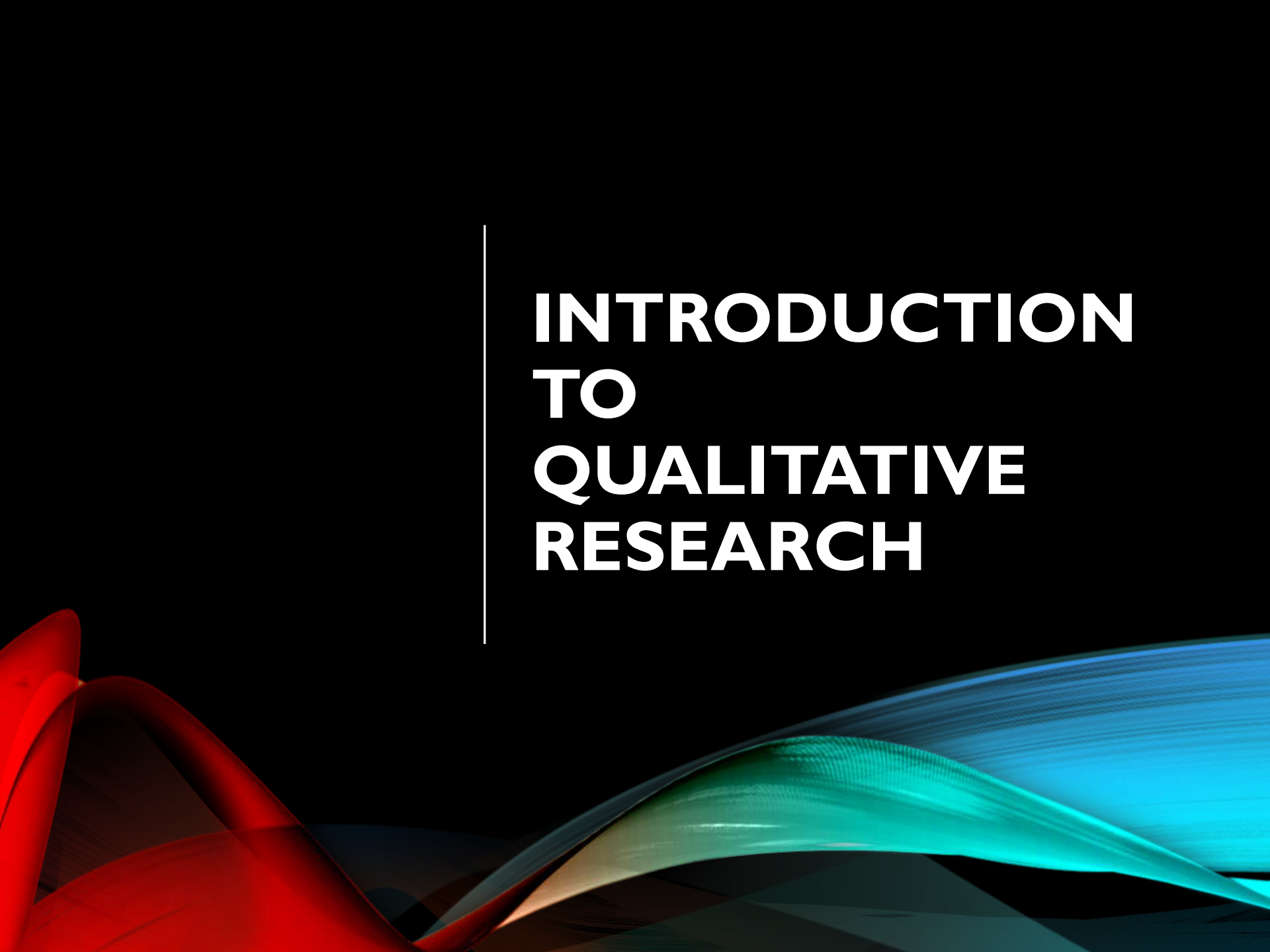




INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



OVERVIEW OF LECTURE

- A brief history of qualitative research
- Key features of qualitative research
- Validity in qualitative research

WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

- Not a “methodological deviation” (Kidder & Fine, 1997)
- Its methods are empirical because they involve the collection, analysis and interpretation of data
- Its data are primarily “language data” (Polkinghorne, 2005)
- It has a long intellectual history in psychology, although the range of specific methods is relatively recent

HISTORY AND INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS

- Has been a part of psychology since the inception of the discipline
- For Wundt, psychology was “a hybrid discipline, representing a combination of a natural science and a human science.” (Kendler, 1987, p. 27)
- Wundt and James: a concern with both subjectivist and objectivist knowledge and approaches
- Titchener: *both* description and measurement

A MUTUALLY ENRICHING RELATIONSHIP

The experiments are complementary, each sacrificing something, and each gaining something. The qualitative experiment shows us all the detail and variety of the mental life, and in so doing forbids us to pack its results into formulae; the quantitative experiment furnishes us with certain uniformities of the mental life, neatly and summarily expressed, but for that very reason must pass unnoticed many things that a qualitatively directed introspection would bring to light. (Titchener, 1905, p. vi)

KEY FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH:

