Postmodern theorist Jacques Derrida (1978) argued that in the West, speech has long been valued over the written word, and that we ignore the written word at our peril. This is precisely why analyzing discourse materials is particularly important in pushing grounded theory around the postmodern turn through situational analysis. Given the stunning elaboration of written, digitalized, and media discourses over the past century, discourse analysis can today be said to be a necessary tool for daily life. It allows us to see and better understand the world around us that is also producing us/in us (Foucault 1988). Analyzing pertinent discourses also helps produce better research regardless of whether the research project is wholly focused on discourse.

Narrative discourses, the focus of this chapter, are parts of most situations, and situations need to be analyzed inclusively. I focus here on narrative materials that have already been produced when we seek them out as data/research materials. The researcher does not co produce such narrative materials, as you would interviews, but instead selects them from extant sources. Furthermore, I focus here especially on analyzing the content of discourse materials, though how they are produced, used, and travel may also be examined.
The research literature on narrative discourse commonly distinguishes among several kinds of materials that can be data for research. First, personal narratives are produced by individuals about themselves for whatever reasons (e.g., diaries, memoirs, autoethnographies). They center on “the knowing subject” and “typically take the perspective of the teller rather than that of the society” (Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994: 465). Analysis of the content of such discursive materials is usually done using one of the more phenomenological approaches to narrative centered around lived experience, of which there are many. But personal narratives often appear to float unanchored to the planet. Here, situational analysis as a new form offers the ability to deeply contextualize and situate personal narratives per se. Such a situational analysis would analytically explain what the specific personal narrative taken up is a “case [study] of “ where it comes from and why it matters. This analytic work too often remains inadequate in case studies today (Baszanger 1997). This is an example of how situational analysis can be used complementarily with other approaches.

Second are narratives produced by individuals about something else we are interested in, centering our focus on that topic. Here situational analysis could be undertaken of a selected set of “narratives about X.” For example, there is an ambitious literature of illness narratives centering on what it is like to live with X disease or condition. One could design a discourse study to examine all the books and articles in certain popular media venues produced before and after the availability of a particular new technological innovation that changes how that disease or condition affects people. Or one could compare how gender, class, and race seem consequential or inconsequential in a set of such narratives. There are many possibilities.

Some individually authored narrative discourse materials may be aural instead of textual. Farnell and Graham (1998:420-424) discuss identifying, collecting, and recording live situated discourse as a “soundscape.” Such materials are handled like interview tapes—transcribed (if verbal), listened to again while annotating the transcription, and stored for later reference (see also Poland 1995). An excellent example here is Angela Davis’s (1999: xi, xiii) transcription and analysis of African American women’s blues songs from the mid-20th century. She pursued this as “an inquiry into the ways their recorded performances divulge unacknowledged traditions of feminist consciousness in working-class black communities.” While it is understandable that “black social consciousness has been overdetermined by race, . . . there remains a paucity of research on the class-inflected character of historical black feminism,” and the oral blues tradition offers “a vast body of musical texts and a rich cultural legacy” for analysis. Davis (1999:xvii) concluded that through the blues “as a privileged discursive
site,” working-class black women achieved both expression of their own sexuality and enhanced authority over it, an authority not available to middle-class black women who lived under the repressive constraints of middle-class respectability.

The third main genre of narrative materials that can be data for research is produced by collectivities and takes the form of documents of many sorts. Using documents as data sources has a long tradition in symbolic interactionist research, dating back to the early 20th-century Chicago ecological studies discussed in Chapter 2 (Bulmer 1984:89-108). Then, documentary data were “just another kind of data” collected as part of fieldwork/ethnography. Today, after the postmodern turn, such data are taken up much more reflexively. Today we emphasize the deeply social nature of the production and maintenance of discourses of all kinds. “[T]he modern world is made through writing and documentation, a point that was emphasized, above all, in Max Weber’s perceptive analysis of ‘bureaucracy’” (Prior 2003:4). Thus all major social institutions have reams of documents (e.g., medical histories, school records, court records, criminal records) that, along with Web sites per se, are increasingly digitalized and hence increasingly facilitate analysis.

I thoroughly introduced and gave extensive examples of the three main modes of analysis of discourses in Chapter 4: (1) negotiating discourses in social relationships/interaction, (2) producing identities and subjectivities through discourses, and (3) producing power/knowledge, ideologies, and control through discourses (Jaworski & Coupland 1999b). Therefore we next turn directly to the nitty-gritty issues of doing situational analysis of narrative discourse materials. I begin with the major concerns and complexities of the design stage and then move quickly into a concrete situational analysis using one of my own projects as the exemplar.

