Critically Reviewing Literature: A Tutorial for New Researchers

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Critically reviewing literature: A tutorial for new researchers

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A B S T R A C T

Critically reviewing the literature is an indispensible skill which is used throughout a research career. This demystifies the processes involved in systematically and critically reviewing the literature to demonstrate knowledge, identify research ideas and questions, position research and develop theory. A three stage model (assembling, arranging and assessing), each with two interrelated steps, is presented and discussed, along with practical tips and helpful examples. Although aimed primarily at research students, this information in this article will also be useful for research supervisors who wish to find ways to pass along their tacit knowledge related to this critical research skill.

C H I N E S E A B S T R A C T

批判性地回顾文献是研究生涯中不可缺少的技能. 本文的目的是揭开系统地和批判性地回顾文献所涉及的过程, 以展示知识, 确定研究思路和问题, 定位研究和发展理论. 尽管本文主要针对研究生, 但对于希望找到方法传递与此关键研究技能相关的隐性知识的研究生导师来说, 本文中的信息也很有用. 本文提出并讨论了一个三阶段模型 (装配, 排列和评估) , 每个模型有两个相互关联的步骤, 以及实用技巧和有用的例子.

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> "Many literature reviews are found to be either incomplete, overly descriptive (reviewers feel they are reading a "catalogue"), or insufficiently selective…. the aim is not to reproduce everything that the author has read on the subject or everything that has been written, but to (critically) examine studies that will enable one to go a little further…"
>
> *Christian* Pinson (2008)

1. Introduction

A research student's first exposure to the literature (a collection of academic research, usually in the form of articles and books) usually involves finding and reading multiple papers, to identify an idea to serve as the basis of his/her thesis. (Please refer to Table 1 for the definitions of this and other key concepts in this paper). Once a student starts working on a topic, s/he is expected to become familiar with a significant amount of literature related to that topic. S/he will be asked to demonstrate this familiarity by conducting and writing up a literature review – a systematic summary and evaluation of prior academic research – as part of a thesis proposal. Even after a thesis proposal is approved, s/he will be asked to include an even more extensive review of the literature in their thesis proper. Moreover, doctoral students adopting the increasingly popular "thesis with publications" option find that each proposed article requires its own literature review.

Research students who propose a "conceptual" paper (i.e. a paper with no empirical data) as their first publication will soon find that the contribution(s) and publication success of conceptual papers often largely depend on the outcomes of their literature reviews. In fact, it is even possible to publish integrative literature views (a literature review that synthesizes different concepts to develop new insights) as papers in their own right (Torraco 2005). Even empirical articles (i.e. that include the collection and analysis of data) still include literature reviews between the Introduction and the Methodology sections. Finally, even after graduating to become fully-fledged academics, researchers will find that they have to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the relevant existing literature in their area(s) in order to publish sufficiently to get promoted (Alpert and Kamins 2004; Snuggs and Jevons 2018).

A decade after Pinson wrote the words at the start of this paper, editors, reviewers and examiners are still complaining about literature reviews that are disappointing (Reuber 2010) because they consist mainly of "agonizing long" (Alpert and Kamins 2004), "mind-numbing lists of citations… that resemble a phone book" (Webster and Watson 2002, p.xiv). Obviously, the practical skills

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Table 1
Key terms.

Term	Definition and notes
Literature	A body of (usually written) work e.g. academic articles, published conference papers, book chapters and entire books. "The literature" usually does not include articles in the popular press (e.g. newspapers) although a few of these may be cited in the introduction to note the importance and/or relevance of the topic being researched.
Literature review	A summary and evaluation of the relevant literature.
Systematic review	Using a logical and complete plan to find and evaluate the literature on the stated topic that is explained clearly and in enough detail to allow others to carry out the same review.
Critical review	A critical review is a detailed analysis and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas and information in written text.

that students need should go beyond data-handling skills (Uncles 2018) to include literature-handling skills. Unfortunately, the important ability to critically review the literature requires sophisticated and complex skills (Torraco 2005) that are difficult for supervisors to pass on. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to provide a practical and pragmatic guide to systematically completing a critical review of the literature.

The task of reviewing the literature is influenced by the type of literature review being undertaken, the relative maturity and cohesiveness of the literature relevant to the topic of interest, and by the norms of the particular discipline the author is working within. For example, a scoping review, an initial review that seeks to "assess the relevance and size of the literature …to delimit the … topic" (Tranfield et al. 2003, p.214) focuses more on searching for material, rather than critically evaluating it. However, it is often the precursor for an integrative literature review - research that "reviews, critiques and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco 2005, p.356). Naturally, a mature topic that is very cohesive (e.g. the topic of nostalgic consumption, which has been studied by a core group of researchers for some time) will be more straightforward to review because there are clearer, more closely linked, sets of studies. Conversely, an emerging topic with strands of knowledge buried in disparate areas (e.g. the impact of digitization on self-presentation) requires far wider search for work that will be far more challenging to integrate.

