

# Introduction to Qualitative Research

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# Today

- Why should you care about qualitative research?
- What is it?
  - Description
  - Toolkit for QR
- What is rigour in QR?
- Parked for future reference:
  - Overview of Methodologies



What's the point of qualitative research?

***Qualitative research holds different assumptions and uses different methods to answer different types of questions than quantitative research***

# QR may be helpful if:

- Your research question concerns something that cannot be measured.
- You are interested in the opinions, experiences, beliefs of participants.
- You're not sure exactly what information you need to answer the question (e.g. what factors are important)
- The boundaries/parameters of the question are still broad and may need exploration within the data collection process itself.

# QR asks different questions....

- Why don't patients take their medications as prescribed?
- How do physicians develop good clinical judgment?
- What makes a particular clinical teaching unit an effective place to learn?

# Explains unexpected findings

**Quant study:** Survey of types of power use experienced by clinical clerks on various learning rotations.

**Finding:** clerks with resident preceptors more likely to experience negative forms of power use and report lower quality learning experiences.

**Qual study:** How do clerks experience power in clinical learning environments?

Baird, Bracken, Grierson *In preparation*

# Can help identify factors of interest for further study or intervention

**Problem:** low levels of medication adherence among people with T2DM.

**Qual study:** How do patients with T2DM manage their medications? What barriers and facilitators do they experience?

**Intervention:** Designed to alleviate particular barriers

**Further Study:** Assessing the prevalence of particular barriers

# What is Qualitative Research?



# Common distinctions

## Qualitative

- Description, Interpretation
- Induction
- Meaning
- Depth, uniqueness
- Multiple realities
- Holistic
- Develops theory
- Process oriented
- Rich descriptions

## Quantitative

- Explanation
- Deduction
- Numbers
- Generalizability
- Single reality
- Reductionistic
- Tests theory
- Outcome oriented
- Precise measurement

# Qualitative research

- Generates theory using an inductive approach.
- Emphasizes the ways in which individuals interpret their social world.
- Emphasizes participant descriptions and understandings of human behavior.
- Strives for careful and detailed descriptions or interpretations of social practices to understand how participants experience and explain their own world.

# Types of data

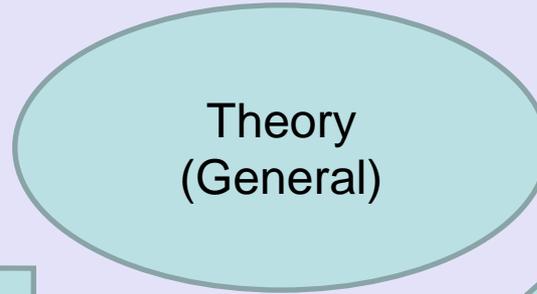
- Participant interviews
- Focus groups
- Document analysis (policy docs, publicly available docs, docs produced by participants)
- Observation (participant, non-participant)
- Also: video, audio, photographs within innovative methodologies.

# QR Reasoning

- Induction, exploration
  - More tentative idea of what is important at beginning of study
- Look for participants to identify what is important to them, not imposing assumptions.
  - Widely elicit priorities, opinions, beliefs, actions of participants
- Requires open research question and open interview questions, to give room for participants to express surprising ideas.

Qual: Starts with specific examples, analyzes to generate theory

Quan: starts with a theory, tests via specific examples to prove or disprove that theory.



Inductive Reasoning

Deductive Reasoning

Data (Specific)

# Inductive Reasoning

- Exploratory
  - Don't know what you're looking for, or what might be important
- Data-driven
  - Let participant show what's important-  
researcher doesn't yet know
- Methods evolve as data is collected, to respond to emerging insights.

# Iterative process

- Qualitative methodologies accept that research question will evolve as data is collected and analysed
- Start broad, ask broad questions, start analysis immediately, let emerging ideas guide further data collection.

# Example

- Initial question: What is it like to wait for an organ transplant?
  1. Interview a couple of individuals who are currently waiting.
  2. In analysis, notice prevalence of talk about ideas of who deserves an organ, and prioritization of patients on the list.
  3. Recruit some more patient participants and ask specifically about their ideas of fairness and equity in organ transplantation.
  4. Analyze responses, notice that talk about prioritization and fairness also coincides with talk about feelings of guilt.
  5. Recruit some organ recipients, re-work questions to query these issues.
  6. Eventually..... develop findings or build a theory about notions of ethics, resource allocation, fairness, equity in organ donation and how those waiting for an organ navigate these ideas, how these ideas affect the way that organ recipients think & act about their experience later in life.