Designing a Narrative Project

“Textual experiments are not so much about solving the crisis of representation as troubling the very claims to represent. If, as Foucault states, we are freer than we feel, how can we feel freer in this space?”

—Lather (2001a:201)

Designing a narrative discourse project first poses the problem of deciding what kind of narrative discourse study you want to pursue—what kind of study best addresses your interests and research needs. There are literally millions if not an infinity of narrative discourses “out there” awaiting analysis.
Social scientists, including historians, are usually interested in discourses where there are multiple perspectives and what we term “interesting” and “important” conflicts—such as a local discourse on homelessness, a national discourse on health care insurance coverage, the discourse on downloading music for free/music piracy, and so on. Alternatively, we can follow in Foucault’s footsteps: “While Foucault does not say much about the selection of his archive, it is clear that his preference is for what we might call ‘programmatic’ texts, writings that try to impose a vision or spell out most clearly a new way of conceptualizing a problem” (Kendall & Wickham 2004:144). An example here is the Bowker and Star (1999) chapter on the laws of apartheid as “programmatic” texts in Foucault’s sense and the problematics of their implementation (discussed in Chapter 4).

Which Narrative Materials?

Designing a narrative discourse project starts from your own extant knowledge of the situation. The grounded theory/situational analysis approach does not assume that the researcher is a tabula rasa, but rather that you are already quite knowledgeable about the substantive area you have decided to pursue. Moreover, you likely have a certain theoretical and methodological sophistication about how to proceed and the nature of your commitments in this domain. The importance of this prior/extant knowledge will soon become clear.

Once you have decided what broad situation or discursive terrain you want to examine, the next step is to do a very sketchy and very preliminary discourse/arenas map. The flip sides of social worlds/arenas are discourses/arenas. Here you roughly map out all the kinds of discourse materials you believe are in that situation. Ultimately, you need to determine what discourses exist and are feasible to study, which discourse(s) to focus upon, and who/what contributes to and participates in their production, maintenance, and distribution. So, begin by laying out what narrative discourse materials you believe are in the situation of interest, the arena(s) writ large. The main goal here (and in subsequent reworkings) is to make sure you capture and provisionally name all the major extant discourses in the situation on this map and any minor ones you think are significant. You will not pursue them all, and usually only a few. But as they are all continually changing in relation to one another—the “field of discourse”/“arena” is a negotiated order—you need to know what is in that field/arena. This is yet another way that situational analysis situates your work: You will be able to defend your selection of discourses to examine by articulating those you chose not to pursue and why.
Analytically, situational analysis starts from the assumption that we seek to represent all the major narrative discourses related to the situation in which we are interested, at least in our analyses, if not in our publications. Thus we must also begin from the assumption that we do not know what narrative discourses are actually in the situation. That is, we will likely know what some but not all of them are, and not much about their interrelations. This can have the experiential sense of feeling one’s way in a very dimly lighted space, especially at the outset.

Locating, Collecting, Tracking, Situating

The next step, with rough and dirty map in hand, is to determine what kinds of extant data exist, how accessible they are, and how “good” they initially appear to be. That is, data for a narrative discourse study could consist solely of extant documents if these offer ambitious representations of all the key features of the discourses/elements of the situation. Or, alternatively, there might be adequate discursive documentary data from and about certain social worlds in this discursive arena but not on others. Then one would consider making the multisite move to also acquire interview/ethnographic data as needed to flesh out data sources on all the key elements to some degree. You might choose to focus on only a few, but you need to know what else is there and why you will not pursue it.

Of course, in wonderful contradictory qualitative fashion, at the initial stages of research, you will likely not know what “all the key discourses” are. Thus, as noted above, it is very likely that you may be patching together data sources in the later stages of some projects. This is a form of theoretical sampling in that the analytic/theoretical salience of the element emerged late, but still needed to be pursued through theoretical sampling—through your gathering new data that speak specifically to the theoretical point. Again, as the French would say, “It’s normal.”

In short, the materials should be the best range of discursive materials you can obtain related to the situation that you have chosen to research. If you are pursuing a multisite project, the narrative discourse materials should articulate well with the other sites you are examining (e.g., an ethnographic/interview site or a visual discourse site or a historical discourse site). By “articulate well” I mean that the materials allow you to reasonably address the same areas of focus or appropriately conflicting ones, and so on. The most challenging part can be bounding the data to be collected “systematically enough.” Returning to Kvale’s metaphors of mining versus collecting, casually amassing interesting discourse materials
is not enough. For a discourse study or discourse site within a multisite study, the data should offer both depth and range of variation. Using the grounded theory concept of saturation, narrative discourse data collection itself should continue until *nothing analytically useful* is being collected—until further analysis is no longer provoked by the new materials.

