

Chapter Five

Analyzing Data in Institutional Ethnography

Once you have collected your data, you are confronted with the problem of what to do with it. Some sense *must* be made of it. Although making sense is the purpose behind conducting any research, the particular aims of institutional ethnography direct the kind of sense that is to be made. Also, the task of presenting the research findings coherently and persuasively, perhaps as a thesis or as a research report or article, is part of doing this kind of analysis. In writing the analysis, your goal is to make the research product not only understandable but also convincing. Analysis means deciding what you are going to be able to say on the basis of the data you have collected. But a convincing presentation of your research also relies on having or gaining the necessary writing skills, including how to make an argument. Like any qualitative research writing, the fundamentals of essay writing are important to making your account persuasive.

By this stage, the story to be told from your data has already begun to make itself apparent – that is, if you have followed the approach to data collection suggested here. This whole book has been a preparation for your discovery of the workings of social relations in everyday life that you have wanted to explore. This notion is part of the conceptual framework that has guided your search for data and your subsequent analysis. You have collected data on people conducting their lives, and have begun to understand that their everyday activities are somehow being coordinated. Now you must begin to make those connections and their implications explicit for others to understand. This next step is analysis. Your task is to enable others to see what you see, so writing is an integral part

of your analytic work. As you begin to write, you must maintain your interest in what is actually happening in the settings you have been examining. Explication of that actuality is the analytic practice that institutional ethnographers must learn, and some of the ins and outs of that learning appear next.

Moving From Data to Data Analysis: What Path to Follow?

Many researchers find the data-collection phase of ethnography exciting but dread the prospect of doing the analysis. It is likely to seem a particularly mysterious undertaking for those who are new to institutional ethnography. Even if they understand the major ideas of institutional ethnography, students may find themselves almost completely at a loss about how to proceed from the data towards the finished research account or product. That does not mean they have learned nothing from collecting their data. Even beginning researchers find themselves learning things about the setting and the situations they are researching, as they conduct interviews or make observations. Of course, seeing connections may not reduce their anxiety about doing analysis. Their very success at recognizing how intertwined their problematic is with all sorts of other issues, people, and places may be upsetting. It can create a feeling of being overwhelmed by the enormity of what they are studying. Rather than clarifying what their study can show, learning about the complexity of their topics may be depressing. They may doubt their capacity to focus on a discrete piece of what they are learning. They may begin to question how they are ever going to be able to make sense of it, and not least produce an account of it that others will understand. Methods texts that offer advice and instructions about ethnography all seem to agree that focusing, choosing the right question, matching up the data and the question one asks, are all crucial to successful analysis. But, for this phase as for others, the methods texts are silent about differences in analyzing data in institutional ethnography as compared to other ethnographies.

Finding no clear instructions for this phase of institutional ethnography poses a challenge. Confronted with mounds of data, you may wonder how to tell what is most important to write about? If it is all equally important, where does one begin? This is a critical moment at which many wrong turnings can be taken, out of confusion and anxiety to be doing something. There is always description to fall back on. You may begin to write up everything you did and everything you were told. Or, realizing that this is an impossible task, you may turn to coding your data, to discover themes. When one is searching for a way to reduce confusion, identifying the replication of themes across informants may seem relevant

or at least rational. Counting instances of comparable events, themes, or language usage may seem useful. You ask yourself "wouldn't it be significant if more than one person talked about the same thing, for instance?" Computer programs designed to help manage qualitative data by categorizing them may only add to the institutional ethnographer's troubles rather than helping (but see DeVault and McCoy 2002, 768-9). The main analytic notion to hold on to, at this point, is the idea of social relations at the heart of your research interest. You do not want to categorize your data in ways that are artificial, or that distort and obscure the relations at the crux of the institutional ethnography. **The meaning of the data is in their setting of use as they arise there.** That is why suggestions to cut up and sort one's data are likewise unhelpful, if not downright dangerous. Such strategies contain vestiges of methodologies and epistemologies foreign to institutional ethnography. But if this is the *wrong* way to go about analysis, what is the *right* way?

