



UWE FLICK

AN INTRODUCTION TO

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



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Preface to the Seventh Edition

Qualitative research continues to be in an ongoing process of proliferation with new approaches and methods appearing and with being taken up as a core part of the curriculum in more and more disciplines. New and older perspectives in qualitative research can be seen in sociology, psychology, anthropology, nursing, engineering, cultural studies, and so on. A general trend to use qualitative research in digital and social media research has developed it further. Of particular relevance for qualitative research are critiques and discourses about decolonizing and indigenous research as well as those about how to make qualitative research more reflexive and integrating a bigger diversity in methods, designs and target groups of the research.

One result of such developments is that the available literature in qualitative research is constantly growing: new books on qualitative research are published and new journals are started and filled with methodological papers on, and giving results of, qualitative research. Another result is that qualitative research is in danger of falling apart into different fields of research and methodological discussions and that in the process core principles and ideas of qualitative research across these different fields could be omitted.

To keep up with such developments and to integrate experiences with using the book in teaching, the sixth edition of *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* has been further revised, updated and expanded in several ways throughout. Major updates have given the book a different focus on several levels.

First of all, the stronger focus on giving (first) orientations in the field has been maintained compared to earlier editions. Therefore some chapters have been moved in the book and now concentrate on introducing a part of the book (e.g., Chapter 14 on verbal data) and the following chapters rather than summarizing a number of chapters at the end of a part. The Glossary supports this aspect of orientation.

Second, the stronger focus on integrative presentations has been further developed. For example, there is one chapter where narrative data are discussed focusing on collecting narrative data as well as on how to analyse them (see Chapter 17). The treatment of data in grounded theory is now integrated into one chapter (see Chapter 25). The chapter on triangulation (see Chapter 13) is now integrated into the part on research design. The approaches of online research are integrated into the other chapters – for example, you will find sections about online interviewing in the interview chapter (see Chapter 15). The same applies to online focus groups (see Chapter 16) and virtual ethnography (see Chapter 19). A chapter on ‘Digital and Social Media Research’ (Chapter 22) has been added for the purpose of better orientation in this new realm of qualitative research. A final chapter about the current state of the art and the future of qualitative research (Chapter 31) attempts to integrate the diversity presented throughout the book. And the first part (Foundations of Qualitative Research) integrates frameworks and theories in the background of doing qualitative research. Throughout the book, the focus on indigenous and decolonizing research has been extended, as has the focus on doing research with marginalized and vulnerable groups as well as on specific communities.

Third, the stronger focus on how-to-do aspects in qualitative research has been intensified. For example, you will find a section on writing field notes in the chapter on observation and ethnography (see Chapter 19). A new feature throughout are case studies called ‘Student

research spotlight' in which students' qualitative research practice is illustrated with research examples.

Several new approaches have been integrated into the book (e.g., thematic analysis in Chapter 26) and the variety in doing specific approaches (e.g., discourse analysis) is now taken into account (see Chapter 27). Research questions are now seen and highlighted as guiding any kind of planning qualitative research designs (see Chapter 6). Research ethics is an issue that attracts growing attention as essential to consider in designing and planning research and has to be developed and specified for doing qualitative research. Issues of data protection are considered in more detail (see Chapter 9). Similarly, the use of existing literature is now more strongly rooted in the planning of any kind of qualitative research (see Chapter 10). The issues of access and entering the field have been extended to field relations and to covering participatory action research (see Chapter 11). And finally, the approach of the book takes into account that qualitative research practice basically rests on collecting three sorts of data: *verbal data* (such as interviews, focus groups and narratives, see Chapters 14–17), *data beyond talk* (such as observation, documents, visual and digital data, see Chapters 18–22), or *naturally occurring data* (such as conversations and discourses, see Chapter 27).

Fourth, the literature has been updated and new approaches, works, areas and authors have been integrated. New examples and case studies have been added to better illustrate how qualitative research is done.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, several areas of qualitative research have developed further, which has made some revisions again necessary. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research is *en vogue* as a topic. The Internet has become a field of research and a tool to do research at the same time, in particular for doing research with and about social media. Documents are data in their own right. These are some of the current trends in qualitative research, which made revision of the book a challenge.

Guide to this Book

The Approach of this Book

This book starts from the premise that qualitative research works, above all, with text. Methods for collecting information – interviews or observations – produce data, which are transformed into texts by recording and transcription. Methods of interpretation start from these texts. Different routes lead towards the texts at the centre of the research and away from them. Very briefly, the qualitative research process can be represented as a path *from theory to text* and as another path *from text back to theory*. The intersection of the two paths is the collection of verbal or visual data or digital data and their interpretation in a specific research design.

This book has been written for two groups of readers: newcomers, new to qualitative research and, perhaps, to research in general; and experienced researchers. For newcomers, mostly undergraduate and graduate students, the book is conceived as a basic introduction to the principles and practices of qualitative research, the theoretical and epistemological background and the most important methods. Experienced researchers working in the field may use this book as a sort of toolkit while facing the practical issues and problems in the day-to-day business of qualitative research.

Qualitative research has established itself in many social sciences, in psychology, in education, in nursing, and the like. As either a novice to the field or as an experienced researcher, you can use a great variety of specific methods, each of which starts from different premises and pursues different aims. Each method in qualitative research is based on a specific understanding of its object. However, qualitative methods should not be regarded independently of the research process and the issue under study. They are embedded in the research process and are, therefore, best understood and described using a process-oriented perspective. Thus a presentation of the different steps in the process of qualitative research is the central concern of the book. The most important methods for collecting and interpreting data and for assessing and presenting results are presented within the process-oriented framework. This should give you an overview of the field of qualitative research, of concrete methodological alternatives, and of their claims, applications and limits. This is designed to help you to choose the most appropriate methodological strategy with respect to your research question and issues.

The Structure of the Book

The book has six parts, which aim at unfolding the process of qualitative research through its major stages. Each of the central parts, Parts 3–5, begins with an overview chapter (e.g., an introduction to verbal data) and then develops the main issues relevant in this area (e.g., interviews or narrative data).

Part 1 sets out the *foundations* of doing qualitative research as discussed in Chapters 1–5:

- **Chapter 1** examines the fundamental questions of why and how to do qualitative research. For this purpose, the current relevance of qualitative research is outlined against the background of recent trends in society and in social sciences. Some essential features of qualitative research in distinction from

quantitative approaches are presented. To allow you to see qualitative research and methods in their context, a brief overview of the history of qualitative research in the United States and Europe is given. Decolonizing methods are introduced here for examples of indigenous research. Subjectivity and identity as issues of doing qualitative research in a reflexive way are added to this more sensitive approach to qualitative research.