Very, very careful tracking (dating, sourcing, and otherwise situating) each discourse document is highly important. Collecting and tracking are fussy, tedious tasks, important to get right the first time. If you don’t, the capacity to publish something may disappear. Depending on what you are collecting, it may best be done where there is space to spread out and a handy photocopier, as it might involve making working copies and preserving originals in files or binders. Tracking narrative materials can be crucial if you want to publish something for which written permission is required—and it usually is required, unless the materials are in the public domain.2

For some projects, some kind of log should be maintained that tracks the “provenance” of all the narrative materials—where they came from in terms of “who, what, where, when, how, how much,” and so on. In addition, you may need to attend to confidentiality issues with great care if the documents are not “public” materials. For example, using and certainly publishing non-public documents of an organization you are studying would require written permission from that organization. Such permissions can be notoriously difficult to obtain.

Overall, the very design of a narrative discourse study using situational analysis (the three main kinds of maps and memos) involves the researcher in tacking back and forth between situational elements, the discourses, the social worlds/arenas, and the positions taken in the discourse(s) throughout the project. In many ways, doing the research is (re)doing the design. Experienced grounded theorists will likely find this familiar territory. I am trying to be very clear about it here especially for relative neophytes. I seek to reassure you that suddenly discovering downstream in the project yet another discourse produced by a heretofore invisible social world in the arena is an indicator of successful use of the methods and not personal analytic failure! Moreover, you might even “find” it through doing a positional map and finding a “new” position articulated.

I find discourse data collection especially challenging. It is usually the case that one is unable to collect “all” of the discourse data on anything. Challenges for the researcher are then to assess the adequacy of what has been collected, to come to tolerate its partialities, to determine how to explain its partialities in publications, and to focus on doing a strong analysis of the materials you have.
Doing Situational Maps of Narrative Discourse

One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation. And one has to bear in mind that the further one breaks down the processes under analysis, the more one is enabled and indeed obliged to construct their external relations of intelligibility.

—Foucault (1991:77)

As with mapping interview and fieldwork data, basic grounded theory coding of the narrative materials should be pursued first. What are these data about? What is going on here? What are these stories of? The usual solid coding will ground you, the analyst, in the discourse and allow you to pursue the situational maps.

Because collecting extant documents is very different from doing interviews and observations, the initial basic coding time, energy, and memos may be even more important. That is, there is a lot of “invisible work” happening in interview processes. We experience the doing of interviews and observations as active participants, consciously, unconsciously, and semi-consciously developing dense visual, narrative, and emotive memories and ideas about the situations in which we find ourselves. As we move along, these often become much more elaborate analytic contributions than we knew at the time. We are always processing and analyzing information on the move, as we go. In sharp contrast, in analyzing discourse documents, much of this work may be missing. The initial grounded theory reading and coding may well be your first serious immersion in the data. The key point is that you must know your data to map it. Coding produces knowing. Also, then, simply reading the narrative materials as you gather them, rather than merely tucking them into files, can be very important often invisible work.

The classic questions for doing the situational map with narrative discourse materials include: What are the discourses in the broader situation? Who (individually and collectively) is involved (supportive, opposed, providing knowledge, materials, money, what else?) in producing these discourses? What and who do these discourses construct? How? What and whom are they in dialogue with/about? What and who do these discourses render invisible? How? What material things—nonhuman elements—are involved in the discourse? How are they constructed? How do they configure the human actors? Were there implicated/silent actors/actants? What were the important discursively constructed elements in the situation? What historical and other contemporary cultural symbologies are evoked in the discourse? What work do these discourses do in the world? What are some
of the contested issues in the discourse? Specifying these anticipates the later need for issues and axes to develop positional maps. It can be helpful to think of a discourse itself as an arena from social worlds/arenas theory. Who/what is in that arena and what do they have to say about it? Who is engaged and debating with whom in/through this discourse?

Flipping back and forth from social worlds to discourses provokes in-depth analyses and the deconstruction of social worlds into segments with their own (sub)discourses. This elasticity of social worlds/arenas analysis makes some people very anxious. But therein lies its power—it keeps you analyzing more and more and works against formulaic usage.

Introducing the Narrative Discourse
Exemplar: RU486 Discourse Project

I use my own work here as an exemplar of a study of producing power/knowledge, ideologies, and control through discourse. The caveat is that it was not pursued with explicit use of situational analyses but with an incipient form that relied on social worlds/arenas analysis. Furthermore, this project did not start out as a discourse analysis though it surely ended up as such. It began impetuously in 1989 when a member of the board of supervisors of the City of San Francisco where I live made the morning papers, arguing that San Francisco should be a test site for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of the use of RU486, widely known as “the French abortion Pill,” in the United States. Actually a set of pills to be taken in a specified timed sequence, RU486 is the first “medical” abortion technology (in contrast to surgical abortion technologies that remove the conceptus, a very early fetus, from the uterus). After taking RU486, the woman’s body expels the conceptus similarly to having a very early miscarriage. Approved and used in France since 1982 and in many other European nations, the contested nature of abortion in the United States considerably delayed and complexified its approval here.

