

Effective Research Proposal Issues and Limits

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Empirical Research

- Experience (data) as a basic source of knowledge

Vs.

- theoretical research,
- analytical research,
- conceptual-philosophical research,
- historical research

Levels of Empirical Research

- **Exploration** (formulative research, often applied research, research problem not clearly defined, problem „at preliminary stage“, generally not sufficient for diss.)
- **Description** (new facts or relations? Speculation)
- **Explanation** – „the“ Purpose (causal research)

Research Proposal

- Describes what will be done during the research
- Its preparation may also involve research!
- Is a product of systematic process of planning and research design
- Target group: supervisors, grant providers

Proposal structure (Punch 2008)

i. Title and title page

ii. Abstract

iii. Introduction

- Area and topic
- Background and context
- Statement of purpose (or aims)

iv. Research questions

- General
- Specific

v. Conceptual framework, theory, hypotheses (if appropriate)

vi. The literature

vii. Methods

- Design – strategy and framework
- Sample
- Data collection – instruments and procedures
- Data analysis

viii. Significance

ix. Limitations and delimitations (if appropriate)

x. Consent, access and participants' protection

xi. References

Getting started

- Topic, issue area
- Literature, theoretical background (puzzle in the literature? new projection?)
- Clear identification of the problem
- Formulating main and specific research question (how many?)
- Formulating the hypotheses (or not?)

Always remember, that

„All social research has a relevant literature, and no research takes place in vacuum.“

[Punch 2008]

...and read, google, read, read! The problem needs to be contextualized. What has been published on a problem? Why is it relevant? Why to ask these questions?

What is a theory? (Creswell)

- **Quant:** „Interrelated set of constructs formed into propositions that specify the relationships among variables“ that „describes how and why variables are related“
- A theory is necessary to generate *hypotheses*
- **Qual:** „A broad explanation, lens or perspective of the study (Feminist perspective, Racialized discourse, Critical theory, Queer theory, Disability inquiry...)... an outcome of the study... even may not be employed at all!“

From problem(s) to question(s)

- select a research area (*quality of life*)
- develop one or more topics within that area; (*determinants of quality of life, impacts of quality of life, measurement of quality of life*)
- select one from among these topics to keep your project manageable; (*economic determinants of perceived quality life in Brno*)
- develop research questions, general and specific, for this topic; (*What are the key economic determinants of quality life in Brno? What is their comparative influence on the quality of life there? How their influence differ according to the morphogenetic zones of the city?*)
- determine what data would be required to answer each specific research question; (*What are the relevant economic factors affecting the perceived quality of life in general? Which of them are relevant in Brno? (...) What is the impact of public financing of education in Brno on the perceived quality of life here? What is the impact of ... „*)
- select research design, data collection and data analysis procedures in order to do this.

Good research question/goals

- Makes you invest time in your research
- Is interesting for the people in the discipline
- Is resolvable (is not too broad)
- Is interesting not only because it was not asked before
- Is good not only because it seems „cool“

Not so good research question/goals

- Is not resolvable based on the empirical data (*What is the real value of sport for the society?*)
- Is loaded with normative element (*Is public financial support for sport too high? Should public financial support for sport reflect the concept of moral hazard?*)
- Consists of „defining“, „demonstrating“ or „evaluating“ (*How can we define regional competitiveness? How can we evaluate humanization of block of flats? The goal is to find and evaluate factors of ...“*)
- Stems from methods and techniques, not vice versa (*„To improve and further develop existing model of...“*)
- Are too simplistic (*„Discovering the share/ratio of ...“*)
- Suggest superior epistemological quality and use term „real“ or „true“ (*What is the real structure of income of nonprofit organizations?*)
- Conditions the other research question(s) (*„Determine whether XY can be identified/defined/measured“ + „Measure the impact of XY on WY“*)

Questions over proposal:

- Is the proposed research feasible and 'doable'?
- Is the research worth doing?
- Can the candidate do it?
- If done, will it produce a successful dissertation, at whatever level is involved?

