



Christina Silver was a Research Fellow on the project and was responsible for designing the computer-assisted analytic approach. She carried out the analysis together with Rose Lindsay (Principle Investigator) and George Stevenson (Research Fellow), and would like to thank them both for editing this overview to ensure it accurately reflects our process.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Project in brief

The Mass Observation Project (MOP) is a writing project that captures the experiences, thoughts and opinions of everyday people living in Britain. Volunteer writers are invited to respond to three questionnaires per year covering a range of personal, social and political topics. The questionnaires are entirely open-ended, meaning that the volunteers can write about any of the topics they wish in any way they wish to. We analyzed 750 responses to two of these questionnaires. The first in 1990 asked their opinions about different divisions in society, the second in 2008 asked them to recount their personal experiences in the form of a life line. A team of researchers working in different subject-areas and institutions combined quantitative factual information about writers (e.g. their age, gender, educational background, occupation etc.) with their qualitative textual writings. We began by analyzing the responses in the questionnaires without preconceived ideas of how to categorize them, a ‘bottom-up’ approach to data analysis. This gave priority to the perspective of the writers. We mapped out the content of their responses in large general categories, and then conducted more in-depth analysis of these general categories in terms of core themes of interest to the project. We also looked at how their responses differed according to their personal characteristics.

Project in context

The MOP, launched in 1981, is a major repository of longitudinal qualitative social data in Britain. Contributing writers retain their anonymity and therefore write openly and candidly, which provides a rich source of material. These archived materials are underutilized, even though they are collated and made available for researchers, teachers, and anyone wishing to learn from them. One purpose of this project was to illustrate how this valuable resource can be used for high-quality secondary analysis, i.e. for research purposes not initially planned when the MOP was launched. This involved two main streams of work. First, a team of quantitative researchers analyzed writers’ socio-demographic characteristics in order to better understand the extent to which, as a group, they are representative of British volunteering communities and the national population as a whole. Second, a team of qualitative researchers analyzed a sample of writings in order to illustrate the value of the MOP archive as a source of qualitative secondary data that can contribute to an understanding of different aspects of British life over time. In this chapter we focus on the second stream of work which was undertaken using MAXQDA.

The aim of the project was to combine the quantitative data about the contributing writers with the qualitative data, i.e. their writing in response to the questionnaires, and to explore this combined data. There were three objectives: a) to increase knowledge about writer’s socio-demographic characteristics, their writing behaviors, their perceptions about themselves, and the key events in their lives; b) to illustrate how this material can be used to study British social attitudes over time; and c) to widen access to the archive for research purposes by making it easier to select and use the material.