I began the project as a brand-new assistant professor, planning it as an interview/ethnographic endeavor to follow the FDA approval process “in practice,” assuming there would be some “local” involvement, given extensive local scientific, medical, feminist, and women’s health infrastructure—and the enthusiasm of that supervisor. Special protocols for early FDA approval of AIDS drugs had even been developed and utilized locally. I was hopeful and excited about my new project. I began gathering data from the media, from involved organizations, attending conferences, collecting papers from the medical literature, and so on. Several years later, because San Francisco clinics were not involved, that supervisor had disappeared, and
FDA approval was so delayed that my third research assistant on the project (Theresa Montini) and I “ended up” doing a discourse analysis focused on the main social worlds involved in the RU486 arena (Clarke & Montini 1993). RU486 was actually not FDA approved until September 2000 (Joffe & Weitz 2003:2353).

I can frame this exemplar as a classic grounded theory project with the “basic social process” as “constructing RU486.” We actually titled the paper “The Many Faces of RU486” as a play on the old Nunally Johnson movie about multiple personalities titled The Three Faces of Eve. In certain ways, I have always thought of this paper as largely a methods paper—a precursor of situational analyses—because it is organized around an explicit social worlds/arenas analysis of narrative discourse. Analytically, we examined the discursive constructions of RU486 put forward by most of the key social worlds (and some subworlds) that had committed themselves to action of some kind in the abortion arena regarding this abortion technology. We focused largely but not exclusively on the United States, and especially on reproductive and other scientists, birth control/population control organizations, pharmaceutical companies, medical groups, antiabortion groups, pro-choice groups, women’s health movement organizations, politicians, the U.S. Congress, and the FDA.

We also examined what little research existed on women users/consumers of RU486 itself as a narrative discourse. I conceptualized these women as “implicated actors”—actors who are either not actually present and/or denied agency in the situation, but for whom the action in the situation is or likely will be consequential (discussed in Chapter 2). There were also silent implicated actors in this situation—actors with sufficient power and resources to “act” but choosing not to do so “for their own reasons.” Despite laying out the quite heterogeneous discourses of this wide array of actors, we also acknowledged the partiality of the glimpses of the different groups we were able to offer in one paper.

This was a multisite study with a nonhuman object—a new abortion technology—at the center. Our data included published materials, interviews with key players, documents produced by involved organizations, and observations of some (but not all) key events. (Today we would use Web sites as a means of access to pertinent organizational discourses.) We regularly accessed materials listed in Med Line, the Readers Guide to Popular Literature, the New York Times, and other major news media. In fact, investigative journalists were some of the major document makers/contributors to the debate. Interviews were conducted by both of us. Dr. Etienne-Emile Baulieu, the key scientist behind the development and use of RU486, was especially generous with his time (he won the prestigious Lasker Prize in 1989).
Situational Map Exemplar: RU486 Discourse Project

See Figure 5.1 for the Messy Situational Map: RU486 Discourse Project. I have not entered the specific names of the many different organizations involved but rather have categorized them under general rubrics here (e.g., feminist organizations, women’s health movement organizations) for a simpler and more easily readable map. Particular organizations are discussed in the published paper. In the situational map, then, we can see the varied collective actors concerned about abortion, committed to act and to producing discourses in that arena. The main nonhuman actant is RU486. Anyone familiar with U.S. abortion politics will note that “all the usual suspects” are gathered
here. I do note one particular organization, the National Abortion Federation, the only national organization of abortion care providers. Established in 1976, it seeks to improve the safety of and access to abortion care for all women, serving as a national abortion technical training unit and information clearinghouse. It also serves as a main bulwark of defense against the ongoing domestic terrorism that has been directed at abortion clinics, workers, and physician providers for many years, including the murders of seven members of the abortion-providing community to date: three physicians, one escort, two receptionists, and one off-duty policeman (www.prochoice.org).

