

THREE

Searching and reviewing world literature

- 3.1 Searching world literature
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How would donkeys review the books of the Bible? They would probably write about all the donkeys – there are lots in the Bible. The problem when reviewing world literature is to maintain reflexive objectivity (C1.2), and not focus on the familiar things that affirm our personal worldviews. Otherwise, the review might as well be written by a donkey.

Around 90% of world information has been produced in the previous two years, and obviously the old idea of basing a literature review on what can be found in a few libraries is no longer sensible. Literature reviews must now be fast, vast and ongoing. For world research, a review has the important function of starting to *focus* a study (C4.2). A good review is particularly important before fieldwork. Mistakes are very expensive, and researchers look very foolish if they visit a country to do research that can easily be done in a home library or online.

This chapter helps with searching and reviewing world literature critically. International literature is notoriously unreliable, not least because it is usually copied many times. But this problem is not new (Figure 3.1).¹ The website elaborates on reliability in relation to international sources.

The Indian scribes are careless, and do not take pains to produce correct and well-collated copies. In consequence, the highest results of the author's mental development are lost by their negligence, and his book becomes already in the first or second copy so full of faults, that the text appears as something entirely new, which neither a scholar nor one familiar with the subject, whether Hindu or Muslim, could any longer understand.

Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, *India* (circa 1030)

Figure 3.1 The reliability of international sources

3.1 Searching world literature

What is 'literature'? The distinctions in Figure 3.2 help to decide. A literature review does *not* include the new data or findings from the research study it forms part of, but it should provide new understandings about the texts that have been reviewed, and other insights. There are also different reasons for a review,² which are explained on the website. A search will probably start as a simple bibliography – a list to see what is available and to find possible gaps. Then this can be developed into a more detailed assessment.

Literature, for a literature review, is usually in the form of single research reports, statistics, texts about specific topics, specialist websites, news media and other front-line accounts of events. These reports may be by academics and other field-researchers, journalists, NGO staff, public officials, sailors, staff from international companies, explorers, travellers and bloggers. 'Literature' can include audio, film and video texts – scripts, commentaries, credits.

Documentary research (C13.2) goes further, and is a data collection *and analysis* method, which treats a text as a source of data. But some of the approaches used to review literature may be similar.

Biographical research also goes further than a literature review, to study specific people. But a review may provide the background for biographical research by, for example, assessing similar biographies, or contextual factors.

Theories and concepts (C2) usually derive from assessments of many empirical studies, reasoned arguments and relevant literature sources within a significant time period, and are usually created by academics.

Figure 3.2 What is 'literature'?

Searches are likely to start through using keywords on internet search engines such as *Google*, *Google Scholar* and *Amazon* books, or bibliographic software such as *RefWorks*.³ *Google Books Ngram Viewer* helps to locate texts worldwide (Box 3.1). Sites like *YouTube* and *Pathe News* provide video and audio data, and texts in the form of commentaries. *Wikipedia*, and other information-bases, may have information that

is biased, flawed, incomplete, or managed by government intelligence services. But entries can help to map (conceptually list) the main concepts of a topic and indicate further reading and people to contact. Comparing entries for the same topic, on *Wikipedias* in different languages, can help to build a balanced view.

Exciting IT can lead to overlooking simple and long-standing ways of finding important literature – reading the *references* and *sources* lists in previous relevant studies, and looking along library shelves for books *next* to the one you thought you wanted. Journalists often phone or email authors to ask for relevant material, whereas academic researchers might spend many hours trying to obtain publications through libraries. Journalists sometimes ask why academics conduct searches as if all their counterparts are dead.

Starting points for an *area study* could be the *CIA World Factbook* and *BBC Country Profiles*. Cultural attachés at embassies and consulates, and national cultural organizations such as the *Institute Français* and *Korea Foundation* may have helpful documents. For events, international media sites such as *Reuters* and *Associated Press* can be compared with views on *China Daily*, *al Jazeera*, *Press TV* (Iran), *Russia Today*, *Reddit* news, the *BBC* and *UN Web TV*.⁴

Academic databases – such as *ISI Web of Knowledge* and *WorldCat* from the *Online Computer Library Centre* (OCLC) can then be searched. *Retrospective* searches entail searching backwards through the literature, as in a traditional library. *Prospective* searches use software that facilitates setting up an ongoing search on specific keywords, and as new sources appear they are reported to the user. Some databases permit tracking the citing of a particular study from the date of publication, which creates a network of related literature. Many university libraries provide useful advice.⁵ The *online resources* list at the end of this chapter suggests the standard sites, and more specific sites are on the website.

Initial searches will probably produce an overload of sources, and many will be irrelevant or unreliable. Even if the sources are overwhelming, the *meta-data* on search engines can be used – how many hits do certain terms get in relation to certain countries? A mass of data can also help to identify keywords, significant writers and relevant organizations, or to develop conceptual and theoretical frameworks.⁶

Non-digital searches are equally important. Not everything is stored on a database. Libraries in less developed countries sometimes have excellent press-cuttings collections together with archivists who know their collections well. Families often have fascinating material – colonial records, locally published books, old guidebooks. Sometimes the content of *archives* cannot be found through a simple online search – it is necessary to know which collections are relevant, and to then use their own search engines or paper indexes. Old archives and chained libraries have hidden gems, for example forgotten musical manuscripts which can be transcribed and published for performance.⁷

3.2 Doing a literature review

Most research reports include some form of literature review, which comes from an awareness of a *general* literature (politics, international relations, world music) and then identifies, describes and assesses the related *specific* literature (Icelandic politicians, gender and international relations, Mali jazz). A literature review should be based on, and cite *methodologies* of doing literature reviews, such as in Hart's *Doing a Literature Review*.⁸ The review process is likely to entail:

- creating relevant *aims, questions, hypotheses, and conceptual frameworks* – deciding good *outcome variables* is crucial (trends, schools of thought, international influence, impact of the literature).
- a 'trawl' – *searching* for all potentially relevant literature (C3.1).
- *screening* – filtering and sorting the search results into a manageable form.
- *quality control* – how sound are the sources?
- *in-depth reading, categorizing and coding*.
- *checking facts* with authors, if possible.
- relating *findings* to aims, etc. (above).

