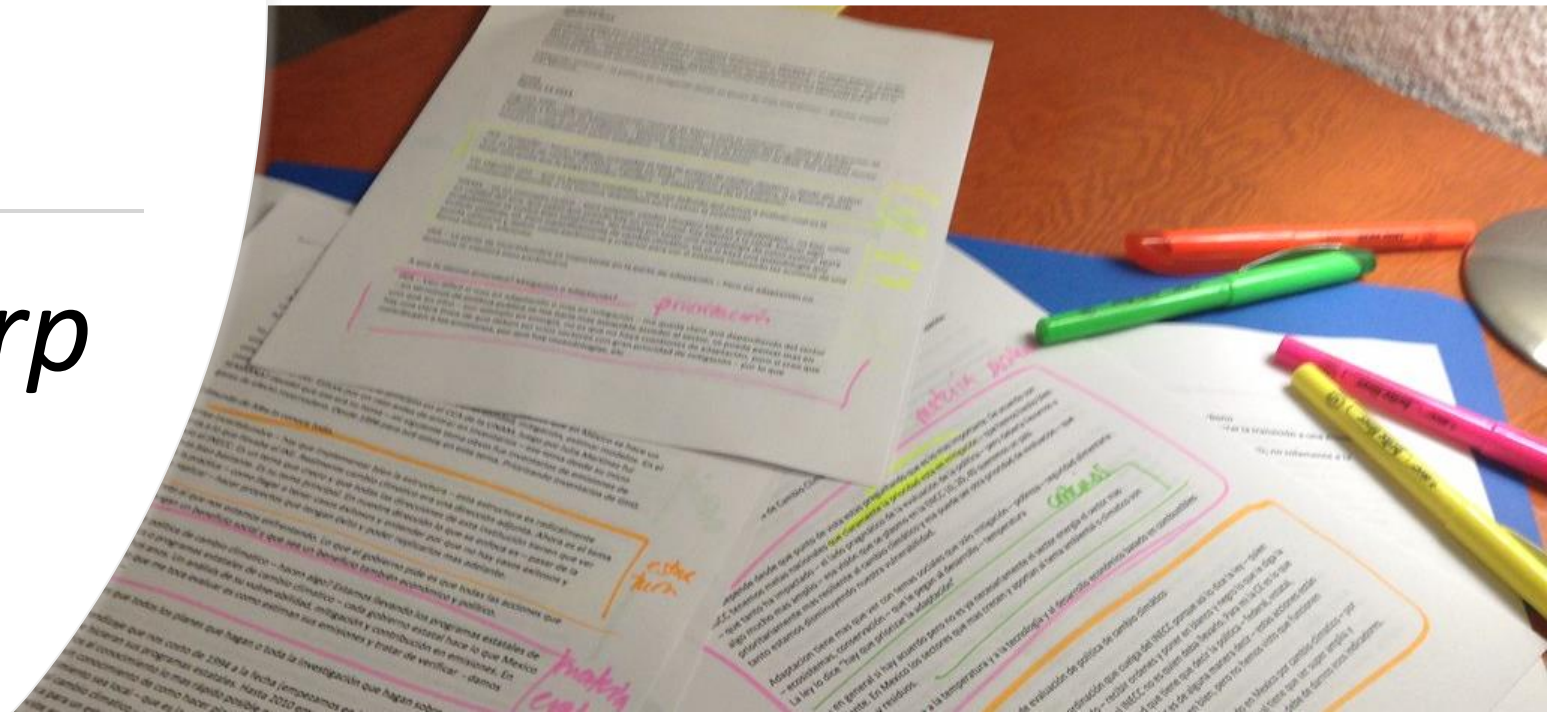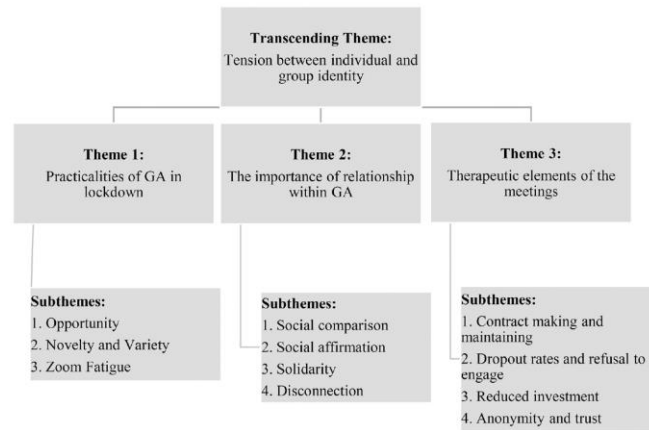# Qualitative Research

Dr. Michael Sharp

What is Qualitative Research?

- A type of research that uses non-numerical forms of data
  - Not monolithic
  - Qualitative thinking in everyday life
- Data tends to be descriptive and rich

Left Page

Diagram 1 Hierarchy of Themes

Transcending Theme:
Tension between individual and group identity

Theme 1:
Practicalities of GA in lockdown

Theme 2:
The importance of relationship within GA

Theme 3:
Therapeutic elements of the meetings

Subthemes:
1. Opportunity
2. Novelty and Variety
3. Zoom Fatigue

Subthemes:
1. Social comparison
2. Social affirmation
3. Solidarity
4. Disconnection

Subthemes:
1. Contract making and maintaining
2. Dropout rates and refusal to engage
3. Reduced investment
4. Anonymity and trust

"I've been joining 2, 3, sometimes 4 meetings a week. The great thing is, with these Zoom meetings, you can join meetings all over the world ... You know, you can join one in Hawaii one day, Sydney the next day, you know, America, all over." (Sebastian).

