THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

University of Warwick institutional repository: http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap

This paper is made available online in accordance with
publisher policies. Please scroll down to view the document
itself. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our
policy information available from the repository home page for
further information.

To see the final version of this paper please visit the publisher's website.
Access to the published version may require a subscription.

Author(s): Deborah Biggerstaff
Chapter title: Qualitative research methods in psychology
Year of publication: Forthcoming
Link to published article:
http://www.intechopen.com/
Publisher statement: Our published articles and chapters are licensed
under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license (CC BY 3.0).

CHAPTER SUBMISSION

Title page

Deborah Biggerstaff

Warwick Medical School
University of Warwick
Coventry UK
CV4 7Al
D.L.Biggerstaff@warwick.ac.uk

Qualitative research methods in psychology

X

Qualitative research methods

Deborah L Biggerstaff
Warwick Medical School
University of Warwick
UK

1.   Introduction to qualitative research and psychology: philosophical shift

In the scientific community, and particularly in psychology and health, there has been an active and ongoing debate on the relative merits of adopting either quantitative or qualitative methods, especially when researching into human behaviour (Bowling, 2009; Oakley, 2000; Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Smith, 1998). In part, this debate formed a component of the development in the 1970s of our thinking about science. Andrew Pickering has described this movement as the "sociology of scientific knowledge" (SSK), where our scientific understanding, developing scientific 'products' and 'know-how', became identified as forming components in a wider engagement with society's environmental and social context (Pickering, 1992: 1). Since that time, the debate has continued so that today there is an increasing acceptance of the use of qualitative methods in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Morse, 1994; Punch, 2011; Robson, 2011) and health sciences (Bowling, 2009; Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1998; Murphy & Dingwall, 1998). The utility of qualitative methods has also been recognised in psychology. As Nollaig Frost (2011) observes, authors such as Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton Rogers consider qualitative psychology is much more accepted today and that it has moved from "the margins to the mainstream in psychology in the UK." (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008: 8). Nevertheless, in psychology, qualitative methodologies are still considered to be relatively 'new' (Banister, Bunn, Burman, et al., 2011; Hayes, 1998; Richardson, 1996) despite clear evidence to the contrary (see, for example, the discussion on this point by Rapport et al., 2005). Nicki Hayes observes, scanning the content of some early journals from the 1920s – 1930s that many of these more historical papers "discuss personal experiences as freely as statistical data" (Hayes, 1998, 1). This can be viewed as an early development of the case-study approach, now an accepted methodological approach in psychological, health care and medical research, where our knowledge about people is enhanced by our understanding of the individual 'case' (May & Perry, 2011; Radley & Chamberlain, 2001; Ragin, 2011; Smith, 1998).

The discipline of psychology, originating as it did during the late 19th century, in parallel with developments in modern medicine, tended, from the outset, to emphasise the 'scientific method' as the way forward for psychological inquiry. This point of view arose out of the previous century's Enlightenment period which underlay the founding of what is generally agreed to be the first empirical experimental psychology laboratory, established by Wilhelm Wundt, University of Leipzig, in 1879. During this same period, other early psychology researchers, such as the group of scientific thinkers interested in perception (the Gestaltists: see, for example, Lamiell, 1995) were developing their work. Later, in the 20th century, the introduction of Behaviourism became the predominant school of psychology in America and Britain. Behaviourism emphasised a reductionist approach, and this movement, until its displacement in the 1970-80s by the 'cognitive revolution', dominated the discipline of psychology (Hayes, 1998:2-3). These approaches have served the scientific community well,

and have been considerably enhanced by increasingly sophisticated statistical computer programmes for data analysis.

 A recent feature of the debate in the future direction for psychology has been a concern for the philosophical underpinnings of the discipline and an appreciation of their importance. In part, this is an intrinsic part of theoretical developments in psychology and the related social sciences, in particular sociological research, such as Grounded Theory, developed by the sociologists Glazer and Strauss during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Searle, 2012); modes of social inquiry such as interviewing and content analysis (Gillham, 2000; King & Horrocks, 2010); action research (Hart & Bond, 1999; Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011); discourse and discourse analysis (Tonkiss, 2012; Potter & Wetherell, 1995); narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 2008); biographical research methods (Roberts, 2002); phenomenological methods (Giorgi,1995; Langdridge, 2007; Lawthom &Tindall, 2011; Smith et al., 2009); focus groups (Carey, 1994; Vazquez-Lago et al., 2011); visual research methods (Mitchell, 2011); ethnographic methods (Boyles, 1994; Punch, 2011); photo-biographic-elicitation methods (Rapport et al., 2008); and, finally, the combining or integrating of methods, the approach often known as 'mixed methods' (Frost, 2011; Pope et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2004; Todd et al., 2004).

Qualitative methods have much to offer when we need to explore people's feelings or ask participants to reflect on their experiences. As was noted above, some of the earliest psychological thinkers of the late 19th century and early 20th century may be regarded as proto-qualitative researchers. Examples include the 'founding father' of psycho-analysis, Sigmund Freud, who worked in Vienna (late 19th century – to mid 20th century), recorded and published numerous case-studies and then engaged in analysis, postulation and theorising on the basis of his observations, and the pioneering Swiss developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980) meticulously observed and recorded his children's developing awareness and engagement with their social world. They were succeeded by many other authors from the 1940s onwards who adopted qualitative methods and may be regarded as contributors to the development of qualitative methodologies through their emphasis of the importance of the idiographic and use of case studies (Allport,1946; Nicholson, 1997)[1] . This locates the roots of qualitative thinking in the long-standing debate between empiricist and rationalistic schools of thought, and also in social constructionism (Gergen, 1985; King & Horrock, 2010: 6 - 24)[2].

More recently, in the UK, the British Psychological Society now has a members' section for Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMiP) which held a successful inaugural conference, in 2008, at the University of Leeds. The Section now boasts a membership of more than 1000 members, making it one of the largest BPS Sections. The undergraduate psychology

---

[1] Allport states "[…] among the methods having idiographic intent, and emphasised by me, are the case study, the personal document, interviewing methods,matching, personal structure analysis, and other procedures that contrive to keep together what nature itself has fashioned as an integrated unit – the single personality." (Allport, 1946, pp. 133).

[2] A notable milestone in the development of qualitative methodologies in the UK for example, was the publication, in 1992, of a paper proposing a role for qualitative methods for psychology, by Karen Henwood and Nick Pigeon in the *British Journal of Psychology*.
(See Henwood, K. & Pidgeon, N. (1992) Qualitative research and psychological theorising. *British Journal of Psychology*, **83**: 97 – 111).

curriculum, BPS graduate basis for registration (GBR), now includes qualitative research methods teaching in the core programme for UK universities degrees. Elsewhere, qualitative psychology has taken a little longer to be accepted e.g. by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is somewhat surprising given the large volume of qualitative research papers which originate from the American research community. However, US researchers, alongside their international colleagues, have finally managed to petition successfully for the inclusion of qualitative methodologies to be admitted to Section 5, the methodology section, of the APA, during 2011.

These developments can be tracked by a search for qualitative research across the main electronic databases and exploring the 'hits' recovered. A quick scan using the umbrella terms 'qualitative' and / or 'qualitative research' for example, provides the researcher with a result for a relatively low number of papers from the earlier years of last century. However there is a noticeably sharp increase in the number of papers published from 1990 onwards. A search of the main databases, using the term "qualitative" as a key word (January, 1990 - December, 2011) produced a retrieval rate for qualitative papers of over 51744 hits (CINAHL); 122012 hits (PsycInfo); 12108 for Medline (OVID); and 18431 for Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA). Prior to 1990 the number of papers recorded in these databases is noticeably lower: searching in ASSIA for papers published between 1985 – 1990, for example, results in 13 papers, while a Medline search for the years 1985 – 1990 returns 6 papers. Searching in CINAHL for the same period (1985 – 1990) results in no papers (zero result).

2. What is qualitative psychology?

So, what exactly is qualitative research? A practical definition points to methods that use language, rather than numbers, and an interpretative, naturalistic approach. Qualitative research embraces the concept of *intersubjectivity* usually understood to refer to how people may agree or construct meaning: perhaps to a shared understanding, emotion, feeling, or perception of a situation , in order to interpret the social world they inhabit (Nerlich, 2004, pp. 18). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln define qualitative researchers as people who usually work in the 'real' world of lived experience, often in a natural setting, rather than a laboratory based experimental approach. The qualitative researcher tries to make sense of social phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)[3].

In qualitative research, it is acknowledged that the researcher is an integral part of the process and who may reflect on her/his own influence and experience in the research process.[4] The qualitative researcher accepts that s/he is not 'neutral'. Instead s/he puts

---

[3] For readers interested in more on the history of the philosophy of science and its relationship to developments in psychology, I recommend the following authors: Andrew Pickering (1992); John Richardson (1996); Mark Smith (1998); Clive Seale (2012); and especially Jonathan Smith and colleagues with the publication of *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (Smith et al., 1995b).

[4] This is in contrast to the positivist, *hypothetico-deductive* methodology, associated with the philosopher Karl Popper, and enthusiastically adopted by the psychology discipline, of 'refuting the null hypothesis', commonly taken to be the 'gold standard' of quantitative scientific research methodology i.e. where hypotheses are defined at the start of the research (see, for example, Popper,1935/2002). One of the challenges however of attempting to fit the 'scientific' approach into researching human behaviour, is that sometimes this scientific experimental methodology, the design of which originates in

herself in the position of the participant or 'subject' and attempts to understand how the world is from that person's perspective. As this process is re-iterated, hypotheses begin to emerge, which are 'tested' against the data of further experiences e.g. people's narratives. One of the key differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches is apparent here: the quantitative approach states the hypothesis from the outset, (i.e. a 'top down' approach), whereas in qualitative research the hypothesis or research question, is refined and developed during the process. This may be thought of as a 'bottom-up' or emergent approach, as, for example, in Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 1995).This contrast is part of the epistemological positions that shape our assumptions about the world. King and Horrocks summarise some of these main differences in position as being either realist, contextual or constructionist. They compare these to assumptions about the world, the knowledge produced and the role of the researcher (**Table 1**). These authors, along with others, such as Colin Robson, advocate adopting a pragmatic approach to qualitative research. As Robson observes, "Pragmatism is almost an 'anti-philosophical' philosophy which advocates getting on with the research rather than philosophizing – hence providing a welcome antidote to a stultifying over-concern with matters such as ontology and epistemology." (Robson, 2011, pp.30)[5].

