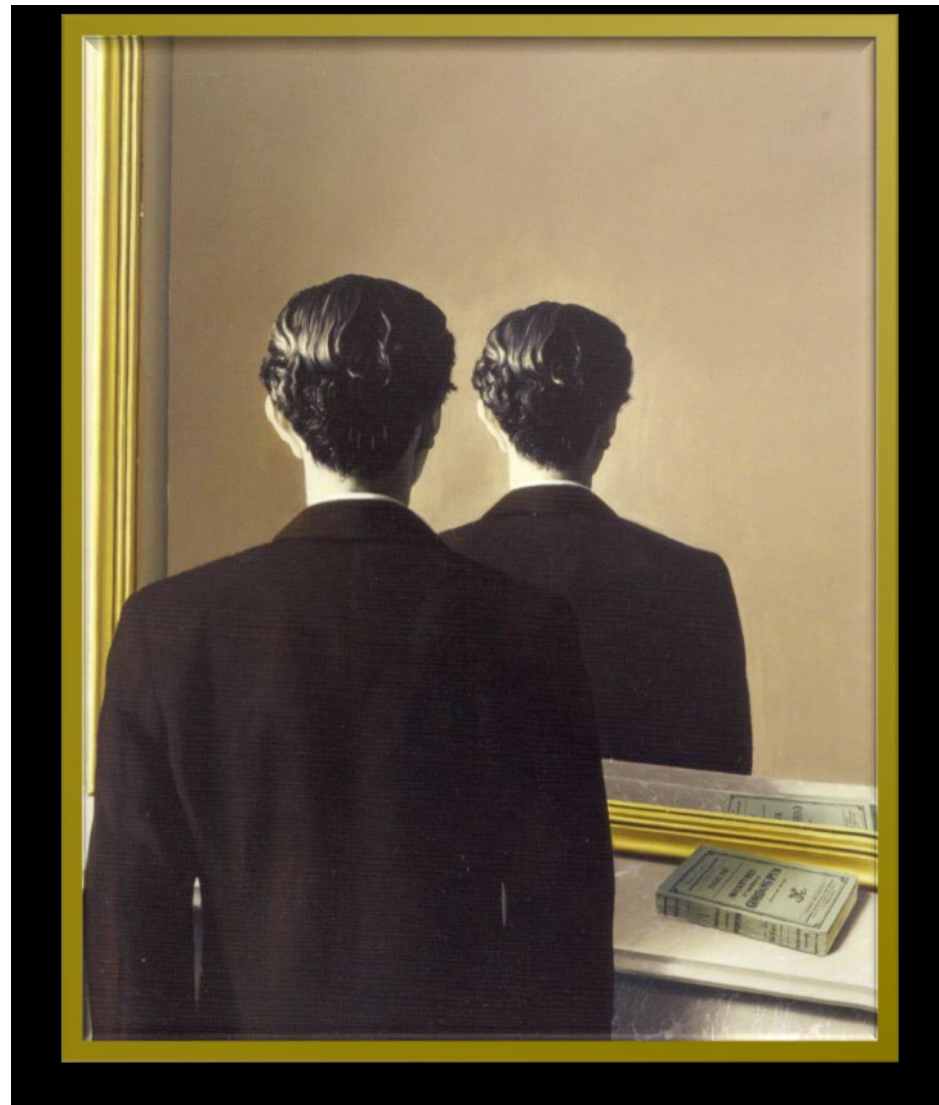




Reflexivity and Positionality in research

ECGE7008Q

Session 5



Research

- In research we are always making decisions about what we see.
 - That means, because of those decisions, there are things we will not see
 - That means that research results will **ALWAYS** be biased by the choices you make
- Part of a researcher's job is to make that bias as obvious as possible



Identification of training need

- We need to reflect more on our own research practices in terms of:
 - What role we played in producing certain kinds of knowledges
 - How and why, we came to the conclusions we did
 - How the resultant knowledges function to shape the world



