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Nathan/Gold Coast Campuses

Griffith Social and Behavioural Science Research College

Qualitative Essentials



Workshop Overview



- Introductions
- What is Qualitative Research?
- Why/When choose Qualitative Research?
- 7 steps to conducting a Qualitative Research Study
- Questions/Discussion
- Where to from here

Why Qualitative Research?

- Research Rigor
 - The Howard Becker Story
- Feasibility/Access
 - The Turkey Story
- Communication, Discipline and Politics
 - The British Medical Journal Story
- My qualitative story – a brief overview - research focus, publications, editorial work, work in progress etc.



What is Qualitative Research?



- Qualitative research is concerned with extracting meaning and understanding from non-numerical data.
 - This includes textual data such as interview transcripts, documents and archival material, visual data such as photos and videos, artifacts and more recently on-line and digital material.
- Qualitative research involves an inductive, interpretive approach to research.
- Qualitative findings are mostly communicated via narrative, diagrams, visual methods or interactive forms.

What is Qual Research cont....



- The achievement of rigor/validity is crucial in qualitative research and this occurs through thorough and transparent data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings.
- Your understanding of what qualitative research is/will be strongly dependent upon your discipline, your supervisor/research team and the communication outlets available to you.



About you...



- Why are you interested in using qualitative methods?
- What is your knowledge base? How much do you know?
- What is your research topic and what is your research design?

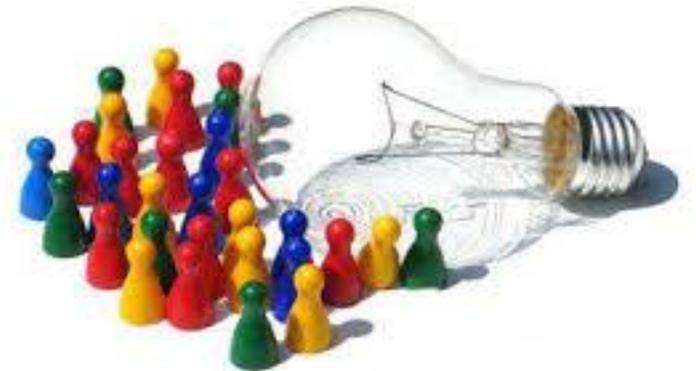
Why am I (and/or thinking about being) a Qualitative Researcher?



- Are you curious about people and the stories they tell?
- Do you enjoy creative writing?
- Are you an avid people watcher and collector of observations?
- Can you be invisible and blend into the crowd?
- Do you have the “blink” factor and strong pattern matching skills?
- What is your previous professional/work experience?

Trick Question

- When you are conducting/communicating qualitative research, what is the ONE key thing you need to get 100% right?
- The answer will be revealed later!
- HINT: It is not what you think!





Key differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches

- Scientific method vs. interpretive method
- Numbers vs. words
- Measurement vs. understanding
- Prediction vs. theory building
- Inductive vs. deductive
- The type of research question or proposition answered or addressed

COMPARING QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Research	RESEARCH ASPECT	Quantitative Research
Discover Ideas, with General Research Objects	COMMON PURPOSE	Test Hypotheses or Specific Research Questions
Observe and Interpret	APPROACH	Measure and Test
Unstructured. Free Form	DATA COLLECTION APPROACH	Structured Response Categories Provided
Research is intimately involved. Results are subjective	RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE	Researcher uninvolved Observer. Results are Objective
Small samples –Often in Natural setting	SAMPLES	Large samples to Produce Generalizable Results [Results that Apply to Other Situations]

The Qualitative “Big 7”



- Imagining – curiosity, passion, trigger event or information
 - Methodological Orientation - Am I working within an interpretive/constructionist/postmodern paradigm?
 - Do I understand why I have to articulate this?
- Focusing – academic processes including literature searches and problematising topic. In qualitative research, the focus is often on the why and how questions.
 - At this stage propositions and research questions are developed.
- Creating – collecting and “making” your data -am I doing ethnography, case study, narrative etc.
 - How will I access organisations, communities, individuals, documents etc.? Is my approach ethical? Will I give dignity and voice to my informants?

