

## Dataset Metadata

Metadata Field	To be completed by Editorial
Dataset title	A Psychosocial Approach to Analysing Interviews: Combining Free Association and Thematic Coding
Final zip file name	dataset-free-association-aging
Author/contributor(s)	Bethany Morgan Brett
SMART author ID(s)	743613
Contracts/Royalties	Royalty Bearing: No Advances Due: No Series / Consulting Editor: No
Content type	Qualitative
Exemplar type (qual only)	Text
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Abstract	This dataset enables the learner to analyse interview data on the topic of ageing using a combination of thematic analysis and psychosocial free association. A thematic approach involves a considered process of careful reading and re-reading of the data, in order to identify patterns and themes in the data. A psychosocial critique of this thematic coding, however, suggests that this fragments and disconnects the data from its original context, and also misses out a more affective reading of the data. Therefore, this dataset shows the reader how to create themes, but also how to consider the data as a whole, emphasising the importance of reflecting upon the thoughts and feelings that are evoked when reading the transcripts. The data are extracted from a PhD project, by Dr Bethany Morgan Brett from The University of Essex, entitled " <i>The Negotiation of Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing.</i> " The dataset comprises three interview extracts and a Student Guide to using them and a Teaching Guide.
Dataset tab text	You can view and download the data exemplar(s) in this tab.
Teaching and Learning Material tab text	In this tab you will find guides on using this dataset. The Teaching Guide is designed for Faculty who are teaching research methods and statistics, with suggestions on how to use the dataset in lab exercises, in homework assignments, and as exam questions. The Student Guide introduces the method for students and can be used in teaching to provide students with an introductory overview of the method or test.
Teaching Guide text	This dataset enables the learner to analyse interview data on the topic of ageing using a combination of thematic analysis and psychosocial free association. A thematic approach involves a considered process of careful

	<p>reading and re-reading of the data, in order to identify patterns and themes in the data. A psychosocial critique of this thematic coding, however, suggests that this fragments and disconnects the data from its original context, and also misses out a more affective reading of the data. Therefore, this dataset shows the reader how to create themes, but also how to consider the data as a whole, emphasising the importance of reflecting upon the thoughts and feelings that are evoked when reading the transcripts. The data are extracted from a PhD project, by Dr Bethany Morgan Brett from The University of Essex, entitled "<i>The Negotiation of Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing.</i>" Full details about the dataset and more information about the original dataset can be found on the "Datasets Info" tab.</p> <p>This dataset and the accompanying guides can be used in a classroom or can form the basis of an exam question or homework exercise. The data file is accompanied by a Student Guide, which explains the method and includes a worked example, and finishes with exercises and discussion questions that the student can do on their own. The Student Guide can be shared with students by email using the "Share" button, can be embedded into your Learning Management System or Virtual Learning Environment, or can be downloaded and printed to use in the classroom.</p>
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Author/contributor bio(s)		In SMART
Discipline(s)	i.e. Those disciplines covered by dataset and guides. A dataset may have multiple subject areas.	Sociology Psychology
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### About This Dataset info

Meta Data Field	Description/explanation	To be completed by Contributor
Data source citation		SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008 <a href="https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035">https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035</a>
Full title of originating dataset		Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing
Data author(s) and affiliations		Dr. Bethany Morgan Brett University of East London
Dataset source website address		<a href="https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035">https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035</a>
First publication date		2011
Data Universe		National  22 British Born Men and Women aged between 39 and 58 years old
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		PTA-031-2004-00144
Sample/sampling procedures	If readily available	Purposive selection/case studies; Volunteer sample; Convenience sample  Snowballing. Followed a criteria of ensuring equal numbers of men and women
Weighting	If appropriate and available	N/A
Data collection dates		2006–2008
Time frame of analysis		Cross-sectional (one-time) study
Unit of analysis	Technical term for who or what is being studied	Individuals
Location covered by data	Location from which the data was gathered	United Kingdom
Other sources	If dataset is drawn from other secondary sources	
Links to SRM content		
List of variables	Where available, practical and accessible	
Abbreviations, conventions or notation devices		

## Data Exemplar

**Data collected by:** Dr. Bethany Morgan Brett

The data reproduced here comprise an example of how I wrote up a free association narrative in this project, an extract from the interview schedule I used in the second interviews, and three interview transcript extracts looking at the specific section of the interviews that focus on the participants' definitions of midlife. All data have been fully anonymised, and I have obtained permission to share these data for teaching purposes.

**Example Extract: Free Association Narrative Analysis**

(Some biographical details have been altered to maintain anonymity)

Fifty-six-year-old Joanne offered an interesting case study of one woman who had made significant changes to her life in midlife. She had been forced to reassess what she was doing with her life because her husband left her when she was in her late forties. At the time of the interview, she was happily married to her second husband and was the mother of two sons. The dynamics of her interview were especially interesting to analyse and revealing about Joanne's attitude towards ageing and her attitude towards her life changes. I found her to be quite intimidating, and she appeared to want to take control of the interview. I found her interview very uncomfortable and the resulting data equally uncomfortable to analyse. I found myself not wanting to transcribe her words and even more reluctant to listen to the audio material again. She came across as a strong woman, with confidence that verged on arrogance. This was compounded by her body language, as she sat with her legs pointing at me on a chair between us. She drank wine and smoked throughout the interview, blowing her smoke in my direction, and on one occasion, she sat down for dinner at the same time as I had been scheduled to arrive, eating without apology. Prior to the interview, I wanted to write down some contact details that she was giving me regarding another matter, but she snatched the pen from me and insisted on writing things down for me – demonstrating rather dominant behaviour and an attempt to gain control. She seemed used to being in control; she later revealed “I've never really been very happy with authority,” which was interesting to reflect upon given the power dynamics in the interview. She seemed keen to impress me by introducing sociological and psychological theories that she had learnt in her own studies, in order to explain experiences from her life and how she felt about them. She frequently framed her life story around a theoretical structure. She kept saying things like “I ask questions like this at work.” This made me more nervous though because the more she said things like that, the more I felt she was monitoring my performance. I felt there was a strong element of competitiveness and at times I definitely felt I was losing the competition. Whereas some women I interviewed felt almost insecure in themselves in my presence (in my role as a university student), sometimes describing themselves, for example, as “thick,” Joanne's insecurities played out in a more challenging way with me. She had a strong view about the way she wanted her life story to be told – she tended to compartmentalise the various stages of her life. She seemed to be protecting the life that she had created for herself over the last 10 years. She repeatedly told me that she was “reconciled” and even commented on

her own overuse of the word, saying “what’s all that about with the reconciliation thing?” I started to think that she was not as reconciled as she was making herself believe, and I certainly did not feel that she was emotionally reconciled. It was a case of “the lady doth protest too much” and her insistence perhaps revealed the opposite was true. Following her divorce twelve years ago, she was left as a single mother of two sons with no money and nowhere to live. In her marriage, she had lived almost as a “trophy wife.” She later remarried. She went on to gain a degree and start a new and successful career. She bought a house with her new husband and raised her children well. She described her achievements,

I think it was quite remarkable really, in a sense ... not that that it’s remarkable because I’m a clever person, but I think um I feel a huge sense of achievement in the face of adversity, I dragged myself out of that and scabbled together a career and sort of weathered all of that and moved on.