Given the diversity of the types of literature reviews, the diverse nature of material they cover and the ways they can be carried out, it is important that literature reviews should be guided by a stated, specific question (Briner and Denyer 2012; Callahan 2014; Torraco 2005). The guiding question might arise from a practical question or personal observation. For example, did an apparent gap in researcher knowledge (e.g. the lack of an easily implementable way to measure a key construct) motivate the review, or was the purpose of the review to identify these gaps (what are the deficiencies in the research on the key construct?). Keeping the research question at the forefront at all times will assist the researcher in deciding how to search for articles, and what to include/exclude from review.

Systematic reviews must critique the literature that is found. According to Torraco (2005), being critical goes beyond identifying strengths e.g. the development and consistent use of improved measures for the key construct) and major contributions (e.g. a new concept that has generated practical benefits for practitioners) to identify and report on mistakes (e.g. a method not being employed rigorously according to the paradigm the authors were working within) and neglected issues (e.g. inconsistent and incompatible definition of a key construct). Critical analysis can uncover issues that have been taken for granted (Callahan 2014). For example, my critical review of the definition of consumer agency uncovered that many papers in consumer research, even those with agency in the title, did not define agency.

Consequently, this article goes beyond the articles already published on this topic by offering practical tips and helpful examples to help research students bridge the gap between a theoretical understanding of what is needed and the ability to practically put that knowledge into practice. This article will first discuss five of the outcomes that a good systematic literature review should achieve. Next, each of the three stage of the literature review process will be discussed in detail, along with practical tips and examples as to how to go about the tasks involved. This will be followed by suggestions to assist in actually writing the review.

2. The outcomes of a literature review

I have deliberately and repeatedly used the term "literature review" rather than calling this endeavor a "summary of each article on a topic." A good literature review is *not* a collection of summaries of individual articles. The focus of a literature review should not be on the individual article, but on a *body* of work (the set of articles and books on a particular topic). Good literature reviews do not include everything written on the topic. The literature reviews in published articles do not, and should not, include every article that the authors have read. Instead, a good literature review (1) demonstrates that the author is knowledgeable about the prior work on the relevant topic(s), (2) identifies research gaps (e.g. issues that have been not been examined, have been mis-studied, or that have resulted in inconsistent findings) for the author and others, and provides the foundation for authors to (3) develop precisely stated research questions for their own further research as well as (4) positions an empirical article or a thesis with respect to prior literature, and (5) develops theory. The next part of this article discusses each of these five outcomes in more detail.

2.1. Demonstrating knowledge

The literature review shows reviewers or examiners that the author is familiar with relevant prior and current relevant research. This is done by reading, and then citing, previous articles on that topic (particularly in the target journal) in an accurate manner. Both classic work and recent work must be cited (the authors of recent work cited, especially if it is in the target journal, are likely to be invited to review the paper or become thesis examiners). This is where the idea of being "systematic" comes in. A researcher has to make a plan about how to tackle their literature review, and be clear about what (in terms of date ranges, journals, databases, search terms and combinations of search terms) will be included and excluded. These decisions should be reported in the written review, particularly if it is the whole paper or chapter is a literature review. As Callahan (2010) explains even *who* (e.g. one or more authors and/or research assistants) searched for the literature and when the search was carried out should be reported.

If at all possible, researchers MUST read the actual material they are citing. (If a researcher reads a translated version of a foreign-language resource, or is unable to source the original, s/he should make this clear in the way the resource is referenced.) If one merely includes a paper based on what someone else said about it, one runs the risk of reporting on, and/or using, or even citing that paper incorrectly. As a simple example, the

Google Scholar references for two papers I mention in this article (Callahan 2014; Epp and Price 2010) are incorrect – if I had not read these in the original, I would not have known that. If I had then referenced either article incorrectly, knowledgeable readers could perceive that I was a lazy and careless author or even worse, that I was unethical in pretending to read what I had not. Reviewers of submitted work will be familiar with the key papers in the area and once they detect an error in someone's work, they will doubt that author's overall credibility.

2.2. Identifying research gaps

It is insufficient for a good literature review to demonstrate knowledge of existing work, it must also contribute new knowledge. A literature review that generates research ideas for your own proposed research and for others is invaluable. Often a research student embarks on a review to identify one or more "gaps" in knowledge for his/her own research could address. At the simplest level, a gap might be viewed as something that has not been formally researched before. A gap might also exist because something that has been researched before needs to be re-evaluated because of a significant change e.g. many aspects of information processing of traditional media had to re-evaluated once digital media became more popular. One really useful thing to take note of, when reviewing prior work, is a "call for future research". This is when the author(s) note a limitation in their own work, or prior work on the topic as a whole and suggest that future research should be done, to fill this gap. These calls can give you (and other researchers who read your review) future research ideas.