The “Big 7” Cont.....



- . Sense-making – sorting and analysing your data – See points 2 and 3 – you need to have decided how you are going to sort and analyse your data well before you start/sourcing it.
 - What approach am I going to use? What technology (if any) will I use to assist me?
- Communicating your research – publishing, presenting and visualising the end result.
 - How am I going to write up my findings? What outlets will I use to disseminate my findings?
- Reflexively analysing your study
 - how will I utilise feedback about my work? How will I respond to this?



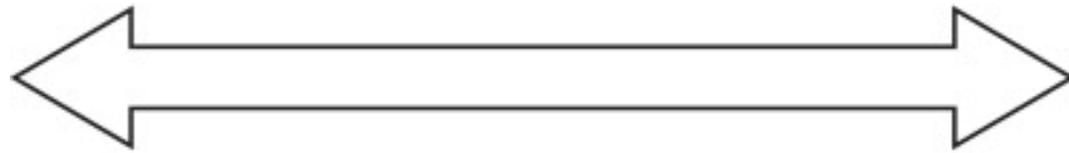
Step 1: Imagining



ONTOLOGY

REALISM

CONSTRUCTIVISM



POSITIVISM

INTERPRETIVISM

EPISTEMOLOGY

Methodological Orientation



- Characteristics of qualitative research methodology include the following:
 - Conducted in a natural setting as opposed to an experimental/contrived setting.
 - The researcher becomes an instrument or tool in the research process.
 - Bias/vested interests are acknowledged, explained and even embraced in some circumstances.

Methodological Orientation cont....



- Multiple sources of and different kinds of data are often used – (interviews with documents etc.)
- Data analysis is inductive.
- Research participants' voices are critical to demonstrating rigor.
- Theoretical lens and interpretive inquiry are central to communicating qualitative research.

What kinds of epistemological orientations inform Qualitative Research?

- **Positivism/post-positivism**
 - content analysis/ mixed methods
- **Interpretivism**
 - The overall common orientation to Qual research
 - Finding meaning and understanding through non-numerical data
 - **Verstehen** – Weber's idea of deep understanding of human experience and phenomena

What kinds of epistemological orientations inform Qualitative Research?



- Phenomenology
 - An intensive study of a particular phenomena experienced by humans – grief, unemployment etc.
 - Small “n”

- Social Constructionism
 - Humans “construct” and “reproduce” their social world

- Symbolic Interactionism/Constructivism
 - Focuses on individuals’ interaction with their social world and how they make sense of it

What kinds of epistemological orientations inform Qualitative Research cont...?



- Post-modernism
 - No “one” objective reality
 - Various kinds of postmodernist approaches
- Pragmatism
 - Whatever it takes to get a research result
- Criticalism
 - Focuses on the political aspects of a social phenomena
- Intersectionality/feminism/post-colonialism
 - Explores the world of human groups/societies that are marginalised/oppressed and how they confront/struggle with this

What is an Inductive Approach?

The purposes for using an inductive approach are to:

- *to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format*
- *to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data*
- *to develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data.*
- The inductive approach reflects frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis.
- Most inductive studies report a “model” that has between three and eight main categories in the findings.

Inductive



Step 2: Focusing

Research Questions/Propositions for Qualitative Projects



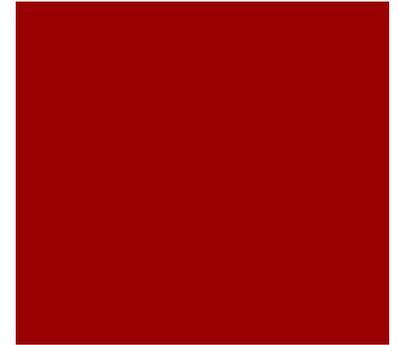
- Qualitative projects are different to quantitative projects in the they are focused on answering different kinds of queries and questions.
- For example, a quantitative study is concerned with testing hypotheses through examining the strength of the relationship between 2 or more variables. So, the literature review does a particular job, in that it clearly leads to the operational definition of a construct.

