

Qualitative Research

Session 1: Taking stock of where we are

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Different stories and different perspectives

Qualitative researchers are after meaning – social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects

Qualitative research has a unique grounding — fosters particular ways of asking questions and particular ways of thinking through problems (how, why, what)

Qualitative research is a separate science

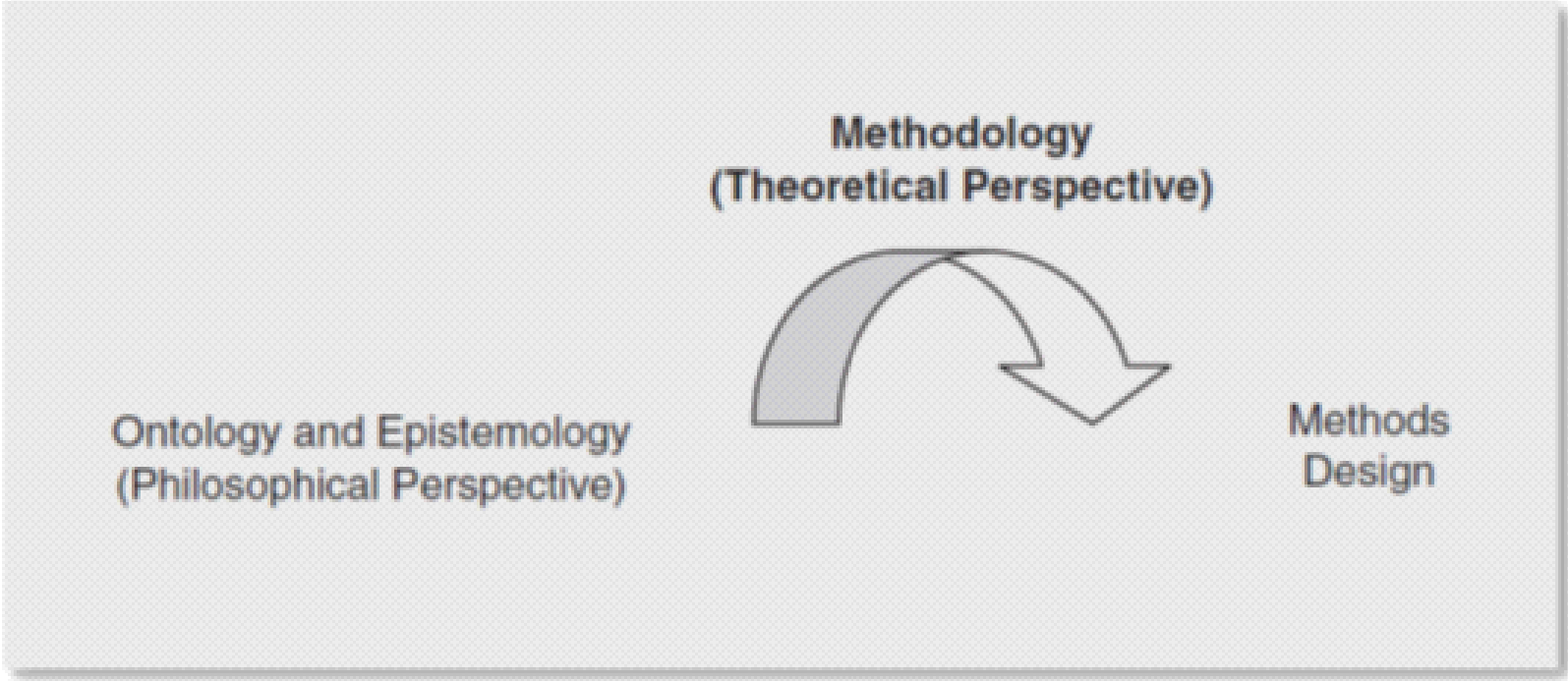
Four key terms

- **Ontology** – the nature of social reality – is the social world patterned and predictable, or is the social world continually being constructed through human interactions and rituals
- **Epistemology** - basic assumptions about what we can know about reality, and about the relationship between knowledge and reality.
- **Methodology (theoretical perspective/ paradigm)** is an account of social reality Three major methodological approaches in qualitative research often discussed:
 - (1) post-modern, (2) interpretive, (3) critical.
 - (2) ..

