



SC101 Researching Social Life I
Week 22:

Fundamentals of Qualitative
Research

Department of Sociology

CISC seminars

- Wednesdays at 1-2pm, room 6.345

Date	Name	Title
01/03/17	Paul Driscoll, Kristen Schaubert Helen Rand Alan Msosa	Digital Intimacies - gay men and dating apps, heterosexual romantic relationships and phones, same sex intimacies in Malawi, and online sex work

Lecture overview

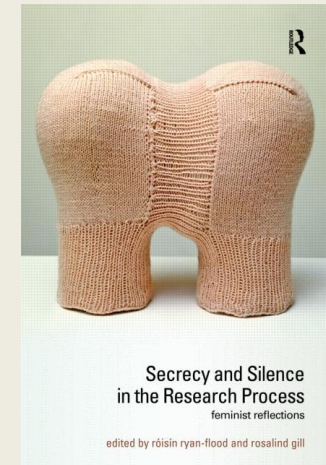
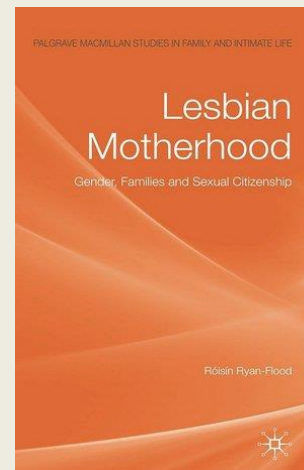
- Introduction to key concepts of qualitative work
- Examples of qualitative research studies

Module structure

- The next three lectures will provide an introduction to some of the key concepts and methods relevant to qualitative research.
- In subsequent weeks, we will explore specific methods and the process of writing up:
 - Ethnography
 - The In-depth interview and focus group interviews
- Drawing on examples of published work, we will examine how the research was carried out, what methodological approaches were adopted and the nature of the inferences that they draw.
- **Students are expected to do the required reading assigned for each week.**

Who am I?

- Dr. Róisín Ryan-Flood
- Office hour Tuesdays
13-14.00, room 5A.338
- Research interests:
Gender, sexuality,
citizenship, families,
assisted reproduction
- Social Research
Methods
- Epistemology



Definition

- “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, records and memos. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3)

Put more simply ...

- “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than numbers” Bryman (2001:366)
- “Qualitative research seems to promise that we will avoid or downplay statistical techniques and the mechanics of the kinds of quantitative methods used in survey research” Silverman (2005:6)

Key defining qualities

- Naturalistic
- Interpretative
- Emic
- Holistic
- Explaining, reasoning
- Qualitative 'Methods' (although boundaries often unclear)

Broad Philosophy

- World is best understood through the lives and words of individuals

The Qualitative Researcher

- Story-teller
- Bricoleur and Quilt Maker (Denzin & Lincoln 2008:5)
 - "The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting (p. 9)."
 - "The product of the interpretive bricoleur's labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage - a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations (p. 9)."
- Scientist, naturalist, field-worker, artist, photographer, film-maker
- Interpreter

A Very Condensed History ...

- Traditional period (1900-1950)
 - Major methods in anthropological study
 - In situ observation of the strange behaviours of other societies
 - Rooted in positivism
 - True external world that exists outside of human perception which can be observed and measured (see Gilbert 1992:32)
 - Knowledge can only be observed
 - Importance of objectivity and evidence in search of truth

Very Condensed History (contd)

- Golden age/modernist phase (1950-1970)
 - Early ideas of reflexivity
 - Debates upon legitimacy of scientific methods for social science
 - Qualitative research a means of overcoming limitations
- Blurred genres (1970-1986)
 - Qualitative research affected by researcher's own experiences and their position in society (see Neuman 1991:14)
 - Biased effects

Very Condensed history (contd)