Research Questions/Propositions for Qualitative Projects



- In qualitative research, question formulation is more suited to a “how” or “why” question.
- In several disciplines, “propositions” are developed in qualitative studies. These are general statements about the likelihood of several concepts informing one another

Example: quantitative hypothesis



- A quantitative hypothesis would read like the following:
- The **experimental hypothesis** states that students will recall significantly more information on a Monday morning than on a Friday afternoon.
- The **null hypothesis** states that there will be no significant difference in the amount recalled on a Monday morning compared to a Friday afternoon. Any difference will be due to chance or confounding factors.

Example: Qualitative Question/Proposition

- An example of a qualitative research question may be:

What is the decision-making process that junior doctors engage in to go rural?

Or

Why do professional women stop seeking leadership and promotion opportunities in their late 20s?

- Propositions may also be presented in qualitative studies. Like hypotheses, these are statements about the likelihood of two or more concepts working together.



Propositions – Examples

- A proposition is a loose statement and not meant to be as precise as a hypothesis.
- Example:
- **Junior doctors with rural backgrounds are more likely to consider a rural placement as a favourable career choice.**

Or

- **Young professional women are less inclined to “drop out” of seeking promotion opportunities if they have access to strong male mentorship.**



Qualitative Project Literature Reviews



- Also known as the *conceptual framework*
- Tells the story of the primary concepts and theories that frame the study and how these ideas have evolved over time
- The literature review also reviews and discusses past research upon which the current study builds, problematises or extends
- Best organised by topic – discuss key topics as if discussing the plot of a story
- The “missing” puzzle approach – finding and filling the gap

What belongs in the qualitative method section of a thesis chapter/Confirmation documents?

- Researcher's brief description of gaining access to research sites
- Participants and sites of study – what types of participants and contextual sites are under study? (Numbers, demographics etc.)
- Sampling plan or rationale – what is the rationale behind who your participants are and how you are going to choose them?
- Detailed description of data collection and fieldwork – make it detailed as people will be interested in what and how you went/or are going to go about your study
- Detailed description of data analysis procedures/processes – what is your plan for answering your research questions



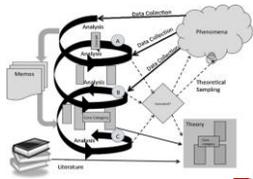


Step 3: Creating

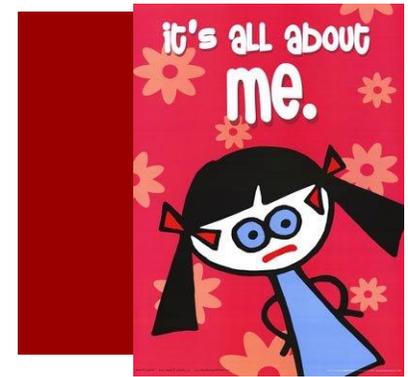
How do Qualitative Researchers collect and source data?

- Observation – simple, unobtrusive, participant
- Interviewing – semi-structured, group/focus, in-depth
- Ethnography – classical and auto
- Visual methods – video, photos etc
- Discourse, content and policy analysis using documents
- Ethnomethodology – studying micro interactions
- Online – Social Media etc





Qualitative Research Approaches



- Narrative Approach – intense and detailed study on a particular person and requires a high level of writing skill where rich and compelling stories are told.
- Phenomenological studies – an intensive focus on a particular phenomena (such as a certain emotion or experience) where the distilled meaning or essence emerges.
- Ethnography – focus on the culture of a group or organisation and is characterised by the researcher taking on a role within that context.

Qualitative Research Approaches



- Case Studies – focus on one or more discrete persons, organisations or groups where multiple sources of data are used and is characterised by a chronological narrative
- Grounded Theory – an approach that is suited to a research question where the focus is on understanding how a particular process works. This approach involves a very detailed and systematic analytic approach to data analysis from which theory emerges.