In addition to women users of RU486 as implicated actors, there are also two sets of silent scientific collective actors. Both are concerned with reproductive phenomena and are constituencies for whom abortion is of considerable importance but who seek to keep the proverbial “10-foot pole” between themselves and the white heat of the current U.S. abortion controversy. For both, RU486 has distinctive meanings. First are geneticists and others active in human genomics (e.g., the Human Genome Initiative) and/or involved in any and all aspects of prenatal genetic screening. Since there are no therapeutic interventions for most of the conditions current and anticipated screening will find, abortion remains the only therapeutic alternative. Enhanced access to and options for abortion for women who wish to terminate such a pregnancy, such as those provided by RU486, would seemingly be central concerns for these actors. Yet abortion was then and remains largely absent from their public discourse.

The second silent collective scientific actor is fetal tissue researchers—a category that includes what are now, over 10 years later, called “stem cell researchers.” This research has since become a very serious and growing segment of the biotechnology industry, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. Since the 1980s, when the fetus emerged as a significant cultural icon in abortion politics, scientists have assiduously attempted to discursively construct fetal tissue research as essentially unimplicated in abortion politics (Casper 1994, 1998b). They have done so despite the almost universal use of fetal tissue from induced abortions as requisite materials for certain scientific research. While a ban on U.S. federal support of such research has been in place on and off since 1988, privately funded research has not been interrupted. Increased numbers of RU486 abortions might negatively impact scientists’ access to abortion materials in the United States because the aborted materials are expelled at home, rather than collected through vacuum aspiration in the clinic and potentially donated to research.

Readers may have noted that I was actually doing situational analyses here. As a feminist researcher, I knew about these silent actors and I put them on the map—a map where they would likely rather not appear. This illustrates the importance of the analyst’s own knowledge of the situation in
situational analysis as well as the legitimacy of using that knowledge “up front.” The analyst uses their knowledge to help design data collection and does not wait quietly for magically appearing data to speak! That is, the analyst needs to anticipate what data should be gathered in the initial design, as well as use theoretical sampling appropriately downstream.

See Figure 5.2 for the Ordered Situational Map: RU486 Discourse Project. The ordered map reveals one significant individual, Etienne-Emile Baulieu, the scientist primarily responsible for its development, who also fully accepted the additional role of public sponsorship and advocacy. There were many significant collective actors organized by and large into recognizable social worlds. This map also clearly demonstrates the importance of the history of politics generally to the history and politics of abortion in the United States—temporal elements. In the 1980s and 1990s especially, abortion as an issue was used by the Republican party and other conservative groups in the United States to recruit and organize segments of the populace previously not politically engaged or committed. (The issue of gay marriage is being discursively deployed similarly today.)

But the most important new point to emerge through doing the ordered map concerns attending to spatial elements. A key feature of RU486 as a medical abortion technology is that it potentially could be distributed where there are no abortion clinics. Fully 86% of U.S. counties do not have abortion services (Joffe & Weitz 2003:2354)! RU486 could legally put abortion services in the offices of primary care physicians and gynecologists in all of those counties. This element was and continues to be key in the politics of RU486 (discussed further below). The New York Times Magazine article that discussed this property of RU486 was titled “The Little White Bombshell” (Talbott 1999)—a vivid narrative discourse statement/in vivo code indeed!

Doing Social Worlds/Arenas Maps of Narrative Discourse

_Ultimately material culture always has to be interpreted in relation to a situated context of production, use, discard, and reuse._

—Hodder (2000:706)

Social worlds/arenas maps of discourse data do the same work as such maps of other data—provide a portrait of the meso-level actors in the situation—producing, contributing to, and maintaining the discourses. I should also note that one can do such maps perspectivally—from the perspective of one particular social world in the arena. (I return to this point at the end of the section.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Human Elements/Actors</th>
<th>Nonhuman Elements/Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Etienne-Emile Baulieu</td>
<td>RU486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surgical abortion technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FDA regulations for approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FDA regulations for use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective Human Elements/Actors</th>
<th>Implicated/Silent Actors/Actants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. FDA</td>
<td>Women as users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Congress</td>
<td>Genetic/genomic scientists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-choice groups</td>
<td>Stem cell researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antichoice/antiabortion groups</td>
<td>Antiabortion terrorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth control advocacy groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s health movement groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion services providers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Abortion Federation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional medical groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive Construction(s) of Human Actors</th>
<th>Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social world constructions of others</td>
<td>Social world constructions of RU486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social world constructions of Baulieu</td>
<td>Social world construction of abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social world construction of FDA</td>
<td>Construction of approval regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction of use regulations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political/Economic Elements</th>
<th>Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to abortion</td>
<td>Morality of abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of abortion</td>
<td>Morality of unwanted children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party concerns re abortion</td>
<td>Pill for abortion as “magic bullet”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal Elements</th>
<th>Spatial Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lateness of approval compared to Europe</td>
<td>Potential ease of wide geographic availability of RU486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of religious right in U.S. politics since 1970s</td>
<td>Lack of abortion services in 84% of U.S. counties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Issues/Debates (Usually Contested)</th>
<th>Related Discourses (Narrative and/or Visual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety of RU486</td>
<td>Abortion discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of abortion</td>
<td>Birth control discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of abortion</td>
<td>Sex/gender/feminism discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of unwanted children</td>
<td>Sexuality discourses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.2** Ordered Situational Map: RU486 Discourse Project
Social worlds shape and are themselves shaped through their active participation with other social worlds in their arena(s) of concern. One of the key ways in which this shaping is done in practice is through the production and promotion of competing discourses and/or particular elements of the broader discourse. I thus start my discursive maps with the questions: What were the patterns of collective commitment and what were the salient social worlds operating here? What were their discourses and what did they hope to achieve through their production and distribution? What were the discursive constructions of nonhuman actants as well as of individual and collective human actors? How did the various worlds “see” and constellate one another through their contributions to the overall discourse? What were their relations and how can I best map these visually?

