Qualitative II:
Research Design and Methodology

Summer camp 2023

Presenters: Rashed & Mike

Accessing the Building

For the ***first week*** try to be punctual and come between 10:15 and 10:45 you wonot be able to access the building otherwise unless you contact us.

Same for lunch try to be infornt of C14 building between:12:50 and 13:05.

What will you learn in this study group

(Week 1)

- 8/14 : The big scary theory (make groups)
- 8/15 : Research Design: The five approaches
- 8/16 : Doing interviews: Writing your interview guide
- 8/17 : Doing interviews: Interviewing
- 8/18 : Transcription & maybe Latex (if needed)

(Week 2)

- 8/21 : Thematic Analysis: Dataset familiarization
- 8/22 : Thematic Analysis: Data coding
- 8/23 : Thematic Analysis: Initial theme generation // Theme development and review
- 8/24 : Thematic Analysis: Theme refining and naming // Writing your thematic Analysis report
- 8/25 : Sharing your experience - presentations

Philosophical/Meta- theories

Introducing the ’ologies: The big scary theory

The terms ontology and epistemology (the ’ologies) refer to the philosophical/meta-theories that underpin all research.

Ontology refers to theories of reality and being by asking *what it is that we can think we can know.*

Epistemology refers what counts as knowledge and how such knowledge is formed and comes to be known. *how we think we can know it*

Big theory

Big theory/Higher-level theory

Big Theory is so-called because it can be seen as the highest level of theory under which all other types of theory operate. Big Theory – or philosophical meta-theory – provides the foundations for our research.

Smaller/lower-level theory

lower-level theory, also referred to as subtheory or substantive theory, focuses on more specific and context-bound explanations or interpretations.

➢Research cannot be conducted in a theoretical vacuum(being detached from existing theories); we always make theoretical assumptions whether we are aware of this or not.

➢Smaller theory provides research with analytic power and analytic validity.

Research example	Methodology/methods	Big Theory	Small(er) theory	How is (small) theory used?
The subjective experiences of British Muslim gay men in gay social spaces, particularly the impact of frequenting such spaces on identity processes (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012).	Interviews with 20 British-born self-identified gay Muslims of Pakistani heritage.	Realist epistemology; reflective view of language. Participants' talk assumed to be a fairly reliable representation of their cognitions; focus on subjective experiences, meanings and motivations.	Identity process theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986) and the concept of identity threat (and the use of coping strategies to alleviate identity threat).	'Quasi-deductive' – theory used to add theoretical depth to data analysis. Also, data analysis used for developing theory – advancing and developing IPT.
How women involved in the US women's movement in the 1970s make sense of their feminist identities (McDougall & McGeorge, 2014).	Interviews with 14 women who were involved with the 1977 US National Women's Conference.	Postmodern feminism (Allan & Baber, 1992) – that assumes experiences are socially located and shaped.	Feminist phenomenology (Dahl & Boss, 2005) which assumes knowledge is constructed, and events can have multiple meanings for different individuals.	Design of the interview guide. And as a guiding lens embedded in the analytic process: "feminist [TA] involves coding the data with an awareness of gender-based oppression and how women's ways of being and identities have been marginalized in society" (p. 82).

Theories of Reality: Ontologies

All researchers make assumptions about the nature of reality and 'being.'

Very simply put, there are three answers to the question of ‘whether a reality exists separately from research practice’:

1. **Realism**: Assumes a separate reality that can be known and understood. *‘Well of course there is’*
2. **Relativism**: Rejects the idea of a separate reality. *‘Definitely not, how naïve are you?’*
3. **Critical Realism**: Acknowledges a separate reality but recognizes complexities. *‘Um yes but also no’*

Realism

- Realism conceptualizes a knowable reality that can be objectively uncovered.
- It assumes the existence of a truth waiting to be discovered, independent of researcher bias.
- Often associated with traditional science and common-sense ways of thinking.
- Realist ontology is prevalent in qualitative research, including thematic analysis (TA).
- In TA, the researcher is akin to an archaeologist, uncovering hidden treasures or a farmer harvesting crops.
- Realist TA aims to accurately and objectively represent the content of the data.
- Challenges arise when marrying pure realism with contextual understanding and subjectivity.
- Critical realism offers a more nuanced perspective, recognizing complexities in reality.
- Naïve realism assumes the world is as it appears, corresponding perfectly to our observations.

Relativism

- Relativism rejects the notion of a singular reality independent of human practices.
- Reality is seen as contingent, local, and multiple, shaped by human action and interaction.
- It is an anti-foundationalist ontology that challenges the idea of an ultimate foundation for truth/reality.
- Relativist TA does not have a final arbiter of truth in the analysis.
- Relativism in research relates to how we perceive the knowable world and the justifiability of knowledge claims.
- In reflexive TA with a relativist ontology, the focus is on subjective, situated, and anti-foundational analysis.
- The analysis offers a partial "reading" of the dataset, emphasizing participant/textual realities without prioritizing one as more real or true.
- Consequences and implications of meaning-making are explored, without tying them back to an ultimate meaning.