Narrative approach



- Explores the life/personal experience of an individual
- Best suited to the need to tell stories of individual experiences
- Draws mainly from the humanities – literature, history, anthropology, psychology etc.
- The unit of analysis is the study of ONE or more individuals
- Data is collected using interviews, documents etc. and is longitudinal in nature
- Data is analysed developing themes, often chronologically, and “restorying” stories

Phenomenology



Understanding the essence of an experience

- Best suited to the need to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon in extreme detail
- Draws from psychology, philosophy and education
- The unit of analysis is several individuals who have shared the same experience
- Data may include interviews, documents, observation, visual data such as photos and or other art forms such as poetry
- Data analysis focuses on analysing text for significant statements, meaning units, textual description, and description of the essence
- A phenomenological study is reported through a detailed and rich description of the essence under investigation.

Ethnography/Observation/Action Research



- The describing and interpretation of a group that shares a culture
- Best suited to studies that are examining culture
- Anthropological/Sociological in nature
- The group/Organisation is the unit of analysis
- Data collected through observations, interviews and other sources
- Thick description of culture sharing group and thematic analysis
- Reporting is through thick description of how the culture in question works or operates.

Case Study Method



- In-depth description/analysis of a case and/or multiple cases
- When an in-depth understanding of a case can provide a deeper understanding of a theory or concept
- Psychology, law, political science and medicine.
- Unit of analysis includes events, programs, activities, policies or more than one individual.
- Multiple sources of data
- Description, thematic analysis and cross-case analysis
- Reported as a detailed analysis of one or more cases

Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis

- Analysis very detailed social and verbal interaction using audio, photographic and video analyses
- Requires high-end digital equipment to document timing, conversational pauses, utterances etc.





Data Collection Methods

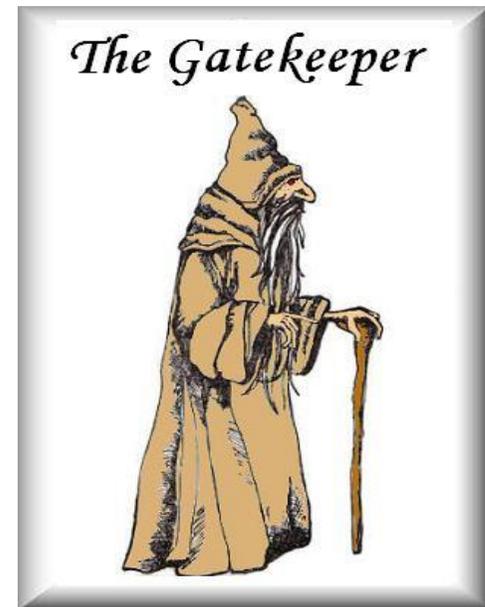
Organising Qualitative Fieldwork



- All qualitative projects involve fieldwork. This means that the researcher has to carefully and meticulously plan and organise where the data is sourced from (the site) and who is going to facilitate this for the researcher.
- Fieldwork Roles – Total immersion, uninvolved observer, partial observer
- Gatekeepers – People who have to power to give you permission to collect data/get access to data. A single study may involve many gatekeeper with whom the researcher needs to negotiate
- Informants/Participants – Any person who provides data or evidence, in either a formal or informal manner

Observation

- Observational Roles
 - Observer
 - Observer as Participant
 - Participant as Observer
 - Full Participant (Immersion)
- Fieldwork/Observational Notes
 - Detailed, methodological & immediate
 - Methodological, conceptual, theoretical and reflexive



Interviewing

- There are various kinds of interviews: open-ended survey questions, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, group interviews, focus groups.
- You need to choose the right interviewing approach to suit the context of your study. It is not possible to conduct interviews in all research contexts.



Qualitative Interviewing: Key Issues and Challenges

- Interviewing is an art form and needs practice. They are tedious, time-consuming and often awkward. If you do them well, are methodical in your process and document everything you do (some call it the “chain of evidence”), this will reward you when you conduct your analysis.
- You can approach interviews in a number of ways, but the most common approaches are using semi-structured and open-ended questions.
- Make sure you “pilot” your questions with one or two interviews and then do a thorough critique of the interview which will lead to modifications.
- Be comfortable with silence.



Qualitative Interviewing: Key Issues and Challenges cont....