How to write a bad proposal

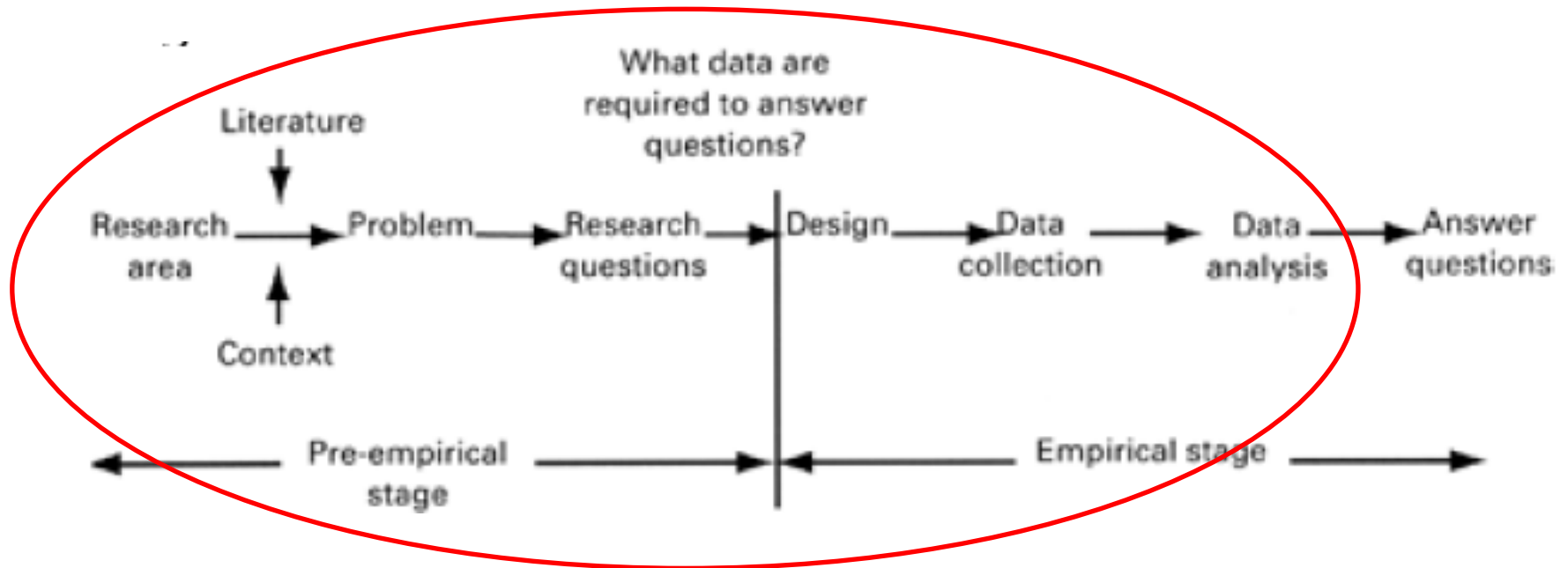
- 1) Fill your proposal with technical language (it makes you seem smarter)
- 2) Make sure your proposal's argument is exceedingly complicated (only smart people should be able to follow your logic after all!)
- 3) Delight in irrelevant examples
- 4) Never provide any kind of synthesis (it should be self-evident, right?)
- 5) Be overly vague or overly specific or both, overly.
- 6) Clearly imagine your audience, then write your proposal for someone else.
- 7) Never contextualize your research
- 8) Humility does not win money – overstate your broader impacts with abandon.
- 9) Make sure your title either grabs the reader's attention (exclamation points help) or summarizes the entire project.
- 10) Use third person perspective in detailing your research so as not to appear self-centered with all those "I"'s (or use the second person to really grab the readers' attention)
- 11) Cite a lot (I'm standing on the shoulders of [an army of] giants!) or not at all (Who needs giants anyway?)
- 12) Don't define A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.S
- 13) Propose research with serious moral/ethical concerns (Science ain't for sissies!)
- 14) Propose research that cannot feasibly be accomplished ('Because you might be the one who can finally do it')
- 15) Don't proofread (If stats can have margins of error so can your spelling)