# Sampling

- Not striving for statistical inference or generalizability, so sampling doesn't seek to be representative of a particular group.
- Important to specify thoughtful inclusion/exclusion criteria.
  - Ensures all participant responses are relevant to the phenomena under study.
- Rather, “purposive”, looking for participants who will yield rich data.
- May evolve with data analysis (seek participants with a particular trait to fill in a gap in emerging theory)

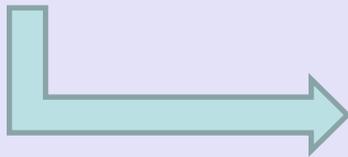
# When do you have enough participants?

- B/c not aiming for generalizability, sample size cannot be calculated.
- Instead, aim for “saturation”
  - When new data does not yield new ideas
  - Further sampling yields “predictable” responses.
- How many is enough? Depends on homogeneity of participants, breadth of experience you are trying to examine.



# Using Qualitative Research

- **Worldview**  
(paradigm, theoretical perspective)
- **Research Approach**  
(methodology)
- **Data Collection Strategy**  
(methods)



Last thing you choose, not the first.

# Building Your Project

- Not necessarily pre-packaged sets of paradigm + methodology + methods.
- Mixing and matching is acceptable, as long as it is justified.
- Some techniques tend to be used together more frequently
- Some are in philosophical opposition



# Choose Methods To Match Broader Research Considerations

“Let’s do a focus group study”

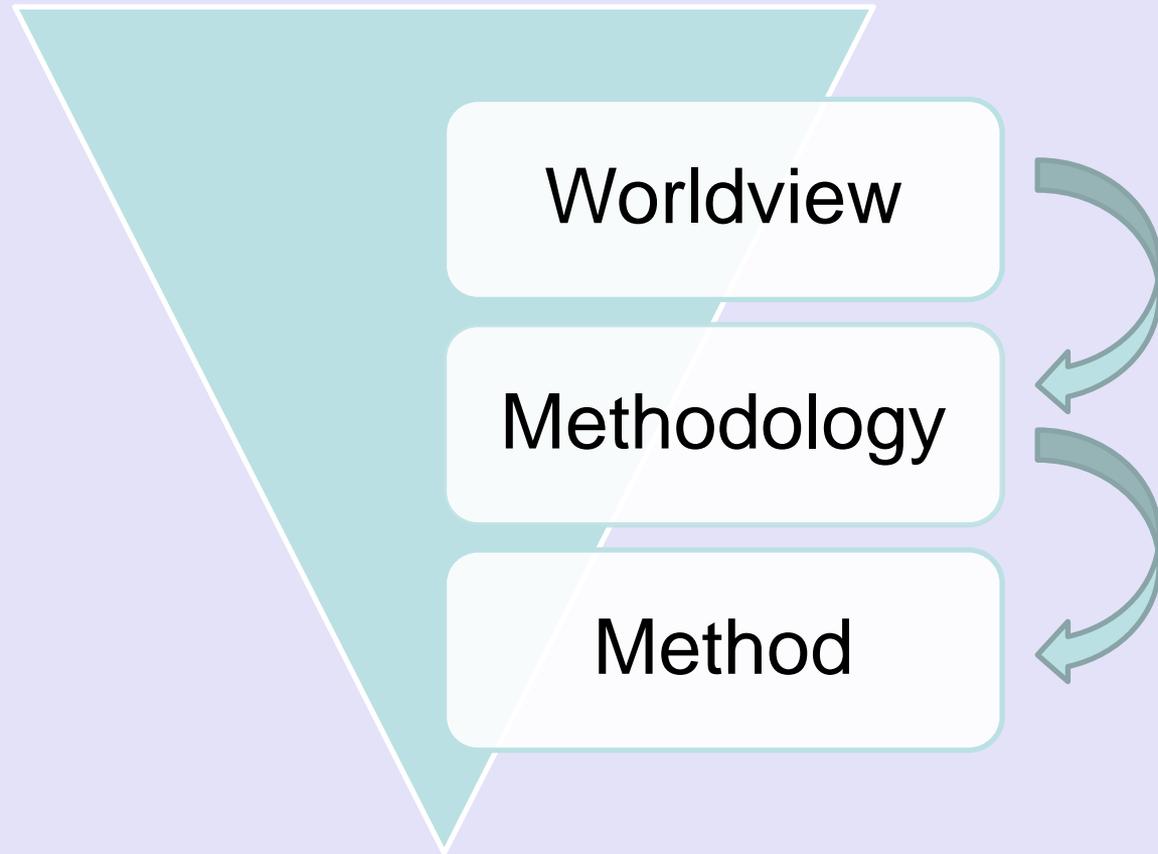
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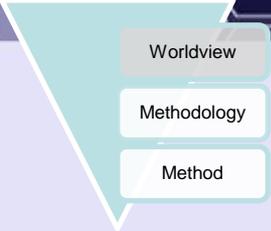
There are many different purposes, formats, uses of focus groups.