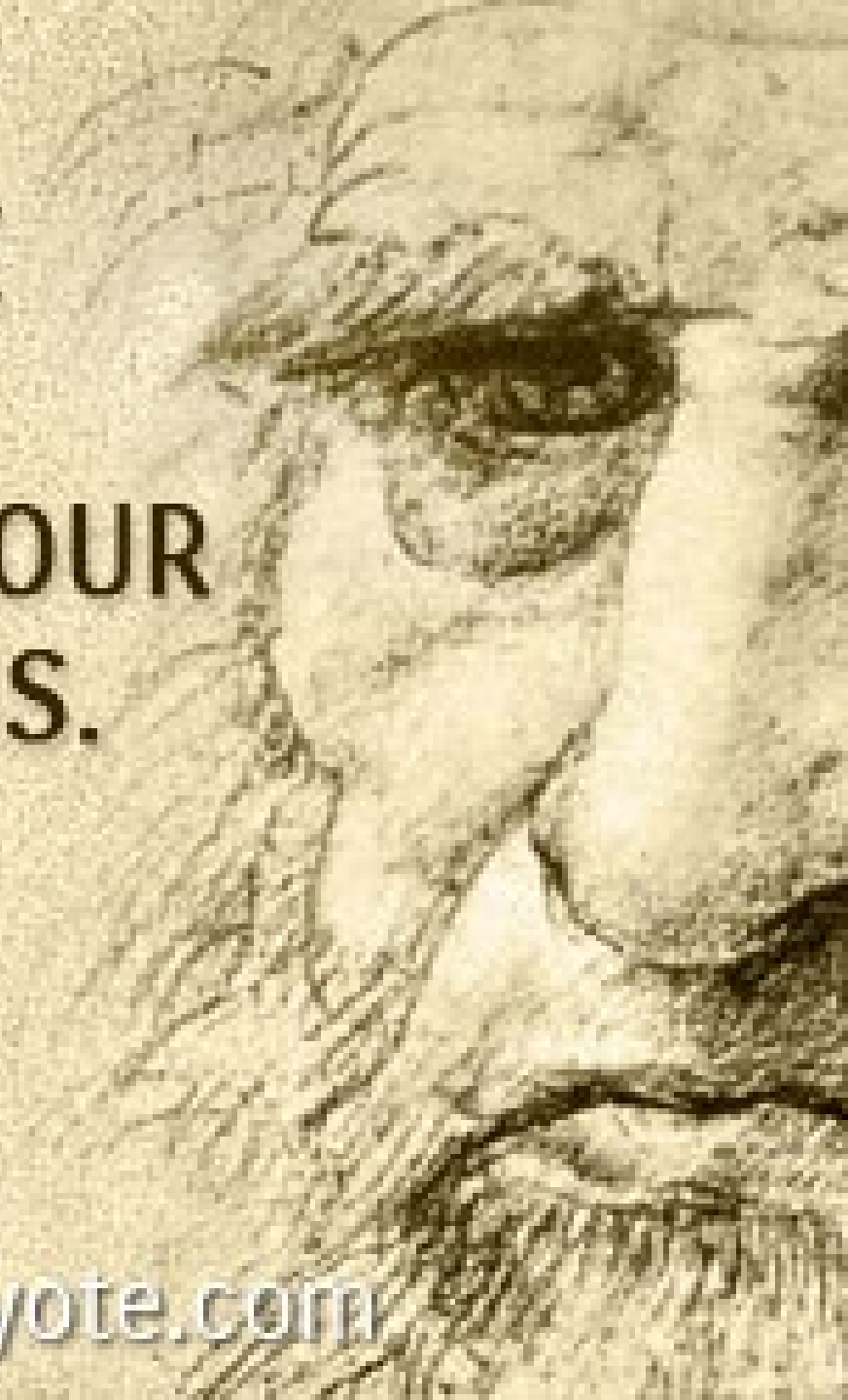
Why?