Four key terms (continue)

- Methods** – the tools researchers use to collect data
– technique for gathering evidence:
- listening to (or interrogating) participants,
 - observing behaviour, or
 - examining historical texts and records.
 - ..

Methodology is the bridge that brings our philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together



Ontology



Epistemology



**Methodology/
Theoretical perspective
paradigm**



**Method
Data gathering
techniques**

- *Positivist
- *Post-positivist
- *Structuralist
- *Post-structuralist
- *Interpretivist
- *Constructivist
- *Critical theory
- *Feminist
- *Participatory
- *Pragmatism
- *Etc! Etc!



Methodology: Three strands in qualitative research

Interpretivism/constructivism

- Focus on people's subjective experience – understanding from within
- Social world distinctly human product
- Meaning originates in human mind
- Multiple realities
- Social world does not exist independently from human mind

Critical theory

- Reality historically constructed
- Relationships based on power
- Social reproduction
- Purpose is to critique social reality and power
- Legitimacy of research is based on critique of discourse of power – emancipation

Post modernism

- Social reality does not exist independently
- No objective truth
- Reality consist of facts and values
- Knowledge is special kind of story
- Knowledge not eternal
- Task is to describe an emerging reality



Historically, qualitative methodologists have described three major purposes for research: *to explore, explain, or describe* the phenomenon of interest.

⊕ Synonyms for these terms could include *to understand, to develop, or to discover*. Many qualitative studies are descriptive and exploratory: They build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature. Others are explicitly explanatory: These studies show relationships

The general view of descriptive research as a lower level form of inquiry has influenced some researchers conducting qualitative research to claim methods they are really not usingthey are using: qualitative description. Qualitative descriptive studies have as their goal a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events (Sandelowski (2010).

Table 2.2 Matching Research Questions and Purpose

<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	<i>General Research Questions</i>
Exploratory: To investigate little-understood phenomena To identify or discover important categories of meaning To generate hypotheses for further research	What is happening in this social program? What are the salient themes, patterns, or categories of meaning for participants? How are these patterns linked with one another?
Explanatory: To explain the patterns related to the phenomenon in question To identify plausible relationships shaping the phenomenon	What events, beliefs, attitudes, or policies shape this phenomenon? How do these forces interact to result in the phenomenon?
Descriptive: To document and describe the phenomenon of interest	What are the salient actions, events, beliefs, attitudes, and social structures and processes occurring in this phenomenon?
Emancipatory: To create opportunities and the will to engage in social action	How do participants problematize their circumstances and take positive social action?

Types of qualitative studies

Case studies (single, multiple, intrinsic, instrumental, collective)

Life history

Historical research

Ethnography (shared culture)

Auto-ethnography(own)

Ethnomethodology (conversations)

Clinical study

Feminist study (critical)

Biographies (their words)

Narrative design

Developmental case study

Phenomenological (lived experience)

Document analysis

Grounded theory

Evaluation (proactive, clarification, interactive, monitoring, impact)



Defining qualitative research

Qualitative research is a methodology concerned with understanding the processes and the social and cultural contexts which shape various behavioural patterns. It strives to create a coherent story as it is seen through the eyes of those who are part of that story, to understand and represent their experiences and actions as they encounter, engage with, and live through situations. To do this, qualitative research employs a wide range of data gathering techniques (e.g. interviewing, focus groups, observation, etc.) and seeks insights through structured, in-depth data analysis that is mainly interpretative, subjective, impressionistic and diagnostic. (Nieuwenhuis/Smit, 2012)



5 axioms of qualitative research

- 1. Human life can be understood only from within.*
- 2. Social life is a distinctively human product.*
- 3. The human mind is the source or origin of meaning.*
- 4. Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world. (Interpretivism accepts that there are multiple realities).*
- 5. The social world does not 'exist' independently of human knowledge.*



Key aspects of qualitative research methodology

A situated activity – locates the observer in the world – researcher is research instrument

World is series of representations

Interpretive, naturalistic approach to world

* study things in their natural setting, attempt to make sense of/ interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them (meaning of meanings)



What is a thick description?

„Thick description“ often not used correctly
thick description is not about the size of data display or the amount of description provided from it

The task of thick description - „is to make meaning clear“ (Shank)

Thick description must be both depictive and analytical, both empirical and intellectual.

