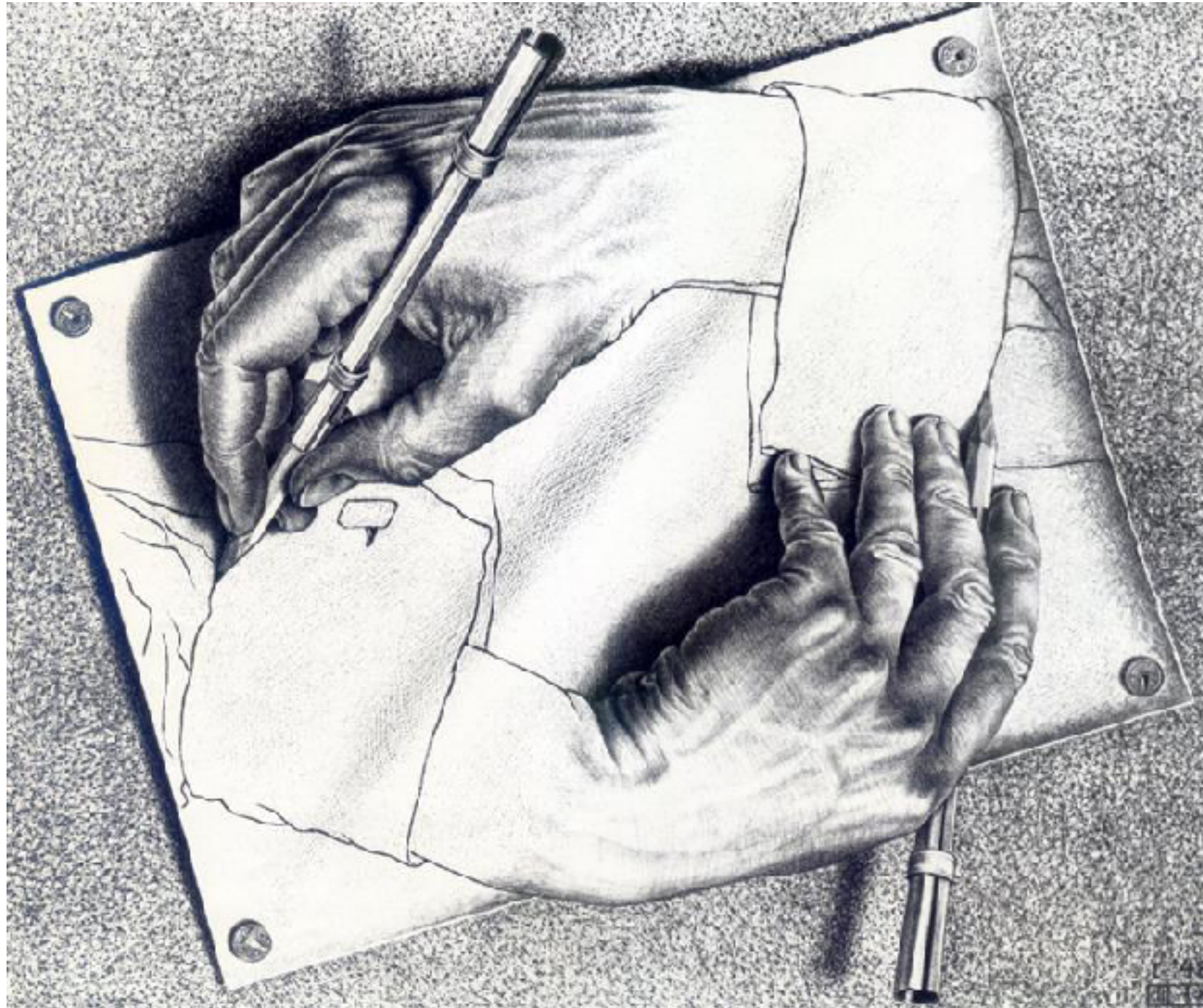


Researching Contemporary Cosmologies: Designing a Qualitative Research Project



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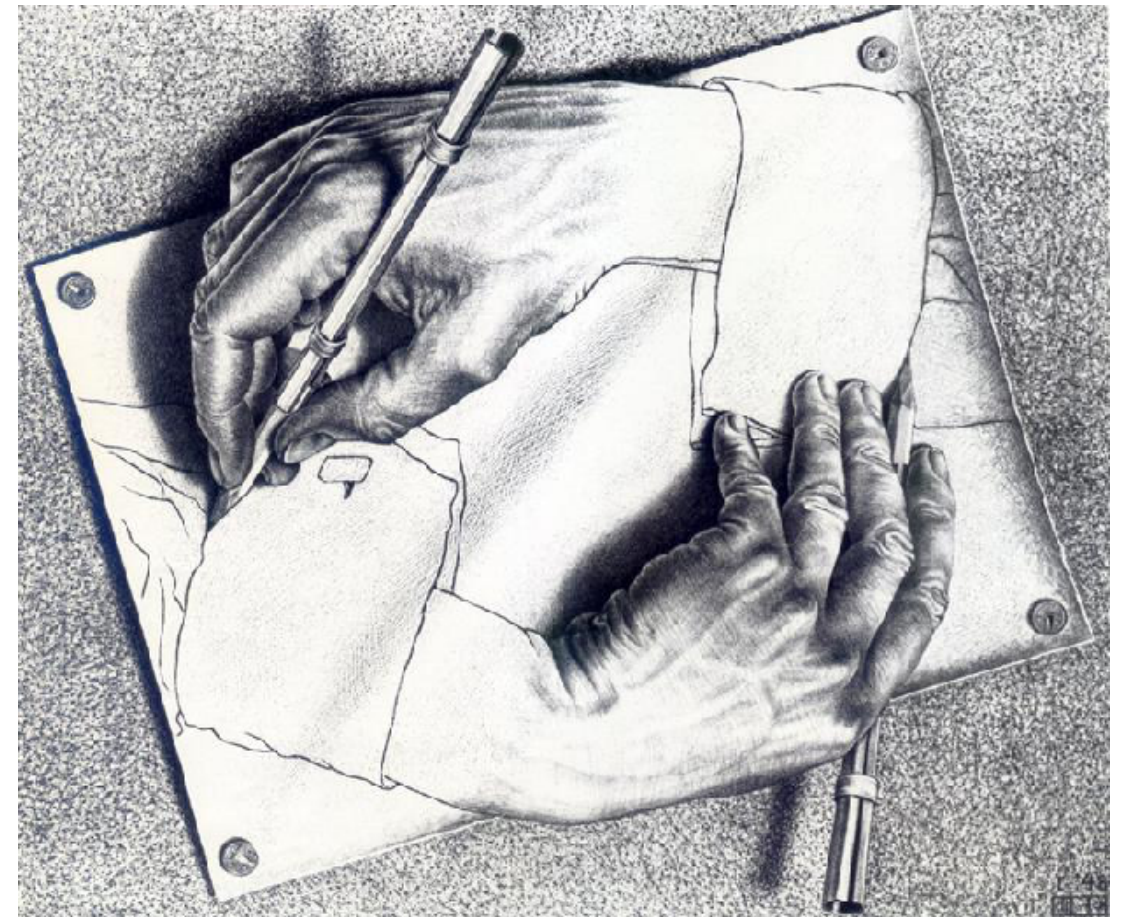
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Overview

- Research Design - Why?
- Philosophical Assumptions.
- Choosing an appropriate research question.
- Literature Review
- Choosing an appropriate research method.
- Considerations.
- When well done Qualitative Research is...
- Summary