Epistemological position	Realist	Contextual	Constructionist
Assumptions about the world	There exists unmediated access to a 'real' world where process and relationships can be revealed	Contrast is integral to understanding how people experience their lives	Social reality is constructed through language which produces particular versions of events
Knowledge produced	Seeks to produce objective data which is reliable and likely to be representative of the wider population from which the interview sample is drawn	Data are inclusive of context aiming to add to the 'completeness' of the analysis by making visible cultural and historical meaning systems	Does not adhere to traditional conventions. Knowledge brought into being through dialogue
Role of researcher	Researcher aims to	Subjectivity of	Researcher 'co-

the laboratory, may not quite provide what is needed when attempting to investigate psychological and human behaviours. The Medical Research Council (MRC) in the UK also acknowledges this. In 2008 they provided new guidance to their 2000 *MRC Framework for the development and evaluation of RCTs for complex interventions to improve health* to include non-experimental methods, and complex interventions outside healthcare. See
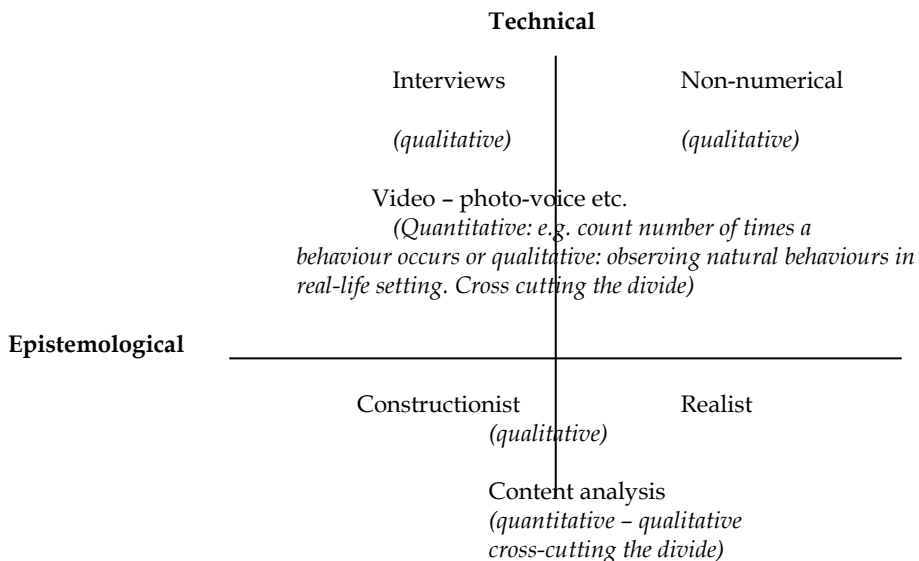http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC004871
[5] See also Robson, 2011, pp. 30 – 35 for further discussion on this topic.

avoid bias. Remains objective and detached	researcher is integral to process. Researcher active in data generation and analysis	producer' of knowledge. Therefore needs to be reflexive and critically aware (e.g. of language)

Table 1: Epistemological positions that shape our world

Source: adapted from King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 20

It may be helpful to think of qualitative research as situated at one end of a continuum with its data from in-depth interviews, and with quantitative 'measurable' data at the other end (see **Figure 1**). At the centre-point of this continuum may rest such data as content analysis and questionnaire responses transformed from the written or spoken word into numerical 'codes' for statistical analysis. Examples include standardised questionnaires, e.g. for depression and anxiety such as HADS, or Beck's Depression Inventory. With limited space given on questionnaires, respondents can only give the briefest answers to pre-formulated questions from the researchers. Respondents' replies are coded and 'scored', but does that mean that we can measure feelings or emotion? How do we 'calculate' levels of depression or anxiety? How does the experience of depression affect people's lives? Have we, as researchers, asked appropriate questions in the first place? Qualitative research methodology looks to answer these types of questions – the *exploratory* approach. An example of this exploratory approach is Jonathan Smith's work examining young mothers' lived-world experiences of the psychological transition to motherhood (see, for example, Smith, 1999; 1998; 1994).

Technical

Interviews   Non-numerical

(qualitative)   *(qualitative)*

Video – photo-voice etc.
(Quantitative: e.g. count number of times a behaviour occurs or qualitative: observing natural behaviours in real-life setting. Cross cutting the divide)

Epistemological

Constructionist   Realist
(qualitative)

Content analysis
(quantitative – qualitative cross-cutting the divide)

Numerical

Quantitative

Figure 1: The quantitative – qualitative continuum

Source: adapted from Henwood, 1996.

Today, a growing number of psychologists are re-examining and re-exploring qualitative methods for psychological research, challenging the more traditional 'scientific' experimental approach (see, for example, Gergen, 1991; 1985; Smith et al., 1995a, 1995b). There is a move towards a consideration of what these other methods can offer to psychology (Bruner, 1986; Smith et al.,1995a). What we are now seeing is a renewed interest in qualitative methods which has led to many researchers becoming interested in how qualitative methods in psychology can stand alongside, and complement, quantitative methods. This is important, since both qualitative and quantitative methods have value to the researcher and each can complement the other albeit with a different focus[6] (Crossley, 2000; Dixon-Wood & Fitzpatrick, 2001; Elwyn, 1997; Gantley et al., 1999; Rapport et al., 2005). Seminal qualitative-focused works from authors such as Jerome Bruner, Donald Polkinghorne and Jonathan Smith and colleagues' in the early 1990s highlight the importance of 're-discovering' qualitative methods in the field (Bruner, 1990, 1991, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Smith et al., 1995a; 1995b).

Jonathan Smith and his colleagues, for example, announce at the beginning of their *Rethinking psychology,* that "Psychology is in a state of flux" with an "unprecedented degree of questioning about the nature of the subject, the boundaries of the discipline and what new ways of conducting psychological research are available." (Smith et al., 1995a, p. 1). Rom Harré, heralded these new ways of thinking as marking the 'discursive turn' (Harré, 1995a, p. 146; while Ken Gergen, writes about there being a 'revolution in qualitative research' (Gergen, 2001, p. 3).

Additionally, as Karen Henwood suggests, integrating qualitative with quantitative methods in psychology also provides researchers with a tool for the potential "democratisation of the research process". She observes how among clinical psychologists working in the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS) for instance, the research process can be "opened to include the views of service users"with an increasing emphasis on exploring "people's personal and cultural understandings and stocks of knowledge" (Henwood, 2004: 43). Henwood suggests that integrating methods may thus also help establish and embed research validity by communicating responsibly and honestly when exploring multiple perspectives.

In a parallel movement, qualitative methods have also come to be increasingly acknowledged across the social sciences more generally (Banister, et al. 2011; Oakley, 2000; Potter, 1996; Radley & Chamberlain, 200; Richardson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Willig,

---

[6] I thank the book's editor, Gina Rossi for this helpful comment.

2008). Meanwhile, as already noted above, the use of narrative and meaning in psychology and the human sciences also re-emerged (Bruner, 1990, 1991; Crossley, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 2008). Interestingly, Polkinghorne observes that, in contrast to other related disciplines in the social sciences, psychology very largely ignored the use of narrative until the end of the 1980s – early 1990s with a shift towards a "renewed interest in narrative as a cognitive structure" (Polkinghorne, 1988: 101) as an element in the field of cognitive psychology. Polkinghorne suggests that the re-emergence of narrative thinking in psychology took place during this period due to the increased attention being given by psychologists to the utility of exploring life histories, self-narrative (for example in establishing one's personal identity) and a renewal of interest in the case study and biographical research (Roberts, 2002). Polkinghorne, along with other authors, such as Jerome Bruner (1990, 1991, 2002) and Ricoeur (1981/1995) proposes that our use of narrative is linked to the perception of time and our place in the lived-world where

> "[...] people use self-stories to interpret and account for their lives. The basic dimension of human existence is temporality, and narrative transforms the mere passing away of time into a meaningful unity, the self. The study of a person's own experience of her or his life-span requires attending to the operations of the narrative form and how this life story is related to the stories of others."
> (Polkinghorne, 1988: 119).

During the same period, (i.e. over the past ten – fifteen years), psychology and social science journals, such as the *British Journal of Psychology*, *Journal of Health Psychology, Social Science and Medicine etc.*, as, indeed, did the *British Medical Journal*, began to include qualitative research papers, indicating that a qualitative approach, in parallel with the quantitative scientific paradigm, can illuminate important areas in the behavioural sciences and psychology. In the early days there was some debate about academic 'rigour' and validity suggesting some unease about using qualitative methods, both in psychology and related areas. This is now much improved as researchers address these issues (Bloor, 1997; Henwood, 2004; Yardley, 2008). However, this is less of a challenge today, with increasing acceptance of these methods and the introduction of appraisal checklists. Nevertheless, as with any research, poor understanding of the methodology and what it can offer, or the inappropriate selection of a method, is likely to lead to poor quality results and the resultant lack of any real insight into the area being explored. Today, the introduction of evidence-based tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) based at the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine, University of Oxford, include a qualitative paper checklist on their websiteproviding evidence of a much greater acceptance of these methods (CEBMhttp://www.sph.nhs.uk/what-we-do/public-health-workforce/resources/critical-appraisals-skills-programme).

Additionally, the British Psychological Society has now developed guidelines for the appraisal of qualitative papers indicating the wider academic acceptance of qualitative psychology today. As Peter Banister and his colleagues note, writing in the preface to their *Qualitative methods in psychology,* in benchmarking UK psychology degrees, The Quality Assurance Agency of 2007, include a section on the need for students to cover both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This includes being able to analyse both types of data. This ability is now (2010) also highlighted as being a requirement for conferring of BPS Chartership status (Banister et al., 2011: vii - viii)

Thus, in order to best gain insight into the field of qualitative psychology some of this background knowledge of the specific theoretical and philosophical underpinnings outlined earlier is needed by researchers today who decide to explore their chosen research topic using qualitative methods. These theoretical and philosophical concerns inform the discipline and it is important that the researcher understands this.

3. Pluralism in qualitative research: synthesizing or combining methods.

The importance of researching and studying people in as natural a way as possible is emphasised i.e. the 'real world' approach (Robson, 2011). This is contrasted with the positivist approach of refuting the null hypothesis. The need for the researcher to put herself in the position of the 'subject' in her attempt to understand how the world is from that person's perspective is emphasised. King and Horrocks, for instance, discuss these different, sometimes competing 'quant – qual' approaches to research. These authors suggest that, while often presented as the challenge of two 'paradigms,' it may be an unhelpful way to approach the quantitative – qualitative continuum (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 7). This is because some researchers today are beginning to think further about how we might optimise results by synthesizing qualitative and quantitative data to interpret our research evidence. Thus, we may further understand (*verstehen*), our findings, by drawing on social theory, from Max Weber's work (Whimster, 2001, pp. 59-64). This interpretive approach, originating, as it does, from the field of social sciences, aims to develop new conceptual understandings and explanations in social theory (Pope, et al., 2007, pp. 72 onward).