A guiding query to use as you read your collection of data analytically is "what does it tell me about how this setting or event happens as it does?" Many experienced institutional ethnographers would agree with Eric Mykhalovskiy when he points out that "analytic thinking begins in the (data-collection) interview" (DeVault and McCoy 2002, 757). His comment arises in the context of explaining to DeVault and McCoy how he conducts interviews with informants. Mykhalovskiy suggests that in "talking to people" he is "checking his understanding as it develops" (757) in contrast to going to an interview with a prepared set of questions to be asked and answered. In a conversational way he can offer up his developing understanding to the informant for confirmation or correction. He is reminding us that, as with other ethnographies, institutional ethnographers want to understand their informants and be absolutely clear about what is being said, meant, etc. Informants are experts in doing what they routinely know how to do. Each informant's story helps the researcher see more of the emerging big picture but there is more to analysis than producing accounts that informants can recognize. **A successful analysis supersedes any one account and even supersedes the totality of what informants know and can tell.** Ellen Pence is alluding to this in the manual describing the Safety and Accountability Audit of domestic violence intervention that she has designed (Pence and Lizdas 1998). In the following excerpt, she identifies additional sources of information on how an informant's experience gets structured outside of her own knowing about it.

Mapping Social Relations

Experiential methods (and accounts of experience) can only go so far in drawing an accurate map of how a victim's lived experience becomes interpreted into the system designed to protect her and hold her abuser accountable. To complete the picture, auditors also need to look at how the paper trail created by each agency serves these goals (Pence and Lizdas 1998, 33).

Pence points to aspects of how agencies structure "what goes on," what happens to people. This, too, is data that add to what people know and can tell about their lives. Institutional ethnographers are attempting to *explicate* everyday experiences and people's accounts of them, not just collect and describe them. The explication of experiences calls for yet another level of researching, data collection, and analysis, and is a distinctive feature of institutional ethnography. Because characteristic difficulties arise for newcomers to institutional ethnography at this point in analysis, we have inserted a section here to try to address them. Explication of ethnographic data, as institutional ethnographers do it, takes their analysis in a different direction from identifying themes or theorizing data. In the following section, we discuss how analytic strategies differ across different ethnographic approaches. We hope that this little excursion into *other ways* of analyzing ethnographic data may help new institutional ethnographers clarify how their own analysis proceeds and why institutional ethnography is done the way it is.

Different Ethnographies, Different Analytic Strategies

Analytic strategies, however tentative or prescriptive, vary considerably across the different traditions within ethnography. Similarities across ethnographic traditions seem self-evident – one goes into the field and listens, observes, and gathers whatever information helps in understanding what people are doing. Differences arise in ethnography, as in other scholarship, when researchers attend differently to what observations mean. Different ontologies (beliefs about the nature of social reality) require the use of different analytic strategies. The social ontology of institutional ethnography discussed in earlier chapters underpins everything that one does as method, including how data are worked with.

Analysis, as we said earlier, is about making some particular meaning from the data. Making meaning in a manner that stands up to the relevant tests is the purpose of any scholarly analysis. Researchers must establish the validity, warrantability, or truth-value of their analysis within the tenets of its particular meth-

odology. Findings are evaluated by asking, "Did the researcher demonstrate that she used the procedures that are relevant to her declared methodology in arriving at these analytic conclusions?" A quick survey of various instructions and explanations available for conducting analysis shows that ethnographers subscribe to a wide range of world-views and epistemologies, at least implicitly. Analytic procedures appropriate to one situation may not be appropriate to another. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) review beliefs about the nature of reality that underlie different ethnographies, and help to match up analytic processes to belief systems. They also give a sense of how shifts in thinking about the sociology and philosophy of knowledge cumulatively alter qualitative and ethnographic research. For instance, much of the difference found in analytic methods can be traced to how the researcher understands, or ignores, her own contribution to the account being generated. Beliefs about how to know the field – the researcher's ontological commitments – determine a researcher's view of acceptable approaches to data analysis. Institutional ethnography is grounded in a particular understanding of the relation between the knower and the known. To attempt to clarify the institutional ethnography position on this, we are going to compare it with the stance (and matching analytic strategies) of some other kinds of ethnography.

What some writers refer to as conventional ethnography is the anthropological version (although, as Whittaker (1994) argues, the anthropological version is not a unitary or static entity). David Fetterman, author of the prestigious *Ethnography: Step by Step* (1989) is a practitioner of the conventional approach. Fetterman sees the anthropologist as ethnographer: "The ethnographer is interested in understanding a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's, perspective. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; *the closer the readers of an ethnography come to understanding the native's point of view the better the story and the better the science*" (Fetterman 1989, 12, emphasis added).