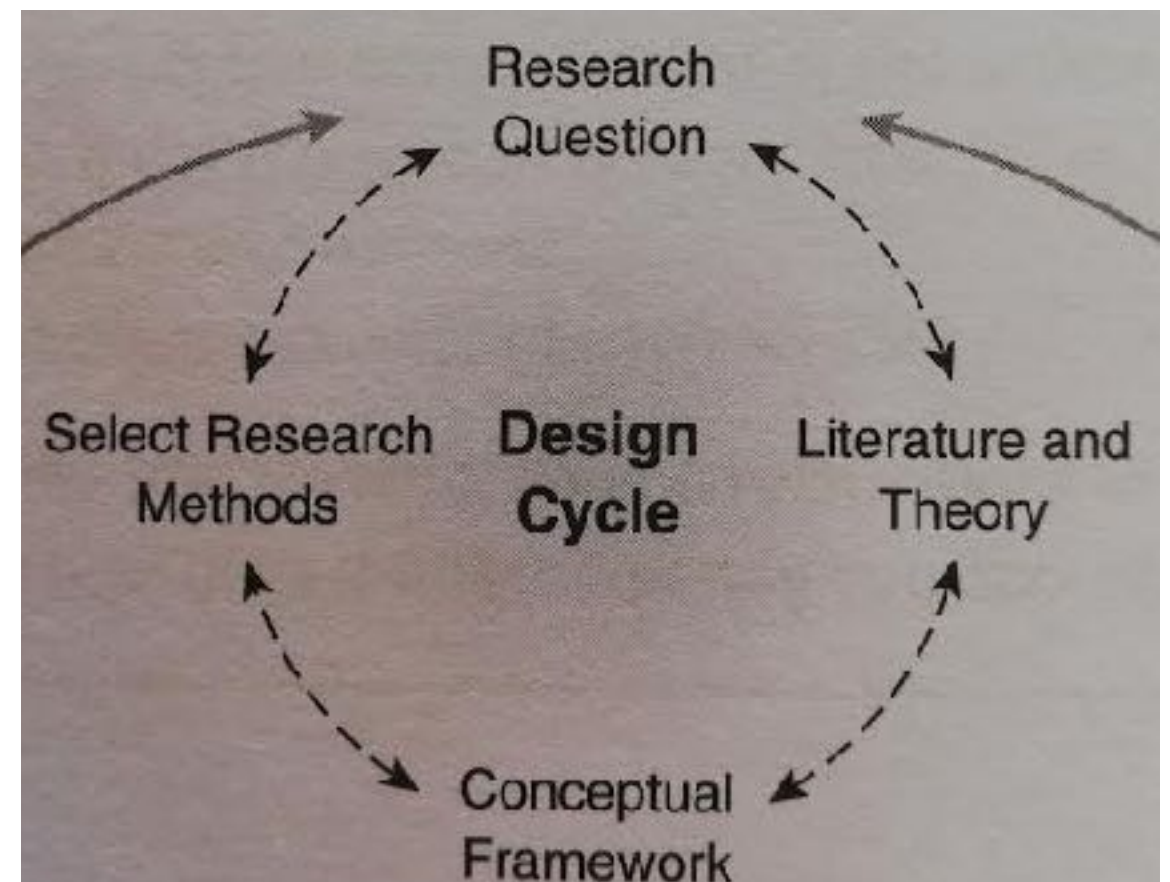
Research Design

- “Most treatments of research design across the social sciences (social-cultural anthropology excepted) take a variables-based, hypothesis-testing, (quasi-)experimental approach to the topic that is quite different from the word-based, abductive, field and archival research approach common to interpretive empirical work...” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 3).
- “...this way of proceeding does not describe very well a whole segment of scientific research: that conducted under the heading of interpretive social science...” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 1).
- Interpretive social science takes place in the real world, which is messy and unpredictable - not necessarily suitable for experimental or quasi-experimental methods.
- “...ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with...is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [they] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render...” (Geertz, 1973, p. 10).
- How do we design (and carry out) a research project that provides a thick description of the messy real world?



Research Design

- Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2020) argue that there are four key components to designing a research project:
 1. Developing the research question and study objectives.
 2. Reviewing research literature and incorporating theory.
 3. Developing a conceptual framework.
 4. Select qualitative methods (2020, p. 30).
- “Research design is about making choices and articulating a rationale for the choices one has made” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 2).
- This is the function of your ‘academic rationale’ and ‘methodology’ sections - to show why you have chosen to do your research in the way that you have done it.



Philosophical Assumptions

- John Creswell suggests that researchers position themselves in relation to five philosophical assumptions:
- “...ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions. The qualitative researcher chooses a stance on each of these assumptions...” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15).