- Learn to actively listen.
- Make sure your recording devices work – the use of smart phones can be risky so make sure you have a back up (Olympus digital recorder from Office works is about \$100.00 and does a great job but there are others just as good and available online.
- All interviews will need to be transcribed. If you are thinking of doing a “shortcut” and only transcribing what you think is relevant, then maybe you need to revisit your choice of methodology here.

Qualitative Interviewing: Key Issues and Challenges cont....



- Transcription costs range from your own time right through to \$60.00 per hour of recording. Examples are Pacific Solutions or Freelancer.com. Remember, cheap is cheap.
- Do NOT cut corners at this stage (for example, NOT transcribe everything word) or else you will end up with “thin” or “washed out” data, from which you cannot extract any meaning or understanding. It will catch up with you (or your supervisor) eventually down the track, when you are trying to publish on good journals.

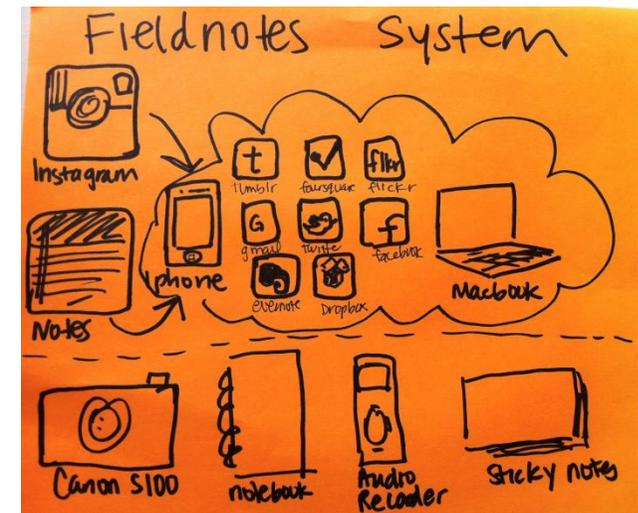
Focus vs. Group Interviews



- Focus groups are a very specialised and particular way of collecting data about a specific phenomena.
 - They are best conducted by professionals who specialise in this technique.
 - This is expensive but it will yield you the richest and thickest data about a particular phenomena.
 - This is not the best approach for collecting exploratory data.
 - Focus groups are tightly controlled, facilitated and are conducted a purpose built facility that can audio and video record the interview.

Ethnography/Fieldwork

- Different ways of doing ethnography include extensive fieldwork, on-line ethnography, auto ethnography etc.
- Etic vs. Emic data (also see data analysis)
- Fieldwork and time/space challenges
- Considering the ethics of covert and/or politically charged research



Discourse/Content/Policy Analyses using Documents/Digital information etc.

- This approach is best suited to questions which **problematise** social, political or cultural challenges through use of semiotics etc.
- Policy analyses of large volumes of documentation can be aided by the use of data mining/content analysis software such **Leximancer**.



Visual Methods

- A picture is worth 1000 words
- Extremely valuable for instantly conveying complex, textured, non-linear ideas
- Visual evidence can be the key focus or supplementary to other data
- Requires a high level of creativity and is difficult to publish





Step 4: Sense-making



Qualitative Data Analysis

- What it is...pattern matching, finding themes, exploring meaning and understanding through textual data
- Types of data analysis include:
 - Content /Thematic analysis
 - Grounded theory
 - The process of coding is a detailed, intensive and multi-staged process used to turn often messy and large amounts of data into a coherent set of themes, typologies or conceptual/theoretical models.
- Data analysis software is increasingly used especially with large number of documents.
- Qualitative research rigour and validation strategies – Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability and Credibility

Technology and Data Analysis



- Nvivo
- Leximancer etc
- These packages are good for indexing and retrieving but they will not “analyse” your data. You need to learn that process before you start using these packages.
- You need to make decisions about how you are going to analyse your data BEFORE you commence data collection.



Qualitative Data Coding: Process, technology and Challenges

- **Coding** – a process whereby “messy” and “unconnected” non-numerical data is analysed via a rigorous and methodical process. This is tedious and takes much more time than most first planned for.
- **Manual Coding** – This involves the process of learning how to code BEFORE you use any Technology such as NVIVO etc. BEFORE you embark on learning how to use a software package such as NVIVO, you really need to be very comfortable and familiar with your data.
- **Computer-aided Technology** – The key word here is “aided”. The technology is wonderful for organising and indexing your data, but it will not analyse it for you. That is what your brain is for.

