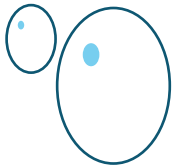


# Research Methods

Lecture 9: Introduction to Qualitative Research

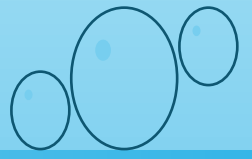
Lecturer: Judith Marshall



(Slide content: Stacey Coleman/Judith Marshall)



# Lecture outline

- Introduction to the role of qualitative research in psychology
  - Discuss a number of qualitative methods
  - Semi-structured interviews and question construction
- 
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- 

# RECAP



## Different types of research:

- Basic versus applied research
  - Qualitative versus quantitative
  - Experimental V non-experimental
- 

# Qualitative and Quantitative data

## Quantitative

**NUMBERS**  
are the data

**Objective**

Numbers

Categories / Continuous

Nominal, Ordinal, Ratio, Interval

## Qualitative

**DISCOURSE**  
is the data

**Can be**  
highly  
subjective

Free text/words

Photos/Videos

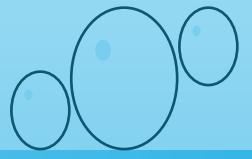


# Qualitative versus Quantitative research

## ◦ Quantitative research:

- We are not interested specifically in the sample that we study – we are interested in the target population
  - Ability to generalise results to target population
- 

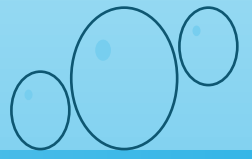
## ◦ Qualitative research:

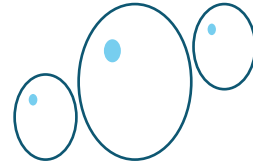
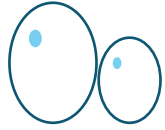
- Interested in the specific experiences of our sample
    - the “life-world” of our participants
  - Do not attempt to generalise to larger populations
- 
- 



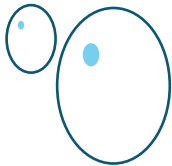
# What is qualitative research?

*“Qualitative research is an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998/2007)*





**Your task... 5 minutes...**





# What is the best way to explore this research question?

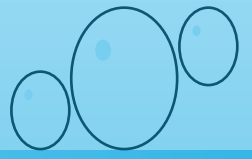
*“Exploring the psychological benefits of owning pets”*



**Quantitative?  
Qualitative?**

**What data would  
you be looking  
to obtain?**

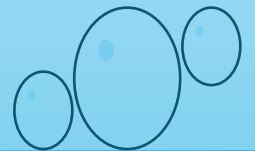
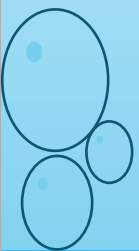
**What questions do  
you think you  
would need to  
ask?**





# What does qualitative research involve?

- An understanding of which approach you are following
- Significant amount of time spent gathering data
- Time-consuming and complex data analysis – reducing large sets of data to a few themes or categories
- Long pieces of text/writing incorporating quotes



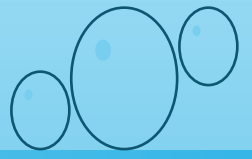


# Why conduct a qualitative study?

- In-depth exploration of a topic
  - Often 'how?' 'what?' or 'why?'
    - How do people feel about bullying?
    - How do men make sense of mental illness?
    - How do people cope with undergoing medical treatment?
    - What do people understand about migrants?
    - Why would you choose/not choose to have a vaccine?
  - Is there a lack of current theory/literature/evidence in the area?
  - Do you want to research in a naturally-occurring environment? e.g. in a self-help group
- 

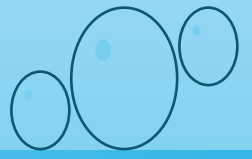


# Qualitative research

- May be able to answer questions which large quantitative clinical studies cannot
    - particularly the 'Why?' And the 'How?'
  - E.g. Can provide an in-depth understanding of
    - **how** a person or people make sense of a particular phenomenon, or
    - **why** people hold specific beliefs or behave in particular ways
  - E.g. Qualitative findings can be used to raise awareness of the lived experiences people working in different professions
- 
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# Validity?