Cresswell and Clark (2007) recognise that, in order to avoid losing potential value of some data, it may be preferable to adopt 'mixed methods'. This is often of value in, for example, health research where health evidence is needed from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. This helps bring together diverse types of evidence needed to inform healthcare delivery and practice (Pope et al., 2007). I offer some suggestions and guidance for when either a qualitative or quantitative approach might be most useful, or alternatively, when it might be helpful to consider using combined methods i.e. a 'mixed methods' approach. The research focus can then be viewed from a number of vantage points, the approach known as *triangulation* (Banister et al., 2011; Huberman & Miles, 1998, pp. 199). Since triangulation is an approach which may be adopted across different qualitative methods, this is discussed next.

4. Triangulation

The term 'triangulation', according to Huberman and Miles, is thought to originate from Campbell and Fiske's 1959 work on "multiple operationalism" developed from geometry and trigonometry (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Huberman and Miles caution that the term 'triangulation' may have more than one interpretation. However, it is usually used to describe data verification of data, and considered as a method for

> "…checking for the most common or the most insidious biases
> that can steal into the process of drawing conclusions."
> (Huberman & Miles, 1998, pp. 198)

When researchers employ triangulation, multiple measures are used to ensure that any data variance is not due to the way in which the data were collected or measured. By linking

different methods, the researcher intends that each method enhances the other, since all the information that is collected potentially offers to be contextually richer than if it were seen from only one vantage point. Each area provides a commentary on the other areas of the research (Frost, 2009). Triangulation can be a useful tool to examine data overload, where researchers analysing data may miss some important information due to an over-reliance on one portion of the data which could then skew the analysis. Another use is to provide checks and balances on the salience of first impressions. Triangulation is also a useful tool to help avoid data selectivity, such as being over-confident about a particular section of the data analysis such as when trying to confirm a key finding, or without taking into account the potential for sources of data unreliability (Huberman & Miles, 1998, pp.198-9).

It should be noted however, that, although triangulation is generally considered helpful when using qualitative methods, it can just as equally be applied to quantitative or mixed-methods research. It is a pragmatic and strategic approach, whether applied to qualitative or qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It may be viewed as providing a way of expanding the research perspective and becomes another means of strengthening research findings (Krahn et al.,1995).

Banister et al. (2011) point out that any method of enquiry, whether quantitative or qualitative, can be open to bias and/or value laden, a fact that should be acknowledged,

> "[…] a researcher and research cannot be value-free, and that a general 'objectivist' notion that science can be value-free is impossible, given that we are all rooted in a social world that is socially constructed. Psychology (at least in the West) has general values (even if these are often left implicit) of communicating broadening knowledge and understanding about people, with a commitment to both freedom of enquiry and freedom of expression."
> (Banister et al., 2011, pp. 204)

Triangulation can help balance out, if not overcome, some of the challenges inherent in research, of whatever methodological persuasion (Todd et al., 2004). Triangulation can be separated into four broad categories: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, triangulation of method and triangulation of theory.

4.1 Data triangulation

Using one data origin may sometimes not be ideal. Collecting information from more than one source can extend and enhance the research process. Banister and colleagues suggest that more than one viewpoint, site, or source, increases diversity, thus leading to increased understanding of the research topic (Banister et al., 2011; Cowman, 1993). The authors propose it can be helpful to look at data collected at different times, or stages, of fieldwork, in order to re-evaluate ("*re*search") the material. This might mean checking if anything has been overlooked or given too much emphasis, during the research process. The use of triangulation can be very helpful when verification of data is needed, such as when doing action research or an ethnography (Walsh, 2012, pp. 257 onward).

The approach supports research being a reflexive, organic process, enriched by researchers' increasing depth of knowledge as they investigate the area (Finlay, 2003). This is linked to the role of *reflexivity* in qualitative research, considered by many to be an essential component in qualitative inquiry (Banister et al., 2011, pp. 200-201; Frost, 2011, pp. 11-12).

The researcher is expected to be able to stand back from the completed research and consider, in retrospect, the selected methodology, whether the approach adopted suited the analysis undertaken what the experience may have been like for both the researcher and the participants etc. Other factors which may be considered include whether flaws were found in the research design, how the research study might be improved or refined, what further research might be needed etc. Some researchers advocate keeping a journal or diary recording these reflexions during the actual research process (Robson, 2011, pp. 270).

4.2 Investigator triangulation

Investigator triangulation is a multi-vantage point method which, as the name suggests, uses different approaches to research into the one area, thus exploring a number of aspects of the topic being examined. In health psychology, for example, it can be a useful way to study certain types of patient groups such as children and their lives (Greig et al., 2008, pp. 88-89). Eiser and Twamley (1995), writing about children and illness, consider that triangulation provides a useful approach for researching children. They discuss research areas such as children's understanding of illness and issues arising from a child's consent to treatment. They point out that children have a different, more limited, vocabulary from adults. The authors state that, when researching illness and children, "…the greater involvement of the family all necessitate a distinctive approach" (Eiser & Twamley,1995, pp. 133). These authors conclude that combining methods involved in using triangulation helps improve investigators' understanding of the issues being researched. They observe that,

> "Quantitative and qualitative research methods can be complementary. While quantitative work provides us with focused and highly generalizable information, qualitative work is particularly useful for new or sensitive areas where little may be known, or where the aim is to obtain understanding of more subjective and cultural aspects of illness."
> (Eiser & Twamley,1999, pp. 145)

They conclude by citing Roche, stating,

> "…each type of approach while distinctly different in orientation, focus and application is able to contribute to the understanding of health problems and the development of solutions. The strengths of one approach do not diminish the other. Qualitative and quantitative techniques are complementary and both are powerful tools in their own right."
> (Roche,1991, pp. 136, cited by Eiser & Twamley, *ibid*.)

Judith Sixsmith and John Daniels, for instance, consider investigator triangulation has the potential to enrich the research process. The authors, however, also flag up the possibility of difficulties in using this method. This can be further complicated when representing a range of perspectives, such as when incorporating stakeholders' views. The authors suggest that

> "it cannot be assumed that that those around the table will have an equally shared degree of responsibility and contribution. If not, then once again fairness is challenged and ultimately more problems are created than solved."
> (Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011, pp. 32-32)

4.3 Method triangulation

Triangulation by method uses several approaches to collect data and information about the topic being explored. Here the researcher chooses the method of inquiry according to the question being researched e.g. by observing behaviours (an observational approach) or exploring how participants feel e.g. using interviews. Multiple methods help avoid any problems of the research findings being an artefact of the particular method used (Banister et al., 2011). This can help resolve issues around any questions of validity or distortion (Flick, 1992; 2007, pp. 37 – 53). Triangulation of method can, therefore, give different information about the research area, where, drawing on the early gestalists work on field and ground, the whole becomes 'more than the sum of the parts' (Perls et al., 1951; Helson, 1933). It is possible to combine qualitative and quantitative methods using data synthesis and triangulation, such as in 'mixed-methods' (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Pope et al., 2007). This methodological approach might encompass either combining different types of data within a research project, perhaps by surveying a large number of participants , thus obtaining quantitative data, before moving on to an in-depth interview element by using a smaller, purposeful sample, to provide further illumination or explanation of the survey findings (qualitative data). Alternatively, researchers might synthesize the evidence from the research data across several qualitative and / or quantitative studies in order to elaborate further on the research context concerned (Pope et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2004). This can be viewed as a pragmatic approach in order to obtain the best information from the evidence available.

4.4 Theoretical triangulation

In contrast, theoretical triangulation explores, and is informed by, more than one theory or theoretical framework. This approach aims to explore the diversity and complexity that is frequently the reality of research particularly when examining human behaviours. This is especially likely where large, multidisciplinary research teams come together to work on a project such as in health research, economics, organisational behaviour and psychology. Theoretical triangulation acknowledges, and allows for, the broad range of theories, complexity and diversity of the real world and how different theories may be accounted for in research (Kok et al., 2004). This is linked to the concept of *levels of triangulation* where an attempt is made to investigate the topic at differing levels, where connections are made to both the explanations at the individual level and at a society level (Banister et al., 2011). This can lead to '*contextualization*' of the picture to gain a greater understanding of the research 'fit' with the environment.

5   Qualitative methods and the implications for psychological research

The emphasis on interpretation and meaning has several implications for the qualitative psychology researcher and for service delivery areas such as health psychology and health services research. Gantley et al. (1999) in their text *An Introduction to Qualitative Methods for Health Professionals*, provide a useful summary:
1. Interpretative analysis concentrates on understanding the views of research participants; it makes explicit the distinction between respondents' views and researcher's interpretation
2. Interpretative analysis accepts that there are different coexisting interpretations of any phenomenon, e.g. a sore throat, and may attach equal importance to each interpretation.

3. The recognition of multiple meanings challenges one of the basic tenets of western biomedicine and evidence-based medicine, that of **positivism**.
(Source: adapted from Gantley et al., 1999)

Positivism is a philosophical approach dating from the nineteenth century. It underlies scientific and other approaches that privilege measurement and counting. This approach inevitably informs our view of the world -but it is not the only way of seeing. Thus, the qualitative – quantitative methodology debate on research may be seen as a reflection on the different emphasis between *values versus facts*.

In psychological and health research, qualitative methods may stand alone, or be used as part of the research process. When used in conjunction with quantitative methodologies (as, for example, in a mixed methods approach), or when using data from several sources, the use of qualitative methodology can help explore more thoroughly complex beliefs, attitudes and experiences. This approach, as we have seen earlier, uses triangulation, since the research focus is viewed through different research 'lenses', or examined by the researcher from a number of angles or vantage points (Huberman & Miles, 1998, pp. 199).

Some of the most frequent uses for qualitative research especially, for example, in health psychology and health services research, addresses issues in research processes and beliefs. These might include **process**: how an outcome is reached or why people follow a certain course of action, or behaviour e.g. in service delivery. An example might be exploring reasons for parents bringing their children to an 'out-of-hours' clinic rather than booking an appointment at their general practitioner's surgery. A recent example, with a European perspective, is a qualitative study exploring primary care physicians' attitudes to prescribing antibiotics to their patients and the challenges of antimicrobial resistance in Spain (Vazquez-Lago et al., 2011).

Other uses for qualitative research are:
- **Examining** research questions to inform and guide questionnaire development e.g. as a preliminary exploratory stage of design, or to gain greater understanding of research questionnaire data e.g. after questionnaires have been returned – using qualitative in-depth interviews to explore further some of the issues mentioned by respondents.
- **Hypothesis generation** (e.g. in a Grounded Theory approach) where categories or outcomes cannot be determined before data collection. This would involve the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from the data obtained. In turn, this data can then be used either to inform the research process and method or, alternatively in the generation of theory.

