

Foundations of Social Science Research: CPT898

Lecture 1b: Disciplinary traditions
and the nature of research
paradigms

Outline

- Disciplinary traditions
- Reality and knowledge – the language of research
- Problematicising social science
- Explaining the differences
- Big Ideas
- Conclusion

Why do this module?

Assessment of quality for a PhD or any higher-level independent research:

- **Contribution** to knowledge?
- Theoretical **perspective**?
- Why do **this** question?
- Why use **these** methods?
- **Critical** Review of existing work?

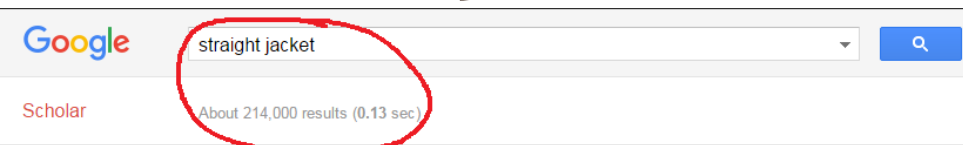
.....*It's all about choices*

Why do social scientists *do* research differently?

- Disciplinary traditions – an honourable tradition or a strait jacket? (not straight jacket)
- Why are there disciplinary traditions? Power, citations networks, invisible colleges, normalisation.
- Paradigms: what are they? (Kuhn, 1962)
- Recognising shifts as they happen – the “cultural turn” for example.



It's straitjacket, dummy!



Movements in monkeys with deafferented forelimbs

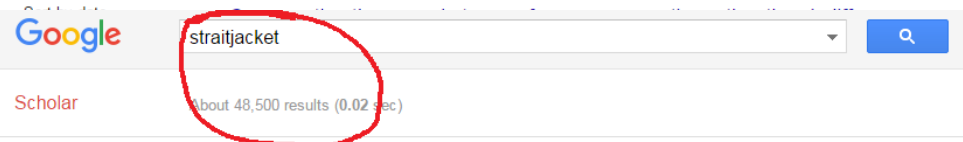
HD Knapp, E Taub, AJ Berman - Experimental neurology, 1963 - Elsevier

... Our approach to the problem utilized an avoidance conditioning technique, prolonged restraint of the intact forelimb in a **straight-jacket** as well as extension of the area of deafferentation to include, in different animals, the neck, the contralateral forelimb and an entire side of the ...
Cited by 186 Related articles All 3 versions Web of Science: 129 Cite Save

[CITATION] From teacher knowledge to queered teacher knowledge research: Escaping the epistemic **straight jacket**

JE Petrovic, J Rosiek - Queering **straight** teachers: Discourse and identity in ..., 2007
Cited by 11 Related articles Cite Save

[CITATION] Too old, too sick, too bad: Nursing homes in America
FE Moss, VJ Halamandaris - 1977 - Aspen Pub
Cited by 146 Related articles Cite Save More



Can organization studies begin to break out of the normal science **straitjacket**? An editorial essay

RL Daft, AY Lewin - Organization Science, 1990 - pubsonline.informaworld.com

The popular and professional press is filled with discussions of major changes in the organizational landscape, including organizational design experiments as well as at major corporations, the slashing of corporate staffs, and the ...
Cited by 424 Related articles All 4 versions Web of Science: 1

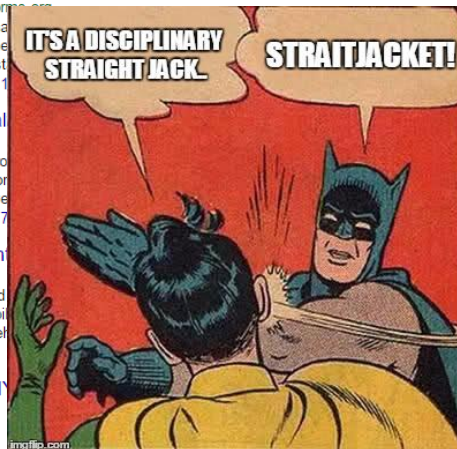
[PDF] Why dollarization is more **straitjacket** than said
J Sachs, F Larrain - Foreign policy, 1999 - JSTOR