- ‘.. To make unexamined meta-theoretical commitments, and remain unaware of their origins, amounts to an abdication of intellectual responsibility which results in poor research practices.’
(Johnson & Duberley, 2003)
- Reflexivity helps us to attend to this.

ALL OUR
KNOWLEDGE
HAS ITS
ORIGINS IN OUR
PERCEPTIONS.

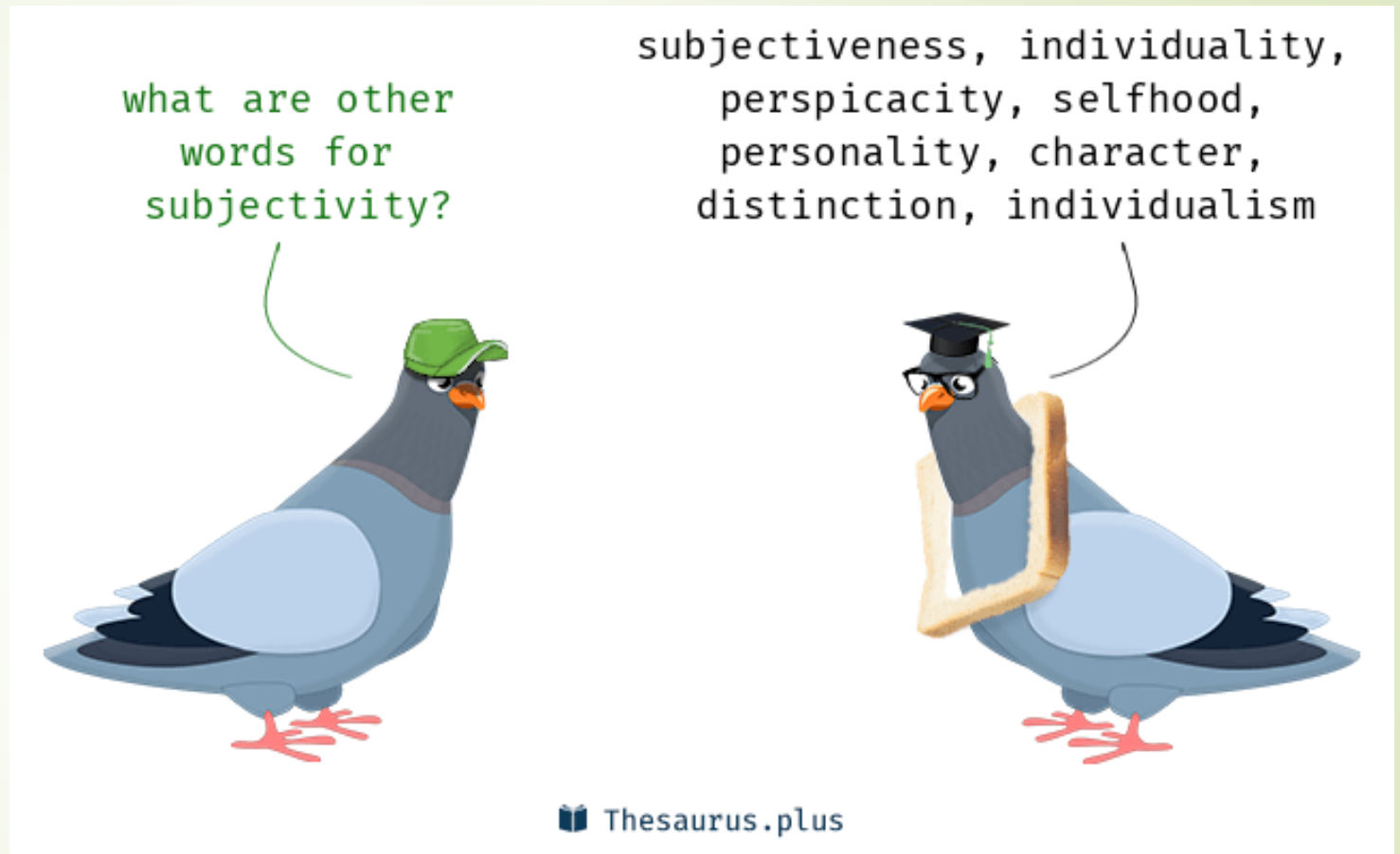
Leonardo da Vinci

www.quote-coyote.com



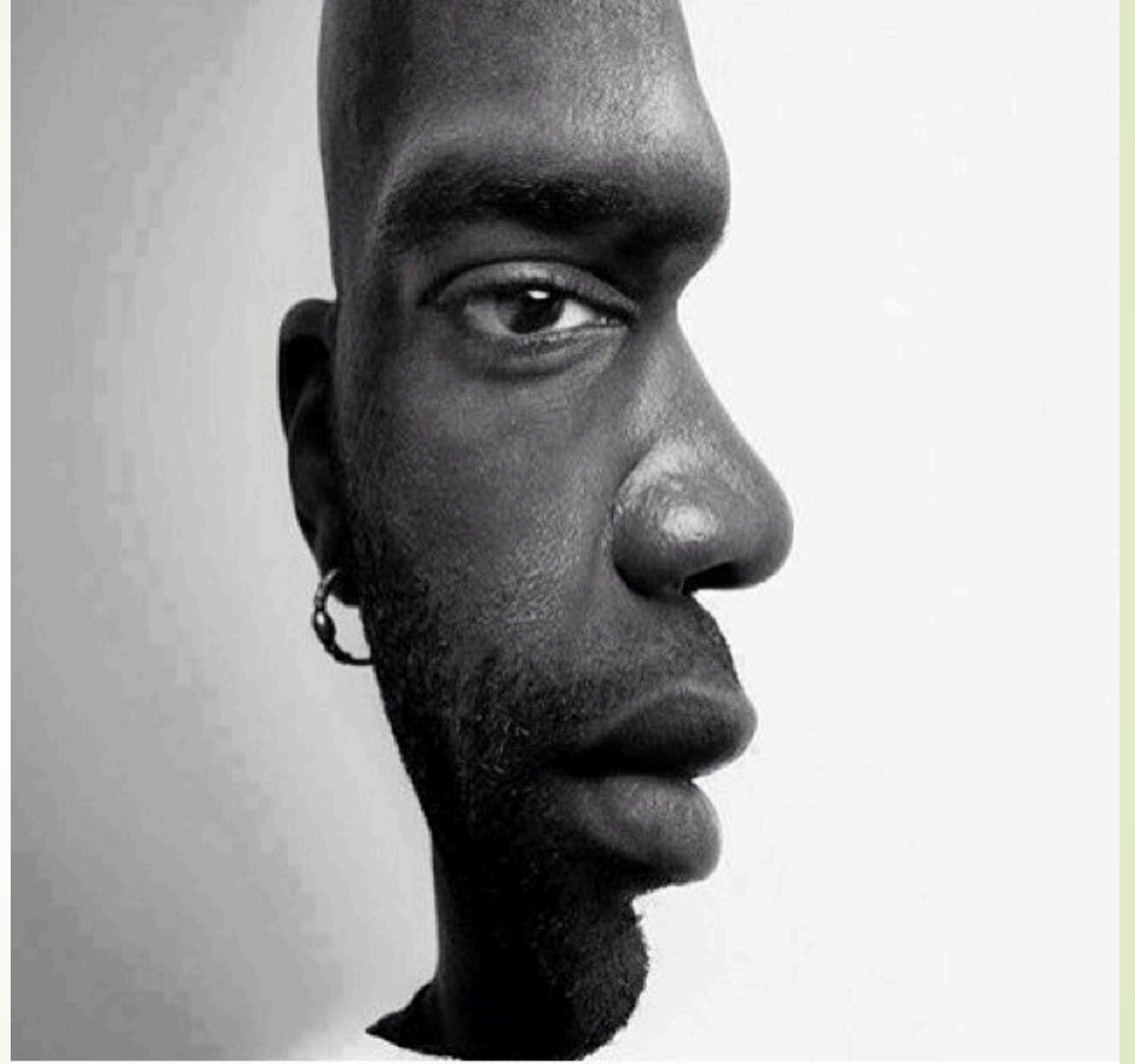
Subjectivity