Fetterman clearly sees the ethnographer's task as the discovery and recording of what informants know about their world. Ethnography, as begun by anthropologists, was of primitive cultures. Ethnography was then, and according to Fetterman still is, primarily descriptive in nature (Fetterman 1998, 139, n. 3). He says: "A typical ethnography describes the history of the group, the geography of the location, kinship patterns, symbols, politics, economic systems, educational and socialization systems and the degree of contact between the target culture and the mainstream culture" (22).

Anthropological ethnographers "go and look" and attempt to bring back accounts of "how it is," as objectively as possible. They may think of what they do as understanding the field in its own terms, but Fetterman's account of ethnography as description alerts readers to how description is not simply a technical matter. As the above quotation illustrates, the elements and terms of an anthropological description are pre-theorized. Fetterman's own instructions introduce the novice ethnographer to the anthropological concepts that he says "guide ethnographers in their fieldwork" (Fetterman 1998, 26): for example, culture, symbol, ritual, holistic orientation, perspectives. He expects these concepts to become "automatic" to their work (26). These instructions show the ethnographer to be a certain kind of knower doing a special kind of seeing, hearing and knowing. For Fetterman, the ethnography is fallible, meaning that the anthropologist can get it wrong unless appropriate procedures are used.

Because practitioners of the conventional version of ethnography must exercise skepticism about the accuracy of data they collect, they use analytic strategies for testing the accuracy of *what informants say*. Triangulation is the most common strategy used for this purpose (Denzin 1978; Thomas 1993). Fetterman (1989) also proclaims triangulation to be a basic analytic procedure in (conventional) ethnographic research. In triangulation, data collected from different sources are compared to "test the quality of the information to understand more completely the part an actor plays in the social drama, and ultimately to put the whole situation into perspective" (Fetterman 1998, 89). A researcher working in this mode compiles "what informants said" to generate hypotheses and then tests them against each other to come up with an accurate, or best possible, account of the situation.

A related analytic use of ethnographic data is to theorize about the setting. Grounded theory (Glazer and Strauss 1967) offers analytical techniques that many researchers find useful in selecting and substantiating ideas about what the researcher saw or heard. In grounded theory, analysis aims for abstraction, not just description. Schreiber (2001) says that grounded theorists try to construct meanings that account for how participants understand their lives and solve the problems occurring in them. A complex set of analytic procedures is followed to produce the concepts, categories, and eventually the "theory," that explains participants' experiences, *as they understand them*.

Grounded theory's interest in analysis that explores and explains informants' perspectives is shared with symbolic interactionists. In an article explaining ethnographic inquiry in the symbolic interactionist tradition, Prus explains that:

Analyzing Data in Institutional Ethnography

(symbolic interactionism) is an examination of the ways that people make sense of their situations and work out their activities in conjunction with others. Human experience is not to be dismissed as subjective, epiphenomenal, or non-factual. Since people know the world only as they experience it, and people experience the world in an intersubjective manner, then this realm of inquiry (human experiences within a world of others) becomes the paramount reality to which researchers should attend in their investigations of human group life. (Prus 1994, 20-1)

Prus suggests that the ontology of symbolic interactionism is social. People are understood to put their lives together interactionally and symbolically and this view underpins the analytic procedures used. Important topics for research attention thus arrive from informants' viewpoints, interpretations of themselves and others, their attempts to influence others, their relationships and the history of their encounters and exchanges. Ethnographers working in this tradition look for how people "do" everyday life rather than for (external) causes and effects. The central research interest is to capture and display the strategies people themselves employ moment-to-moment, denoting "a realm of human agency and enterprise rooted in an awareness of the intersubjective other" (Prus 1994, 26).

As in grounded theory, analysis of data aims at how the individual experience can be generalized. Symbolic interactionists use theoretical concepts (Prus calls them "generic" concepts) to transcend single instances of ethnography. The use of generic concepts draws single instances, descriptions of individual cases, etc., into theory to "make something" *generalizable* of the data. This explanatory direction towards abstraction is shared with grounded theory. In contrast, institutional ethnography's interest in explication is materialist and empirical. To "make something" of data in institutional ethnography, researchers go back to the field to discover actual connections. Speaking in theoretical terms about their analytic work, institutional ethnographers would say that they explicate the ruling relations that organize and coordinate the local experiences of informants. Generalizability in institutional ethnography relies on discovery and demonstration of how ruling relations exist in and across many local settings, organizing the experiences informants talked about.

