

Researching Contemporary Cosmologies

Seminar 7: Grounded Theory & Case Study Research

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Grounded Theory



Origins of Grounded Theory

Developed by American sociologists **Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss** in the mid-60s out of their qualitative research work on hospital patients who were dying – they created a new approach to working with qualitative data.

Their book *Awareness of Dying* (1965) showcased this new method. It later became known as Grounded Theory. Introduced in their 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

Developed at a time when qualitative methodologies were largely dismissed as ‘unscientific’ and being used largely to confirm existing opinions or as a precursor to more ‘rigorous’ quantitative research. Glaser and Strauss developed a rigorous methodology of their own which led it to be widely accepted within the academy.

Glaser and Strauss challenged the idea that qualitative research is only impressionistic and can give rise only to descriptive case studies and not to theories.

Grounded Theory eventually came to be seen as the only real way to conduct qualitative research – a view which has been critiqued by other qualitative researchers and which is now changing.



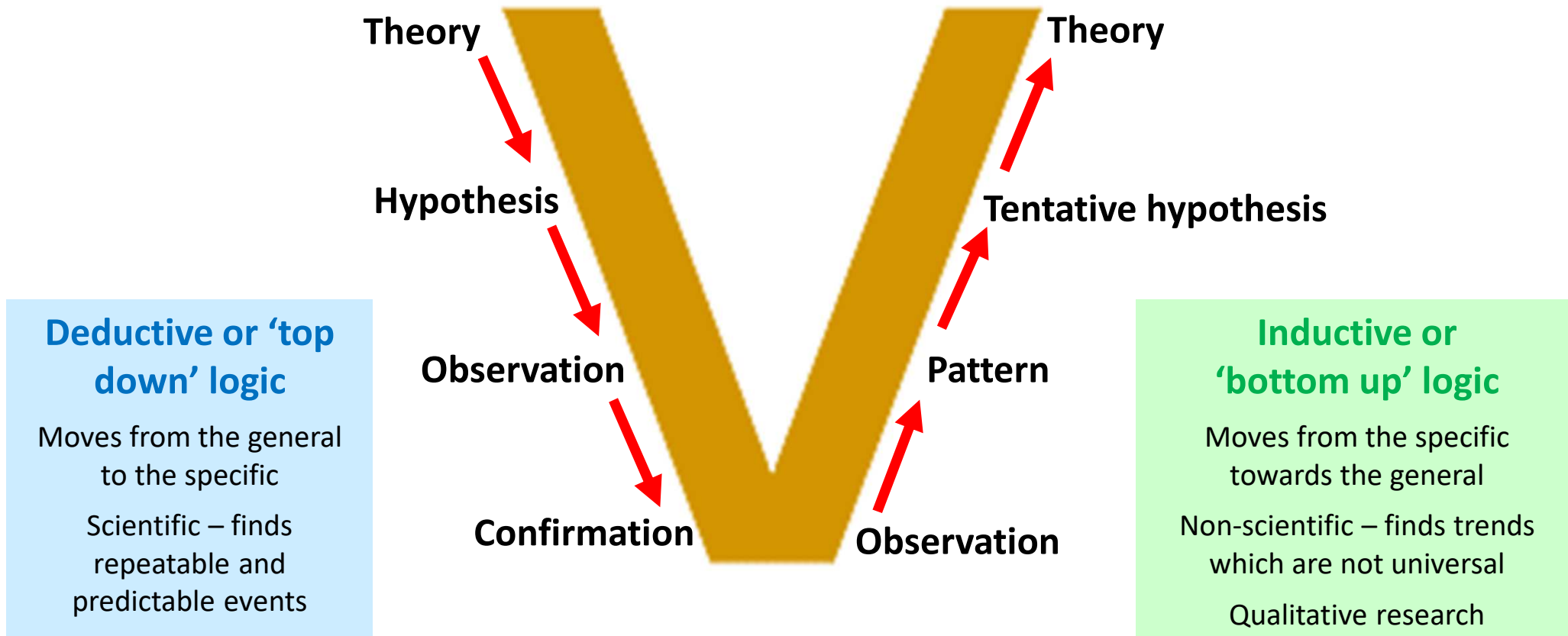
Barney Glaser



Anselm Strauss

Grounded theory is inductive

Theories are developed inductively from a body of data



N.B. Grounded Theory (and other qualitative methods) also utilize deductive approaches. E.g. some themes which arise in the research may emerge directly from the conceptual framework of the research. Also, there will usually be pre-existing theory in the field.

- HHB (2020), p. 210.

Grounded Theory is emergent

Grounded Theory is different from other qualitative and quantitative research in that it is explicitly **emergent**.

It does not test a hypothesis. Instead, it takes the raw data of a research situation and draws out of that a theory which will account for that data – its aim is to discover the theory implicit in the data.

Theories that emerge are thus ‘grounded’ or rooted in observation – hence the name.

Seeks to explain people’s actions and experiences. Outcome of research is neither ‘right’ nor ‘wrong’. Goal is to gain understanding of people and their motivations, feelings and reactions. (Highly phenomenological). Interested in emic perspective of participants.