This quotation shows that Sebastian has increased the number of meetings he attends, embracing 'travelling' "all over the world" to attend them. This aspect may have been particularly appealing because at the height of lockdown, individuals were unable to leave their homes for more than an hour a day. The ability to not only continue attending meetings but gain some sense of freedom, even if in a virtual way, may have been cathartic for people.

People were also able to attend different *types* of meetings. For example, in the UK, whilst all meetings are based on the 12-step principals, only a small proportion of the meetings are classed as 'steps meetings' which focus on working through each of the 12 steps of GA. For many, the ability to attend different meetings meant they were able to specifically choose these meetings and found more value in them than their regular meetings. For example, Brian describes how the decision and ability to log onto the 'steps meetings' on Zoom changed his approach to his recovery, and strengthened resolve after relapse:

"...the only reason I've changed this time is because I've gone onto the steps meeting on Zoom. If I'm honest, and that's what the GA programme is all about, and that's the message I'm hearing on the Zoom meeting is...get on the Steps meetings. Get on the steps." (Brian).

Brian specifically states that if he hadn't "gone onto the steps meetings" - which were only made available to him because of lockdown - then he believes he would have relapsed.

The above quotations demonstrate how the transition to Internet-based meetings not only allowed participation in the programme to continue but presented unique benefits which resulted in positive outcomes. In this way, the participants of this study demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, and managed to adapt quickly to the new scenario.

Novelty and Variety

The opportunities presented created a sense of novelty and variety, resulting in a 'fun' and positive experience. For example, Brian discussed an excitement from GA members from all over the world to participate in his local meeting, which lead to a positive and enjoyable experience for him. He said:

"On Saturday there was about 10 or 12 people on it, and again we had a couple of foreign people on it and stuff like that, and it's great, and I think, just where I'm from ... people come on because of that, Liverpool. There was one fella with a Liverpool top on on Saturday all made up. But people see Liverpool, they go "oh, yeah". So, I think that meeting is really going to grow and it's only going to get better." (Brian).

Brian speaks with a sense of pride about his hometown and alludes to other people being excited to attend the Liverpool

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Right Page

Table 2 Mean forgiveness ratings for the interaction of mortality salience × target affiliation × empathic disposition (Study 2)

Target affiliation (Mortality salience)	Oilers		Flames	
	MS	Control	MS	Control
Empathic disposition				
High	6.79 (1.64)a	5.77 (2.42)b	6.76 (1.84)a	4.96 (2.09)b
N	17	18	17	14
Low	7.35 (1.29)a	4.97 (1.80)b	3.66 (1.11)c	3.62 (1.59)c
N	14	15	15	16

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. Means that do not share a common subscript differ at $p < .05$.

low empathy individuals yielded a main effect of mortality salience, $F(1,56) = 10.07$, $p < .01$, and a main effect of group affiliation, $F(1,56) = 43.12$, $p < .0001$. However, both of these main effects were qualified by the predicted mortality salience × group affiliation interaction, $F(1,56) = 9.40$, $p < .01$. The pattern of means for this interaction closely resembled the pattern observed for the mortality salience × group affiliation interaction in Study 1. Pairwise comparisons showed that when mortality was made salient, participants were more likely to forgive the aggressive player when he was an ingroup member than when he was an outgroup member, $t(126) = 5.55$, $p < .001$, and this comparison was also significant within the dental pain salience condition, $t(126) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. However, pairwise comparisons also showed that when the aggressive player was a member of the ingroup, mortality salience led to more forgiveness than dental pain salience, $t(126) = 3.58$, $p < .01$, but this difference was not significant when he was a member of the outgroup ($t < .50$). Thus, for low empathy individuals, mortality salience led to the highest degree of forgiveness of the aggressive player when he belonged to the ingroup.

As predicted, the mortality salience × group affiliation ANOVA for high empathy individuals yielded only the predicted main effect of mortality salience, $F(1,62) = 7.89$, $p < .005$, indicating that when mortality was made salient, participants were more likely to forgive the aggressive player than when dental pain was made salient ($Ms = 6.78$ vs. 5.37, respectively). More importantly, the emergence of only the main effect of mortality salience demonstrates that among individuals who see themselves as empathic, mortality salience led to forgiveness of the aggressor regardless of his group affiliation. To further test this hypothesis, we conducted two critical pairwise comparisons across low vs. high empathy individuals. These comparisons showed that when the aggressive player belonged to the outgroup, mortality salience led to more forgiveness for high empathy individuals than low empathy individuals, $t(126) = 4.89$, $p < .001$, however this same comparison was not significant when he belonged to the ingroup ($t < .50$).

Liking

We constructed a composite measure of liking for the aggressive player by averaging the two liking questions ($\alpha = .86$). The same 3-way ANOVA performed on this measure yielded no main effects or interactions ($Fs < 1$).