Having come from a situation where she felt she had underachieved and was viewed solely in terms of her appearance and status rather than for her true personality or intelligence, it is now those latter achievements of which I would argue she is so protective and defensive. She says it is not because she was a “clever person,” but because she had the strength of character to fight. She is someone who lived out earlier dreams of being wealthy and beautiful but found that, when those dreams were shattered by her divorce; that they did not actually satisfy her desires and she needed to create new dreams and ambitions for herself.

## Interview Schedule Extract

Extract from interview Schedule taken from the collection SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008.

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035>

### *Ages*

How did you feel about turning 30/40/50 years old?

- How did you celebrate your birthday?
- What conscious changes have you made to your life, since you turned 30/40/50?
- What changes do you feel have happened since you turned 30/40/50?

### *Experience of ageing:*

How do you feel about being the age you are now?

- How old do you feel?
- What was your favourite age and why?
- At what age were you most happy/least happy and why?
- Is there anything you begin to think you should not or cannot do because of your age?
- Do people ever treat you differently?
- What age group of people do you feel most comfortable with?
- What do you like and dislike about being your age at the moment?

*Do you consider yourself to be “middle aged”?*

If so,

- What is middle age and what makes you feel middle aged?
- Was there a specific moment of realisation that you were middle aged?
- What characteristics do you associate with middle age?

If not,

- When do you think middle age begins?

*Midlife crisis:*

- Do you think there is such a thing as a midlife crisis, if so what is it?
- Do you feel that you have experienced or are experiencing a midlife crisis?

### *Physical Changes in Midlife*

*Health:*

Would you say you were health conscious?

- How good, would you say, your health is now?
- Have you noticed any health changes in the last five years?
- Do you worry about your health?
- Do you exercise?
- Do you smoke?
- How healthily do you eat?

Have you ever been seriously ill (physically or mentally)?

- How far do you feel these changes affect the way other people see you or act towards you? Can you think of a specific experience?

If you have a partner, what changes have you noticed in them in the last five years?

- How have these changes impacted upon your relationship?

*Menopause:*

Women...

Have you experienced the menopause?

- How old were you when the menopause began?
- What kind of physical symptoms did you experience?
- Did it affect the way you felt about yourself?
- Has it affected your relationship with your partner in any way?

Men...

Do you think there is such a thing as a male menopause?

- Has your wife been through the menopause?
- How did you feel about your wife's menopause?

*Physical appearance:*

What physical changes in appearance have you noticed in your body, as you have got older?

- How far do you feel these changes have affected you?
- How far do you feel these changes affect the way other people see you or act towards you? Can you think of a specific experience?
- How happy are you with the way that you look?
- Is age a factor in how you feel about your appearance?
- What do you think about clothing fashion?

## **Data Exemplar One: Interview With Janet**

Edited extract from Janet's interview taken from the collection SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife:

Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008.

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035>

**Pseudonym:** Janet

**Number of interviews in transcript:** 2

**Date of interview:** 2007

**Location:** At her house

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 40

**Marital status:** Married

**Children:** 3 boys, aged 16, 14, and 9.

**Parents:** Dad died recently. Mum does not need care

**Grandchildren:** None

**Class Category (based on HoH):** D

**Bethany:** At the age of 40, is there anything that you should not or could not do because of your age?

**Janet:** I don't think I could bungee jump. Can't do or wouldn't do? There is lots of things that I wouldn't do now that I used to do when I was younger, oh like daredevil stuff and I mean going to the pic, I was going to say the pictures then, no going to the fair, I might go on some things, but like going back a couple of years ago that wouldn't have bothered me. I wouldn't think twice, but now I probably would be like "Ooh I am not going on that," I know if I do go on it I will have a buzz and I will really enjoy it but no I wouldn't do that now I wouldn't think. I don't think there is a great deal, not off the top of my head that I can think about. There is probably a lot of things I can't do, but [laughs] perhaps I used to be able to do, um jump on a trampoline, that is one of my main things, I used to love the trampoline, oh, what else, there is probably quite a few, that is one that sticks in my mind.

**Bethany:** Do you think other people's attitudes towards you have changed as you have got older?

**Janet:** I suppose yes, you know, especially with relatives then, you are beginning to feel as that you are talking on their level, you know because you are a grown up now, you are not a child now, you are a grown up and I do find that strange sometimes you know and you are sitting there and you are having an adult conversation with them, you know you are not little anymore.

**Bethany:** When did you start feeling like a grown up?

**Janet:** Uh, oh, probably about 40.

**Bethany:** 40? (Laughs)

**Janet:** Don't we all feel it at about that age! (laughs)

**Bethany:** So you feel more grown up just recently?

**Janet:** Probably in the last 10 years, you know definitely, you know people listen to you and think and they don't sort of look down.

**Bethany:** The term middle age, do you consider yourself to be middle aged?

**Janet:** I don't really know what you can class middle aged to be honest because you know if people are living until their 90s middle age then is 45 because it is half way really but no, I mean I don't see 60 as old and again I think that comes down to a very individual thing because you could have one person there who is 60 who could be quite young in herself and the way she looks and the way she dresses and everything else, and you could have another person there who is bent over, crippled up, and don't do anything with themselves. They look two different ages you know, so I don't really, I don't use age as a concept very often I find it hard when people say oh how old would you say I am? God, I don't know the answer to that one. I would probably be wrong and in the wrong direction as well.