Data analysis is a circular process, rather than a linear one – tasks may be repeated, overlapped, or conducted simultaneously. Continual comparison of the data.

Seeks to go beyond description – purpose is to develop an explanatory framework or theory out of the data.

- E.g. See Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).
- See also HHB (2020), chapters 10 and 11.

GT stages

a) **Collecting** of the raw qualitative data using any mode of research. **Data collection, note-taking, coding and making memos** all occur simultaneously from the beginning – they are ongoing and overlapping. Data collection is not separate from analysis – no set order.

(In 'deep GT', literature is not accessed at the beginning, only as it becomes relevant – in case it drives the gathering and observation of the raw data. Not recommended for you as MA students!).

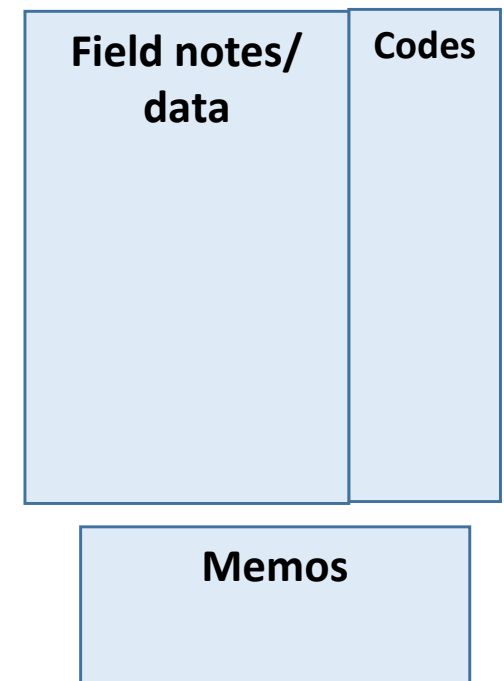
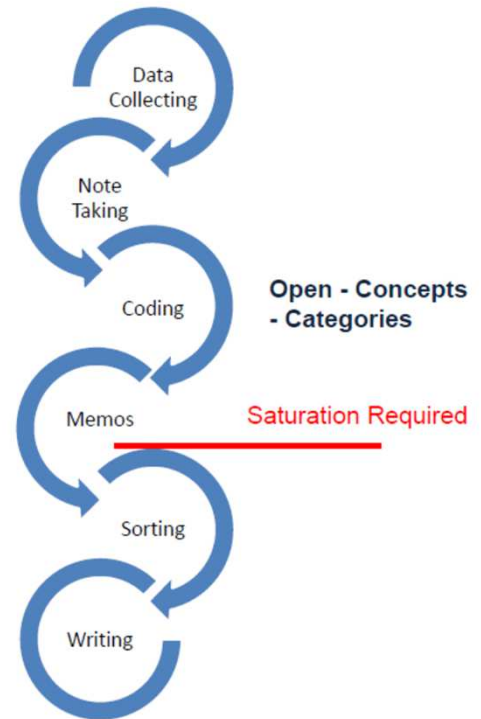
b) **Coding** – examining the raw data in great detail until patterns begin to form.

c) **Memoing** – researcher's notes. Examining the codes and concepts that emerge; freeform writing of speculative notes and ideas about what is emerging from the data.

d) **Saturation of data.** Achieved when no new ideas are emerging from the data. Triangulation of the data through seeking out other sources of information, such as publications or additional interviews.

e) **Sorting** the memos into an outline of an emerging theory. Sorting happens when all categories have reached saturation. **Application** of the theory back into the raw data to test for rigour and application of that theory into new cases.

e) **Writing up.** The relevant literature is woven in, to put the theory into a scholarly context.



Codes, Concepts and Categories

First, **codes** are identified – these are then grouped into **concepts**, which are then themselves grouped into **categories**. Continual comparison of the data allows these patterns to emerge – from which a theory might then be derived.

Stages	Process/purpose
Codes	Similarities in the data which the researcher tags with a code. The researcher is looking for consistent themes across the data. Careful analysis of the data line by line.
Concepts	A collection of codes which all reflect a similar content. They emerge from continual analysis of the data.
Categories	Broad groups of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory.
Theory	An explanation (or collection of explanations) that reflect what has been found in the data.

Coding can be done very simply in a Word document, by using headers or 'tags' in front of paragraphs. These tags can then be searched for and cut-and-pasted to group them together.

Or you can use **CAQDAS** software – computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. (e.g. Nivo; QDA Miner Lite (free); Quirkos (offers significant discount for students)).

Grounded Theory – weaknesses

Conclusions are reached by inductive arguments. Thus, like any qualitative methodology, GT is vulnerable to criticism because:

- a) It is highly responsive to the data.
- b) Researcher has to pay close attention to disconfirming evidence and be able to explain it.

Glaser himself pointed out that the researcher must suspend their existing beliefs and preconceptions in order that the concepts which emerge from the data can be trusted.

To avoid merely descriptive interpretations but instead to see patterns emerging, Glaser said GT researcher must employ constant comparison.