Affect

The PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994) is composed of 13 subscales measuring positive and negative mood, fear, attentiveness, hostility, shyness, fatigue, guilt, happiness, self-assuredness, sadness, serenity, and surprise. Because the positive and negative mood scales are composed of items that also contribute to the other subscales, we conducted 2 mortality salience × trait empathy ANOVA's on the positive and negative mood subscales and a parallel MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) on the 11 remaining subscales. These analyses produced a significant main effect of empathy on fatigue, $F(1,114) = 7.59$, $p < .007$, indicating that low empathy participants were more fatigued than high empathy participants ($Ms = 3.21$ vs. 2.67; $SDs = 1.06$ vs. 1.03, respectively). There was also a mortality salience × empathy interaction on a number of the negative mood subscales: hostility $F(1,114) = 7.02$, $p < .009$, guilt $F(1,114) = 5.07$, $p < .026$, Sadness $F(1,114) = 4.36$, $p < .039$, shyness $F(1,114) = 5.30$, $p < .023$, and overall negative mood $F(1,117) = 6.57$, $p < .012$. There was also a mortality salience × empathy interaction on a few of the positive mood subscales such as self-assuredness, $F(1,114) = 3.89$, $p < .05$, and a marginal effect for surprise $F(1,114) = 3.74$, $p < .06$. The pattern of means for these interactions generally showed that mortality salience led high empathy participants to experience more of the emotion in question than dental pain salience, whereas mortality salience led low empathy participants to experience less of the emotion than dental pain salience (See Table 3 for the cell means and standard deviations for these interactions). Because mortality salience differentially impacted high vs. low empathy participants on the affect measures, we submitted the forgiveness measure to a

Penfold & Ogden, 2021

Schimel et al., 2016

Research Questions in Qualitative Research

Less of a focus on group comparisons, cause and effect, and variables

Seeks to explore or describe

More idiographic than nomothetic

May be more general

May change over the course of the study

Sample Research Questions

How do people come to terms with the death of a partner? (Golsworthy & Coyle, 1999)

What is it like to experience depression? (Smith & Rhodes, 2014)

How do people in the early stage of Alzheimer's disease perceive and manage the impact on their sense of self? (Clare, 2003)

How does chronic illness affect people's lives and sense of time (Charmaz, 1991)

What is the interpretation of the broader societal narratives with the personal narrative identities of Alaskan frontiers people? (Kleinfield, 2012)

Common Features of Qualitative Research

1. Unstructured data

Unstructured Data

- Quantitative research uses structured data, qualitative research uses unstructured data
- Types of data
    - Interviews
    - Focus groups
    - Media data
    - Observational data
    - Naturalistic data
    - Visual data

Transcripts

- Before analyzing some forms of data, they may need to be transcribed
  - Playscript transcripts
  - Jeffersonian transcripts

Playscript transcription:

57	INT:	When you are with each other, what, I mean what do you get up to? What do you do?
58	LOU:	Like in the day or … just generally?
59	INT:	Well generally, in the day, in the evening, whatever, both, all three.
60	LOU:	Oh generally, just the typical watch telly together and then drink together before we
61		go out and then go out, like do each other's fake tan and stuff [laughs], so …

Jeffersonian transcription:

230	INT:	=.hhh when you are with each other what
231		(0.2)
232	INT:	I mean w what d'you get up to what d'you do?
233		(0.5)
234	LOU:	like in the day or::
235		(0.5)
236	INT:	we[ll]
237	LOU:	[js] generally
238		(.)
239	INT:	generally [in the day] in the evening or whatever (.) both
240	LOU:	[>well we generally<]
241		(0.2)
242	INT:	all thre[e]
243	LOU:	[x] typical watch telly togther an erm
244		(1.1)
245	LOU:	drink together before we go out ˚n then go out˚
246		(0.7)
247	LOU:	˚like˚
248		(0.4)
249	LOU:	do each other's fake tan n stu HA ha ha ha .hhh so ha ha .hhh

Notation	Meaning
↑ or ↓	Marked rise (or fall) in intonation.
Underlining	For emphasis (of the parts of the utterance that are stressed).
UPPER-CASE LETTERS	Indicate increased volume (note this can be combined with underlining).
.hhh	The letter h repeated in a row with a dot in front of it indicates an in-breath. Without the dot an out-breath is indicated.
(comment)	Analyst's comment about something going on in the talk.
>word<	Noticeably faster speech.
?	Rising intonation at the end of an utterance.
(h)	Out-breath/laughter in word(s) when speaking.
:::	Colons indicate sounds that are stretched or drawn out (number of colons indicates the length of stretching).
[ ]	Overlaps, cases of simultaneous speech or interruptions.
°word°	Shown when a passage of talk is noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
=	When there is nearly no gap at all between one utterance and another.
(.)	Small pauses.
<word>	Noticeably slower speech.
(1.4)	Silences (time in secs).

