4 Thinking Symbolically

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND SUMMARY

- Your mind will reflect on ways to condense and consolidate information.
- Your mind will transcend from realistic to symbolic modes of thought.

This chapter explores deeper thinking by reflecting on representational modes for social life. These methods of mind consist of

- Thinking Symbolically
- Thinking Conceptually
- Thinking Abstractly
- Thinking Capsulely
- Thinking Metaphorically
- Thinking Phenomenologically

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss the multifaceted details of symbolic representation or their utilization in, for example, semiotics, but to heighten your awareness of their possible applications for qualitative inquiry.

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Thinking Symbolically

Symbols and their related variants (concepts, metaphors, etc.) are human constructions and condensed attributions of specific associations, memories, and meanings. They consolidate various properties into a single representative entity. The function of a symbol can range from practical utility (e.g., shorthand) to maintenance (of customs and traditions) to aesthetic achievement (in literature and the arts). Symbolizing may be our brain's way of creating order and making meaning from disparate pieces of information. It consolidates various parts into a significant whole. If the symbol is a tangible object, something we can actually see, it is retained longer in our memory store. But the symbol is meaningless without some type of association to it—for example, a memory, an analogy, a person, or a story.

A symbol is an essentialized "something" that represents something else larger. A flag may represent or symbolize a nation. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterwork, *The Scarlet Letter,* Hester Prynne's symbolic "A" on her bosom represents the stigma of adultery. A dangerous carnival ride in a dream may symbolize the dreamer's sense of chaos and lack of control in daily life. Science relies on symbols such as Fe and Cu for iron and copper, respectively, on the periodic table of elements. Mathematics employs numerals and other figures such as β and ≤. And don't forget that words themselves are symbols. Every sentence we read and write is an intricate symbol system of meaning.

Symbolic representations imbue qualitative research. One- or two-word codes symbolize the meanings of larger passages of data. A matrix of qualitative data contains condensed analytic summaries in its cells, representing or symbolizing the patterns and larger phenomena of social life observed during fieldwork. And Angrosino (1994) learned that a developmentally disabled adult male's drawing of a heart (replicated from a logo painted on the side of a city bus) symbolized for the participant not love but aspiration, independence, and status. Riding the bus represented luxurious freedom from walking all the time. The lessons here are that symbolic attributions can be particular to each person, that symbols contain significant and meaningful memories and stories, and that symbolism is contextual. The white rose, for example, means something different depending on whether it's used at a wedding, at a funeral, on Mother's Day, in *The Hunger Games* films, or as a Valentine's Day gift (see Figure 4.1).

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Figure 4.1. The white rose evokes various symbolic meanings.

From technology, the visual icon has become a prominent feature of most people's lives. The "f" of Facebook, the "t" and bird of Twitter, and the "swoosh" of Nike are well recognized globally. They are eye-catching and ubiquitous symbols of something greater. Imagine if your field site or

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even key participants had their own customized icons. How would you represent or symbolize them visually? Which emoticon best symbolizes their general temperament? Your ability to capture the totality of something into an essentialized form is a higher-level analytic if not creative act.

Thinking symbolically is a necessary method of mind that serves several purposes:

- It enhances your ability to distill, condense, and summarize the massive qualitative and quantitative databases you accumulate into more manageable and salient representations.
- It stimulates your creativity by making analogous connections between social life and other domains of experience.
- It encourages you to transcend the reality of your observations to develop more evocative presentational forms.
- It represents and presents the salient features of your research study in more elegant and accessible ways for your readership.
- It permits possible transferability of your specific and local fieldwork observations to more general applications.

The following methods of mind profile other modalities of symbolic representation for qualitative inquiry: *thinking conceptually, abstractly, capsulely* (an invented word), *metaphorically,* and *phenomenologically.*

For your mental Rolodex: As you investigate social life, look for actions, artifacts, roles, routines, rituals, and so on that seem to symbolize something larger, either to you or to your participants. Attribute symbolic properties to core items in your study, or generate original symbolic representations of selected key aspects.