While the institutional ethnographer is interested in collecting data that display insiders' knowledge (thus our interest in informants' descriptions of their "work" discussed in Chapter Four), the ultimate purpose of the institutional ethnography is *not* to produce an account *of* or *from* those insiders'

perspectives. Where ethnographers in the conventional mode conduct tests (for example, triangulation) to give evidential weight to specific views, the institutional ethnographer attempts to explicate how the local settings, including local understandings and explanations, are brought into being – so that informants can talk about their experiences as they do. Institutional ethnographers, like ethnographers who use symbolic interactionist theory, understand an ethnographic setting to be constituted locally by people's work. However, theorizing that work and those understandings, as grounded theorists and symbolic interactionists do, is not the analytic goal of institutional ethnography. Getting to an account that explicates *the social relations* of the setting is what an institutional ethnographic account is about. This kind of analysis uses what informants know and what they are observed doing for the analytic purpose of identifying, tracing and describing the social relations that extend beyond the boundaries of any one informant's experiences (or even of all informants' experiences). Translocal and discursively-organized relations permeate informants' understandings, talk, and activities. An institutional ethnography must therefore include research into those elements of social organization that connect the local setting and local experiences to sites outside the experiential setting. Analysis in institutional ethnography is directed to explication that builds back into the analytic account what the researcher discovers about the workings of such translocal ruling practices. These are some of the important theoretical and ontological differences that distinguish analysis of data in institutional ethnography.

Making Sense of Discursively-Organized Settings

As many writers explaining ethnographic methods indicate, the world of ethnography is changing. Anthropologists working at the end of the twentieth century recognized that primitive settings were fast disappearing under the pressures of globalization. Societies under study are all being influenced by Western/Northern industrialization. Even a cursory consideration of how North Americans and Europeans live reveals differences in the warp and weft of the contemporary social fabric from earlier times. In Canada, prior to the 1950s, the differences between some aspects of our lives and those of so-called primitive cultures might not have been so distinctive. Not too long ago, for example, many Canadians lived in communities surrounded by their extended families and produced their own food. Now multinational or transnational corporations and mass media "brand" our daily lives. Canadians

have become consumers orientated to a global market, even for our food. Reports from the South Pacific atolls suggest that so-called primitive cultures buy some of the same food products as we do and suffer similar (environmentally orientated) perplexity about the disposal of its packaging. Whereas these island people until recently would have had closely interlocking kinship patterns and family life, now their families, like ours, are fragmented by employment across vast distances and by schedules not of their or our own making. The effects of these social organizational changes on local settings are apparent. For instance, in Canada, contemporary employment patterns may require parents to work outside the home. Daycare for children then becomes an issue when members of the extended family, who in previous generations would have assumed responsibility for the care of the child, are now living thousands of miles away. The discourse on childcare may continue to express values arising in earlier times. It may confirm or conflict with parents' views and their everyday experiences.

The point is that social life has crucial "meanings" organized outside local settings where people live and from which they speak when they talk about their experiences. Late-twentieth-century scholars have been exploring and debating the extent to which everything we know about our lives is discursively organized. This feature of social life is currently an important and unifying topic across different disciplines (besides sociology, feminist, and literary studies where it has engaged scholars for several decades). Disciplinary traditions are being rethought by, among others, Moss (2001) in geography, Purkis (forthcoming) in nursing, Scott (1991) in history, Chambon (1999) in social work. Previously authoritative ways of knowing appear to fail or are discredited. It becomes apparent to researchers who accept the implications of a discursively-organized world that the conventional approach to ethnography, "going and looking," falls short as a way of knowing. Or, at least, data collected through traditional ethnographic methods are being subjected to new theories and new analytic strategies.

It is methodologically important, institutional ethnographers insist, to be attentive to how someone, speaking about their life, misses its social organization. In order to discover and disclose how its taken-for-granted social organization is meaningful for what happens, a specialized inquiry must be conducted. For researchers convinced of the importance of the discursive organization of everyday life, the social organization of knowledge is useful theory and institutional ethnography is a relevant analytic approach.

Writing Analysis in Institutional Ethnography

Understanding the theory that informs institutional ethnography is the necessary framework for analysis but it is not a sufficient guide to writing it. Researchers must take some practical steps to make something of their data. There are some openings to be found in the apparently blank wall that confronts the new institutional ethnographer with mounds of ethnographic data and no convenient schema for analytic writing. Institutional ethnographers have developed various practices for proceeding. In this section, some practical suggestions and illustrations are offered to help researchers build on the ideas that emerge as the data is collected.