(Forrester, 2002, p. 11; based on Psathas, 1995)

Common Features of Qualitative Research

1. Unstructured data

2. Focus on language

Brian specifically states that if he hadn't "gone onto the steps meetings" - which were only made available to him because of lockdown - then he believes he would have relapsed.
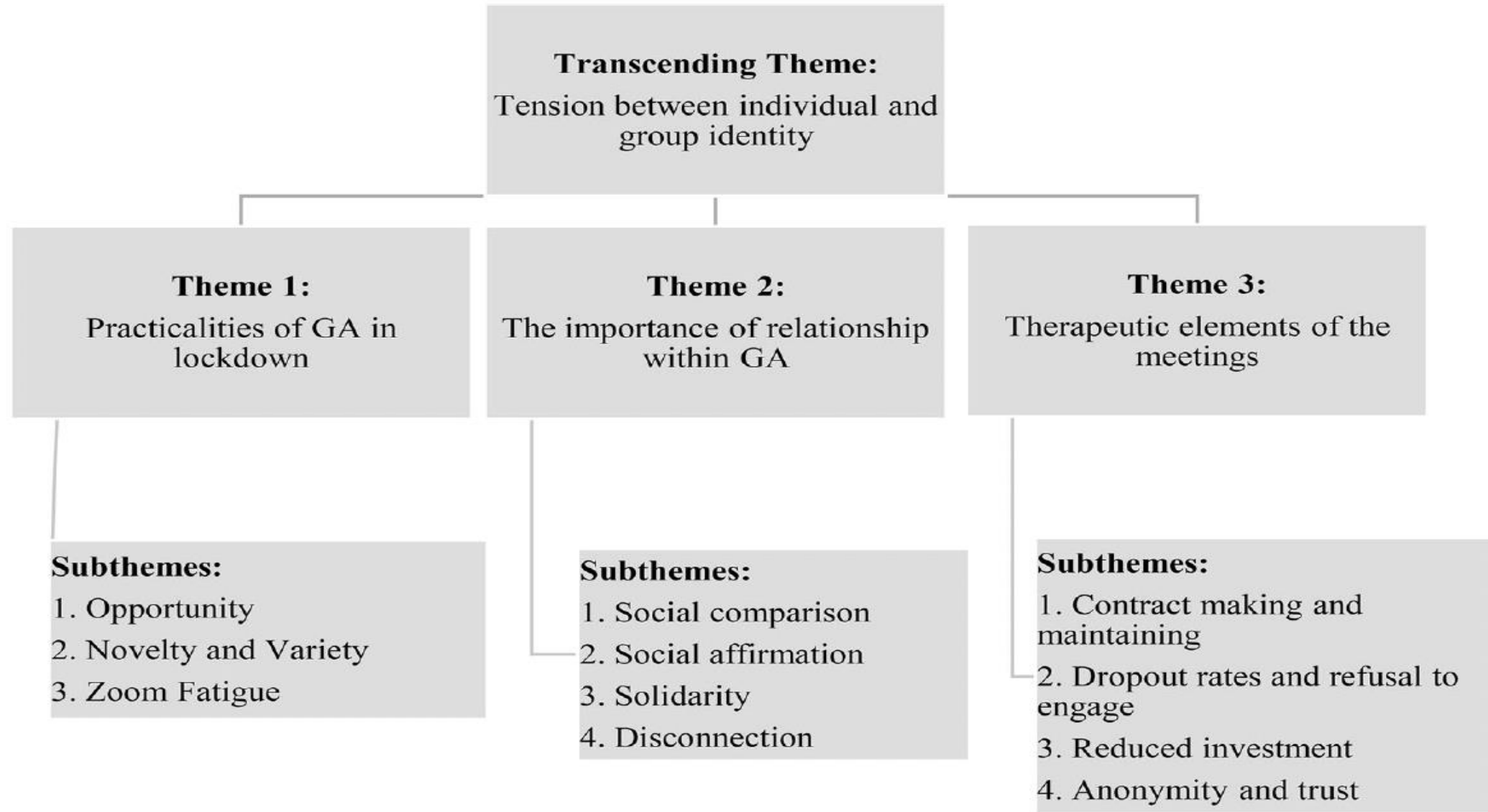
The above quotations demonstrate how the transition to Internet-based meetings not only allowed participation in the programme to continue but presented unique benefits which resulted in positive outcomes. In this way, the participants of this study demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity, and managed to adapt quickly to the new scenario.

Penfold & Ogden (2021)

Common Features of Qualitative Research

1. Unstructured data
2. Focus on language
3. Seeking out themes

Transcending Theme:
Tension between individual and group identity

Theme 1:
Practicalities of GA in lockdown

Theme 2:
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Subthemes:
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Subthemes:
1. Social comparison
2. Social affirmation
3. Solidarity
4. Disconnection

Subthemes:
1. Contract making and maintaining
2. Dropout rates and refusal to engage
3. Reduced investment
4. Anonymity and trust

Common Features of Qualitative Research

1. Unstructured data
2. Focus on language
3. Seeking out themes
4. Interest in people's perspectives, sense-making, and subjective experiences

"I've come off the wagon…squandered…chosen to gamble many times in those eight years. But I've always attended back to GA ... it's just nice because you go back and even though it's a lower point to go, they're obviously very understanding…and erm, they are…congratulate you for being honest and getting back into… obviously, getting back to, erm, on the road to recovery." (Rick).

