

Introduction to Qualitative Research

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Lecture Outline

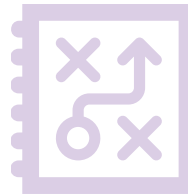
Introduction to role of qualitative research in psychology

Discuss a number of qualitative research methods

Semi-structured interviews and question construction



Different types of research:



Basic and applied research



Experimental and non-experimental research



Qualitative and quantitative

Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Quantitative



NUMBERS
are the data

Objective

Numbers
Categories / Continuous
Nominal, Ordinal, Interval, Ratio

Qualitative



DISCOURSE
is the data

Can be highly
subjective

Free text / words

Photos / Videos

Quantitative versus Qualitative research

- **Quantitative research:**

- We are not really interested 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

Think about the best way to explore this research question...

What are the perceived 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
- A 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?”



Qualitative research

- May be able to answer questions which large quantitative clinical studies cannot
 - Particularly related to the “why?” and the “how”
- 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 certain ways
- *E.g., qualitative findings can be used to raise awareness of the lived experiences of people working in different professions*

Qualitative research

Is there a lack of current theory / literature / evidence in the area?

Do you want to conduct research in a naturally-occurring environment? E.g., a self-help group



Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Research

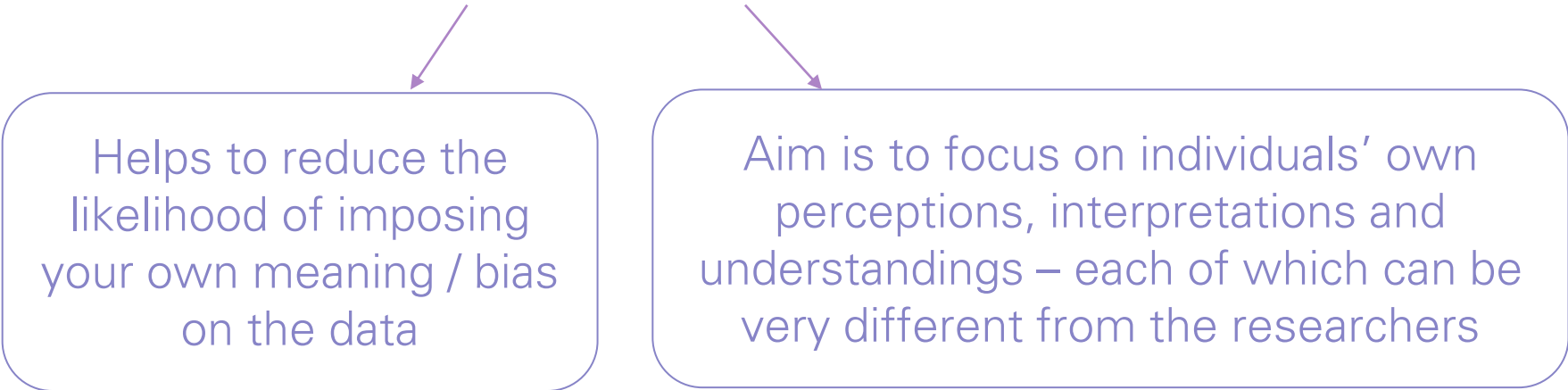


Validity?

- 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; the sense they make of their experiences, interactions, etc*
- Methods designed so that participants can challenge and correct assumptions

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 / bias on the data

Aim is to focus on individuals' own perceptions, interpretations and understandings – each of which can be very different from the researchers

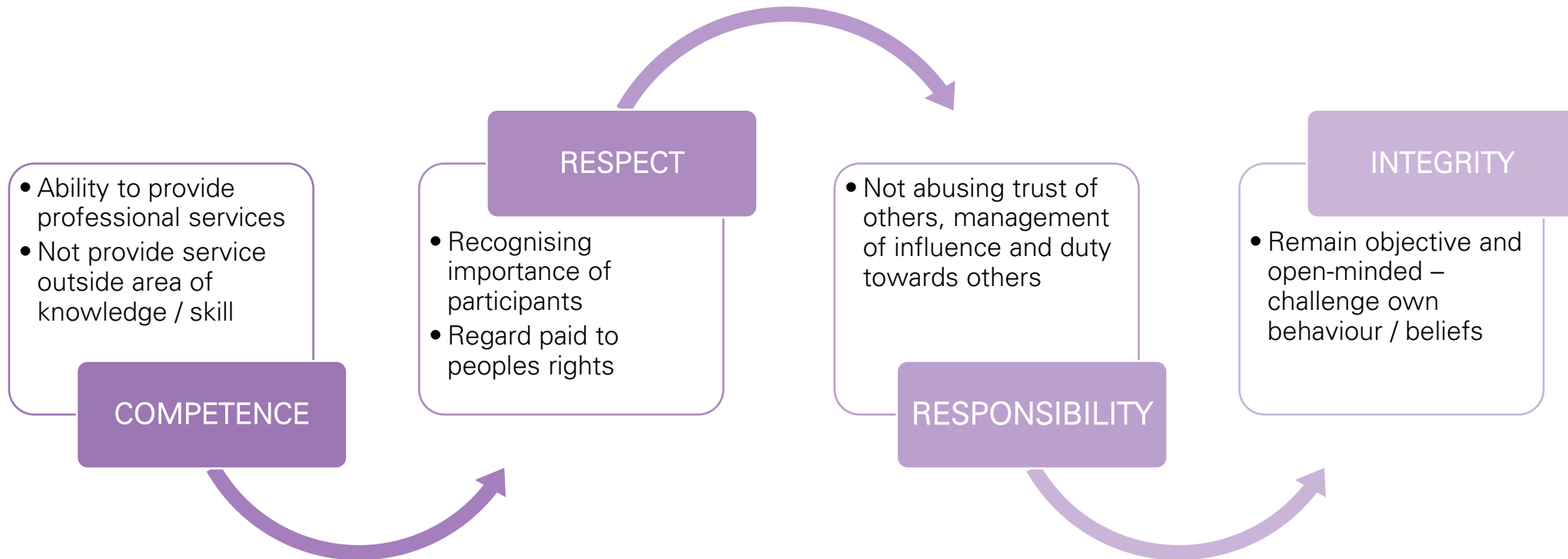
Reliability?