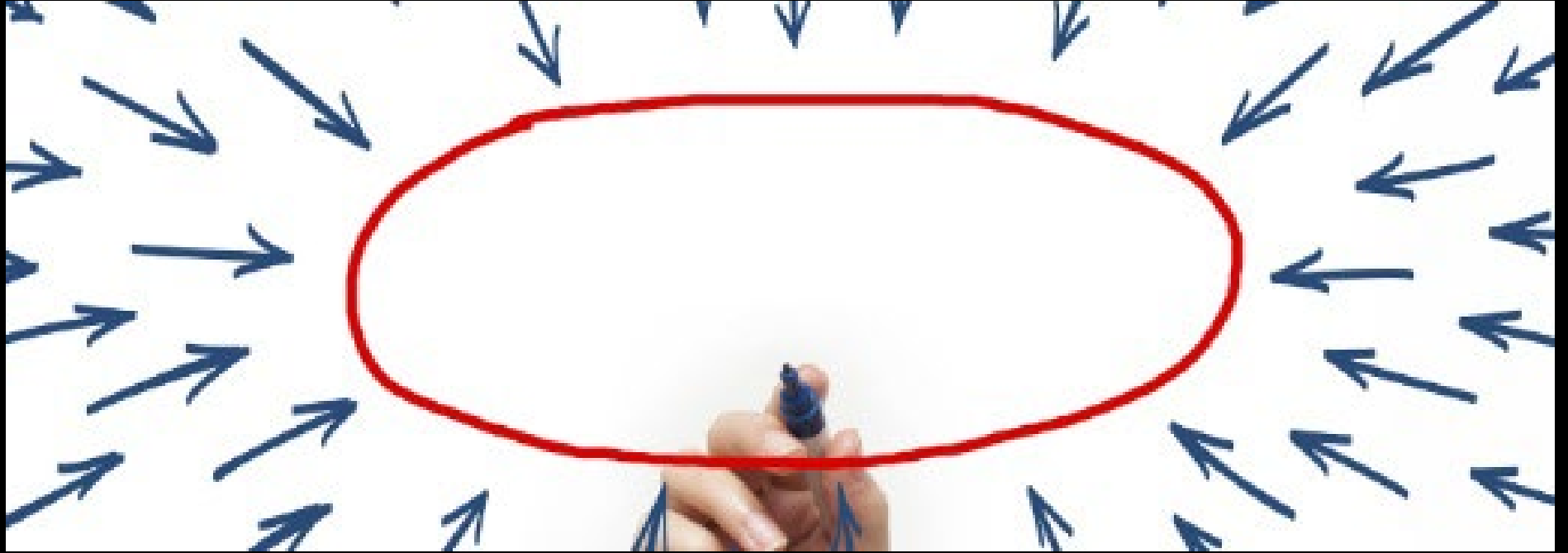
- The following all influence and inform an individual's judgments about truth or reality
 - Perceptions
 - Experiences
 - Expectations
 - Personal or cultural understanding
 - Beliefs specific to a person