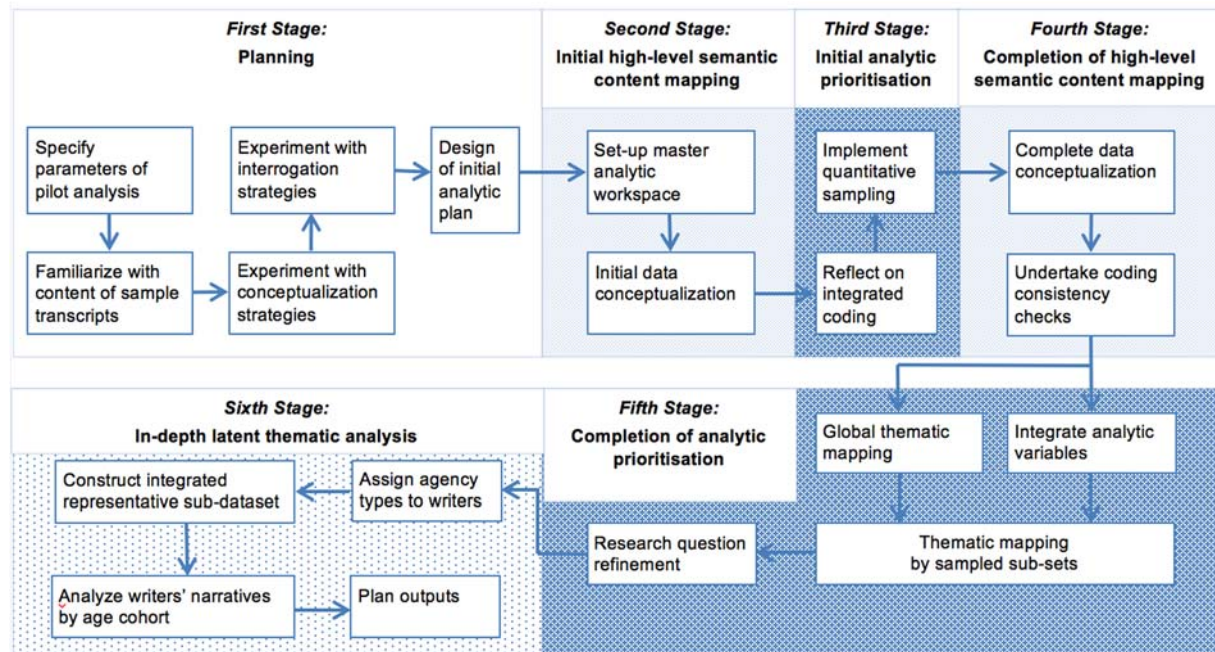
Stakeholders, published works, funders

The formal name of this project is *Defining Mass Observation: Using mixed-methods longitudinal analysis to increase knowledge of the Mass Observation Project’s volunteer writers*. It was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and was a cross-disciplinary collaboration between the Universities of Southampton, Birmingham and Surrey, and the Mass Observation Archive. The project ran for 18 months between January 2015 and August 2016. The project website is at: <https://definingmassobservation.wordpress.com/>

STAGES OF THE ANALYSIS

Overview of the analysis We started by piloting the analysis on a sample of the data in order to ensure we could accomplish our objectives. This led to an initial analytic plan with four stages. As the project unfolded we encountered some unanticipated issues which led us to revise the initial plan twice. For example, it quickly became obvious that we could not analyze all the data within our time frame, so we identified representative sub-samples of data as the focus of the analysis. We also realized the plan had to account for the differing time availability of each team member. These reorganizations led to a revised analytic plan with six stages-in-practice.

- Stages of the analysis**
- **FIRST STAGE: Planning (Phases 1-5)**
Pilot analysis of a sample of the data in order to plan the analysis
 - **SECOND STAGE: Initial high-level semantic content mapping (Phases 6-7)**
Descriptive coding and reflection on the explicit content of the responses.
 - **THIRD STAGE: Initial analytic prioritization (Phases 8-9)**
Identification of potential themes for further analysis and the resulting refinement of the initial objectives
 - **FOURTH STAGE: Completion of high-level semantic content mapping (Phases 10-11)**
Completion of semantic content mapping across the whole data set and checks for coding consistency amongst researchers
 - **FIFTH STAGE: Completion of analytic prioritization (Phases 12-15)**
Identification of patterns across the dataset and within sub-sets and refinement of research questions
 - **SIXTH STAGE: In-depth latent thematic analysis (Phases 16-18)**
In-depth interpretation of the identified themes and generation of results outputs