**Bethany:** Do you consider yourself to be middle aged?

**Janet:** No, no, no, I still think I'm 20. [laugh]

**Bethany:** And do you think there is such a thing as a midlife crisis?

**Janet:** Possibly yeah, I think with some people yes. And I think that just comes down to people looking for either something that isn't there and never will be there or if it is there, it is only there for a short space of time because once you come to know it, you fall back into the same circle that you [...] it's like lots of relationships that people, that perhaps you know, and you think ooh God, really shocked and possibly have split up and then you find out that she has got somebody else or he has got somebody else because they think the grass is greener on the other side and it is not going to be greener on the other side for very long because once you become part of them like you have the other relationship, once you know all the bits and pieces and all the gory details and it is all going to become the same thing so what do you do, replace then every 10 years? ... I just think some people are more susceptible to midlife crises than other people.

**Bethany:** Do you think you have experienced a midlife crisis?

**Janet:** I wouldn't say midlife crisis, but I think we have all at some stage, we would all be lying if we said it never happened, but I do think at some stage when you are married you do wish for something different in some shape or form and wish this was better and wish that was better, if I had stayed with that person would my life have been better or wouldn't it? But there is no way of answering it you know unless you are that way inclined you can run away from things and running away isn't the answer, you commit yourself to somebody unless and it does happen I know, they fall out of love. I always think there is a reason behind that and people I can

understand people breaking their relationships up because of violence or things like that, I can totally agree with that sort of thing, but I think these days I think the youngsters actually don't know what it is to commit yourself to something and they don't want to try, they don't want to work it out. I mean God there have been loads of times when I could have just walked out that door and never came back but at the end of the day, what are you going to go to? The same bloody thing, see you have got to sit down and you have got to work it all out and it is hard, being married isn't easy, if anybody says it is they are lying, but that is all part of it, it is working through together you know.

**Bethany:** How do you think your appearance has changed as you have got older?

**Janet:** Everything has travelled south. I don't think my face is too bad. I don't think I am ready for a face life yet, not that I'd have one, um, yes I, your body I think does change and I am getting shorter, that is very unnerving, why do you grow to shrink? [laugh] I hope I don't get any shorter though because my bum will be dragging on the floor [laugh], yeah I think there are lots of changes, um you know if you come down to it, health wise and you know cosmetic then, if you want to call it cosmetic and I mean my shape has altered, but then that could be to do with because I am exercising as well now but perhaps and for the better, well I like to think it is for the better anyway. I could be with doing a stone lighter, but I think that is middle aged spread [laugh] not a middle aged crisis, uh and obviously I think the biggest thing of all that I have noticed over the last few years is I can't push myself so much as I used to you know if I had things to do I'd set myself a goal and I would have to do them but I have got to the stage now when I am tired, I'm tired, I can't push myself anymore so bugger it, leave it, I will do it tomorrow.

**Bethany:** Are you content with the way you look?

**Janet:** No, I would like to be thinner, that's probably about all. I am quite happy with everything else, I am alright with everything else I would just like to be thinner, that's all and I could have a tummy tuck. I would like a tummy tuck, although {Jack} did ask me last year how much would it cost, 'if it means that much to you' and half of me wants to and the other half is afraid and making sure I go to the right place, but I don't think I can go down that road yet.

**Bethany:** But that is something you have quite seriously considered.

**Janet:** Yes, I would because I had, {Arthur} was a caesarean and it has left me with quite a bit of what they call a jelly belly and it has a lip, an apron that hangs and you can't do nothing about

it no matter how much you exercise it doesn't do anything because the muscle is dead and you can't reform it, so it needs to just come off. I have thought about it myself, just doing it myself, get the scissors out and just cutting it off

**Bethany:** Oh you don't want to do that [laugh]

[...]

**Bethany:** Ok, last question on this, how much attention do you pay to fashion?

**Janet:** I like, I think about what I wear lots and I like to look nice in my own way and I can't afford to look the way I would love to look. I have to be realistic I suppose, I have got a family, my money goes on them rather than myself and so it is cheap and cheerful and I do like to follow fashion to a certain extent. I am not overboard on some of the things you see and you think oh god alive, but at the same time I have to think I am 40 plus now and you have got to be careful about what you wear, you know you don't want to be mutton dressed as lamb and all that as they say.

**Bethany:** What wouldn't you wear?

**Janet:** Oh God I wouldn't wear big blooming high heels with platforms on them because I think oh, and I couldn't walk in them for one I would break my leg. I wouldn't wear that. I suppose if I went into a shop I would say oh yes, I would know instinctively as soon as I walk in what things I like and I know I would wear and would look nice in and so but until you go in and there are lots of things I wouldn't wear. I wouldn't wear hipsters because my belly would hang over the top. But I don't see why I should mind because the youngsters don't seem to care about that. They are bigger than me and they are wearing hipsters and their love handles are hanging over, their bellies are hanging over and their bums are sticking out of them and I think Oh my god if I had a daughter who went out looking like that I would shoot her. And they just don't seem to care what they look like and when they bend over they've got all their thongs, thongs, oh I wouldn't wear a thong, I wouldn't, I don't think there is anything nice about them at all. Ughh, they bend over and they have their thongs showing and oh I don't like it. I don't care how young they are or slim I don't like it. I am not a prude at all, but I just think it is tacky. It makes them look like a slapper. They even put diamonds on them now so that you can show them. For goodness sake! We will be wearing them on the outside [laugh]. Dear, dear.

## **Data Exemplar Two: Interview With Lisa**

Edited extract from Lisa's interview taken from the collection SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008, <https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035>

**Pseudonym:** Lisa

**Number of interviews in transcript:** 3

**Date of interview:** 2007

**Location:** Her home

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 45

**Marital status:** Married

**Children:** Two children, boy (24) and girl (19). Both have already left home for university, but have both returned

**Parents:** Dad died recently. Mum does not need care

**Grandchildren:** None

**Class Category (based on HoH):** C2

**Bethany:** Is there anything you should not or could not do because of your age?

**Lisa:** No I don't think so. Um, I don't think so, years ago I suppose when you got to a certain age it was we should do this and we shouldn't do that, but it doesn't matter today, people are a lot fitter than they used to and um, I think people are generally younger than their age. I probably wouldn't do any extreme sports but I don't think I would have done bungee jumping anyway, I don't think I would have the courage for that. But no I don't think there is anything really.

**Bethany:** And would you consider yourself to be middle aged?

**Lisa:** I suppose so yeah. Uh, I don't really know what is middle age, I have often wondered that when they used to say what is it three score and ten and that's 70 and so half way through that is 35 and so I am past 35 so I must be middle aged yeah, yes, not old, but I am not young, I am not young but yeah I suppose it is middle age isn't it?