Penfold & Ogden (2021)

Common Features of Qualitative Research

1. Unstructured data
2. Focus on language
3. Seeking out themes
4. Interest in people's perspectives, sense-making, and subjective experiences
5. Generating localized, context-specific theories

"They are not taking it seriously": Constructing family dynamics in end-of-life care interactions in Hong Kong

David Matthew Edmonds ✉, Olga Zayts-Spence, Irene Nga Yu Au & Jacqueline Kwan Yuk Yuen

Check for updates

Humans and Farm Animals in Documentary Film Narratives: A Romantic Perspective on the Problem of Capitalist Meat Production

Andreja Vezovnik ✉

Check for updates

"I feel like I'm living the authenticity of my being": gender identity developmental trajectories of trans youth in Portugal

Marta Conceição ✉, Jaime Moura & Pedro Alexandre Costa

Check for updates

Task-Designated Identities in Danish Homeless Shelters

Amir B. Marvasti, Nanna Mik-Meyer ✉

Go here for SFX

Why Would Someone Use Qualitative Methods

- Desire for "richer" data
- Beginning research in a new area/direction
- Mixed-method validation
- Restricted by the situation/research interest
- Philosophical assumptions

Philosophy and Research

- Philosophy is foundational for quality research
- Ontology and epistemology
- Entities and representations
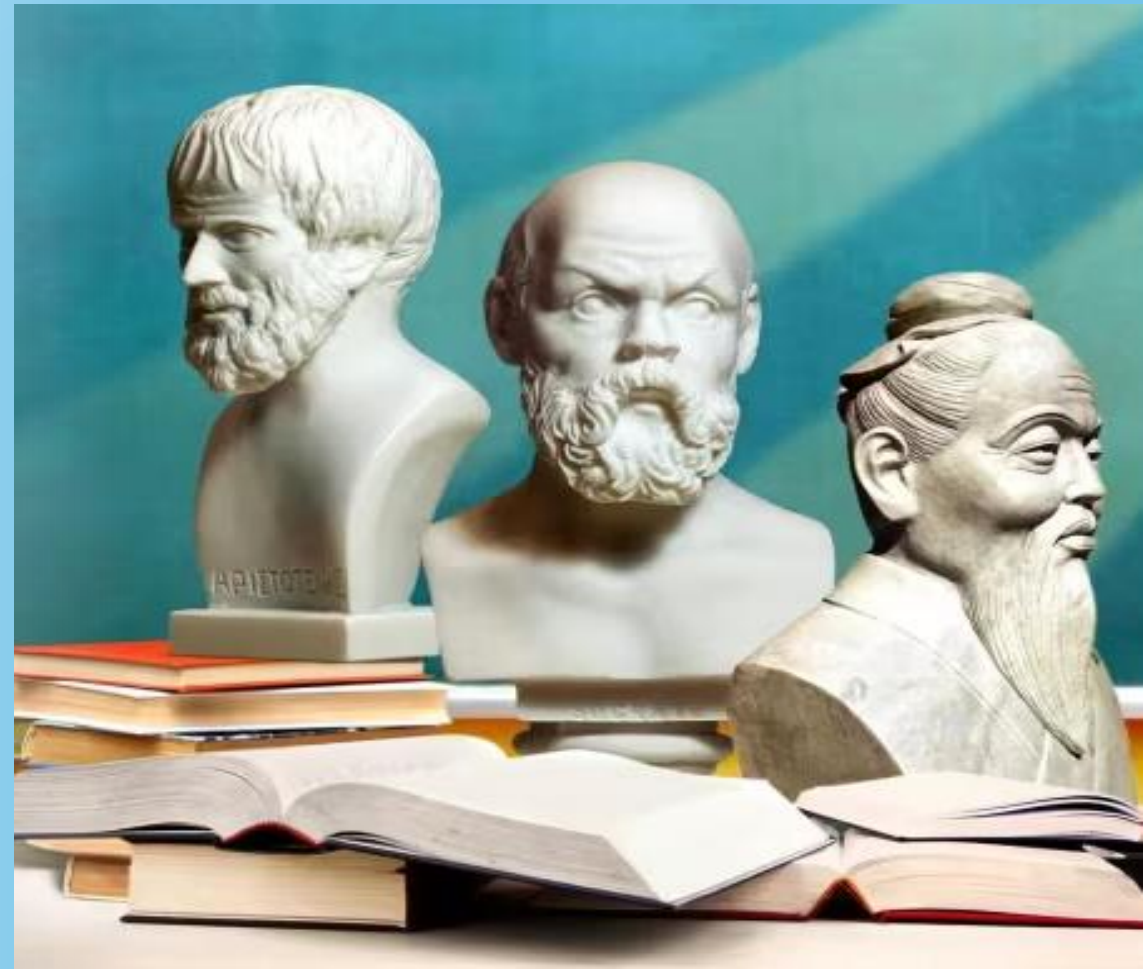
Realism and Relativism

- Realism argues that there is an independent, objective world of things, facts, and states of affairs that are accessible to us
  - Entities are distinct from their representations

- Relativism argues that our representations of the things in the world are social constructed
  - Entities are intertwined with their representations