“Let’s use a wrench”



# Components of a Qualitative Research Study





Worldview

Methodology

Method

# Worldview

- “Paradigm”, “Worldview”, “Epistemological Paradigm”, “Theoretical Tradition”
- Ontology (what exists) + Epistemology (what can be known) + Methodology (how we can know it)
- Foundation of all research, qual + quant

# Additional Reading Resources

- Giacomini, M. Theory matters in qualitative research. In Handbook of Qualitative Health Research. Bourgeault, I., DeVries, R., Dingwall, R. (Eds). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Grix, J. (2002). Introducing students to the generic terminology of social research. *Politics*. 22(3), 175-86.
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (2004) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Hesse-Biber, S. & Leavy, P. (Eds) *Approaches to Qualitative Research*.

Worldview

Methodology

Method

# Methodology

- Package of guidelines for conducting qual research
  - Affiliated with a particular worldview/ epistemological paradigm(s)
  - Data collection guidelines
  - Sampling
  - Data analysis guidelines
- Developed out of different disciplines, each has a different focus.

# Choosing a methodology

- Concentrate on focus of each methodology, look for one that asks the type of question you are interested in.
- Might end up refining your RQ slightly after choosing a methodology.
- Wikipedia is an excellent resource for a short summary of what each methodology is about, and list of key texts to start with.

# Reading list on Wikipedia's GT Page

## Glaser

- Glaser BG, The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 445, 1965.
- Glaser BG, Strauss A. *Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Sociology Press [3] [↗](#), 1967
- Glaser BG. *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of Grounded Theory*. Sociology Press [4] [↗](#), 1978.
- Glaser BG (ed). *More Grounded Theory Methodology: A Reader*. Sociology Press [5] [↗](#), 1994.
- Glaser BG (ed). *Grounded Theory 1984-1994. A Reader (two volumes)*. Sociology Press [6] [↗](#), 1995.
- Glaser BG (ed). *Gerund Grounded Theory: The Basic Social Process Dissertation*. Sociology Press [7] [↗](#), 1996.
- Glaser BG. *Doing Grounded Theory - Issues and Discussions*. Sociology Press [8] [↗](#), 1998.
- Glaser BG. *The Grounded Theory Perspective I: Conceptualization Contrasted with Description*. Sociology Press [9] [↗](#), 2001.
- Glaser BG. *The Grounded Theory Perspective II: Description's Remodeling of Grounded Theory*. Sociology Press [10] [↗](#), 2003.
- Glaser BG. *The Grounded Theory Perspective III: Theoretical coding*. Sociology Press, 2005.

## Strauss & Corbin

- Anselm L. Strauss; Leonard Schatzman; Rue Bucher; Danuta Ehrlich & Melvin Sabshin: *Psychiatric ideologies and institutions* (1967)
- Barney G. Glaser; Anselm L. Strauss: *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967)
- Anselm L. Strauss: *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987)
- Anselm L. Strauss; Juliet Corbin: *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Sage (1990)
- Anselm L. Strauss; Juliet Corbin: "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons and Evaluative Criteria", in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*
- Anselm L. Strauss: *Continual Permutations of Action* (1993)
- Anselm L. Strauss; Juliet Corbin: "Grounded Theory in Practice", Sage (1997)
- Anselm L. Strauss; Juliet Corbin: "Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques". 2nd edition. Sage
- Juliet Corbin; Anselm L. Strauss: "Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques". 3rd edition. Sage