2.3. Generating specific research questions

Most research is motivated by a general research purpose or observed practical problem that the researcher wants to address (e.g. reducing smoking levels among Pacific peoples). Literature reviews can provide justification for the importance of the overall research purpose. Even more importantly, the research gaps noted in the review can be used to develop specific research questions for the proposed work to answer. Asking specific research questions that can be answered by the proposed research are important, because reviewers and examiners will judge the finished work partly on whether the researcher actually answered the questions they promised to answer. For example, a paper in this journal that aimed to help reduce smoking rates among Pacific peoples (Fifita et al. 2015) could not provide a complete answer to how Pacific peoples could be induced to stop smoking altogether. But, it could ask (and answer) how self-construal influences the creation of a smoking-resistant identity in Tongan non-smokers compared to NZ European non-smokers.

Often, novice researchers will think of something that interests them, do a quick search to ensure nothing academic has been published related to it, and then expect that they no longer need to review the literature because they are proposing research on something that "has never been done before". But, this researcher still needs to ask specific research questions. In this case, s/he needs to find existing streams of research that are somewhat relevant to their proposed research and then review these articles, noting how this prior work has not addressed the aspect of interest. Even better, the researcher could explain how the somewhat relevant literature they had identified could be adapted to inform the proposed research. For example, when I proposed studying how people used telephone directories (something that appeared to have not been academically researched at the time), I did a systematic search and eventually found a masters' thesis and two journal articles on the topic. With no other academic literature to review, I reviewed the extensive literature on information processing of advertisements, noting that most advertisements sought to attract potential customers with low involvement in the relevant products. After much thought, I realized that when people use telephone directories, they are usually highly involved and ready to purchase. So I reviewed, adapted and applied the prior research on information processing to develop hypotheses that attempted to explain how highly involved consumers would process advertising information (Fernandez and Rosen 2000). There are also some researchers who emulate the classical anthropologists in doing "grounded theory," and thus believe that since they have to approach their topic with open minds, they do not have to review the literature before embarking on their data collection. However, "an open mind is not an empty mind" (Belk 2001). Researchers really do have to know what has been done before they can add to the sum of that knowledge in a meaningful way.

2.4. Positioning research

Fields and subfields of research, as well as specific journals are interested in discipline-specific issues that can, and do change, over time. Just like a group of friends may discuss the latest rugby match in Rugby World Cup season, but then turn to a discussion of the latest cricket match in Cricket Test season, authors of articles in a journal engage in different "conversations" that change over time. So, when planning a thesis or an article, a research student has to decide (and then clearly demonstrate) which conversation(s) s/he wants to join. Reviewing the literature exposes the research student to the various current problems and issues and more importantly, the ongoing debates in their area. This may then suggest to them which discussion(s) they want to join, and which journal(s) might be suitable outlets for their work (since those journals are currently interested in those discussions). To clearly establish which conversation is being joined and extended, researchers need to know what has already been done, what is wrong with what has already been done, and how they are contributing to what has been done – this is called "positioning" one's work with respect to prior literature. One simply cannot do this properly, if one does not have a good picture of the prior literature that is relevant to the work being positioned. If a review of prior work has uncovered a "call" to answer the question you are trying to answer, these authors also be cited when doing one's own empirical work by promising to "research the influence of x on y in answer to the call by A to do so."

2.5. Developing theory

Theory development relies on the literature in different ways, depending on the paradigmatic perspective underpinning the research being carried out. The knowledge the authors gain from doing their literature reviews will help researchers working within quantitative paradigms (e.g. positivists planning experimental designs) develop the hypotheses that they intend to test. Researchers working within qualitative paradigms (e.g. consumer culture theorists interpreting ethnographic data), blend the literature with the data as it is interpreted, to develop new theory within their findings sections. Moreover, irrespective of research paradigm, a deep familiarity with the literature is essential when drawing out implications of the research in the discussion section and answering the all-important question of how the new work informs, extends or even changes what is already known about the focal concept(s), relationships and/or issues. Having discussed the five outcomes of a good literature review, I will now provide practical guidance on how to actually conduct the review.

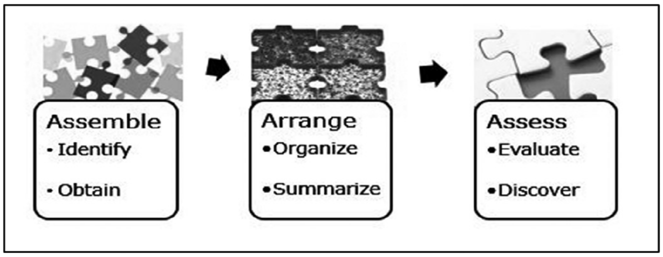

Fig. 1. The literature review puzzle.