**Bethany:** So do you think it goes by ages? What do you think is middle aged?

**Lisa:** I see what you mean, if it goes by actual age, instead of years then I suppose it is middle age, but um, I don't know maybe perhaps some people, because you are not young and you are not old you are in between so it has got to be, um and some people, some people are old at 60 aren't they? And some people are not old at 80, so there are 80-year-old ladies hair that I do –

talking about the “old people” – and I think blimey you are 80 odd and yeah it is old, but nobody wants to be do they, that tickles me, and they say ‘oh I am not going to the old age centre’ and ‘I am not ready for that’ and I think well if you are not ready at 80 you might not be there when you are 90 and you wont be able to go so you are missing out on a whole section of bingo and trips out and things, that’s quite funny really.

**Bethany:** What characteristics would you associate with middle age?

**Lisa:** Um, probably people’s attitudes are different today, whereas when the kids grew up and left home and people very often settled in their easy chair and they had less things to do, less cooking, less cleaning, less looking after the kids where I think people would go out on an adventure, they would pack up and go travelling or go out more and find something else, and some people do fostering and some people do charity work and yes, I think people’s attitudes have changed.

**Bethany:** And with middle age, where would you say were the age brackets around it?

**Lisa:** Oh I don’t know, I really don’t know I never thought about it, again as I say in years it is probably 40 to 60 I suppose. But I think in everyday life it is different with different people and you don’t really draw a line under one and not another and one just goes into the next and you don’t really think about these things. It is interesting that you say that at 40 you became a grown up, although I didn’t realise at the time and things like when you have got a fear of doing something and now you think oh pull yourself together I am 40 years old, for God’s sake just do it you know and I have never thought like that before 40, no, so it must have some bearing.

**Bethany:** Do you think there is such a thing as a midlife crisis?

**Lisa:** Yes, yes, I think that um, that a lot of it is to do with the children growing up and leaving home and suddenly it might be just husband and wife left at home and you have got more time on your hands and you don’t quite know how to fill it and it does put people into a panic and I think with women it coincides with the menopausal years as well so you are already dealing with that without the trauma of the children having left and you need to fill your time because if you don’t, I am sure this is when men go out and buy sports cars and possibly because kids have left and they have got more money in their pocket now so they are able to do it. It is something they have always wanted to do and couldn’t afford to do it, and then suddenly they can afford it, so they do get that, and I think it is probably a prime time for divorcing when people go off with other people and I think there is, and like I say with women it is definitely, and they know it is

hormonal but I definitely think that plays a part with men as well, because it stands to reason that girls and boys go through puberty at the beginning of it all, so why should a man not change the same as a woman. And I think men find it harder to come to terms with because they are not told that and they don't realise that these changes are natural and they panic about it and I am sure they would be better if they spoke about it more.

### **Data Exemplar Three: Interview With Matthew**

Edited extract from Matthew's interview taken from the collection SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008,  
<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035>

**Pseudonym:** Matthew

**Number of interviews in transcript:** 2

**Date of interview:** 23 August 2007 (2–4 p.m.)

**Location:** At his work's office

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** 55

**Marital status:** Married

**Children:** Two children in their 20s. Both have left home

**Parents:** Both parents alive – but not close emotionally or geographically

**Grandchildren:** None

**Class Category (based on HoH):** B

**Bethany:** Is there anything that you begin to think that you should not or could not do because of your age. Is there anything that you shouldn't or couldn't do?

**Matthew:** I shouldn't wear speedos ... (both laugh) but that doesn't matter old you are, does it? My children and my kind of you know the ones who cringe at the sort of sloppiness of the way that I dress I mean I wonder sometimes I don't ... you know there are some things that I wouldn't wear, but that's partly because I think they look bloody stupid. You know, things like trousers around your hips with your Calvin Klein's showing, I just think that's pathetic and I wouldn't want piercings. I think they wouldn't be appropriate but I just wouldn't want them. I just think they're a part of popular culture that I think is unattractive really. Ears are fine, even, you know in women, a little nose thing, but I don't get it on men and I don't get these stud things and I don't get it on tongues and I don't get it on lips. It's just yuck ... What else? And my kids

certainly tell me that I shouldn't dance, because that was probably always true as well. You know at family weddings and stuff like that. It's embarrassing to have your parents pretending that they can still get down and boogie. I've always been a bit uncoordinated anyway. That's why I do running rather than ... um ... any other things that I'm beginning to think that I ought not to be doing? No I think I ought to do more mountain marathons and ought probably to have a go at doing stuff like bungee jumping and real adventure stuff but I don't really ... I'm not that keen on leaping off bridges and climbing high enough to hurt yourself when you fall, but I think it would be nice to have done that and to feel that you could, I feel I could do it physically but not in my head. I'm a bit nervous about heights. But no there's not ... what other kind of things? No I can't think of anything that I enjoy doing and have done and think that I ought not to be doing just because I'm 55. I mean I suppose there mainly you don't want to be seen as mutton dressed up as lamb so but it's mainly because I don't relate particularly to the fashion but I would hate to feel that I couldn't wear jeans. I mean a generation ago people wouldn't but nowadays ... I wouldn't do gel in my hair (both laugh). Because when you see people my age that are like that, I do find that a bit sad that people are I don't know trying that overtly to hold on to something. Something I read the other day that somebody said that they don't want people to think that they're 21 they just want them to think that they're good for their age, if they're you know 55 and accept that you are 55 but you still want ... I mean I'm a bit vain I suppose, not in the sort of men's health or style sort of way, but I don't want a fat gut and I don't want to look a physical wreck but that's about as far as my vanity runs.

**Bethany:** You take care of your body?

**Matthew:** Yeah, I want to be able to wear beachwear and not look like an out of condition middle-aged person. So ...

**Bethany:** What do you like most about your age?

**Matthew:** The prospect of retirement getting closer. Um, the fact that it is only quite really recently that I felt we can afford to go on multiple holidays a year and I mean we run an old car that's nearly a quarter million miles on the clock and it's a bit rusty but I like the feeling that if I really wanted to I could go out and buy a decent car. I like the financial, relative financial security and not penny pinching. And I like having grown up kids. I think ... I mean I regret that they are grown up but I like that they're grown up. It was lovely when they were younger but they are nice to have, you like to think that you're friends with your kids. I mean, it's a difficult

one. And, yeah I like to be able to afford to belong to a gym and so those things I quite like about my age. It's mainly the physical deterioration that I keep on about that is the big bug bare really. If only you could keep the physical vigour that you had when you were, I don't know, even 40. I didn't really start to notice going downhill until 10 years ago. So if you could keep that physical vigour of late youth, early middle life, even if you only live to 85 that will be perfect. You know, fit old age, do everything that you wanted to and then suddenly overnight, no with a week's notice, you died in your sleep. That would be great. I could live with that.