Resource: <https://colindonihue.com/2012/10/10/how-to-write-a-bad-research-proposal/>

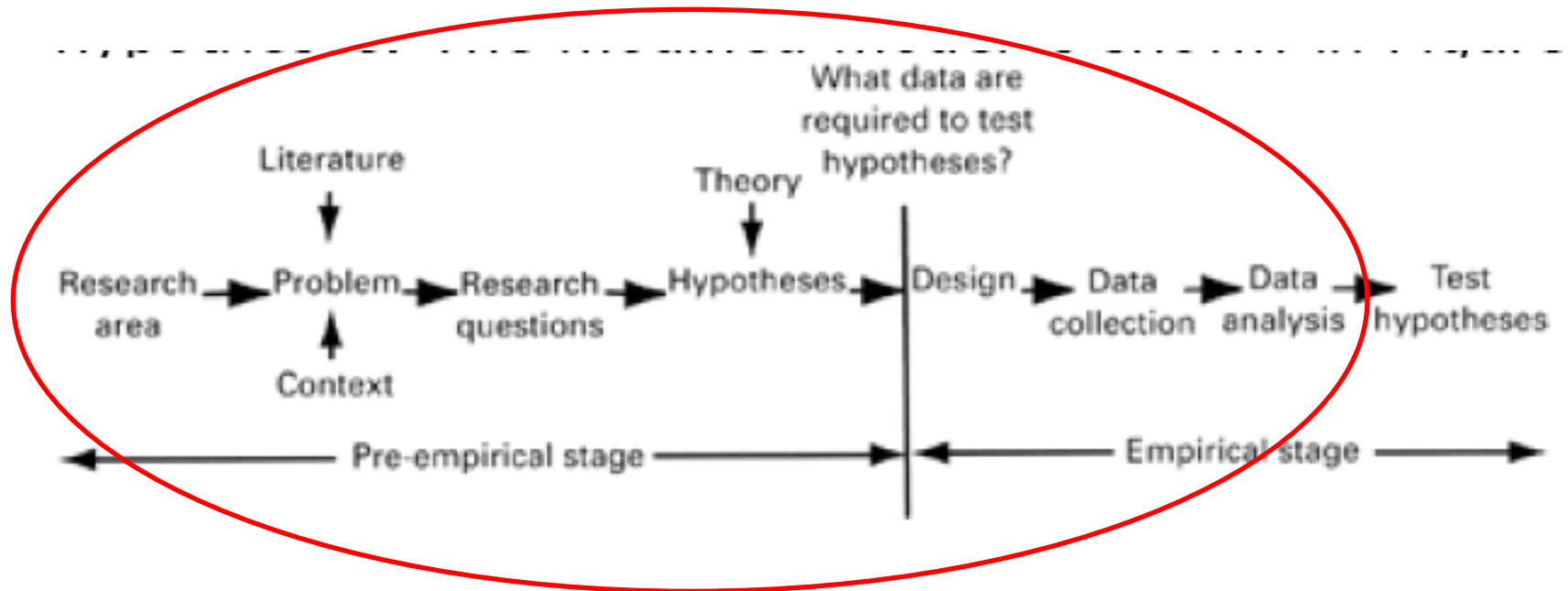
Simplified model of research



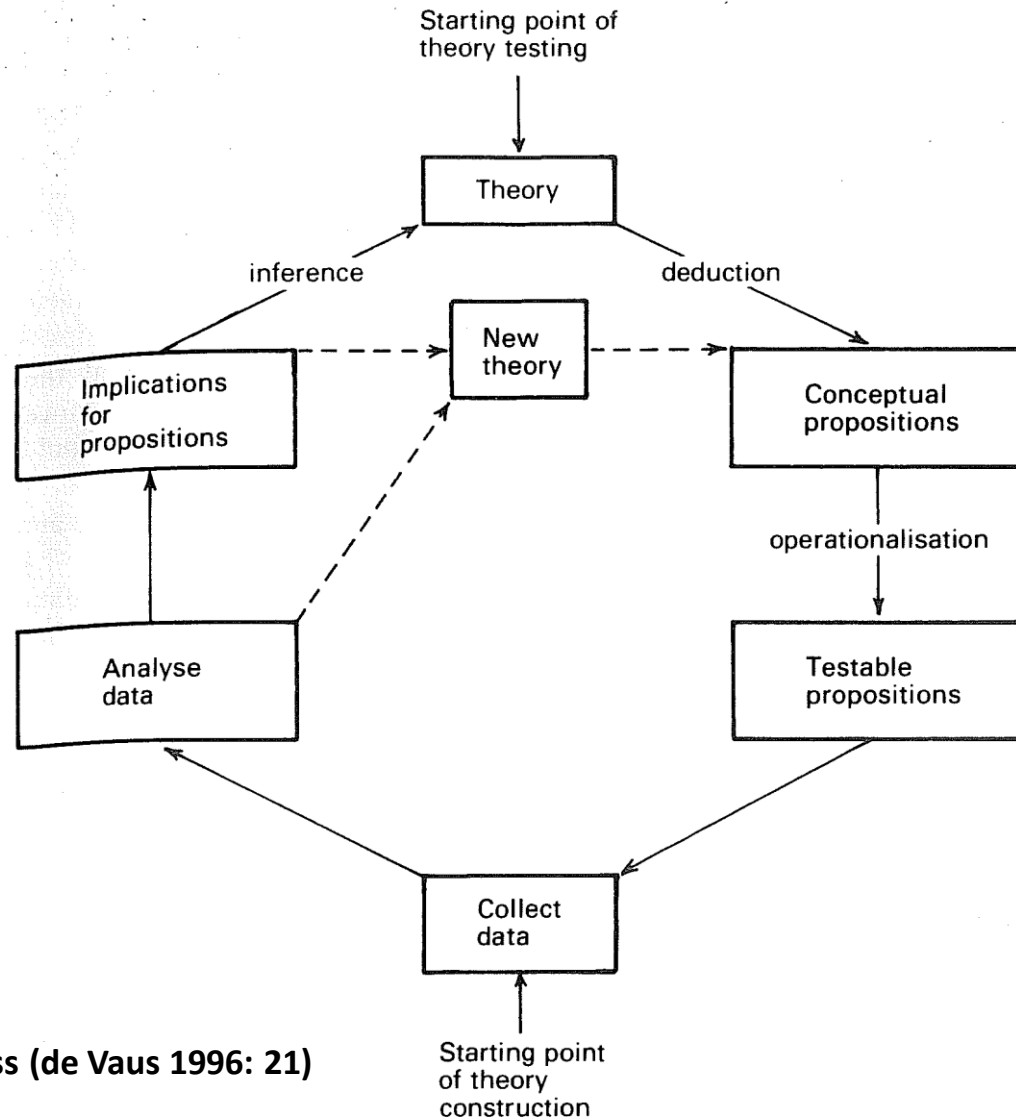
Simplified model of research



Hypotheses ?



Hypotheses in research process



What is a hypothesis?

- A tentative answer to a **research question**
- Relation(s) that we want to test in our research
- Conjecture about causal and non-causal the **relationship** between one or more **independent** variables and a **dependent** variable
- Typically, a hypothesis is connected to a larger conceptual **framework/theory** (Brady, Collier)

Do I need hypothesis?