Critical Realism

- Critical realism offers a contextualized version of realism, combining ontological realism and relativism.
- It acknowledges a reality independent of researchers' ideas and descriptions but recognizes the influence of language and culture on our experiences and understandings.
- Reality is viewed as singular, but different perspectives, interpretations, and representations coexist within it.
- Language and culture are important influences on reality, structuring our concepts and shaping our experiences.
- Critical realism retains a concept of truth and reality while acknowledging the role of human practices in shaping our understanding.
- The material world has an ontological status independent of human representations but is accessible only in relation to them.
- The qualitative researcher is immersed/engage in the world they seek to understand, unable to stand outside of the human and social reality they study.

Do I really have to think about ontology for TA (Thematic Anlysis)?

Yes! As noted, ontology always lurks in the background and within the process and ‘outputs’ of the TA research you do. It’s helpful to realise that thinking about ontology connects to the purpose of your project. But more importantly, it connects to practice, and to ensuring not only that you produce a coherent analysis, but that you understand what it is you’re doing, and why you’re doing it.

Comparison between realist and relativist TA

Questions	Realist TA	Relativist TA
What overallparadigm?	Small q qualitative; (post)positivist epistemology	Big Q qualitative; non-positivist epistemology
What is the research goal?	To understand reality in a way that is as accurate as possible. Another researcher should be able to replicate the results in the same or a similar setting.	To explore meaning in context. The researcher should allow the unexpected to happen, be open to multiple ways of making sense and observe how people use language to create meaning.
What sort of knowledge is possible?	Truth through objective knowledge production. It is possible to access participants' real thoughts and feelings, but you need to be alert for deception, inconsistency and error. Objectivity is idealised	Objective knowledge is not possible, and there is no single truth to discover. Knowledge is contextually located and produced within relationships and interactions; meaning will be different in different times and contexts.

Theories of Knowledge: Epistomologies

How do we define meaningful and valid knowledge? How can we generate it?

In everyday life, we rely on various sources of information, but which ones do we trust as real and valid?

- Epistemology explores our understanding of what can be known and how we seek knowledge.
- Qualitative research employs different epistemological positions, such as **(post)positivism**, **contextualism**, and **constructionism**.
- These epistemologies shape how we approach and acquire knowledge in social and health sciences.

Postpositivism

- Positivism was the dominant epistemological framework in scientific research for centuries.
- It assumed an objective reality and the possibility of generating objective knowledge through scientific methods.
- Postpositivism emerged as a **refinement of positivism**, retaining its logic and values.
- Postpositivism recognizes that observation and perception are selective and situated.
- Objective knowledge remains the ideal, even if ultimate objectivity is deemed impossible.
- Postpositivism is often labeled as the "working philosophy" in mainstream psychology.
- Research practices aim for objectivity, demonstrated through measures like coding reliability.
- There are variations in how postpositivism is understood and applied across different research tradition

Contextualism

- Contextualism provides an epistemology aligned with Big Q qualitative research.
- It recognizes the context-contingent nature of language and meaning, the role of theory and interpretation, and the political-ideological nature of research.
- Multiple accounts of reality are possible, and knowledge is evaluated based on utility rather than accuracy.
- Contextualism views knowledge as contextually situated, partial, and perspectival.
- The researcher and participant are in a relationship, co-producing meaning.
- Reflexivity is important, acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping knowledge.
- Knowledge produced through research is seen as local, situated, and provisional.
- Data analysis is subjective but provides grounding for results and reveals the underlying logic of social practices.
- Contextualism aligns with a critical realist ontology and offers a middle ground between (post)positivism and constructionism.

Constructionism

- Constructionism views research practices as creating evidence rather than revealing it.
- It compares the researcher to an artist or maker, creating meaning with tools and cultural resources.
- Language is understood as actively constructing realities, rather than reflecting them.
- Knowledge is historically and culturally constituted, socially constructed, and situated.
- Constructionism rejects the notion of an ultimate truth or foundation for knowledge.
- Everything is seen as a social construct, without an essence or natural foundation.
- Constructionism is an anti-foundationalist approach that emphasizes human practices as the basis for knowledge.
- It is an empirical tradition that involves generating and analyzing data.
- Constructionist TA explores how reality has been constructed and its implications.

How to use big theory?

- Always check your local guidelines for expectations relating to dissertations or theses!

“To be crystal clear– we are not advocating that this is the level you should aspire to, but rather describing what we regard as often-acceptable practice. The one exception is for critical qualitative research, where a richer knowledge of the precise ontological and epistemological underpinnings of researchis often expected. We encourage reading further, once you’ve determined a general ontological/epistemological position for your research – which may, also, change, as a project progresses.”