From Russia to Indonesia to Ecuador, economic crashes have prompted politicians and their economic advisers to advocate the abandonment of currencies in favor of stronger, more stable ones. But as attractive as dollarization may seem, it is not without its costs. ...
Cited by 115 Related articles All 4 versions Web of Science: 7

[CITATION] **Straitjacket** Society an Insider's Irreverent
M Miyamoto - 1994 - philpapers.org

This entry has no external links. Add one. ... Sign in / register and use this tool. ... John P. Burke (1986). Bureaucratic Responsibility (Matt - Pseudo). ... Peter Hennessy & Simon Coates (1992). Blue ...
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SYMPOSIUM ON AMARTYA SEN'S PHILOSOPHY



- Strait-laced
- Dire Straits
- Straits of Gibraltar
- Menai Straits



A **straitjacket** is a garment shaped like a jacket with overlong sleeves and is typically used to restrain a person who may otherwise cause harm to him/herself or others. Once the arms are inserted into the straitjacket's sleeves, they are then crossed across the chest. The ends of the sleeves are then tied to the back of the wearer, ensuring that the arms are kept close to the chest with as little movement as possible.

Although *straitjacket* is the most common spelling, *strait-jacket* is also frequently used, and in Scotland *strait-waistcoat*, which is generally deemed archaic.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straitjacket>

An activity: locating yourself

- What discipline are you located in? (sociology, economics, politics for example) Perhaps it's not a discipline but a *field of study*.
- Is there a dominant paradigm, a particular way to do research, a particular epistemological approach or method?

Follow up: identify the main journal(s) in your field. Using the contents pages look at how theoretical debates have shifted during the last 20 years. Is there evidence for paradigm shifts or the existence of disciplinary traditions?

How can we explain this?

- Understand philosophical backgrounds
- Problematicise *social science*
- What is the nature of reality?, whose reality?
- What is the nature of knowledge?
- Knowledge is highly subjective, who's version of reality is correct, is there a single measurable reality?

Different ways of seeing

Different ways of seeing exist based upon answers to **four questions**;

- What is “out there” to know
- What, and how, can we know about it?
- How do we go about acquiring the knowledge to find out about it?
- What techniques or procedures will we use to acquire this knowledge?

The language of research

Four questions = four dimensions;

- ontology
- epistemology
- methodology
- method

Classifying research meaning systems

- **Ontology.** Ontological issues are concerned with *being* - i.e. with what *is*, or what we believe to exist. What assumptions do we make about how the world works?
- **Epistemology.** Epistemological issues are concerned with *knowing* - i.e. what sort of statements will we accept to justify what we believe to exist? What constitutes acceptable knowledge?

Classifying research meaning systems (cont)

- **Methodology.** Methodological issues are concerned with the *logic* of inquiry - i.e. how are we to discover or validate what we think exists?
- **Methods.** Issues of method concern the *technique* for collecting data - i.e. which specific techniques do we use to get at evidence which will support our propositions?

An example: poor housing design

- “Home buyers are getting a raw deal concludes the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), which carried out the audit. Among the biggest design crimes are:
- homes aimed at families with nowhere for children to play;
 - windows looking out onto brick walls;
 - and poorly lit areas”.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6339469.stm>

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EDITORS' BLOG

More than 80% of new homes don't measure up to design standards, according to new report. The result is a mass of 'nowhere homes' that are costly in the long run and could be storing up social ills.

Homes built for families but found everywhere - bland, boring and monotonous. Not the most inspiring description of the majority of new homes built in the UK, but it's how design experts sum them up and a new report suggests they have a point.

Does your new home have bad design? Send us your photos for a rogue's gallery.

A staggering 82% of new homes built over the last five years aren't well-designed and fail to measure up to the building industry's own benchmarks, says the first national audit of new private housing design.

Home buyers are getting a raw deal concludes the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe), which carried out the audit.

“ Good design doesn't cost more money, it's not about using the finest Italian marble instead of tarmac ”

Matt Bell

Ontology

Poor housing design:

- Is observable and can easily be measured;
- or**
- Is a socially constructed concept in Urban Design and Planning texts

Epistemology

Acceptable knowledge about poor housing design includes:

- Observable and measurable universal facts based upon CABE criteria

or

- Discovering what the idea of poor design “means” or “feels” like for either residents, urban designers or both.