Thinking Conceptually

A **concept** is word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action—a bigger-picture idea beyond the tangible and apparent. A concept is something you literally cannot touch; thus, it suggests an idea rather than an object. For example, a wristwatch is something you can touch, but its higher-level or bigger-picture meaning is the concept of *time.* The "touch test" is a heuristic for transcending the reality of what you can experience with your senses to develop an entity with more magnitude. For example, I can touch a church building, but I cannot touch the concept of *religion*. I can touch and smell a red rose, but I cannot touch (or smell) the concept of *romance.* And I can internally think and feel assured that a good friend will repay a small loan I gave him, but I cannot physically touch my *trust*. A smartphone is a handheld device, but it's also *technology.* McDonald's is not just a fast-food restaurant; its building and golden arches represent a *corporation*. Note that these concepts are nouns.

Concepts also refer to observable actions—processes—and their bigger-picture or broader meanings. For example, you can see me brushing my teeth and gargling with mouthwash, but in the bigger scheme of things I'm *maintaining oral health*. I can watch a pianist pressing down

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white and black keys expertly on a keyboard, but what she's also doing is *making music*. I could take it a step further by saying she's *expressing her artistic sensibilities* or *creating art*. I once bought a $25 gift card for an eight-year-old girl's birthday, and I jokingly mused that I wasn't just buying her a birthday present (the observable action), but *indoctrinating youth into consumer culture* (the concept). For some, visiting Starbucks five mornings a week isn't just about purchasing coffee (an observable action), but a means of *performing a morning ritual, maintaining a workday habit,* or *feeding an addiction.* Note that these concept phrases begin with gerunds—"-ing" words—to describe broader processes at work.

Some use the terms *concept* and *construct* (as nouns) interchangeably, yet to others there are subtle differences between the two. For example, is the human soul a concept or a construct? What about consciousness? To some individuals, the soul and consciousness are constructs because they are ideas or phenomena whose constituent elements cannot be observed and thus proven to exist. I won't split hairs here or develop artificial and fluid differentiations between the two terms. I will simply use *concept* as my term of choice for this modality of thinking. Familiar concepts these days include *emotional labor, fighting terrorism,* and *legislating morality.*

Thinking conceptually in qualitative research means inferring how single or patterned instances of social action, or a field site's architecture (in its broadest sense) and artifacts, represent or symbolize broader, bigger-picture ideas—concepts. We conceptualize in order to transcend the local and particular of what we study to find possible applicability and transferability to more general settings and contexts. We also conceptualize to discover possible hidden meanings and deeper significance embedded in our everyday lives. If I observe kindergarten students lining up for lunch and recess in an elementary school classroom at precisely the same times and in exactly the same ways every day, I am watching actions suggesting the concept of *classroom management* at work, or witnessing a teacher who is conceptually, in the broader social scheme of things as a process, *regimenting young lives* or *instilling obedience.*

Concepts become essential building blocks for theory development. Once the concepts are labeled and defined to represent broader phenomena, they can be integrated into statements that suggest general applicability. For example, sociologist Joel M. Charon (2013) describes the concept of *destructive social conflict* as "governed by anger and hostility. . . . The other side is seen as the enemy, anger and a desire to hurt or destroy others are encouraged, and escalation to violence is common" (p. 323). *Constructive social conflict,* however, is characterized by negotiation and compromise for achievement and change: "People's interests are heard, and real problems are identified and dealt with" (p. 322). These two concepts are brought together to put forth the theory that "*destructive conflict partly arises when constructive conflict is discouraged or ignored and real differences and problems are neither faced nor resolved*" (p. 165, emphasis in original). Charon then explains and illustrates the dynamics of how these conceptual ideas are made manifest in humans, later noting that an important source of destructive conflict is another concept: *social inequality.*

A concept is somewhat comparable to a category's function. It is a label for an assemblage of comparable and patterned actions, reactions, and interactions. But whereas a category could consist of an observable process or something perceived (e.g., rejecting membership, hate

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speech), a concept—like social inequality—is broader in scope and intangible in sensory terms. Concepts are ideas that bring together and embody related realities.