- Describing and explaining the target phenomena – from the stories/understandings of individuals
  - **Fluid, flexible and ‘open’** – less valid?
  - Likely to be **led by participants’** interactions
    - their presented accounts; their ‘sense-making’
  - Methods designed so participants can challenge and correct assumptions
- 
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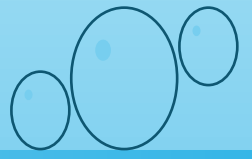
# Validity?

- **Real-life settings** – higher ecological validity?
- Reflexivity of researcher – continually **reviewing your own role/position** and its impact on the study itself
- Helps to reduce the likelihood of imposing your own meaning on the data
- Aim is to focus on individuals' own perceptions, interpretations and understandings
- Can be very different from the researcher's





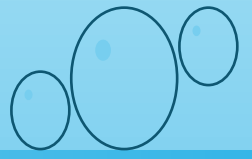
# Reliability?

- Less emphasis on designs that will set parameters on likely responses
  - Many qualitative researchers are less interested in reliability across studies
    - Focus instead on **the richness** of the data
    - Individuality
- 
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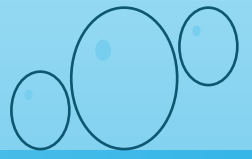
# Ethical issues

## **BPS (2018)**

- Respect
  - Competence
  - Responsibility
  - Integrity
- 
- 
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# Ethical issues

- Extremely important in qualitative research
  - **Informed consent**
    - *Before data collection*
  - **No deception**
    - Can the research question be answered without deception?
    - Do the potential benefits of the research outweigh risks to participants?
  - **Right to withdraw**
    - At any time, without fear of penalty
- 
- 
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# Ethical issues

## ○ Debriefing

- After data collection, participants should be informed of the full aims of the research
- Ideally also access to publications arising from that study



## ○ Confidentiality

- Anonymity
- Care taken with materials
- Materials destroyed after completion of study
  - Unless permission gained to use the material for another purpose e.g. teaching/training
    - All confidential/anonymised material must be stored securely





# Ethical issues

## ○ **Non-maleficence**

- Avoid harming participants in any way
- Duty of care - cannot rely on built-in safeguards regarding responses to questions



## ○ **Beneficence**

- The research should provide positive and identifiable benefit – not just research for its own sake

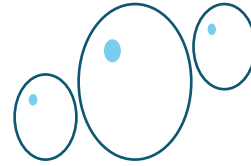
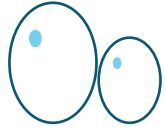
## ○ **Autonomy**

- The participants values and decisions should be respected

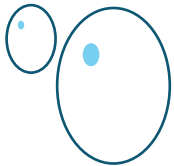
## ○ **Justice**

- All people should be treated equally





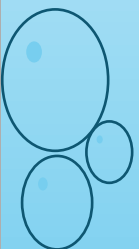
# Qualitative data collection techniques





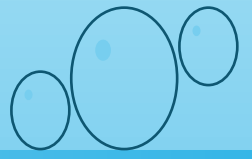
# Qualitative data collection techniques

- Observations
- Unstructured interviews
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus groups





# Observations

- Observational research can be useful in the early stages of research, helping to identify the parameters of a phenomenon
  - Observational research tends to be high in **ecological validity** since observations are made in natural settings
  - Host of **uncontrolled extraneous variables**
- 
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# Interviews

- Not tied to any single approach, theory, etc.
- Flexible in format and function
- Data generated can be interpreted in a number of ways e.g.
  - Subjectivities of researchers
  - Purpose of research using the data
- Direct interaction between research and participant e.g.
  - Social context
  - Perceived purpose of the interview
  - Participant's presentation of self
  - Power relations
- **The resulting account is a co-construction**





# Interviews

## Unstructured interviews

- Avoids imposing researcher assumptions and expectations at the interview design stage
- A single prompt question may be used e.g.