- *Chapter 2* develops the distinction of qualitative and quantitative research and the relations between both. Here, I take several points of reference for spelling out the possible links of qualitative and quantitative research. In the end, you will find some guiding questions for assessing the appropriateness of qualitative and quantitative research. This chapter allows you to identify various approaches and then decide which one is best for your research.
- *Chapter 3* outlines the theoretical frameworks of doing qualitative research. It considers first two theoretical debates that are currently very strong in qualitative research: (1) the debate concerning positivism and constructionism, which informs a great deal of qualitative research, in how to understand the issues of research, in how to conceive the research process, and in how to use qualitative methods; and (2) those over feminism, and intersectionality, gender and queer studies. Then it presents several theoretical positions underlying qualitative research. Symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and structuralist approaches are presented as paradigmatic approaches for their basic assumptions and recent developments. From these discussions, the list of essential features of qualitative research given in Chapter 1 is completed.
- *Chapter 4* provides, by way of orientation, an overview of methods and data in qualitative research. It outlines schools of qualitative research and discusses recent and future trends in qualitative research in different contexts.
- *Chapter 5* continues the discussions started in Chapter 3, as well as outlining the epistemological background of qualitative research using text as empirical material. It now also addresses epistemological issues of subjectivity as well as of identity issues on both the researchers' and the participants' sides.

After setting out the framework of qualitative research, I focus on the process of a qualitative study. Part 2 addresses *research design in qualitative research* and we come to the more practical issues of how to plan qualitative research:

- *Chapter 6* addresses the relevance of a well-defined research question for conducting research and how to arrive at such a research question. It now also discusses these issues in indigenous and decolonizing research.
- *Chapter 7* offers an overview of practical issues of how to choose and construct the research design in qualitative research. It also covers the basic designs in qualitative research and addresses the possibilities of doing qualitative research online and a novel understanding of the task of designing qualitative research.
- *Chapter 8* outlines how to plan the qualitative research process and shows that the single steps are linked much closer to each other than in the clear-cut step-by-step process in quantitative research.
- *Chapter 9* focuses on an issue which becomes more relevant on the level of planning and doing qualitative studies – research ethics. The ethics of qualitative research deserves special attention, as you will come much closer to privacy issues and the day-to-day life of your participants. Reflection and sensitivity to privacy are essential before launching a qualitative study. At the same time, general discussions about research ethics often miss the special needs and problems of qualitative research. A new part of the chapter is devoted to data protection in an international perspective. After reading this chapter, you should know the importance of a code of ethics before beginning your research as well as the need for ethics committees. Whether research is ethical or not depends as much on practical decisions in the field.
- *Chapter 10* introduces the use of the literature – theoretical, methodological and empirical – in planning and doing a qualitative study. It outlines the use of and the finding of such resources while doing your study and while writing about it.

- *Chapter 11* is about how to find access in qualitative research – how to enter a field and how to get in touch with the participants of your study. It now also addresses field relations in ethnography and participatory action research.
- *Chapter 12* covers the topic of sampling – how to select your participants or groups of participants, situations and so on.
- *Chapter 13* addresses issues of extending the designing of qualitative research in a more complex way. Concepts discussed here first comprise triangulation, which means combining several methodological approaches in one study and in one design. This is about several qualitative approaches as well as combining qualitative and quantitative research. This principle is outlined as triangulation in action, covering several design issues in referring to concrete examples. The second concept is mixed methods, which is limited to combinations of qualitative with quantitative research. At the end some newer discussions are addressed – pluralism, multimodal research and merged methods.

Part 3 introduces one of the major strategies of collecting data. Verbal data are produced in interviews, narratives and focus groups:

- *Chapter 14* gives an orienting overview of the methods for collecting verbal data. It is intended to support you in making your decision between the different ways outlined in Part 3 by comparing the methods and by developing a checklist for such a decision.
- *Chapter 15* presents a range of interviews which are characterized by using a set of open-ended questions to stimulate the participants' answers. Some of these interviews, like the focused interview, are used for very different purposes, whereas others, like the expert interview, have a more specific field of application. Online interviewing is discussed as an alternative to face-to-face interviews. Novel approaches to interviewing have been added here such as how to do (for example mobile) interviews or use tools in interviews.
- *Chapter 16* explores ways of collecting verbal data in a group of participants. Focus groups are currently very prominent in some areas, while group discussions have a longer tradition. Both are based on the stimulation of discussions, whereas group interviews are more about answering questions. The chapter also identifies the potential and limitations of online focus groups and looks at the use of focus groups in decolonizing research.
- *Chapter 17* outlines a different strategy leading to verbal data. Here the central step is the stimulation of narratives (i.e., overall narratives of life histories or more focused narratives of specific situations). These narratives are stimulated in specially designed interviews – the narrative interview in the first and the episodic interview in the second alternative. Joint narratives seek to make a group of people tell a story as a common activity. This chapter takes an integrative approach to narrative research in action and covers the specific ways of analysis developed for narrative research. It also addresses the use of narratives in indigenous research.

Part 4 examines alternatives in collecting qualitative *data beyond talk*. Observation and visual data, as well as documents, have become important in qualitative research:

- *Chapter 18* maps out the area of data beyond talk offline and online. This overview will help you decide when to choose which sort of data and method and what the advantages and problems of each method are.
- *Chapter 19* deals with non-participant and participant observation in the field. It also focuses on ethnography. Here observation and other data collection strategies (interviewing, using documents, etc.) are employed to complement observation itself. The chapter also covers virtual ethnography and addresses issues of documentation in ethnography, in particular how to work with field notes. It now covers examples of ethnography in feminist and decolonizing and also in students' research.
- *Chapter 20* focuses on visual data and on selecting, analysing, studying and using media like photos, film and video as data.

- *Chapter 21* explores the construction and analysis of documents in qualitative research, including online documents like websites. This chapter now addresses secondary analysis of existing data such as documents but also of interviews from other researchers or earlier research.
- *Chapter 22* focuses on working with digital and social media data. In earlier chapters the online use of established methods (such as interviews turned into online interviewing) was presented. Here the main interest is in social media such as Twitter, Facebook, or blogs and how they can be used in studying social issues with qualitative methods.

The central parts of the book have so far concentrated on the collection and production of data. Part 5 deals with *analysing qualitative data* – how to develop theoretically relevant insights from these data and the text produced with them. For this purpose, qualitative methods for analysing data are the focus of this part:

- *Chapter 23* gives an orienting overview of the approaches to analysing text and other material in qualitative research. Again, you will find a comparison of the different approaches which should help you to select the appropriate method for analysing your material and advance from your data to theoretically relevant findings. Examples of indigenous research are included.
- *Chapter 24* discusses data management and transcription in qualitative research in detail, both in their technical and in their general aspects and with examples. Particular attention is paid to challenges of transcription in studies with several languages and in postcolonial studies.
- *Chapter 25* covers methods using coding and categories as tools for analysing text. This chapter unfolds a specific research perspective in an integrative way. It describes grounded theory research as an exemplar for coding strategies, which are embedded in a more general research programme. The chapter shows how analysis in this research perspective works when its elements are brought together. It also covers examples and challenges from feminist and decolonizing research and from students' projects.
- *Chapter 26* introduces other ways of coding data, in particular thematic coding, thematic and qualitative content analysis.
- *Chapter 27* continues with approaches that are more interested in how something is said and not just in what is said, and focus on naturally occurring data. After a more general discussion of this kind of data, conversation analysis is presented, which looks at how a conversation in everyday life or in an institutional context works, and which methods people use to communicate in any form of context. The various forms of discourse analysis have developed this approach further in different directions. Hermeneutics examines texts with a combination of content and formal orientations. Interpretive approaches in decolonizing research are discussed at the end of the chapter.
- *Chapter 28* discusses the use of software for qualitative data analysis. Principles and examples of the most important software are presented. This chapter should help you to decide whether to use software for your analysis and which package.