## Constructivist Grounded Theory

- Bryant, Antony (2002) 'Re-grounding grounded theory', *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, 4(1): 25-42.
- Bryant, Antony and Charmaz, Kathy (2007) 'Grounded theory in historical perspective: An epistemological account', in Bryant, A. and Charmaz, Kathy (eds.), *Handbook of Constructivist Grounded Theory*, Sage, 2007, 1-25.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2000) 'Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods', in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, 2000, 401-415.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2003) 'Grounded theory', in Smith, J.A. (ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2008) 'Constructivism and the grounded theory method', in Holstein, J.A. and Cubrim, J.F. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, 2008, 435-454.



Worldview

Methodology

Method

# Methods (Tools)

- Interviews
  - Semi-structured
  - Unstructured
- Focus Groups
- Observation
  - Participant/Non-Participant
- Textual Analysis
- Arts-based approaches
  - Photovoice

# Your QR Toolkit

- **Worldview**
  - Epistemology
  - Ontology
- **Methodology**
  - Affiliation with a particular worldview
  - Linked to particular disciplinary and theoretical perspectives
  - Guidance for all stages of research
- **Methods**
  - Data collection techniques

# What do you choose first?

## Some potential starting points

- Question you want to ask
- Type of data that's accessible
- Methodology you are comfortable with
- Congruency with theory you want to use, way you see the world



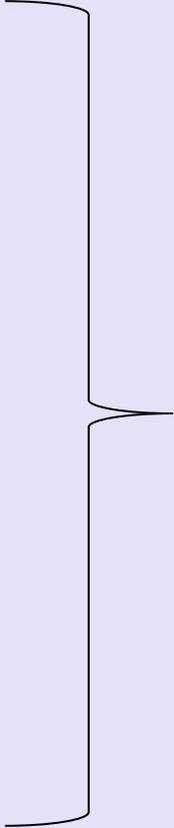
# Overview of Methodologies



- Recognize the variation of methodologies
- Appreciate the influence of the methodology on the research
- Place to start if you need to choose one

# Overview of Methodologies

- Grounded Theory
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Narrative
- Case Study
- Text-Based approaches
- Participatory approaches