„I believe that hypotheses should be used in research as and when appropriate, rather than in some mandatory or automatic way. That belief is based on the view that hypotheses have an important function in research when they can be deduced from a theory, or when they are explained by a theory, so that the research, in testing the hypotheses, is really testing the theory behind the hypotheses.“

K. Punch - *Developing Effective Research Proposals*
Essential Resources for Social Research

Hypothesis should:

- Have explanatory power
- State expected relationship & direction
- Be testable
- Written as simply as possible
- Relate to general, not specific phenomenon
- Be plausible

Hypotheses?

„The Czech Social Democratic Party was the only political party in 2006 that was capable to implement marketing strategies a we can label this party as marketing-oriented.“

„Industry structure is a determinant of generic enterprise strategy adopted by a service enterprise seeking competitive advantage in international markets.“

„In contemporary society the cultural politics, with regard to its mission, may be implemented effectively only as a combination of public and private sector efforts while the fully functional market mechanisms is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its effectiveness.“

„In the long run, the concepts of competitiveness and sustainability may be considered as analogous“

Research design

- Connects research questions to data

The data will be collected and analysed:

- following what strategy (*ethnography, experiment, case study*)?
- within what framework (*conceptual status of objects of research and their relation*)?
- from whom (*unit of analysis, unit of observation*)?
- how (*statistics, interpretation*)?

How is research strategy related to method?

- Research problem (questions ...) →
 - → **research strategy** →
 - → theoretical framework →
 - → **method/technique**
-
- **Problem driven approach VS. method-driven approach**

Two basic research strategies

- Testing hypotheses - deduction
- Formulating hypotheses – induction
- Broader perspective: what data I need to answer my research question? How shall I analyze them?
- Research problem, personal experience, audience (Creswell)

Inductive research strategies

Strategies of inquiry focus on data collection, analysis, and writing

- Narrative research
- Phenomenology
- Ethnographies
- Grounded theory studies
- Case study

Inductive research strategies

- Complexity, thick description, variation not required, important cases, case-based, small N)
- Researcher has sustained and intensive experience with data/participants
 - Moving deeper into **understanding** the data
 - **Representing** the data
 - Making an **interpretation** or the **larger meaning** of the data
- Strategic, ethical, and personal issues can arise

Comparative method

- Functional equivalent of experiment
- Controlling the effect of variables with small number of cases
- Case selection crucial!!! (manipulation of variables)
- Cross-sectional design for small N

A B C D occur together with w x y z
A E F G occur together with w t u v

Therefore A is the cause, or the effect, of w.

A B C D occur together with w x y z
B C D occur together with x y z

Therefore A is the cause, or the effect, or a part of the cause of w.

Hypothetical– deductive strategy

- The goal is generalizability/transferability
- The procedures are public and replicable
- The conclusions are uncertain (statistics... probabilistic))

- Adequate (full range of) **variability** in values of research variables,
- Precise and accurate **measurement**,
- Identifying and controlling the effects of **confounding variables**, and
- Appropriate **subject** selection

Types of deductive strategies

Experimental designs (direct manipulation of independent variable, control who gets treatment and when and how much each subject receives)

– *True Experimental Studies, Pre-experimental Studies, Quasi-Experimental Studies*