**Bethany:** So what are the main physical changes in your body that you've noticed in the last say ten years?

**Matthew:** Well it's I can't run as fast. I feel as though I'm running as fast but I'm not. I don't race very often but when I do I know that it's only in my head that I still run 10k in 40 minutes and six minute miles and that I can do a marathon in under three hours. I realise that actually in reality I couldn't. I tell myself that if only I had the time to train I could get it back up to that kind of level. I've got lumps, not very big, but you can see there's one there and I've got a couple here and there. It's a family trait. I think they're lipomas, they're kind of benign. Just little lumps of fat really and I'm not terrible keen on them. The main thing is the aches and pains in my joints. I'm very lucky really because I can still run mountain marathons and cycle a long way and do pretty much all the things that I want. Yeah mainly hips and knees um and other general muscular skeletal aches and pains. I don't notice, well I seem to wake up in the morning with a headache and that seems to happen irrespective of whether we've shared a bottle of wine the night before. So I don't think I'm so good at keeping my hydration levels up. I've never been a great one for drinking lots of you know six glasses of water a day and that sort of thing, which I don't know whether I notice it more or it's always been there and I've forgotten. Other physical deteriorations? I don't know ...

**Bethany:** Physical changes ...

**Matthew:** Okay, but none of them are any better I have to say. Just the loose skin and the wrinkles and the collagen cross-linking and all that stuff which I notice. Obviously I've gone a bit grey, but I've been lucky. I've always had quite a high receding hairline but I don't think it's changed much and my dad's got a full head of hair. I suppose I worry, not all the time, but I'm slightly concerned about receding gums and leaving teeth that our dentist assures me for my age they are all okay and I think as far as I'm aware both my parents have got their own teeth, so that

must be a good sign. Um ... other things. I'm getting shorter, I think. Centimetres, which is a bit worrying because if I live to 90 I shall disappear completely into my shoes, which would be a bit awkward. What else? I mean I still ... I've been lucky I haven't really had any serious health problems apart from that heart thing which seems to be resolved and so I mean I think I can still you know I usually volunteer to be a subject in my own student's projects. If they are doing something to do with endurance then I usually compare well with most of the students, because they are unfit rather than I am super fit! But then there is no doubt that there has been a deterioration, it's not had much impact on what I can do, it just changes the speed with which I can do and how frequently and so on.

**Bethany:** Are you happy with the way that you look?

**Matthew:** I'm alright. Yeah, I mean for my age. Um ... Yeah I suppose so. I'd like smaller ears (laughter). They're a bit flappy, Prince Charles sort of ears and apparently that's one thing that never stops growing, so again by the time I'm 90 I'll look like Dumbo. A very small Dumbo. The thing is the way that you look you edit it, don't you. I mean, I was a bit shocked about a year ago because as part of a project for {department} I'm not sure which, made a promotional DVD and I did a talking heads thing and I was quite amazed by how much sort of flappy skin there is. They do say that the first thing to go is your jaw line supposedly. I've never had much of a jaw line anyway but just the kind of break and sagginess really which I'm not all that bothered by but what the hell. It could be a lot worse. I'm not about to invest in plastic surgery.

**Bethany:** Would you ever consider anything like that?

**Matthew:** I don't think so, no. I mean if I really did get jowly, very jowly like one or two people I know that look like turkeys, you know, if you could take out a bit of that skin, then I might be tempted. I'd be much more tempted to, if I was paying for anything, I'd pay for hip replacements, anything to keep me going for a few years longer, but the appearance things no I suppose I'd like to think could be worse. Fortunately I don't have to look at myself though very often, but I'm reasonably okay with self image.

**Bethany:** Have there been any kind of, you know, like the DVD moment and seeing yourself on that. Sometimes little things can, you know, make you notice something about yourself. Have there been any other incidents like that?

**Matthew:** Yeah, the only thing that I can really think of. Yeah I think that DVD moment was definitely ... oh the other change is pattern of hair growth. You know, I don't like having hairy

shoulders and hairy back and all that stuff. I don't like that at all. So I have to confess that I have even waxed, mean all over or anything. But like before we go on holiday I will get {Anne} to strip the hairs off my shoulders and back. I don't like that at all. I've never been a very hirsute sort of person, kind of matt of chest hair or anything like that. I just don't like it.

**Bethany:** Would you wax the whole upper body or is it just the back and shoulders?

**Matthew:** Just the back and shoulders. I can't see any other bits that need waxing.

**Bethany:** Laughs. I think we should leave that there!!

## Student Guide

### Introduction

This dataset will enable you to analyse qualitative psychosocial data on the topic of ageing using a combination of a thematic analysis and a psychosocial free association approach. Thematic analysis is a widely used form of qualitative data analysis and it involves identifying patterns and themes in the data. It involves a considered process of careful reading and re-reading of the data, as well as systematic approach to identifying and coding themes. A psychosocial critique of thematic coding, however, suggests that this process fragments and disconnects the data from its original context and also misses out a more affective reading of the data. This dataset demonstrates how to identify themes and create codes, but also asks you to consider the data as a whole, thinking about the links and connections between these themes. It also emphasises the importance of reflecting upon the thoughts and feelings that are evoked when analysing your data.

The data comprise three interview transcript extracts that have been extracted from a PhD project, by Dr Bethany Morgan Brett from The University of Essex, entitled "*The Negotiation of Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing.*" The original aims of the project were to offer a new perspective on the experience of midlife, by exploring the ways in which psychic defences operate at this period of the life course in order to deal with age-related anxieties. Three key themes were developed: (1) the ageing body, (2) intergenerational relationships, particularly around the ageing and death of parents, and (3) how life dreams were reviewed at this period of the life course.

This dataset Student Guide will take you step-by-step through the analytic process and indicate ways in which you can practice these approaches on the accompanying transcripts.

## Interviewing: Using a Psychosocial Approach

My research into the psychosocial experience of ageing and specifically “midlife” was influenced by Hollway and Jefferson’s approach to interviewing, which was outlined in their book *Doing Qualitative Research Differently* (2000 1st edition, 2013 2nd edition). Here, they suggested that the incorporation of psychoanalysis into social research methods required a very specific interview technique and, importantly, new ways of analysing the information gathered. They termed this the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) Method. This method requires two interviews (firstly a free association interview and secondly a semi-structured interview) with each participant, which are conducted within a relatively short time frame. Below, I outline the method, and then go on to explain the importance of observing the psychodynamics that are at play within the interview encounter, and how we can use our own emotional responses as an interviewer as a tool to understanding the unconscious thoughts of the other.