Part 6 goes back to context and methodology and addresses issues of *grounding and writing* qualitative research and ends with an *outlook*:

- *Chapter 29* discusses first the use of traditional quality criteria in qualitative research and their limits. It also informs about alternative criteria which have been developed for qualitative research or for specific approaches. It shows why answering the question of the quality of qualitative research is currently a major expectation from outside of the discipline and a need for improving research practice at the same time. A stronger focus now is on the relation of transparency and credibility and on the questions about research quality raised from students' perspectives and in indigenous research. In its second half, this chapter explores ways of answering the question of quality in qualitative research beyond the formulation of criteria. Instead, strategies of quality management, and of answering the question of indication, are discussed.
- *Chapter 30* addresses issues of writing qualitative research, first in decolonizing research, then in reflecting the research and finally in reporting the results to an audience and about the influence of the way

of writing on the findings of research. Legitimizing functions of writing and issues of making qualitative research relevant are discussed next, before the chapter concludes with a look on how to prepare and undergo vivas and assessments based on qualitative research.

- *Chapter 31*, finally, provides a summary of the book and outlines a view of future developments in qualitative research. Additional focus is on diversity and the clash of Western and indigenous knowledge in the contexts of internationalization and decolonization of research.

Special Features of the Book

I have included several features to make this book more useful for learning qualitative research and while conducting a qualitative study. You will find them throughout the following chapters.

The Qualitative Research Navigator

The beginning of every chapter is designed to orient you towards the body of the chapter.

First, a *navigator* through a qualitative research project you might plan and use this book for is provided at the beginning of every chapter so that you can see at a glance how each chapter fits into the whole. To illustrate, the Chapter 1 Navigator is presented here:

Qualitative Research Navigator

Foundations of Qualitative Research

- Why and How to Do Qualitative Research
- The Qualitative–Quantitative Distinction
- Theoretical Frameworks
- Methods and Data in Qualitative Research
- Subjectivity, Identity and Texts in Qualitative Research

Research Design

- Formulating a Research Question
- Choosing and Constructing the Research Design
- Planning the Process in Qualitative Research
- Ethics of Doing Qualitative Research
- Using the Existing Literature
- Access, Field Relations and Participatory Research
- Sampling
- Qualitative Designs with Multiple Methods

Verbal Data

- Collecting Verbal Data
- Doing Interviews
- Doing Focus Groups
- Using Narrative Data

(Continued)

You are
here
in your
project

Data Beyond Talk

- Collecting Data Beyond Talk
- Observation and Ethnography
- Visual Data: Photography, Film and Video
- Documents as Data and Secondary Data Analysis
- Digital and Social Media Research

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Analysing Qualitative Data
- Transcription and Data Management
- Grounded Theory Coding
- Thematic Coding and Content Analysis
- Analysing Naturally Occurring Data: Conversation and Discourse
- Using Software in Qualitative Data Analysis

Grounding, Writing and Outlook

- Quality of Qualitative Research: Criteria and Beyond
 - Writing Up and Assessment in Qualitative Research
 - State of the Art and the Future
-

How this Chapter Will Help You

Second, a list of ways of how the single chapter will help you is included at the start of each chapter, defining what you should have learnt and know after reading the chapter. This list should guide you through the chapter and help you find topics again after reading the chapter or the whole book.

Case Studies and Boxes

Case studies found throughout the text examine methods and professional researchers' applications of them (*Research in the real world*) or students' use of qualitative research (*Student research spotlight*). Beyond these case studies, *Boxes* will summarize each chapter highlighting 'What you need to ask yourself' and 'What you need to succeed'. Suggestions for *What's next* to read or watch round off each chapter.

Glossary

A glossary of relevant terms has been included at the end of the book. Terms included are highlighted in red when they appear in the text for the first time.

Online Resources

This book has an updated website, which provides links to online resources for each chapter.

The Seventh Edition – What Is New?

The structure of the book (the Parts and the Chapters) has not changed, but the focus of many of the chapters has been updated, revised and adapted to the current state of qualitative research. The focus on diversity, equity and integration has been intensified as well as that on decolonizing and indigenous research. The presented research examples have been extended to student research spotlights and to examples from indigenous and more international research. The variety of methods has been extended by including secondary analysis of qualitative data and participatory research. Some new topics have been added, such as vivas and assessment based on qualitative studies. The online resources have been adapted and updated. In general the focus on reflexivity has been made stronger without giving up the how-to-do approach of the book or its overview character concerning the variety of methodological approaches covered and the research process as whole.

Discover the Online Resources



Get the qualitative methods support you need at: <https://study.sagepub.com/flick7e>.

For students:

Essential concepts videos hand-picked by author Uwe introduce you to the key aspects of qualitative research.

Recommended further reading which illustrates how qualitative methods can be used in the real world.

For instructors:

Download **PowerPoint slides** for each chapter featuring figures and tables from the book, which can be customized for use in your own lectures and presentations.

Case studies showcasing real world research.

Fully annotated **anatomy of a journal articles** that help you assess theoretical framework and shows you what is going on at each phase in the research process.

PART 1

FOUNDATIONS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Part 1 is designed to lay the foundations for doing **qualitative research** and to help you understand the subsequent parts of this book. It also outlines why qualitative research has become particularly relevant in the last decades of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Part 1 begins with an overview of the background to qualitative research. It then introduces you to the essential features of qualitative research (in general, Chapter 1). Chapter 2 outlines the relationship between qualitative and **quantitative research** and the possibilities and pitfalls of combining both approaches. We then consider the major theoretical perspectives underpinning qualitative research. These theoretical perspectives can be seen as the **theoretical frameworks** of qualitative research. Each of them contains assumptions about the nature of realities, how to address an issue conceptually, and how to plan research (Chapter 3). In this chapter, we will also encounter two influential discussions in qualitative research. The first concerns **positivism** and **constructivism** as a basic epistemological assumption; the second focuses on the impact of feminist positions on qualitative research in general. Chapter 4 maps out methods and data in qualitative research (which will be presented in more detail later in this book). The discussion concerning positivism and constructivism will be developed a little more in the final chapter of this part (Chapter 5). There, we will consider questions concerning the epistemological background of using text in qualitative research and address the basic processes in constructing and understanding texts. Together, these chapters offer a framework to assist the use of qualitative research methods, which are outlined and discussed in greater detail later in the book.