‘Deep GT’ can be rigid in its process – e.g. optimal freedom comes from having no pre-research literature review and no taping of interviews. ***For the MA however, you need to begin with a literature review and you need to tape your interviews!***

JSTOR paper that outlines problems with Grounded Theory:

Gary Thomas and David James. ‘Reinventing Grounded Theory: Some Questions About Theory, Ground and Discovery.’ *British Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 6 (2006), pp. 767-795.

References

Books

Glaser, B.G & A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967).

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin, eds., *Grounded Theory in Practice* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

Strauss, A. & J. Corbin, J., *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

Charmaz

JSTOR papers

Harry, Beth, Keith M. Sturges, and Janette K. Klingner. 'Mapping the Process: An Exemplar of Process and Challenge in Grounded Theory Analysis.' *Educational Researcher* 34, no. 2 (2005), pp. 3-13.

LaRossa, Ralph. 'Grounded Theory Methods and Qualitative Family Research.' *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 4 (2005), pp. 837-857.

Thomas, Gary, and David James. 'Reinventing Grounded Theory: Some Questions about Theory, Ground and Discovery.' *British Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 6 (2006), pp. 767-795.

Case Studies



Why use case studies?



Some fields have used case study method extensively, notably education and social science.

Case studies are useful and relevant where in-depth information is needed.

They focus on just one individual case (one person, one group) and they privilege personal experience, felt response and narrative.

‘The truth is rarely pure and never simple.’

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I, Scene I

Definition

‘...the case study approach can be particularly appropriate for individual researchers because **it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth.**’

Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project* (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press, 2010), p.8)

‘Case study researchers use the method of specimens as their primary method **to come to know extensively and intensively about the single case...the abiding interest is in the particular case...seeking to understand what the specimen is, how the specimen works.**’

Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (London: Sage, 1995), pp.36-37



Definition

→ An in-depth study of an individual or group of individuals – or an event or situation

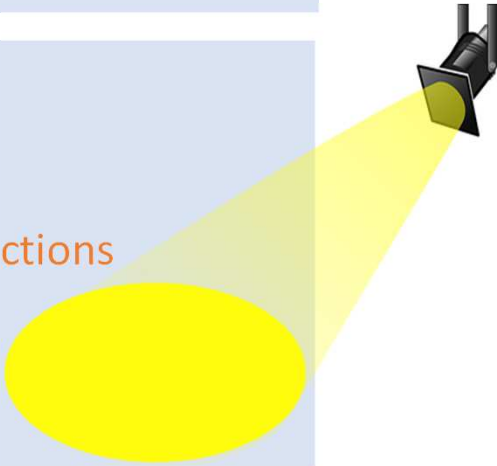
*'1. A case study is an **empirical** enquiry that*

- investigates **a contemporary phenomenon in depth** and within its **real-life context**, especially when*
- the **boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident***

2. The case study enquiry

- relies on **multiple sources of evidence**, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion*
- Benefits from the **prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.***

Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th ed. (London: Sage, 2009), p.18

- Information gained through observation or experience
 - What's happening here and now
 - Depth and detail
 - 'Real life' – interested in the subject's personal experiences/beliefs/reactions
 - Subject of study cannot be abstracted from its context
 - Multiple sources of data
 - Guided by theoretical propositions (although may contradict them...)
- 

Qualitative...



Case studies can use quantitative elements but are typically qualitative in nature – often focused on narrative description of experiences or behaviours:

Stake: ‘In quantitative studies, the research question seeks out a relationship between a small number of variables...**In qualitative studies, research questions typically orient to cases or phenomena,** seeking patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships.’ (Stake 1995, p.41)

Yin (2009): case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining.

...and ideographic



Bryman

- The quantitative mode is broadly nomothetic (seeks to establish general law-like findings which can be deemed to hold irrespective of time and place)
- The qualitative mode is broadly ideographic (locates its findings in specific time-periods and locales)

‘...the qualitative researcher frequently conducts research in a specific milieu (a case study) whose representativeness is unknown and probably unknowable, so that the generalizability of such findings is also unknown.’

Bryman 2001, p.100

‘Indeed, some writers treat ‘qualitative research’ and ‘case study research’ as more or less synonymous terms (e.g. Rist, 1984, p. 160).’

Bryman 2001, p.87.