Any review must have a good *introduction* explaining the methods. This should explain succinctly:

- its *purposes*. Clear aims, questions, hypotheses and conceptual frameworks focus the content. ("How has the literature changed since the democratic government?" – "How does local literature differ from European-American perspectives?")
- the *parameters*. What's in and what's out, and why? What period does the review cover? Which fields/disciplines are included? What types of literature are assessed? What countries and languages are considered? How are relevant terms defined?
- the search *methods*. Which databases were used and why? What keywords were relevant? Are there any unique problems, such as confusing terminology? How were searches for non-text based material (photos, videos, films, *YouTube*) carried out? How was foreign language, non-digital, historical and "grey" literature accessed?
- the *methodologies* that were used to create the review – how were sources selected, categorized and coded in relation to *purposes* (above)?
- *language aspects*. How were keywords in different languages searched and used? Were there translation problems? Was some literature "invisible" for language reasons? How is material in different languages listed and systemized?
- the *critical* (quality) approach. How were sources tested and assessed? How were the principles of epistemology (C1.1) applied?
- the *structure* of the review. Which headings are used, why, and how do they link with the main research questions?

The introduction can then be used to structure the *conclusion* to the review.

There are many ways to *structure* a review, and the reasons should be explained. The structure might simply copy the structure of previous similar reports. Alternatively, it might relate to *sources* of literature – UN reports, civil society organizations, internet

material. Or it could be *thematic* – perceptions of immigration officers, immigration rules, the training of civil servants. A review might be arranged in terms of *linked issues* – child trafficking in Laos, political corruption in Asia, Asian gang leadership. Sections may be *chronological*, or for small-scale narrowly focused research the whole review might be chronological to show the development of a specific area of literature, such as Russian policy on international corruption. Large reviews may combine a number of these systemizations.

A *concluding assessment* of the literature should address the review *aims* and/or *questions*, and summarize and provide new insights into the nature of specific aspects of the literature as a whole. This might identify key writers, schools of thought, trends in knowledge production and influences. The results might be presented as flow charts, spidergrams, tables, or *Ngram* graphs showing historical trends (Box 3.1). See other examples on the website. An academic review will also explain how there is a gap in the literature that will be filled by the new research. It will demonstrate that the new study passes the “so what’s new?” test.

Box 3.1 Using Google Books Ngram Viewer

‘Comfort women’ and the Japanese military

Hypothesis: That the term ‘comfort women’ would have become increasingly known in English since the end of World War II, 1945.

Method: The phrase ‘comfort women’ may not always relate to Japan, e.g. “Men try to comfort women who cry”. Using ‘case sensitive’ can distinguish the use of Comfort Women and COMFORT WOMEN, which are more likely to be collective nouns and book titles. The boxes show yearly statistics. Clicking the *Google Books* search leads to specific literature.

Initial findings: There also seems a sudden increase since the end of the Cold War.

Further findings: Using maximum smoothing (50) confirms the predicted trend since 1945. Minimum smoothing (0) reveals a sudden increase around 1990. The boxes show no use of the terms in 1987, but used from 1993.

Further analysis: The recent increase started before the UN *Security Council Resolution on Sexual Violence against Civilians in Conflict* (2008), and so was not driven by this UN initiative.

Further research: Has the term been politicized since the 1990s, to encourage regional acrimony and destabilize East Asia?

[See: *Google Books Ngram Viewer* – <http://books.google.com/ngrams>]

3.3 Checking reliability

World texts are often very unreliable. Most international data is controlled in some way by national governments. From her study of Guatemalan military elites, Jennifer Schirmer concludes of the CIA, “They get promotion by listing assets, not for getting information right.”⁹ It is important to treat all international sources very *critically* when reviewing apparent facts that claim to describe things on a world scale. Epistemology (C1.1) and documentary analysis checklists provide useful starting points (C13.2). An important question is – which methodologies could support this claim, and do robust methods even exist that could support this claim? But the key to being innovative is to ask a smart question. A famous study of the literature on cannibalism did not ask simply, “Did cannibals exist?” It carefully asked, “Are there any *first hand* reports of *socially sanctioned* cannibalism?”¹⁰

thinking zone: did cannibals exist?

cannibalism

European literature talks of witches, Jews, savages, Orientals and pagans as eating human flesh.

- In 1098, Christian armies in Syria, apparently ate local Muslims.
- Paleontologists report that Neanderthals ate one another in Moula-Guercy (France) and El Sidrón (Spain).
- The first permanent British settlers in James Fort, Virginia, North America seemed to have eaten one another in 1609–1610.
- Swiss biologists found that fruit fly maggots will eat one another, if starved in a laboratory.

but

William Arens tested the literature about cannibalism by asking if there were any *first hand* reports of ‘socially sanctioned’ cannibalism, i.e. excluding eating for survival, or weird individuals who broke social rules. He could find no ‘adequate documentation’ and therefore humans should be seen as “innocent until proven guilty” of cannibalism.

SO

- Does the evidence from Neanderthals, Syria, Virginia or fruit flies change or support Arens’ argument?
- How important is *definition* in Arens’ claim?
- How might Arens’ approach to reviewing literature relate to other apparent facts about peoples of the world?
- How reliable is present-day literature about cannibalism in North Korea?

[See References for further information.¹¹]

Another relevant question is – what is being measured? Politicians, who are opposed to the EU, claim that between 6–84% of national law ‘is made by Europe’.¹² Those extremes cannot both be correct, so what was counted – regulations directives, European Parliament legislation then passed by the EU, rules passed by member states, the number of regulations (a regulation may be one line or many pages), the number of paragraphs (many relatively unimportant rules have numerous paragraphs), or the significance? One paragraph concerning immigration control is surely more important than 100 pages regulating duck eggs.

The internet has significantly increased the availability of information but also opportunities for *manipulation*, and these problems might be mentioned in a review. Dubious facts can gain *authority* (C1.1) because they come from a government internet site. Much international information is deliberately misleading, ‘pheets’ – phony tweets – for example.¹³ ‘Shills’ – people or organizations that pose as independent experts and create fake sites or news stories – are common.¹⁴ But ‘fake news’¹⁵ can itself represent literature or data for analysis.