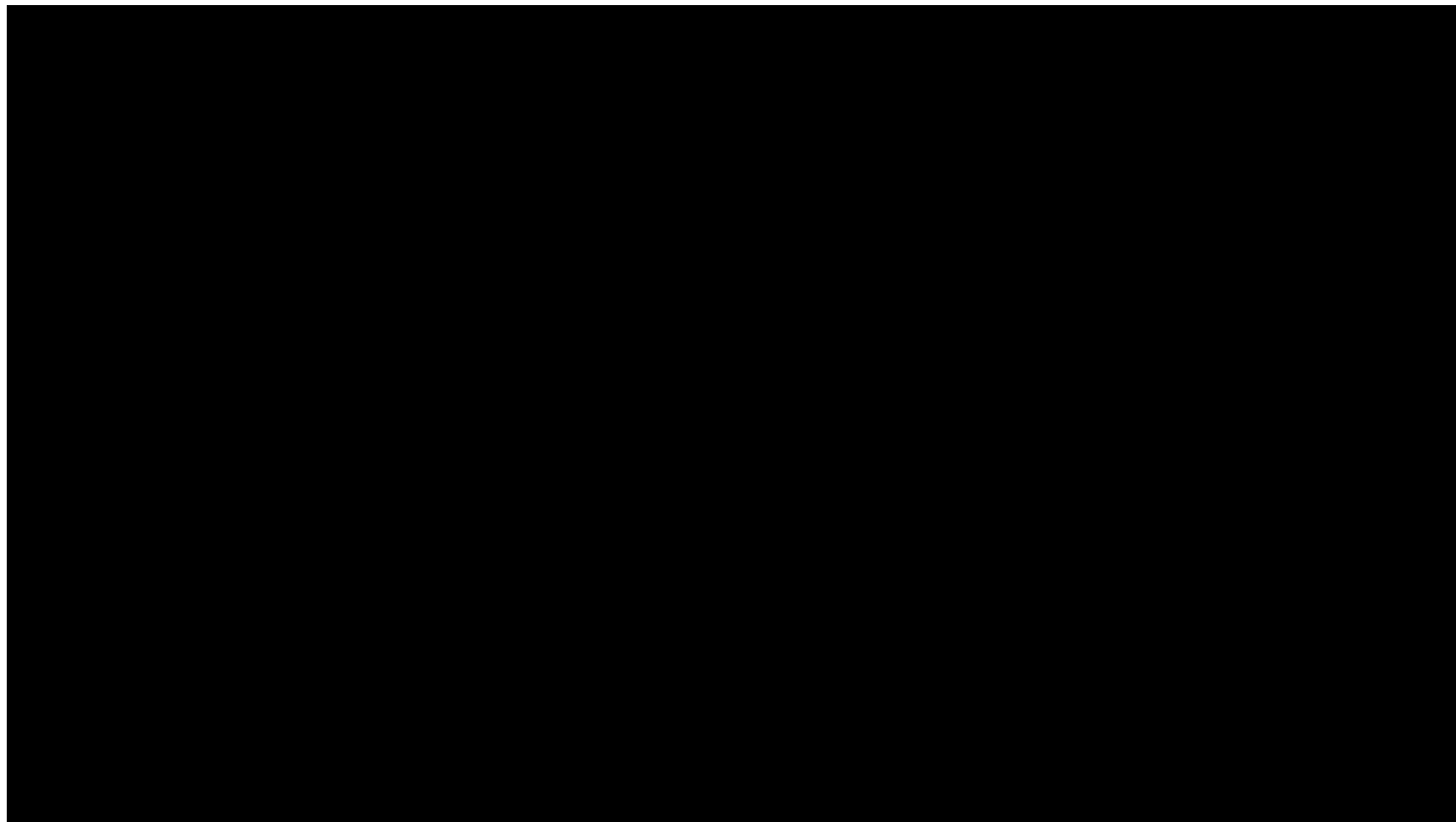
Correlational designs (Covariation Rule, Temporal Precedence Rule, Internal Validity Rule)

– *Ex-post Facto/Correlational Studies*

Explanation

- Explanation = causal explanation (effect, *impact*, mechanism, *cause*)
 - independent variable -> (mediating variable 1-> mediating variable 2 ->) dependent variable
 - Nomothetic Causal Explanation (probabilistic)
 - Idiographic Causal Explanation (deterministic)
1. Association
 2. Time Order
 3. Nonspuriousness
 4. Mechanism
 5. Context