For your mental Rolodex: As you progress through your fieldwork observations and data analyses, think of the bigger picture at work. Explore how you can conceptualize key artifacts and actions to transcend from the local to the general.

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Thinking Abstractly

Most of us are familiar with the term *abstract* as a prefacing summary of a longer work, such as a paragraph-length abstract for a journal article or a one- to two-page abstract for a thesis or dissertation. Others might use the term for a work of modern art that presents an expressionistic interpretation of reality (see Figure 4.2). Still others use the term to refer to something that is not actual but instead a figurative representation (e.g., "I'm referring to *place* in the abstract."). What these different meanings seem to have in common is that an abstract is something apart yet derived from something else.

When you enter someone else's home for the first time, you'll naturally look around at the decor and might find one item in particular that stands out and strikes you as intriguing. It motivates you to ask the owner more about it. This knickknack or piece of art that caught your eye becomes a conversation piece—something that generates a series of questions and answers or a brief discussion about its unique qualities. Perhaps there's an intriguing history and story to its acquisition. Comparably, an abstract in qualitative research functions not just as a prefacing summary, but also as a conversation piece you present to the reader or listener. This conversation piece doesn't contain the entire story of your study, but it consists of one or more items that merit a brief discussion because they hold intriguing properties worth mentioning.

Thinking abstractly in qualitative research develops something separate from some component of your work, such as the field notes or the data analysis process or an idiosyncratic event of some kind. This separate item, be it a written summary, diagram, or narrative vignette, is a small piece that can stand on its own yet originates from the totality of your study. It doesn't necessarily have to summarize; it reveals a facet of the work that holds interest and has something to say. It is not a tangent—it is, for lack of better

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Figure 4.2. *Abstract* can refer to a style of visual art.

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phrases, a significant footnote or an intriguing sidebar or boxed example with a small nugget of rich insight.

As an example, I adapted and dramatized for the stage the fieldwork of homeless youth conducted by Susan and Macklin Finley (1999; M. Finley, 2000) to create the ethnodrama *Street Rat* (Saldaña, Finley, & Finley, 2005). One of the main characters of the ethnography and the play was Roach, a young man with a "bad boy" edge who survived by his street smarts in pre-Katrina New Orleans. I remained faithful to Finley and Finley's data by adapting verbatim dialogue from their sources. Whatever became of the actual Roach was unknown, according to the researchers. But three years later when I taught an arts workshop in Baton Rouge, approximately 75 miles away from New Orleans, I struck up a conversation with the janitor of the complex that hosted the classes. He was in his late twenties or early thirties, appeared to have led a hard life, and had a slightly "badass" edge to him. As I spoke with him, it occurred to me that some of the phrases he used in our conversation ("The cops around here are fuckin' evil," "All's I gotta do is walk through it") were the *exact* same lines of dialogue documented almost a decade earlier by the Finleys in their ethnographic fieldwork and adapted into my ethnodrama. I was stunned by the realization that, serendipitously, I may have been talking with the real Roach.

That was an example of an abstract—a conversation piece that constitutes one small facet of the whole study but not the central part of it. These portraits in miniature are anecdotal, to some, yet can make an impact on the reader's memory because of their novelty and intrigue. Abstracts are brief yet meaningful moments of data that possess alluring properties. Sometimes a small detail, rather than a lengthy experience, captures our attention and stays with us.

For your mental Rolodex: When you complete your study, develop a traditional narrative abstract that summarizes the story of your research and its major findings. But as you progress through your fieldwork, look for interesting conversation pieces that derive from yet stand apart from the study and will make for potentially intriguing discussions.