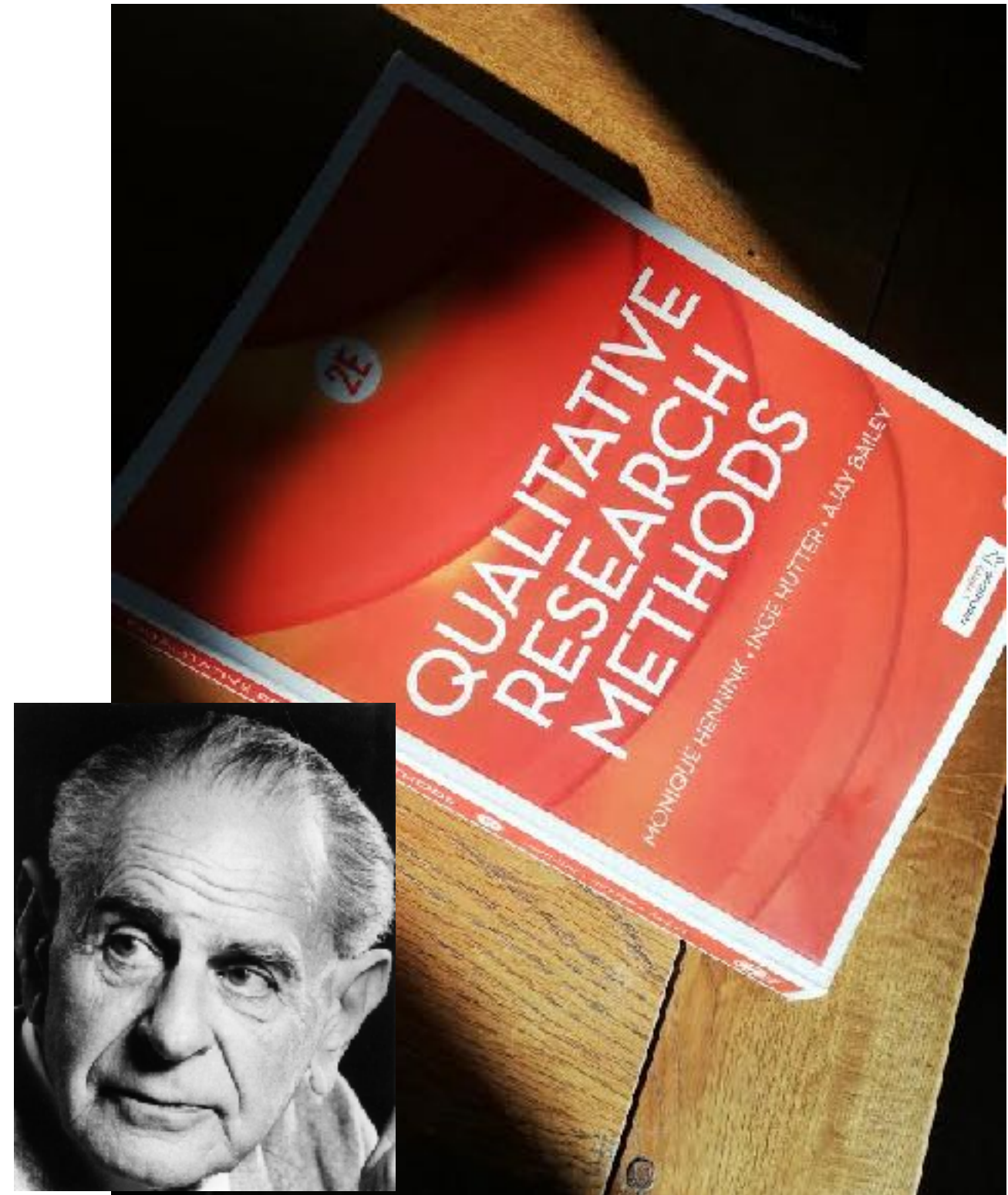
Table 2.1 Philosophical Assumptions With Implications for Practice

<i>Assumption</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Implications for Practice (Examples)</i>
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study	Researcher uses quotes and themes in words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives
Epistemological	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched	Researcher collaborates, spends time in field with participants, and becomes an “insider”
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present	Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	Researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice and uses qualitative terms and limited definitions	Researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use first-person pronoun, and employs the language of qualitative research
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design	Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field

(Creswell, 2007, p. 17).