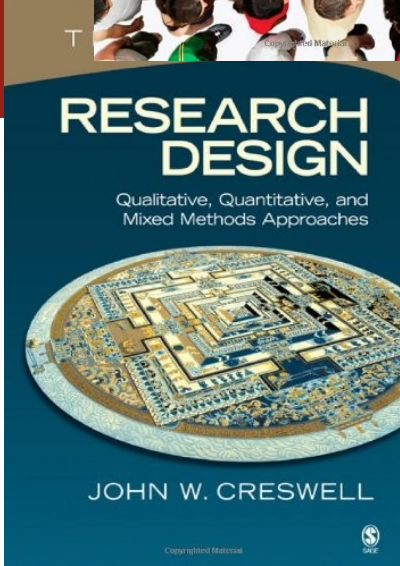
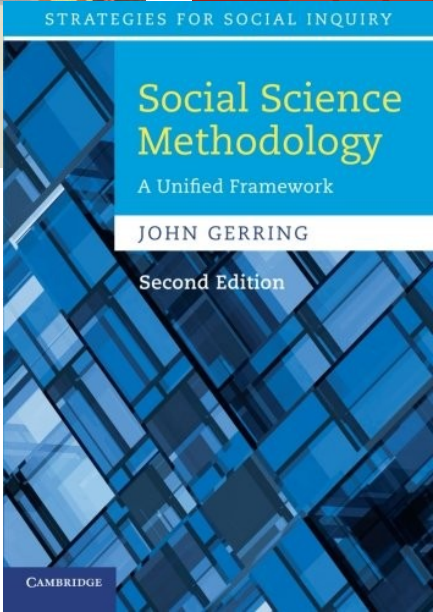
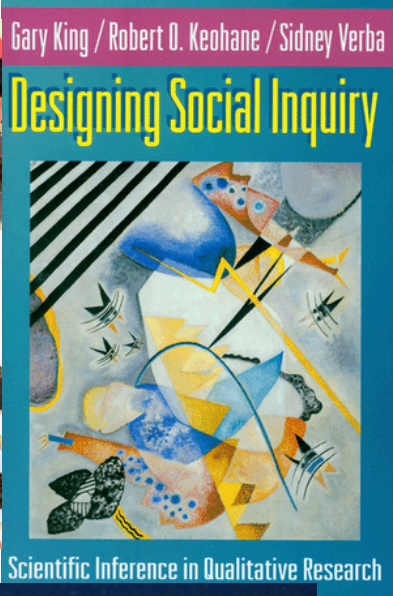
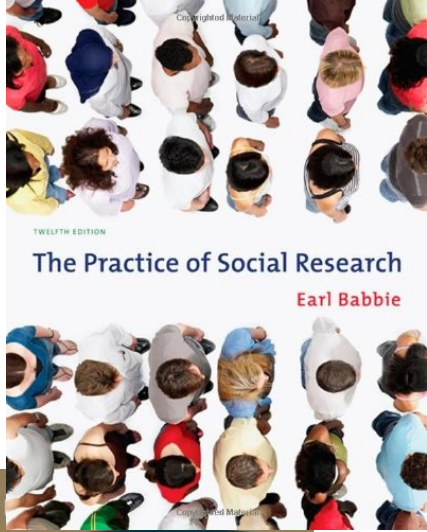
Causality vs. choice



Beyond quant./qual. divide: Mixed methods

- **Process tracing**: tools to study of causal mechanisms in **a single case** research design (Beach, Pedersen; George, Bennett)
- ambition to trace **causal mechanisms**
- potential of enabling us to open up the **black box of causality** using small-n case study methods
- small N, variation not required
- murkiness about what process tracing actually is and how it should be used in practice can be cleared up by *differentiating process tracing into three variants* within social science: **theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining outcomes**

Resources



STEPHEN VAN EVERA

GUIDE TO METHODS FOR STUDENTS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



Cornell University Press

ITHACA AND LONDON