A Metaphor

Groups

Group 1: (Black Coffee)

Ann

Gleymang

Chinh Thon

Suggested Research Topics

You can pick one or multiple topics/questions OR You can choose your own topic if you want to..

- **1. How did COVID-19 affect your academic experience at Tohoku University? Did the shift to online courses, social distancing measures, and the use of masks impact your learning environment?**
- **2. How did COVID-19 affect your social experience at Tohoku University? How did the changes due to the pandemic influence your interactions with peers and engagement in extracurricular activities?**
- **3. As an international student in Sendai, what are the main challenges you face in terms of cultural adaptation? How do you navigate these challenges while pursuing your studies?**
- **4. What specific challenges do you encounter as an international student in Sendai? How do you manage these challenges and seek support to ensure a smooth academic journey?**
- **5. How has Tohoku University addressed student well-being and mental health, especially in the context of the pandemic? What resources and support systems have you found helpful for maintaining your mental well-being?**
- **6. Could you describe your experiences with faculty-student interactions at Tohoku University? How do these interactions contribute to your academic and personal growth? Are there any notable instances you'd like to share?**

- **3. As an international student in Sendai, what are the main challenges you face in terms of cultural adaptation? How do you navigate these challenges while pursuing your studies?**

Reserach Design

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the **use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks** that inform the study of research problems addressing the **meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem**. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an **emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting** sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both **inductive and deductive** and establishes **patterns or themes.** The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the **reflexivity** of the researcher, a **complex description** and interpretation of the problem, and its **contribution** to the literature or a **call for change**.

Characteristics of Qualitative research (1)

- **Natural Setting**: Qualitative research takes place in the field, where researchers directly interact with participants in their real-life context. No lab settings or surveys are involved.
- **Researcher as Instrument**: Qualitative researchers collect data personally through interviews, observations, and document analysis. They create open-ended questions and avoid reliance on external instruments.
- **Multiple Methods**: Researchers gather diverse data forms (interviews, observations, documents) rather than relying on a single source. They organize and categorize the data into cross-cutting themes.
- **Inductive and Deductive Logic**: Qualitative research involves complex reasoning using both inductive (bottom-up) and deductive (data-checking) approaches. Themes evolve from data and are continually validated.

Characteristics of Qualitative research (2)

- **Participants' Meanings**: Qualitative research focuses on understanding the perspectives of participants, avoiding preconceived notions. Themes should reflect diverse viewpoints on the issue.
- **Emergent Design**: Qualitative research allows flexibility in the research process, with plans subject to change based on data collected in the field.
- **Reflexivity:** Researchers disclose their background and biases, acknowledging their influence on the study's interpretation and outcomes.
- **Holistic Account**: Qualitative researchers aim to present a comprehensive view of the issue, incorporating multiple perspectives and interactions among factors.

When to use Qualitative research

1. **In-depth Understanding:** When exploring complex problems or issues that require deep insights.
2. **Specific Groups:** To study populations with unique characteristics not easily measurable.
3. **Detailed Understanding:** When seeking comprehensive and intricate comprehension of the subject matter.
4. **Empowerment**: To empower participants, minimizing power imbalances between researchers and subjects.
5. **Contextual Understanding**: To understand the social settings where the issue is addressed.
6. **Complementing Quantitative Research**: By explaining mechanisms and causal linkages.
7. **Theory Development**: When existing theories lack sufficiency or complexity for specific populations.
8. **Addressing Sensitive Issues**: For research involving interactions among people and sensitive topics like gender, race, and economic status, where quantitative measures may not fit.

What Qualitative research requires from us

- Commit to extensive time in the field.

- Engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis through the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories.

- Write long passages, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple perspectives.

- Participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and constantly changing.

The process of designing a Qualitative study

- **Preliminary considerations** include assumptions, interpretive lens, and a reviewed literature that identifies a problem to study.

- **Open-ended research questions** evolve through exploration and interactions with participants.

- **Multiple data sources** (interviews, observations, documents) are collected without a preconceived agenda.

- **Data analysis** involves inductive and deductive reasoning, moving from particulars to broader themes.

- Writing formats vary, embracing **narratives, metaphors, and visuals.**

- Researchers' personal backgrounds and **ethics influence** their inquiry process.