*"I'm exploring people's experiences of unemployment and I'm interested in hearing about your experiences of being out of work."*

- A few prompts prepared, but also spontaneous questions are likely to be used





# Interviews

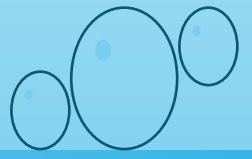
- **Fully-Structured Interviews:**

- Rigid structure and order of questions
- 

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:**

- Key questions – allow for elaboration and some deviation
  - Keep the main topic in focus – include pre-determined probes to contribute to answering the main question

- **Photo-elicitation Interviews:**

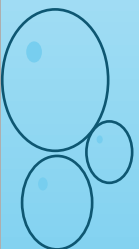
- Use images as prompts
    - Images may be interviewer-generated or participant-generated
- 
- 



# Interviews

## Semi-structured interviews

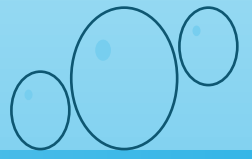
- Neutral, open-ended questions aimed at eliciting in-depth responses from participants
- Questions form a prompt to the interviewer
- Should enable participants to express their beliefs, opinions and feelings freely
- Some capacity to further develop interesting/useful content





# Interviews

## Face-to face vs Telephone interviews

- 
- **Face-to-face interviews:**
    - Suited to exploring issues in depth
    - Easier to fully engage in conversation/establish good rapport
    - Can pick up on non-verbal cues
      - confusion, hesitation, anger, distress, etc.
- 
- 

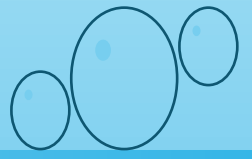


# Interviews

## Face-to face vs Telephone interviews

- **Telephone interviews:**



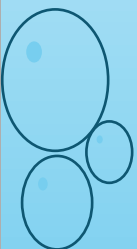
- More cost effective/faster data collection (Breakwell, 2004)
  - Fewer negative interviewer effects – visual cues cannot be observed (Groves & Jahn, 1979)
  - Suitable when wide geographical location of target sample or resource constraints (funding, time, etc)
- 
- 



# Interviews

## ◦ **Walking and Talking**

- Participant shows researcher around a physical space  
e.g. building, geographical area...
- Interview is conducted by the
  - Participant, who guides the account via the tour: they choose what to present to the researcher
  - Researcher: study-relevant questions and could also ask about particular places/objects not shown/discussed  
(once the participant has finished their account)





# Focus groups

- Group discussion of a **small number** of people
    - Sometimes people who have something in common
    - Sometimes people with very different experiences/views
  - An ideal method eliciting people's own meanings and understandings of e.g.
    - Health and illness (Wilkinson, 2005)
    - Poverty and universal credit relief – who is 'deserving' of this?
    - A specific intervention for managing anxiety or anger
- 



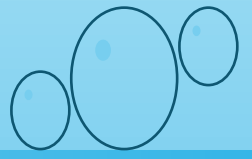
# Focus groups

- Allow individuals to interact with each other in response to a particular topic
- **How** do people negotiate meaning through interaction?
- **How** do they explain, justify, argue...?
- What understandings do they draw upon to do this?
- Make use of group dynamics to stimulate discussion, generate ideas and gain insights





# Focus groups

- No single correct way to 'do focus groups' (Morgan, 2008)
  - Group size – suggested between 6 and 8 people (Wilkinson, 2003)
  - Participants responses are not always individuals, reasoned and rational
  - Co-constructed during the focus groups session – a result of the group discussion and interaction
- 
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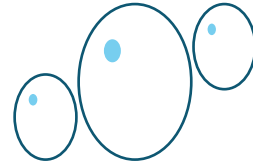
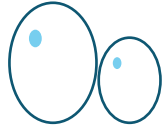


# Focus groups

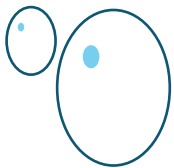
## Additional ethical considerations:

- Confidentiality is expected of **all** members
- Respect to other speakers in the group
- Subtle and unobtrusive guidance – intervene only to maintain a productive group
- Diffusing difficult situations?
  - Refocus the group
  - Balance out the discussion