- Qualitative research places 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 collected
 - Individuality

Ethical issues

British Psychological Society (2021)

Code of Ethics and Conduct



Ethical issues

- Extremely important in qualitative research



Informed
consent

Before data
collection



Deception

Do potential
benefits outweigh
risks?



Right to
withdraw

At any time
without fear of
penalty



Debriefing

After data
collection,
informed of full
aims (and access
to publications if
applicable



Confidentiality

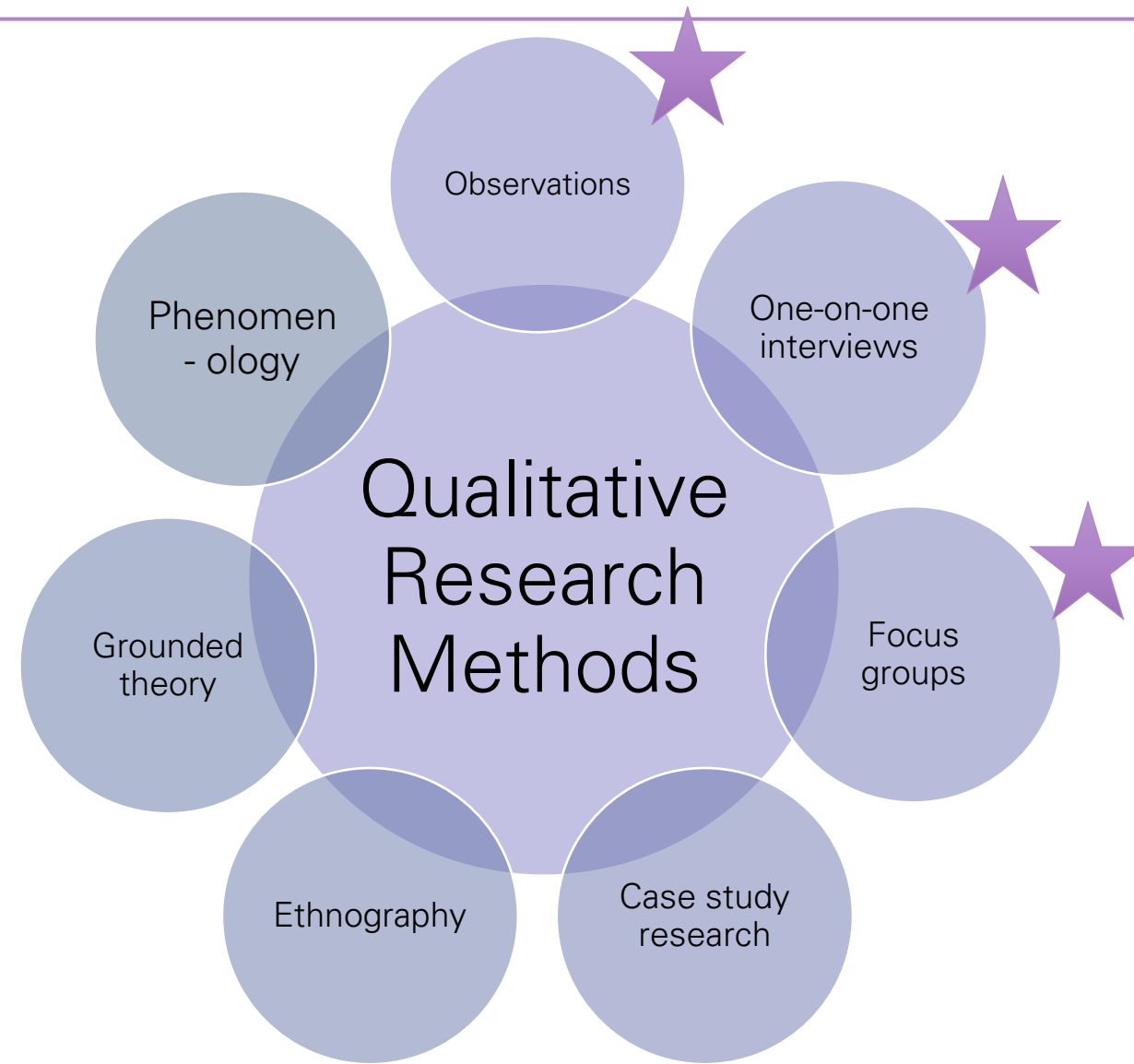
Anonymous?
Storage of
materials
Materials
destroyed after
study