Positionality

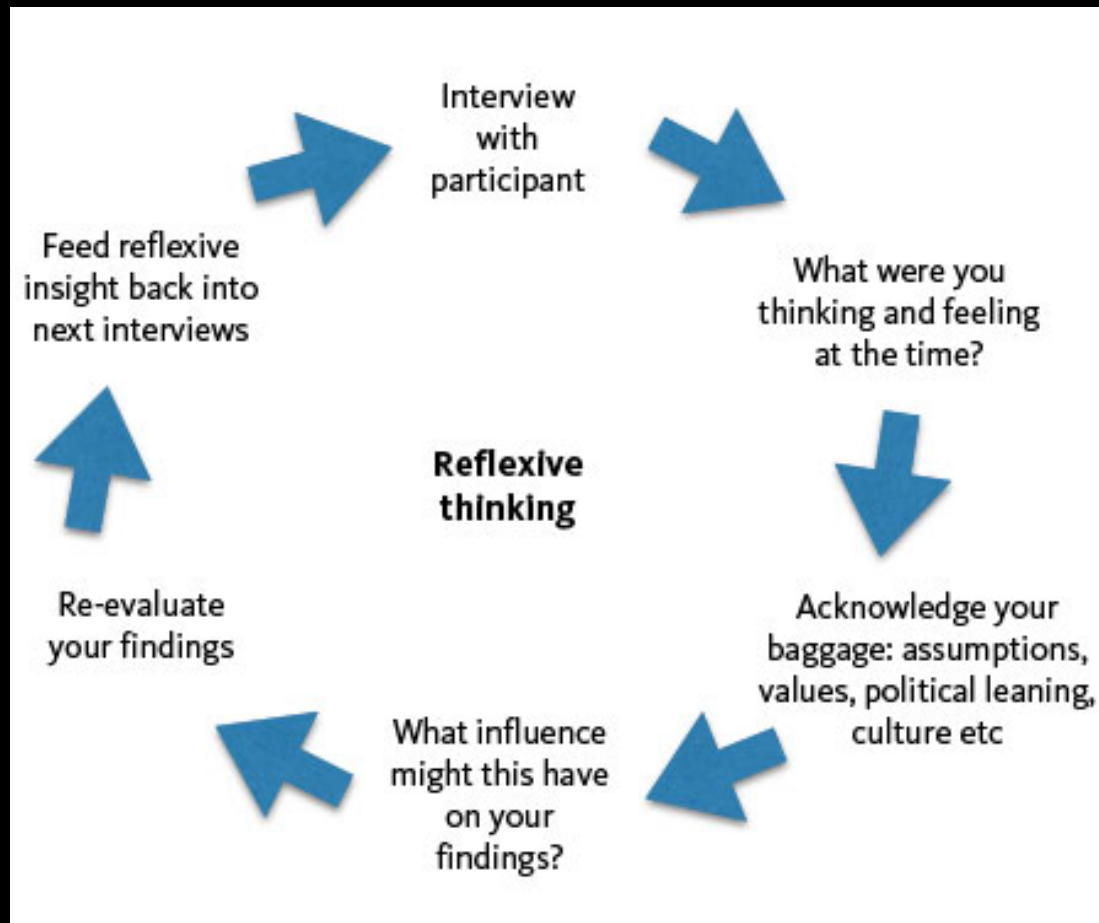
- I see what I am **disposed** to see
- When I see something it means
- that I do not see other things





The Influence of Positionality

- Research design
- Data gathering
- Analysis



Reflexivity

- Study design, data collection and analysis are to some extent a product of the researcher's positionality,
- it is crucial to research that a researcher makes the influences on subjectivity as apparent as possible



Reflexivity



- In quantitative research we do this by eliminating as many influences of the researcher as possible.
- Attention to validity and reliability usually presented in the methods section
- In qualitative research we do this by including rigorous self-reflection on the research process in the final report.
- It can be anywhere in the report
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- It can be anywhere in the report

Reflexivity: A working framework



Domain 1: Being reflexive about method



Domain 2: Being reflexive about epistemology



Domain 3: Being reflexive about discipline

Domain 1: Being Reflexive about Method



How the research should be designed or conducted in order to provide a convincing account;



Alternative interpretations and their refutation;



Role researchers play in producing results;



Choices that were made and reasons for them.

Exercise 1

- Consider your research proposal and choice of methodology :
 - What is the purpose of the methodology you are intending to use?
 - What is the expected role of the researcher?
 - What effects do you think this will have on how the research is conducted?
 - What do you think the limitations of the methodology will be?