# The growing role of mixed-methods research



# Mixed-methods research

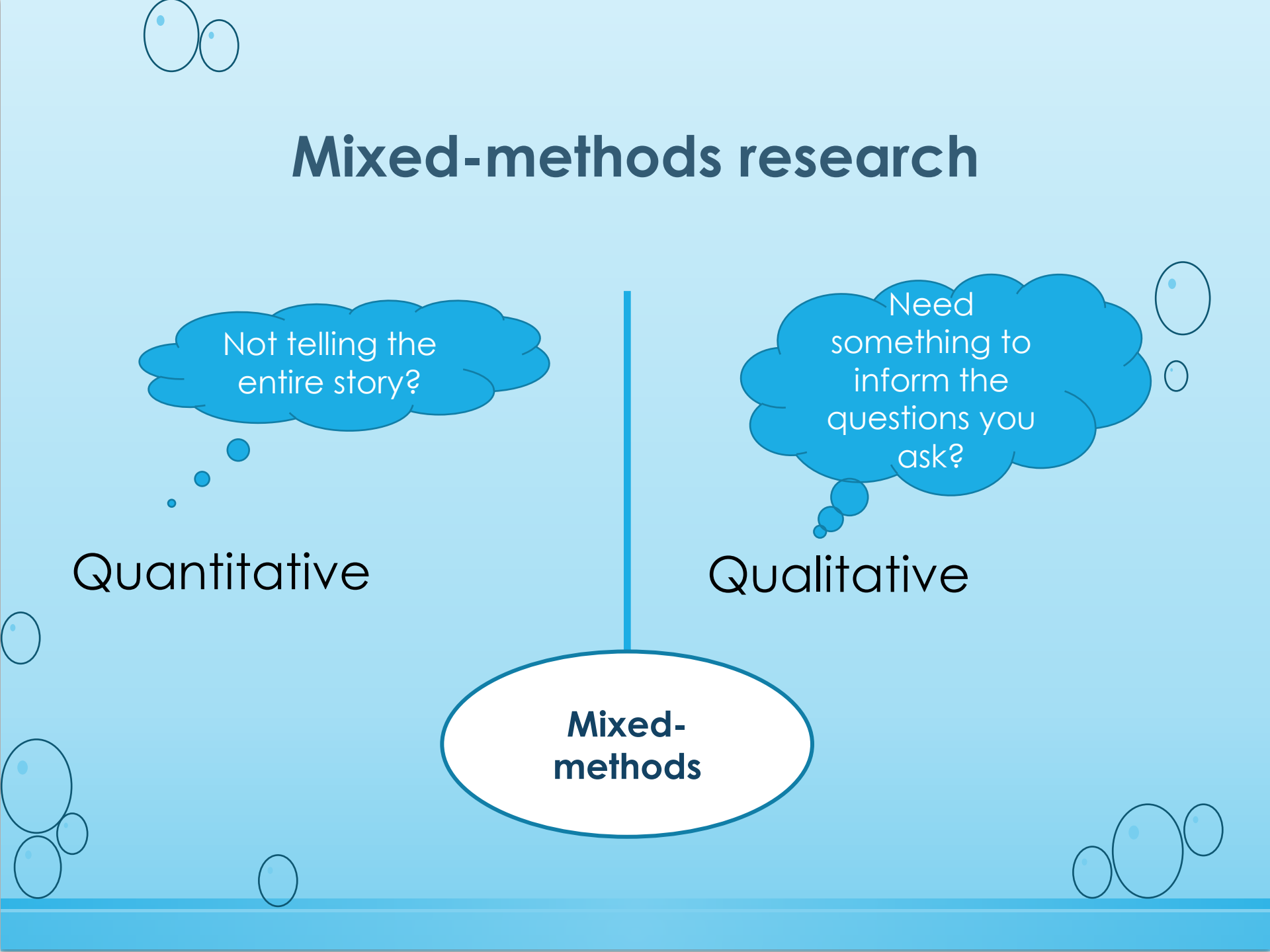
Not telling the  
entire story?

Quantitative

Need  
something to  
inform the  
questions you  
ask?

Qualitative

**Mixed-  
methods**





## Example: attitudes towards organ donation

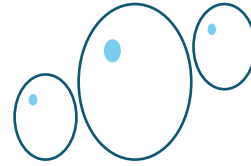
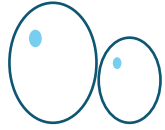
### Quantitative:

- Survey based around the Theory of Planned Behaviour
- Minimum of 150 responses
- Data analysed using hierarchical multiple regression in first instance

### Qualitative

- Semi-structured interviews
- Maximum of 15 participants
- Data analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**WHY?**



***Further consideration of qualitative research planning and design will take place during the Discussion and Seminar sessions this week.***

***Please read the required chapters.***