Ethical issues

- **Non-maleficence**
 - Avoid harming participants in any way
 - Duty of care – cannot rely on built-in safeguards regarding responses to questions
- **Beneficence**
 - Research should provide positive and identifiable benefits – not just research for its own sake
- **Autonomy**
 - Participants values and decisions should be respected
- **Justice**
 - All participants should be treated equally

Qualitative Data Collection Techniques





Observations

- Useful in early stages of research
 - Can help to identify 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**

Interviews

- Not tied to any single approach, theory, etc
- Flexible in format and function
- Data generated can be interpreted in multiple ways:
 - Subjectivities of researchers
 - Purpose of research using the data

Interviews

- Direct interaction between researcher and participant

Social context

Perceived purpose
of the interview

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



Interviews

Fully-Structured

Rigid structure and order of questions

Semi-Structured

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

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

Face-to-face vs Telephone 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...



- 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 of relevance to them
- Interview conducted by the:
 - Participant: guide the account via the tour. They choose what to present to the researcher
 - Researcher: study-relevant questions, could also ask about particular places / objects that are not shown or discussed by participant (after participant has finished their own 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

Focus groups are ideal for eliciting people's own meanings and understandings of phenomena:

- 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

- Allows for interaction of participants 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

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

Focus Groups

- Additional ethical considerations:



Confidentiality
is expected of
all members



Respect to
other speakers
present



Researcher
intervention to be
subtle and
unobtrusive – only
to maintain
productive group

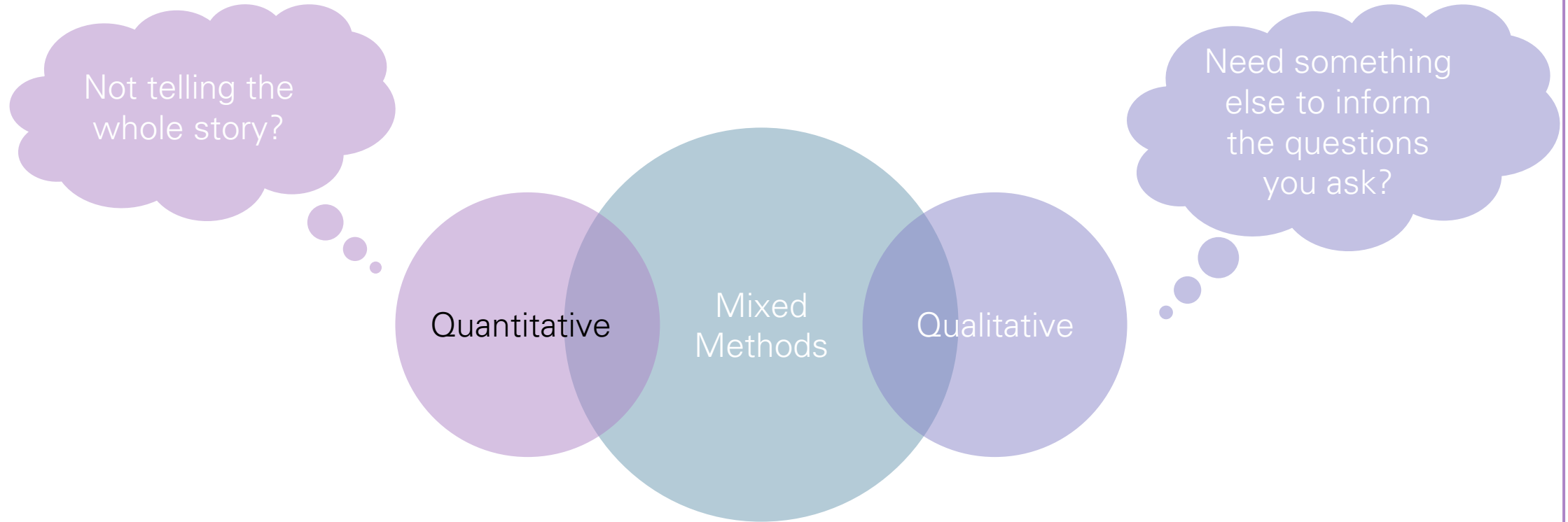


Diffusing difficult
situations?

Refocus the group
Balance out the
discussion



The Growing Role of Mixed Methods Research



Example: attitudes towards organ donation

Quantitative

- Survey based on 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?