Slides parked at the end of lecture in case you need them in the future

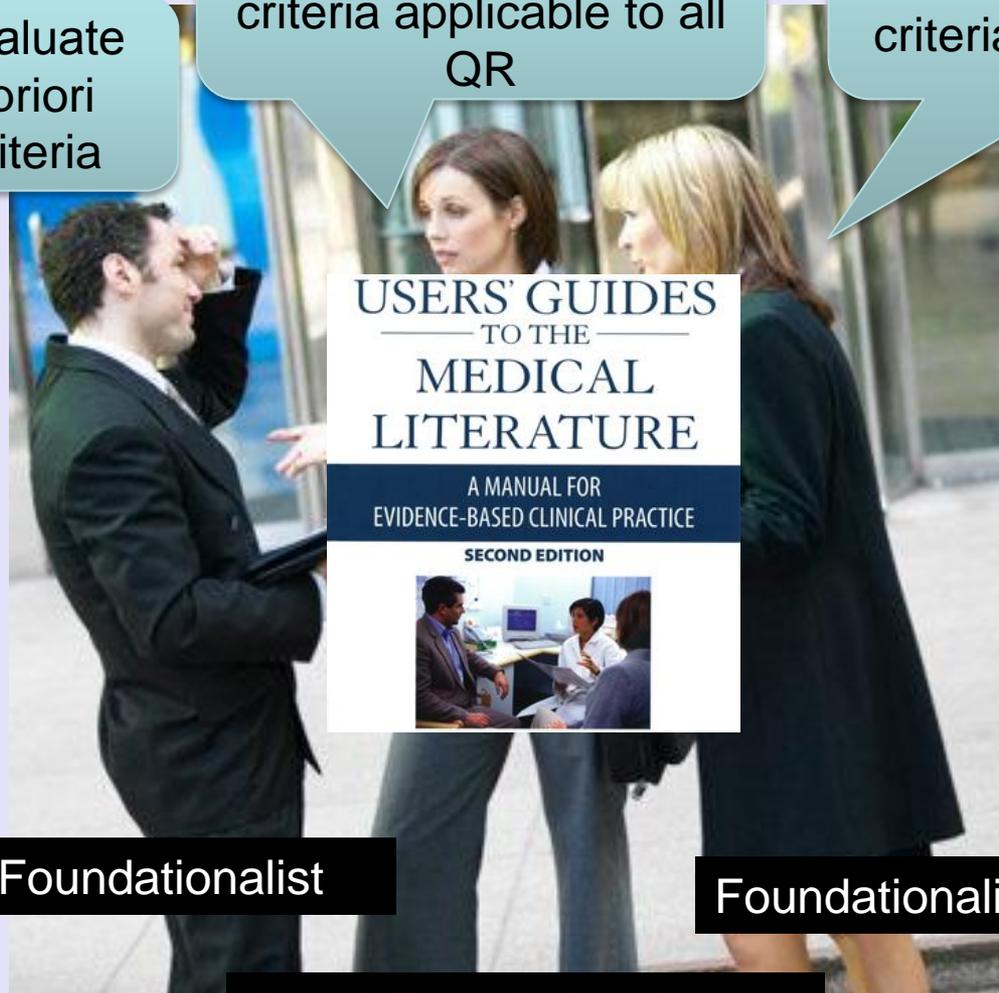
# Rigour in Qualitative Research



You can't evaluate QR with a priori standard criteria

QR requires it's own criteria, but there are criteria applicable to all QR

All research should stand up to the same criteria (quant. criteria)



Non-Foundationalist

Foundationalist

Quasi-Foundationalist

# Difficulty of Standardized Appraisal



Table I A hierarchy of the evidence

Grade of evidence	Source of evidence
A	Meta analysis of clinical trials
B	Systematic review of clinical trials
C	Randomised controlled trials
D	Case control studies
E	Cohort studies
F	Expert opinion



# Assessing Quality

- No unified QR paradigm
- No consensus on methods and standards for critical appraisal
- Procedural details typically under-reported
- Good procedures do not ensure a good product
- High quality research also requires conceptual and analytical prowess

# What QR strives for

- Theoretically sophisticated findings
- Usefulness
- Resonance
- Originality
- Trustworthiness
- Credibility
- Reflexivity, acknowledgement of limitations and researcher influence
- Enough details reader can evaluate resonance between data and conclusions

# Some ways to achieve this

- Triangulation
- Member-checking
- Memos, field notes
- Audit trail of analytic decisions
- Theoretical saturation
- Theoretical sampling
- Present a “thick description” of data

# Critical Appraisal

- From evidence based medicine
  - Developed for causal (hypothesis testing) research
  - Focus on experimental design & logical inference
  - Presumes a hierarchy of worse -> better designs
  - ...leading to worse -> better quality evidence
- Reinforced by the strategic use & abuse of clinical research
  - Fear of bias by authority figures, pharmaceutical companies, etc.
  - Also problems of “equipoise” – evidence as a disciplining influence on overzealous theoreticians

# Critical Appraisal

- Basic premise:

*The methods reported can warrant the results as true (or not)*

- This holds true enough for experimental, hypothesis testing studies
  - (when the causal mechanism is plausible and accounted for)
- But it is largely untrue for qualitative studies

# Research as cooking: Appraising quantitative methods

- Specify the:
  - **Ingredients**
    - (...data)
  - **Recipe**
    - (...design)
  - **Machine**
    - (...analysis, stats)
- & anybody should get the **same results**
- The design & procedures tell you much about the quality



(& keep yourself out of it)

# Research as cooking: Appraising qualitative methods

- Specify (limited features of) the:
  - **Ingredients** (data)
    - Always “local”
    - Never the same twice
  - **Recipe** (design)
    - Pinch of this, bit of that...
    - & mind the bowl ...
  - **Machine** (analysis)
    - Coding, corroboration, etc.
    - Walking in the woods...
- Different cooks get **different results**
  - & may differ from intended result
- Many good, many bad, some a matter of taste
- **The proof is in the eating**



# Critical appraisal: If research were cooking...

- Appraising the **protocol**
  - Should you be able to cook what you expect?
  - Can you do it without making a mess, burning somebody, etc.?
  - Is this something nobody else has already made?
  - Does it sound like it will come out really good?
- Appraising the **report**
  - Did you make something worth eating?
  - Is it...
    - ... real food (real ingredients, followed the recipe)? ...or fraud?
    - ... wholesome? ... or possibly toxic?
    - ... good, nutritious, worthwhile? ...or junk?
    - ...exciting? ... or so bland it's not worth a bite?