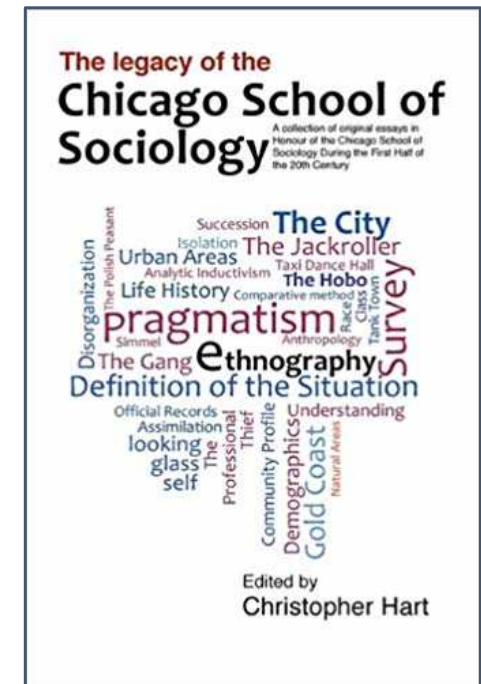
Nomothetic and idiographic: Used by 19th century German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband to describe two approaches to knowledge:

Nomothetic: literally ‘proposition of the law’

Ideographic: ‘ideis’ = own, private: description of a singular case. (Lack of reference to a comparison)

Overview of history

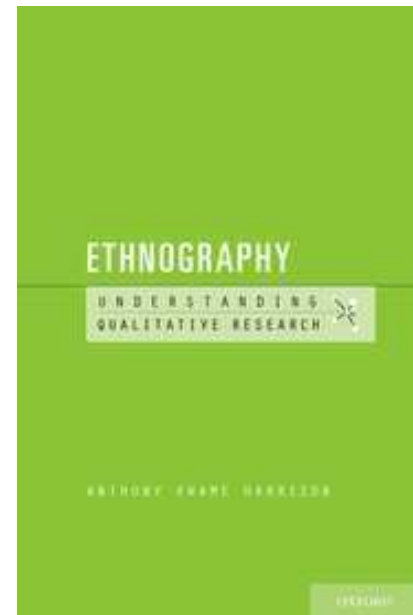
- Earliest use of case study method was in Europe (particularly France) – growing out of law and medicine, where the individual case can set a precedent for action in future cases; teaching came to be based on case studies.
- Development in USA – closely associated with University of Chicago Dept of Sociology: pre-eminent in the field **ca.1900-1935** and source of much early literature. Arose from high level of immigration to Chicago – provided rich subject matter for study ([Hamel et al, 1993](#)) – **see next slide.**
- Early problems encountered – a movement grew within sociology to make it more scientific, embracing quantitative methods; rejection of case study methodology. Columbia University (scientific method) challenged the Chicago school (case study method) for primacy in research design. Columbia won the argument → decline in use of case study method, **1930-1960**, and growth of quantitative method.
- Hamel ([Hamel et al., 1993](#)) has rejected the criticism that case study was poorly founded – said rather that sociology itself was immature as a discipline and this was the root of the methodological conflict of the 1930s.



Overview of history: the Chicago School

‘In 1892, a newly formed sociology department (the first in the United States), as part of the newly established University of Chicago (founded in 1890), found itself situated in a young and volatile urban milieu featuring a diverse influx of immigrants (including Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles, Scandinavians, Jews, Czechs, Lithuanians, Croats, and African Americans from the U.S. South), as well as itinerant travelers. The rapidly industrializing city was ripe with ethnic tensions, class conflicts, poverty, political corruption, and everyday crime. By conceiving of urban life as an assemblage of “**natural areas**” or “**little communities**,” researchers affiliated with the University of Chicago imagined their city as a social laboratory through which to examine dynamics associated with assimilation, acculturation, amalgamation, and various forms of civic otherness.’
(Harrison, p.18)

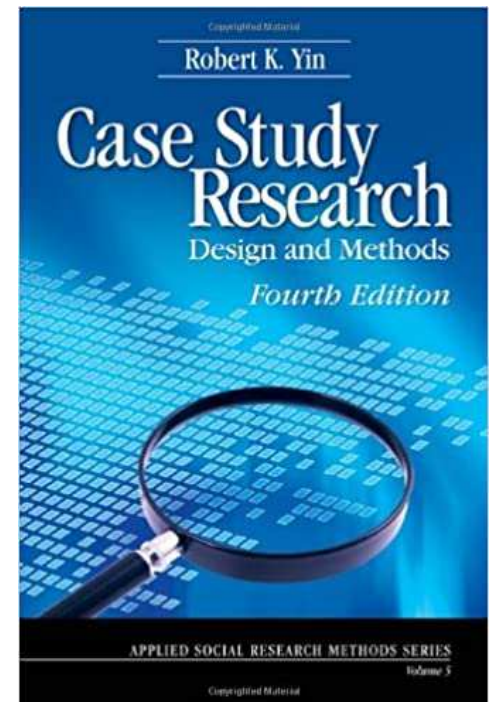
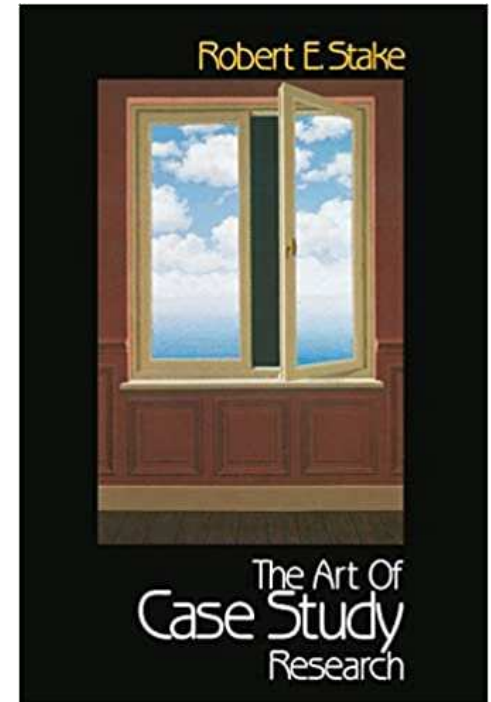
Anthony Kwame Harrison (Gloria D. Smith Professor of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech, USA) – ***Ethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research (2018)***
[Available as an eBook in the TSD Online Library]