PHASES IN EACH STAGE OF THE ANALYSIS

FIRST STAGE (Phases 1-5) Phase 1: Specify parameters of pilot analysis	1-A	Select sample of transcribed responses to the SD and LL Directives
	1-B	Set-up analytic workspace
	1-C	Define and create potential concepts to be used for pilot coding
Phase 2: Familiarize with content of sample transcripts (both Directives)	2-A	Familiarize with content of transcripts
	2-B	Reflect on transcript familiarization
	2-C	Create a critical readings template
Phase 3: Experiment with conceptualization strategies to determine if potential concepts are present in Directive responses (both Directives)	3-A	Identify potential and emerging concepts in the transcripts
	3-B	Capture how writers' express their emotions
	3-C	Capture the timing of writers' life events (My Lifeline responses)
	3-D	Capture writers' ranking of professional social status (Social Divisions responses)
	3-E	Reflect on the coding captured so far
Phase 4: Experiment with interrogation strategies to determine if research questions can be answered with Directive responses (both Directives)	4-A	Investigate the co-occurrence of concepts in transcripts
Phase 5: Design analytic plan (both Directives)	5-A	Map out planned stages of analysis
	5-B	Write team working protocols
SECOND STAGE (Phases 6-7) Phase 6: Set-up master analytic workspaces	6-A	Impose team working protocols
	6-B	Create and define scheme for common <i>a priori</i> concepts
	6-C	Duplicate master analytic workspace
	6-D	Add sub-project specific concepts to each analytic workspace
	6-E	Import transcripts into each analytic workspace
	6-F	Group transcripts according to focus of initial coding
Phase 7: Initial data conceptualisation	7-A	Code sub-sample of transcripts to <i>a priori</i> and emerging descriptive concepts
	7-B	Add transcript-derived variables to Writer's spreadsheet
	7-C	Reflect on coding achieved so far
THIRD STAGE (Phases 8-9) Phase 8: Reflect on initial data conceptualisation (both Directives)	8-A	Merge work done in separate My Life Line analytic workspaces
	8-B	Realign My Life Line coding scheme
	8-C	Merge work done in separate My Life Line and Social Divisions analytic workspaces
	8-D	Assess ambiguous concepts (both Directives)
Phase 9: Implement quantitative sampling	9-A	Identify Writer sub-samples according to quantitative sample matching
FOURTH STAGE (Phases 10-11) Phase: 10 Complete data conceptualisation (both Directives)	10-A	Capture how writers' rank the social status of different professions (SD Directive)
	10-B	Develop writer agency types (SD Directive)
	10-C	Capture how writers conceptualise class systems (SD Directive)
	10-D	Identify Writers according to their definitions of self-class identity (SD Directive)
	10-E	Complete coding of sub-sampled transcripts to <i>a priori</i> and emerging descriptive concepts
	10-F	Add transcript-derived variables to Writer's spreadsheet

Phase 11: Undertake code consistency checks (both Directives)	11-A	Merge work done in separate My Life Line analytic workspaces
	11-B	Realign My Life Line coding scheme
	11-C	Check transcript accuracy and format
	11-D	Check consistency of concept application in transcripts
	11-E	Reflect on RQs in context of each Writer's transcript
FIFTH STAGE (Phases 12-15) Phase 12: Global thematic mapping (Social Divisions Directive project)	12-A	Determine thematic importance of main concepts (SD Directive)
	12-B	Investigate the ways writers discuss main concepts (SD Directive)
	12-C	Compare writers' perceptions of class systems with contemporary social science models (SD Directive)
	12-D	Compare writers' self-definitions of class with contemporary social science models (SD Directive)
Phase 13: Integrate analytic variables (My Life Line Directive project)	13-A	Import MLD writers' characteristics
	13-B	Import analytic variables relating to Writers
Phase 14: Thematic Mapping by sampled sub-sets	14-A	Determine thematic importance of main concepts by sampled sub-sets
	14-B	Investigate how writers discuss main concepts by sampled sub-sets (SD Directive)
	14-C	Compare writers' perceptions of class systems with contemporary social science models according to sampled sub-sets (SD Directive)
	14-D	Compare writers' self-definitions of class with contemporary social science models according to sampled sub-sets (SD Directive)
	14-E	Investigate class systems used by self-identifiers of different class groupings (SDD)
Phase 15: Research Question refinement	15-A	<i>Accomplished outside MAXQDA</i>
SIXTH STAGE (Phases 16-18) Phase 16: Assign agency types to writers Phase 17: Construct integrated representative sub-dataset	16-A	Assign agency types to writers
	17-A	Combine Directive databases
	17-B	Identify combined serial responders
	17-C	Allocate age-cohort categories
	17-D	Create integrated database
Phase 18: Analyse writers narratives by agency types and age-cohorts (both Directives)	18-A	Collate evidence of agency types
	18-B	Check consistency of agency categorisation (within separate Life Line analyst projects)