- Characteristics of a "good" qualitative study include **rigorous data collection, adherence to a recognized approach, single focused concept, detailed methods, and analysis at multiple levels of abstraction.**

Example 3.1 A Qualitative Constructivist/Interpretivist Format (Creswell, 2009, pp. 74–75)

Introduction

- Statement of the problem (including literature about the problem)
- Purpose of the study
- The research questions
- Delimitations and limitations

Procedures

- Characteristics of qualitative research and philosophical assumptions/interpretive frameworks (optional)
- Qualitative research approach used
- Role of the researcher
- Data collection procedures
- Data analysis procedures
- Strategies for validating findings

Narrative structure

Anticipated ethical issues

Significance of the study

Preliminary pilot findings

Expected outcomes

Appendices: Interview questions, observational forms, timeline, and proposed budget

The General Structure Of a Plan Or Proposal

Example 3.4 Maxwell's Nine Arguments for a Qualitative Proposal (2005)

1. We need to better understand . . . (the topic)
2. We know little about . . . (the topic)
3. I propose to study . . . (purpose)
4. The setting and participants are appropriate for this study . . . (data collection)
5. The methods I plan to use will provide the data I need to answer the research questions . . . (data collection)
6. Analysis will generate answers to these questions . . . (analysis)
7. The findings will be validated by . . . (validation)
8. The study poses no serious ethical problems . . . (ethics)
9. Preliminary results support the practicability and value of the study . . . (pilot project)

Nine arguments for a qualitative proposal

Ethical issues in Qualitative research

Table 3.2 Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

Where in the Process of Research the Ethical Issue Occurs	*Type of Ethical Issue*	*How to Address the Issue*
Prior to conducting the study	• Seek college/university approval on campus • Examine professional association standards • Gain local permission from site and participants • Select a site without a vested interest in outcome of study • Negotiate authorship for publication	• Submit for institutional review board approval • Consult types of ethical standards that are needed in professional areas • Identify and go through local approvals; find gatekeeper to help • Select site that will not raise power issues with researchers • Give credit for work done on project; decide on author order
Beginning to conduct the study	• Disclose purpose of the study • Do not pressure participants into signing consent forms • Respect norms and charters of indigenous societies • Be sensitive to needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., children)	• Contact participants and inform them of general purpose of study • Tell participants that they do not have to sign form • Find out about cultural, religious, gender, and other differences that need to be respected • Obtain appropriate consent (e.g., parents, as well as children)
Collecting data	• Respect the site and disrupt as little as possible • Avoid deceiving participants • Respect potential power imbalances and exploitation of participants (e.g., interviewing, observing) • Do not "use" participants by gathering data and leaving site without giving back	• Build trust, convey extent of anticipated disruption in gaining access • Discuss purpose of the study and how data will be used • Avoid leading questions; withhold sharing personal impressions; avoid disclosing sensitive information • Provide rewards for participating

Ethical issues in Qualitative research

Where in the Process of Research the Ethical Issue Occurs	*Type of Ethical Issue*	*How to Address the Issue*
Analyzing data	• Avoid siding with participants (going native) • Avoid disclosing only positive results • Respect the privacy of participants	• Report multiple perspectives; report contrary findings • Assign fictitious names or aliases; develop composite profiles
Reporting data	• Falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, conclusions • Do not plagiarize • Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants • Communicate in clear, straightforward, appropriate language	• Report honestly • See APA (2010) guidelines for permissions needed to reprint or adapt work of others • Use composite stories so that individuals cannot be identified • Use language appropriate for audiences of the research
Publishing study	• Share data with others • Do not duplicate or piecemeal publications • Complete proof of compliance with ethical issues and lack of conflict of interest, if requested	• Provide copies of report to participants and stakeholders; share practical results; consider website distribution; consider publishing in different languages • Refrain from using the same material for more than one publication • Disclose funders for research; disclose who will profit from the research

Sources: Adapted from APA, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Lincoln, 2009; Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009.

The Five Qualitative Approaches

- **Narrative studies** in qualitative research collect stories from individuals about their lived experiences, emphasizing identities, and using various data sources like interviews, observations, and documents. These stories are analyzed thematically, structurally, or dialogically, and may contain turning points or specific tensions. Narrative research procedures involve capturing detailed stories, contextualizing them, and actively involving participants in the research process.

- **Phenomenology** is a qualitative research approach focused on exploring the common meaning of lived experiences among individuals who have encountered a specific phenomenon, seeking to describe its essence while considering philosophical underpinnings and employing various data collection and analysis procedures.

- **Ground theory.** The intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory, a “unified theoretical explanation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 107) for a process or an action.

- **Ethnographic research** aims to describe and interpret the shared patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language within a culture-sharing group, involving extensive fieldwork, data collection through interviews and observations, and an analysis that filters insider perspectives through the researcher's scientific lens to develop an overall cultural interpretation, with realist and critical approaches being two popular forms.

- **Case studies.** Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, using in-depth data collection and presenting a detailed case description and themes, with variations including single instrumental, collective/multiple, and intrinsic case studies. Stake and Yin are among the prominent scholars who have contributed to defining and establishing procedures for conducting case studies.