5.1 Different uses for four approaches commonly encountered in research

Silverman (1993) summarises some of these different approaches commonly adopted in research. These are set out below (**Table 2**) with the differences contrasted between quantitative compared to qualitative.

Methodology		
Approach	*Quantitative research*	*Qualitative research*

Observation	Preliminary work e.g. prior to designing questionnaire	Fundamental to understanding another culture
Textual analysis	Content analysis – counting in terms of researchers' categories	Understanding participants' categories
Interviews	'Survey': mainly fixed choice questions to random samples	'Open ended' questions to small numbers of participants (in-depth interviews)
Transcripts	Used infrequently to check accuracy of records	Used to understand how participants organise their talk / think about their experiences

Table 2: Different uses for four research approaches

Source: adapted from Silverman, 1993.

6 Some of main qualitative methods used in psychology

6.1 Introduction

Rigorous research methodologies form a necessary foundation in evidence-based research. Until recently such a statement has been read as referring solely to quantitative methodologies such as in the double blind randomised controlled trial (RCT) encountered in healthcare research. Quantitative methods were designed for specific purposes and were never intended to take researchers to the heart of patients' lived experiences. The experimental, quantitative research methods, such as the RCT, focus on matters involved in the development of clinical drug trials and assessing treatment outcomes, survival rates, improvements in healthcare and clinical governance and audit.

Qualitative paradigms, on the other hand, offer the researcher an opportunity to develop an idiographic understanding of participants' experiences and what it means to them, within their social reality, to be in a particular situation (Bryman, 1988). Qualitative research has a role in facilitating our understanding of some of the complexity of bio-psycho-social phenomena and thus offers exciting possibilities for psychology in the future. Qualitative research is developing therefore new ways of thinking and revisions to the more established methods are constantly being introduced and debated by researchers across the world. These methods include: Content / thematic analysis (CA/ TA); Grounded Theory in psychology (GT); Discursive psychology / Discourse analysis (DA); Narrative psychology (NA); Phenomenological psychology methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

6.2 Content Analysis and Thematic analysis

Content Analysis, or Thematic Analysis (the terms are frequently used interchangeably and generally mean much the same), is particularly useful for conceptual, or thematic, analysis or relational analysis. It can quantify the occurrences of concepts selected for examination (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). CA or TA, has become rather a 'catch-all term' (Boyle, 1994), but this approach is useful when the researcher wishes to summarise and categorise themes encountered in data collection. These can include: summaries of people's comments from questionnaires, documents such as diaries, historical journals, video and film footage, or other material: the list is not exhaustive. The approach is also useful in guiding the development of an interview schedule. However, this method provides – *summaries* of frequency of the content. The method may therefore be considered too limited where an in-depth approach is required.

Interview data need methods of analysis capable of providing the researcher with greater insight into participants' views, the psychological and phenomenological background to participants' stories and their narrated experiences and feelings. Other qualitative methods are explored for utility of purpose here. One such method, originally developed from sociological research is Grounded Theory (GT).

6.3   Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) is frequently considered to offer researchers a suitable qualitative method for in-depth exploratory investigations (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Willig, 2008). It is a rigorous approach which provides the researcher with a set of systematic strategies (Charmaz, 1995). While this method shares some features with phenomenology, (see below), GT assumes that the analysis will generate one over-arching and encompassing theory. GT was, in its original version, designed to investigate social processes from the bottom up, or the "*emergence* of theory from data" (Willig, 2008, p. 44). GT methods developed from the collaboration of sociologists Glazer and Strauss during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a set of strategies that has been of immense use in sociological research as an aid to developing wider social theory (hence its name). As Willig observes, GT can be an attractive method for psychologists who have trained in quantitative methods since the building blocks, identified using the GT approach, aim to generate categories from the data collected, thus moving from data to theory (Willig, 2008, p. 34 onward). Its originators, Glaser and Strauss (1967), considered the separation of theory from research as being a rather arbitrary division. They set about devising an approach whereby the data collection stage may be blurred or merged with the development of theory in an attempt to break down the more rigid boundaries between the usual data collection and data analysis stages. GT approaches data by blurring these different stages and levels of abstraction. A GT analysis may proceed by checking and refining the data analysis by collecting more data until 'data saturation' can be achieved (Charmaz, 1996). However, for many psychological investigations, it may be obvious at an early stage that, due to the complexity of people's lived experiences, participants' narratives about their lives, feelings and/ or emotions, may not always be best served by adopting GT as a method (i.e. generation of one main theory).

Carla Willig (2008), for example, observes that GT, as a methodology for psychological research, may not offer psychologists a particularly reflexive approach. She considers it sometimes has a limited applicability, proposing that, "It could be argued that research questions about the nature of experience are more suitably addressed using

phenomenological research methods." (Willig, 2008, pp. 47). In all fairness, GT was originally developed for researching from a sociological perspective and, while there is some commonality between sociology and social psychology, the use of GT to analyse data might not always provide a sufficiently robust and flexible way of capturing psychological nuances and complexities contained in participants' narratives about lived experiences. GT, as a methodology, was therefore adopted and adapted by some qualitative psychologists (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Willig concludes that GT can be "reserved for the study of social psychological processes" as a descriptive method (Willig, 2008, pp. 47).A further challenge, when considering using GT, is the challenge provided by the different types of GT that have developed within the field such as the debate on the two main 'schools' of GT: Straussian and Glaserian (see Stern, 1994, pp. 213 on for discussion).

6.4 Discursive psychology and discourse analysis

As its name suggests, Discourse Analysis (DA) is primarily concerned with the nuances of conversation (Potter, 1996). The term 'discourse' can cover anything related to our use of language whether a single utterance or moment of speech (speech fragment) through to a conversation between two people, or the delivery of a political speech. It may refer to how language may be systematically ordered as in language 'rules' or different conventions such as medical jargon or legal terminology (Tonkiss, 2012, pp. 406). The 'turn to language' in researching society and in the discursive psychology field has been inspired by theories emerging from other disciplines and consideration of speech use as both communication and performance (Seale, 2012). As Willig observes (2008, pp. 95) DA is more than a methodology, since social scientists have become interested both in how we use language in communication and also how we 'socially construct' our environment and lived experience by the use of language (see, for example, Bruner, 1986, 1991; Gergen, 2001). It has become more of a critique of how we describe the world and the nuances of the discourse and language we use. Discursive psychology highlights how 'knowledge' is socially constructed and reported for example in "existing institutional practices that may be considered unjust." (Holt, 2011, pp. 66). Where some psychologists may wish to explore conversation by exploring the finer nuances of conversation such as the length of a pause, the terms of speech people use, or other variations of discourse, then DA can be a very useful method (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2008, pp. 96-106).

The discursive approach looks to verbal behaviour as a more direct means of uncovering underlying cognitions (Harré,1995) rather than assigning a numerical value 'score' or scale to a behaviour. This approach takes the view that interpretation and empathy are involved in attempting to understand human behaviour. Self-report, from people being studied, can then become a valuable resource in its own right:

> "Thus the experimenter or observer has to enter into a discourse with
> the people being studied and try to appreciate the shape of the subject's cognitive
> world. But at this point it no longer makes sense to talk of observers and subjects at
> all. They are only coparticipants in the project of making sense of the world and
> our experience of it."
> (Harré & Gillett, 1994, pp. 21)

This approach to studying human behaviour uses words, contained in language, as symbols with meaning, where the 'subject' i.e. the person, is seen as discursive in order that they may make sense of their environment by signifying "the order of things" (Foucault, quoted by Harré & Gillett, 1994, pp. 26).

The discursive view sees people as active agents within their own lives and, as such, cannot, "be defined in isolation from a context and whose mental processes can be unravelled by objective measurement and description." (Harré & Gillett, 1994, pp. 26).

However, when considering the selection of a qualitative method, and thinking about using discourse analysis, we need to be clear about what our research aims and objectives are. Participants' narratives frequently include elements relating to feelings and emotions rather than how reality is manufactured and portrayed in conversation. Willig suggests that discourse analysis can be used to explore "the internal organisation of the discourse itself and ask 'what is this discourse doing?'" (Willig, 2008, pp. 99). Here is a prime distinction between DA and other psychological qualitative methods such as IPA, in that DA explores the *role* of language in participants' descriptions of events and conversations while the phenomenological approach examines how people *ascribe meaning* to their experiences in their interactions with their environment (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pringle et al., 2011; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Smith et al., 1999).

6.5 Narrative Analysis

Linked to discourse, we now turn to consider briefly narrative in psychology and the rise of narrative analysis. Narrative in both psychology and medicine has much in common with studying narrative as a more general linguistic form (Bruner, 2002; Greenhalgh& Hurwitz, 1999; Webster, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988). Indeed, some of the earliest thinkers in the field of psychology used methods we more usually associate with narrative to describe our experiences of encountering and engaging with the world. One of the foremost psychological thinkers of the late nineteenth century, Brentano, in his foreword to his 1874 text, *Psychology from an empirical standpoint,* states, "My psychological standpoint is empirical: experience alone is my teacher." (Brentano, cited in Moran & Mooney, 2002, pp. 32).

A narrative approach entails examining people's use of stories, accounts of events etc. and also of listening to these stories (Sarbin, 1986). The related discipline of 'narratology' has developed from the disciplines of linguistics and literary criticism where narratives are treated as a search for meaning in the lived experience of people (Bruner, 2002; Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). This search for meaning has much in common with phenomenological methods of enquiry and the search for meaning or significance as we strive to make sense of our lives and our 'being in the world' (Brockmeier, 2009). He observes,

> "[…]the *quest* for meaning: the meaning, or significance, that we give to our lives, to our being in the world. This question arises again and again in the life of each individual in a particular, in fact, unique, way, and it hence requires a patient and ongoing examination of the multifarious forms and practices in which individuals make sense of their lives. One might think of the river in which you never step twice."
> (Brockmeier, 2009, pp. 217).

Using psychology of narrative, for example, the researcher may examine people's life stories or their accounts of such experiences (Esin, 2011). It explores the biographical lives of participants' lives or social and cultural stories (Goodley, 2011). Psychology of narrative can be helpful to explore and interpret findings from such research, since this type of enquiry

helps the researcher to enter more fully into understanding people's lives and their experiences (Crossley, 2000; Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1999 & 1998; Murray, 2008 & 1995). Esin defines essential features of narrative as connections between events that help make these events meaningful for the audience, stating that "Sequence is necessary for narrative. A narrative always responds to the question 'And then what happened?'" (Esin, 2011, pp. 93).

Narrative in psychology can provide an important method for the exploring psychological development, self-understanding and people's inter-relationship with their world (Gergen, 2001b). Examining human experiences and 'making sense' of our environment offers a core method of enquiry across many disciplines and cultures (Brockmeier, 2009; Brown et al., 1996; Bruner, 1999; Bruner, 2002; Charon, 2005; Harré, 2003; Murray, 2008; Riessman, 2008).