- Harrison ‘situates ethnography within its original, anthropological context and highlights key anthropological principles that were important to its initial professionalization and subsequent evolution’ (from the publicity material)

Overview of history

- **From 1960s:** Researchers began to identify the limitations of quantitative methods, leading to renewed interest in case study methodology.
- [Strauss and Glaser \(1967\)](#) developed the concept of 'grounded theory' – this, along with some well-regarded studies, accelerated a renewed use of case study.
- [Giddens](#) considered case methodology 'microscopic' because it lacked a sufficient number of cases. [Hamel](#) countered that case study method has its own intrinsic merits. A single case study is intrinsically valuable because it can establish parameters which can then be applied to further research. (see [Hamel et al., 1993](#)).
- [Hamel et al., 1993](#): finding 'a concentration of the global in the local' – i.e. a localised case study can provide an experimental prototype on which to found wider studies.
- [Yin \(1989a\)](#): case study method is valid if it is properly constructed – results from one case can then be applied to other situations.



Features of case study research

- **Narrow focus:** an in-depth study of one individual, one group, one location, one school, one event etc
- Provides a **high level of detail** on **one particular** person, group or situation
- Seeks **depth** of understanding
- Focuses on **particularisation** rather than generalisation
- Focuses on the **experiential** – allowing what arises to speak for itself
- Focuses on **open exploration** – not testing a pre-conceived hypothesis
- Emphasis on **personal/subjective** description and narrative ('thick description' – Clifford Geertz)
- Acknowledges **context** – situated, local
- Uses **multiple methods of data gathering** – a combination of objective data (objective description of context, behaviour, etc) and subjective data (feelings, beliefs, impressions, interpretations) to provide a rich and in-depth understanding



Bell 2010, p.8-9

‘Case studies may be carried out to follow up and to put flesh on the bones of a survey. They can also precede a survey and be used as a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation, **but the majority are carried out as free-standing exercises**. Researchers identify an ‘instance’, which could be the introduction of a new way of working, the way an organization adapts to a new role, or any innovation or stage of development in an institution.’...

‘All organizations and individuals have their common and their unique features. Case study researchers aim to identify such features, to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work, to show how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organization functions. These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but could be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organizations.’

Types of case study

- **Intrinsic** – represent only themselves. The case is studied because it is interesting in its own right. Researcher wants to know about that person or group in particular rather than about a more general phenomenon.
- **Instrumental** – study of someone/group which might exemplify a more general phenomenon. The phenomenon is chosen – e.g. belief in astrology – and then a case is chosen to see how that phenomenon exists within one chosen case.

See Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p.73.

Purpose of study

- **Exploratory** – a short, condensed study to gather initial data that can be used to formulate a research question for a larger study. It does not aim at detailed data from which any conclusions can be drawn
- **Illustrative** – to illustrate a situation or event. Purpose is to create greater familiarity with the subject or topic in question and to acquaint people with the features, language and terminology associated with it
- **Critical Instance** – to investigate situations of unique interest or to challenge a generalised belief about something. These studies do not create new generalisations but may serve to challenge previously-held beliefs or assertions
- **Cumulative** – brings together information from several events or situations, combining it so that it allows for greater generalisation and conclusions. Saves time and money by not creating a new study each time

What kinds of subject matter?

- **An individual** – understanding the motivations/beliefs/experiences of one particular person/exponent/practitioner
- **A family**
- **A particular group** – e.g. the local astronomy club
- **A community** – e.g. a village, a religious community
- **An organisation** – e.g. an astrological school: how is it run, what is its ethos
- **A decision** – e.g. the impact of legislation or the founding or closure of a local group: why was the decision taken, how was it implemented, what was the outcome etc
- **An event** – e.g. participants in a local May Day or Summer Solstice celebration
- **A location** – the study of one particular place and the way people use/interact with it



Case study: example

'God Meets Gaia In Austin, Texas: A Case Study Of Environmentalism As Implicit Religion'

John P. Bartkowski & W. Scott Swearingen (University of Texas, Austin)

Review of Religious Research, Vol. 38, No. 4 (June 1997), pp. 308- 324
(available on JSTOR)

ABSTRACT:

Most research on the relationship between religion and environmentalism has been concerned with the effects of formal religious participation on individual ecological attitudes. This case study examines another fascinating aspect of the religion-ecology connection by revealing the implicitly religious character of grassroots environmentalism. Drawing on insights from Mircea Eliade's theory of sacred space, we call attention to a series of striking similarities between classical modes of religious experience on the one hand, and the **sacralization of a prized natural resource located in Austin, Texas** on the other. Using interview data collected from forty-five environmentalists and ecologically-minded individuals in Austin, we argue that this city's most prominent natural resource (**Barton Springs**) is construed by these individuals in terms that can be interpreted as (1) nodal space that provides individuals with access to ultimate reality, (2) **integrative space which binds them to the local Austin community**, and (3) **demarcative space that furnishes Austin with a distinctive character in opposition to surrounding locales**. We conclude by offering suggestions for future research and by delineating the implications of our findings.