Qualitative Research Navigator

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here
in your
project



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-

1

WHY AND HOW TO DO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

HOW THIS CHAPTER WILL HELP YOU

You will:

- understand the main characteristics of qualitative research in context of its history and background;
- identify common features of qualitative research;
- know about current challenges to qualitative research in debates about decolonizing research;
- see why qualitative research is pertinent and necessary in contemporary social research.

The Relevance of Qualitative Research

Why use qualitative research? Is there any particular need for such an approach in the current situation? As a first step, I outline why interest in qualitative research has grown considerably over the last few decades. Due to a development that has become known as the **pluralization of life worlds**, qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations. This phrase, associated with what Habermas terms the 'new obscurity' (Habermas, 1996), seeks to capture the growing 'individualisation of ways of living and biographical patterns' (see Beck, 1992, p. 90), and the dissolution of 'old' social inequalities into the new diversity of milieus, subcultures, lifestyles and ways of living.

This pluralization requires on the part of social researchers a new sensitivity to the empirical study of issues. Advocates of **postmodernism** have argued that the era of big **narratives** and theories is over: locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are now required. In this context, the following statement by Blumer becomes relevant once again, with fresh implications: 'The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study' (1969, p. 33).

These developments are triggered by the current processes of globalization (see Flick, 2014c) and the increasing migration within and across continents. Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds increasingly confront social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives. As a result, their traditional deductive methodologies – deriving research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models and testing them against empirical evidence – are failing, due to the differentiation of objects. Instead of starting from theories and then testing them, research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies: in the process, '**sensitizing concepts**' are required for approaching the social contexts to be studied. Theories are developed from empirical studies. Thus knowledge and practice are studied as *local* knowledge and practices (Geertz, 1983).

As a more recent development, the discussion about **decolonizing methodologies** has specific implications for qualitative research in several respects: Is it still adequate to export established methodologies developed against the background of a Western **epistemology** and concept of knowledge to 'other' areas (see Hsiung, 2012, for the case of Asia; and Chilisa, 2020 for the conceptualization of **indigenous methodologies** more broadly)? What is the impact on local knowledge for example in Māori cultures in New Zealand or First Nation cultures in Canada, when researchers come and reduce the role of indigenous people to that of providers of data? Here, the request of 'Nothing about us without us' (e.g., Manokaran et al., 2021) illustrates the need for redefining the relations of researcher and the researched in this context (see Chapter 11; see also Flick, 2022a, 2022b). In the context of indigenous research, the following understanding of research is used:

Research: It is systematic, that is, it is the adoption of a strategy or a set of principles to study an issue of interest. The systematic strategy usually starts with the identification of an area of interest to study; a review of the literature to develop further understanding of the issue to be investigated; and choice of a research design or strategy that will inform the way the sampling of respondents is performed, the instruments for data collection, the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings. (Chilisa, 2020, p. 5)

This shows that the starting points of indigenous and Western qualitative research are not so fundamentally apart. It is more the ways in which this definition is applied which makes the difference and particular approach.

Research Questions as a Starting Point

The main reason for using qualitative research should be that a research question *requires* the use of this sort of approach and not a different one. Let us illustrate this with an example (we will come back to this in more detail in Chapter 6). In an ongoing research project we address the following problem. Addiction to drugs and alcohol is the third most frequent mental illness. Young Russian-speaking migrants in Germany are reported to often have particularly strong patterns of alcohol and drug consumption. Thus they have a high risk for drug-associated diseases. At the same time, they are a target group which is largely under- or unserved by existing health services. This study pursues the question of how Russian-speaking migrants perceive their use of substances and possibly consequent diseases, such as hepatitis, and how they cope with them. Of particular interest are conditions of their utilization of professional help and their connected expectations and experiences, and why they may refrain from such utilization.

Why should qualitative research be used for such a study? This is an example of a pluralization of life worlds mentioned above. Our knowledge about this life world (migration, Russian background, addiction) is too limited to start from a hypothesis to test in our research. Instead we need sensitizing concepts for exploring and understanding this life world and the individual (and social) biographical processes that have led to the current situation of our participants. This social group is for several reasons a **'hard-to-reach' group** (one which will fall out of more general studies and may refuse to fill in a questionnaire, for example). For understanding how and why the participants with hepatitis make use of social and health services or refrain from using these services, we need to understand their personal experiences with the health system, the meanings they link to such experiences, and the discourses and practices concerning these issues in their contexts. Thus we approach the issue and our target group by using qualitative methods – interviews and **participant observations**, for example (see Chapters 15 and 19 for details).

Limitations of Quantitative Research

Beyond the general developments and examples like the one outlined above, the limitations of quantitative approaches have always been taken as a starting point for developing more general reasons why qualitative research should be used. Traditionally, psychology and social sciences have taken the natural sciences and their exactness as a model, paying particular attention to developing quantitative and standardized methods. Guiding principles of research and of planning research have been used for the following purposes: to clearly isolate causes and effects; to properly operationalize theoretical relations; to measure and to quantify phenomena; to create **research designs** allowing the **generalization** of findings; and to formulate general laws. For example, random samples of populations are selected in order to conduct a survey representative of that population. *General statements* are made as independently as possible about the concrete cases that have been studied. *Observed phenomena* are classified according to their frequency and distribution. In order to classify causal relations and their **validity** as clearly as possible, the conditions under which the phenomena and relations under study occur are controlled as far as possible. Studies are designed in such a way that the researcher's (as well as the interviewer's, observer's, and so on) influence can be excluded as far as possible. This should guarantee the **objectivity** of the study, whereby the subjective views of the researcher as well as those of the individuals under study are largely eliminated. General obligatory standards for carrying out and evaluating empirical social research have been formulated. Procedures such as how to construct a questionnaire, how to design an experiment, and how to statistically analyse data have become increasingly refined.

For a long time, psychological research has almost exclusively used experimental designs. These have produced vast quantities of data and results which demonstrate and test psychological relations of variables and the conditions under which they are valid. For the reasons mentioned above, for a long time empirical social research was mainly based on standardized surveys. The aim was to document and analyse the frequency and distribution of social phenomena in the population (e.g., certain attitudes). To a lesser extent, standards and procedures of quantitative research have been examined fundamentally in order to clarify the research objects and questions they are appropriate to or not.