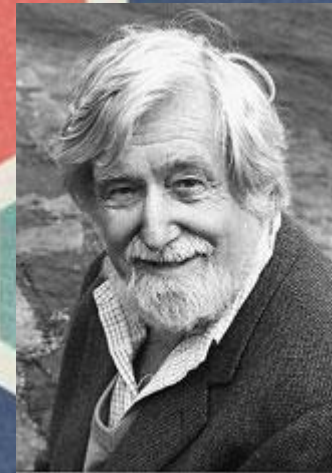
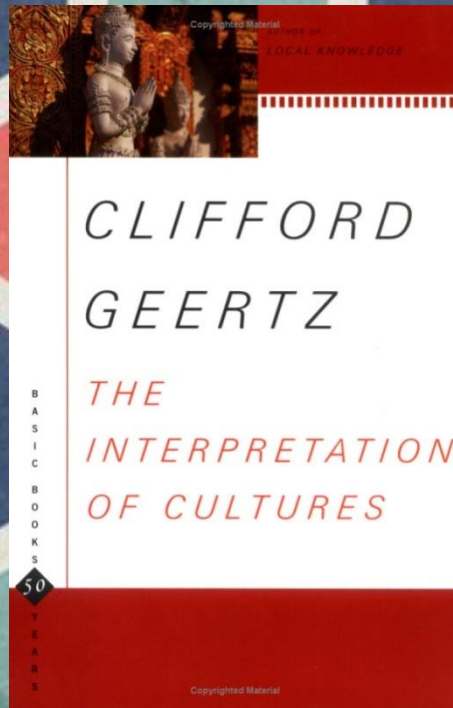
- Crisis of representation (1986-1990)
 - Truth only in objectivity
- Post modern (1990-1995)
- Post experimental inquiry (1995-2000)
- Methodologically contested present (2000-2004)
- Fractured future (2005 to present)

Source: The Eight Historical Moments of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln 2008:3), see also Bryman p.368)

Perspectives on the 'Qualitative'

- Quantitative
 - Use numbers
 - Researcher driven
 - Non-participant
 - Deductive/Theory testing
 - Static
 - Structured
 - Wider inference
 - Hard data
 - Thin descriptions
 - Macro
 - Behaviours, Attitudes, Values
 - Artificial Settings
 - Objective
- Qualitative
 - Use words (respondents own)
 - **Participant driven**
 - **Participant or non-participant**
 - **Inductive/Theory emerging**
 - Process
 - **Unstructured/Semi Structured**
 - Contextual understanding
 - Rich, deep, soft data
 - **Thick descriptions (Geertz)**
 - Micro
 - Meaning
 - Natural/Semi-Natural Settings
 - Subjective

Thick Descriptions (Geertz)



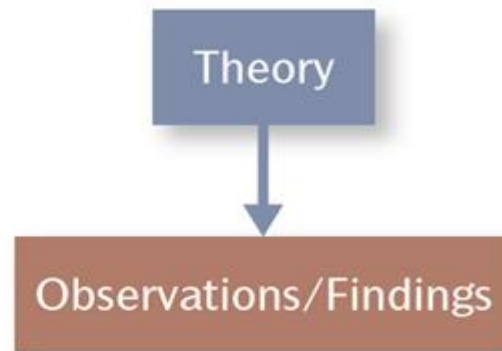
1926-2006

Qualitative Research Design

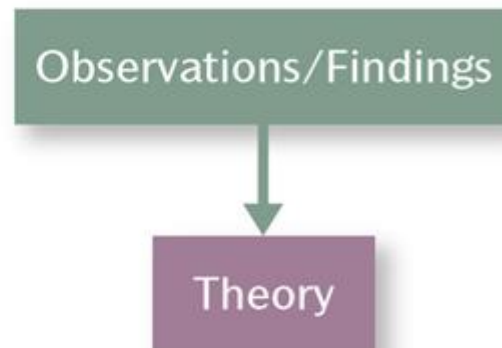
- Generally accepted there is a need for some type of plan which structures and frames the research
- Three ingredients of social research (Gilbert 1992)
 - Theory, design of methods to collect, data collection
- Three main phases Blaikie (2000)
 - Planning, execution and reporting

Deduction and Induction

Deductive approach



Inductive approach



Theories in Qual Research

- Theories and Concepts 'fit' differently in qualitative research compared to quantitative
- The more inductive nature of qualitative research suggests that theories or explanations for certain social phenomena emerge from your research
 - Grounded theory
 - But theories can be espoused and tested using qualitative methods (Silverman 1993)
- Merton (1968)
 - Research reformulates, deflects and clarifies theory