3. The stages and steps of a literature review

As mentioned earlier, it is important that literature reviews should be guided by a stated, specific questions (Briner and Denyer 2012; Callahan 2014; Torraco 2005) because doing so will assist researchers as they consider important decisions that will influence how they undertake their review. Fig. 1 depicts the three sequential stages of a literature review – the literature being reviewed has to be (1) assembled, (2) arranged and (3) assessed. The model presents the three stages as a linear process for simplicity of explanation. However, in reality, the process may involve re-working earlier stages later in the process. For instance, an article (e.g. that provided a cross-cultural comparison of extended self) that was initially deemed unimportant in the Assembling stage may become significant later in the Assessing stage (e.g. which uncovered the weakness that most empirical comparisons of extended self were situated within a single culture). In that case, that particular article (and related articles) would require close re-reading. Furthermore, each stage consists of two interrelated steps. The first stage (Assemble) involves the two steps of identifying, and finding relevant literature. These two steps are interrelated since an article once found and read will likely lead to the identification of other relevant articles. Next, the second stage of (Arrange) involves the steps of organizing and summarizing the literature. These two steps are also interrelated since the way the material found is organized both reveals and influences the sub-categories of the material to be summarized. Finally, the third stage (Assess) involves the two interrelated steps of evaluating the literature and discovering research opportunities.

3.1. *Assembling the literature to review*

This first stage of reviewing the literature involves identifying (finding) and then actually obtaining (retrieving) the articles that were identified. As the following discussion will show, the two steps of assembling - identifying and obtaining prior research - are also closely interrelated.

3.1.1. *Identifying the literature*

A good place for research students to start identifying articles are in the relevant readings in courses they have taken, or other papers that they have found very interesting. A search tactic commonly used by research students next, is to look up relevant articles that have been cited by the authors of the key articles they have already found. This is not wrong, but remember, this will only lead a researcher backwards to prior work, rather than to forwards to subsequent work.

Most researchers also do a Google Scholar™ search and/or search other relevant electronic databases in their institution's library system (e.g. ABI-Inform). A key decision involves settling on keywords – the words that best describe the proposed work (e.g. "smoking" "cessation" and "Pacific"). These key words will help researchers select search terms and phrases that can be used to retrieve appropriate articles, books, and reports from databases. An initial scoping review might use only general search terms based on the key words that initially framed the research question for the review e.g. a scoping review for uncovering research on smoking cessation in New Zealand might use "smoking" or "cessation" or even more specifically, the search phrase "smoking cessation" AND "Zealand"). However, once a more systematic review is undertaken, the search terms might include "self construal AND (Pacific OR Tongan OR Zealand"). There is a particular grammar and logic that must be used to search various online data sources, and it is important to understand and utilize the search conventions that are appropriate for each database being used (Denyer and Tranfield 2009). Importantly, using key phrases instead of individual key words will often result in generating a smaller, more manageable, number of articles that, at the same time, are more closely focused on the research question.

A researcher can also look up the authors of major articles see what else they may have published later on the same topic. For example, if a researcher clicked on the "cited by" link in Fig. 2, they would be taken to subsequent articles that have cited the original article. Researchers can also click on one of the underlined names in the article listing shown in Fig. 2 to be directed to that author's Google Profile, which should list all the articles they have published before, and after, the article s/he was initially interested in. Another handy hint is that many academics have web-pages with lists of their articles and sometimes, direct links to some of these articles or even unpublished working papers. Researchers should use Google™ (not Google Scholar™ since they are searching for unpublished work) to search for the authors of key articles to see if they might have material which might be useful. Researchers may also find it useful to create accounts on academic social networks such as Academia.Edu (www.academia.edu) and ResearchGate (www.researchgate.net) so they can follow authors they are interested in. Researchers may also want to investigate if there are Facebook groups in their areas of interest that they can join. These groups, such as the Consumer Culture Theory, GENMAC (Gender, Markets and Consumers) and MASSIG (the Marketing & Society Special Interest Group of the American Marketing Association) all have links to upcoming conferences, forthcoming articles and engage in discussions that may be of interest.

Some scholars search for relevant key words AND the term "literature review" to uncover previous reviews such as the excellent review on possession attachment conducted by Kleine and Baker (2004). Yet, there are other excellent reviews that do not have the word "review" in the title or abstract (see for instance, MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Therefore, searches must be systematic and thorough. If a topic has links to psychology, sociology or anthropology, the *Annual Review of Psychology, Annual Review of Sociology* and the *Annual Review of Anthropology* are also useful sources of articles on many topics. These usually offer excellent literature reviews of whatever has been done in a particular area since the prior literature review in that same publication (usually about five years apart) by leading scholars in those areas. These annual reviews are available in the print and/or online version in many libraries. A researcher might wonder why I am suggesting s/he looks at older reviews, if s/he are writing his/her own review, since of course, s/he will have no intention of plagiarizing these prior reviews. First, a prior review will quickly provide a researcher with an overview of what has been done up to the date of that review. Secondly, if these reviews are relatively outdated, one may be able to just summarize that review briefly and then specifically limit one's own review to papers that have been published after the date of that review. Thirdly, these writers will often note areas that have been under-researched, or questions that have not yet been answered. This will allow a subsequent reviewer of that topic to do a more focused search to see what has been done (since the earlier review was published) on those under-researched topics. If a leading

Fig. 2. Searching Google Scholar for subsequent developments.

scholar calls (i.e. asks) for future research on a specific topic and it has not yet been researched, this provides a very useful justification for one's own future research.