Extreme realism

Extreme relativism

Philosophical Frameworks

Extreme realism

Extreme relativism

Positivism

Philosophical Frameworks

Extreme realism

Extreme relativism

Positivism

Relative
Social
Constructionism

Philosophical Frameworks

Extreme realism

Extreme relativism

Positivism

Critical Realism

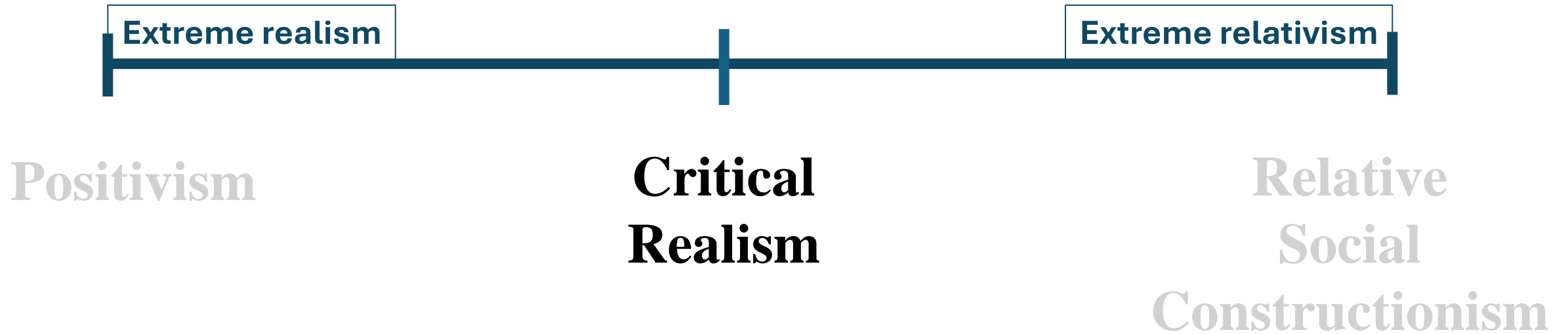Relative Social Constructionism

Table 2.1 Three approaches to psychological research

Positivism (Robson, 2011 and Clegg, 2016)	Relativist Social Constructionism (Robson, 2011 and Burr, 2015)	Critical Realism and Post-positivism (Robson, 2011 and Burr, 2015)
• Research, done properly, gives us objective knowledge, which is superior to other forms of knowledge (e.g. beliefs, 'common sense'). • Research uses strict procedures to gather quantitative data. • Through research we determine how truthful knowledge about the world is by comparing it to how the world actually is. • The main purpose of research is to create universal causal laws (overarching explanations telling us which things directly cause other things). • To do this, research identifies 'constant conjunction': experimental evidence that two things invariably occur together. • Language is a tool used to reflect and describe things.	• Knowledge from research is one view of the world and not necessarily more valid than other views. • Research can't tell us whether one bit of knowledge is more truthful than another. • This is because we can't meaningfully distinguish between knowledge about the world and how the world actually is (and so cannot compare them). • Research is a subjective social process, influenced by the social and cultural context in which it is done. • Language doesn't reflect the world, but shapes the world and what is possible within it. • To understand people, we must understand the complex context they operate in and the meanings attached to things. • Qualitative research is often used, as it focuses on language, context and meaning.	• Research is not entirely objective, yet can produce forms of knowledge that are more accurate than others. • Knowledge can be compared, to some extent, against evidence of what the world is actually like. • Research is a subjective process that is always conducted in a social and cultural context, so knowledge is shaped by this. • Language doesn't reflect the world, but shapes the world and what is possible within it. • Studying language, and its role in shaping the world, is important but we can also study things that operate outside of language (e.g. the direct effect of social or bodily process on people).

Types of Analyses

- Thematic analysis

- Focused on themes
- Flexible
- Atheoretical

Coding Example

Data Extract	Coding Examples
Yeah I'd rather have a few people that mean a lot to me than hundreds of people that I know so little about, that doesn't, it's, it's not, you can't even call it a friendship it's just like an acquaintance [Int: Yeah], but I don't, I'm not really bothered about people that I'm just acquainted with and like just fellow students and stuff like that, I kind of push those kind of, 'cause I don't like people knowing exactly what I'm feeling and thinking all of the time, so I think if I've got a few people around me that are close to me I can confide with them and that's it, I don't have to, yeah I don't like other people knowing too much about me [Int: OK, OK], I don't know if it's because I don't really like them or because I keep away for a reason, but yeah, so only a few people close to me.	Preference for close friends Definition of friendship No desire for superficial relationships Acquaintances Desire for privacy Small number of close friends Intimacy in friendship Desire for privacy Shazia's autonomy in her friendships Small number of close friends

Coding in Thematic (and other types of) Analysis

- **Deductive vs. Inductive coding**
- **In vivo coding** uses participant's own words
- **Process coding** uses action-based codes to describe movements, procedures, or describing unspoken parts

Coding in Thematic (and other types of) Analysis

- **Descriptive coding** uses a word to encapsulate a section of data
- **Value coding** focuses on participant's worldview
- **Structural coding** labels specific attributes of the data set