Thinking Capsulely

A **capsule** contains something; it holds important contents necessary for other functions once the capsule is broken open—e.g., medication, seeds, historic artifacts. The capsule as container usually has its own label that identifies the contents (e.g., "Tamsulosin," "polysaccharide envelope," "1950 Time Capsule"). It is the labeling that is relevant here.

Newspaper headlines not only summarize the primary content of the article, but they also attempt to grab the reader's attention and interest her or him in reading the full story (e.g., "Homeless shelter faces closure"). Captions under pictures identify the individuals and the scene, yet sometimes they provide context to the photo and even subjective or ironic commentary (e.g., "Runaway teenager 'Gina' and her one-year-old child face an uncertain future on the

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streets"). In both cases, headlines and captions make summative statements about something larger. Selected newspapers quoted key phrases from U.S. President Barack Obama's 2009 and 2013 inaugural addresses as their headlines ("Hope Over Fear," "We Are Made for This Moment"), capsulizing the optimistic tone of the administration.

A title for a book, article, magazine, film, TV program, play, poem, song, or other work is an identifying, summarizing, and preferably evocative marker for the total piece. A book title can be as descriptive as *Learning About Spices for Cooking* or as fanciful as *Spice It Up in the Kitchen!* Each of these two books can contain exactly the same narratives and recipes, but each title suggests something different and evokes a particular feeling for what the reading experience may be like. Some titles and their works have become canonized or so popular that many people automatically know or know about the piece: *Romeo and Juliet, The Wizard of Oz, Fifty Shades of Grey.* In some cases, the font style and visual artwork for the title reinforce or support the contents. Men's fitness and bodybuilding magazines, for example, tend to display their titles in large, bold, and often capitalized and slanted letters that look hypermasculine, active, and aggressive to the eye. Black and red are prominent colors throughout these publications.

Thinking capsulely is reflecting on a significant portion of or all the content, meaning, or themes from the data or field experiences and labeling, headlining, captioning, or titling them. The label, headline, caption, or title captures a holistic impression of the larger body and symbolizes the essence of the contents. Sometimes these markers can derive from or serve as categories and themes developed from data analysis. A significant phrase or quote from a participant that seems to sum up the gist of the entire case or study can also function as a caption that works its way into the write-up as a heading or subheading, frontispiece, or subtitle.

For example, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommend giving each day's set of field notes a title that captures the spirit of the experience for the researcher or participants: "Orientation to the Field Site," "Power Plays," "The Day From Hell." Saldaña (2013) recommends that each analytic memo composed by a researcher also be assigned a subtitle that captures the content and general spirit of the analysis: "Patterns: Putting Out Fires," "Themes: New Guard vs. Old Guard." Kuckartz (2014) advises that each interview transcript be truncated into a short case summary—a simple bullet-pointed list of topics and content addressed by the participant—accompanied by a "motto," or a phrase that identifies the interview's overall tone or the participant's general persona, such as "A Rough Day at a Rough Job," "An Optimistic Outlook on Life," or a unique participant quote from the transcript that encapsulates a significant theme or idea ("When You Don't Believe in God, Luck Is the Next Best Thing").

Photos taken at the field site should not only be content-analyzed but evocatively captioned as part of the analysis. A daily blog or journal entry about the fieldwork might also be headlined as if it were a newsletter or newspaper story. Even the title for the entire study can evolve as it progresses and new findings emerge. In fact, *design* the cover page and title of your study as if it were a magazine or book cover's artwork. Create a home page for your study on the web with visual elements that capture the qualities of your field site and data analysis.