One recommendation to assist in your movement towards analysis is to find someone with whom you can talk about what you are learning from your data. Begin to try to explain to someone else what you now see. Listen to their questions and try to answer comprehensively. Watch yourself drawing on what your informants have told you, or what you learned in your observations, or from textual materials that you have gathered from the settings you studied. As you talk, make notes to yourself about what chunks of data illuminate the stories you are able to tell. Notice also when you cannot answer a question you are asked. This kind of informal storytelling may help you to decide what elements of your data to include in your analytic writing. It may also suggest how your analysis is going to have boundaries established by the specificity of the data you have collected. Seeing what you can and cannot speak to from your data is real progress.

Notice when you want to say, in answer to a query about your story, "but that is not really relevant to what I am studying." Are you as clear as you might be about what you are studying? Sometimes getting involved in data collection brings up so many interesting issues that you get a bit confused. Here is how your earlier conception of a "problematic" helps. You might want to go back to that writing of the problematic and its conceptual framing to recall what you did and did not understand earlier. Remember that, for developing a focus, you relied on certain experiences that puzzled you and others. You may have had a hunch about the topic that helped you identify a problematic for study. Even though you will have set it aside as you developed your conceptual framework and conducted your fieldwork, that moment of "disjuncture" or "disquiet" motivating your interest in the topic is still analytically important. Now you have dug more deeply and excavated the problematic setting from various angles. Informants speaking from various positions have added their expertise

Analyzing Data in Institutional Ethnography

to what you know. You chose them as informants because of some position they occupied that related them to the original setting and your original curiosity. Now you can review your early thoughts informed by all that your informants have told you. **There is no technical fix for finding meaning in institutional ethnography. You have to read, think, puzzle, write, and continue in that vein with each element of the data.** Your insights will be about how the data illuminate the way that the setting works. You are figuring out the social relations of the setting.

This reflection on the data in conjunction with a review of your problematic offers you a starting point for "writing up the data." Analysis in institutional ethnography is done in your writing and as you write. Your writing begins to make something of your data, to move it towards analysis. It alters your data from an undifferentiated mass – from piles of transcripts, notebooks full of observational notes, boxes of documents – to "analytic writing." Be prepared to write and rewrite. The pieces that you write up now will eventually go together in ways that construct the analysis. Just as you can "tell a story" to a listener, now in writing you are telling a story about what you learned to a reader. You can use "the point" that you saw in your storytelling, to make an analytic point in your writing. Begin there and do not worry about the flow of a chapter at first. Writing a little piece shows you that you have something to say about your data and that you can use them analytically.

Writing up your data into stories begins the process of making use of your data as evidence. Let's say that you want to make a particular analytic point in writing that you have already explained in your storytelling. The idea may seem to have just come to you, but you must search out the evidence for your insight as it occurs in the raw data. You find a piece of raw data, insert it into the text you are writing and then explain what you have already noticed that is relevant (to your problematic) about it. As you do so, you learn what exactly you can say using this piece of data. You need to consider how it supports your developing account. Notice that as you work with it, this piece of data may alter slightly what you thought you were going to say. The data hold your writing to "their" account.

There are some simple but important technical strategies for writing up data into analysis. The goal is to use your data persuasively. Just inserting a blob of data into your writing will not work. As you write, explain to readers the meaning that you have discovered in it, inserting your explanation both before and after the data excerpt that you use. An example of how to write

using data as evidence comes from Campbell's (2001) article analyzing the text-mediated assessment of an applicant's needs for community health services. An observer has taped a conversation between a case manager (an employee of the local health care authority) and a man called Tom who has a disability and needs personal care in his home. The case manager doing the assessment is trying to be "client-centred," as is the agency's claim, and is trying to keep Tom fully involved in the decision making about the range of services that might be offered. The argument being made in the article is that, regardless of her intent, the case manager is unable to work in a client-centred way. In the section chosen for use here, Campbell is developing for readers her point that Tom's participation in decision making about community health services is not authentic, that he cannot possibly collaborate equitably in making decisions under the particular circumstances. An excerpt of observational data is used to illustrate what the author sees is actually happening (in contrast to what she will argue later in the paper is an ideologically constructed version of it). The following is an instance of how to support a point an analyst wants to make by using observational data as evidence. The form that the writing takes is important to reading it as analysis. In the first paragraph of the following text, the author makes the point she wants readers to "get," prior to inserting the data:

All these features of the decision making appear to undermine Tom's sense of being in control of his life and health, regardless of the services the case manager is able to offer. This suggests that caution should be taken in assuming that Tom is really participating authentically in any of these decisions. This becomes even more apparent in the following exchange where the case manager is clearly attempting to include him.