Care should therefore be taken not to *repeat information and terminology* uncritically. Oppositional groups that may be termed ‘terrorists’, ‘rebels’, or ‘insurgents’ by some writers are, from the perspective of others, ‘freedom fighters’, ‘patriots’, or ‘resistance movements’ which may well become the next legitimate government. Questionable statistics are often repeated uncritically. Hazel Smith provides an example:

Foreign observers have regularly cited the figure of three million dead from famine, or 10 per cent of North Korea’s population. Those who use these figures also frequently argue that the government left the people in the northeastern provinces of North Hamgyong, South Hamgyong and Ryanggang to starve to death...The figure of three million was extrapolated from a 1998 survey of North Korean migrants and refugees in China, and was published in the reputable British medical journal *The Lancet*. These North Koreans in the main came from North Hamgyong province, and the scientific work in question specifically stated that their findings could not be extrapolated to the whole country. Firstly, the North Koreans interviewed in China were not a representative sample of their home province; secondly North Hamgyong, which has an urbanised, non-agricultural population, was not representative of the country as a whole. There is no doubt there was a terrible humanitarian disaster in the 1990s...However, the truth is that nobody – including the government – probably knows the real figure.¹⁶

Two warnings, old and new, should be above the desk of a researcher when dealing with world literature: *Accept nothing on authority* (motto of the *Royal Society*, 1660), *Trust nothing, debate everything* (Jason Calacanis, internet entrepreneur, 2010¹⁷).

thinking zone: where do international “facts” come from?

a British colony

Minister: “And how do we collect these wonderful population statistics?”

Governor: “Oh. Thank you Sir. My extremely excellent Chief District Officers provide them.”

Minister: “And where do the CDOs get the numbers from?”

Governor: “Oh. They send census forms to their very excellent Assistant Chief District Officers.”

Minister: “And how do the ACDOs fill in the forms?”

Governor: “Oh. The ACDOs require our quite excellent District Education Officers get their very efficient secretaries to collate them.”

Minister: “And so where do the DEOs’ secretaries get the numbers from?”

Governor: “Oh. They request the highly diligent Assistant District Education Officers to gather them biannually.”

Minister: “And then where do the ADEOs get the figures from?”

Governor: “Oh. Our dedicated missionaries collect the basic returns from the village chiefs?”

Minister: “AND SO where do the chiefs get the numbers from?”

Governor: “Oh THEY just put down what they damn-well like. But it doesn’t matter.”

Minister: “WHY doesn’t it matter?”

Governor: “Because most are illiterate and can’t count anyway.”

SO

How might this relate to present-day international statistics?

main ideas

There are many *reasons* for a literature review, and these need to be clarified.

- What were the aims or questions, and parameters? How were searches done, and what critical methods were used?
- How was it organized – chronologically, thematically, linked issues?
- The reasons, aims and introductory questions need to be addressed in the conclusion to the review.

Internet *search engines* provide a mass of information quickly, but:

- may overwhelm with *information overload*.
- can also provide useful *meta-data*.

Wikipedia and similar sources:

- may be *unreliable*, and are used by authors (especially American) to promote their writing.
- can help to understand how a topic is *framed*.
- may list *key texts*, and sometimes *unusual sources*.

Non-digital sources are equally important, and can often lead to original and innovative research. They include:

- *small local libraries* – church records, local government offices, cemeteries.
- *press-cuttings archives*, especially in less wealthy countries.
- *government archives*, for example the release of secret documents.
- *monuments* – gravestones, statues, inscriptions on buildings.
- *family collections* – photos, letters, scrap books.

International evidence is very **unreliable**, and must be reviewed **critically**. Consider:

- the whole *chain of evidence* – a UN statistic is only as reliable as its local sources.
- how, *methodologically*, the information was created.
- why sources may want to *mislead*.
- whether *repeating* information or terminology is valid.

key reading

Cooper, H. et al. (eds) (2009) *The Handbook of Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Ford, N. (2011) *The Essential Guide to Using the Web for Research*. London: Sage.

Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*. London: Sage.

Rocco, T.S. and Plakhotnik, M.S. (2009) 'Literature reviews: conceptual and theoretical frameworks', *Human Resource Development Review*, 8 (1): 120–130.

online resources

To access the resources – search on the name in italics, use the http, or search on the generic term in 'quote marks'.

Google Trends – indicates when and where certain topics and writers become of global interest

Google Books Ngram Viewer – provides trend graphs showing the frequency of key phrases and titles, since 1800, with links to relevant books

Virtual Salt or *Colossus* list numerous search engines by country

DIRT – provides a wide range of research tools

WorldCat – searches numerous academic libraries

Endnote – can help to organize material, but this is more efficient for very specific topics rather than generalist studies

Mendeley – creates a sophisticated networked data collection system

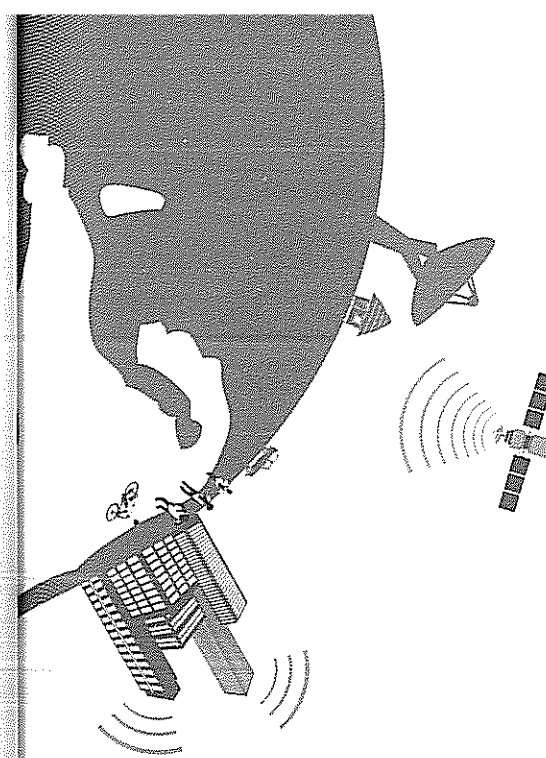
Exaronew – may have interesting information for investigatory research

UN Research Guide and *Columbia University UN Research System* – offer an introduction to UN sources and organizations

Global Research – provides access to world data indexed thematically

Wikileaks – subverts state secrecy by presenting leaked material in searchable formats

MORE ON THE WEBSITE



PART II

Planning the research

Chapter 4 – Planning and *research designs* are especially important for world studies because mistakes can be expensive or impossible to correct. Research design must reconcile the intellectual objectives of a study with the practical constraints of field-work, relevant technologies and pragmatic research management. The goal is to do micro-research that has macro-significance.