- Naturalistic settings
- An emphasis on real-worldness: gains in richness/relevance but loses in control and certainty
- Less interested in the quantity and measurement, and more interested in the qualities and features which make a phenomenon what it is
- Ways of thinking about the data rather than things for doing to the data

KEY FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- Qualitative research asks different questions, and therefore needs different methods to quantitative research
- Qualitative research collects words (and sometimes images or movement) as data
- Within qualitative research there are many different approaches to data collection and analysis

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Depending on method used may PERMIT:

- inductive exploration of new topic, development of new theory or discourse
- holistic analysis of complex, dynamic and exceptional phenomena

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

- analysis of subjective and symbolic meaning, language and socio-linguistic interaction
- analysis of investigator's role in knowledge construction
- study of contexts and processes not amenable to experimental manipulation - e.g. policy and management changes, natural/cultural contexts.

WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS OF USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

- not objective or reliable (but alternative criteria for quality will be considered in the next part of this session)
- findings less precisely specified than when quantified, less suitable for prediction and control
- because of the above, and small intensive samples, cannot test hypotheses (e.g. between group differences, relationships between variables)



Qualitative Methods

Grounded
theory

Discourse
analysis

Narrative
analysis

Interpretative
Phenomenological
Analysis (IPA)

Thematic
analysis

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Open ended research questions rather than hypotheses
- Exploratory
- Focus on meaning
- Answerable, and worth answering

<i>Example research question</i>	<i>Key features</i>	<i>Suitable approach</i>
What are the main experiential features of being angry?	<i>Note the focus on the common structure of ‘anger’ as an experience.</i>	Descriptive phenomenology
How do people who have complained about their medical treatment make sense of being angry?	<i>Note the focus on personal meaning and sense-making in a particular context, for people who share a particular experience.</i>	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
What sorts of story structures do people use to describe events which made them angry?	<i>Note the focus on how narrative relates to sense-making (e.g. via genre, structure, tone or imagery).</i>	Narrative analysis
What factors influence how people manage being angry?	<i>Note the willingness to develop an explanatory level account (factors, impacts, influences, etc.).</i>	Grounded theory
How do people talk about ‘being angry’ in close relationships?	<i>Note the focus on interaction over and above content, and the caution about inferring anything about anger itself.</i>	Discursive analysis
How is ‘anger’ constructed in incident reports from a residential home for Older People?	<i>Note the willingness to use a range of data sources, and the focus on how things ‘must be understood’ according to the conventions of a particular setting.</i>	Foucauldian discourse analysis



DATA COLLECTION

- Interviews
- Observation
- Focus groups
- Diaries and other written accounts
- Visual and pictorial material
- Newspapers, television, film, social media

REFLEXIVITY

- Exploring “the ways in which a researcher’s involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research.” (Nightingale, & Cromby, 1999, p. 228)
- Personal reflexivity
- Epistemological reflexivity: “encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings.” (Willig, 2001, p. 10)



REFLEXIVITY (CONT.)

Being reflexive involves the “process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes” (Finlay, 2003, p.108).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH CRITERIA FOR VALIDITY?

- Criteria necessary to justify claims for value of research
- Criteria necessary to win acceptance within discipline, funders, policy makers, etc.
- Criteria necessary to maintain/improve standards
- Criteria helpful for guiding/assessing individual pieces of research

WHY IS ESTABLISHING THE QUALITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROBLEMATIC?

- Traditional criteria used for quantitative research inappropriate for most qualitative research
- Qualitative methods relatively new in psychology - criteria and validation 'hierarchy' not yet fully established (e.g. training, experts, journals, etc.)
- There are many different varieties of qualitative research, which require/employ different criteria for validation.



WHY ARE TRADITIONAL CRITERIA FOR QUALITY INAPPROPRIATE FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Objectivity

Reliability

Generalizability

WHAT QUALITY CRITERIA CAN BE APPLIED TO (QUALITATIVE) RESEARCH?

OR how to demonstrate to an examiner or editor that your research merits a pass or publication!

Inter-rater reliability

Triangulation

- of sources (people, places, times)
- of investigators
- of methods
- of theoretical approaches

WHAT QUALITY CRITERIA CAN BE APPLIED TO (QUALITATIVE) RESEARCH?

Deviant/disconfirming case analysis

Participant feedback/respondent validation

‘Paper trail’ + making raw data available



EXAMPLES

Existential therapists' spirituality and their therapeutic practice: A thematic analysis (True, 2019).

Intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy (ISTDP) therapists' experiences of staying with clients' intense emotional experiencing: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

The influence of therapists' spirituality on their practice: A grounded theory exploration

The hardest words: Exploring the dialogue of suicide in the counselling process — A discourse analysis

Formulating research questions

E.g.

- What is it like to recover from alcohol addiction within a self-help programme?
- How do people receiving support from an Early Intervention Service make sense of their experiences of auditory hallucination?
- How is the experience of dialysis understood in the context of impending transplantation?

Top tip: set yourself some clear objectives, so that you know when you are finished!

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUESTIONS

E.g.

How can the help-seeking narratives of hard-to-reach parents help us to evaluate the relevance of a 'stages of change' approach to service provision?

How can young people's experiences of making decisions about risk help us to develop existing theories of planned behaviour?