Thick description – use ideas and concepts that help with the sense-making process of inquiry.



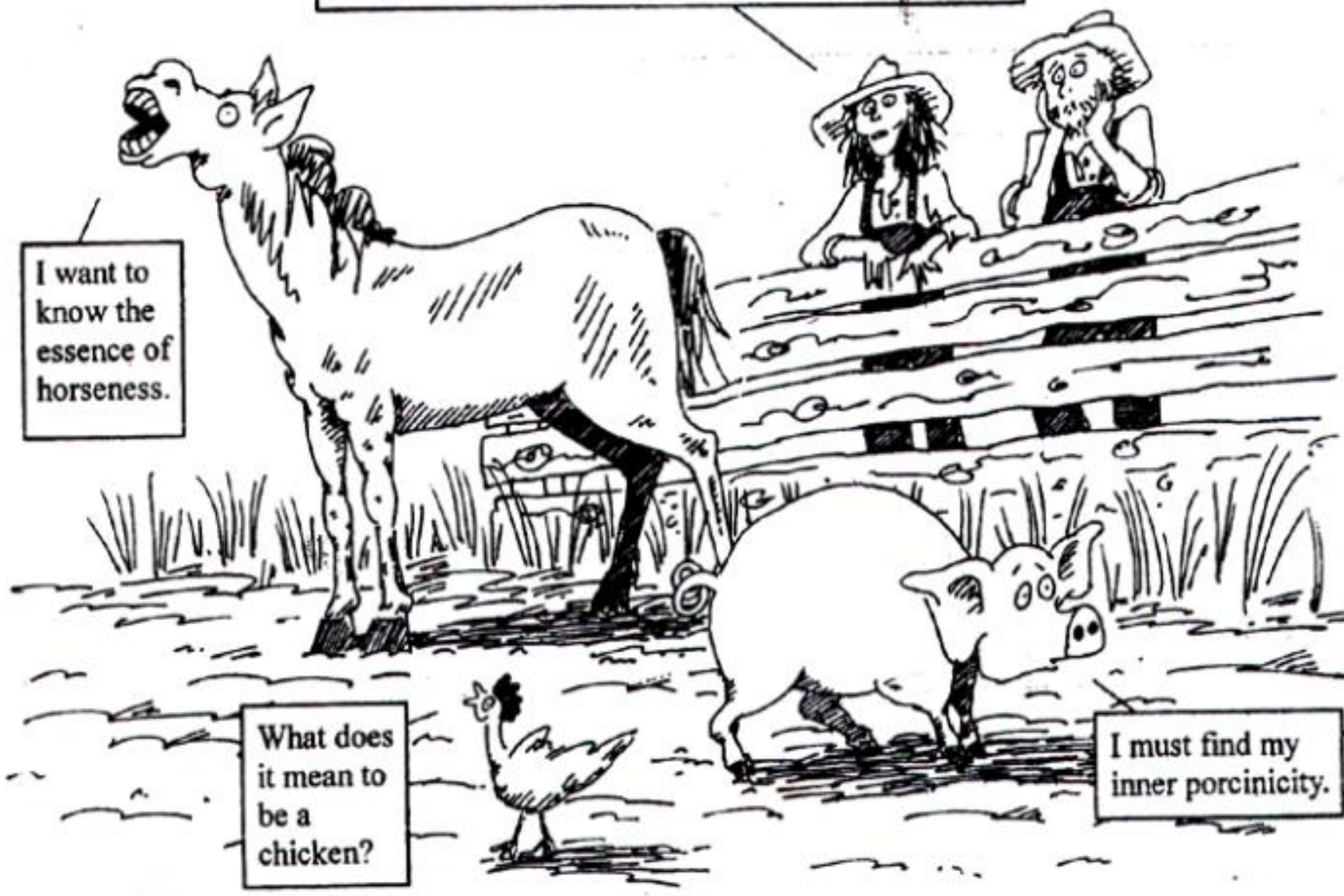
- Participants' perspective of events, beliefs, practices *from their point of view*
- "*the professional stranger*" vs professional scientist
- Deeper understanding: through first hand understanding
- Emphasises participants voices and settings:
- Meaning emerges and is constructed by participants
- Levels of meaning: levels of listening and looking
- Researcher is method/ instrument

Things jist ain't been the same 'round here since that re-search dude did those inter-views.