Case Manager: *Would you like a physio to come and just do maybe a bath assessment and just assess what you're doing and see if there are any aids or little things that could help you with — managing from day to day?*

Tom: *If it's all right with you, sure, I guess so.*

The author then tells readers what she wants them to "see" in the above exchange. She does not leave them to make their own interpretation. As we read on, we see that she inserts *her* interpretation and that it elaborates the analytic point that she asserted at the beginning of the excerpt. This discussion, that directly follows the data (above), is *analysis of it*.

Notice that the case manager does not say, "I will get the physio to come and see you." She asks Tom's opinion. But Tom's response "if it's all right with you, sure, I guess so," suggests that he may not really understand what is being offered. He is unsure about whether he wants or needs what she is offering. He seems to defer to the case manager's expertise and she does little to correct this imbalance. Without access to adequate information, he cannot make sensible choices. At this point (in the application process) the case manager has information about the health care system, physiotherapy, and other programs and services potentially available to him, none of which he knows about. Client participation requires more than this kind of on-the-spot invitation to agree or disagree. The choice being offered here is definitely not the same thing as Tom having sufficient information to make his participation in decisions viable. Any claim that Tom retains control over his life and the important choices about becoming a client of the agency is not supported by this observed interaction even though we can see that the case manager is attempting to be "client centred". (Campbell, forthcoming)

The goal is to have readers first "hear" your analytic point, then read an excerpt of data that illustrates it. It is not sufficient to throw into the story bits of data that you see as confirming your view. You must explain to readers how "what informants say or do" works as confirmation or evidence. You will want to draw from at least one interview or observation or other data source. You will probably see how to introduce pieces of data from several sources. But remember that, in institutional ethnography, inserting more examples does not necessarily make better analysis.

As you work through your data, you will see that not all stories seem to be pointing in the same direction. You must examine these carefully and account for differences. Do not worry about informants having different experiences and saying different things about them. In institutional ethnography, as discussed earlier in this chapter, informants are not expected to have matching experiences. Analysts discover coherence as they uncover the social relation organizing informants' various experiences and stories about them. You will begin to see how different stories enlarge your overall understanding of what is happening. As you work with your own data, you will continue to clarify your understanding, moving away from your beginning hunch towards an argument that becomes nuanced and useful. In this way, you will find that you are doing analysis.

Mapping Social Relations

You are drawing on your data to make one point, as above, which is analytically “interesting.” You move on from there to other features showing how the story develops and unfolds.

What you find analytically interesting in your data, if you have followed the process suggested here, will not be irrelevant to your problematic. There are, of course, an almost unlimited number of potential topics that could be explored in any setting and your data could be used in many ways. What is interesting to you will be so precisely because it helps you understand the dynamics of your problematic. Your interest as you go into the field to collect data has already been directed by your preliminary conceptual work. You have developed your research interest by problematizing the situation and the setting of your study. That careful preliminary work focused your attention in a particular way. By becoming engaged in the conceptualization of your study as institutional ethnography, you will have developed your research interest theoretically. You already knew when you collected the data that you were looking to see how the social relations of the setting work, how different actors constitute the setting, etc. As you listened to informants explaining what they do in their everyday life, you already had in your mind the notion of ruling relations, texts operating as extensions of ruling relations, and so on. Now you begin to sort through your data analytically and determine what pieces to use. Reminding yourself of the problematic with which you began helps you identify from your reams of data the pieces that advance your understanding of the problematic.

The following is an example that shows the development of an analytic process from the conceptualization of a problematic to the writing-up of the data and the establishment of an argument – sustainable by the data. As research for her thesis (2001), graduate student Nancy Bell thought that institutional ethnography might help her gain some new insights into a high-profile inquest into the death of a child in British Columbia. The records of the inquest were publicly available for study. Many features of the death and how it was subsequently dealt with were puzzling to Bell, both personally and in her working capacity at the BC Children’s Commission. She brought both points of view to the research. To focus on what she would make the problematic for study, Bell had to first examine the relevant data, in this case a number of texts that became part of the exhibits of the inquest or its proceedings. Not until then could she see what her study could address and what puzzles, latent in the setting, might be made visible through close examination of these data.

