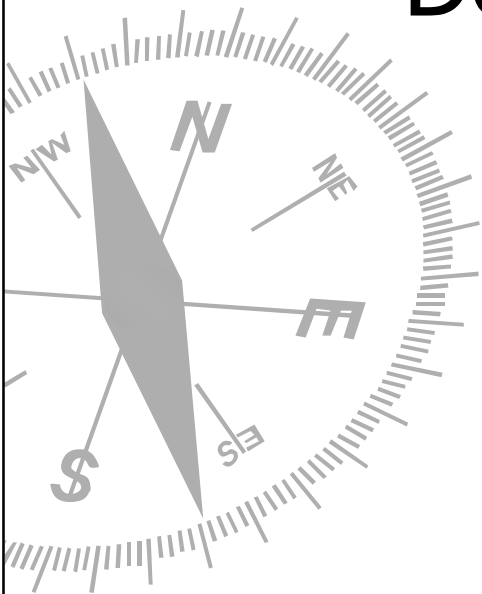


Selecting a Topic

Doing Qualitative Research

David Silverman



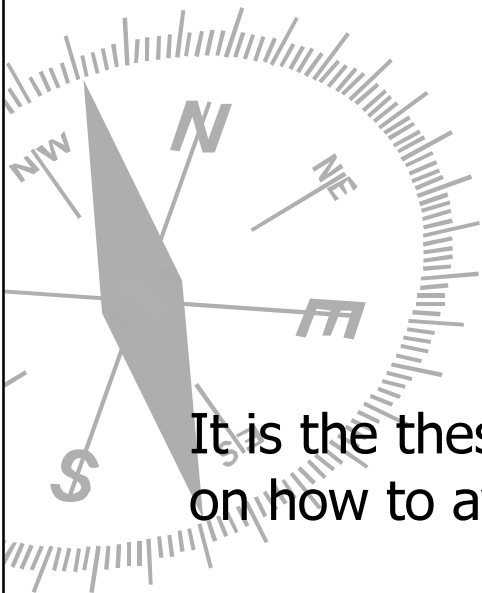
University social science methodology courses emphasize memorization rather than manipulating and applying concepts.

This creates a risky environment when it is time for them to do research

They often follow one of three strategies

1. simplistic induction
2. the kitchen sink gambit
3. grand theory

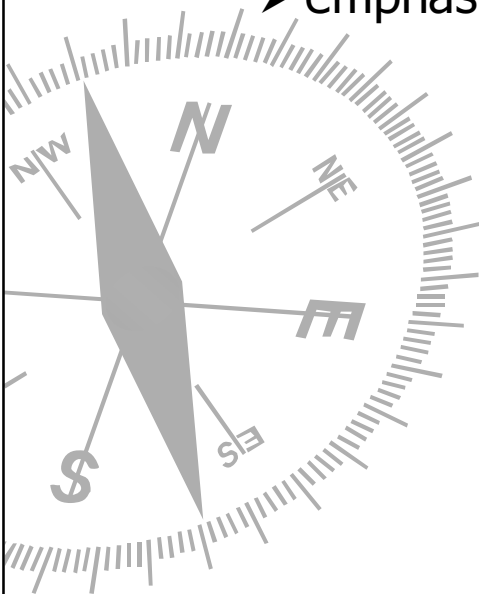
It is the thesis of this chapter to examine each and provide advice on how to avoid some pitfalls of each



Simplistic Inductivism

This was a backlash to the strict research designs of quantitative theory.

- researchers want to “grasp the reality of everyday life”
- meaning will emerge from exposure
- theory is grounded in data
- approach the research without any definitions of concepts
- the situation is a static reality viewed from the outside
- emphasis on immersion, description and exploration



Pitfalls of Simplistic Induction

The omnipresence of theory

- All researchers approach fieldwork with some orienting ideas, foci and tools
- Minimizing presuppositions comes from naturalistic inquiry

The need for research design

- The looser the initial design, the more unfocused data, the more difficult to make generalizable conclusions

Over the past century qualitative research has built a wealth of common knowledge that allows researchers to change their positions, explore new areas based on ever accumulating data.



The Kitchen Sink Gambit



Do not:

Pick a broad topic

Try and include every aspect of the problem

Do:

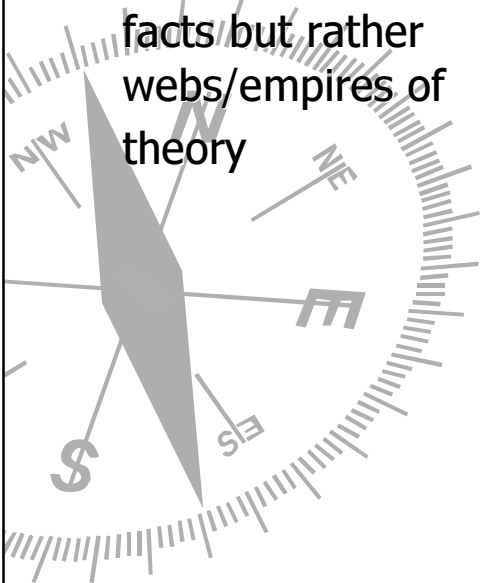
Think about depth not breadth

Say a lot about a little problem

Avoid saying a little about a big problem, it will look like a cop out

Grand Theory

Thesis without
Leaving the library
the
Not
concerned about
facts but rather
webs/empires of
theory



Problems:

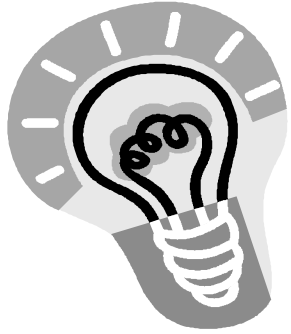
1. Do you have will to stop Not reading?
2. Must be aware of new trends in
3. May lose touch with reality.