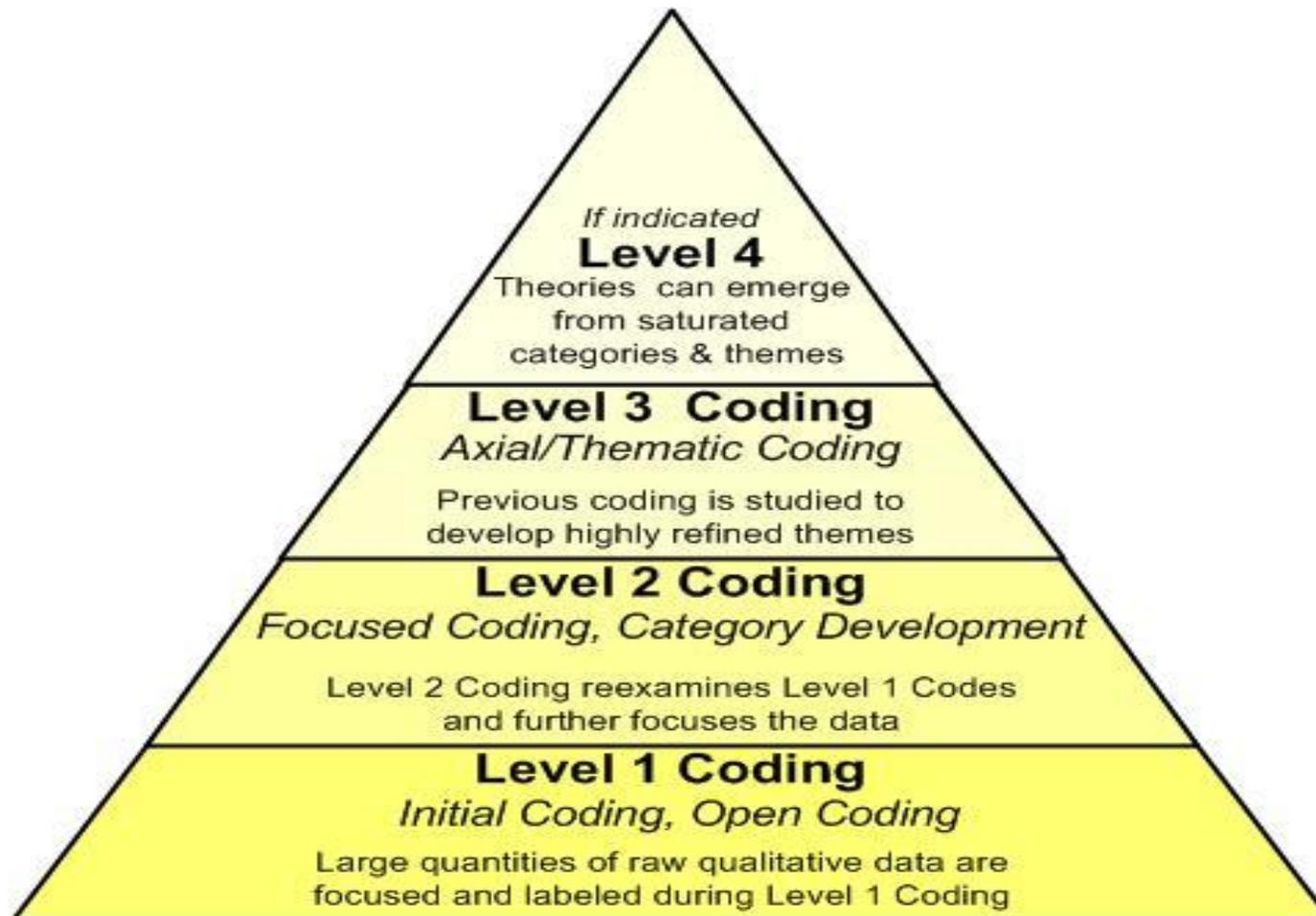


What does manual qualitative data coding look like?