Chapter 5 – The *integrity* of a project depends on sound, workable *ethics* and an unbiased approach. International and local law is a significant consideration, because small mistakes can have big consequences. Consideration for *others* is vital to avoid the unethical practices of former, colonially-minded, researchers. Remote and online research raises new and fast-changing dilemmas.

Chapter 6 – *Frameworks* provide the basis for collecting data. They reflect the level of the study – *peoples, territories, systems* – and include cross-cutting frameworks – *cross-sectional analysis, crowdsourcing research* and *online research*.

FOUR

Research design and logistics

4.1 Design – mixed methods and iterative approaches

4.2 Focus

4.2.1 Problematization

4.3 Fieldwork and project management

Albert Einstein apparently said that if he had only one hour to solve a difficult problem to save the world, he would spend 55 minutes analysing the problem, and deciding which questions to ask. A research design is a plan to solve a problem – intellectual or practical. If a ‘problem’ is well analysed, it will nearly solve itself. And good planning is vital for world studies because mistakes may be expensive or impossible to put right.

A *research design* is a plan for discovering something significant that is *not* known already, and it shows that ideas can be transformed into action. Plans often seem linear and inflexible, but in reality they should just provide a provisional conceptual *map* which may change and ‘emerge’ as methods are thoroughly explored and implemented.¹ As world research usually entails researching **others** in some way, the first consideration is how the purpose of the study reflects the likely concerns of those ‘other’ people (C5.3). It should be possible to locate a planned study within the chart on the website – the degree to which research is *about others*, *from others*, or *with others*. Hopefully, world research will increasingly be framed in terms of the last, to address world problems such as climate change and water shortages.

The conundrum for world research is to design a micro-study in a way that has macro-significance – smart ways to make small-scale work have big-scale meaning. This means carefully defining the *focus – topic problematization, hypothesis or questions, and terms*. If a project includes *fieldwork, logistics* such as *risk assessment* and gaining *access* need to be planned.

4.1 Design – mixed methods and iterative approaches

A *research design*, explains the *how* of research, based on decisions about *what, who, when* and *where*. But the starting point for any plan should be the *why*, the purpose, rationale and outcomes. Why do you want to do this project, why is the project useful – and what type of data, findings, results and evidence are eventually required to fulfil the *why*?² A design also shows which *frameworks (C6) and data collection methods (C7–C13)* are likely to be feasible, efficient and cost-effective. Charts can help with planning, and examples are on the website. Many methods books explain ‘research design’,³ some take design as the central aspect of methodology,⁴ there are online resources,⁵ and some discuss specific international concerns such as development.⁶ The specific problems of planning world research are outlined on the website. A design may also eventually form the basis for a *funding proposal*, or an outline research plan to apply for a Master’s or PhD course.

Traditional studies often started with a decision to use a qualitative or quantitative approach, but modern world research is likely to combine the two. It is therefore more helpful to consider the ‘degree’ to which a world study needs to be quantified,⁷ and to ‘move beyond’ the traditional distinctions.⁸ Comparative analysis can help (C6.3; C14.1).⁹ Unless the intent of the research is to test and develop a specific method, a world study is very likely to entail *mixed (‘multi’) methods*.¹⁰ Different types of data are collected in different ways, which may or may not be compared, and may involve a *multidisciplinary* combination of social and other sciences.¹¹ But whatever approach is used, don’t collect any data before thinking about how it will be *analysed (C14)*.

In real life (outside methods books), an *iterative* process of mixed-methods data collection and analysis is becoming common. This entails repeated incremental “bite-sized” micro mixed-methods data collection and initial analysis to “snowball”¹² more data and build towards *further analysis* and final conclusions. Much social research is now done in this muddle-through way, but this is rarely acknowledged in methods books. Yet ‘iterative’ product design is well tried and tested, especially in software companies.¹³ There are many variations, but Figure 4.1 gives an impression of how it can happen.

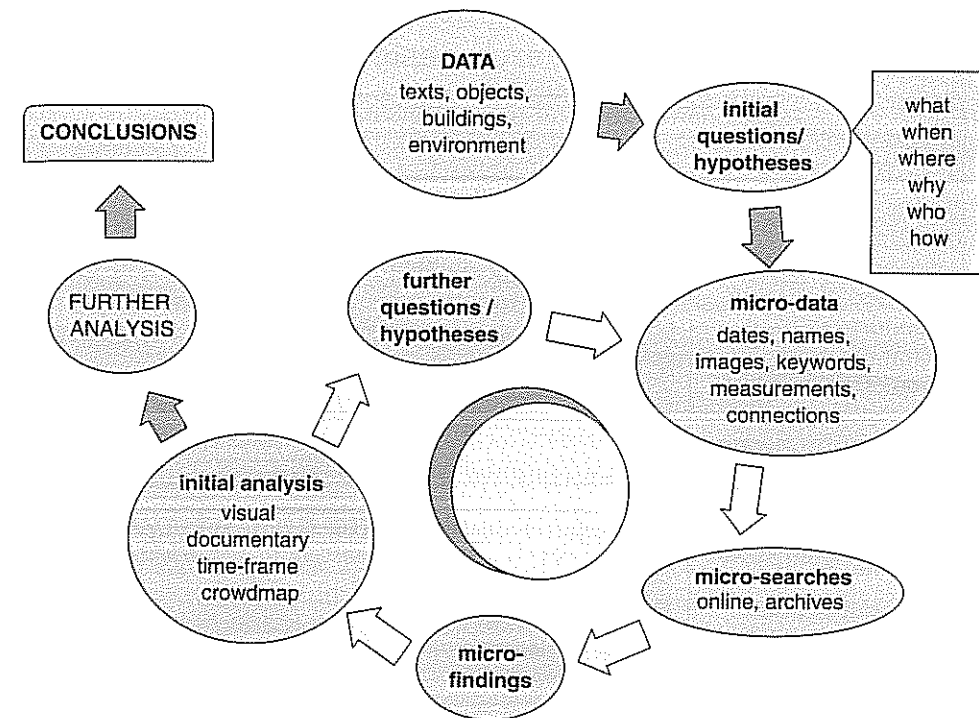





Figure 4.1 Iterative “snowball” data collection analysis

Box 4.1 outlines a case study, and the website provides the details. Starting from an old photo of an unknown statue, an iterative process helped to track the origins and significance of the statue. This included:

- checking *infrastructure (C10.8)* – online transport maps, bus routes.
- *observation (C8.3)* – walking the bus route to find the site of the old photo. (*Google Street View* might help, but it is very clumsy unless the exact location is known.)
- *visual analysis (C10.6)* – how and why the photo was taken. *Photo enlargement* – magnifying glass, digital. (Optical enlargement is often better than digital, for example by putting the original image on a *PowerPoint* slide and projecting it onto a screen.)
- viewing/acquiring additional *textual data (C10.6)* – photos, cigarette cards, stamps, from *eBay*.
- searching *archives* for relevant *documents (C13)* – museums, galleries, government, libraries, press.
- creating *time-frames* from visual data – technology/vehicles, seasons, political events.
- *timeline analysis* comparing events with the “life” of the statue.
- *big data* – using *Google Image* to find other copies of photos and *Google Books Ngram* to find relevant documents.¹⁴

Box 4.1 Iterative research design – case study

Investigating 'statue diplomacy'	
<p>What is this photo?</p> <p>An unlabelled photo of a horse-drawn bus, and statue of a uniformed man riding a camel. Photo enlargement showed the destination names on the bus.</p>	
<p>Where was the statue?</p> <p>Searching online bus maps: using destination names, found a similar bus route. Architectural style is probably near a city-centre</p> <p>Street observation: walking along the bus route, from the centre.</p>	 <p>Found: a site with similar buildings, but no camel statue.</p>
<p>Compare: by holding the original photo in line with landmarks at the site.</p> <p>Found: site verified. Camel statue would now be in the middle of the road.</p>	

Full case study on the website.

Recent photos: Author's own

The results supported a hypothesis that imperial statues reflect international events and were used as colonial soft power, and that 'statue diplomacy' is worth investigating. And, as always, there were surprise findings. Tracking the history of the minister who dealt with the statue, John Profumo, shows how the postcolonial British government was not only involved in playing games with statues, but also with spies, sex scandals and the courts, leading to miscarriages of justice, the fall of a government, and the death of an innocent man, which became the subject of an Andrew Lloyd Weber musical – *Stephen Ward*.¹⁵

A *pilot study* may be used to test the whole, or an aspect of, a research design before large-scale data collection. Research instruments – questionnaires, interview schedules, observation charts – may have been designed and tested previously by other researchers, or they may be created or adapted for a new study, in which case they will first be piloted to identify ambiguous or misleading aspects, particularly if translation is involved. Instruments sometimes use *proxy* measurements, which measure something that is easy to measure to assess something that is hard to measure (absenteeism to assess 'workplace wellbeing'), or data may be used to create indicators and aggregate indexes (C14.4). All instruments should be tested as part of the research design, to ensure the data can be used to produce the form of findings or analysis that is required. A pilot study for fieldwork could be carried out in a "home" country, using international students or others from the country that is to be visited.

World research is likely to utilize and develop appropriate technologies for *data management* (C7), and this needs to be considered when planning a study, not least because of cost implications. The possible technical options for each data collection activity need to be assessed *and tested*. Decisions should be influenced by the best way to obtain the required data, not by technological preferences, unless an aim of the research is to test a research technology. The website provides a checklist for fieldwork technologies. But most importantly, what is the *contingency* plan and *backup system* if things go wrong? Will extra voice recorders and video cameras be available? Are there plenty of notebooks and pencils available, when they all go wrong?

4.2 Focus

Focus defines the boundaries and parameters of a study – "what's in and what's out?" This may entail a 'perspective',¹⁶ 'frame of reference' or 'lens'.¹⁷ World studies are often categorized by their 'purposes', which can be academic¹⁸ or professional (C15.2). The focus will be explained in the *rationale* or *justification* section of the report, and should include relevant statements from objective authorities. Consider the *levels* of inquiry? If the topic is 'the future of eco-tourism', this could be investigated at the level of individuals in one country, state policy, or international regulation. Alternatively, a *cross-sectional analysis/study* might study a 'slice' across all levels.¹⁹ If the study is for an academic degree, it is useful to check the formal requirements before planning the study and report (Box 15.2). Materials elaborating, and providing templates for these aspects of focus are on the website.

The way that *purpose* and *rationale* are presented can affect *access* (below), and careless phrases, for example on a university or funder's website, can bring fieldwork to a sudden halt. People are more likely to cooperate with a research study if they understand and appreciate its purpose, see it as unthreatening, and believe that they might benefit in some way. Sometimes purpose can be presented more appropriately by reframing a large-scale study in terms of one specific area. Data collection for a book about "Brain-Drain in Islamic Countries" might be better presented as "Career aspirations among Muslim MBA students".

The *title* of a study is important to communicate the focus to others. Topics expressed in terms such as "Youth tourism" or "World poverty" might provide a good title for a book, but do not describe a practical piece of research. The title is what first impresses potential funders or examiners. And most importantly, it must be relevant to those the research concerns – "Refugee health services in Iran" is better than "Persian clinical traditions of hospitality". It is crucial that the title of a study, and section headings, include the relevant *keywords*, not least for embedding in project websites. A good title is best constructed by identifying the main keywords, and then assembling them into a title. This can then be tested on search engines for its originality and effectiveness.

Definitions and *concepts* clarify the focus, and help to identify *keywords* for data searches (C3.1). These come from noting keywords in similar studies, and by authors thinking about how they would search for their own study. *Wordle* provides an interesting visual way to test if the frequency of words in a text reflects the keywords.²⁰ *Dictionaries* are a useful starting point. *General dictionaries* remind researchers that some words have many meanings – 'development' might refer to nations or babies. *Specialist dictionaries* – politics, sociology, philosophy, social psychology – help to ensure that the terminology in a study reflects current usage in relevant disciplines. A *thesaurus* helps to find relevant keywords and related concepts. *Etymological dictionaries* not only explain the roots and linguistic derivations of words, but show linkages that can inspire interesting lines of thought. When working in more than one language, a meticulous approach helps with basic understandings of different cultures, which can be useful when writing questionnaires and analyses (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 Conceptualizing a study of leadership in Korean and Arabic

The Korean word for leader – *ji-do-ja* – means 'instructing person', but another – *dae-tong-ryong* – means 'big controller of territory' and is used only to refer to the head of state. In Arabic, *zaa-a-ma* means 'to command people', but another word – *qya-da* – literally means, 'to walk in front of the animal in order to give it direction'. A separate term – *al-raïs* – only describes the head of state, as in Korea.

Concerning 'elite', the Korean *sag-ryu-in-sa* means a 'higher type/system/tendency of people', and this is distinct from *bu-ja*, which is reserved for wealthy people.