I want to know the essence of horseness.

What does it mean to be a chicken?

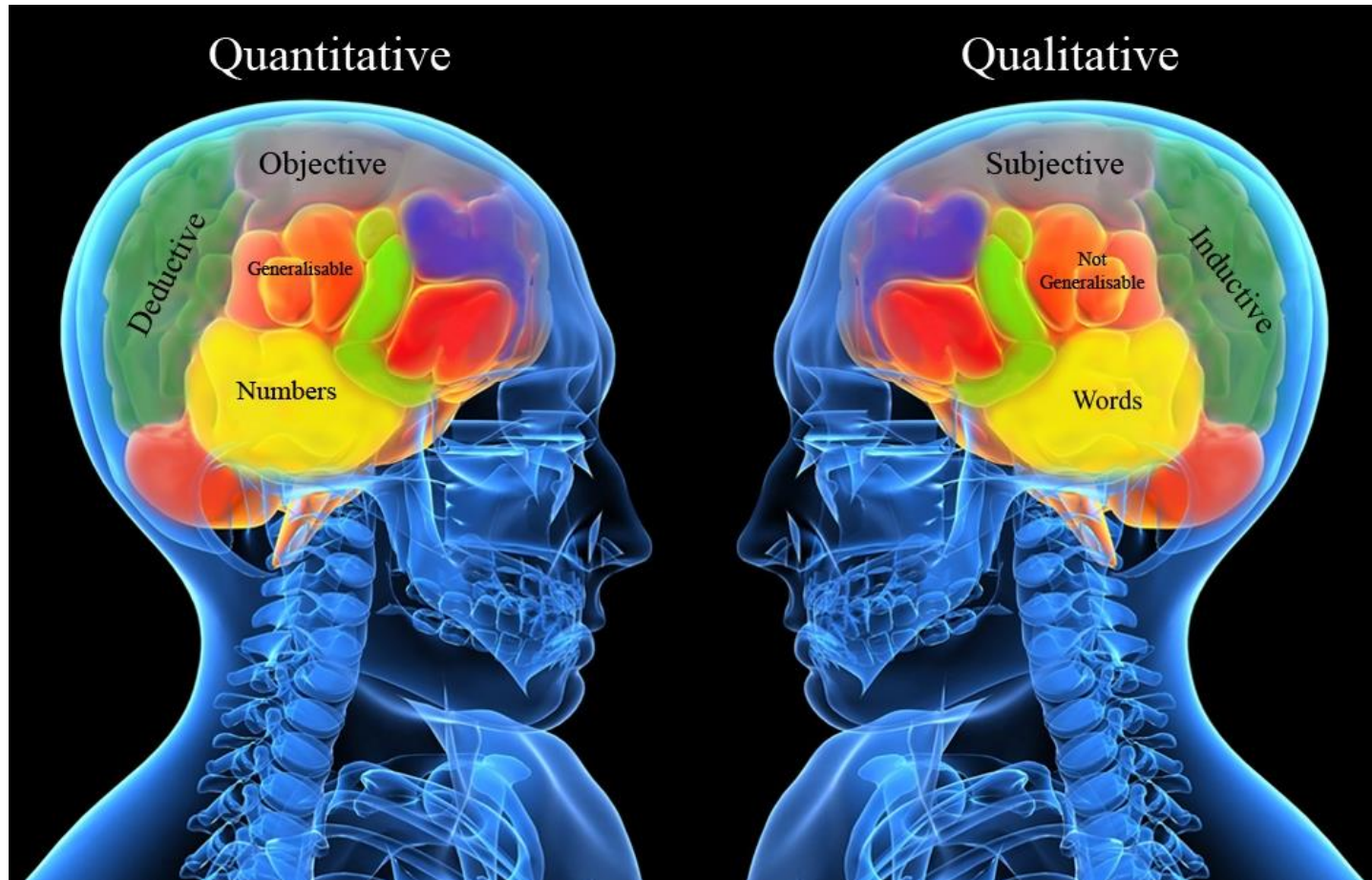
I must find my inner porcinity.