Comparison of five qualitative approaches

Table 4.1 Contrasting Characteristics of Five Qualitative Approaches

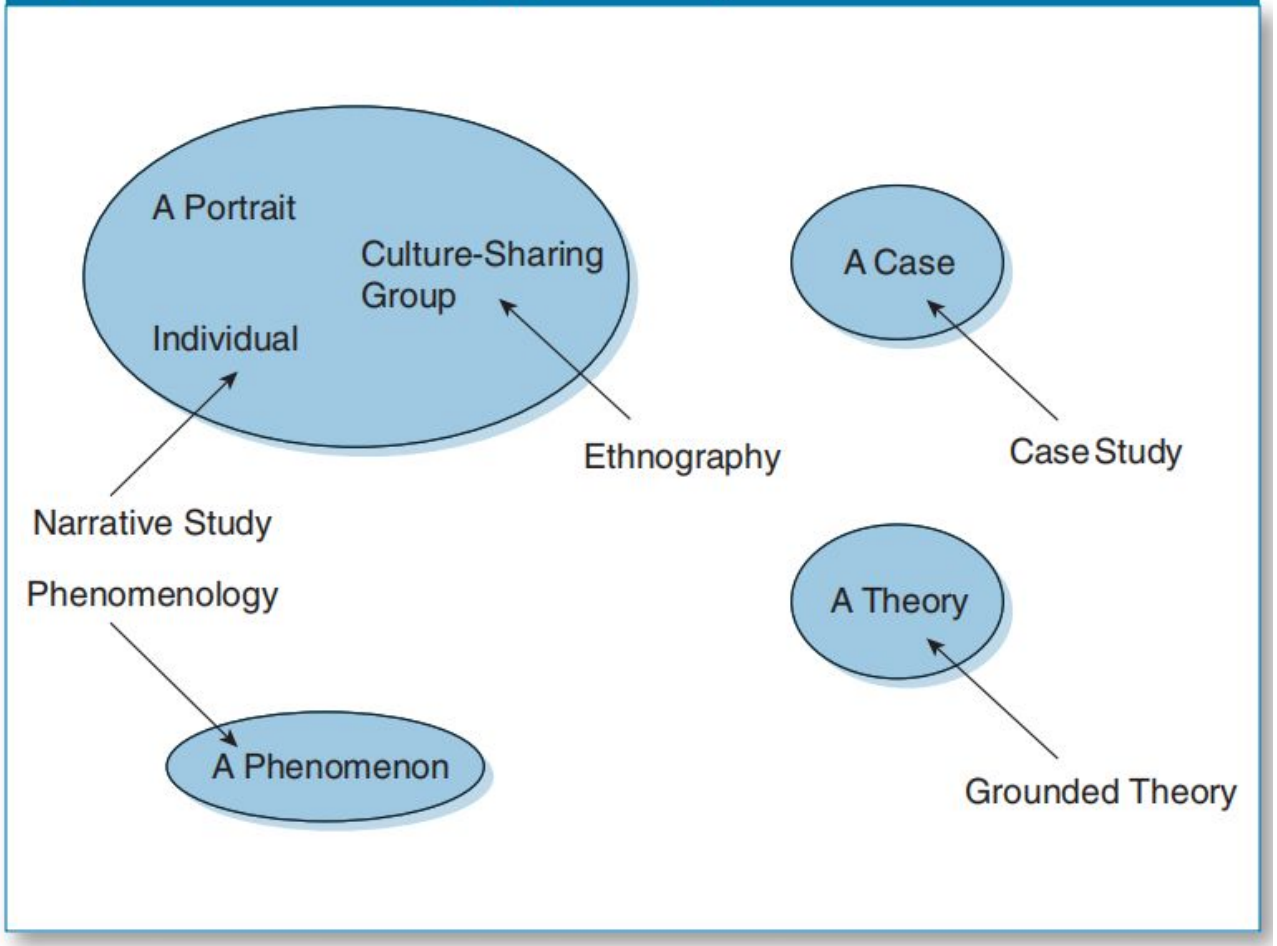
Characteristics	*Narrative Research*	*Phenomenology*	*Grounded Theory*	*Ethnography*	*Case Study*
Focus	Exploring the life of an individual	Understanding the essence of the experience	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases
Type of Problem Best Suited for Design	Needing to tell stories of individual experiences	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon	Grounding a theory in the views of participants	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases
Discipline Background	Drawing from the humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology	Drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education	Drawing from sociology	Drawing from anthropology and sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science, and medicine
Unit of Analysis	Studying one or more individuals	Studying several individuals who have shared the experience	Studying a process, an action, or an interaction involving many individuals	Studying a group that shares the same culture	Studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Characteristics	*Narrative Research*	*Phenomenology*	*Grounded Theory*	*Ethnography*	*Case Study*
General Structure of Study	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (a narrative, significance of individual, data collection, analysis outcomes) • Report of stories • Individuals theorize about their lives • Narrative segments identified • Patterns of meaning identified (events, processes, epiphanies, themes) • Summary (adapted from Denzin, 1989a, 1989b)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (a phenomenology and philosophical assumptions, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Significant statements • Meanings of statements • Themes of meanings • Exhaustive description of phenomenon (adapted from Moustakas, 1994)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (grounded theory, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Open coding • Axial coding • Selective coding and theoretical propositions and models • Discussion of theory and contrasts with extant literature (adapted from Strauss & Corbin, 1990)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (ethnography, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Description of culture • Analysis of cultural themes • Interpretation, lessons learned, and questions raised (adapted from Wolcott, 1994b)	• Entry vignette • Introduction (problem, questions, case study, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Description of the case/cases and its/their context • Development of issues • Detail about selected issues • Assertions • Closing vignette (adapted from Stake, 1995)