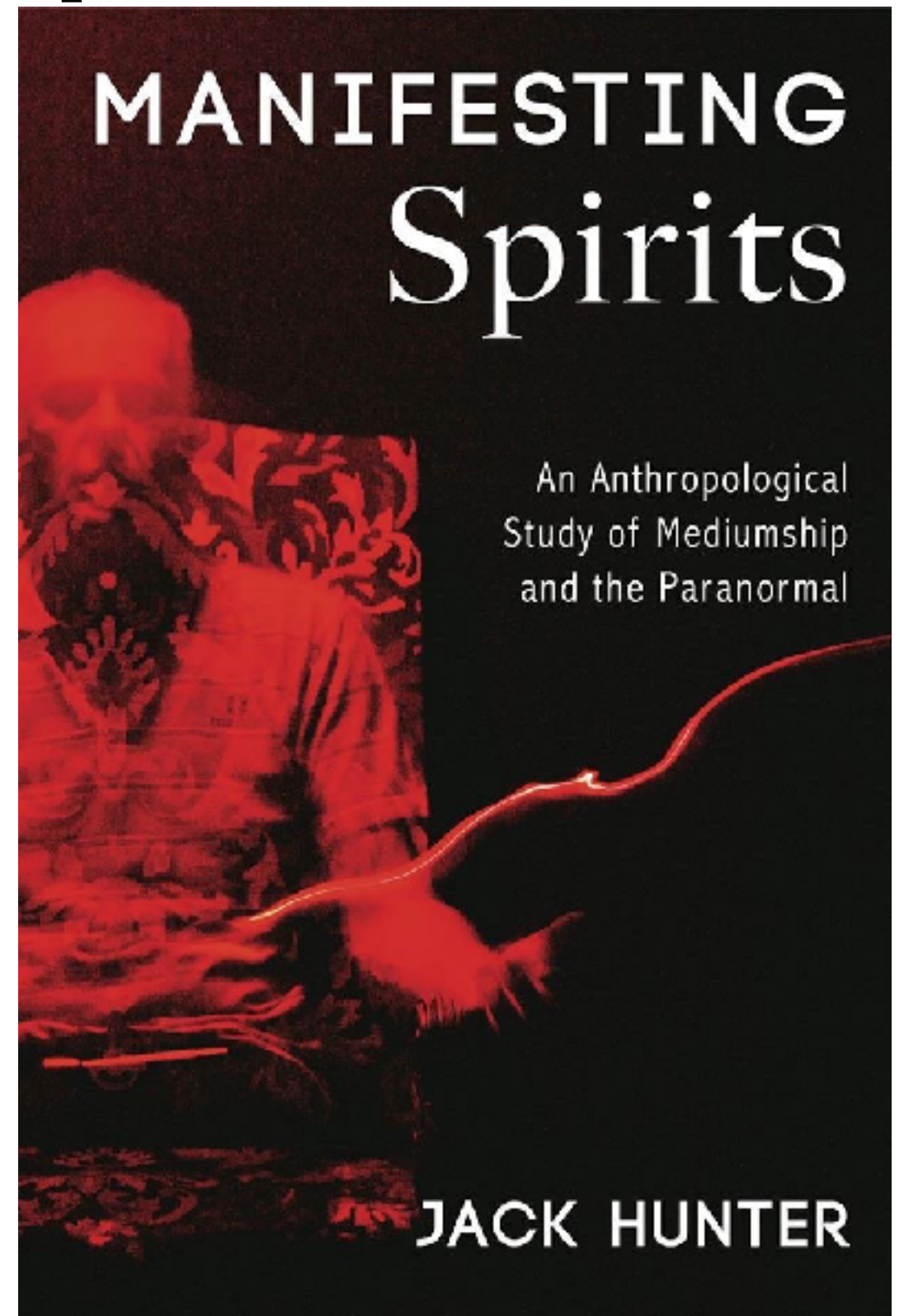
Choosing an Appropriate Question

- Your question should be manageable - and answerable in principle.
- Karl Popper - hypotheses should be falsifiable to be scientific.
- Hennink, Hutter & Bailey make a distinction between research topic, objectives and research question.
- **Topic** - may be drawn from other sources, publications, studies, issues, etc.
- **Objectives** - what do you want to achieve with the project, e.g. contribute to academic knowledge, to policy change, etc. Will it be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research, and so on.
- **Research Question** - General question formulated from the objectives - a question that will help to meet them.



For example...