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Session 2:

Changing stories: The turf war



The separation between qualitative and qualitative research

Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) Changing stories

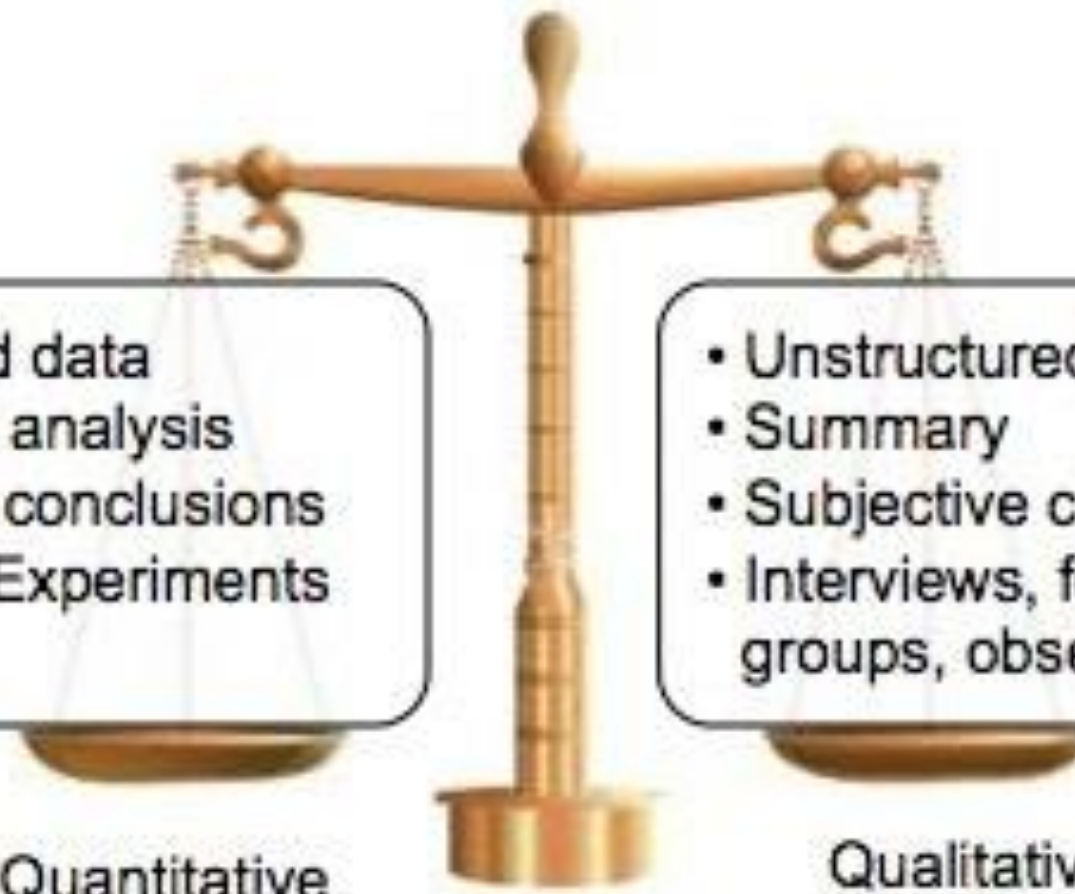
1. *Movement from simple to complex realities:* It is no longer possible to view systems as merely the sum of their parts; as systems become more and more complex
2. *Movement from hierarchic to heterarchic concepts of order*
3. *Movement from mechanical to holographic images*
4. *Movement from determinacy to indeterminacy.*
5. *From linear toward mutual causality*
6. *From assembly to morphogenesis:* Morphogenetic change occurs suddenly and dramatically, operating in such a way that lower forms create higher order forms.
7. *From objective to perspectival views:* Objectivity is an illusion, but subjectivity in the usual sense is not the only alternative:



Changing stories

	Scientific story	Emergent story
View of knowledge	World is based on fixed laws Knowledge is absolute Can be known Objectivity - rationally	No absolute fixed laws – relative Knowledge tentative - approximation Can be aptially known Subjectivity - rational
View of phenomena	Can be empirically studied Simplistic Reductionistic	Relational Complex Holistic
Relationship between phenomena	Linear Hierarchical order Parts are discrete units	Fluid – systemic Integrative – heterarchical Whole more than sum of parts
Causation	Linear (cause-effect) Unidirectional – measurable Deductive reasoning	Multi – interrelated Not always measurable - understand Inductive/lateral/deductive reasoning
Outcome of research	Predictable future Control of behaviour	Unpredictable Morphogenesis