Characteristics	*Narrative Research*	*Phenomenology*	*Grounded Theory*	*Ethnography*	*Case Study*
Data Collection Forms	Using primarily interviews and documents	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered	Using primarily interviews with 20–60 individuals	Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field	Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts
Data Analysis Strategies	Analyzing data for stories, "restorying" stories, and developing themes, often using a chronology	Analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, textual and structural description, and description of the "essence"	Analyzing data through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding	Analyzing data through description of the culture-sharing group and themes about the group	Analyzing data through description of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case themes
Written Report	Developing a narrative about the stories of an individual's life	Describing the "essence" of the experience	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure	Describing how a culture-sharing group works	Developing a detailed analysis of one or more cases

Figure 5.1 Differentiating Approaches by Foci



Pre-interviews

Research Journal & Interpretative Research:

- Journal:Personal log, not public. Record everything vital.
- Reading: Understand field, questions, debates. Multiple perspectives.
- Learning: Talk to friends, specialists. Diverse insights. Engage with setting experts.

Feasibility & Research Questions

- Feasibility: Doable, safe. Seek advice, refine questions.
- Questions: Specify participants, settings, focus. Evolve over time.

Sampling Criteria
— Step 1: Making decisions about participants

1. Specifying the group(s) of people to study
2. Specifying groups to study is always purposive
3. Setting the number of participants for your study
4. Reaching out to potential participants
5. Putting the recruitment techniques into use
6. Composing the message to potential participants
7. Contacting and enlisting participants
8. Setting up the interview situation
9. Compensating participants
10. Ethical regulations of research

Doing Interviews
— Step 1: Making decisions about participants

Box 4.1 Elements of the first conversation with potential participants

1. Your name and who you are (e.g., your position and the institution you work for)
2. The topic of the study, phrased in everyday language
3. How you got the person's name or why the person was selected
4. Screening questions that will enable you to screen in suitable participants

For those who are screened in, the conversation continues as follows:

5. What the main topics of the interview will be
6. How long the interview will take
7. Information regarding confidentiality and anonymity
8. Your need to audio-record the interview and why (e.g., "I want to be free to listen and talk with you without writing notes" or "I want to be able to review what we have talked about after we have finished")
9. Information regarding payments (if any) and reimbursement of expenses such as travel costs
10. Agreeing on a time and place for the interview

Email sent to the interviewees

Dear Professor Fujimoto,

(Cc: Haruka Minemura, Shiqi Peng, Yuko Nishide-sensei)

Thank you so much for your reply and explanation on RIRC in very detail!

We understand that RIRC and its business sectors--RIPS and RIAS, have relatively strong profit-oriented characteristics in regional economic recovery and reconstruction, rather than self-identified as a social business intermediary or accelerator. We also impress about RIRC's extensive engagement in promoting the regional innovations, empowering small and medium enterprises (SME) and also mobilizing regional resources.

After we had a discussion on RIRC, we agreed that RIRC aligns with our research topic and conceptual definition for three reasons. First, as you mentioned, although RIRC does not delimit for-profit orientation and social orientation on supporting SME, there are considerable cases of SME manifest salient social business characteristics, which is germane to our research topic--social enterprise. Second, SMEs that RIRC support are generically community-based/region-based, thus RIRC offers us a desirable context to understand community ecology through a region-focused perspective. Third, RIRC integrates multiple resources and cross-sectorial relations, for which we think RIRC plays as a 中間支援組織機関 role in local SME life-cycles.