Negative results abound when the targets previously mentioned are assessed for how far they could be reached. Some time ago Weber (1919/1988) proclaimed that the sciences' task is the **disenchantment of the world** by providing analysis and explanations through the research they do. Bonß and Hartmann (1985) have described the increasing disenchantment of the sciences – their methods and their findings. In the case of the social sciences, the low degree of applicability of results and the problems of connecting them to theory and societal developments are taken as indicators of this disenchantment. Less widely than expected – and above all in a very different way – the findings of social research have found their way into political and everyday contexts. **Utilization research** (Beck & Bonß, 1989) has demonstrated that scientific findings are not carried over into political and institutional practices as much as expected. When they are taken up, they are obviously reinterpreted and picked to pieces: 'Science no longer produces "absolute truths," which can uncritically be adopted. It furnishes limited offers for interpretation, which reach further than everyday theories but can be used in practice comparatively flexibly' (Beck & Bonß, 1989, p. 31). In summary, the ideals of the objectivity of sciences and their findings are largely disenchanted because of the problems just stated.

It has also become clear that social science results are rarely used in everyday life. In order to meet methodological standards, their investigations and findings often remain too far removed from everyday questions and problems. On the other hand, analyses of research practice have demonstrated that the (**abstract**) ideals of objectivity formulated by methodologists can only be met in part in conducting concrete research. Despite all the methodological controls, influences

from specific interests and social and cultural backgrounds are difficult to avoid in research and its findings. These factors influence the formulation of research questions and hypotheses as well as the interpretation of data and relations.

Finally, the disenchantment that Bonß and Hartmann discussed has two major consequences for what kind of knowledge the social sciences can strive for and above all are able to produce. First these consequences refer to what to expect from research: 'On the condition of the disenchantment of ideals of objectivism, we can no longer unreflectively start from the notion of objectively true sentences' (1985, p. 21). Rather we should downsize our expectations from objectivity and truth to 'statements which are related to subjects and situations, and which a sociologically articulated concept of knowledge would have to establish' (1985, p. 21). To formulate such subject- and situation-related statements, which are empirically well founded, is a goal that can be attained with qualitative research.

Essential Features

The central ideas guiding qualitative research are different from those in quantitative research. The essential features of qualitative research are the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories (see Chapter 3); the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers' reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production ('**reflexivity**'); and the variety of approaches and methods.

Appropriateness of Methods and Theories

Scientific disciplines have used defining methodological standards to distinguish themselves from other disciplines. Examples include the use of experiments as the method of psychology or of survey research as the key method of sociology. As a scientific discipline becomes established, its methods become the point of reference for deciding the suitability of ideas and issues for empirical investigations. This has sometimes led to suggestions to refrain from studying those phenomena to which the usual methods – experimentation, say, or surveys – cannot be applied. For example, it may be that variables cannot be effectively identified or isolated, in which case experimental design will not be applicable.

Of course it makes sense to reflect on whether a research question can be studied empirically (see Chapter 6). Most phenomena cannot be explained in isolation – a result of their complexity in reality. If all empirical studies were exclusively designed according to the model of clear cause–effect relations, all complex objects would have to be excluded. Sometimes it is suggested that, in the case of complex and rare phenomena, the best solution is simply not to study them. A second solution is to take contextual conditions into account in complex quantitative research designs (e.g., multi-level analyses) and to understand complex models empirically and statistically. The necessary methodological abstraction makes it more difficult to reintroduce findings in the everyday situation under study. The basic problem – the study can only show what the underlying model of reality represents – is not solved in this way.

Another way to study complex issues with qualitative research is to design methods that are sufficiently open to the complexity of a study's subject. In such cases the object under study is the determining factor for choosing a method and not the other way round. Here objects are not reduced to single variables: rather, they are represented in their entirety in their everyday context. Thus the fields of study are not artificial situations in the laboratory but the practices and interactions of the subjects in everyday life. Exceptional situations and people are frequently studied in this way (see Chapter 12). In order to do justice to the diversity of everyday

life, methods are characterized by openness towards their objects, which may be guaranteed in various ways (see Chapters 15–22).

The goal of research then is less to test what is already known (e.g., theories already formulated in advance): rather it is to discover and explore the new and to develop empirically grounded theories. Here the validity of the study does not exclusively follow abstract academic criteria of science as in quantitative research: rather it is assessed with reference to the object under study. Thus qualitative research's central criteria depend on whether findings are grounded in empirical material or whether the methods are appropriately selected and applied, as well as the relevance of findings and the reflexivity of proceedings (see Chapter 29).

Perspectives of the Participants

The example of mental disorders allows us to explain another feature of qualitative research. Epidemiological studies show the frequency of schizophrenia in the population and furthermore how its distribution varies: in lower social classes, serious mental disorders like schizophrenia occur much more frequently than in higher classes. Such a correlation was found by Hollingshead and Redlich (1958) in the 1950s and has been confirmed repeatedly since then. However, the direction of the correlation could not be clarified. Do the conditions of living in a lower social class promote the occurrence and outbreak of mental disorders? Or do people with mental problems slide into the lower classes?

Moreover, these findings do not tell us anything about what it means to live with mental illness. Neither is the subjective meaning of this illness (or of health) for those directly concerned made clear, nor is the diversity of perspectives on the illness in their context grasped. What is the subjective meaning of schizophrenia for the patient, and what is it for his or her relatives? How do the various people involved deal with the disease in their day-to-day lives? What has led to the outbreak of the disease in the course of the patient's life, and what has made it a chronic disease? How did earlier treatments influence the patient's life? Which ideas, goals and routines guide the concrete handling of this case?

Qualitative research on a topic like mental illness concentrates on questions like these. It demonstrates the variety of perspectives (those of the patient, of his or her relatives, of professionals) on the object and starts from the subjective and social meanings related to it. Qualitative researchers study participants' knowledge and practices. They analyse interactions about and ways of dealing with mental illness in a particular field. Interrelations are described in the concrete context of the case and explained in relation to it. Qualitative research takes into account that viewpoints and practices in the field are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them.

BOX 1.1

STUDENT RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Refugee women's experience of emancipation in Germany

For her empirical bachelor thesis in education, Jackleen Khazal (2019) was interested in exploring the influence of experiences of being a refugee on Syrian women's emancipation in Germany. To answer her research question, she studied the cases of four women of 20, 28,

(Continued)

36 and 48 years who had come to Germany on differing routes from Syria. Khazal used the **episodic interview** (see Chapter 17), covering five topics – the interviewee and her experience as refugee; everyday life in Syria and Germany; her understanding of emancipation; life in Syria and Germany and societal demands; and ideas about her future in and perspective on Germany. The data were analysed using **thematic coding** (see Chapter 26). The results show specific understandings of the interviewed women and differences among them. In this study the focus is on exploring the participants' subjective views embedded in the student researcher's own background in the country and culture of the interviewees.

Reflexivity of the Researcher and the Research

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods take the researcher's communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge instead of deeming it an intervening variable, as the case study of student research in Box 1.1 already illustrates. The subjectivity of the researcher *and* of those being studied becomes part of the research process. Researchers' reflections on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings, and so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation, and are documented in **research diaries** or context protocols (see Chapter 24).

Variety of Approaches and Methods

Qualitative research is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept. Various theoretical approaches and their methods characterize the discussions and the research practice. Subjective viewpoints are a first starting point. A second string of research studies the making and course of interactions, while a third seeks to reconstruct the structures of the social field and the latent meaning of practices (see Chapter 3 for more details). This variety of approaches results from different developmental lines in the history of qualitative research, which evolved partly in parallel and partly in sequence.