own home
alone / lonely
When you move into your own home, you're alone. There is *no* *bustle of people around the*
miss company
house. I miss having someone to chat to when I get home. I put the TV or some music *30*
background noise
there's some background noise. the silence makes me feel so alone. Sometimes I will be sat
lonely
wasting time / inactive
watching trash TV and thinking I should be out doing something rather than watching this
doing
tired / depressed
rubbish. I read a lot but sometimes I am too tired and just want to veg out. But it's been good
unhealthy to be dependent
to move out of mum and dads as it's not healthy to rely on them as they won't last forever. I
independence
become independent and made my own decisions. It's good they still there when I need them. *support*
distance
It's good to have some distance as when I was at home I was arguing a lot with my dad and
conflict
moving out
that was made me decide it was time to go.

Conventional Thematic Coding Process



Step 5: Validating



Qualitative Analysis: Validation Strategies



- Bias – Is it relevant in qualitative research?
- Reflexivity
 - Not just reflection on practice but also deep understanding of biases, assumptions and interpretation
- Your validation strategy will depend on your research approach - See Creswell (2013) Chapter 10 for the 8 most common different types of qualitative validation strategies
- Triangulation
- Inter-coder reliability



Step 6: Communicating

Communication/Dissemination



- Reporting and communicating the findings of a qualitative study is the most challenging and most satisfying part of conducting qualitative research.
- Most journals tend to prefer quantitative research but there are an increasing number of new journals that publish qualitative research.
 - You really need to do your homework regarding what the norm is for your discipline, what journals are publishing qualitative research, and who the editors of your key disciplinary journals are.

Communication/Dissemination



- There are challenges with multidisciplinary team research especially a traditional medical/allied health mix.
 - Being the “token” qualitative researcher on a research team can be challenging and often not much fun. You often have to engage in quite a lot of “educating” re the process, scientific merit and value of Qualitative research.
- Public media/social media.
 - There is an increased expectation that scholars will have a strong social media presence. This means your research will reach a wider audience, but it will also receive much more intense scrutiny.



Step 7: Reflexivity/Reflection

Being Reflexive

- Qualitative research is really dependent upon the researcher being reflexive.
- This means you really need to interrogate what you have done, how you did it, and what the outcomes were.
- Feedback from journals, conferences and trusted colleagues is ‘gold’. Use it to improve your work.
- And the last “Important” thing?



And the answer is...Ethical Practice

- Qualitative research is (unfortunately) subject to more scrutiny ethics wise.
- **Unless the information/data you are using is sourced from the public domain (that is, freely available to everyone) you need to de-identify your informants, participants, organisations etc. The exception is when you have permission to identify your data sources and you have written and approved permission from the University and the source to do this.**



- 
- If you have not sufficiently de-identified your data, and someone correctly identifies where your data is from, you run the risk of compromising your reputation and career prospects and also your research centre and the University's reputation.
 - You may also harm the organisational/personal reputation from which you collected the data.
 - Your university will not be your friend if you get the ethics wrong throughout your research.
 - **So, MAKE SURE you get it right.**

Where to from here?

- Consultations are available with me but you MUST get permission from your supervisor and/or your research team leader before I will meet with you. I cannot provide consultation unless your dissertation supervisor/academic research /supervisor leader approves this.
- My contact details are: m.boyle@griffith.edu.au. Please email if you wish to organise a consultation.
- Qualitative Data Analysis Workshop – This is a really great workshop and I encourage you to attend.
- Set up a qualitative research reading/support group in your school/discipline area. I am happy to help you do this.



Useful Reference links

Mortari (2015)

<http://ijq.sagepub.com/content/14/5/1609406915618045.abstract>

Clark and Thompson (2016)

<http://ijq.sagepub.com/content/15/1/1609406916641250.full.pdf+html>

Archibald et al (2015)

<http://ijq.sagepub.com/content/14/2/5.full.pdf+html>

Morse et al (2002)

<http://ijq.sagepub.com/content/1/2/13.full.pdf+html>

Questions???



Thank you!!!

My contact details are:

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