3.1.2. Obtaining the literature identified

When clicking on the results returned by their Google Scholar™ search, researchers will find that sometimes a document they identified is available for direct, free download, but other times, they will be directed to the publisher's site, which states they do not have free access and must pay to access the article. A really useful tip is to initiate Google Scholar™ searches from *within* one's institution's library website. Then, when researchers are directed to a publisher site for a journal that their institution has already paid to access online, the publisher's site will usually recognize them as being authorized to download that paper for free. This saves them the time it would take to go to their Library site later to search for, and download papers the in their search results. If research students come across citations which they think might be useful for their reviews but cannot obtain the articles in question from their library or through interlibrary loan, they could ask about these articles in a relevant academic Facebook group such as those mentioned earlier. Alternatively, they could consult their supervisors who might already have the article they need, or be able to get it from the author(s) for the student. Doctoral students in particular are encouraged to write to authors directly as many scholars will be delighted that an aspiring scholar want to read their work in the original and will graciously send it to the student – and this contact could even help the student build a connection with an accomplished scholar in their area of interest.

3.2. Arranging the literature that was assembled

Researchers will quickly start accumulating a lot of references. Many research students wisely choose to attend a University Library workshop to learn how to use an electronic referencing system such as RefWorks or End-Note. The time investment to learn this skill will pay off greatly when formatting references for theses, and for preparing publications, throughout one's academic career. Nowadays, most articles have their full reference for the article on their first pages. However, if this is not the case (e.g. for a chapter that was copied and/or scanned from a book), I strongly suggest that researchers add this citation information on the paper or e-copy of the article if at all possible, or update their electronic bibliographies with this full reference as soon as possible. It is very easy to forget where something one found or quoted came from. Another handy tip is to include the authors' full first names (rather than just their initials) in a bibliography if that is information available. That is because some journals style guides (e.g. that of the *Journal of Consumer Research*) require that authors include the full first names of authors (instead of just initials) in their reference lists – and it will be time consuming to retrieve this information later.

3.2.1. Organizing the literature

Researchers need to start searching for and then reading articles over a long period of time, rather than leaving it to the last minute. Even experienced researchers cannot absorb all this material and come up with the big picture in a rush. Research students should not be discouraged if they take a long time to read an article. It will become easier as one becomes familiar with the literature and the terminology used. If one has to look up a word or term in an article, one should write the meaning down, preferably next to the word in the article, as the exact meaning of that word will be forgotten a week later! As a researcher finds each article, s/he should quickly skim the abstract to try and determine what aspect of the topic the article deals with. This will help with an initial categorization of the articles found (for the researcher's own use now and for future research). For example, if the topic of the literature is "influences on the processing of visual and verbal cues" a researcher may end up with categories like "involvement", "affect", "color" etc. One can then make folders on one's computer with these titles to virtually organize the articles found. If a folder (e.g. involvement) grows rather large, then this folder can be subdivided into sub-folders. If a paper relates to two topics, put a copy in each folder!

Researchers might want to start reading each category of articles chronologically (in order of publication date, from earlier articles to more recent ones), since logically, later work will build upon earlier work. Experienced researchers develop different ways to organize the ideas in the articles read. For example, some might print out article abstracts and physically group them into categories while others might use index cards to note the main points of each article and then group the index cards into categories. One practical tip that works for me, is to create a summary table, as depicted in Table 2 in Microsoft Word®, Microsoft Excel®, or similar software. Table 2 depicts a small part of a summary table that I made as I read the literature on the topic of Agency. Initially as I worked through a paper (e.g. Epp and Price 2010), on my topic I wrote down ideas from the paper that I thought might be relevant to my review (see the 3rd column of Table 2). If I used the exact words of the authors, I put them in "inverted commas" to remind me later that this was an exact quote that either needed the page number in the citation or had to be paraphrased. Readers should notice that in Row 3, I made a point of noting that the point used was actually a quote from Money (2007, p.37) that Epp and Price had quoted on p.22 of their 2010 article. I referenced it this way to remind myself that if I used this quote, I either needed to note that this was a quote that Epp and Price (2010) had made from Money (2007), or I needed to read Money in the original (always the preferred strategy, rather than quoting something a researcher has not personally read).

As I went along, I noted the reference and the page numbers where I had found each point – this would be useful later if I included the quote in the article I hoped to write. If a thought of my own occurred to me as I read a quote, I noted this idea in italics, to remind me it was my own thought, which I could freely include in the paper. As I progressed, I started noticing some interesting categories of concepts and noted these in the first column. As categories of ideas grew, I could see that some of them could be divided into sub-categories (see the 2nd column of Table 2).

Naturally, the final table of 43 landscape pages became quite difficult to work with, and comprehend. Not only that, I needed

Table 2
Article summary matrix – Initial stage (unsorted).