Social Worlds/Arenas Map
Exemplar: RU486 Discourse Project

Doing the social worlds/arenas map is more complex than one might imagine. It provokes the ever-present but now more pressing problems of scale, scope, position, and context particularly intensely. Do RU486 and the social worlds involved in this discourse constitute an entire arena? Or, would it be “better”/“more accurate” to situate the RU486 Discourse Project in the broader arena of abortion in the United States? To me, the answer when I find myself asking such a question is “do both,” and I have.

Social worlds/arenas analytics are elastic. They can be stretched wide to encompass considerable complexity and “context”/“situatedness” (see Figures 7.3 and 7.4, the social worlds/arenas maps for the development of modern contraceptives). And they can also be pared down to a simpler version—eminently articulable and coherent as a publishable story in one paper. One social world can itself be analyzed as an arena or subworlds/segments—each having its own distinctive discourse. One of the things to be learned in doing situational analyses is how to both expand and contract social worlds/arenas analysis to address the needs of the project at hand—to get comfortable using its elasticity for your own analytic and downstream representational purposes.

See Figure 5.3 for the Social Worlds/Arenas Map: RU486 Discourse Project. This map situates RU486 and the social worlds involved with it and producing discourse about it in the larger U.S. abortion arena as it intersects with both political and medical arenas. The full complexity of these arenas is clear here. RU486 is relatively “small potatoes”—insignificant—in this broader, highly politicized, cultural, medical, and political situation. Studying RU486 when we did was a discursive opportunity, rather like a
photo opportunity or sound bite, a very small story inside a very complicated big saga. Looking at this map when I initially did it well over a decade ago, I realized that one article could not capture such complexity. I would have to decide whether or not to aim for the “full saga” version. I was very hesitant to do so because so much had already been written, including excellent feminist work. I kept hearing Strauss’s injunction to “study the unstudied” echoing loudly.

My second set of concerns centered on RU486 as a technology. I have long been interested, as a feminist medical sociologist, in technologies that affect large numbers of women around the world—masses of women—such as contraceptives and the Pap smear (the main screening method for early detection of incipient cervical cancers). RU486 was, I believed, going to become such a technology. But RU486 qua special technology would get lost—be a minor player—if I went down the “full saga” path and wrote about the abortion arena as a whole. I therefore decided to feature that
technology \textit{analytically}, and produced a project map that did this work. See Figure 5.4, Project Map: RU486 Discourse Project.

This map can be read as a close-up or zoom lens version of a social worlds/arenas map wherein the major social worlds and arenas discursively involved with RU486 are much enlarged. It can also be easily and coherently narrated in one paper. In that paper, we drew on the broader social worlds arenas map (Figure 5.3) to help construct our narrative, to discursively situate RU486 more broadly. But we organized the paper itself, section by section, through this zoom lens “project map” (Figure 5.4). After a short introduction, we literally started in the middle of this diagram with a history of the development of RU486 (problematizing that as well). We then worked
our way around the circle, (re)representing the discourses on RU486 produced by each of those social worlds and some of their subworlds.

This is a classic social worlds/arenas study “played on the flip side,” largely using narrative discourse data about a nonhuman object—a material cultural object—with which all the social worlds were concerned. The paper literally centers on the discursive constructions of that object made by each of those worlds (reproductive scientists, birth control/population control organizations, pharmaceutical companies, medical groups, antiabortion groups, pro-choice groups, women’s health movement groups, politicians, Congress, the FDA, and women users/consumers of RU486). While the organization of the paper mirrors the project map, our narrative also focused on the heterogeneities of these groups’ discursive constructions. The discourses, like the social worlds, were not monolithic. We also addressed how they deployed their discourses to convince others of the validity of their own perspectives, to create alliances, to denigrate enemies, and to further their own (rather heterogeneous) interests.