If you are having trouble thinking of your own research idea....

Use your knowledge to sensitize you to researchable issues!

History **C**ulture **P**olitical **C**ontextual

- Institutions mean different things in different contexts
- Researchers *should not* import assumptions about context
- Not necessary to combine sensitizers, possibly confusing
- Without using any you risk common sense explanations



More tips on generating research ideas...

Use earlier findings and test their limits by adding new conditions.

Weber to define bases of consent

Sefi and Heritage for HIV counseling



Introduce a 3rd variable

General: How young people view the elderly

Specific: if a grandparent lives with them

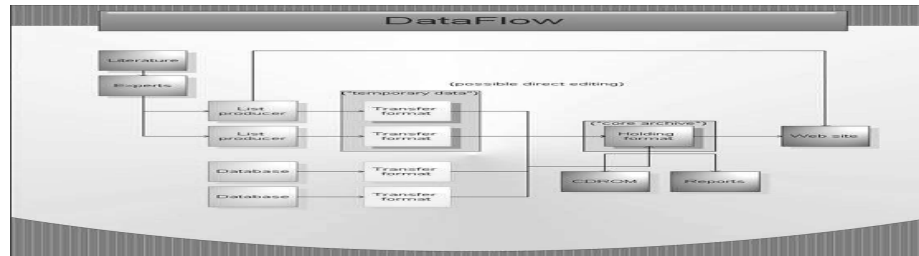
how media representations change this
when and where they make descriptions

Strategies for kitchen sinkers

Do less more efficiently!

How do you narrow your ideas down?

Flow chart: set out key components and how they relate



Find a puzzle: What am I really trying to find out?

How/why did x develop?

How does x work?

What causes x or what influence does x have on y?

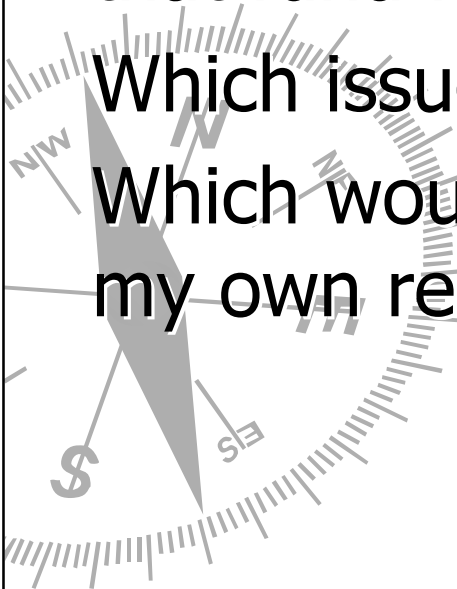
You can't research them all, so how do you choose?

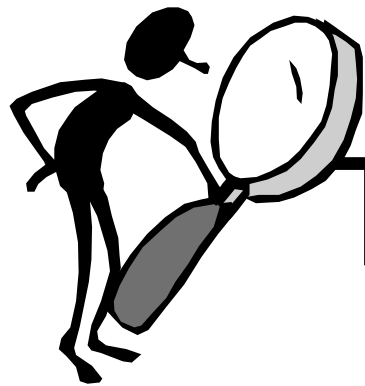
Which puzzle most interests me?

Which puzzle might interest my supervisor or those that fund me?

Which issue relates to my background?

Which would generate questions I could answer with my own resources and available data?

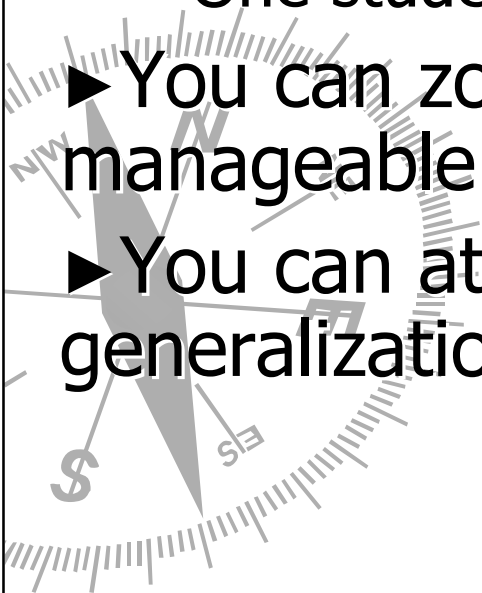




The zoom lens

What you lose in breadth you will gain in detail!