In Arabic, the general term for elites is *aaliyatul-qaum*, meaning 'high profile people', but *al-kheirou fi al-qaoum* is also used, meaning 'the best of men'. Like Korean, there is a separate term for wealthy elites, *aghniya*.

[Source: Lee, Y.-j. (2011) 'Leadership and development in South Korea and Egypt: the significance of "cultural shifts"'. Unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London.]

The website outlines how focus might be explained. The important point is that all elements of focus are logically connected to one another and to other relevant parts of the report. Whatever the style, the outcome should be that the researchers could explain what the research is about, and why it is 'international' or 'global' (Introduction), in a few words. And to be able to do this to anyone at a party in one minute, without ending up as the bore who no one else wants to talk to.

4.2.1 Problematization

Problematization formally focuses a study, and entails turning a *topic* into something that can be researched. A topic such as "Mobile phone use" does not intrinsically describe a research problem – "What is the per capita ownership of mobile phones in North Korea?" does. Problematizing a topic is also a way for the researcher to reflect (C1.2), gain more objectivity, and not jump to hasty conclusions about a topic.²¹ World research is often *problem-solving*²² or *solution-oriented*²³ in relation to practical and/or intellectual problems. Research for campaigning organizations is often action-oriented. If data is to be used for specific purposes – court cases, documentary films, political advocacy – the design must produce appropriate data and findings in relevant action-oriented forms. A research **problem** is an unknown that invites a *solution* or *resolution*. The *Club of Rome* report *The First Global Revolution* was structured in terms of a world '*problematique*' and '*resolutique*'.²⁴ Holmes talks of a 'problem (solving) approach'.²⁵ But not every issue is amenable to a solution, as Gwyn Prins argues in relation to climate change:

...there was a fundamental framing error, and climate change was represented as a conventional environmental 'problem' that is capable of being 'solved'. It is neither of these...climate change is better understood as a persistent condition that must be coped with and can only be partially managed more – or less – well.²⁶

'Tame' problems may be complex but have 'defined achievable end states'; 'wicked problems' are 'issues that are often formulated as if they are susceptible to solutions when in fact they are not'. It may be possible to solve the research problems about "migration rate", but it is probably not possible to solve the "problem of migration".

Having problematized a study, this can be expressed as initial **hypotheses** and/or **research questions** which have emerged from the literature review (C3). A hypothesis

is an informed guess which can be tested to create a generalizable conclusion. Usually, hypotheses test causal relationships (C14.2) – that W did Z – or they might test a predictive theory – that if A happens, B will follow. The likely relationships within hypotheses are often framed in terms of *variables* (C9.3.2). Formal hypotheses need to be proved or disproved on the basis of statistical probabilities, which is very difficult outside experimental research.²⁷ A guiding or *soft hypothesis* can also be used, which is *addressed* but not proved or disproved in the conclusions of the study.

Research questions similarly guide a study. Questions are also usually *addressed* rather than *answered*, unless the study is investigative or evaluative and demands finite answers. Questions need to be framed in relation to the data collection and analysis methods (Parts Three and Four).²⁸ *Initial* research questions/hypotheses may be elaborated as a result of an ongoing literature/theoretical review, or other data collection, to create sets of *specific* hypotheses/questions, which can be investigated through interviews and surveys, observation or interrogation schedules.

To operationalize the hypotheses/questions, a study can be further focused by determining a hierarchy of *aims* – aim, sub-aims, sub-sub-aims – but terms relating to this are very muddled. For example, one study might be framed in terms of – PURPOSE > AIMS > OBJECTIVES – but another study might use the terms – GOAL > OBJECTIVES > AIMS – to imply the same hierarchy. The website suggests how a table or spidergram can show how the aspects of focus might relate to one another, and also possible overlap in terms of practicalities such as fieldwork planning. In any study, it should be possible to trace the chain of systematic inquiry from any conclusion – back through analysis, findings, methods – to aims, questions, rationale and purpose. The evidence of a systematic process is what makes research different from a casual conversation in an airport lounge.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between what a study aims to discover, and the *assumptions* of a study. Assumptions form the taken-for-granted bases for the hypotheses or questions, and are accepted as correct and are therefore not questioned further – “women are disadvantaged”, “children are vulnerable”. But assumptions must be referenced to theory, strong evidence, or ontological and epistemological arguments, which support their general acceptance (C1; C2).

4.3 Fieldwork and project management

Some world studies will entail *fieldwork*, and large-scale projects will require formal *project management*. These two areas are discussed further, with resources, on the website. But think first about the ethics of going abroad to study another country, including how those being studied might view the research design (C5).

thinking zone: how would humans respond to alien researchers?

aliens

Alien researchers have landed. They say they are from an organization called *Save the Humans*, and are carrying out a project called *Omnicide of the Earthlings*.

research design

- **Aims** To discover why humans are destroying their habitat, and to modify their intelligence appropriately.
- **Questions**
 - Why is the human brain the only thing in the universe that threatens its own wellbeing and survival?
 - What type of mental disability do humans have, which causes this self-destructive behaviour?
 - Why do women continue to have babies that have this mental disability?
 - How is it possible to save the human species through genetically enhancing the human brain to prevent it being self-destructive?
- **Literature review** Indigenous texts on eugenics, human enhancement and transhumanism.
- **Methods**
 - Genetic analysis of humans who appear most, and least likely to destroy their habitat.
 - Action research to enhance the brains of babies with the most favourable genetic profile.
- **Outcome** Participatory grassroots health and education programmes to ensure the appropriate intellectual enhancement of the human race.

response

How might humans respond from the perspectives of: disability rights, feminism, ecology, philosophy, science, religion, transhumanism and being a planetary minority group?

[See references for further information.²⁹]

Whatever the scale, world research entails some form of *risk assessment*. Even if working from home and asking a few friends to do some interviews in another country, their safety must be considered. The main consideration is risk to local people and participants, such as the safe disposal of unwanted equipment – cars, electronics, confidential material. A simple starting point is to sit with others and list everything that could go wrong, and what could be done if these things happened. Even humorous brainstorming can be valuable. Ask international students about their home countries. But keep in mind that local people are not experts in everything. Try to build up a portfolio-picture of a country from many different sources.

