Chapter 19  Rubin and Babbie (2008)
Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering the underlying meanings; capturing the “essence” of the observations in primarily narrative form.

Qualitative analysis involves linking theory to research and discovering patterns in a research topic, which can include the following issues:
1. Frequencies—how often
2. Magnitudes—what levels
3. Structures—different types or elements
4. Processes—order among elements of structure
5. Causes—what relationships can be explanatory; reasons for occurrence
6. Consequences—what effects, short and long term

The grounded theory method employs the constant comparative method to compare the data being collected to evolving theory.

Semiotics is often defined as the “science of signs” and emphasizes the importance of signs and symbols in qualitative analysis.

Conversion analysis seeks to uncover the implicit assumptions and structures in social life through an extremely close scrutiny of the way we converse with one another.

Qualitative data processing is both an art and a science involving key tools:
- Coding involves classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data; these coded units must then be “retrieved” into groupings
- Memoing refers to writing notes to oneself and other researchers to describe the coding, sorting, and integrating process
- Concept mapping involves putting concepts in a graphical format; using diagrams to explore relationships in the data

Computer software is increasingly helpful in qualitative data analysis. In addition to word processing, database, and spreadsheet software, dedicated qualitative analysis software such as NUD*IST and Atlas-ti provide excellent tools for analysis.

See handout summarizing qualitative data analysis in the Tutty, Rothery, and Grinnell book on Qualitative Research for Social Workers for a more straightforward approach to qualitative data analysis.