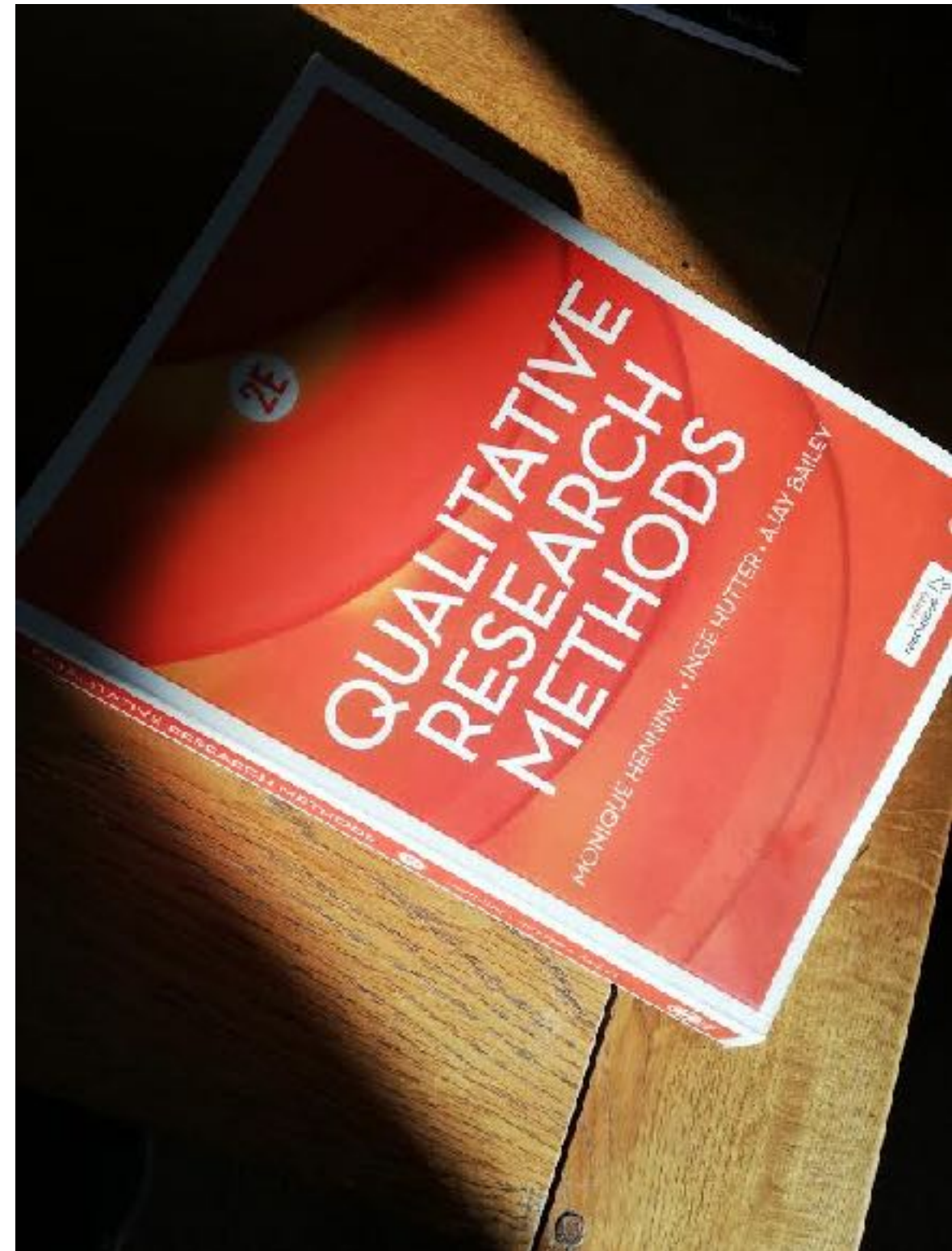
- **Topic:** Spirit Mediumship and the Paranormal.
- **Objectives:** To contribute to scholarly debates on the nature of spirit mediumship and the paranormal through an ethnographic case study.
- **Question:** Why do people believe in spirits?
- **Questions:** How is the body used in spirit mediumship demonstrations? What does it feel like to go into trance? What are the models of self that emerge from this practice?...



Literature Review

- What existing literature is there around your topic and research question? Are there other theorists whose work has relevance to your project?
- Hennink, Hutter & Bailey:

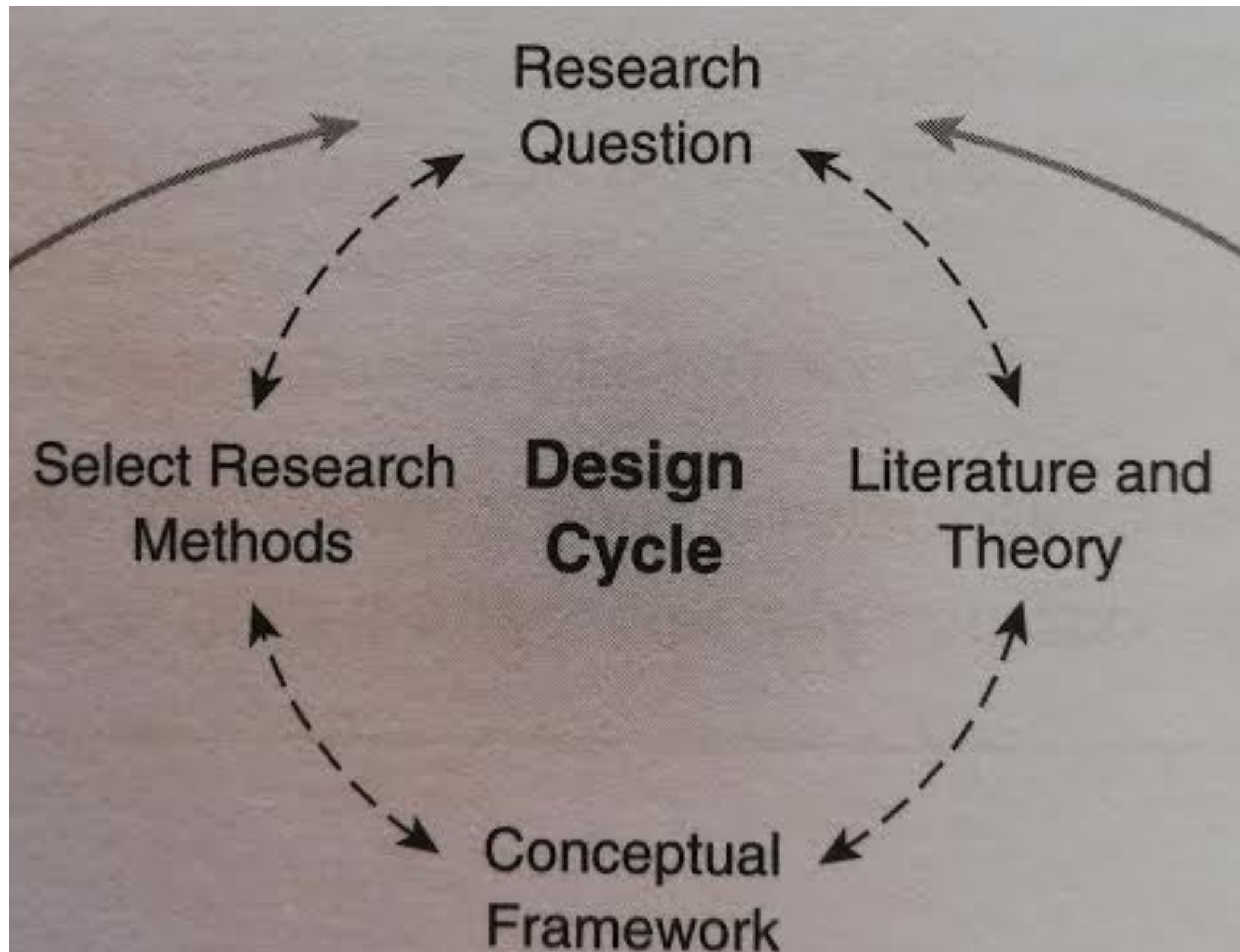
“...it allows you to embed your research within the wider scientific literature...referring to literature also helps to further define your research questions and incorporate concepts from previous research...helps to justify the research...informs the reader about possible data that can be collected and the methods that can be applied...” (p. 33).
- This helps to develop a ‘conceptual framework’ for your research project - what are the key concepts and ideas in your research project.
- e.g. in my own study, key concepts included - performance, extraordinary experience, selfhood and so on.
- Developing a conceptual framework:
 1. Provides focus and structure to the study;
 2. Provides clarity to the concepts that are being investigated;
 3. Provides a way to further refine research questions;
 4. Reflects the theoretical assumptions and concepts adopted;
 5. Reflects the expected relationships between concepts to be explored (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020, p. 37).



Choosing an Appropriate Method

- John Creswell argues that there are five main methodological approaches to qualitative research:
 - Narrative Research
 - Phenomenology
 - Grounded Theory
 - Ethnography
 - Case Study
- Which method(s) will help to create the kind of 'thick description' we are looking for? Which is the most appropriate?
- We will be looking in greater detail at these different methods as we progress through the module.