Methodology

I can validate what I know about poor housing design by:

- experimentation and deduction

or

- Identifying how discourses of poor design are constructed

Methods

Collecting data about poor design might imply:

- Doing a large number of surveys to identify CABE criteria in the field, correlate these with other indicators, collect quantitative survey data from residents about residential satisfaction.

or

- Doing in-depth interviews or focus groups with urban design professionals and/or local residents; undertaking a discourse analysis of policy documents

Why is this important?

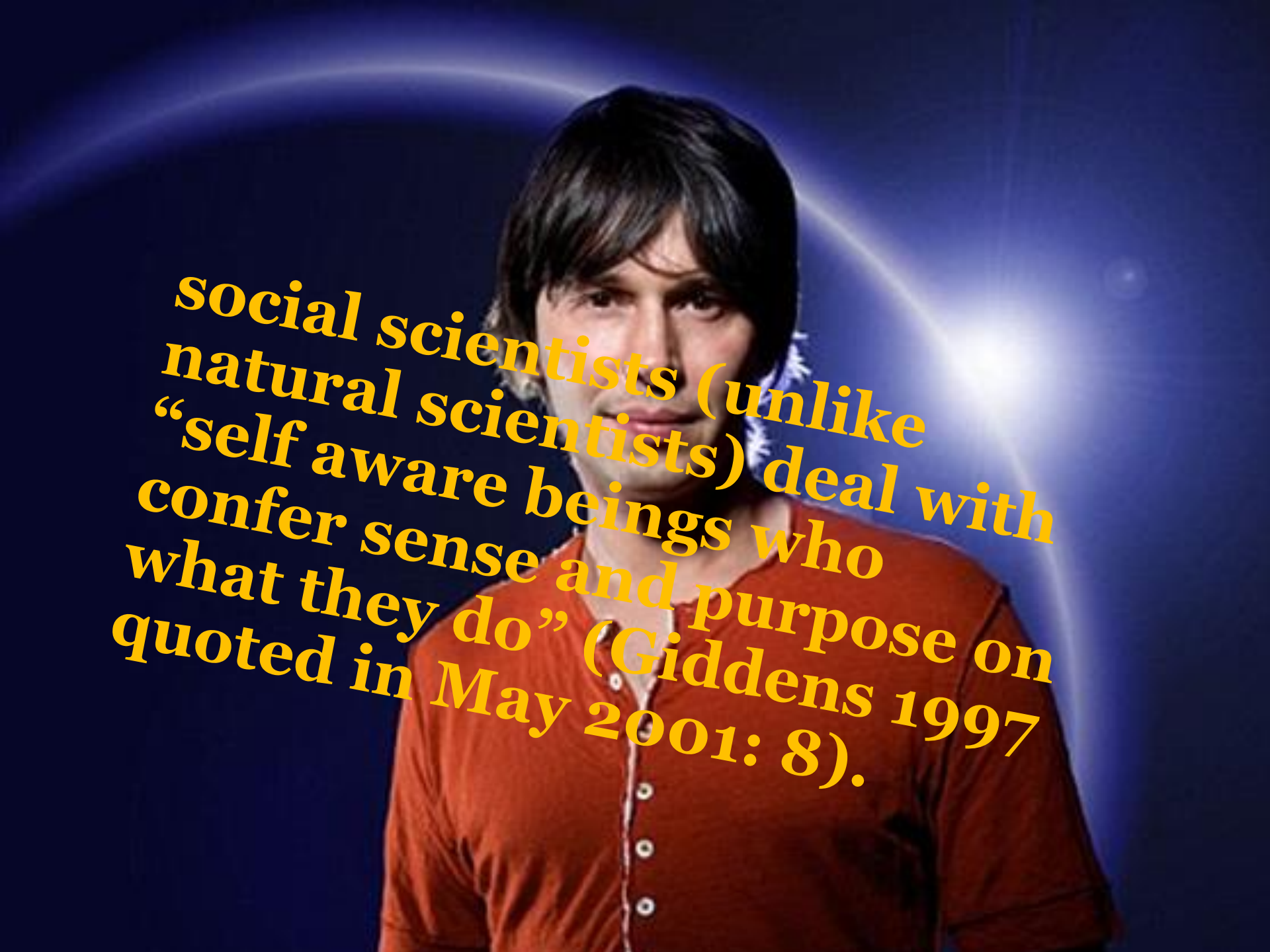
- These different ontological, epistemological, methodological and methods perspectives are a shorthand for the outcome of choices.
- It is important to recognise when these choices are made by yourself and by others.
- **Social constructionists**, for example, view the world very differently to **positivists** and thus will do their research in very different ways using different methods and producing different sorts of data.