Therefore, we are eager to know more about RIRC and its strategies related to community/regional innovations. **So if it is possible, may we ask you or other informants in RIRC to have a short interview with us?** We would sincerely appreciate if you could give us an opportunity to pursue our research activities. Here below is the brief information of our interviews:

Interview style: Semi-structured
Expected interview time: End of July--Mid of Augest
Duration: 1-1.5 hours
Participants: 2-5 persons (students in our seminar might be invited)
Language: Japanese (the second author in this research is a Japanese student, she will coordinate the interview)
Core topics: 1) The activities, functions and resource integration of RIRC, 2) Support to regional business in Tohoku region, 3) Sustainability of regional business, 4) RIRC's engagement in community/regional ecology.
Privacy declaration: The interview will be audio-recorded for accurate documentation purposes, but rest assured that your identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. The recorded interview will be securely stored and used solely for the purpose of analysis and reporting. All data collected will be anonymized and presented in aggregate form to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. The findings of this research may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences, but your personal information will not be disclosed. (We will have a signable consent form)

Thank you again for your reply to our questions, and we appreciate if we can have an opportunity to have a conversation with RIRC. Looking forward to your reply!

Sincere
Feng Youxin

Structure of the Interview Guide

Constructing an Interview Guide:

1. **Introduction:**
   - Introduce yourself and the project.
   - Obtain informed consent.
   - Reiterate ground rules.
2. **Warm-up Questions:**
   - Build rapport and put participants at ease.
   - Start with non-sensitive or unrelated topics.
3. **Demographic Information:**
   - Gather basic participant details.
   - Place at the beginning or end, considering sensitivity.
4. **Main Body - Clusters of Questions:**
   - Organize questions into related sections.
   - Begin with easy, orienting questions.
   - Progress to more complex topics.

5. Sensitive Topics:

- Place sensitive topics after rapport is established.
- Avoid ending with sensitive discussions.

6. Closing the Interview:

- Allow participants to reflect and add insights.
- Offer participants the opportunity to ask about the study.
- Thank the participants for their time.

7. Pretests and Pilot Tests:

- Iterative process to refine the interview guide.
- Pretest with role-play participants for feedback.
- Pilot test with actual participants similar to the target group.

Doing Interviews
— Step 2: Designing the Interview Guide

1. **Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions**

Interpretative researchers conduct interviews with a focus on personal meaning-making, distinguishing them from factual interviews used in surveys. The conversational, semi-structured format allows participants to share experiences, memories, and opinions freely. Unlike closed-ended questions, open-ended questions encourage rich and complex responses, enhancing the depth of the obtained accounts. (Your job is to find the answer not expect it)

Box 5.3 Ways of framing open-ended questions and requests

Can you tell me about a time when . . .?
Could you tell me what happened when . . .?
Can you give me a specific example of . . .?
I'd like you to tell me about what you did yesterday.
I wonder if you have ever experienced X.
What was your experience of X like?
How do you think X came about?
I'd like you to tell me about how X happened.
I'd like to know what you think about X.

Doing Interviews
— Step 2: Designing the Interview Guide

2. Rich talk in interviews

Rich talk in interpretative research refers to stories, opinions, recollections, and reflections sought out from individuals when encouraged to speak freely. It is distinct from naturally occurring talk, as it is prompted by interview questions. Extracts from various studies exemplify this concept. (ask for examples)

2. The interviewer–participant relationship

Semi-structured interviews should be relaxed and inviting, fostering a conversational tone. Interviewers must put participants at ease using informal language, allowing them to share freely without fear of judgment. Although interviews resemble conversations, they differ as interviewers guide and constrain the content. The relationship is asymmetrical, with interviewers facilitating while participants share experiences. Constructing an interview guide starts with reviewing researchable questions.

4. Researchable questions are not interview questions

Researchers gather material from interviews to shed light on their researchable questions. A clear distinction is made between researchable questions (formulated by the researcher, framed within a theory, and general) and interview questions (specific, inviting stories about personal experiences). New interpretative researchers may mistakenly ask participants to answer researchable questions, using abstract terms that result in uninformative responses. Instead, researchers should ask specific questions about participants' experiences and relationships to gather relevant material for analysis and address their researchable questions effectively.

Doing Interviews
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5. **Developing the interview content**

To develop interview topics, start by reconsidering your research questions and breaking them down into specific aspects or incidents. Review your research journal, literature, and conversations with experts for ideas. Ensure that interview topics are understandable and relatable to participants. For instance, instead of asking vague questions about gender, focus on specific experiences, such as a child's toy preferences or activities with playmates. Concrete experiences will yield richer responses.