Concepts in Qual Research

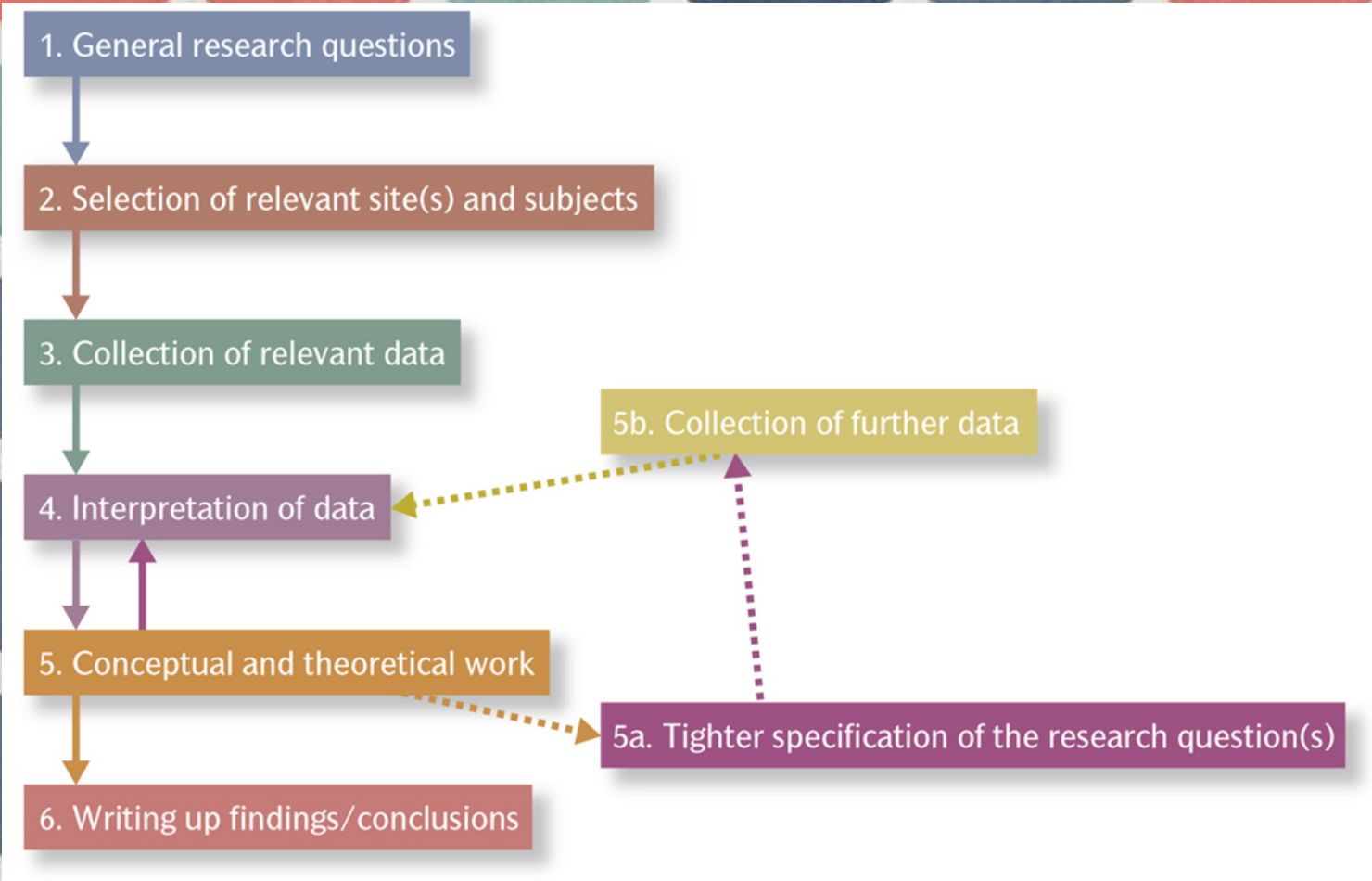
- Concepts are part of the ‘landscape’ of qualitative research (Bryman 2008:373)
 - May not be used to derive measures but used to frame the research or categorise your ideas
 - “Concepts are categories for the organisation of ideas and observations” Bulmer (1984:43)
 - » Intelligence, obesity, fast food, consumption, environmentalism, eating disorders, social identity

The Research Process

Ideas → Literature Review → Design → Data Collection and
Organisation → Analysis and Findings → Dissemination

The Spiraling Research Process (Berg 2009)

Main Steps in Qualitative Research



Inside the Design

- A Manifesto for social research (Blaikie 2000) social research is about

Answering research questions

- Three types = what, why and how
- Research questions answered through research strategies
 - Two broad strategies = inductive and deductive

Research Questions

- Three main types of questions
 - All research questions fall into one of these categories
- ‘What’ questions
 - Descriptive, exploration
 - Take measurements
- ‘Why’ questions
 - Understanding or explaining
- ‘How’ questions
 - Intervention, problem solving

Qualitative Research Objectives

- Inductive research produces generalisations or theories
 - To understand whether and how family life effects our attitudes, feelings and behaviours around food
- Deductive research tests theories
 - What types of people re-offend once left prison?
 - Why do people re-offend (theory testing)?
 - Know anything or need to produce generalisations
 - Do we have a theory to test?
 - People who do not have jobs are more likely to re-offend once leaving prison
 - If ex-prisoners go straight into jobs are they less likely to re-offend?

'Good' Qualitative Research?