Collating Codes Example

Reciprocity

Mutual support

There for each other

Reliance on friends

Putting friends needs above own self

Finding comfort in friendship

Long-term childhood friends

Preference for close friends

Intimacy in friendship

Comfortable silences

Constant communication with close friends

Necessity of acquaintances

Awkward silences with certain friends

Mitigation of awkwardness through shared activities

Future loss of friendship

No desire for superficial friendships

Loss of contact with people

Distance emerging in relationship

Changing interests in friendships

Changing patterns of communication

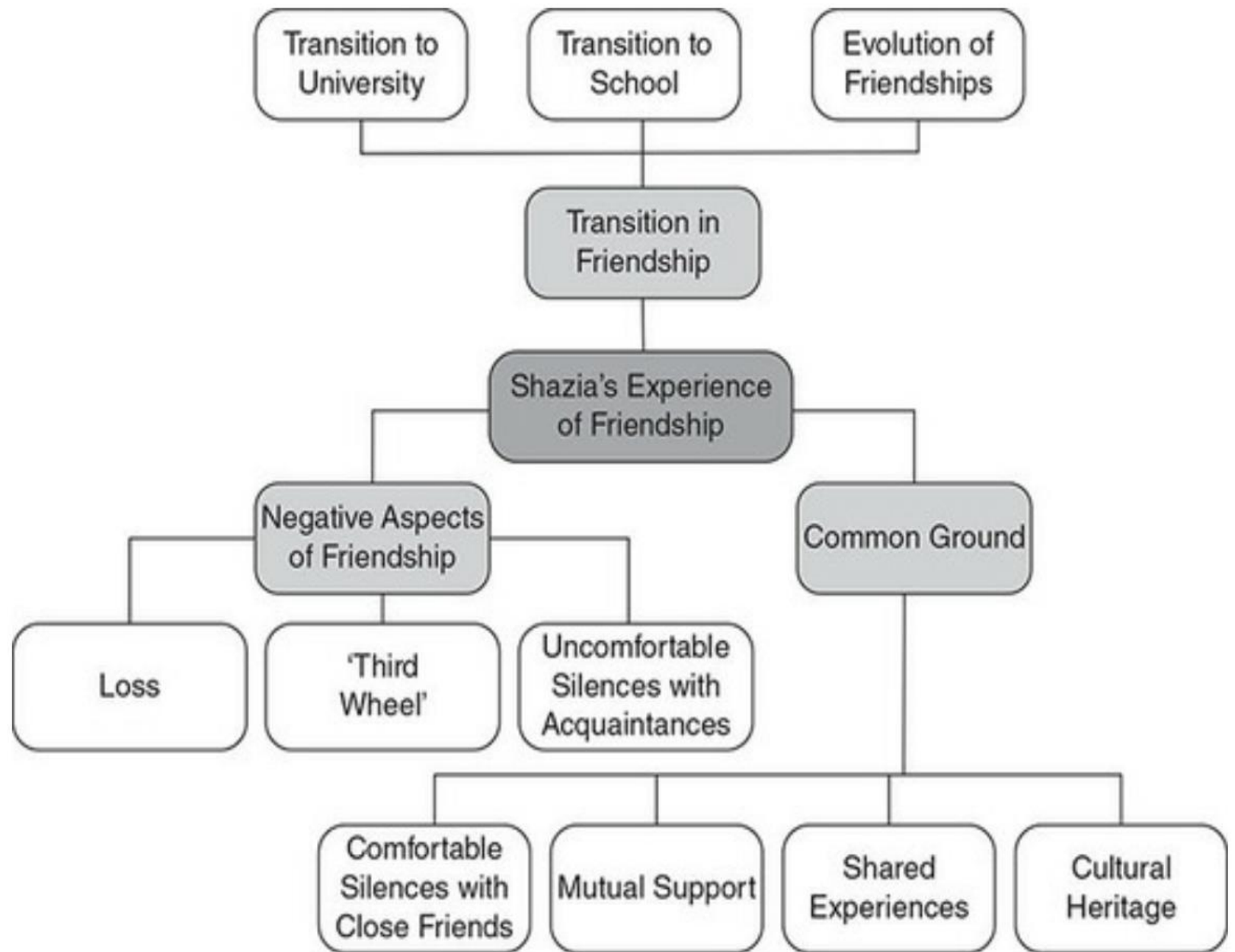Anxiety about possible changes to friendship

Time spent re-investing in friendships

Changing perceptions of people

Maturation of friendships

Realistic expectations of friendships

Finalized Themes Example

Types of Analyses

- TA

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis

- Focuses on experiences
- Themes
- Idiographic

Coding in IPA

- IPA has a two-step coding process
- Phenomenological coding
  - Summarizes/describes
  - Left margins
- Interpretative coding
  - Interprets/analyzes
  - Right margins

Types of Analyses

- TA
- IPA
- Narrative analysis

- Focuses on narratives
- Takes many forms

Structural Narrative Elements

Table 11.1 Elements in Labov's (1972) model of structural narrative analysis

Abstract (A):	Summary of the story
	What is the story about?
Orientation (O):	Time, place, characters and situation to orient the listener
	Who is the story about, when did it happen, what happened, where did it happen?
Complication Action (CA):	Events of the story
	Then what happened?
Evaluation (E):	Where the narrator steps back from the story to tell the listener its meaning
	So what?
Resolution (R):	Outcome of the story
	What finally happened?
Coda (C):	Ending the story and returning to the present
	Does not answer any question and signs off the narrative.

Structural Narrative Elements

This extract from the interview with Shazia has been re-transcribed into the elements of Labov's structural narrative analysis model to show how it is applied to her narrative.