(A reminder of the practicalities of any research project: certain decisions about the inquiry depend upon what data are going to be accessible.) Owing to the textual nature of Bell's research setting, her inquiry would be confined to textual data.¹⁰ She found herself puzzling as she read through the different texts over differences in how they pictured the child who died. An early expression of her research problematic was "This child became known quite differently to the various people who interacted with her in the last weeks and months of her life." At this early stage in the inquiry Bell wrote that "some accounts took on an authority that led to certain actions or inaction ... and ... they obliterated other accounts"(working notes). That particular action-in-texts was to become the focus of her research, its problematic to be explicated.

The process of inquiry that Bell followed began with her entry to the text-mediated world of inquests and human service work. She undertook her research by exploring the theory of textual action and the analytic use of a "text-reader conversation." Reading the texts analytically would be her method of inquiry into the social relations of such a setting. Institutional ethnography acts as a kind of radiography of everyday life, making visible its skeletal underpinnings. Of course, the skeleton is comprised of people's actions that are coordinated somehow, including textually. Bell, immersing herself in this approach, was simultaneously thinking through how a textual analysis might be done. It was necessary for her to keep in mind that, although she would need to discover who did what with regard to producing and using the texts in question, she had to make her discoveries by following the traces left in those same texts. That was all she had to go on. Her text analysis had to begin with what was in the texts. She had to make sense of them using familiar reading practices.

As she began to write up her data, she saw that the child had come to be known as dying of a terminal illness in the course of the work conducted by health care providers. She recognized that this textual construction was an important element in what actually happened to the child. Bell was then able to be more specific in her formulation of her research problematic as a question about how this knowledge of the child had been produced as authoritative. She identified some specific texts to analyze: a set of records made by health care providers. These texts displayed work processes involving the child and her family. The question of "how the child came to be known as dying of a terminal illness" was a kind of touchstone that Bell could hang on to as she did her reading of the texts and her analytic writing. That was the puzzle to be solved.

Mapping Social Relations

The institutional ethnographic character of the textual analysis that Bell conducted made it possible for her to treat the texts as visible traces of certain social relations of the child's life and death. This determined her approach to the analytic reading of the texts. Something had actually happened that occasioned the writing of the health care providers' records. Each worker had activated an organizational text. They each selected features of their work, their observations and decisions about the child, proposed action, etc., for inscription in their records, and, consequently, they de-selected other features. Bell's reading had to make their inscriptions sensible – not in any which way, but as a competent reader of such texts was intended to understand them. Beyond that, her institutional ethnography had to recover and display what the texts accomplished in the child's life and death. Bell's analysis explicated this work of inscription. She discovered how collectively the health care workers' texts constituted the "fact" that the child was "dying of a terminal illness" and how attention to possible neglect of the child was subordinated, and eventually ignored, until the inquest determined her to have died of severe malnutrition.

Interpretation and Analysis

Working with data in institutional ethnography calls for interpretation, or rather, for finding conceptual links in order to make sense of the data. Not just any interpretation will suffice. In institutional ethnography interpretation is disciplined first by the analytic framework of social organization of knowledge and then by the materiality of the data. The connections that are to be made are not theoretical ones – although, as we stress throughout this book, theory guides the problematizing of the research setting, data collection, and analysis. But when it comes to interpreting data, institutional ethnography relies on, explores, and explicates linkages that are lived, brought into existence in time and space by actual people doing actual things. Nancy Bell's argument had to adhere to what she found and could display about what had actually happened in the situation she studied. To do so, she identified and wrote up her argument, bringing in evidence from the texts that constituted both the health care providers' work and the records of that work. She explicated how their ideas, accounts of actions, statements, plans, professional language, etc., appearing in one or more texts recurred, carrying specific meanings across sites of action. She discovered how the idea arose that the child was dying of a terminal illness and then became an officially-accepted view in the texts and was acted on. She found instances of how alternative ideas and potential actions were dropped. She showed that the

Analyzing Data in Institutional Ethnography

signing of a Do Not Resuscitate order officially supported palliative care as appropriate intervention, and that it suppressed interest in other potential courses of action.