A Brief History of Qualitative Research

Why does it make sense to turn to the history of qualitative research at this point? Historical backgrounds of current methods and their diversity may explain this variety and allow locating the single approach in the wider field of qualitative research. Such a look at the historical developments that happened in several contexts at the same time but in different ways may help to develop an understanding of why there are now different understandings of qualitative research, which manifest in varying concepts of epistemology, of methods, of data and of research in general.

Here only a brief and rather cursory overview of the history of qualitative research can be given. Psychology and social sciences in general have a long tradition of using qualitative methods. In psychology, Wundt (1928) used methods of description and **verstehen** in his **folk psychology** alongside the experimental methods of his general psychology. Roughly at the same time, an argument between a more **monographic conception of science** and an empirical and statistical approach began in German sociology (Bonß, 1982, p. 106). Monographic science was oriented towards induction and case studies and not so much towards using

empirical or statistical methods systematically. Rather than doing representative studies referring to society as a whole, case studies were the empirical basis for analysing a social problem in detail. In American sociology, biographical methods, case studies and descriptive methods were central for a long time (until the 1940s). This can be demonstrated by the importance of Thomas and Znaniecki's study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20) and, more generally, with the influence of the **Chicago School** in sociology.

During the further establishment of both sciences, however, increasingly 'hard', experimental, standardizing and quantifying approaches have asserted themselves against 'soft' understanding, open and qualitative descriptive strategies. It was not until the 1960s that in American sociology the critique of standardized, quantifying social research became relevant again (Cicourel, 1964; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This critique was taken up in the 1970s in German discussions. Finally, this led to a renaissance of qualitative research in the social sciences and also (with some delay) in psychology (Banister et al., 1994; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2007). The developments and discussions in the United States and for example in Germany not only took place at different times, but are also marked by differing phases.

The United States

Denzin and Lincoln (2005b, pp. 14–20; 2011, p. 3) identify eight moments of qualitative research, as follows. The *traditional period* ranges from the early twentieth century to World War II. It is related to the research by Malinowski (1916/1948) in **ethnography** and the Chicago School in sociology. During this period, qualitative research was interested in the other – the foreign or the strange – and in its more or less objective description and interpretation. For example, foreign cultures interested ethnography and a society's outsiders interested sociology.

The *modernist phase* lasts until the 1970s and is marked by attempts to formalize qualitative research. For this purpose, more and more textbooks were published in the United States. The attitude of this kind of research is still alive in the tradition of, for example, *Boys in White* by Becker et al. (1961), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) as well as in Miles and Huberman (1994; see also Miles et al., 2014).

Blurred genres (Geertz, 1983) characterize the developments up to the mid-1980s. Various theoretical models and understandings of the objects and methods stand side by side, from which researchers can choose and compare 'alternative **paradigms**', such as **symbolic interactionism**, **ethnomethodology**, **phenomenology**, semiotics, or feminism (see also Eberle, 2014; Guba, 1990; Jacob, 1987; see here Chapter 3).

In the mid-1980s, the *crisis of representation* discussions in artificial intelligence (Winograd & Flores, 1986) and ethnography (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) impact qualitative research as a whole. This makes the process of displaying knowledge and findings a substantial part of the research process. Qualitative research now becomes recognized as a continuous process of constructing versions of reality. After all, the version of themselves that people present in an interview does not necessarily correspond to the version they would have given to a different researcher with a different research question: researchers, who interpret the interview and present it as part of their findings, produce a new version of the whole. Readers of a book, article, or report interpret the researchers' version differently. This means that further versions of the event emerge. Specific interests brought to the reading in each case play a central part. In this context, the evaluation of research and findings becomes a central topic in methodological discussions. This raises the question of whether traditional criteria are still valid and, if not, which other standards should be applied for assessing qualitative research (see here Chapter 29).

The situation in the 1990s is seen by Denzin and Lincoln as the *fifth moment*: narratives have replaced theories, or theories are read as narratives. But here (as in postmodernism in

general) we learn about the end of grand narratives like Marxism or Parsons' systems theory (Parsons & Shils, 1951): the accent has shifted towards theories and narratives that fit specific, delimited, local, historical situations and problems. Experimental writing includes approaches like **autoethnographies** (see Ellis et al., 2011 for an overview), instead of theories, and tales from the field were the outcome of qualitative research (see Chapter 30 for more details on these approaches of writing about research).

The next stage (*sixth moment*) is characterized by postexperimental writing and linking issues of qualitative research to democratic policies. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b, p. 17) mention: 'Fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry and multimedia texts are today taken for granted. Postexperimental writers seek to connect their writings to the needs of a free democratic society.'

The *seventh moment* is characterized by further establishing qualitative research through various new journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry* or *Qualitative Research*.

Denzin and Lincoln's *eighth moment* in the development of qualitative research focused on the rise of **evidence-based practice** as the new criterion of relevance for social science and on the new conservatism in the United States. 'Evidence-based' refers to a rather narrow understanding of which kind of research produces results that can be relevant for informing practices, for example, in medicine, nursing, or social work. According to this understanding, research designs have to be based on using a control group and randomized selection and allocation of participants in the study group and the control group. If this is taken as the only relevant social research type, qualitative research is difficult to locate in this context. Denzin and Giardina (2006) discuss this development in connection with a more general new conservatism in the United States in research politics but also in social welfare policy.

Denzin and Lincoln's outline of its history is often taken as a general reference for the development of qualitative research. However, as Alasuutari (2004) mentions, such a general 'progress narrative' (p. 599) may obscure the fact that qualitative research has become a globalized phenomenon with different developments in various contexts. Thus he proposes a spatial, rather than temporal, view on the development of qualitative research. Therefore I will complement Denzin and Lincoln's outline of a history of qualitative research by a sketch of the development of qualitative research in one particular region in Europe, namely German-speaking areas.

German-speaking Areas

In Germany, Habermas (1967) first recognized that a 'different' tradition and discussion of research was developing in American sociology related to names like Goffman, Garfinkel and Cicourel. After the translation of Cicourel's (1964) methodological critique, a series of anthologies imported contributions from the American discussions. This has made basic texts on ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism available for German discussions.

From the same period, the model of the research process created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) has attracted much attention. Discussions are motivated by the aim to do more justice to the objects of research than is possible in quantitative research, as Hoffmann-Riem's (1980) argument for the **principle of openness** demonstrates. Kleining (1982, p. 233) has argued that it is necessary to understand the object of research as a preliminary until the end of the research, because the object 'will present itself in its true colors only at the end'.