This analysis demonstrates rather vividly that there are not “two sides” but rather N sides or multiple perspectives in any discourse—even abortion in the United States! It is very rare for more than two sides to be represented about anything in the United States, not just abortion. Simplification (Star 1983) into two “sides” is not necessarily benign, and delimiting representation of contestation to “two sides” may in itself be a hegemonic strategy to intentionally silence other actors/actants and perspectives/discourses. Power analytics are very important. Here they particularly raise the possibilities of implicated actors and actants in the discourse under study. In fact, as noted above, there are two sets of implicated scientific actors whose discursive silences are both interesting and significant.

**Doing Positional Maps of Narrative Discourse**

*Marginality and subordination are conditions lived by social actors. But they are also inscribed in categories, classifications, texts and treatises.*

—McCarthy (1996:109)

To do positional maps of discursive data, one first seeks to elucidate from the data what the basic (often but not always contested) issues are in the discourse about which there are different positions, and to array these two-dimensionally in some fashion. It is important to remember that positions here are not correlated with persons or groups. The goal is to elucidate all the seemingly
important positions taken in the discourses. There may therefore, of course, be multiple positional maps.

Ideally, having done the situational maps (both messy and orderly versions) and the social worlds/arenas map, by now the researcher is deeply familiar with the data. This usually makes doing the positional maps easier. Sometimes one grasps from discovering a particular position in the data what the axis is or could be. That is, each axis is likely to interact with more than one other axis. Playing with this analytically can be most useful. Furthermore, the very doing of the positional maps will reveal those positions not taken in the data gathered to date and trigger theoretical sampling. That sampling may or may not find heretofore silent positions articulated.

Positional Map Exemplar: RU486 Discourse Project

See Figure 5.5 for Positional Map I: RU486 Discourse Project—Constructing RU486 viz. Safety and Morality. It takes up two major contested elements of the discourse on RU486 that are related to one another—safety and morality. There are multiple positions taken on the safety of using RU486 for abortion, including differences among and within women’s health groups. Certainly there are differences on the morality of abortion using whatever technology. There are also positions especially against using RU486 for abortion. I am not going to detail these substantive issues here (see Clarke & Montini 1993; Joffe & Weitz 2003).

Interestingly, one position not taken in the data was that RU486 is safe but is not moral. Unsafeness and immorality go hand in hand in this discourse. Thus, one of the fascinating insights that emerges from this positional map is that both the “regulatory science” (Jasanoff 1990) of the FDA and the basic science, clinical research, and epidemiology regarding the safety and efficacy of both medical and surgical abortions are contested in the discourse. Science itself is discursively implicated. This is actually becoming increasingly common in controversial arenas where science “matters.” Classic examples include tobacco, nuclear, and other forms of power, most anything concerning the environment, and so on. In fact, within the scientific establishment itself, RU486 was designated a “Runner-Up Molecule of the Year”—by Science magazine for 1989, not surprisingly at the top of the “Most Controversial [Molecule]” category! The natural sciences, which had been considered inviolate—fully/wholly separate from politics and social life—no longer enjoy such “exemption” from the sociology of knowledge, including among lay people.

Figure 5.6 offers Positional Map II: RU486 Discourse Project: Constructing RU486 viz. Safety and Access. Here the safety axis from Figure 5.5 intersects with another axis—access to the technology for abortion purposes. At one end
of the access continuum is the position that access should be wide (via primary care physicians and obstetrician/gynecologists as well as established abortion care providers) while at the other end is the position that access to it should be limited to established abortion care providers (available in only 14% of U.S. counties). Predictably, antichoice/antiabortion groups have sought the narrowest access. In sharp contrast, many positions were and are held down by the groups that support a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion. These positions turned on perceptions of drug safety, whether local hospitals would provide adequate and reliable backup surgical services, whether primary care physicians and obstetricians/gynecologists would provide adequate and quality abortion counseling and services, and so on. Unusually, there was no absence of positions taken in the positional map. There was, in Foucault’s (1978) terms, considerable “incitement to discourse” among the pro-choice worlds. In fact, the discourse examined here in the early 1990s continues. Today it centers around FDA regulations for use of the drug where safety
concerns have particularly loud voices (see, e.g., Joffe 2003). I doubt it will disappear in my lifetime.