Sark in the Dark:

WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY ON THE DARK SKY
ISLAND OF SARK

by Ada Blair



 SOPHIA CENTRE MASTER MONOGRAPHS

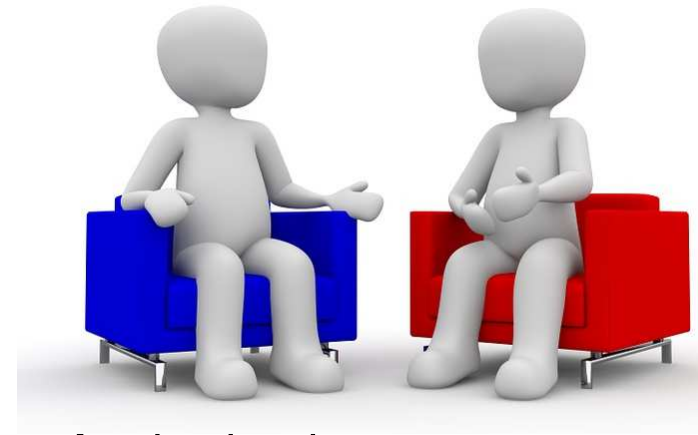
Sark in the Dark: Ada Blair

‘Studies of the beneficial and transformative qualities of encounters with nature typically focus on ‘green’ or grounded nature. In *Sark in the Dark*, Ada Blair shifts this focus upwards to a refreshing encounter with the richness of the dark night sky. In this book, she documents the research she conducted while at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David into the culture and history of the world’s first designated Dark Sky Island. **Through a series of interviews with Sark residents, as well as poignant self-reflections,** Blair explores the importance of the dark sky on human wellbeing and community.’

Ada Blair, *Sark in the Dark: Wellbeing and Community on the Dark Sky Island of Sark* (Sophia Centre Master Monographs, 2016)

<https://sophiacentrepress.com/publication/sark-in-the-dark/>

Narrative elements



- Case study research is closely related to **narrative research** – both take a phenomenological approach. There are often narrative elements in case studies.
- In narrative research people describe their experiences as a **personal story**. The rich narrative detail allows insight into complex processes in a way which is not possible with closed questioning or rating scales.
- Narrative research captures the **voice of the participant** – the researcher then offers a retelling or re-storying of the material. The challenge is to capture the key elements of the stories, identify the themes, and convey the material to the reader in a way which provides insight and authentically reflects the source.
- A case study is often written in a **narrative style** and can incorporate speculation ([cf. Jenny Blain's paper on Seidr](#)).
- **Many narrative studies are completed with a single participant** (case study), although these may also be combined with other qualitative and quantitative methods in a hybrid design.



Case study example

‘Gender, religion, and the experience of suffering: a case study’

Helen K. Black (Arcadia University, Glenside, PA, USA)

Journal of Religion and Health, 2013 Dec; 52(4): pp. 1108-19.

ABSTRACT:

This article explores how gender and religious belief come together in **an elderly woman's experience of suffering**. It is based on qualitative research that explored experiences of suffering in a group of community-dwelling elders (80+) living in a North American city. **We use the case study method** to introduce themes that **show suffering's uniqueness to the individual whose narrative we report**, as well as similarity to themes that emerged in other participants' narratives. In this case, **an elderly woman's gender and religious identities merge in her stories of suffering, which include the memory** of a childhood disability and an incident of clergy abuse that occurred 70 years previously. A key finding in this paper is that key themes in her story of suffering, which are disablement and clergy abuse, resonate to the general themes of suffering found in our study, which are (1) threats to personal identity; (2) loss of a valued item, quality, or relationship; and (3) a lack of control over self or the circumstances of life.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22033671>

What a case study doesn't do

- Not seeking an overall 'truth'
- Doesn't set out to prove a hypothesis or reach a conclusion
- Doesn't determine cause and effect or allow for prediction of future patterns
- **Doesn't allow the researcher to make generalisations** which will apply to other individuals or groups (although research outcomes can be a platform for further studies and several case studies together might make generalisation more feasible)

Generality

'This preoccupation with establishing generality can probably be attributed to the quantitative researcher's tendency to mimic the methods and style of the natural scientist. By verifying generality, the quantitative researcher draws nearer to the law-like findings of the sciences. Perhaps for this reason, qualitative research, which is frequently based on the study of one or two single cases, is often disparaged by researchers in the quantitative tradition, for the cases may be unrepresentative and therefore of unknown generality. How does one know whether a slum in Boston (Whyte, 1943) is representative of all slums in the USA, and, if one is unsure, how can the fruits of such research be generalized beyond the confines of Boston?'