- Conventions of reporting
  - If it's not reported it wasn't done?
  - Can't report every relevant procedural detail.
  - You can follow a strong recipe, report all the steps, but still end up with a bad product (i.e. missing “analytical prowess”)

# Appraising **methods** in reports: Some pointers

- Methodology is usually “under-” reported (sometimes not reported at all)
- Methodology concerns tend to be...
  - Less about possible strategically motivated bias or fraud than in clinical research
  - More about naivete, superficiality, or reflexivity (role of preconceptions & prejudice)
- Look for evidence that the researcher knows what he/she is doing
  - Names a **methodology**, that you could locate ontologically & epistemologically
  - Cites one methodology **text** (not a bookshelf full)
  - Any procedures reported are **consistent** with the declared method (e.g., field observation for ethnography, staged coding for qualitative research, etc.)
  - Doesn't include procedures **inappropriate** for the inference aims (e.g., ‘inter-rater reliability’ assessments are meaningless for interpretive studies)
  - Indicates data collection **iterated** with analysis (if possible)
  - Articulates criteria for when data collection & analysis deemed **finished**
  - (Depending on methodology, you may want to see more specific features)

# Appraising **findings** in reports: Some pointers

- Assess the qualitative report
  - Is the theory or narrative or argument **coherent**? ...comprehensive enough?
    - Is every important category well defined and related to the data?
    - Are elements and dynamics clearly described, & related to each other?
  - Is **translation** between participant, researcher, & audience perspectives clear & meaningful – esp. wrt: participants' perspectives?
  - Are **interpretations** of excerpted data (e.g., quotes) sound, on face?
- Relevance and new contribution to theory are very important:
  - “If qualitative research produces analysis capable of explaining the data, and offers **some theoretical insights**, it is doing its job.” (Melia 2010, p. 572, emphasis added)
  - “...have the researchers demonstrated successfully why we should believe them? And does the research problem tackled have **theoretical and/or practical significance**?” (Silverman, in Melia 2010, emphasis added)

# Bottom Line

- No research project is perfect. What steps did they take to make it better? Does the project have more strengths than weaknesses? Did they acknowledge their limitations? Can you trust what they are saying? Is it relevant and/or useful?



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# Rest of the Methodology Slides

# Grounded Theory

Focus: How do people interact, take action, or engage in a process?

Among the most widely used qualitative methodologies, in many disciplines.

Question starts very broad, mainly to identify phenomenon of interest, and is refined as data collection progresses.

# Grounded Theory

**Disciplinary origin:** Sociology

**Theoretical Traditions:** Objectivism/Post-Positivism (Glaser, Strauss & Corbin); Constructivism (Charmaz)

**Theoretical foundation:** Symbolic interactionism (how people define events and how those beliefs affect the way they act)

**Main Authors:** Barney Glaser, Anton Strauss, Juliet Corbin, Kathy Charmaz, Adele Clarke, Antony Bryant.

# GT Example

- Hall, Tomkinson & Klein, 2012
- “How do care providers and women manage birth?”
  - Focus groups of women + health care providers (family docs, midwives, nurses, obstetricians, doulas)
- Generated a theory about how women and providers used different strategies to minimize risk and maximize integrity, including: accepting or resisting recommendations for surveillance and intervention; plotting courses v. letting events unfold.

# Ethnography

Focus: Interested in examining shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs, and language by studying groups of people who interact and share a common experience.

Aims to describe and interpret the culture AND the behaviors, belief, and language of the culture-sharing group, usually through observation and/or conversation. Sometimes the researcher is immersed within the group (participant-observation).

# Ethnography

**Disciplinary origin:** Anthropology

**Theoretical Traditions:** Realist ethnography is post-positivist, critical ethnography uses critical theory or critical realism.

**Theoretical foundation:** See above. May include structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, feminism, Marxism, ethnomethodology, critical theory, cultural studies, postmodernism.