We are stressing the importance of how an institutional ethnographer writes the analysis that supports her argument. The presentation is frequently a weak point in an otherwise interesting inquiry. Beginning institutional ethnographers are likely to see the linkages that emerge from their inquiry. They usually discover what is happening and are likely to be able to explain it coherently in a verbal presentation. But writing the analysis is more difficult. Sometimes beginning institutional ethnographers begin to assume that readers can see what they see and that they do not really need to describe their basis for knowing. Sometimes their writing lacks sufficient illustrative content to be clear and convincing. The difficulty may be in translating one's developing understanding of how a setting works into an argument that can be substantiated. An argument develops in stages. There is the "seeing" that the institutional ethnographer can do as she reviews her data early on, becoming increasingly explicit as she writes it up into stories. The first statement of argument can be worked up as a kind of sketch of what the data collection allows the researcher to see and understand. That is the basis of a working argument. It helps the researcher select data for ongoing work, including some picking and choosing about which lines of analysis will be followed up and which will not. With the work-up of this early sketch of an argument, the researcher can move on to the next step. Let's say that she has written some stories about discrete pieces of data. She can now collect those pieces and organize them into coherent sections with each addressing a part of the sketched argument. (Sometimes mapping the argument helps – an actual pictorial arrangement of chunks of writing grouped in relation to the argument.) As more pieces of data are analyzed, the original thinking about what was going on can be updated and the argument clarified. The final statement of the argument is what the data allow to be said and what the writing of it actually says.

Analytic interest in institutional ethnography is often in discovering how the conduct of people's lives is coordinated in relation to ruling ideas and practices. From informants' stories and research on how reported events occur, the analyst can figure out what makes things happen as they do. The research will make apparent the people who are involved and how they are involved. Bell's research, for instance, discovered the temporal sequencing of health care intervention. She discovered the emergence in formal and informal health providers'

Mapping Social Relations

(sequenced) texts of a crystallized view of the child, whom she called Nina. Bell writes what she sees, and what she makes of it:

On May 21, the home care nurse visited [the child's] home after the hospice volunteer telephoned to advise the home care nurse of [the child's] need for service. In the home care nursing records, there is a recording in the "Progress Notes" section [see Appendix D (a)...]

'Ten year old girl dying from Rett syndrome apparently was diagnosed [with] disease at 18 months...'

It appears that these notes represent information the home care nurse received from the hospice volunteer prior to the visit to [the child's home] – information that would have guided the home care nurse in her work on the day she conducted [the] assessment. (Bell 2001, 103)

Bell then identifies from the nurses' recording, following the telephone call from the hospice worker, the phrases that articulate with the provincial criteria for admission to palliative care. For instance, she argues that speaking about Rett Syndrome as a disease "fits [this child] within the provincial policy that refers to 'other end-stage diseases'" (Bell 2001, 103). She goes on to compare the nurse's assessment notes to the home care nursing policy for palliative care. She is demonstrating how these workers acted within their proper standards and yet how their choices of observations and language use "worked up" the child, her life, her behaviour, and circumstances to fit the palliative care policy. This is building Bell's evidence for an argument.

Bell's analysis suggests how certain officials such as those of the ministry responsible for child welfare were not brought into the conversation about the child and her family taking place through texts. She explicates the professional and organizational course of action that culminated in a Do Not Resuscitate order. She is getting at an important feature of the social organization of the health providers' work. She shows how the health provider texts were activated, *properly*, in light of organizational and professional rules and expectations. Her explication of textual practices sustains her argument that this textually coordinated work resulted in an account of the child as "dying of a terminal illness," that it authorized subsequent palliative care, and made plausible service providers' inaction around neglect. This example displays what can be learned through institutional ethnography's attention to the coordination or concerting of action that organizes "what happened." Beginning with what is known experientially,

Analyzing Data in Institutional Ethnography

talked about, and in this case what appears in textual data, the actual concerting of social relations is discovered and plotted in. Here the policies, professional practices, and organizational interactions, some of which were formal and textually mediated, and some informal and casual, are shown to be ruling what happened. Little by little, from picking at the pieces of data and writing them up, the full argument is made.

Also exemplified in Bell's analysis is the feature of institutional ethnography that makes it most useful to those who want to make changes to practices that oppress or subordinate. At the centre of the analysis is the standpoint of the subject or subjects who occupy the everyday world as the study problematizes it. Bell puts the child at the centre of the analysis. Nina died and Bell answers the question "how did it happen that Nina's life unfolded as it did?" Bell's analysis makes crucial aspects of Nina's life and death visible and understandable; she explicates the institutional processes that account for what happened. The promise of institutional ethnography is that it maintains the subjectivity of those whose experience is problematized. The findings should explicate that experience and reveal what is happening that is relevant *to them*. In focusing on social relations and the institutional processes organizing them, this form of analysis identifies and then illuminates the actual workings of the setting. From an interest in blame, research interest shifts to analysis of processes and practices. How participants are, or were, involved can be made clear. When it is time to put research findings of this sort into practice, they point to the institutional processes that need to be reviewed and changed.