### The Free Association Narrative Interview Method

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advocate conducting two interviews with each participant, ideally around a week apart from one another. The first interview should involve an element of free association and allow for an interviewee’s story to emerge as much as possible in his or her own words with minimal intervention from the interviewer, although some gentle guidance and encouragement may be offered in order to maintain the narrative flow. This first interview can be guided by very few open questions (Hollway and Jefferson used six questions and I often just used one), for instance “Can you please tell me the story of your life and all the events and experiences which have been important to you.” The questions are designed to elicit a story about the topic under enquiry. The interviewee then follows his or her own path in telling you their life story, and this enables them to develop a narrative that is “not structured according to conscious logic” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; p. 37). The interviewer should follow the narrative frame that the interviewee presents and should be open to new lines of thought and questioning. For instance, one male participant “Rodney” consistently turned his narrative to the topic of sex. This felt exasperating at the time, but it was important for me to let Rodney lead his narrative down the avenues he felt were most relevant and to relinquish my control as an interviewer and try and steer him to talk about things that I wanted him to talk about. Instead, analysing why

Rodney wanted to talk about sex constantly revealed very interesting findings around the control and mastery over his body and about proving his masculinity as he aged.

The second stage of the process is to carefully transcribe and listen back to the interview, resituating yourself back into the primary context of the encounter as much as possible. You need to pay attention to the interviewee's "ordering and phrasing" of their story (2000, p. 53) – why did Rodney talk about sex at that moment? Why was it such a central feature of his narrative? You then look critically for any inconsistencies and contradictions in the narrative formation of the story. For instance, in Rodney's narrative, there were numerous stories of feeling emasculated, whilst also trying to portray a very masculine attitude by talking about his sexual prowess. At this point in the process, you would develop a series of tailor-made follow-up questions based upon the narrative offered to you in the first interview, and also add in a few standard questions that you would like to ask all participants.

The third stage of the process is a second interview with the participant, and this interview follows a more semi-structured format. This involves asking a series of pre-prepared, tailor-made questions based upon the first interview encounter. This interview enables you to follow up with emergent "hypotheses and hunches" and allows the participant to reflect upon the experience of the previous interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, 2000). The semi-structured nature of this interview means that you are able to probe, prompt, and follow leads as you feel are appropriate through the interview without sticking rigidly to a set of questions.

During each interview, and particularly after the interview, you should try to capture as much of the contextual data as possible. For example, did you notice any body language or interesting interactions between you? What was the setting like? What does all this say about the unconscious or conscious relationship between you and your participant? How did you feel during and after the interview? What were your impressions of your participant? These notes should most importantly contain a detailed reflection on your own emotional responses in the interview, no matter how strange these might seem at first. If taking notes about personal demeanour or private spaces, however, you may want to do this discretely or after the interview. Be sure to also type up your notes as soon as possible as quickly scribbled notes may be illegible at a later date. I often find that interviewing can be tiring, particularly if the interview is long or very emotional. I therefore find the best way for me to take notes is to record myself – speaking

into my Dictaphone – on my way home. I later transcribe these verbal notes along with the interview itself.

The fourth stage of the process is the analytical stage in which you examine the process as a whole – the verbal content of the interview and its narrative construction; reflecting on the experience as a whole, noting the physical setting and impressions of your participant whilst also thinking through your own self-presentation, and being attuned to the psychological and psychical dynamics of the relationship between you and your participant.

### **Attuning to the Psychodynamics of the Interview Encounter**

Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) argue that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee in the interview encounter plays a crucial role in how research data are created. Both parties – the interviewer and research participant – come to the encounter with their own anxieties, defences, histories, and emotional baggage. They state, “what we say and do in the interaction will be mediated by internal fantasies which derive from our histories of significant relationships” (2000, p. 45). This psychical material creates psychological “defences” that necessarily influence how data are collected/created (or how a story is told). So, a participant may be defensive (Hollway and Jefferson use the term “the defended subject”) choosing to psychologically reveal or hide certain aspects of a story depending on how defended they are against the emotional content of the story they are telling or depending on how open and receptive the interviewer is to receiving and containing that story. They argue that the defended subject is someone who is unconsciously defending against anxiety and this can have a significant influence on their actions, lives, and relationships. They take a psychoanalytical stance in arguing that everyone is necessarily “defended” against anxiety, as this is inherent in the human condition and that indeed any threat to the self creates anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2009). So, by asking a participant to reveal anxiety-provoking memories, which may threaten their self-presentation or unleash difficult feelings, this can create defensiveness and the interviewee will present those memories in a modified or socially acceptable manner. The interviewer themselves, of course, can be defended too, choosing to only follow particular lines of narrative which bear the least weight upon their own unconscious anxiety.

Containment is also an important aspect of the interviewer’s role here. Containment refers to the capacity of the receiver (in this case, the interviewer) to take into him or herself the psychological projections of the other (the interviewee), hold onto those feelings that have been

projected, transform them, and then be able to convey them back to the subject in a modified or detoxified way. Just like a clinical psychoanalyst, the psychosocial interviewer “contains” the emotional projections and creates a safe environment in which the interviewee is able to access and express emotions without the risk of being judged, criticised, or mocked. By containing the painful aspects of the interviewee’s story, it becomes easier for them to acknowledge those difficult feelings and to feel understood.

## Research Practicalities

This method is not suited to every research topic and will have practical implications for the research design; who your research sample includes, and how you manage your time and financial resources. It involves a significant time commitment from the interviewee, and the generally free-flowing, relatively unfocused, nature of the first free-association interview, makes this method perhaps less suited to studying particular populations (the time-poor, elites, or vulnerable groups). Since you need to interview your participant twice, and usually within a week or so of the first interview, then you need to be able to factor in how you will practically access these participants for the second meeting. In my research, I interviewed people in areas where I had relatives to stay with and paid them two successive visits to complete my interviews. In total, participants offered on average four hours of time across both interviews. In one interview using this method, the first free-association interview was a solid five hours alone, so be sure to be seated comfortably! Most interviews took place in people’s own homes, so it is also important to be aware of your own safety, making sure that someone else knows where you are going and when to expect you back.