(Bryman 2001, p.35)

Generalisation vs. Particularisation

‘Quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as “error”, outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. Particularization is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case.’

(Stake 1995, p.39)

Solutions to problems of (non-) generalisation

'First, the qualitative researcher may study more than one case. For example, Skolnick (1966) conducted the bulk of his participant observation of police officers in one US city, Westville. In addition, he writes: 'For the sake of broad comparison, two weeks were also spent in Eastville, a city of comparable size, nonwhite population, industry and commerce' (p. 23). This extra case allowed Skolnick to place his observations in Westville in perspective and to develop a number of contrasts between the two forces, such as their different ways of using informers (p. 136). Lupton (1963) was a participant observer in two firms in order to pursue his research on output regulation among manual workers. Interestingly, he chose a second case because his initial firm, much to his surprise, did not exhibit output regulation to any marked degree. **His serendipitous strategy of comparing two case studies enabled him to extract numerous suggestions about the factors which are likely to promote output regulation...**

A second possible approach to the case study generalization problem is through the examination of a number of cases by more than one researcher, whereby the overall investigation assumes the framework of 'team research', such as that found in much quantitative research...

A third approach to the problem of case study generalization is to seek a case which is 'typical' of a certain cluster of characteristics (Woods, 1979, p. 268); other researchers can then examine comparable cases which belong to other clusters of characteristics. ... generalizations may be extracted as evidence is accumulated (Kennedy, 1979). **A corollary of this course is the 'deviant' case, which is of interest because it is known to differ on an important characteristic from other like cases.'**

(Bryman 2001, pp.88-89)

'A Niche Degree: a Case Study of an MA (in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology)'. *DISKUS, Teaching and Learning*.

Authors: Bernadette Brady UWTSD and Alie Bird UWTSD

Abstract

This paper introduces a case study of The Sophia Centre's MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UK. Initiated in 2002 as a campus-based degree with fifteen students, the MA has been taught online since 2008; its current student body numbers seventy-five. The strategies adopted in moving to online delivery are identified and evaluated. It is observed that these were influenced by an entrepreneurial philosophy imported from the private sector. While at first glance the differences between a campus-based and an online degree seem obvious, on closer inspection these differences become blurred. Key factors in implementing successful online course delivery are recognised as being the construction of a virtual campus to mirror the brick-built campus in functional terms to facilitate learning and encourage students and their tutors to establish online identities and build community. The particular importance of the curriculum is noted. Criteria attributed by different commentators to so-called niche degrees are considered. It is concluded that the MA can be described as a niche degree by virtue of the facts that its student body is diverse in age; may or may not use the degree for leveraging their careers; that its specialised curriculum links it with a special interest group which is geographically diverse and hence exclusively accessible online. Contrary to some criticism of an entrepreneurial influence on higher education, it is concluded that this style of an online niche degree harks back to a medieval academic model.

- <http://jbasr.com/basr/diskus/diskus14/bradyandbird.pdf>

The Researcher

As with any qualitative research, there is a personal (rather than impersonal) role for the researcher, who benefits from being:

- Approachable and personable
- A good networker – building contacts
- A good listener – questions are probing but sensitively framed
- Ethical, trustworthy
- Open-minded – dealing with people not numbers
- Interested in, and respectful of, the people they are studying
- Insider elements – has awareness of, or respect for, the language, rituals, beliefs which define the group or situation they are studying
- Outsider elements – objectivity and powers of observation
- ‘Researcher near’ – may be embedded or have regular and close contact with the individual or community



Brink versus Blain...?



Verstehen versus understanding

Course notes, Week 5: Nick Campion – THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER DEBATE

‘The German sociologist’s Max Weber’s concept of **Verstehen** is useful; it can be translated as to understand, but also,

1. To perceive and comprehend the nature and significance of, to know.
2. To know thoroughly by close contact with or by long experience of the phenomenon.
3. To grasp or comprehend the meaning intended or expressed by another.
4. To know and be empathetic toward.

Weber used the term to refer to the social scientist's attempt to understand both the **intention** and the **context** of human action.’

‘...understanding can be viewed from two different perspectives: from that of the researcher using their own frame of reference on the issues, which is referred to as **understanding**, and from those of the study population by identifying their perspectives on the research issues, which is referred to as **Verstehen**.’

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: Sage, 2015) p.17.

Methodology and Data Collection

Although some studies may use just one method of data collection, typically a broad mix of methods is employed – ‘multi-modal’. Allows for multiple perspectives on the subject matter, leading to depth of understanding.

- Interviews and personal testimony
- Questionnaires
- Observation and field study – naturalistic, observing people in situ
- Personal documents – diaries, letters, photographs
- Official documents and archival records – e.g. studying an astrological school: syllabus, course notes, website pages
- Physical artefacts (e.g. ritual objects, symbolic objects)
- Quantitative study – how many people use the facility, how many of the group do a certain thing

‘Though observation and interviews are most frequently used, no method is excluded.’