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These capsule representations of the inquiry are not just isolated, arts-based exercises. They can be assembled and reviewed for any discernible patterns or themes. They can also be clustered into similar groupings so that noteworthy categories can be detected. Since everyone has her or his own story to tell, consider how different participants might label the same event differently, depending on their individual perspectives. An employee might see a token cost-of-living pay raise after years of dedicated effort as "an insult to my loyalty," while the employer might see the raise as "a fair and equitable reward" given to each member of the staff. Simple, descriptive summaries are fine as starters, but don't be afraid to extend your creativity by assigning attention-grabbing and provocative labels to the phenomena.

For your mental Rolodex: As you progress through your fieldwork, label, headline, caption, and title or subtitle larger chunks of data and experiences into capsules.

Thinking Metaphorically

A **metaphor** is traditionally a literary device, "comparing two things via their similarities and ignoring their differences. . . . Metaphors are thus a partial abstraction" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 281). For example, we might say that a faculty lounge creates an "oasis" for a teacher—a place where he can relax and refresh himself before returning to his classroom and students. The metaphor of a "maelstrom" may be used by an evaluator to suggest the workplace turbulence observed among employees in a large, dysfunctional organization. The home of a continually bickering couple might be called a "war zone" because it is a place of constant conflict and fighting. Even people can be assigned metaphors; perhaps you know someone whose personality reminds you of a "rock" or a "bear." Some might refer to a brave elementary classroom teacher as a "lioness" protecting her "cubs" (children) in her "den" (classroom). Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) classic text, *Metaphors We Live By,* is an indispensable reference for this topic.

Thinking metaphorically, primarily but not exclusively a right-brained skill, in qualitative research attunes you to how participants themselves use metaphors in their everyday interactions and in interviews to describe their experiences. In one of my qualitative survey studies about the lifelong impact of high school theatre on future adulthood (McCammon, Saldaña, Hines, & Omasta, 2012), several former students referred to *theatre as a parent* and *themselves as its developing children.* Survey respondents used phrases such as "born a theatre person" and "it's in your blood," describing how theatre "created me," "made me," "pushed me," "shaped me," "developed me," "made me blossom," or "opened me up." Metaphors can also be formulated by the researcher during fieldwork and analytic work to crystallize observations of phenomena—for example, a university may be perceived as a "business" or "factory machine" assembling student "products."

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You may have noticed that some of the examples above were technically not metaphors but **similes**. We were taught in our literature courses that the literary device of simile uses *like* or *as* for its comparisons. Some of the more famous similes are "You're as cold as ice" and "You lived your life like a candle in the wind." Some may debate whether a metaphor or simile is the better device to use for writing, but they both serve the same purpose in the end: a comparison of something actual to an evocative referent. Either can work well for qualitative inquiry. Other comparable literary devices to consider and employ are *analogy* (in which two different things are noted to resemble or associate with each other), *synecdoche* (in which specific instances are linked to a larger concept), and *metonymy* (in which the whole is represented in terms of one or more of its parts).

Metaphors and similes might arise in your mind as you observe social life, your own personal memories and experiences are triggered, and similarities become apparent—that is, as something reminds you of something else. For example, a field site might look like a "prison" or feel like a "zoo." Metaphors and similes may also formulate in your mind as you're reviewing and analyzing data, particularly during classification tasks. The comparability of a certain cluster of codes (e.g., FAMILIARITY, FRIENDSHIP, SUPPORT, OPENNESS, INTIMACY) could stimulate a category label that is not just summative but metaphoric in nature: *family*. The literary devices also serve to represent the primary or central image of a study that captures the essence of the case or phenomenon. The classroom teacher as *juggler,* forced to keep many balls in the air simultaneously through expert, focused, and continuous action, is one example.

Metaphors and similes can enhance your readers' understanding by making the local and particular more generalizable, or at least comprehensible. The literary devices kick your study up a notch by venturing into the aesthetic realms of analysis. By comparing one thing with another, you engage in synthesis and creativity—two higher functions of cognitive processing. Your representation and presentation of metaphors and similes in your research demonstrate your ability to make connections within and among various domains of social life, so long as the connections and comparisons are logical, plausible, and evocative.