Concept	Sub-Cat	Idea/Quote/Comment	Ref	Section/ Story	Used
Home	Justify context	"Just as the historicity of the home can impose constraints to action (Miller 2001), we suggest that the forces that empower and constrain an object's agency-activated by the interplay of identity practices, objects and spaces-are consequential for the biographies of singularized objects."	Epp and Price (2010 p.822)		
Home	Justify context	A growing social science literature focuses on the domestic space as a context to explore the nature of "relationships between people and material culture"	Money (2007, p.357) in Epp and Price (2010 p.822)		
Method	Follow up interview	"Between the first set of interviews and the second set of interviews, the family moved to a new house, making identity issues salient (Otnes et al. 2014; Schouten 1991)" *So life AND spatial transitions make identity issues salient*	Epp and Price (2010 p.823)		
Gap	Safety of Home	"in comparison to other families, the Eriksons underscore the importance of clear boundaries around their family and protection from outside influences that may conflict with the family's values and beliefs ("The outside might beat you up; school will beat you up; but you come home and it is safe")."	Epp and Price (2010 p.824)		

Table 3
Article summary matrix – Final stage (sorted).

Concept	Sub-Cat	Idea/Quote/Comment	Ref	Section/ Story	Used
Agency	Ancestor	Ancestors have agency/are agents – Munn (1971)- p.57	Miller 1987		
Agency	Def	Agency is the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act and... may include spirits, machines, signs, and collective entities (ancestors, corporations, social groups) [& socio-culturally mediated means that the degree of freedom that a human has, to act, varies considerably in different settings and societies – see- Knappett & Malafouris 2008]	Ahearn 2001, p.110 in Hoskins	Intro	Part
Agency	Def	Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.	Barker 2005 in wiki		
Agency	Def	The intentional causal intervention in the world, subject to the possibility of a reflexive monitoring of that intervention	Bhaskar 1989 in Ratner 2000		
Agency	Def	'traditionally agency refers to the ability to act, and this typically involves intention"	Borgerson (2013) p.131		
Agency	Def	"In his [Belk 1989] understanding, "agency" presumes acting upon objects, and through agency "objects can become part of the extended self (p.130). Whereas this definition of consumer agency implies a control *over* things , Belk insists, moreover, that a kind of agency on the part of objects, a kind of control *by* things also results in feelings of merged identity with objects (p.130)." *consistent with Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011*	Borgerson 2005 ACR p.430	Discussion	√

to find a way to avoid the temptation to talk about one paper at a time (since I did not want to end up with a list of summaries of individual articles)! So next, I sorted the table by category and then by sub-category so that remarks about a single aspect or issue would be grouped together. A portion of this post-sorted final summary table is presented as Table 3.

The first row in my sorted summary table dealt with the "Agency (of) Ancestors and was followed by three pages of rows dealing with the definition of Agency. Thus, this was a big hint to me that the meaning and definition of Agency is a key issue in the prior literature on Agency that I had to include in my review. A close perusal of this table also shows how I highlighted any text that I had used when writing up my review. This helped me to avoid quoting the same words twice, thus avoiding reviewer/examiner complaints that my writing was repetitious. The table also shows how the final two columns were used later, to keep track of whether I used an idea in whole or in part, and which sections of the paper the idea was used in. (If I were to use this table to write more than one paper, I would simply use a different highlight color for each paper). As noted earlier, this is just one way of keeping track of the ideas found and used.

As a researcher starts to get ideas about what issues are important in the literature being read, s/he will want to keep track of which papers wrote on each issue. As the researcher organizes that material read into sub-topics, s/he should also be alert to different ways of organizing the material. There is no single right way to do this, which is why researchers have the opportunity to make contributions by making creative choices. One practical approach to working on this categorization task is to create a Literature Review Planning Matrix as shown in Table 4. The folder system on the researcher's computer can be re-organized to reflect this table as it takes shape. The table may also give hints regarding ideas the researcher can add to the review. For example, the (fictional) Table 4 could indicate that Article "B" is a key article for the review/topic being researched (and thus should be given special attention in the analysis and writing) and that there are, possibly, no (or not many) articles on the influence of ability on the processing of visual cues.

Table 4
Literature review category planning matrix.

Category	Basic articles	Involvement & X	Ability & X
Visual ad cues	A, **B**	**B**, D	
Verbal ad cues	**B**, C	B, E, F	G

3.2.2. Summarizing the literature

As mentioned earlier, a literature review should not include long lists of mini-summaries of individual articles. However, it would not be very useful to just talk generally about ALL the articles on a topic at once, either (e.g. "this body of work has largely utilized experimental design"). So in practice, I suggest researchers do something in between- after the articles have been grouped into meaningful categories, researchers could then write about each category separately, before making more general comments about the entire set of articles. How then, to decide what these categories should be? It is not recommended that researchers organize their reviews by author (Webster and Watson 2002). Instead,

Example of an Introduction

Who has not seen an advertisement featuring someone famous? Businesses competing in todays cluttered media environments are increasingly using celebrities - individuals who receive public recognition (McCracken 1989) to endorse their products (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg, 2000). Celebrity endorsers can be expensive, accounting for 10% of advertising expenditure (Till, Stanley and Priluck 2008). Clearly, marketers need to understand how, why and when to use celebrity endorsers. Consequently, this literature review will delve into this body of literature, covering the following issues: defining celebrity, selecting celebrity, outcomes of celebrity endorsements, and cross-cultural comparisons of celebrity endorsements. Since a literature review was conducted on celebrity endorsement by Erdogen in 1999, this paper will only evaluate the literature from the year 2000 onwards.