5. **Composing interview questions about your topics**

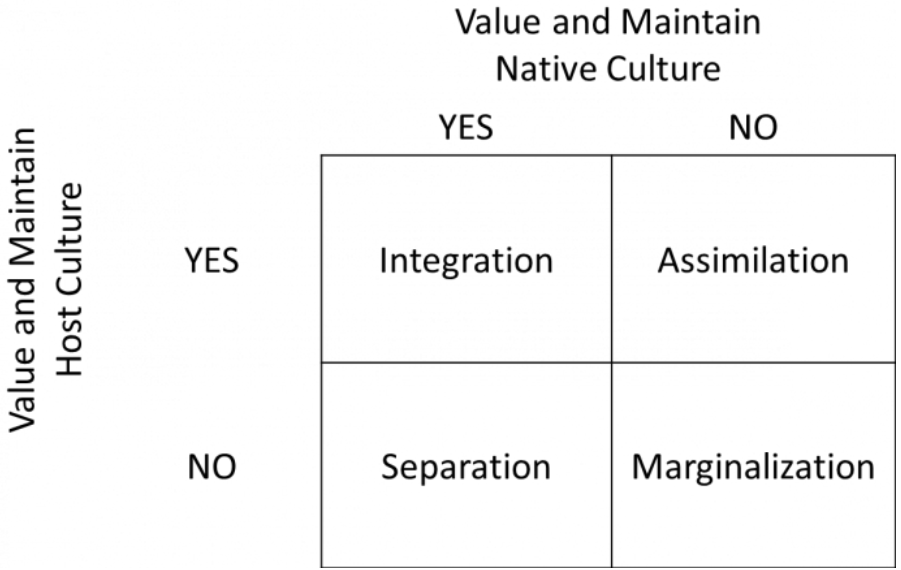
Good interview questions have two crucial characteristics. First, they elicit full, rich, andpersonalized stories from participants, and encourage them to volunteer their reflections on their experiences. Interviewers make requests for stories, opinions, and reflections and ask open-ended questions. Such requests and questions serve to open a conversation about a topic. We use the general term interview item to signify that interviews usually include a mix of requests and questions.

5. **Follow-up questions**

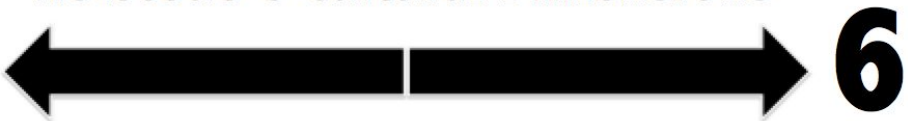
Interviewers use follow-up questions, including general and focused ones, to help participants elaborate on their stories during interviews. General follow-ups, also known as "expansion questions," encourage elaboration when responses are brief. Focused follow-ups seek concrete details or redirect attention to specific topics of interest to the interviewer and their research question.

Small theory suggestions

1- Acculturation Theory:



Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions



6

Power Distance Index (PDI)

High: Acceptance of a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification.	Low: People strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.	PDI

Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

Individualism: As a preference for a loosely-knit social framework	Collectivism: Tightly-knit framework in society.	IDV

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

Masculinity: Preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success.	Femininity: Stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life.	MAS

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

High: Maintains rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas.	Low: Societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.	UAI

Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation (LTO)

High: Pragmatic approach, they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.	Low: Societies prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion.	LTO

Indulgence versus Restraint (IND)

Indulgence: Societies that allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun.	Restraint: Societies that suppress gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.	IND

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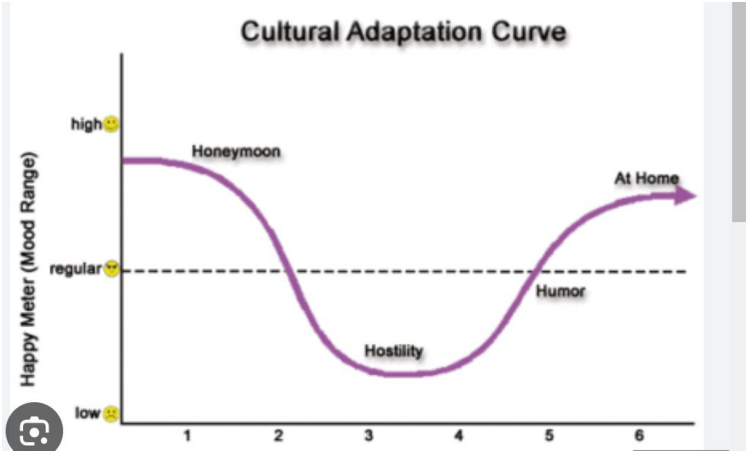
Small theory suggestions

U-Curve Theory:

The U-Curve Theory suggests that individuals experience a pattern of **emotional ups and downs when adapting to a new culture.** This pattern resembles a "U" shape, with phases of initial excitement or honeymoon, followed by a dip in the form of culture shock, and then gradual recovery and adjustment.



Small theory suggestions

Ecological Systems Theory:

This theory looks at how individuals interact with different levels of their environment, from individual to societal, and **how these interactions influence their experiences.** You could use this framework to explore how international students' experiences are shaped by their personal characteristics, their relationships with others, and the broader cultural and institutional contexts in Japan.

Social Identity Theory:

This theory focuses on how people categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics**. You can examine how international students in Japan form their identities, cope with feelings of "otherness,"** and establish connections with both fellow international students and local Japanese individuals.