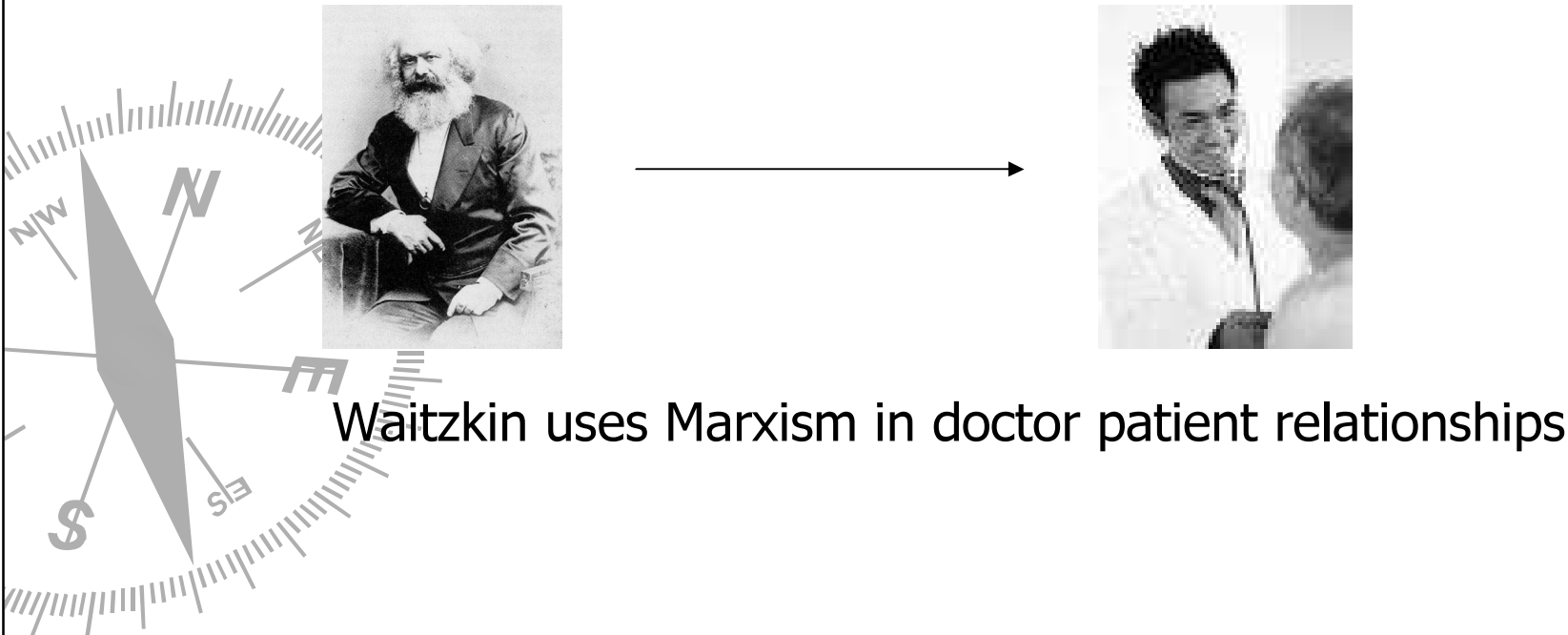
- ▶ Taking some manageable unit of 1
 - Think in manageable units of 1
 - One student, one day or one event
- ▶ You can zoom in “closer and closer until your task is manageable and back out to regain perspective.”
- ▶ You can attempt later to broaden your generalizations a different levels of reality



The 3rd Variable

Benefits: It guards against explaining complex processes in terms of a single cause

There are social scientists who claim that one factor or institution is the cause of everything and do research to prove it



Strategies for Grand Theorists



Ignore Fashion: Stick to central readings

You can use trendy theories to reflect on implications and limitations of your theory at the end

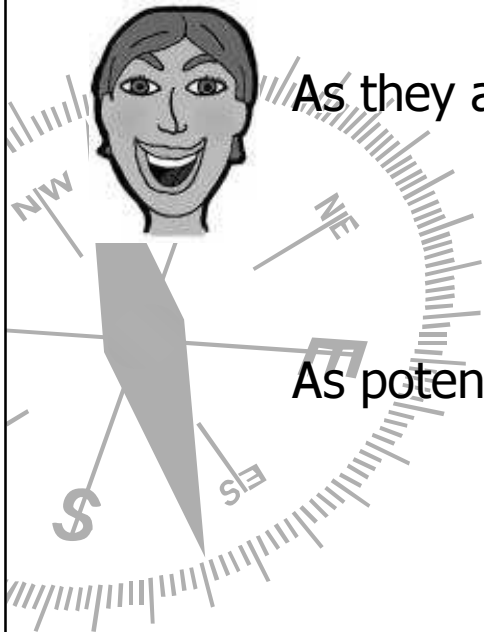


Find Some Data:

Even if it is not directly related to your thesis it will stimulate your mind in new ways

Conclusion:

There are 2 ways of thinking about these pathways



As they are related to your personality and your personal experience

As potential pitfalls in all research