Remuneration for the interviews has also been an interesting experience. I often felt bad for offering a small gift voucher in return for such a long, intensive, and often highly emotional interview, and I have had mixed reactions to the vouchers. In one case, the male participant cried and said I was so generous (in receipt of a £10 gift voucher for 5 hours of interview time), and another threw it onto a desk without thanks. I realised that although some participants expressed some gratitude that actually I felt that it was never enough to thank them for the time that they gave me and indeed it felt a little insulting to give them such a small return. I also came to realise that despite the high emotions in the interviews, participants often expressed enormous gratitude towards me and told me how cathartic it was to talk so openly about things that they had not talked about before.

## Data Exemplar: Psychosocial Interviews on Midlife

This dataset draws from a sample of interviews with 22 British born men and women aged between 39 and 58 years old. Included are three interview transcript extracts, which were extracted from a PhD project, by Dr Bethany Morgan Brett from The University of Essex, entitled “*The Negotiation of Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing*,” which explored the social and psychological issues that affect people in midlife. Several key themes were developed including (1) the ageing body, (2) intergenerational relationships, especially those coalescing around the ageing and death of parents, and (3) how life dreams were reviewed at this period of the life course. Participants were selected using a convenience and snowballing sampling method. One of the weaknesses of this approach to sampling was that contacts often referred me to people or friends who they felt had enough time to be interviewed, and in this case, interviewed twice. This was therefore mainly women who worked primarily in low-paid, part-time jobs. Men in general and women of a higher educational level were harder to access. Moreover, I was often referred to “characters” or people who had a particularly interesting story to tell about their lives. All, but one, participants were White British; all were self-defined as heterosexual, and all but one had at least one child. Each participant was interviewed at least twice and there were a total of 45 interviews, lasting on average two hours each. Almost all interviews took place in the participant’s own home and the others took place in a neutral location such as a public place or an empty office at my University. All the interviews were fully transcribed and analysed using a combination of a free association analysis technique and thematic analysis.

This dataset Student Guide will now take you step-by-step through the analytic process and indicate ways in which you can practice these approaches on the accompanying transcripts.

## Free Association and Thematic Analysis

### Free Association Analysis

An interview is more than a simple conversation; it is an encounter, and in this approach, the dynamics of this encounter are an important part of the analysis. Although all the interviews were transcribed in full, I argue that by simply examining the words in a transcript, the researcher risks missing out on a rich level of data that comes through taking into account the

emotional experience of the interview at the time and through an exploration of their own emotional reactions to the data post-interview.

One of the first practical steps in this process is a careful re-reading of the transcripts, annotating as you go along, with any thoughts, feelings, or interesting observations that you might make on the data. Also by listening back to the original audio recording, you can become re-immersed into the primary encounter with the interviewee and be reminded of your emotional experience during that time. One of the key principles of a psychosocial approach to research is to fully re-immense yourself back into the original encounter of the interview. Using the audio recordings, alongside the transcripts, and reflecting back on your original field notes, think about “what was that experience like?” Try to get “under the skin” of your interviewee and reflect on any moments where you felt an emotional reaction to something that person said or did. As Holloway and Jefferson maintain in their analytic process, they felt “inhabited by that person in the sense that our imagination was full of him or her” (2000, p. 69). When conducting this research, I found myself dreaming about my participants or accidentally calling someone else by a participant’s name!

It is important in this stage to make reflexive notes during this process of revisiting the transcripts asking “how did I feel at particular points in the interview?” ‘How do I feel now when looking back over it?’ You may have taken some notes of this nature during or immediately after the interview and you can revisit these again now, but is also important to go back to the transcripts at a slightly later date when your emotions are less heightened (and you are possibly defensive about your observations). There may have been things you did not want to see or feel when you were in the moment, or felt too uncomfortable noting directly after the interview.

In this analytical stage, try to write freely, and uninhibitedly, any thoughts, reactions, emotional responses, key words, and themes etc. – anything that comes to mind no matter how silly it might sound. Even obscure thoughts and observations can lead to some interesting lines of analysis. See my SAGE case study of “Adrian” (Uncovering the Unconscious in Psychosocial Research), which outlines one of my unusual experiences of analysing my strange feelings towards a participant in an interview, which were felt but not immediately acknowledged or interpreted in the moment of interviewing him.

A free association analysis technique can produce some interesting findings, but it can also provoke significant anxiety. When an interview is so unstructured, the lines of narrative can go

in many, and unexpected, directions. It can feel overwhelming and it can be difficult to hold all of that information in your mind at once. Holloway and Jefferson advocate sitting with this anxiety and trusting your own internal capacity to hold the data in your mind. They state that the principle of *Gestalt* “is based on the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts” and that “we can appreciate better the Gestalt principle if it is understood also as the internal capacity for holding those data together in the mind” (2000, p. 69). So, in practical terms, you may find a small and interesting piece of data that evokes a particular emotional reaction. Once you have analysed this piece of information and why it might evoke such feelings, you then need to re-contextualise this back into the whole interview. What does it mean when you look at the interview as a whole? Please take a look at the example analysis offered in the data exemplar below.

It feels tempting at this stage then to revert to qualitative computer software to help cope with all the information that needs to be systematically and thematically organised. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) warn against such analytic procedures as they feel that the fragmentation of data means that the complete picture is often lost (p. 69). They warn that qualitative data programmes “offers increasingly sophisticated ways of not holding the data as a whole in the mind, precisely as it affords ways of holding it outside of the mind” (2000, pp. 68–69).

This is where I depart from Holloway and Jefferson’s approach. Although a free association analysis is an extremely interesting and important stage of analysis, I believe that it can be used effectively in combination with a more traditional qualitative thematic approach.

## **Thematic Analysis**

A thematic approach to qualitative data analysis involves looking for recurring themes, meanings, or patterns across the dataset. It involves a familiarisation with the data, developing codes that represent important features of the data content, identifying themes from these codes, refining these themes (perhaps merging, splitting, or removing codes as you go along), and then finally developing and defining your emerging dominant themes to create a narrative of your data. It is an iterative process that involves reading, coding, re-reading, and recoding until your themes are clearly defined. To develop your thematic codes, you can approach your data inductively, deductively, or a combination of both.

## **Deductive Versus Inductive Analysis**

You can approach your data in two ways. The first is a deductive approach, which is driven by theory and existing ideas about what you want to find in your data. Therefore, any deductive codes will be developed in advance of reading your data. These codes might, for example, emerge from the questions that you asked in your interview. For example, these are some of the questions I asked in my semi-structured interviews:

- What characteristics do you associate with middle age?
- Do you think there is such a thing as a midlife crisis, if so what is it?
- What physical changes in appearance have you noticed in your body, as you have got older?