Fig. 3. Example of an introduction.

a literature review for an empirical article or for a thesis is usually organized by concept. However, a literature review on a topic that one is trying to publish in its own right could be organized by the issues uncovered in that review e.g. definitional issues, measurement issues and so on.

3.3. *Assessing the literature that was arranged*

With sufficient time and effort, most research students are able to assemble (identify and obtain) and then arrange (summarize and organize) the literature. However, even experienced researchers often struggle with the third and most difficult stage – assessing the literature. This involves evaluating (judging the quality and value of) the literature and discovering (finding something for the first time) opportunities to contribute to it. Earlier, I made the point that identifying and obtaining the literature are interrelated steps, as are the steps of organizing and summarizing the literature. Similarly, the step of evaluating the literature is interrelated with the step of discovering new opportunities for future research.

3.3.1. *Evaluating the literature*

Evaluating literature involves judging the quality of each individual article/book to make overall judgements about the value of each sub-set of the literature; as well as noting the importance of the area in general. As a researcher evaluates each article collected, s/he can ask and answer questions about the nature of the empirical work involved. For example, is a paper purely conceptual (no new empirical data was collected? If data, was collected, was it framed within a quantitative or qualitative paradigm? This is important because the quality of empirical work must be judged by the standards and criteria appropriate to its paradigm. For example, to judge an interpretive study with 24 interviews as having too small a data set would reveal a lack of knowledge of the norms of qualitative research. A researcher would also look at subsets of the material collected to decide if any important issues remain unresolved, or if inconsistencies exist. For example, one would look across the articles to see if the key concept has been defined clearly, completely and consistently. For empirical quantitative work, one could see if important concepts been measured and/or manipulated appropriately (given the context and the research paradigm) and consistently across papers. It is important to note here that "critical" does not mean only being negative – the researcher should point out the positive aspects of a body of work as well as its shortcomings.

3.3.2. *Discovering possibilities*

As evaluating the literature progresses, the researcher should be alert to discovering possibilities for future research. Research ideas can also be found by looking for inconsistencies and controversies in prior research. Does all the research define, manipulate and/or measure the key concept in the same way? If any inconsistencies found have not yet been resolved, then there may be an opportunity for future research to resolve it. I say "may" because sometimes something has not yet been resolved because it is (still) too difficult, expensive or impractical to do so. For example, if the subset of articles looking at one type of empirical relationship (e.g. the effect of x on the relationship between y and z) have mixed (inconsistent) findings, there might be the opportunity to understand the differences between the two groups of findings, or to resolve the inconsistencies empirically. Another common issue might be that prior work has only been carried out in a particular cultural context. Could the context thus have influenced the findings? Thus there is the potential for cross-cultural research to examine if this is the case. If the researcher uncovers controversy on any aspect of the topic, they should consider if it could be resolved by future work. Sometimes, a researcher might be able to suggest that knowledge in one area could be applied to another area, or that the current work be extended by looking at other contexts.

4. Writing the literature review

Once a literature review has been conducted, it has to be written up for the target audience. This next section will offer some tips on writing the introduction and structuring the body of the review.

4.1. *Introducing the literature review*

The introductory section of a literature review should grab the reader's interest (while quickly showing familiarity with a number of relevant prior articles on the topic). A common mistake is to omit providing a definition of the key concept as soon as possible. Often, the researcher may find that they wish to discuss the definition of the concept in detail, as one of the sub-sections of the review. This might be because the term has not been defined consistently, or the researcher wants to show how the definition changed over time. While this is not wrong, the researcher should not skip providing a definition in the introduction. They should provide a working definition (perhaps the most commonly used one, or the one the researcher has concluded at the end of their consideration of the literature to be the best one), and state that this definition will be discussed later in the review. The introduction should also explain why the topic being reviewed is important and interesting to consider. It should conclude by telling the reader what the rest of the review will cover. Importantly, the introduction will also make clear what will not be covered – this is called setting the boundaries of the review. The introduction example in Fig. 3 was adapted from a student literature review. It starts

Summary Statements

Consumer researchers have devoted considerable study to possession attachment—consumers' bonding with psychologically appropriated material objects (Kleine and Baker 2004). Key among these studies is Belk's (1988) seminal conceptualization of the extended self, the people, possessions and places a person is most emotionally attached to (Belk 1989). Prior empirical work on the extended self has mainly concerned itself with how personal possessions create (Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011), express (Tian and Belk 2005) and memorialize (Mehta and Belk 1991; Noble and Walker 1997) one's identity. More recent work investigates how extended self influences sharing (Karanika and Hogg 2016) and responsible consumption (Kunchamboo, Lee and Brace-Govan 2017).

Fig. 4. Summary statements.