Domain 2:
Being Reflexive
about
Epistemological
Assumptions

‘An important function of reflexive analysis is to expose the underlying assumptions on which arguments and stances are built’
(Holland, 1999)

‘become more consciously reflexive by thinking about our own thinking, by noticing and criticizing our own epistemological pre-understandings and their effects on research, and by exploring possible alternative commitments.’ (Johnson and Cassell, 2001)



Domain 2: Being Reflexive about Epistemological Assumptions



What our measures can tell us about the nature of the world and human action;



What our aims are in conducting the research;



What assumptions are implicated in the theories that drive our research and are produced as a result of our research.



Thinking about your research proposal : focus particularly on your research questions:



What insights would you like to generate from these questions?



On what basis do/will these insights contribute to 'knowledge'?



What different insights may be/have been made if a different epistemological perspective had been taken? (e.g. qualitative quantitative?)



Exercise 2



Differing Epistemological Stances: Potential Problems

- Epistemological assumptions reflect researcher commitments to particular philosophical beliefs
 - But all epistemological stances have weaknesses
 - Consequently, awareness, debate and reflection are paramount



Domain 3: Being Reflexive about the Discipline

‘Reflexive research ..

allows an examination, not just of the researcher, but also of the community..

Recognizing that we operate in complex networks that hold in place certain approaches to representation’

(Hardy, Phillips and Clegg, 2001)



Domain 3: Being Reflexive about the Discipline

- Why were we interested in these particular research questions?
- What disciplinary-based interpretive frameworks inform our accounts?
- What aspects of our disciplinary background lead us to dwell on certain aspects of the research context and not others?
- Whose voices were allowed to be heard?

Exercise 3

- Thinking about your research proposal:
 - What (or who) prompted the research and why?
 - How will access be achieved?
 - What disciplinary assumptions will be made?
 - What is the focus of the research (and what will not be considered)?
 - Who will be involved in the research and who will not be ?
 - What will be the outcomes for your participants and those not directly involved?





Critique of Reflexivity



Self-indulgence (Seale, 1999, Finlay, 2002)

Difficulties of reflection (Seale, 1999)

Paralysis (Weick, 1999)



Potential Reflexive Practices



- Constant iteration between

- personal experience of research,
- potentially relevant theory,
- underlying assumptions,
- data,
- participants' feedback

- By . . .

- Writing self-critical accounts
- Research diaries
- Action learning groups
- Multi-paradigmatic research
- Collaborative and emancipatory research

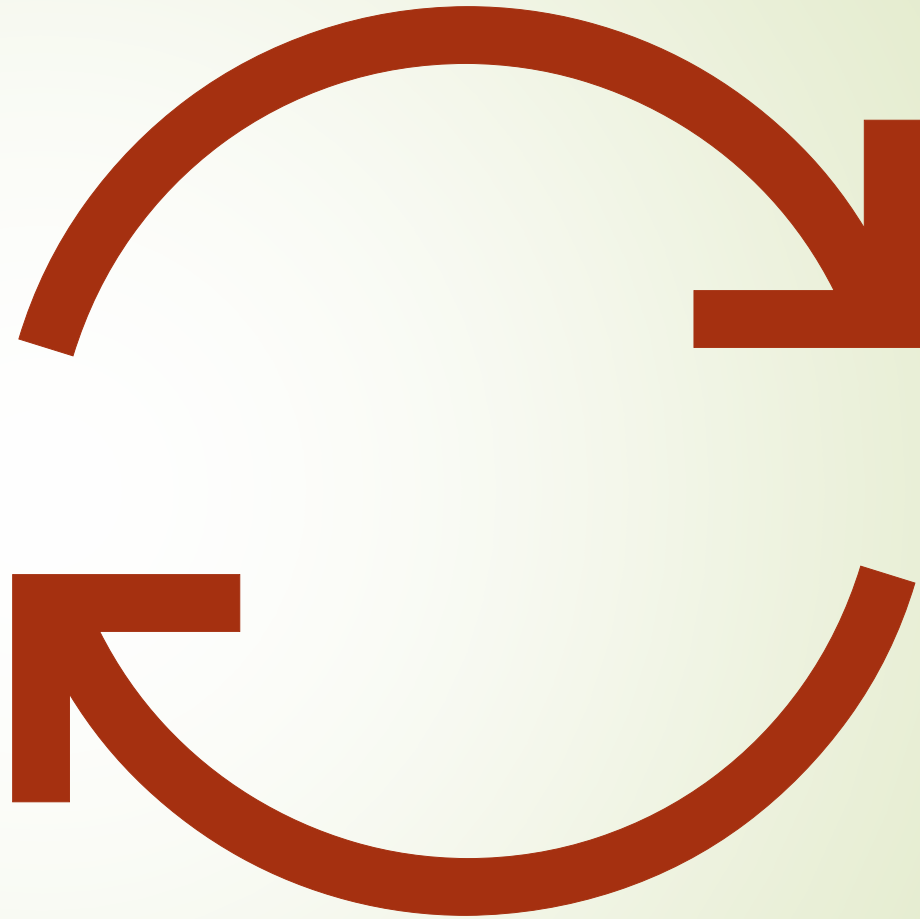
The Research Diary: A Place for Recording Reflections