Using a deductive approach these could be then developed into thematic codes right from the start. So, these codes could be:

1. Characteristics of Middle Age
2. Definition of Midlife Crisis
3. Physical Changes in Body

I might then develop these further to create some subthemes, developed from what I have read on the topic and what I anticipate might arise in my data.

1. Characteristics of Middle Age:
  - 1.1. Difference between “middle age” and “midlife”
  - 1.2. Connotations of the term
2. Definition of Midlife Crisis:
  - 2.1. Stereotypes of midlife
  - 2.2. When does it occur?
  - 2.3. Personal experience of midlife crisis
3. Physical Changes in Body:
  - 3.1. Menopause
  - 3.2. Changes in body shape
  - 3.3. Keeping fit

Thematic coding would then involve reading through your transcripts carefully, selecting small sections of data, and assigning them one of these codes. Almost like putting that chunk of data

into a box or a file. Before computers could assist with this process, early social research used to involve the physical cutting out of the data from a printout of the transcripts with a pair of scissors and literally placing it into a box file! Thankfully, computers have made this process much more simple for us and there are plenty of excellent computer software programmes, such as MAXQDA and NVivo, which can assist with this process. However, here I am just taking you through the basics of how to do this process in Microsoft Word or on a printout.

An inductive approach to the data, means that the analysis is data-driven and you would identify themes or codes as you read through your transcripts. You are not trying to code themes within a pre-existing coding frame like the one above. Instead, you immerse yourself in the data in order to identify themes. So, as you read through the interviews, you may notice an unanticipated theme emerging. For instance, to take you back to Rodney's narrative about sex, this was an unanticipated line of discussion and led me to a theme around the "mastery over the ageing body" that developed from looking at his narrative inconsistencies around masculinity and emasculation. This was not an anticipated theme and one I could not have predicted through looking at the theory or through looking back over my interview schedule. This then becomes an inductively developed thematic code. Ideally, data should be analysed in a combination of both deductive and inductive approaches. So, have some deductively created codes to start with and develop new inductively created ones as you go through your data more thoroughly.

When you have identified a thematic code, you will need to read through your data and identify every instance – across your dataset – where something is said about that theme. It therefore helps if you pilot a set of thematic codes on a small selection of your data before coding the whole dataset. If you are coding with a computer programme such as MAXQDA, you would drag that section of data into the code (or "Node" if using NVivo). Eventually, that code will start to gather a series of "coded segments" which is everything that all your participants said about that theme. These codes help you to locate and retrieve all the data within that theme. If you are not using computer software to assist with this process, you can assign each section of data a code. For instance, in the examples above, you might code the section as "3.1" every time someone mentions the menopause. Similarly, 3.1 could be replaced by colour coding or highlighting.

It is important to not view these codes as final, end products. They are what Mason (2002) termed "unfinished resources," in that they are flexible groupings that should be further

analysed, merged, split, recoded, or uncoded in line with the development of the analytical process. For instance, you may read through your data and notice that no one spoke about “the menopause,” so you may choose to uncode this. However, you notice that participants talked more generally about “hormonal changes” and so you might recode this instead. Perhaps, in another example, you realise that the code for “keeping fit” is becoming over populated. You may choose to “split” this code into more subcodes (perhaps “going to the gym” and “healthy eating”) to make the retrieved coded segments easier to manage.

## Combining Free Association and Thematic Analysis

The key criticism of thematic analysis is that it has the potential to fragment the data and extract quotations from the original context. However, it is also extremely useful for systematically developing themes that can be identified across a dataset. A free association approach to analysis allows for a more affective, emotional, and reflective engagement with the participant’s story, and to the interview encounter as a whole. I suggest therefore approaching your data using both analytical methods; first, reading through the data as a whole, reflecting upon your emotional connection to the data, perhaps even drafting pen portraits that summarise the participant’s story as a whole, ensuring that you identify and maintain the subtle connections within the narrative of the interview and, second, coding the data thematically. In another project I worked on with another researcher, I completed the thematic coding and he completed the free association analysis. We then worked together to compare our findings. So, if you are working as part of a team, then this can be a valuable way of verifying your interpretations. I mentioned previously that it could feel overwhelming to hold on to participant’s stories as a “whole”: to hold on to all of those subtleties, links, and emotional connections within a narrative. It is important, therefore, to learn to trust that you *can* hold on to and contain your interviewee’s stories and to use these reflections as a way to deepen your analysis.

## Summary

This data case study has taken you through the steps of a FANI method, and how to analyse the resulting data using both thematic analysis and a more reflexive, affectively engaged free-association approach to analysing the data. I have highlighted the importance of reflecting upon your emotional reactions through the interview itself and when returning to the transcribed data.

Below, are some tasks using selected data extracts that will help you to practice using these techniques.

## Exercise

**Step 1.** Read through the interview schedule extract. Use this to deductively identify 10 thematic codes.

**Step 2.** Read through the three interview extracts. Free Associate on the transcripts; freely writing down any thoughts, reactions, and emotional responses that come to your mind whilst reading them. Try not to be inhibited (defended!) when writing these notes.

**Step 3.** Re-read the transcript and identify any other themes that you might have missed. What interesting things are said across the interviews?

**Step 4.** Create a list of thematic codes and group them into main “top level” codes and “sub codes”. Assign each code and sub code a number or colour.

**Step 5.** Re-read each transcript, line by line, and assign sections of the data to one of your codes by placing the number in the margin (or colour coding it).

## Reflective Questions

1. How useful do you feel the free association step of analysis is in combination with the thematic analysis?
2. What additional level of analysis did this step offer you that you might not have gained using solely a thematic analysis?
3. To what extent would you agree with Hollway and Jefferson (2000) when they say that qualitative data software “offers increasingly sophisticated ways of not holding the data as a whole in the mind, precisely as it affords ways of holding it outside of the mind” (pp. 68–69).

## Further Readings

### Web Resources

This is a teaching resource that I wrote for the UK Data Service on Psychosocial Approaches: Psychosocial Approaches, UK Data Service (2018, June 10). Retrieved from

<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/psychosocial>

This is the archived data collection from my PhD: SN 8035 – Negotiating Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing, 2006–2008,

<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=8035>

My PhD thesis is published here: Morgan Brett, B. (2011). The negotiation of midlife: Exploring the subjective experience of ageing (PhD Thesis). Retrieved from

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