Shazia's story about what she does together with her friend:

Abstract (A):	INT: Ehm so what kind of things do you do with your friend? What, what kinda things would you do with her? SHAZ: Well we've tried making up diets,
Orientation (O):	because for the past three years we've been saying that we're gonna diet and then we're gonna go on holiday
Evaluation (E):	and it's gonna be really good, but that's just not happened,
Complicating Action (CA):	and then we used to go swimming, but then we'd just end up going and getting like a kebab or something
Evaluation (E):	and then that would just wipe out any good that we do [laughs],
Complicating Action (CA):	and we just watch films and go out, normally just go for a drive or something and just do that really,
Evaluation (E):	just any little thing,
Resolution (R):	we just like sit there for hours just talking and doing nothing,
Complicating Action (CA):	and yeah, once we just spent a whole hour just trying on different hats [laughs].
Coda (C):	Yeah bit sad but that's what we do, yeah.

Types of Analyses

- TA
- IPA
- NA

- Discourse analysis

- Focuses on how language constructs an understanding of the world and its effects

- Discursive psychology and Foucauldian-informed discursive psychology

Discursive Devices

Name of Device	Example in Data	Description	Example Social Action
Assessments	>cos I don't< (0.4) like	An evaluation of a person, object or event	Draw attention to either the object (what is being assessed) or the subject (who is assessing)
Extreme case formulations	hundreds of people Knowing exactly All the time	A word or phrase that is noticeably extreme	Can strengthen or justify an argument
Contrasts	I'd rather have...	Set up an either/or state of affairs	Can be used to manage accountability and identities
Hedging	>stuff like tha< (0.8) I kind'v:	Often incomplete, rushed utterances, numerous pauses	Can highlight the social delicacy of an issue
Minimisation	just fellow students	Treats the object as minimal	Downplays significance of something
Script formulations	I'm not really bothered about	An account that appears typical or routine	Presents the behaviour as if normal and expected

Types of Analyses

- TA
- IPA
- NA
- DA
- Conversation analysis

- Focuses on how people understand and respond to each other in their "turns at talk"
- Great for looking at potential sources of "trouble in talk"
- Naturalistic conversations

Elements of Conversations

- Identify each turn-construction element
  - Finding turn-allocation element
- Identify adjacency pairs
  - First- and second-pair parts
- Identify what each part is doing
  - Summons, greetings, questions, answers, formulations, endings

Extract adapted from Forrester (1996):

1.		Telephone rings	SUMMONS	1st PP*
2.	Dave:	Yes?	Response to summons	2nd PP to (1)
3.	Chris:	Hello, there:	Greeting	1st PP
4.		is that Dave?	Question	1st PP
5.	Dave:	Yea,	Answer	2nd PP to (4)
6.		hi	Greeting	2nd PP to (3)
7.	Chris:	How are you?	Question	1st PP
8.	Dave:	Not bad,	Answer	2nd PP to (7)
9.		how's yourself?	Question	1st PP
10.	Chris:	Good	Answer	2nd PP to (9)
11.		Look, the reason I'm calling is	Topic	

Types of Analyses

- TA
- IPA
- NA
- DA
- CA
- Grounded theory

- Attempts to produce a theoretical understanding of psycho-social phenomena
- Delayed literature review
- Theoretical sampling

Analysis in Grounded Theory

- 3 levels of coding
  - Initial coding breaks data down in conceptual components
  - Intermediate coding arranges concepts into categories
  - Advanced coding identifies relationships between categories to produce a theory
- Memo writing

Analytical Tools

- Questions
  - E.g., Theoretical, sensitizing, and practical questions
- Look at language
- Constant comparisons
- Flip-flop technique
- Look for negative cases

"It was a very difficult decision to put my husband in a nursing home but I couldn't physically or emotionally care for him anymore. I am 85 and it was just getting to be too much. But he died only six months after I put him there. Now I wish I had kept him home."

Quality in Qualitative Research

- Qualitative research can (and must) be done with quality
  - Criteria is not the same as quantitative research
- Rigor
- Validity
  - Apparent validity
  - Deviant Cases

Quality in Qualitative Research

- Reflexivity
  - Personal and epistemological reflexivity
  - Reflexive journal
- Transparency

Tracey (2010) argues one of the key markers of quality in qualitative research is sincerity, that is, the practice of "authenticity and genuineness." Crucial to sincerity is self-reflexivity, where authors examine both why they are conducting the research and any potential biases and preconceptions they may have. In her discussion of the literature, Berger (2015) contends self-reflexivity increases the quality of research by allowing researchers to consider how their identities shape the construction of meanings in the data and to contemplate a more diverse range of theories to fit research data. Accordingly, we have included the following self-reflection from the primary researcher:

I am involved in campaigns and charities around migrants' rights, the son of Iranian migrants, and have family and friends who have gone through the asylum process. This gives me an understanding of some of the issues raised in interviewee narratives. Equally, it means that I view the asylum process negatively and, thus, am more likely to notice issues. Moreover, my identity as a straight man might also affect my ability to empathise with female forced migrants (many of whom have been through gender specific experiences and trauma) and forced migrants who identify as homosexual (many of whom have had to flee because of their sexuality).

Jannesari et al. (2022)

Quality in Qualitative Research

- Coherence
  - With philosophical framework and aspects of the research
  - With previous/related findings
  - The "golden thread"

Myths About Qualitative Research

- That doing research is purely a matter of learning a few techniques and, hence, atheoretical
- Qualitative research is in competition with quantitative research
- Qualitative research is **just** about understanding people's experiences
- Anything goes and therefore not rigorous

Some Closing Thoughts