For your mental Rolodex: As you collect data from your participants, make note of how they use metaphors and similes in everyday discourse or during interviews. Also explore how you as the researcher can construct metaphors and similes of the social phenomena you observe. Assign metaphors and similes to key participants.

Thinking Phenomenologically

A phenomenon actually represents something experienced by the senses, but the term has evolved in qualitative inquiry and in its subfield of study, **phenomenology**, to mean the description of lived experiences—the essences and essentials of experiential states, natures of being, and personally significant meanings of concepts such as *belonging, fatherhood, grief,* and

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spirituality. Generally, a form of "mean" can be included in the initiating research question to frame the inquiry: "What does it mean 'to belong'?" "What is the meaning of 'spirituality'?" Sometimes the inquiry can be descriptively driven: "What does 'grief' consist of?" The wording of questions should be considered carefully, for there are subtle differences between the inquiries, "What is a 'father'?" "What does it mean to be a 'father'?" and "What are the lived experiences of 'fatherhood'?" Notice that all of these questions begin with "what." Though not absolutely required, *what* questions seem to harmonize best with the goals of phenomenology. And asking "What is . . . /are . . . " questions takes us deeper into inquiries about states and natures of being.

Phenomenology asks you to set aside (or bracket) your own perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon you're studying and to see it from the participants' points of view. Thus, it calls upon your capacities to decenter your own values system and worldview, to listen to others carefully, and to empathize. It demands the ability to strategically and improvisationally construct finely tuned questions, for it is often difficult for people to articulate clearly what something is or means to them. It also requires your ability to review the database to detect similar experiences across a range of participants in order to construct patterns and, most importantly, the essences and essentials of the phenomenon—the "bottom line," "bare necessities," or "must-haves" that define it. Adams (2011), in his exemplary research of coming out for lesbians and gays, lists seven "conditions" that he constructed from autoethnographic reflections, interviews about others' experiences, and the research literature about the phenomenon of "the closet," or keeping one's nonheterosexuality hidden. One of these conditions summarizes the origins of such secrecy: "The closet begins to form when a person realizes that a marginal and devalued attraction or identity may encounter negative criticism from others *if discussed*" (p. 51, emphasis in original).

Though coding data is certainly one way to closely examine them, phenomenological analysis may be better served through the construction of themes—statements and theoretical constructs that provide a more narrative grounding to the story of lived experience (see *Thinking Thematically* in Chapter 2). Themes permit the articulation of meanings that a single word or short phrase may not be able to embody or evoke. For example, as I approach retirement and reflect on it with colleagues who are also retiring, one commonality to our experiences I've observed is "lasts." But without explication, the word alone does not advance anyone's understanding of what it means to approach retirement. Thus, a thematic statement, or the phrasing of the term as a theoretical construct, better serves the analysis:

- *Theme:* Impending retirement means noting "the last time" work-related tasks are being performed. [The accompanying narrative illustrates types of "lasts" and further describes the related mental and emotional interplay, such as "accomplishment closure" and "nostalgic regret."]
- *Theoretical construct:* Impending retirement as *calibrated finality.* [This construct is composed of the thematic statement above plus other related themes, such as counting the remaining days left to work, feeling unmotivated to work due to feelings of "senioritis," and avoiding commitment to long-term tasks.]

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Thinking phenomenologically in qualitative research is not just for phenomenological studies. It is heightened attunement to the phenomena of what you're exploring. Peel away the complexity and unnecessary details to get at the core meanings of what you're investigating. Rather than composing a lengthy narrative, first bullet-point the essential constituent elements of the "thing" you're studying. What *must* be present for the phenomenon to exist? The phenomenon of *home* doesn't always require a physical dwelling—to some, home is a particular city; to others, it's being in the company of a specific cultural community of people. But what links or connects these various ideas is the central idea: *Home means feeling that you belong somewhere.* Madden (2010), reflecting on the meanings of home, conceptualized and assembled the following list: Home is familiar, parochial, discrete, habitual, permanent, birth, death, and ambivalence—the last referring to "a place I felt the need to leave, and to which I need to return" (pp. 45–46). See Brinkmann (2012); J. A. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009); Van Manen (1990); and Wertz et al. (2011) for more on phenomenological analysis.