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- Structured data
 - Statistical analysis
 - Objective conclusions
 - Surveys, Experiments

Quantitative
Research

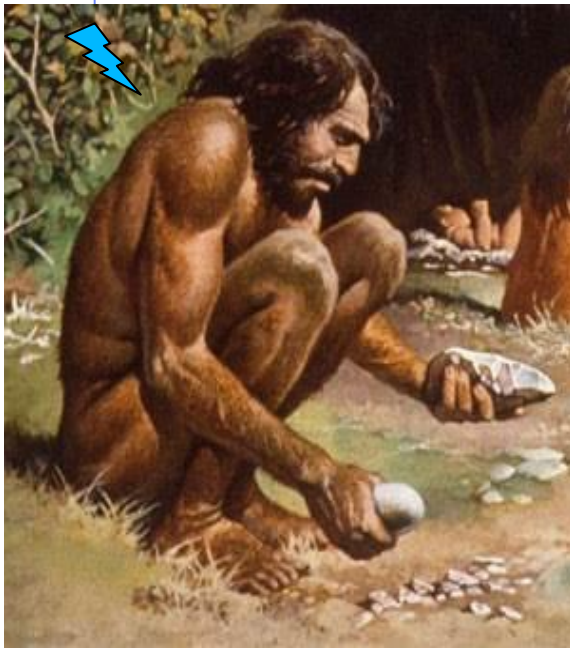
- Unstructured data
- Summary
- Subjective conclusions
- Interviews, focus groups, observations

Qualitative
Research

Quantitative Mode	Qualitative mode
<p>Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social facts have an objective reality • Primacy of method • Variables can be identified and relationships measured • Etic (outside's point of view) 	<p>Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality is socially constructed • Primacy of subject matter • Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure • Emic (insider's point of view)
<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalizability • Prediction • Causal explanations 	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualization • Interpretation • Understanding actors' perspectives
<p>Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins with hypotheses and theories • Manipulation and control • Uses formal instruments • Experimentation • Deductive • Component analysis • Seeks consensus, the norm • Reduces data to numerical indices • Abstract language in write-up 	<p>Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends with hypotheses and grounded theory • Emergence and portrayal • Researcher as instrument • Naturalistic • Inductive • Searches for patterns • Seeks pluralism, complexity • Makes minor use of numerical indices • Descriptive write-up

The turf war

There are bands who go around gathering their data in a qualitative way, and there are others who carry out large-scale hunting expeditions with their surveys. Each band is rather autonomous with very few links, apart from occasional periods of warfare and sporadic raids on one another's cattle. (Scott cited in Thompson 2004: 23)



So the difference between the two is often claimed as:



Quantitative is like a trench –
Long and shallow



Qualitative is like a well-
Narrow but deep



Max Bergman (2011)

At first glance, it appears that they are indeed different paradigms as most authors in this vein even provide tables, which classify the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods on epistemological, ontological, and axiological grounds (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). On closer inspection, however, it is difficult to sustain these differences because qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques do not necessitate a particular view of the nature of reality, privilege a specific research theme and how to research it, or determine the truth value of data or the relationship between researchers and their research subject.



The fallacy of separation of qualitative and qualitative

False dualism (Pring, 2000) – one not a better science than the other – it is not a tug of war

False primacy (Brew, 2001) – no superior truth – approximation of truth

False certainty (Barnett, 2000) – super complexity

False expectations (Hammersley, 2002) – cannot produce final answers – openended





So what are we dealing with?

The crime scene analogy

Evidence =
Scientific data +
Narrative data



Pragmatism as alternative paradigm

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition developed around the idea that the nature of knowledge, language, concepts, meaning, belief, and science—are all best viewed in terms of their practical uses

Pragmatism, is aimed at solving practical problems in the “real world” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, Rorty, 1999).

Pragmatism “anti-representational view of knowledge” - “aim at utility for us” (Rorty, 1999).

Pragmatism offers an alternative worldview to those of positivism/post-positivism and constructivism and focuses on the problem to be researched and the consequences of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Miller, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)



Crafting a research design

Pragmatist approach

Start with the research question

Identify the most appropriate design

Identify data collection methods

Identify data analysis strategy

Science methodological approach

Formulate your ontological position

Formulate your epistemological point of departure

Decide on appropriate design

Select data gathering techniques

Determine data analysis strategy

So what are the alternatives?