How can risks be minimized? Is protective clothing required? In hazardous or polluted settings, masks may be necessary. Can communications technology help – tracking devices, alarms, satellite phones? Is kidnapping a possibility? But however good the planning, the unexpected often happens, and risk assessment must include *contingency plans*. Relatively small incidents such as a hotel fire or small bomb can interrupt all communications and transport, including airports. A significant risk factor when suddenly being caught in an emergency is lack of local information. The first indication that a war has started may be a sudden silence punctuated by rumblings and bangs. It could just be heavy construction vehicles backfiring – or it could be tanks and shooting. Check the TV, ask cafe staff, watch how local people are reacting – are you in the middle of a war? But while seeking information about an apparent conflict, the important thing for foreigners is not to reveal information about who they are or where they are. Sending emails or tweets that indicate a hotel and room number – which can be deduced from a room phone number – may not be wise.

Many governments have online country assessments such as the UK *FCO Travelling and Living Overseas* site, and the US *State Department – travel.state.gov*. Many books provide advice,³⁰ and big organizations will provide online or other training packages, checklists and forms. The BBC *myRisks* site is very helpful. But most importantly, chatting to local people, and careful observation at fieldwork sites, can indicate the significant dangers already known to local people. Press articles, radio and TV news and street posters can all provide information about local hazards.

main ideas

World research often uses *mixed-methods*, *interdisciplinary* approaches, and ongoing *iterative* data collection analysis using new technologies.

A research design should:

- create a “map” to convert *ideas into actions*.
- provide the basis for *communicating* the research project clearly to others.
- include creating *research instruments*, *pilot studies* and a *technology plan*.

The *focus* of a study should clarify:

- the *purpose*, conceptually and practically.
- the *rationale* for doing the study.
- *definitions* of concepts and terms.
- the *levels* that are being researched.

Problematization entails:

- differentiating between *wicked problems* that cannot be solved, and *tame problems* that can.
- formulating *hypotheses* or *research questions*.
- clarifying the *assumptions* that are being made – what is taken-for-granted?
- stating the specific *aims* and *objectives*.

Fieldwork means thinking about:

- *why* it is necessary to travel to a research site.
- using *checklists* and the experience of others.
- negotiating *access* to research sites and key people.
- deciding the organizational and individual *personas* of the researchers.

Small- and large-scale research requires *project management* which means:

- *responsibility* for other people.
- doing *risk assessments* and making *contingency plans*.

key reading

Cresswell, J.W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage.

Horwood, J. and Moon, G. (2003) 'Accessing the research setting: the politics of research and the limits to inquiry', *Area*, 35: 106–109.

Lee-Treweek, G. and Linkogle, S. (eds) (2000) *Danger in the Field: Risk and Ethics in Social Research*. New York: Routledge.

Sriram, C. et al. (eds) (2009) *Surviving Research: Doing Fieldwork in Violent and Difficult Situations*. New York: Routledge.

Thomas, D.R. and Hodges, I.D. (2010) *Designing and Managing Your Research Project: Core Skills for Social and Health Research*. London: Sage.

Winser, S. (ed.) (2004) *Expedition Handbook*. London: Profile Books.

online resources

To access the resources – search on the name in italics, use the http, or search on the generic term in 'quote marks'.

Fieldwork

Royal Geographical Society Expedition Handbook – a comprehensive and updated site

Insurancewide – comparisons of 'long stay travel insurance' products – www.insurancewide.com

Risk assessment

FCO Travelling and Living Overseas. US *State Department travel.state.gov* site – country risk assessments

BBC *myRisks* – checklists and forms – www.bbc.co.uk/safety/resources/forms-and-documents.html

Funding sources

European Research Council – <http://erc.europa.eu/>

Kickstarter – crowdfunding

World Bank. *Evoke*. *Global Giving Challenge*. *Crowdfunding* – www.globalgiving.org/evoke

FIVE

Research ethics and integrity

- 5.1 World research ethics
- 5.2 The law
- 5.3 'Others' and 'othering'
 - 5.3.1 Inclusion and participation
- 5.4 Online and remote research
- 5.5 Ethics committees

Too often, the design for world research is – “get in, get what you want, and get out” – and this also applies to online research. Researching another country can create a feeling of intellectual impunity, because repercussions are minimal for researchers once they finish. Yet the consequences of bad practice can harm local research participants, hosts and assistants, local and other visiting researchers, and the reputations of universities and organizations.

The overall integrity (moral soundness) of a research project entails thinking about research ethics (rules of conduct), together with methodological aspects such as objectivity, impartiality and bias.¹ Unethical research practice often leads to biased data collection and analysis, and *vice versa*.² Ethics can seem an irritation, but developing ethical standards for international work can be an ‘outcome’ of any study,

which could be more significant than the basic work. This chapter outlines the cross-border and cross-cultural considerations of *world research ethics*, relevant *law*, the abuse and inclusion of *others*, the new conundrums of *online research* and the ethics of *ethics committees*. But, for world research the big question is, whose ethical standards take priority – those of the researchers’ “home” country and funder, or those of the countries where the research is carried out?

5.1 World research ethics

Many books explain the basics of social research ethics,³ and usually the focus is *human participants*. These principles may need to be developed for international work, particularly in less developed countries.⁴ In many contexts, a standard ethical practice may be very dangerous. Getting informed consent in the form of a signed document may be accepted by university ethics committees in wealthy countries. But if the research were being carried out among illiterate village elders in a war zone, other considerations may be more important. Those concerned may not have the background knowledge to be, or to become, ‘informed’. And signing anything may be a meaningless or very risky act, which breaches confidentiality.

There are numerous ethical codes available from research bodies, universities,⁵ public services, government departments,⁶ civil service and professional organizations such as journalists.⁷ These should balance good practice with *academic freedom*, but ideas about this differ across the world.⁸ There are many national codes about international research, but few internationally agreed standards, such as the EU *RESPECT Code* and the *Singapore Statement on Research Integrity*. The ‘ethics’ section of any study should mention ethical standards used previously in similar studies, and relevant codes. It should then identify and discuss aspects that are not fully covered, seem unique to a particular study, or require adapting for different settings. This is explained further on the website.

Confidentiality is a significant concern for cross-border research, because local people in other countries can be put at significant risk by careless use of data and personal information. This is not just because of state action – families and other interpersonal relationships can easily be destroyed. When research is by an INGO such as *Amnesty International*, carelessness could endanger the same people that the organization is trying to help. And there is a self-interest aspect. Media coverage of harmful outcomes from research by a few individuals could put the credibility and future of the whole organization at risk. Proper data management, including safe transfer, is increasingly important, and better technology does not always increase security (C7.7).