For your mental Rolodex: As you progress through your fieldwork, occasionally "press the pause button" on the action you're observing and reflect on the nature of your topic and the states of being and lived experiences of the participants. Think of what it means to be who they are and what they do in daily life. Summarize those meanings into as few bullet-pointed phrases or sentences as possible.

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Closure

Thinking symbolically condenses vast arrays of qualitative data about social life into more elegant forms of representation and presentation. As you progress through fieldwork, keep a sharp eye and ear out for details that seem to hold special significance for the participants or for you as a researcher. When appropriate, assign symbols, concepts, abstracts, capsules, metaphors/similes, and phenomenological interpretations that transcend your data yet remain firmly rooted in them.

Our information-laden world today bombards us with massive amounts of data that our brains cannot fully process. I recall a factoid that the average person encounters approximately 3,000 attempts each day to capture her or his attention through the barrage of print and media advertising, signage, people's voices, and so on. I may not have time to read an entire newspaper, but I can turn the pages quickly to scan its headlines. And I can't review every single article in the numerous journals to which I subscribe, but I'll take the time to read an issue's abstracts to assess whether an article's contents capture my interest and merit a full reading. These days, qualitative researchers must learn how to accompany their stories with economical and attention-arresting symbol systems to better guarantee the notice and readership or viewership of their work, and the retention of ideas in their audience's minds.

Exercises for Thinking Symbolically

1. Brainstorm all the metaphors and similes you've heard about *life* (e.g., "Life is a dream," "Life is like a roller coaster ride," "Life is hell"). Unpack the connotations of each through writing or discussion—for example, what is inferred or suggested by the simile, "Life is like a box of chocolates" (aside from "You never know what you're going to get")?
2. Go through your immediate personal possessions (e.g., backpack, purse, wallet) or your living space, and select three and only three tangible items that you feel best symbolize your life at this particular point in time. Write or explain to another why you selected these three items and what these symbols represent or suggest about you and your values, attitudes, and beliefs. (If you are currently involved in fieldwork, ask your case study subject or a key participant to go through this exercise and interview her or him about the three choices, if appropriate.)
3. Visit a newsstand or bookstore and survey the titles in a section of books, magazines, or other print materials. What thoughts and feelings are evoked within you as you read just the titles? What do you infer that the content and tone of the publication will be like based on its cover art? Scan the publication after you've reflected on its title and cover and assess whether your assumptions and preconceptions may have been correct.

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4. Do this next exercise with a partner. Each of you will develop a list of three simple, realistic actions or things that can be pantomimed for the other. One partner performs the action for the other, and an exchange of ideas is improvisationally given for transcending from the actual to the conceptual. The first conceptual idea offered should be a *gerund-based process* (an "-ing" word or phrase), and the second idea offered should be a *noun or noun phrase*. Here's an example:

Partner 1: [pantomimes eating a slice of pizza]

Partner 2: What are you doing?

Partner 1: I'm eating pizza.

Partner 2: No, you're not, you're fueling your body.

Partner 1: That's right, this is sustenance.

***

Partner 2: [pantomimes brushing her hair]

Partner 1: What are you doing?

Partner 2: I'm brushing my hair.

Partner 1: No, you're not, you're grooming.

Partner 2: That's right, this is impression management.

***

Partner 1: [pantomimes throwing a ball in the air and hitting it with a tennis racket]

Partner 2: What are you doing?

Partner 1: I'm playing tennis.

Partner 2: No, you're not, you're competing.

Partner 1: That's right, this is a friendly challenge.

(Continue for three more exchanges.)

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