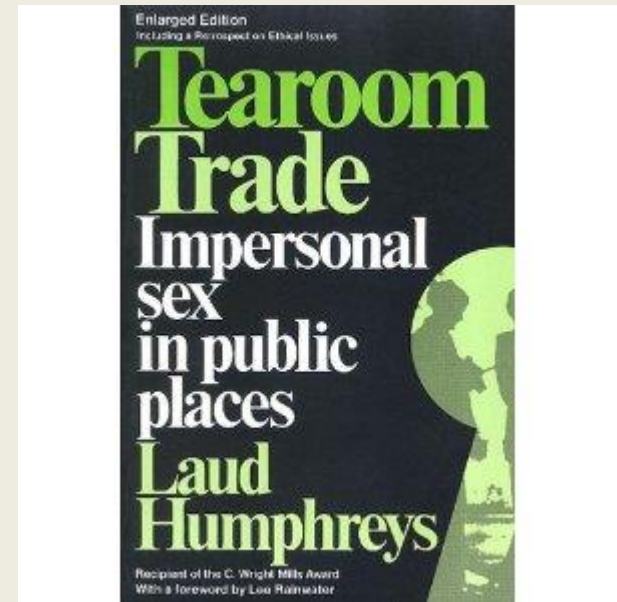
- Reliability and validity
- Common criteria through which to assess the accuracy of quantitative research
- Issues equally important in qualitative enquiry and the research design and plan provides an external framework against which validity and reliability of research findings can be evaluated
- But suggestions other criteria more suitable for qual research
 - Trustworthiness and authenticity (see Bryman chapter 16)

Qualitative Research and 'hidden populations'

- Enables research with rare/subjugated 'populations'

- Hidden populations

- Homeless people
- Gang behaviour
- MSM
- People with eating disorders
- Vulnerable children



Appraising Quality in Qualitative Research

- How credible are the findings?
- Has knowledge/understanding been extended?
- How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purposes?
- Is there scope for drawing wider inferences? How well has this been explained?
- How defensible is the research design?
- How well was the data collected?
- Contexts of the data sources – how well are they retained and portrayed?

Quant –v- Qual similarities too!

- Data reducing
- Address research questions
- Relate data analysis to research literature
- Explore variation
- Frequency is a springboard for analysis
- Avoid deliberate distortion
- Importance of transparency
- Address question of research error
- Appropriate to the research question

Related Philosophies

- Hermeneutics
 - Interpretation of events through understanding the meaning of objects, norms and structures to individuals within their culture
 - Learn ‘rules’ of the group or culture being studied (Rubin & Rubin 1995)

- Phenomenology

- The subjects' perspectives on their world, deals with conscious thoughts and how the individual perceives themselves situated within the social world and its structures

Research methods and epistemological / ontological considerations

- quantitative and qualitative research strategies tend to reflect different epistemological and ontological beliefs
- some say these commitments are inevitable
 - choice of method reflects assumptions about the nature of knowledge and of social phenomena (Morgan & Smircich, 1980)
- others suggest looser connections:
 - autonomy of research methods (Platt, 1996; Bryman, 2004)