I noted above that one can do a social worlds/arenas map from the perspective of one particular social world in the arena. See Figure 5.7 for an Abstract Perspectival Project Map. I have called it “The Arena According to Social World X.” In making such a map, one would first proceed as above, (re)representing the discourses of all the major social worlds in the arena. One would also seek out and represent the discourses of any minor worlds noted by X world in its discourse, and any others you think worthwhile pursuing. Then, in addition, one would articulate the discursive commentary and evaluations of the discourse(s) of all the other worlds offered by social world X. The latter narrative would be “the arena according to social world X.” But to be of any interest, the perspective of X world would need to be compared to those of the other worlds (which you laid out first) to see what

![Figure 5.6 Positional Map II: RU486 Discourse Project—Constructing RU486 viz. Safety and Access](image-url)
in particular makes the discourse of social world X distinctive and worthy of being featured analytically. It is the comparisons that matter most here.

Obviously doing such a map and analysis is of most use if you really want to understand social world X in depth. For example, in the RU486 arena, all the social worlds today have an interest in having a very clear understanding of how the Bush administration (or any other political administration, for that matter) constructs their worlds. That is, each world needs to regularly discursively (re)position itself vis-à-vis the current administration’s distinctive stand on abortion and on RU486 in general, but also on themselves qua organizations/social worlds in particular. A presidential administration has sufficient power in the situation that the other social worlds might well not only seek to reconstellate their own discourse but to do so vis-à-vis those of the other worlds in the arena. Perspectival project maps are
especially useful in the study of long-lived arenas, and may of course be usefully done for more than one world in an arena.

**Final Comments: Situational Analysis of Narrative Discourse**

*The interpretation of mute material evidence puts the interactionist view under pressure. How can an approach that gives considerable importance to interaction with speaking subjects . . . deal with material traces for which informants are long dead or about which informants are not articulate? . . . Although the evidence cannot “speak back,” it can confront the interpreter in ways that enforce self reappraisal.*

—Hodder (2000:710)

In this epigraph, Hodder reminds us that contemporary and historical discourse analyses are quite different projects from those relying on “knowing subjects” who speak to us and may tell us where we have gone analytically astray. He reminds us that we need to take our confrontations with the data very seriously. While I have not nagged about memoing very much in this chapter, I want to do so now. Memos are the best way to confront discursive data—“mute material evidence”—and your own analyses. Memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data. Those conversations are even more important in the absence of speaking subjects who often inadvertently confront our hidden assumptions and cherished ideas. Doing collaborative projects and/or working and pursuing analysis in Straussian working groups can also expand conversational—and analytic—possibilities. But they do not replace memos!

In terms of selecting projects, Hodder (2000: 714) further argues that “[t]he challenge posed by material culture is important for anthropological and sociological analysis because material culture is often a medium in which alternative and often muted voices can be expressed.” As I wrote this book, I was also watching documentary histories of American jazz and blues music. It would be hard to think of any other medium in which the experiences, cultures, ideologies, perspectives of a broad spectrum of African Americans were more vividly expressed (e.g., Davis 1999)—“alternative and often muted voices” indeed.

Documents too provide entrée to special domains. But we must take care not to reify them: “[I]f we are to get to grips with the nature of documents then we have to move away from a consideration of them as stable, static, and pre-defined artifacts” (Prior 2003: 2). Documents have agencies in the
world. What is it a document of? What work is it doing? Where does it go? How is it changing? That is, in analyzing discursive materials, we need to analyze not only their contents but also how they are used, how they travel, and so on (see, e.g., Kendall & Wickham 2004; Prior 2003:21-26 and ch. 9). Any or all of these may be featured in our final products.

In sum, situational analyses of narrative discourse data not only can be fun and interesting but often immensely useful. They provide maps of a particular discourse of interest that ambitiously frame the entire discourse arena. They can flexibly allow the analyst to pursue one or another element of the discourse for further analysis—while holding that element clearly “in place” within the broader discourse arena as a whole. In sum, situational analysis provides big picture maps that enable the researcher to “see” better where they may—and may not—want to go in terms of smaller portraits and/or the use of wide-angle lenses. Situational analysis is thus very user friendly with diverse discourse materials.

Last, the accessibility and relative cheapness of access to certain kinds of discursive materials make such projects attractive as well. A lot of qualitative research is not supported by research funds. Finding good, very cheap but still highly worthwhile, interesting, and provocative projects is important—especially but not only for students.

Notes


2. Permission to use materials for academic scholarly purposes is sometimes free and usually granted upon request—once you have located the right person or original publisher, whichever holds the copyright. However, some advertisers and other copyright holders will not grant permission; in such situations, careful narratives of the ads or other images must suffice and can be more than adequate. Copyright holders can also charge for use of their materials. In academia, authors rather than publishers are generally expected to bear these costs, which can be hefty. Obtaining permissions can be quite time consuming, and advance planning is best. Also, preparing materials for reproduction can be complex and costly, and is also usually done by authors.