Discussions concerning **naturalistic sociology** (Schatzmann & Strauss, 1973) and appropriate methods are determined by a similar assumption (initially implicit and, later, also explicit). Application of the principle of openness and the rules that Kleining proposes (e.g., to postpone a theoretical formulation of the research object) enables the researcher to avoid constituting the object by the very methods used for studying it. It then becomes possible 'to take everyday

life first and always again in the way it presents itself in each case' (Grathoff, 1978, quoted in Hoffmann-Riem, 1980, p. 362, who ends her article with this quotation).

At the end of the 1970s, a broader and more original discussion began in Germany, which no longer relied exclusively on the translation of American literature. This discussion dealt with interviews, how to apply and how to analyse them, and with methodological questions that have stimulated extensive research (see Flick et al., 2004a for an overview). The main question for this period was whether these developments should be seen as a fashion, a trend, or a new beginning.

At the beginning of the 1980s, two original methods were crucial to the development of qualitative research in Germany: the **narrative interview** by Schütze (1977; Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004; see here Chapter 17) and **objective hermeneutics** by Oevermann et al. (1979; see also Reichertz, 2004; Wernet, 2014; and see Chapter 27). These methods no longer represented simply an import of American developments (as had been the case in applying participant observation or interviews). Both methods have stimulated extensive research practice, mainly in **biographical research** (for overviews see Bertaux, 1981; Rosenthal, 2004). But at least as crucial as the results obtained from these methodologies has been their influence in the general discussion of qualitative methods.

In the mid-1980s, problems of validity and the generalizability of findings obtained with qualitative methods attracted broader attention. Related questions of presentation and the **transparency** of results were discussed. The quantity and, above all, the unstructured nature of the data required the use of computers in qualitative research too (Fielding & Lee, 1991; Gibbs, 2018; Kelle, 1995, 2004; Richards & Richards, 1998; Weitzman & Miles, 1995), leading to the development of software programs like ATLAS.ti and MAXQDA.

Finally, in the 1990s the first textbooks or introductions on the background of the discussions in the German-speaking area were published (see Flick, 2005). At that time also a number of specialized journals in qualitative research were established (e.g., *ZQF [Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung]*, *Sozialer Sinn*, but also *Forum Qualitative Research (FQS)*, which was founded in Germany).

Table 1.1 Phases in the History of Qualitative Research

United States	Germany
Traditional period (1900–45)	Early studies (end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries)
Modernist phase (1945 to the 1970s)	Phase of import (early 1970s)
Blurred genres (until the mid-1980s)	Beginning of original discussions (late 1970s)
Crisis of representation (since the mid-1980s)	Developing original methods (1970s and 1980s)
Fifth moment (the 1990s)	Consolidation and procedural questions (late 1980s and 1990s)
Sixth moment (postexperimental writing)	Research practice (since the 1980s)
Seventh moment (establishing qualitative research through successful journals, 2000–4)	Methodological proliferation and technological developments (since the 1990s)
Eighth moment (the future and new challenges – since 2005)	Establishing qualitative research (journals, book series, scientific societies – since the 1990s)

Using Table 1.1, we may contrast the lines of development in the United States and in Germany. In Germany, we find increasing methodological consolidation complemented by a concentration on procedural questions in a growing research practice in the country. In the

United States, on the other hand, recent developments are characterized by a trend to question the apparent certainties provided by methods. The role of presentation in the research process, the crisis of representation and the relativity of what is presented have been stressed: this has made the attempts to formalize and canonize methods (**canonization**) rather secondary. In American qualitative research the 'correct' application of procedures of interviewing or interpretation has tended to count for less than the 'practices and politics of interpretation' (Denzin, 2000). Qualitative research therefore becomes, or is linked still more strongly with, a specific attitude based on the researcher's openness and reflexivity.

As the examples of the United States and Germany show, the histories and developments of qualitative research overlap but also diverge in different local areas. There have been waves and movements back and forth in the acceptance and relevance of qualitative research. Practical aspects of establishment (new methods, tools or **research programmes**) are sometimes paralleled by politics and challenges in the disciplinary developments (see also Flick, 2015).

Qualitative Research at the End of Modernity

At the beginning of this chapter, some changes to the potential objectives were mentioned in order to show the relevance of qualitative research. Recent diagnoses in the sciences result in more reasons to turn to qualitative research. In his discussion of the 'hidden agenda of modernity', Toulmin (1990) explains in great detail why he believes modern science is dysfunctional. He sees four tendencies for empirical social research in philosophy and science as a way forward, linked to returning: (1) to the oral traditions by studying narratives, language and communication; (2) to the particular – in empirical studies with the aim 'not only to concentrate on abstract and universal questions but to treat again specific, concrete problems which do not arise generally but occur in specific types of situations' (Toulmin, 1990, p. 190); (3) to the local – by studying local systems of knowledge, practices and experiences instead of assuming and attempting to test their universal validity; and (4) to the timely – problems and solutions in their temporal or historical context (Toulmin, 1990).

Qualitative research is oriented towards analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts. Therefore, qualitative research is in a position to design ways for social sciences, psychology and other fields to make concrete the tendencies that Toulmin mentions, to transform them into research programmes, and to maintain the necessary flexibility towards their objects and tasks: 'Like buildings on a human scale, our intellectual and social procedures will do what we need in the years ahead, only if we take care to avoid irrelevant or excessive stability, and keep them operating in ways that are adaptable to unforeseen – or even unforeseeable – situations and functions' (1990, p. 186). Concrete suggestions and methods for realizing such programmes of research are outlined in the following chapters.

New Challenges: Diversity and Decolonizing Qualitative Research

While Toulmin discusses perspectives for (qualitative) research (backwards) in returning to pre-modern traditions, current discussions look forward and put a critical reassessment of historical backgrounds on the agenda. Discussions about decolonizing methods are not limited to qualitative research but focus on social science methodologies more generally (Chilisa, 2020; Smith, 1999/2021). Nevertheless, they have become relevant for qualitative research as well.

Chilisa (2020, pp. 105–6) has summarized a number of limitations of dominant research methodologies from a decolonizing research perspective. She sees the role of imperialism, colonization and globalization in the construction of knowledge ignored, and academic imperialism, which dismisses, and attempts ‘to quash alternative theories, perspectives, or methodologies’. A methodological imperialism is based on ‘a collection of methods, techniques, and rules that valorize the dominant culture’. Euro-Western languages are dominant in the construction of knowledge and ‘unfavorable to former colonized societies and historically oppressed groups’ (Chilisa, 2020, pp. 105–6).

Mainly, in this discussion it is argued that social science methods have been developed against the backgrounds of a Western epistemology and political traditions of colonization. These traditions have a specific impact if these methods are used in indigenous research or in non-Western contexts. Three consequences are drawn from these discussions. (1) Researchers such as Chilisa (2020), Smith (1999/2021) or Cram (2022) request a stronger role of indigenous people (such as Māori in New Zealand for example) in indigenous research and other communities beyond being interviewed or observed (e.g., ‘Nothing about us without us’ – Manokaran et al., 2021).