Problems with the quantitative/ qualitative contrast

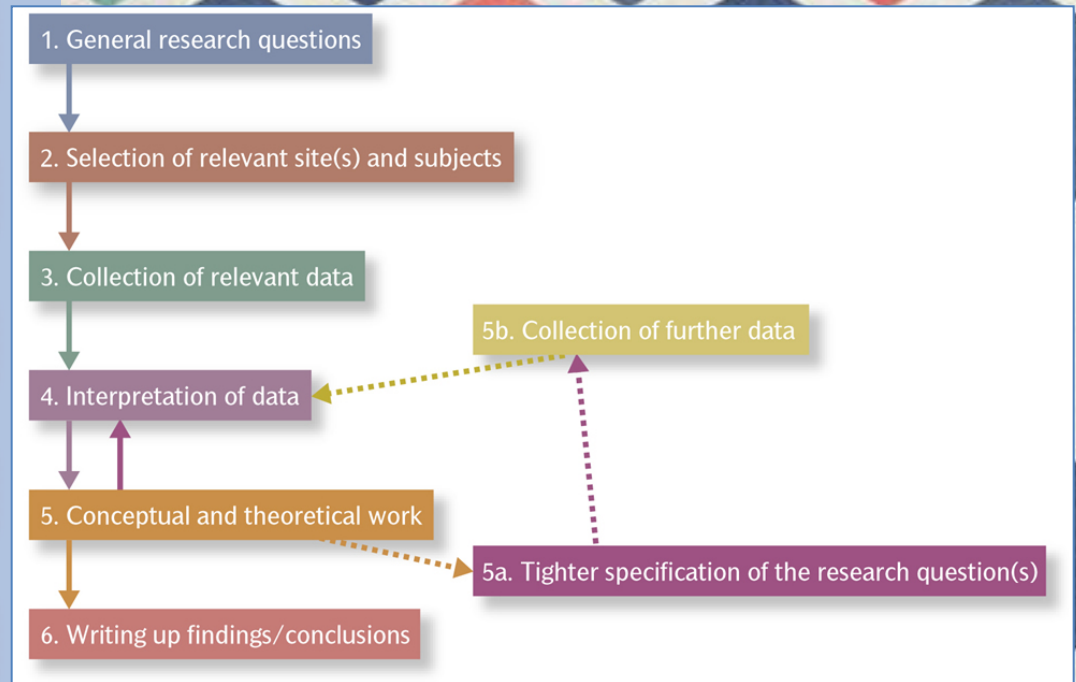
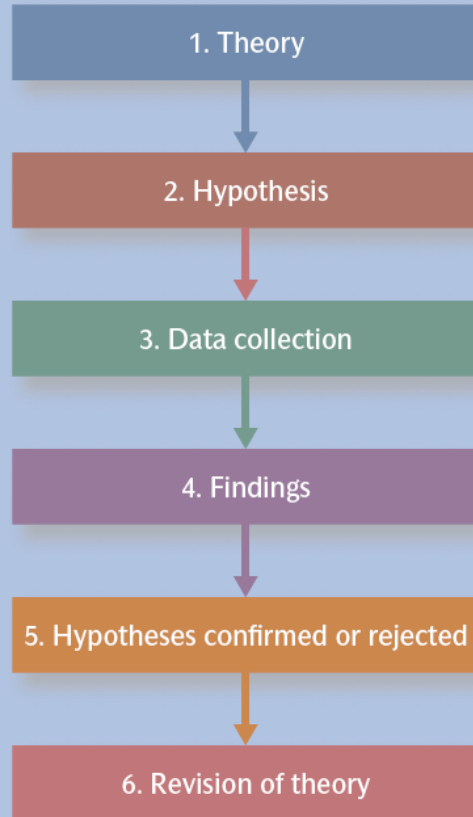
- exaggerated differences between the two research strategies
- based on contrasting dualities:
 - behaviour vs. meaning
 - quantitative methods often attempt to study meanings (even if believed to be unsuccessful!)
 - qualitative researchers also study human behaviour, but in the context of norms, values and culture

Quantitative research, interpretivism and constructionism

- quantitative researchers also study the social meanings people give to the world
 - surveys and questionnaires attempt to measure *attitudes* or elicit *accounts* of action / events
 - Cultural groups (women, low income families, ethnicity, single parent families)
 - British Social Attitudes Survey

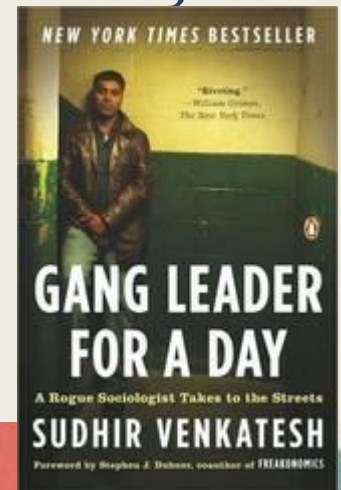
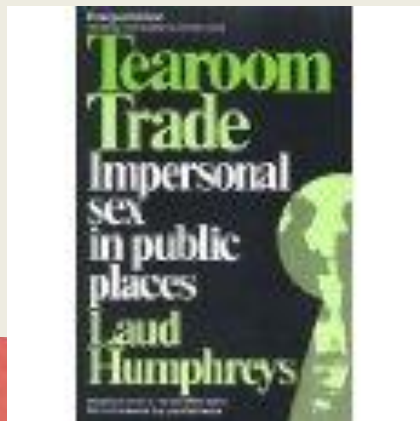
The Deductive and Inductive Process

The process of deduction



The natural science model and qualitative research

- Qualitative research also has some features of natural science
 - empiricist overtones (direct contact with reality)
 - specific problem/ tightly defined research question
- Hypothesis- and theory-testing (analytic induction)



Qualitative findings may be ...

- Theory directing
 - Margaret Mead's work on concept of Adolescence (in Samoa). Found it had little value in Samoan culture. Girls did not have years of tears and troubles before growing up.
- Theory generating
 - Laud Humphreys' study of MSM behaviour.
 - Typology of male sexual behaviour