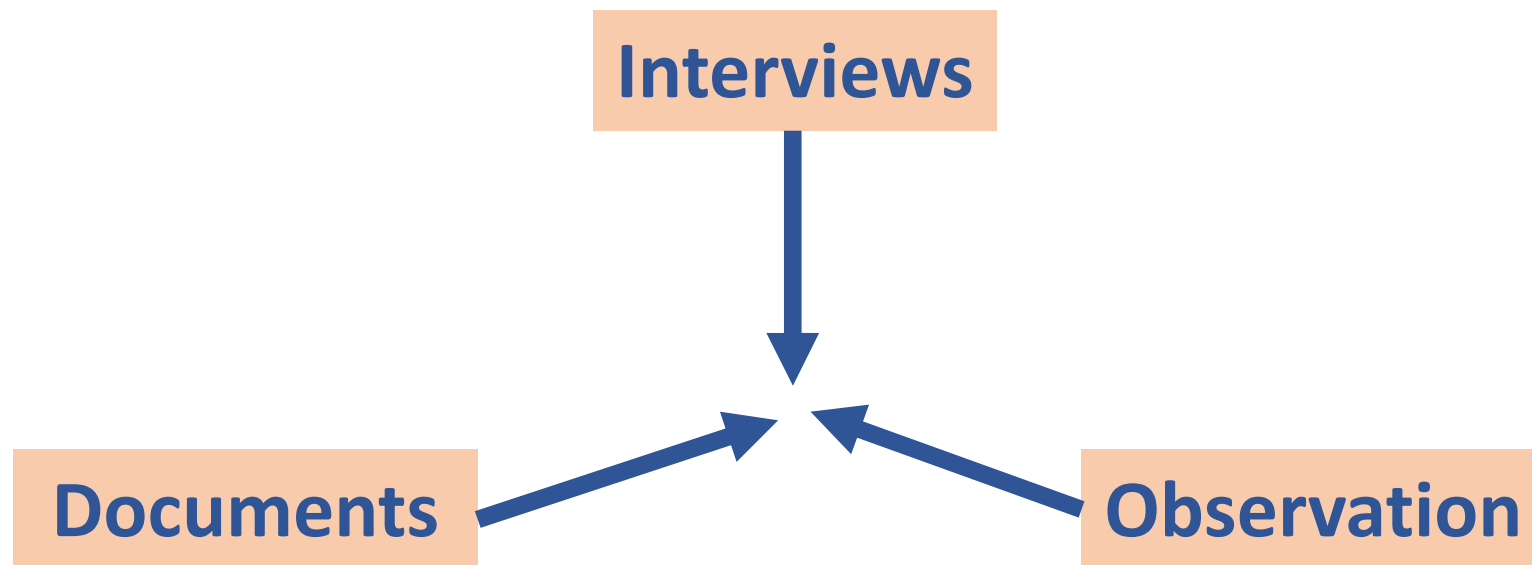
Bell 2010, p.8

Triangulation



Use of more than one method to collect data. Using a variety of methods increases the richness and validity of the research, not necessarily through cross-validation but rather to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon.

‘...converging lines of enquiry’ (Yin 2009, p.115)



Data analysis

Typically analysed either holistically or through coding procedures:

- **Holistically** – reviewing all the data as a whole and drawing conclusions based on the totality of the data. Appropriate when the subject of study is general or elusive, or when the study is for the purpose of providing an overview
- **Coding** – searching the data to identify specific actions or characteristics. Each action is assigned a code that allows the data to be analysed (statistical/quantitative methods can be applied)



Advantages

- **Flexibility** – allows the researcher to explore with an open mind and make discoveries as the research progresses
- **Can give new insight** into a particular phenomenon or experience
- **Privileges in-depth content** and allows the researcher to enter deeply into the material, using a rich variety of data sources to gain a more complete picture
- **The data is collected in a natural setting** and is therefore situated, in context – how does a person or group act in the specific setting
- **Can shed new light on established theory** – e.g. one case study can serve to contradict an established theory
- **Can lead to the creation of new hypotheses** that can be tested later. The results often provide a platform for further research and exploration

Disadvantages

- **The data gathered only applies to a single situation** – it is unique and cannot be replicated. The research is in-depth and localised – difficult to conduct this type of research on a large scale
- **Individuals may be atypical** – your subject of study may not be representative of other individuals or groups. Difficulty with generalising out
- **May be difficult to replicate findings** or reliably apply them to other situations
- **‘Expectancy effects’** – i.e. researcher bias. The researcher is close to the subject of study and needs to be aware of subjectivity and danger of misrepresenting participants’ descriptions (*‘...the possibility of selective reporting and the resulting dangers of distortion.’* (Bell 2010, p.10). Care needs to be taken not to seek out only confirmatory evidence or engage in biased/partial reading of data and accounts. E.g. see some of Freud’s case studies (Little Hans, Anna O., etc)

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