflective diary, and the production of an audit trail documenting the analysis process. Rachel Shaw, in taking us carefully through the steps involved in doing such analysis, points out that IPA involves what is known as a 'double hermeneutic' – in other words, the analyst is seeking to *make sense out of* how participants *make sense out of* their experiences. As with all the chapters, the reader can see very quickly through an examination of the common sample extract how this particular method differs from the others.

The fourth method of analysis in Part 3 takes you through how a conversation analyst might approach the understanding of an element or aspect of the interview data set. Conversation Analysis (CA) is sometimes described as being 'ethnomethodolgically' inspired; in other words CA is one of a number of examples of the ethnomethodological perspective. Essentially what this means is that the analysis is centred on how people themselves produce 'sense-making methods' in and through their everyday interactions: thus the term 'ethno-method'. Here you will see that a conversation analyst cannot simply say: oh, look this is what this person is doing/feeling/thinking here. Instead, whatever suggestions or arguments the analyst makes will be based on a careful 'line-by-line' sequential examination of how participants themselves treat 'what happens next'. This is part of the reason why you will immediately see that the orthography used when producing a CA-based transcription will include not just what people say, but many different aspects of the 'talk-in-interaction' – any action might be potentially significant for the participants themselves. In this chapter the CA focus is on how people manage the business of ending a conversation, looking at the conversational structures they use and examining how they produce their own understandings of what an interview is for them.

This brings us, finally, to Part 4 of this book and to Chapter 12, which is focused on what is involved in writing up a qualitative methodology practical or laboratory (lab) report. Colm Crowley begins by reminding you that for the most part the final report you would write looks very similar to that which you have produced for quantitative reports (experiments or questionnaire based studies). The major difference with qualitative reports is with what would traditionally be called the results section of a report. This is now described as a 'findings and discussion' or 'analysis and discussion' section, where you would detail your analysis, and at the same time discuss what it means for the question(s) you asked. There are a number of other differences, for example: occasional changes in writing style; comprehensive use of the appendix; details about reflexivity and the form of analysis you used. Students writing up qualitative methodology reports in psychology often find it rather difficult to see how the formats they find in qualitative research journals, which can vary depending on the methodology being reported, translate into an undergraduate research report structure. In this chapter you are taken through everything you need to do in order to write a comprehensive high-quality report within the conventions found in psychology (e.g., word length, abstract format, referencing).

Chapter learning hints, aids and guidelines

Throughout the text, contributors have sought to ensure that guidance and hints are included so as to help you get the most from each chapter. In Part 3, for example, all four qualitative analysis chapters (8 to 11) adopt a similar five-part format of '*Introduction - Background - Analysis - Writing up the analysis - Summary points*', so as to highlight the focus of each analysis and how it is done. In addition, each analysis chapter considers a sample extract, again so as to draw your attention to some essential differences across the methods. Throughout these, and where appropriate in other chapters, a number of other aids have been employed. These include:

- *Procedure highlight boxes.* These summarise or list specific steps, processes or proce-dures unique to one or other qualitative method, as well as relevant steps in the interviewing and write-up chapters. So, in the case of CA there is a Procedure Highlight box outlining what 'participant orientation' means in practice – when you are carrying out the analysis. In contrast, in the IPA chapter your attention is drawn to the importance of writing descriptive summaries during the analysis.
- *Definitions boxes.* We recognise that there are many theoretical and technical terms that will be unfamiliar to you, and so will find definitions boxes throughout the text. We adopted the view that we must be very careful to make sure we define as many things as we can, given your possible unfamiliarity with qualitative methods.
- *'Where are we now?' boxes.* There may be occasions, although few we hope, where a reader might be unsure as to the stage they have reached in their reading or analysis. Thus we thought these boxes would be useful, reminding the reader where they are, and what has been covered up to that point.
- *'Want to know more?' boxes.* At different points in each chapter you will find indica-tions of where you might want to do further reading. These boxes indicate to the reader where they should go for further information.
- *Critical issues boxes.* At times throughout the book your attention is drawn to one or other critical questions or issues relevant to the topic being discussed. So, for exam-ple, in Chapter 5 you are asked to consider what status 'subjective' experience has in psychology, or in Chapter 4 to critically consider issues surrounding what kind of data is 'naturalistic' or not. These boxes can be helpful for highlighting questions or issues that continue to present challenges for qualitative researchers.
- *Summary points.* This listing provides a brief reminder of what has been covered in each chapter.

Concluding comment

This book is very much about *doing* qualitative research in psychology, particularly in contexts where not much prior knowledge can be assumed. Throughout there is

a close interdependence between chapters and the specially produced data set – the friendship interviews – accompanying the book. The book can used either as a guide for doing qualitative research and analysis in conjunction with the data set or as the basis for work where you collect your own data. We are confident you will find it very useful for learning how to do qualitative research.