The use of narrative methods in both psychology and medicine, assumes a narrator and a listener. Narrative is an interactive transaction with the potential for narrator and listener to assign their own meanings to their experiences as the topic under discussion unfolds (Bruner, 1991; 1990). Bruner for example, proposes that the interpretation of people's actions and their narratives about what happens to them provides us with explanations of those experiences. Such interpretation "is concerned with 'reasons' for things happening, rather than strictly with their 'causes' " (Bruner, 1991).

6.6 Phenomenological psychology

When we want to learn how we can best explore participants' lived experiences, a different approach can be helpful, that of phenomenology. The aim of the phenomenological psychologist is to help make implicit 'taken-for-granted' elements of our lives explicit (Giorgi, 1995, pp. 33). Phenomenological research has developed from the philosophy of the European phenomenological 'school' of philosophy, the most prominent proponents of which are Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. More recently, some phenomenological researchers have been influenced by what has become known as the Duquesne school, which includes Giorgi, Van Kaam and others. The group acquired this title because some of the founders to this approach either worked in, or had links with, Duquesne University in the United States. The Dutch school of phenomenology, which includes authors such as Langeveld, is known as the 'Utrecht school' (see Cohen & Omery, 1994, pp.138 onward, for further discussion regarding different phenomenological schools). This is by no means a complete list: there are many other phenomenological researchers in psychology such as Scott Churchill (USA), Karin Dahlberg (Sweden), and Les Todres (UK). Over the past decade in the UK, Jonathan Smith has led the development of a phenomenological method specific to psychology, that of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Smith developed this method from his work exploring people's lived experiences based on European phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl. His original development of the IPA method was based on the detailed interpretive analysis of in-depth interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 1999)[7]. When we wish to explore the 'being-in-the-world' psychology of experience, the idiographic case-study approach proposed by methods such as IPA can be especially helpful (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was specifically developed by Jonathan Smith (Smith et al., 1995) to rigorously explore idiographic, subjective experiences and, specifically, social cognitions. It is now widely used

---

[7] The IPA website and research forum may be found at: www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk

within British psychology (e.g. Clare, 2003; Duncan et al., 2001; French et al., 2005; Smith, 2011; Thompson et al. 2002).

Phenomenology in psychology places the experience of the self at the centre of the current psychological dialogue about people's lived experiences and their meanings (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1995; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 1995; Spinelli, 2005). The qualitative psychologist is aiming to see and understand what surrounds us (Cohen & Omery, 1994). When exploring the 'taken for granted' - the everyday lives of participants, especially those aspects relating to the psychology of how people feel about an issue, event, or experience for example - the use of a phenomenological approach highlights such issues and brings them to the fore. This might be useful for example, when considering the background of health service delivery (Oakley, 1993, pp. 235).

IPA's theoretical basis stems from the phenomenology originating with Husserl's attempts to construct a philosophical science of consciousness, with hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), and symbolic interactionism. This last proposes that meanings an individual may ascribe to an event are of central concern, but that access to such meaning can only be obtained through an interpretative process. IPA acknowledges that the researcher's engagement with the participant's 'text' has an interpretative element, in contrast to some other methods (e.g., discourse analysis, DA; see Potter, 1996). IPA assumes an epistemological stance whereby, through its careful and explicit interpretative methodology, it becomes possible to access the meanings an individual gives to their feelings and their cognitive inner world. IPA also draws on Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics and the study of the understanding of the text (Smith, 2007).

Attention is drawn however to one of the main differences between IPA and Discourse Analysis (DA): DA aims to examine the *role* of language in describing a person's experience, whereas IPA intends to explore how people may ascribe *meaning* to their experiences when interacting with their environment (Smith et al., 1999). It is thus especially suited to behavioural and psychological studies that relate findings to the bio-psycho-social theories informing discourse among healthcare professions (Smith, 1996; Smith, 2004; Willig, 2008). IPA is a qualitative methodology with a clearly set out methodology that is both rigorous and yet sufficiently flexible fit for a wide range of types of study (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008). It is important to note that IPA is only one version of phenomenological research methodologies (Willig, 2008) and other phenomenological approaches are also useful to the qualitative researcher (Giorgi, 1995). As van Manen observes

> "the simple phenomenological precept (is) to always try to understand someone from his or her situation. [....]
> The phenomenological approach asks of us that we constantly measure our understandings and insights against the lived reality of our concrete experiences, which, of course, are always more complex than any particular interpretation can portray"
> (van Manen, 1998, pp. 8,pp. 10)

Phenomenological methods have some elements in common with Grounded Theory, discussed above, in that the theoretical framework may be uncovered during the research analysis - i.e. theory emerges and informs the data analysis in a cyclical, or iterative, fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As with GT, the aim of the IPA researcher is to uncover, develop

and verify data as it emerges. This is achieved by a careful and systematic process which uncovers themes and connections in an orderly sequence. The overall aim of adopting a phenomenological approach is to explore the world of 'lived experience.'[8] The difference in IPA and Grounded Theory may be summarised by suggesting that IPA reflects the diversity of experience rather than a more condensed single theoretical viewpoint, or core category, an approach usually arrived at through the use of Grounded Theory (Chamberlain, 1999).

IPA is still evolving as researchers use and debate the method. It does, however, have the advantage of being especially developed by practising psychologists and is therefore an obvious candidate in current psychological qualitative analytical methodology. It is increasingly found to be an accessible approach and a method which is idiographic, inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004) and aims to provide insight into the heart of participants' lived experiences (Biggerstaff &Thompson, 2008; Pringle et al., 2010).

7   Emergent qualitative methods

The rise of technology and digital photography and use of the internet and video editing tools, have enabled researchers to consider the potential of these newer, and potentially rich, resources of data from film, video and DVD. Newer, emergent, qualitative methodologies especially in technology and visual research methods, can prove attractive and useful to researchers. Accessing information resources online can provide today's psychology researcher with rich data and fruitful new areas to explore. Examining resources such as diaries or personal eye-witness accounts can also provide the researcher with data. Again, these become easier to access if they have been uploaded as a research resource online, although with any such repository it is advisable to seek permission to use before beginning a research project since such data may raise copyright issues.

Using qualitative data analysis of video interviews recording people's experiences of health and illness, in the UK, for example, has led to a unique website resource for health research 'DIPex' (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006). Increasingly, psychologists are looking to use the internet and online platforms for their research. The internet offers the possibilities of online interviews, discussion forum analysis, or what people may have written online e.g. in blogs. The *Healthtalk online* project (www.healthtalkonline.org) arising from the DIPex project, is a rich resource for people who can view video clips and transcript excerpts from patients discussing their experiences and feelings about their illnesses, how they cope with their condition, their fears and anxieties, how they fought back and similar narratives. Commentaries from clinicians providing information about the illnesses being discussed are also available on the website. Additional sources of advice and resources are offered providing a solid platform supporting patients, their families and loved ones during their illnesses.

8. Ethics of researching online

---

[8] From the concept of the Life-world or *Lebenswelt*, from Husserl's unpublished works after his death (see for example Ashworth, 2008: 10 - 12; Philipse, 1995: 277; Cohen and Omery, 1994: 139, for further discussion).

When researching into online discussion forums and chat rooms etc., the researcher needs to remain mindful of possible ethical issues. The majority of comments posted by people online, for instance, may originally have been written and uploaded to a website for a different purpose. Contributors may have intended their internet 'posts' to be private, or at least their personal views and opinions were written to share with like-minded people, perhaps going through similar experiences or coping with similar situations.   People may not be happy to agree to their original postings on a website being analysed by researchers and used for a different purpose. Such concerns should be considered on a case by case basis.

New ways of researching are being developed as research teams debate these issues and explore these resources (Willig, 2008). Standard ethical practices may need adapting to account for the internet age. However, where material is in the open domain, it may be easier for researchers to make a case justifying its use as source material. This would still need to be checked out with your university or health services research ethics committee (e.g. NHS National Research Ethics Service NRES in UK) and appropriate professional codes of practice. For UK psychologist researchers and students, for example, this would be research governance codes of the relevant university or institution and the British Psychological Society, possibly in conjunction with the NHS , if patients were involved. This is especially pertinent since it is not usually possible to contact patients to obtain informed consent from such resources later (and any such consent would be retrospective and difficult to obtain). Such ethical issues are being addressed today by research bodies. The Association of Internet Researchers, for example, has developed ethics guidelines for researchers[9]. The British Psychological Society provides an ethical code of conduct and research guidance to working online[10].   This emphasises the need for qualitative psychology researchers to be able to assess both the context and aims of their proposed research when selecting their methodology and to be aware of the need for vigilance in keeping abreast for new guidance on these issues as it is released.

Similar criteria may be used for both selecting an appropriate qualitative method and in the critical appraisal of published qualitative research in order to establish a systematic and thorough approach to appraising the evidence from qualitative research papers.

9. Evaluating qualitative psychology research: some suggested criteria

In this final section of the chapter I set out some suggestions to help readers evaluate qualitative research. I have drawn from several sources but particularly acknowledge the contribution of May and Pope (2000), Mays et al., (2007), who have written extensively on this issue in health research and Uwe Flick, Lucy Yardley and Jonathan Smith who consider the importance of quality and validity when evaluating qualitative research in psychology (Flick, 2007; Smith, 2011; Yardley, 2008) .

9.1 General features

---

[9] Association of Internet Researchers http://aoir.org/documents/ethics-guide /

[10] See British Psychological Society www.bps.org.uk/webethic

In general, as with reviewing a quantitative research paper, we need to ask what the paper contributes to knowledge of the research area. Does the study have something new to say about the topic for instance? Alternatively, perhaps the researchers have explored the chosen topic from a different angle, or incorporated different viewpoints from their participant sample. As identified earlier in this chapter, people are seen as an important resource for collaboration, thus highlighting the need for qualitative research to acknowledge reflexivity and subjectivity (Sixsmith & Daniels, 2011, pp. 26 – 7). An example of this type of approach might be where the research examines the views of a minority whose opinions have not previously been sought. In turn, such a paper would then pave the way for further research.

Next we need to think about the method(s) the researchers have used for their study. Does it seem appropriate? Does the study design lend itself to using a qualitative approach? In examining the reasons for conducting any such study, we need to bear in mind questions such as: does the research team situate their reasons for carrying out their work within an appropriate body of research literature?

Alternatively, the approach used may incorporate theoretical interest. Perhaps the research topic is approached in a different way, or from a different and newer theoretical context? Again, this needs to be clear to the reader with appropriate support from the theoretical literature. Does the research reported contribute to the development of knowledge in the direction of theory?