**Main Authors:** Atkinson, Hammersley, Coffee, Delamont, Madison, Fetterman, Wolcott, Dorothy E. Smith.

# Ethnography

- McGibbon, Peter, & Gallop (2010)
- What are the forms of stress experienced by nurses (in a particular hospital)?
  - Examines existing formulations of stress in relation to data collected about the culture-sharing group.
  - Described stress in the context of the ruling relations at work in the hospital under study, focusing on how stress may be socially organized.

# Phenomenology

Focus: Describes the commonalities in the lived experience of several individuals. Questions often ask “what is the meaning” or “what is the experience”.

Aims to achieve a deep understanding of a phenomenon (means smaller samples). Interested in the everyday way in which people make sense of their “being” in the world. Posits the existence of an “essence” of a phenomenon which will be similar across multiple people.

Each person has a unique view of the world, and a particular social reality which is as true as anybody else’s reality.

# Phenomenology

**Disciplinary origin:** Philosophy. Used frequently in Nursing research.

**Theoretical Traditions:** Varies significantly by author.

**Theoretical foundation:** Existentialism (the way one views the world, emphasizing the 'here and now')

**Main Authors:** Max Van Manen; Moustakas; Merleau-Ponty. Informed by philosophers Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre.

# Phenomenology Example

- Ouelette, Achille & Paquet, 2009
- “How do patients experience kidney graft failure”
  - Develop a comprehensive description of the way individuals constructed meaning out of this experience.
- Analysis of data identified five themes which the authors then compared to an existing theoretical framework about psychosocial transition.

# Narrative inquiry

- Begins with the experiences of individuals as expressed as stories. A narrative can be spoken or written, but it gives an account of an event or an action chronologically.
- Stories tell of experiences, but they also illuminate how a person understands and/or constructs their identity. Stories may be collected (found as-is), or constructed between participant and researcher. Also allows for creative methods of storytelling.
- No specific data collection or analysis techniques, although many authors have written about their own strategies. Very flexible methodology.

**Disciplinary origin:** Different social science and humanities disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, sociology.

**Theoretical Traditions:** Constructivist, interpretive. Contextual, recognizing tentative and variable nature of knowledge.

**Theoretical foundation:** Postmodern, psychological, sociological, developmental. Depends on type.

**Main Authors:** Clandinin and Connelly\*\*, Czarniawska, Lichtmann, Spector-Mersel

# Narrative Example

- Weber, Rowling & Scanlon, 2007
- “How do university students story the ways in which they cope with loss and trauma to find meaning in that experience”

# Case Study

- Examines a phenomenon by looking how the phenomenon has manifested in different “cases”.
- A case can be a group of people, a historical event, policy, programmes, communities, individuals.
- Usually mixed methods, including multiple different sources of data.
- May seek to explain (quant) OR describe (qual).

**Disciplinary origin:** History, political science

**Theoretical Traditions:** Objectivist, but varies depending on type.

**Theoretical foundation:** also depends on type.

**Main Authors:** Robert Yin, Robert Stake.

# Textual methodologies

- Qualitative Content Analysis
  - Discourse Analysis
  - Critical Discourse Analysis
  - Conversational Analysis
- 
- Different aims, but all focus on how words convey meaning.
  - Often use constructivist tradition (except QCA)
  - Some (CA, some DA approaches) also analyze pauses, interruptions, false starts etc.
    - Necessitates a different type of transcription.

# Discourse Analysis Example

- McKenzie & Oliphant, 2010
- “How do midwives and their clients draw on different forms of knowledge and sources of information as evidence in clinical communication”
  - Identifies and describes three different discursive strategies that women use as they discuss options that are not obstetrically standard.

# Participatory/action/advocacy/community-based approaches

- Not a single methodology
  - Can be a broader approach that uses other aspects of different methodologies.
- Usually takes a critical theory or critical realism approach, aiming to empower, advocate, create change, problematize current situation etc.
- Main methodological authors: Nina Wallerstein, Meredith Minkler, Barbara Israel

# Hallmarks of action/advocacy approaches

- Educates researcher, participant, those who encounter knowledge produced by research.
- Deals with individuals as members of a social group
- Is problem-focused, context-specific.
- Involves a change intervention
- Aims at improvement and involvement
- Participants are directly involved in shaping, carrying out, analyzing, research.

# Example

- Cristancho, Garces, Peters, Mueller (2008)
- Explore the opinions and experiences of Hispanic immigrants living in three American Midwest communities about barriers to accessing and using healthcare.