Article	Type of past					Recent past	Distant past	Consumption focus		Main themes			
	Veridical												
	Personal	Familial	Cultural	Alternative	Fantastic			Objects	Experiences	Identity	Authenticity	Sense of belonging and community	Continuity and
Holbrook & Schindler (2003)	☐	☐				☐		☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Baker, Motley, & Henderson (2004)			☐	☐		☐	☐	☐			☐	☐	
Curasi, Price, & Arnould (2004)	☐	☐				☐	☐	☐		☐		☐	☐
Hunt (2004)				☐	☐		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Ahuvia (2005)	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐	☐		☐		☐	☐
Wilhelm & Mottner (2005)		☐	☐	☐			☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hannam & Halewood (2006)				☐	☐		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Carnegie & McCabe (2008)			☐	☐			☐		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Chronis & Hampton (2008)				☐			☐	☐	☐		☐		☐
Gapps (2009)			☐	☐			☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Schau, Gilly, & Wolfinbarger (2009)	☐			☐		☐			☐	☐		☐	☐
Russell & Levy (2012)	☐					☐		☐	☐	☐		☐	☐

J. Choi (2013), "Retroconsumpion"
Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of Auckland

Fig. 5. Conveying a lot of information efficiently.

with a statement that makes the topic seem interesting. The second sentence includes a definition of the key term (celebrity) while the third and fourth sentences explain why the topic is worthy of study from a practical and a theoretical standpoint. Finally, the introduction concludes by setting the boundaries of the review - listing what will be covered by the review and what will be excluded (and why).

4.2. Structuring the body of the literature review

The material to go into the literature review first has to be organized into categories. A useful technique to ensure one writes about categories of papers as a group, rather than about each paper individually, is to use what I term a "summary statement". Fig. 4 contains examples of summary statements. The first sentence in Fig. 4 situates the key construct (extended self) within the larger area of possession attachment and defines possession attachment. The second sentence defines extended self. It is followed with two summary statements that quickly (and very briefly) establish that the author is familiar with key examples of classic and recent prior literature on extended self.

As mentioned earlier, new researchers often make the mistake of spending several paragraphs summarizing one particular article. Readers are interested in the big picture more than every tiny finding in each article in the area. The only time that it is appropriate to give a lot of detail about one article, is when that article is the one (or at most, two) article(s) that is/are absolutely crucial to the dissertation, thesis or paper that the researcher is writing. A

	Direct	Indirect
Individual	Personal Nostalgia (Stern, 1992) Real Nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994)	Historical Nostalgia (Stern, 1992) Simulated Nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994) Interpersonal Nostalgia (Holak & Havlena, 1998)
Collective	Collective Nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994) Cultural Nostalgia (Holak & Havlena, 1998)	Collective Nostalgia (Baker & Kennedy, 1994) Virtual Nostalgia (Holak & Havlena, 1998)

Aseka Kandaaddara, (2014) "Getting in the Grooves of Nostalgia"
Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of Auckland

Fig. 6. Using tables to present organized categories.

common pitfall is to not use language that makes it clear that a statement made is actually critically evaluating the work being mentioned (noting whether some aspect of the literature is good or bad) rather than just describing it. For example, using words like "unfortunately" or "providentially" make it clear that the writer thinks something is a strength or a weakness, respectively.

It is understandable that a research student may find it frustrating to have to leave out so many of the references that s/he has read. Particularly when completing a thesis, the student might be keen to demonstrate the extent of their work. One useful tactic that students can utilize, is to present some of their references in a table that shows which source materials addressed which issues. Fig. 5 presents an example of this technique. Please note however, that every citation included in every figure or table would have to be included in the reference list, even if not specifically mentioned in the body of the thesis.

Once the categories have been decided on, they have to be put into a logical sequence. This logical sequence is what we mean when we talk about the "structure" of the literature review. Often the earliest category is the "definition" of the key concept of interest. You could also organize some of the literature according to the contexts that were used to collect the data. For example, a paper on Advertising to Children could use "children's advertising on television", "children's print advertising" and "ethical concerns" as sub-headings. Another way of organizing the literature might be to give a historical perspective of the development of literature in the area. Often a table or a figure can be used, to convey how the material has been organized into categories, and how the categories relate to one another. For example, Fig. 6 demonstrates how one research student effectively demonstrated her organization of the material she had found, when reviewing the literature on nostalgia.

5. Discussion and conclusion

To sum up, conducting a literature review involves (1) assembling (identifying and obtaining), (2) arranging (organizing and summarizing), and (3) assessing (evaluating and discovering research opportunities in) the existing knowledge about a topic. Most research students are eventually able to assemble and arrange the literature that they have read quite well, to produce a systematic review of the literature. However, research students usually find the task of critically evaluating the literature far more challenging. This article has explained the nature, purposes and outcomes of a high quality literature review. Practical tips, suggestions and examples were provided to assist with the tasks of first doing the literature review and then writing it up. Although space limitations precluded a complete coverage of every aspect of writing literature reviews, it is hoped that research students have found some useful ideas to help them get started on the road to mastering this critical skill.

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