9.2 Outline of methods used

As with quantitative research appraisal, we need to evaluate researchers' sampling methods. A clear rationale for how participants were approached and selected for inclusion in the study should be clearly set out and a clear rationale should be stated for this sample. Do the researchers use a purposive sample? Have they used 'snowballing', that is following up introductions to potential other participants from volunteers in the study? This is a useful approach for accessing 'hard-to-reach' groups of people in society. Have the researchers continued interviewing participants until data saturation is reached (i.e. when no new themes emerge from their analysis)? What do they decide to do about *disconformatory cases*, (i.e. where a participant's viewpoint and emergent themes may differ from other participants)? This is acceptable in qualitative research, indeed understandable, since sample sizes are usually smaller than in a quantitative study.

Whatever the research team have done, their approach needs to be set out clearly. As in quantitative research, the research method and approach must be capable of replication by other researchers so detail is important. Demographics such as numbers of participants, gender, age group, descriptive vignettes with pseudonyms, if used, etc. should also be clearly stated.

The ethical principles of informed consent should be set out clearly. For example, how was consent obtained and was it recorded on paper? A clear explanation for the choice of data collection and method used is needed. It is important that the research team provide reflexive discussion about how they handled the researcher – situation interface: for example, issues encountered during data collection, what they decided to do about any

group dynamics, such as may occur during focus group research for example (Ali & Kelly, 2012; Burman & Whelan, 2011).

The paper should clearly state how data were collected and managed. This includes information about areas such as data collection and storage: how was the transcription of recorded interviews handled, how are data stored, and for how long does the research team plan to store their data? Exact details are usually governed by local or national research data governance but these details must be considered. Research governance details are particularly important in qualitative research since a person's audio interview is more likely to be unique to that individual compared to a briefer set of responses contained from a questionnaire for example. While researchers generally are able to offer anonymity, such as using pseudonyms, it can be harder for the qualitative researcher to offer total confidentiality since a person's narrative about an experience may be unique to them, thus offering more likelihood for possible identification. If this is the case, then the researcher must inform the reader what steps they have taken to protect their participants – perhaps by changing identifying features or details of that particular participant's situation (Frith, 2007, pp. 126).

How data are recorded is also important. The use of field notes is recommended, and can prove invaluable as an *aide-memoire*, they also provide 'back-up' insurance should there be recording failure. However, data verification is also very important. I strongly recommend all interview and focus group data be recorded, whether using audio or video, in order to obtain the highest quality 'raw data' prior to analysis.

9.3 Data analysis

When undertaking critical appraisal, the researchers need to provide a clear description of the framework they used for data analysis. Whatever method is used for analysis, and, as we have seen, a wide choice of possible qualitative research methods are available, the method adopted should be stated with clarity and be capable of replication by another researcher. Whatever research method is selected, this must be clearly stated and set out in a way that is capable of replication. Research methods should be referenced by the authors in the literature. However, if no pre-existing framework exists, then the authors should be very explicit about the approach they have adopted. Their reasons for this development must be justified by providing appropriate support from relevant literature (this may happen if a researcher is developing a new methodology for instance). For a clear audit trail, these processes and procedures should be clearly described.

What categories were used for analysis? How did the researchers decide on these categories? These areas need adequate discussion. For instance, if there are references to raw data sources, did the researchers use more than one data source? How did the researchers identify their themes and data categories? Are issues of data verification, such as asking an expert colleague to check thematic categories, considered? Do the researchers report how they decided on the categories? Adequate discussion is necessary since such themes provide the main results from which conclusions are drawn. This point leads on to findings and discussion.

9.4 Findings and discussion

When reading findings and conclusions it is important to consider carefully how the confirmation of findings was handled: were any *reliability checks* used by researchers? If there are excerpts from data transcripts (usual in qualitative papers) then what do these excerpts tell us about the research results (Frith, 2007, pp. 124-5). Are any quotations used to highlight findings? It is helpful if the paper states whether the excerpts are illustrative, or provide contrasting viewpoints by participants. It is also helpful to ask oneself whether the researchers comment if they consider their findings are transferable from one context to another and, should that be the case, what particular elements do they highlight as being most important or relevant?

When we consider these results and themes as a whole, do we find the researchers' conclusions useful and applicable? Do the conclusions drawn seem reasonable and appropriate, given what we know about the background and stated aims for the study? Does the paper state if excerpts provided are illustrative or, have the researchers provided the reader with contrasting viewpoints?

Another area to examine is that of 'credibility checks'. Sometimes researchers may feedback their proposed analysis to individual participants and ask for comments. Not all methods adopt this approach. However, if this has been carried out by the research team, is the process clear to the reader?

Sometimes there may be an alternative explanation or thematic summary to a particular perspective. This needs to be considered and discussed by the research team. Do the researchers adopt a reflexive approach? If so, do they state how they handled these reflections and how these relate to their reported findings? As discussed earlier (section 3.1). reflexivity is important in qualitative research since researchers need "to be aware of their own positions and interests and to explicitly situate themselves within the research."(Finlay, 2003, pp. 5). From the perspective of the critical reader, it is helpful to stand back from the results and ask oneself if the researchers' results and conclusions drawn are credible and appropriate in relation to the original research question. Other areas which need to be considered include whether these results relate back to the research literature and theoretical background reported in the authors' original literature review and research aims.

Finally, the reviewer needs to consider whether the researchers discuss whether their findings are transferable from one context to another. Are the results and conclusions useful and applicable?

10. Balancing the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research in psychology
One of the main strengths of the qualitative approach, and thus its attractiveness to psychologists, is that it allows the researcher to explore the meanings people give to their experiences. These approaches can help provide us with more insightful information and quality data on how people think about their world, their lived-world experiences. It provides the researcher with an open-ended approach and one where the participant takes the lead in data collection (the researcher usually remains responsible for data analysis and interpretation). The usual use of a smaller sample size also enables that this detailed, richness of data, can be finely nuanced and in-depth.

Furthermore, the researcher is able to utilise complementary data sources. There are opportunities for the researcher to incorporate multiple methods in order to obtain richer data, or what is sometimes known as *thick description* (for instance in ethnographic methods). As David Walsh observes, the researcher,

> "then finds a whole web of cultural structures, knowledge and meanings which are knotted and superimposed on one another and which constitute a densely layered **cultural script**"
> (Walsh, 2012, pp. 247, original author's emphasis)

Data sources in qualitative research include interviews, focus groups, observation techniques, analysis of text, such as historic diaries and journals, film, video or art work. Validity can be confirmed with research participants. Finally, qualitative research does not pretend to be other than it is: it is situation specific

Of course, some of these features also have their counterpart. For example the issue of data being context specific means that it is not always generalisable to a different context. This should be borne in mind when considering qualitative approaches. The researcher is not separate from the research process but instead can be seen as part of the process. This may have an impact on the research and the data collected and the researcher usually acknowledges her role in the research process (Willig, 2008).

Although the smaller size of qualitative data sets and the eventual findings may limit generalisable applicability, nevertheless such findings may reflect and inform what is happening within a larger population. This can then be examined further. The idiographic approach that forms a major trend in qualitative research does however take account of individuals, their values, and their experiences in a way that places people at the centre of the field of study.

To summarise, **Table 3** provides a brief check-list for the appraisal of qualitative psychology research papers. When assessing a paper for quality the reader may wish to consider the following points adapted from the British Psychological Society guidelines for authors and reviewers. These guidelines are available online:http://www.bps.org.uk

Checklist for evaluating qualitative psychology research
How does this work contribute to our knowledge of this area? Does it enhance or develop knowledge? Do the researchers provide the reader with a different perspective on research findings in the field?
Are the research findings of worth or relevance?
Is there evidence of a clear research question to the reader?
Have the researchers used an appropriate design for the research question and theoretical approach?
Are we provided with sufficient information to relate the findings reported here to another setting? (Context)
Are there a good range of possible cases or settings used for this study? (Sampling)
Considering data collection and analysis. Have the researchers used a systematic approach?
Does the paper specifically address issues relating to sound audit processes? Are such processes reported clearly. Is informed consent reported?

Is the reported account sufficiently reflexive? How do the authors incorporate this in their research?

Table 3: Checklist for evaluating qualitative research in psychology

Source: acknowledgement to The British Psychological Society. See www.bps.org.uk

11. Use of the internet and computer software in qualitative analysis

Computer software (e.g. NUD*ST, NVIVO, Atlas-ti, and information technology such as the behavioural coding and analysis software programmes provided by Noldus) has been available for qualitative analysis, in one form or another, for some time now. Programmes today are very sophisticated. Today software programmes can store transcripts of interviews, upload video files and act as thematic notebooks for researchers to store and share work with colleagues. As with any statistical software, it takes time for researchers to learn the programme in addition to learning how to conduct a qualitative analysis. Where a computer programme has been used, look for evidence that shows how the researchers conducted the analysis and how they used the computer programme to arrive at their results (but remember the adage GIGO : garbage in, garbage out). Computer programmes can be useful to help researchers store, share and sort their data.While they may not yet be a substitute for rigorous analysis, they can be a helpful tool for the qualitative researcher to think about, categorise, and sift through the large volume of data generated by qualitative research methods.

Additionally, today there are many rich e-resources available to qualitative researchers via the internet such as the Vision 2 Lead (V2L) website for "e-learning, e-community and e-leadership" with its "12 questions for qualitative e-researchers for 2012" (see http://blog.vision2lead.com/e-interviews-2/12-e-research-ideas-for-2012/) and international e-journals for qualitative research such as *The Weekly Qualitative Report* and *The Qualitative Report,* a peer-reviewed open access journal for qualitative researchers originating from Nova South eastern University, Florida, US.[11] E-communities such as these and the Sage publishing house's online community *Methodspace* across the UK, US and Europe, help develop a truly international research community of qualitative researchers, thus enhancing debate and encouraging new research networks for developing qualitative methods.

12. Summary and conclusions

Qualitative research methods have much to offer psychological research. As with any research approach, there are strengths and weaknesses. These should be carefully and systematically weighed up and assessed by the researcher before any firm decision is made. The methodology selected needs to be fitted to the aims and objectives of the research proposed.

The exploration, interpretation and our understanding of data is a skill that the qualitative researcher can develop to uncover new ways of viewing the world. A qualitative approach can provide arich source of data. It is frequently an in-depth process, therefore sample sizes

---

[11] The Qualitative Report and Weekly Qualitative Report http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/index.html

tend to be smaller than numbers usually seen in quantitative research. As Carla Willig observes, the exploration of qualitative research methods is an exciting 'adventure' of discovery (Willig, 2008). It is an approach I recommend to any reader thinking about embarking on their own research voyage. Qualitative psychology research helps uncover aspects of life which may not have been explored in much detail. This in-depth approach can help us understand experiences of the lived-world, and participants' behaviours, feelings and emotions.