- Keeping a research diary is an essential part of undertaking qualitative research should include
 - Observational Note
 - Methodically note
 - Theoretical Note
 - Analytical note



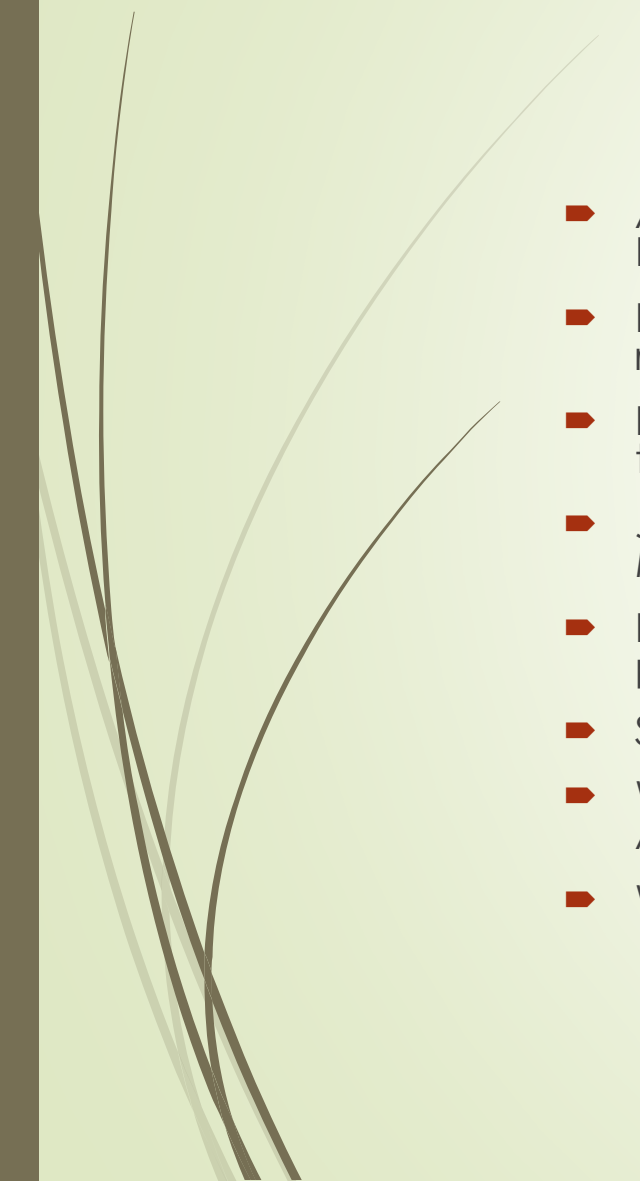
Conclusion

- This sort of
 - critical appraisal,
 - evaluation and development
- is a continual process.
- Therefore, reflexivity
 - is always a pursuit and never a destination





Further Sources



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