Mixed method research

Action research

Case study research

Pragmatist (functionalist) research approach

Formulate the research question

Do intensive literature review

Identify appropriate theories that offer provisional answer to question

Identify questions for data collection from literature

Select appropriate data gathering techniques

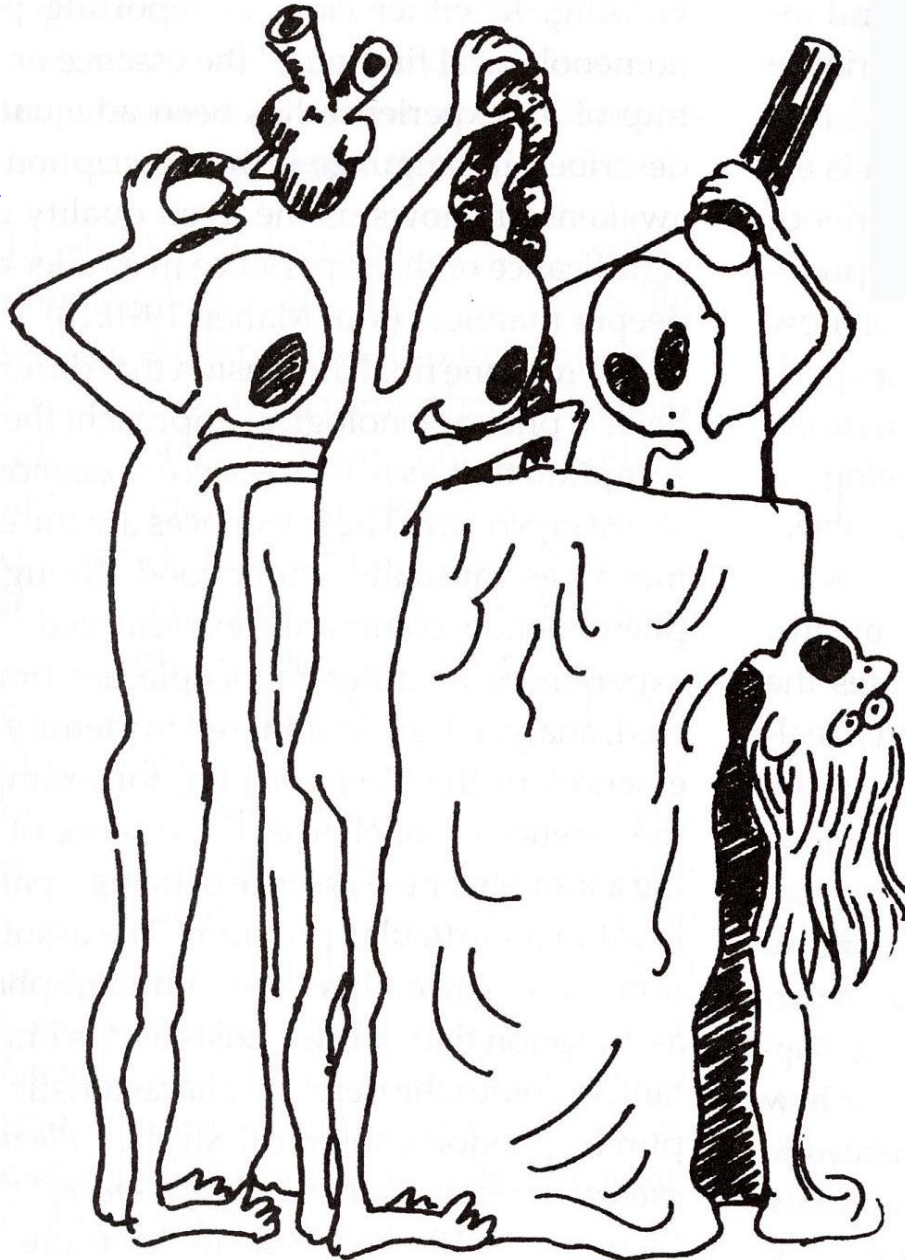
Purposive sampling

Collect data

Analyze data using a-priori coding

Triangulate to determine if findings corroborate theory

Qualitative Research



— The
end of
session
1&2