Your choices - your research

- What is the nature of reality: external or socially constructed?
- What is your view of the world: Objective or subjective?
- What is considered acceptable knowledge: Observable phenomena or subjective meanings?
- What are you trying to create? Law-like generalisations or details about specific places or events?

Science and the scientific method

- a coherent body of thought
 - broad consensus among its practitioners
 - emphasis on irrefutable “facts”
 - what we can see, hear and touch and not “just” opinions
 - unprejudiced observation to create knowledge
 - objectivity, generalization and explanation
- (gratuitous Brian Cox picture follows)*



**social scientists (unlike
natural scientists) deal with
“self aware beings who
confer sense and purpose on
what they do” (Giddens 1997
quoted in May 2001: 8).**

Social Science

- social sciences are more complicated than natural sciences,
- there is no clear agreement on a coherent body of thought
- opinions, motivations, emotions etc. do matter – but how much?
- can data and data gathering ever be neutral ?
- Multiple social science paradigms built upon responses to these issues

Explaining the differences

- Sayer: (2010) Intensive v Extensive Research
- Saunders et al (2012): The research onion
- May (1999) Objectivity, Subjectivity, Reflexivity
- May (2012) The *objective* world, the *experienced* world and *bridge-building*

	INTENSIVE	EXTENSIVE
Research question	How does a process work in a particular case or small number of cases? What produces a certain change? What did the agents actually do?	What are the regularities common patterns, distinguishing features of a population? How widely are certain characteristics or processes distributed or represented?
Relations	Substantial relations of connection	Formal relations of similarity
Type of groups studied	Causal groups	Taxonomic groups
Type of account produced	Causal explanation of the production of certain objects or events, though not necessarily representative ones	Descriptive 'representative' generalizations, lacking in explanatory penetration
Typical methods	Study of individual agents in their causal contexts, interactive interviews, ethnography. Qualitative analysis	Large-scale survey of population or representative sample, formal questionnaires, standardized interviews. Statistical analysis
Limitations	Actual concrete patterns and contingent relations are unlikely to be 'representative', 'average' or generalizable. Necessary relations discovered will exist wherever their relata are present, e.g. causal powers of objects are generalizable to other contexts as they are necessary features of these objects	Although representative of a whole population, they are unlikely to be generalizable to other populations at different times and places. Problem of ecological fallacy in making inferences about individuals. Limited explanatory power
Appropriate tests	Corroboration	Replication