In conclusion, therefore, rigorous methodologies in qualitative psychology are now recognised as being an essential component for evidence-based research whether for quantitative or qualitative research (Biggerstaff &Thompson, 2008). This is especially important when exploring people's behaviours, their experiences of their interactions with, and engagement in, their world and organisations. Many areas of psychology, in particular social, organisational, and health psychology have embraced qualitative psychology methods in order to gain a better understanding of how behaviours relate to people's experiences, e.g. their response to treatment (see, for example, Mays & Pope, 2000, 1995; Murphy & Dingwall, 2001; Murphy et al., 1998).

In the past, there has been a great deal of debate in the discipline of psychology, as in other areas of social sciences, surrounding the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative approaches with much discussion on issues such as 'quality' and ensuring 'rigour' in qualitative research. However, there is now a growing acceptance and recognition that we gain greater understanding of participants' psychological experiences of their lived-experiences by including qualitative methods, and the issue of validity has become recognised (Yardley, 2008). These have challenged quantitative exclusivity in the field of psychology. Qualitative psychology has established itself in research methods for psychology postgraduate training and UK undergraduate psychology degree courses now include it as a core element in the curriculum. Today, to ignore qualitative research in examining psychological experiences would be akin to 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'. As we have seen in this chapter, searching the main research databases produced a large volume of qualitative research literature and qualitative methodologies can help provide rich answers to our questions. As ever, the skill lies in asking the right questions and selecting the most appropriate methods to answer our inquiry.

References

Allport, G. W. (1946. Personalistic psychology as science: a reply. *Psychological Review*, **53**: 132-135,

Ali, S. & Kelly, M. (2012). Ethics and social research. In C. Searle (Ed.) *Researching society and culture 3rd edition*. London: Sage.

Banister, P., Dunn, G., Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. & Whelan, P. (2011). *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide. 2nd edition.* Maidenhead: Open University Press/ McGraw Hill.

Biggerstaff, D. L. & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, **5**: 214 – 224.

Bloor, M. (1997). Techniques of Validation in Qualitative Research: a Critical
        Commentary. In G. Miller & R. Dingwall (Eds.) *Context and Method in
        Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Bowling, A. (2009) *Research methods in health: investigating health and health services* (3rded.)
        Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Boyle, J. S. (1994). Styles of ethnography.In J. M. Morse (Ed.).*Critical issues in qualitative
        research methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Brentano, F., C., von (2002/ 1874) Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint: Foreword
        from the 1874 edition and The Distinction between Mental and Physical
        Phenomena. In D. Moran & T. Mooney (Eds.) *The phenomenology reader*. London:
        Routledge.

British Psychological Society. (2010). *Accreditation through partnership handbook: guidance for
        undergraduate and conversion psychology* programmes. Leicester: British
Psychological   Society.

Brocki, J. M., & Wearden, A. J. (2004). A critical evaluation of the use of interpretative
        phenomenological analysis (IPA) in health psychology. *Psychology and Health*, **21**
(1):   87- 108.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality.*Critical Inquiry,***18**: 1- 21.

Bruner, J. (1999). Narratives of ageing.*Journal of Ageing Studies*, 13 (1): 7 – 9.

Bruner, J. (2002). *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.

Burman, E. & Whelan, P. (2011). ~~Problems~~ in / of qualitative research. In P. Banister, G.
        Dunn, E. Burman, et al.(Eds.) *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide. 2nd
        edition.* Maidenhead: Open University Press/ McGraw Hill.

Carey, M. A. (1994). The group effect in focus groups: planning, implementing, and
        interpreting focus group research. In J. M. Morse (Ed.) *Critical issues in qualitative
        research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine (2012). Solutions for Public Health, National Health
Services. In collaboration with University of Oxford. CEBMhttp://www.sph.nhs.uk/what-
we-do/public-health-workforce/resources/critical-appraisals-skills-programme (Accessed
26th March, 2012)

Charmaz, K. (1983). Loss of self: a fundamental form of suffering in the chronically ill.
        Sociology of Health and Illness, **5** (2): 168 – 195.

Charmaz, K. (1995). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. Van Langenhove, (Eds.)
        Rethinking methods in psychology. London: Sage

Cohen, M. Z. & Omery, A. (1994) Schools of phenomenology: implications for research. In J.
        M. Morse (Ed.) *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Cowman, S. (1993). Triangulation: a means of reconciliation in nursing research.
        Journal of Advanced Nursing, **18**: 788-792.

Creswell, J. W. & Clark, P. V., L. (2007).*Designing and conducting mixed methods research*.
        Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). (2012). http://www.casp-uk.net/ (Accessed
26th March, 2012)

Crossley. M. L. (2000). *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, trauma and the
        construction of meaning*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (1994 / 2000).*Handbook of qualitative research*. London:
        Sage Publications.

Denzin, N., K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2008). *The landscape of qualitative research*. London: Sage

Dixon-Wood, M., & Fitzpatrick, R. (2001) Qualitative research in systematic
    reviews: has established a place for itself. *British Medical Journal*, **323**:
765-   766.
Elwyn, G. J. (1997). So many precious stories: a reflective narrative of patient based medicine
    in general practice, Christmas, 1996. *British Medical Journal*, **315,** 1659 - 1663.
Esin, C. (2011). Narrative analysis approaches. In N. Frost (Ed.). *Qualitative research methods
    in psychology: combining core approaches.* Maidenhead: McGrawHill/Open
University   Press.
Finlay, L. (2003). The reflexive journey; mapping multiple routes. In L. Finlay & B. Gough
    (Eds.) *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences.*
    Oxford: Blackwell.
Fitzpatrick, R. (1997). The assessment of patient satisfaction. In C. Jenkinson (Ed.)
    Assessment and evaluation of health and medical care Buckingham: Open University
    Press.
Flick, U. (2007). *Managing quality in qualitative research*. London: Sage
Flick, U. (1992). Triangulation revisited: strategy of or an alternative to validation of
    qualitative data. *Journal of Theory of Social Behavior*, **22**: 175 – 197.
Frost, N. (2011). *Qualitative research methods in psychology: combining core approaches.*
    Maidenhead: McGrawHill/Open University Press.
Frost, N. (2009). 'Do you know what I mean?': the use of a pluralistic narrative analysis
    approach in the interpretation of an interview. *Qualitative Research*, **9** (1): 9 – 29.
Gantley, M., Harding, G., Kumar, S., Tissier, J. (1999). *An Introduction to Qualitative Methods
    for Health Professionals.*London: Royal College of General Practitioners.
Gergen, K. J. (2001) *Social Construction in Context*. London: Sage Publications.
Gergen, K. J. (1985).The social constructionist movement in modern
    psychology.*American Psychologist*, 40: 266 – 275.
Gillham, B. (2000). *The research interview*. London: Continuum
Giorgi, A. (1995). Phenomenological Psychology.In J. A. Smith, R. Harré & K. Van
    Langenhove (Eds.) *Rethinking Psychology*. London: Sage Publications
Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967).*The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago:
    Aldine.
Goodley, D. (2011). Narrative inquiry. In P. Banister, G. Dunn, E. Burman, et al.(Eds.)
    Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide. 2nd edition. Maidenhead: Open
    University Press/ McGraw Hill.
Greenhalgh, T. & Hurwitz, B. (Eds.) (1998).*Narrative Based Medicine: Dialogue and
    discourse in clinical practice*. London: BMJ Books.
Greig, A., Taylor, J., & MacKay, T. (2008). *Doing research with children*.2nd
    edition. London: Sage.
Harré, H. (1995a). Discursive psychology. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. Van Langenhove,
    (Eds.) *Rethinking psychology*. London: Sage.
Hart, E., & Bond, M. (1999). *Action research for health and social care*. Buckingham:
    Open University Press.
Hayes, N. (Ed.) (1998). *Doing qualitative analysis in psychology*.Hove: Psychology
    Press.
Helson, H. (1933). The fundamental propositions of Gestalt
    psychology.*Psychological Review*, **40** (1): 13 -32.
Henwood, K.L. (1996). Qualitative inquiry: perspectives, methods and psychology. In J
    .T.E.Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the
    Social Sciences.* Leicester: The British Psychological Society.

Henwood, K. (2004). Reinventing validity: reflections on principles and practices from beyond the quality-quantity divide. In Z. Todd, B. Nerlich, S. McKeown, D. D. Clarke. (Eds.) *Mixing methods in psychology: the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in theory and practice.*Hove: Psychology Press.

Henwood, K. & Pidgeon, N. (1992) Qualitative research and psychological theorising.*British Journal of Psychology*, **83**: 97 - 111.

Holt, A. (2011). Discourse analysis approaches. In N. Frost (Ed.) (2011). *Qualitative research methods in psychology: combining core approaches.* Maidenhead: McGrawHill/Open University Press.

Huberman, A.M. & Miles, M.B. (1998).Data Management and Analysis Methods.In N.K.Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln.*Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials:Handbook of qualitative research.Volume 3.* London: Sage Publications.

King, N., &Horrocks, C. (2010).*Interviews in qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Kok, G., Schaalma, H., Ruiter, R. A. C., Van Empelen, R. (2004). Intervention mapping: a protocol for applying health psychology theory to prevention programmes. *Journal of Health Psychology*, **9** (1): 85 – 98.

Lamiell, J. T. (1995). Rethinking the role of quantitative methods in psychology. In Smith,J. A., Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (Eds.) (1995b). *Rethinking methods in psychology*.   London: Sage

Lawthom, R. & Tindall, C. (2011). Phenomenology. In P. Banister, G. Dunn, E. Burman, et al. (Eds.) *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide. 2nd edition.* Maidenhead: Open University Press/ McGraw Hill.

May, T. (Ed.) *Social research: issues, methods and process*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: McGrawHill/ Open University Press.

May, T., & Perry, B. (2011).Case study research. In T. May (Ed.) *Social research: issues, methods and process*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: McGrawHill/ Open University Press.

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000).Assessing quality in qualitative research.*British Medical Journal,***320** : 50 – 52.

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Qualitative research: rigour and qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, **320**: 50 - 52.

Mitchell, C. (2011). *Doing visual research*. London: Sage.

Morse, J.M. (Ed.) (1994) *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Murphy, E. & Dingwall, R. (1998).Qualitative methods in health services research. In N. Black, J. Brazier, R. Fitzpatrick, B. Reeves (Eds.). *Health Services Research Methods: A guide to best practice.* London: BMJ Books.