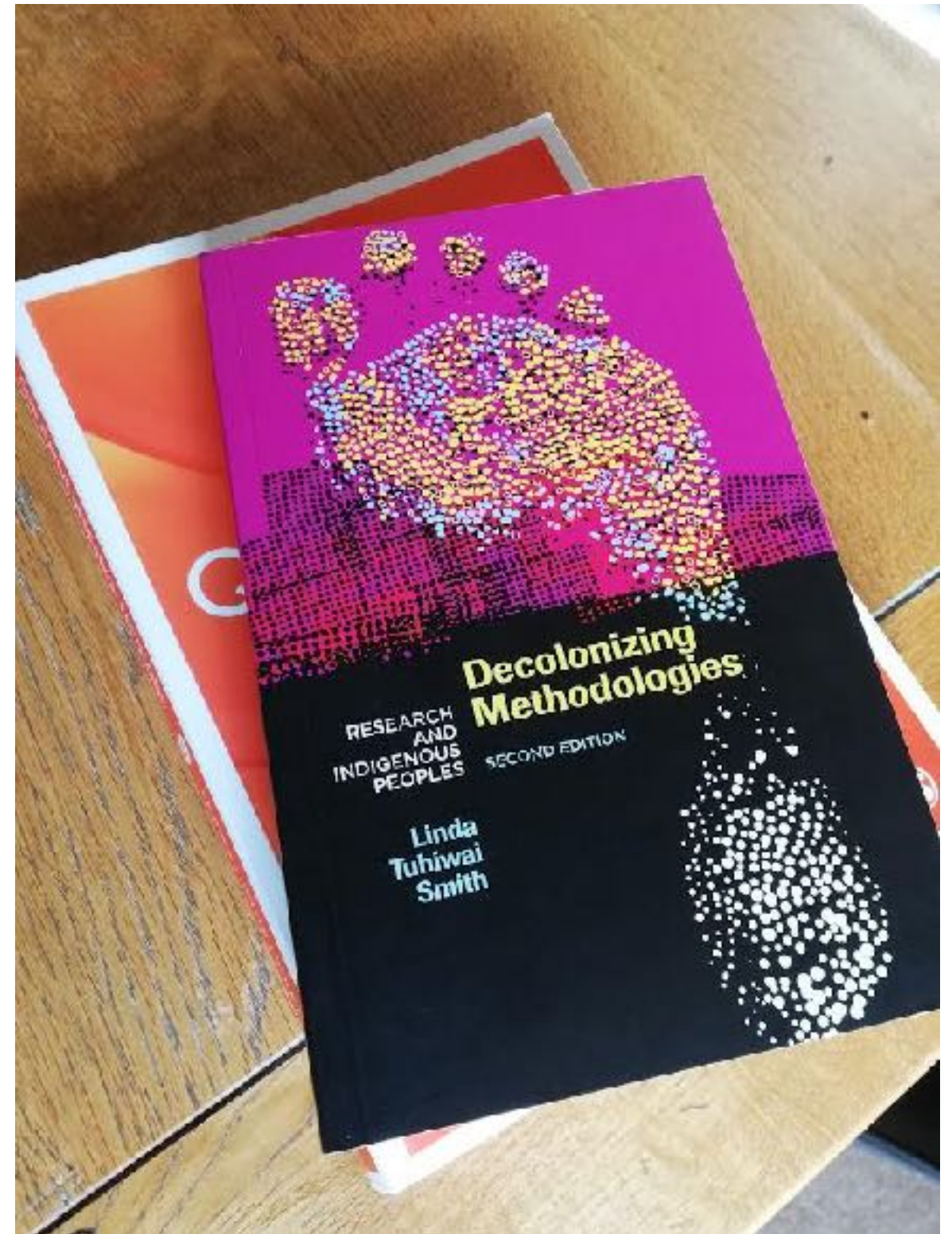




- (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020, p. 26).

Considerations

- Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that there are certain questions that need to be asked about any research project, especially in a cross-cultural context:
 - Who defined the research problem?
 - For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
 - What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
 - What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
 - What are some of the likely positive outcomes from this study?
 - What are some possible negative outcomes?
 - How can the negative outcomes be eliminated?
 - To whom is the researcher accountable?
 - What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher? (pp. 175-176).
- These are good questions to ask in order to bring ethical considerations for your research project into focus.
- You will have to address ethical considerations in your E1 forms.



When well done...

- Borman, LeCompte and Goetz (1986) argue that when done well qualitative research has multiple strengths over quantitative approaches:
- **It is hologeistic** - "...it tells the whole story with all of its variations, including patterns documented in previous related research literature...whole spirited...it goes beyond the mere location of a research project within its physical, cultural, and historical setting" (pp. 53-54).
- **It is recursive** - "...procedures can be repeated indefinitely...every activity includes a complete review of the entire process. Each step requires a...cyclic pattern of thinking from inductive to deductive and back to inductive reasoning, allowing the researcher to integrate serendipitous or unexpected findings into the total study..." (p.54).
- **It is based upon self-conscious, non-mechanized thinking processes** - advantages over statistical and other quantitative methods, to see different connections, on the ground, in the lived world.
- **It is personally and emotionally satisfying for practitioners** - "Researchers find it important to be certain that their work really speaks with the voice of "their people," and feel that this is facilitated more adequately by qualitative research methods' (p. 55).

Summary

- Research design is a cycle - you continue to refine your focus and questions as the project progresses - and is your rationale for why you have chosen to your research in the way that you have.
- We must be aware of our underlying philosophical assumptions, and how they might impact our research.
- Your research question should be answerable, and should enable you to contribute new data to existing debates.
- Existing debates should be adequately explored in your literature review - show where your research fits in and how it contributes to academic knowledge and/or policy.
- This also helps to develop a conceptual framework for your research - what are they key ideas and concepts you will be using.
- You need to select an appropriate research method for collecting data - these will be explored in later seminars.
- Must begin to consider the ethics of our research projects
- The real world is messy!

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