Figure 13 Intensive and extensive research: a summary

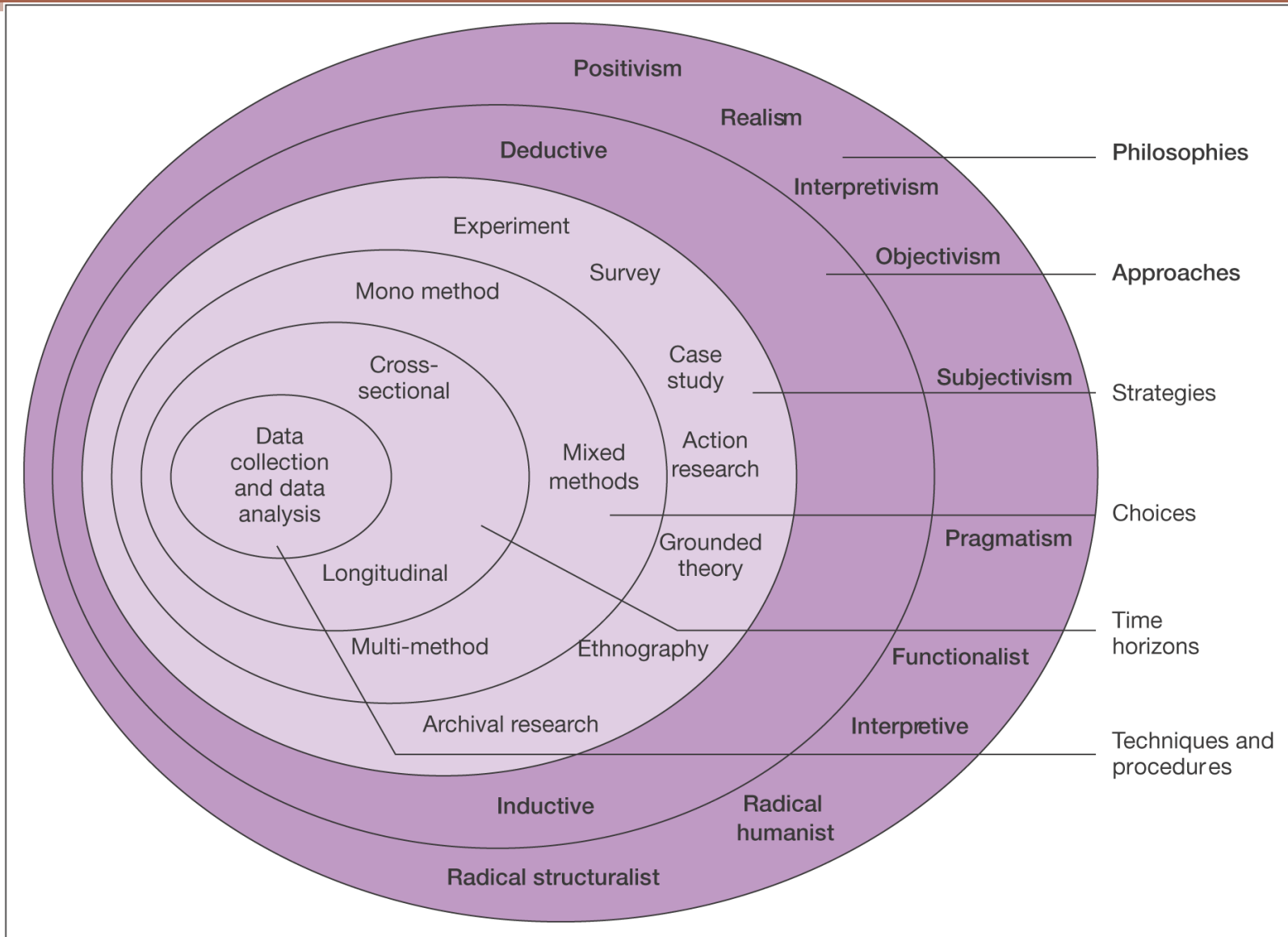


Figure 4.1 The research 'onion'

Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2006

Tim May: Epistemologies of objectivity/subjectivity/reflexivity

- Objectivity
There is a social world independent of people's perceptions and interpretations
- Subjectivity
A focus on the meanings that people give to their environment, not the environment itself.
- Reflexivity
Move beyond the oppositional positions of objectivity/subjectivity. Positionality, crises in definitions of science.

Questions of objectivity (see supplementary material)

- Positivism
- Empiricism
- Realism

Questions of subjectivity (see supplementary material)

- Idealism
- Intersubjectivity

Questions of Reflexivity (see supplementary material)

- Post modernism
- Post structuralism
- Feminist perspectives
- Post social perspectives

Summary

- Contrasting epistemologies
- No right or wrong answers
- Some types of question better suited to certain epistemologies and these imply particular methodologies and methods

Big debates

There are some important concepts which cut across disciplinary and paradigmatic traditions

Can you think of some examples which have had an impact within your own discipline or field?

Two examples: Time and Structure v Agency

Time

- “Temporal turn” in the work of Adam and others.
- cross-sectional - single point in time.
- longitudinal – waves of measurement.
- Important links to research design.

Structure versus agency

- An individual actor in the face of structural forces?
- Choices?
- The unit of analysis?
- Nature of change?
- Nature of causation?
- Structuration?
- Methods – big data or small stories?

Conclusion: Perspectives on the research process

- This matters!
- Where are you located? Is your research on the margins or at the centre? Mainstream or not?
- Make choices visible
- Position your research