Murphy, E. &Dingwall, R. (2001).Qualitative Methods in Health Technology Assessment. In A. Stevens, K. Abrams, J. Brazier, R. Fitzpatrick & R. Lilford (Eds.) *The Advanced Handbook of Methods in Evidence Based Healthcare.* London: Sage Publications.

Murphy, E., Dingwall, R., Greatbatch, D., Parker, S., Watson, P. (1998). Qualitative research methods in health technology assessment: a review of the literature. *Health Technology Assessment,***2** (16). Wessex: NCCHTA.

Nerlich, B. (2004). Coming full (hermeneutic) circle. In Z. Todd, B. Nerlich, McKeown, & D. D. Clarke (Eds.) *Mixing methods in psychology: the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in theory and practice*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Nicholson, I. (1997). Humanistic psychology and intellectual identity: The "Open" system of Gordon Allport. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, **37**: 61 – 76.

Oakley, A. (2000). *Experiments in Knowing: Gender and Method in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Perls, F., Hefferline, R. & Goodman, P. (1951).*Gestalt therapy.* New York: Dell.

Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (2000/1969).*The psychology of the child*.Basic Books.

Pickering, A. (Ed.) (1992). *Science as Practice and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pidgeon, N. & Henwood, K. (1997). Using grounded theory in psychological research. In N. Hayes (Ed.). *Doing qualitative analysis in psychology*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988).*Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Pope, C., Mays, N., Popay, J. (2007). *Synthesizing qualitative and quantitative health evidence: a guide to methods.* Maidenhead: McGrawHill/ Open University Press.

Popper, K. (1935/2002). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Routledge

Potter, J. (1996). Discourse analysis and constructionist approaches: theoretical background. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.).*Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester: B.P.S. Books

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1995). Discourse analysis. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.).*Rethinking methods in psychology*. London: Sage

Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., Hendry, C. (2010). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: a discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher*, **18** (3): 20 – 24.

Punch, K. F. (2011). *Introduction to research methods in education*. London: Sage.

Punch, K. J. (2011). *Introduction to social research: quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage. *2nd edition*.

Quality Assurance Agency. (2007). *Subject benchmark statement psychology.* London: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Radley, A. & Chamberlain, K. (2001). Health psychology and the study of the case: from method to analytic concern. *Social Science and Medicine*, **53**: 321 - 332.

Ragin, D. F. (2011). *Health psychology: an interdisciplinary approach to health*. Boston: MA: Pearson.

Rapport, F., Doel, M. A., Wainwright, P. (2008). The doctor's tale: enacted workspace and the general practitioner. Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 9 (2): Art. 2, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs080227 (accessed, 9th December, 2011)

Rapport, F., Wainwright, P., Elwyn, G. (2005). "Of the edgelands": broadening the score of qualitative methodology. *Medical Humanities*, **31**: 37 -42.

Reissman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Richardson, J. T. E. (Ed.). (1996). *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester: B.P.S. Books

Ricoeur, P. (1981 / 1995). *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.Trans. & Ed. J. B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roberts, B. (2002). *Biographical Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research: A resource for social-scientists and practitioner-researchers.* 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Shinebourne, P. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In N. Frost (Ed.). *Qualitative research methods in psychology: combining core approaches.* Maidenhead: McGrawHill/Open University Press.

Silverman, D. (1993). Theory and Method in Qualitative Research. Ch.1, in *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction.* London: Sage Publications.

Sixsmith, J., & Daniels, J. (2011). Action Research. In P. Banister, G. Dunn, E. Burman, et al.(Eds.) *Qualitative methods in psychology: A research guide. 2nd edition.* Maidenhead: Open University Press/ McGraw Hill.

Smith, J. A. (1994). Reconstructing selves: a case study of changing identities during the transition to motherhood.*Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, **10**: 225 – 243.

Smith, J. A. (1998). Developing theory from case studies: self-reconstruction and the transition to motherhood.In N. Hayes (Ed.).*Doing qualitative analysis in psychology*.Hove: Psychology Press.

Smith, J. A. (1999). Towards a relational self: social engagement during pregnancy and psychological preparation for motherhood. *British Journal of Social Psychology*,**38**: 409 – 426.

Smith, J. A. (2007). Hermeneutics, human sciences and health: linking theory and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on health and Well-being*.**2**: 3 – 11.

Smith, J. A. (Ed.) (2008). *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods*. London: Sage.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2008).Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nded.) (pp. 53 – 80).   London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009).*Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research.* London: Sage.

Smith,J. A., Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (Eds.) (1995a). *Rethinking psychology*. London: Sage.

Smith,J. A., Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (Eds.) (1995b). *Rethinking methods in psychology*. London: Sage

Smith, J. A., Jarman, M., Osborn, M. (1999).Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods* (pp. 218 – 240). London: Sage.

Smith, M.J. (1998). *Social Science in question*. London: Sage Publications

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990).*Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory procedures and techniques.* London: Sage Publications.

Thomas, J., Harden, A., Oakley, A., et al. (2004) Integrating qualitative research with trials in systematic reviews. *British Medical Journal*, **328**: 1010 – 1012

Todd, Z., Nerlich, B., McKeown,S, Clarke, D. D. (Eds.) (2004). *Mixing methods in psychology: the intergration of qualitative and quantitative methods in theory and practice.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Tonkiss, F. (2012). Discourse analysis. In C. Searle (Ed.). *Researching society and culture. 3rd edition*. London: Sage.

Vasquez-Lago, J. M., Lopez-Vazquez, P., López-Durán, A., Taracido-Trunk, M., & Figueiras, A. (2011). Attitudes of primary care physicians to the prescribing of antibiotics and antimicrobial resistance: a qualitative study from Spain. *Family Practice*, doi:10.1093/fampra/cmr084

Walsh, D. (2012). Doing ethnography. In C. Searle (Ed.) *Researching society and culture*, 3rd edition. London: Sage.

Whimster, S. (2001). Max Weber: work and interpretation. In G. Ritzer & B. Smart (Eds.). *Handbook of social theory*. London: Sage.

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing qualitative research methods in psychology: Adventures in theory and method. 2nd ed*. Maidenhead: McGrawHill/ Open University Press.

Willig, C. & W. Stainton Rogers (eds) (2008) *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: Sage.

Biggerstaff: Qualitative research in psychology. Revised version Feb 2012 InTech
Amended March 2012 from Rossi comments

Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative research. In J. A. Smith (Ed.)
  Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods (pp. 235 – 251). London:
  Sage.
Ziebland, S., &McPherson, A. (2006).Making sense of qualitative data analysis: an
  introduction with illustrations from DIPex (personal experiences of health and
  illness).*Medical Education*, **40:** 405 – 414.
Ziebland S., & Wright, L (1997). Qualitative research methods In C. Jenkinson (Ed.)
  Assessment and evaluation of health and medical care Buckingham: Open University
  Press.

Figures and tables

Table 1

Summary of epistemological positions

Epistemological position	Realist	Contextual	Constructionist
Assumptions about the world	There exists unmediated access to a 'real' world where process and relationships can be revealed	Contrast is integral to understanding how people experience their lives	Social reality is constructed through language which produces particular versions of events
Knowledge produced	Seeks to produce objective data which is reliable and likely to be representative of the wider population from which the interview sample is drawn	Data are inclusive of context aiming to add to the 'completeness' of the analysis by making visible cultural and historical meaning systems	Does not adhere to traditional conventions. Knowledge brought into being through dialogue
Role of researcher	**Researcher aims to avoid bias. Remains objective and detached**	**Subjectivity of researcher is integral to process. Researcher active in data generation and analysis**	**Researcher 'co-producer' of knowledge. Therefore needs to be reflexive and critically aware (e.g. of language)**

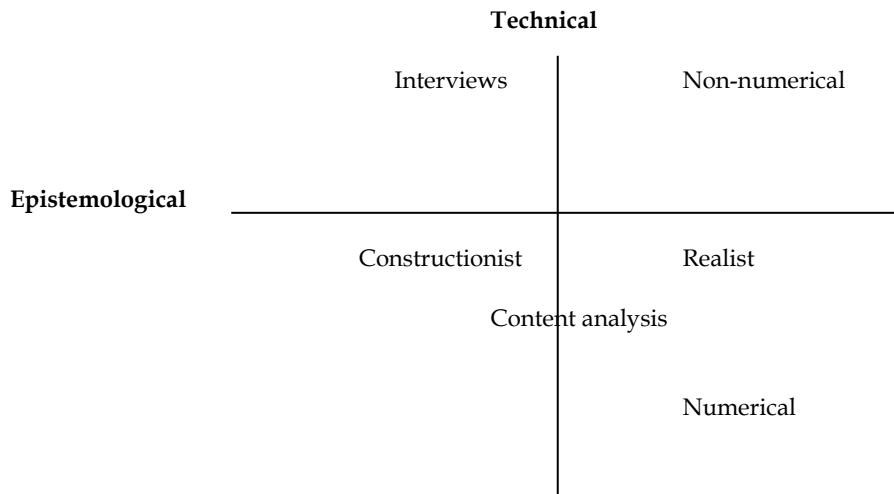*Source:* (adapted from King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 20)

Biggerstaff: Qualitative research in psychology. Revised version Feb 2012 InTech
Amended March 2012 from Rossi comments

Figure 1

Technical

Interviews | Non-numerical

Epistemological

Constructionist | Realist

Content analysis

Numerical

Figure 1: The quantity – quality debate (adapted from Henwood, 1996)

Table 2:

Methodology		
Approach	*Quantitative research*	*Qualitative research*
Observation	Preliminary work e.g. prior to designing questionnaire	Fundamental to understanding another culture
Textual analysis	Content analysis – counting in terms of researchers' categories	Understanding participants' categories
Interviews	'Survey': mainly fixed choice questions to random samples	'Open ended' questions to small numbers of participants (in-depth interviews)
Transcripts	Used infrequently to check accuracy of records	Used to understand how participants organise their talk / think about their experiences

Table 2: Different uses for four research approaches

(Adapted from Silverman, 1993)

Checklist for evaluating qualitative psychology research
How does this work contribute to our knowledge of this area? Does it enhance or develop knowledge? Do the researchers provide the reader with a different perspective on research findings in the field?
Are the research findings of worth or relevance?
Is there evidence of a clear research question to the reader?
Have the researchers used an appropriate design for the research question and theoretical approach?
Are we provided with sufficient information to relate the findings reported here to another setting? (Context)
Are there a good range of possible cases or settings used for this study? (Sampling)
Considering data collection and analysis. Have the researchers used a systematic approach?
Does the paper specifically address issues relating to sound audit processes? Are such processes reported clearly. Is informed consent reported?
Is the reported account sufficiently reflexive? How do the authors incorporate this in their research?

Table 3

A checklist for evaluating qualitative research in psychology

(with acknowledgement to The British Psychological Society (www.bps.org.uk)