Some authors (e.g. Smith, 1999/2021) (1) call for being involved in planning and doing the research and that only indigenous people should do research with and about indigenous people. These discussions are virulent in New Zealand-Māori (see Cram, 2022; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2022; Smith, 1999/2021), African (see Chilisa, 2020) and Asian contexts (Hsiung, 2012). (2) A specific discussion about indigenous methodologies (Chilisa, 2020) develops. Some Western researchers (3) have started to discuss the background assumptions and preconditions of interviewing (Gobo, 2011) for example, or have integrated an approach of a decolonizing interview in their overviews of interviewing (Roulston, 2010, based on Smith, 1999; see also Chapter 31). And finally we should sound out which role qualitative research can play in the developments and how we should conceive the framing and methodologies of qualitative research accordingly. This may then become relevant for other communities as contexts of doing research with vulnerable groups, LGBT communities or in postcolonial studies also in European and North American contexts. Finally, in qualitative studies in the Global South (see Schöngut-Grollmus & Energici, 2022) these discussions become relevant.

What does this mean for a contemporary book on qualitative research? First, qualitative research should be conducted with *diversity, equity and inclusion* in mind. This means (1) ethnographies or interviewing for example should more fully take into account the diversity of participants and their situations of living (see Chapter 11). (2) The research situation should be constructed in a way that does justice to the target group and be characterized by valuing the individual circumstances of participants, their needs and perhaps the discrimination they experience. (3) Qualitative methods should be constructed and applied in a way that all social groups and communities can be included in the practice of research – as participants but also as researchers.

Subjectivity and Identity in Doing Qualitative Research

Second, qualitative research, understood this way, will ask for an extended concept of reflexivity. This should (1) cover issues of diversity in the target groups and also of the researchers. It should (2) take into account what the discussion about decolonizing methods has pointed out for the design of qualitative research methods in other communities such as vulnerable groups and LGBT communities. And (3) reflexivity should focus on the research in two ways: one is for researchers to take into account their own subjectivity and identity when doing research in sensitive contexts – for example with specific communities or in the context of queer and LGBT communities (see e.g. Milani & Borba, 2022) and feminist research (see Hawkey & Ussher, 2022).

Knowledge about qualitative research is helpful in four ways. (1) It is necessary for understanding and assessing existing qualitative research in general. (2) It can provide the starting point and basis for doing your own empirical qualitative study, for example, in the context of a thesis or as a professional researcher. (3) It can provide the starting point for critically assessing established research approaches for their adequacy for specific issues areas and study groups. (4) It will be helpful for understanding critical debates about research and methods including the justification for such critical debates.

What you need to ask yourself

For these four purposes, Box 1.2 offers a number of guideline questions which allow a basic assessment of research in planning your own or in reading other researchers' studies (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2

WHAT YOU NEED TO ASK YOURSELF

Understanding qualitative research

1. How far can the issue of your research be studied by using qualitative methods?
2. What is the main focus of your study; what should the main focus of your data collection be?
3. Who should your interview partners be – lay people, professionals, experts, elites?

What you need to succeed

For a first orientation in qualitative research you can ask a number of guideline questions regardless of the specific qualitative methodology that has been used. They can be applied to the various methodological alternatives.

The reasons for doing qualitative research and the ways of using this approach discussed in this chapter are highlighted in Box 1.3.

Box 1.3

WHAT YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

Understanding qualitative research

1. Do I understand what qualitative research is about?
2. Am I aware that qualitative research has developed over time and in different contexts as set of methods of doing research?
3. Do I see the role of decolonizing research methods for my use of qualitative research?
4. Do I have some idea what qualitative research is used for in social research?

What you have learned

- Decisions to do qualitative research can result from the particular developments in the social worlds to be studied.
- Qualitative research has, for several reasons, a special relevance for contemporary research in many fields.
- Specific kinds of research questions can be the starting point.
- Limitations of quantitative research can be the background for choosing a qualitative approach.
- Quantitative methods and qualitative research methods both have limitations.
- Qualitative research exhibits a variety of approaches.
- There are common features among the different approaches in qualitative research.
- Qualitative research has developed over time and there are differing developments in different areas (e.g., the United States and Germany).
- Qualitative research has a particular relationship with decolonizing research and should recognize the importance of taking the needs of some communities more into account.

What's next

This handbook gives a detailed account of the ongoing development of qualitative research in the United States, mainly with a focus on interpretation and performance but also on current developments in other areas. Recommended for contextualizing current approaches.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th edn). London: Sage.

This open access article further develops the comparison of research styles in the US and Germany.

Flick, U. (2005). Qualitative Research in Sociology in Germany and the US – State of the Art, Differences and Developments [47 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(3), Art. 23. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0503230>

The next four resources present in more detail the range of approaches in analysing and collecting qualitative data. They are helpful in providing an overview for making decisions for a specific method and for detailing its application. The handbooks focus on designing qualitative research, on collecting and analysing data.

Flick, U. (Ed.) (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*. London: Sage.

Flick, U. (Ed.) (2014). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

Flick, U. (Ed.) (2022). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* (2 vols). London: Sage.

This collection of short introductory books outlines approaches such as interviews or ethnography in more detail.

Flick, U. (Ed.) (2018). *The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit* (2nd edn – 10 vols). London: Sage.

In this article a more recent overview of developments of the state and future of qualitative research is presented, also covering aspects such as the globalization and focusing on the societal relevance of qualitative research.

Flick, U. (2015). Qualitative Inquiry – 2.0 at 20? Developments, Trends, and Challenges for the Politics of Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(7), 599–608.

This book gives an introduction to indigenous research methods in general.

Chilisa, B. (2020). *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (2nd edn). London: Sage.

Qualitative Research Navigator

You are
here
in your
project



Foundations of Qualitative Research

- Why and How to Do Qualitative Research
- The Qualitative–Quantitative Distinction
- Theoretical Frameworks
- Methods and Data in Qualitative Research
- Subjectivity, Identity and Texts in Qualitative Research

Research Design

- Formulating a Research Question
- Choosing and Constructing the Research Design
- Planning the Process in Qualitative Research
- Ethics of Doing Qualitative Research
- Using the Existing Literature
- Access, Field Relations and Participatory Research
- Sampling
- Qualitative Designs with Multiple Methods

Verbal Data

- Collecting Verbal Data
- Doing Interviews
- Doing Focus Groups
- Using Narrative Data

Data Beyond Talk

- Collecting Data Beyond Talk
- Observation and Ethnography
- Visual Data: Photography, Film and Video
- Documents as Data and Secondary Data Analysis
- Digital and Social Media Research

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Analysing Qualitative Data
- Transcription and Data Management
- Grounded Theory Coding
- Thematic Coding and Content Analysis
- Analysing Naturally Occurring Data: Conversation and Discourse
- Using Software in Qualitative Data Analysis

Grounding, Writing and Outlook

- Quality of Qualitative Research: Criteria and Beyond
 - Writing Up and Assessment in Qualitative Research
 - State of the Art and the Future
-