Ethics discussions often confuse *harm* and *deceit*. The aim should be to avoid or minimize harm, but it is virtually impossible to do research without deceit in some

form. If research subjects were fully aware of the nature of the research, this would inevitably bias the way they responded or behaved. Deceit may be acceptable to facilitate observation and evidence gathering, especially about deceitful people, but it is less acceptable to use deceit to entrap people into doing wrong – ‘setups’ and ‘stings’. Is *covert research* reasonable? How far is ‘blagging’ acceptable – getting data by posing as someone else? Is it ethical to adopt a false persona, or gain access by joining an organization or providing a service? Dress can create a conundrum – should it reflect the persona of the interviewee or the interviewer? If a non-Muslim woman wears a *hijab* to interview a Muslim leader, is that respectful or deceitful (Figure 5.1)? NGOs doing research in poor communities in Colombia consider it ethical to wear conspicuous T-shirts with the logo of the NGO, to show people who they are.

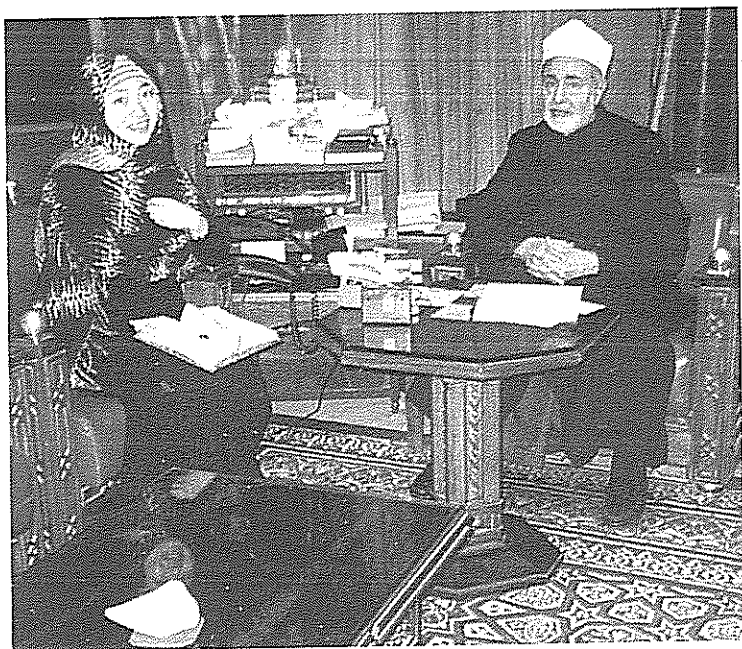


Figure 5.1 The cultural persona of the researcher

A Korean researcher, Yun-joo Lee, wearing Muslim dress to interview an Islamic leader, Professor Muhammad S. Tantawy, Grand Sheik of *Al-Azhar*

Any information that is already in the *public domain* can usually be used freely without further permission, even if it is incorrect, but some countries still take action against those who repeat unfavourable information. Although *Wikileaks* is seen by many people as unethical and even unlawful, when leaks become public they can be widely used, even for court cases.¹⁰ A broad *public interest* is often argued by journalists and by whistle-blowing organizations, but there are significant differences in national laws.¹¹

If research participants cannot understand and/or *consent* to the research, there are ways to argue that a *non-consensual approach* is ethical. If public officials are in a public place, it seems reasonable to assume that, whatever they say or do, they know that they are acting in an *official capacity* and can therefore be quoted or recorded freely. The concept of *best interests* is often applied when research subjects cannot give informed consent, for example studies concerning children's rights.¹² Is reporting the findings of research likely to be better for all those concerned, than any potential harm? Medical, military and police ethics address the same concern in terms of *proportionality* – is the risk of harm less than the benefit arising from taking that risk?

Similarly, *substituted judgement* may be applied in non-consenting circumstances – people with mental disabilities and children.¹³ This asks a counterfactual question: if those concerned could fully understand the research, and its risks and benefits, what might they decide? This can be applied to right previous wrongs. In the 1990s, international journalists in China presented the care of orphaned children negatively. But from shadowing the journalists it was possible to record how they manipulated images and reports, and Chinese care workers explained how photographers used tricks such as photographing children through the safety bars of their cots, to create prison-like images. This badly affected the morale of staff who were doing their best in difficult circumstances. Permission to take accurate photos was granted by the manager – had the children and all staff understood the purpose of documenting the truth, they would probably have agreed.

Photos of children, or people in vulnerable situations, can be considered unethical, but there are no clear rules. If children are photographed in a school or other private space, permission should usually be sought from the children and/or responsible adults. But when children are in the street, this is public space where photographing anyone is normally acceptable, unless they are in distress. If showing the identity of people may cause harm, faces can be *fuzzed* very simply. But try to maintain the aesthetic of the picture – colour, tone, shape – because people can be upset by fuzzing that makes them look silly, and distortions can distract from the purpose of using the photo. Some people are upset if their face *is* hidden. From the children's perspective, often the main ethical concern is that they want payment or an immediate print of the photo. The only rule is, if possible, ask and note what individuals prefer.

Increasingly, it is seen as ethical to ensure *open access* to research findings that may help disadvantaged people. Organizations such as *Research4life* make vital research available within disadvantaged communities, about UN priorities including health, development, environment and agriculture. This raises arguments about intellectual property. Ethics discussions about the production of cheap generic drugs to address world pandemics like HIV/AIDS, in less wealthy countries, are an increasing concern. Medical charities such as *Welcome* demonstrate progressive approaches.

5.2 The law

Legal issues are closely related to research ethics.¹⁴ It is not possible to give comprehensive advice for all countries, but the website discusses the relevant issues including visas, local rules, restrictions in public places, copyright and defamation. The *Index on Censorship* provides updated information about changing laws and actions against journalists and other researchers, internationally. The UK FCO site details 'local laws and customs'. Relevant laws are often very unclear, even to local people, for example what is a 'public place' where photos can probably be taken, and private property where they cannot (C10). Major problems can arise from minor infringements which can give police an easy excuse to inconvenience unwanted researchers because, for example, they take nasal sprays into Japan, cover their face in France, or feed pigeons in Venice.

The law may sometimes conflict with research ethics, for example about confidentiality versus freedom of speech, the research participants' desire to publicize or conceal their views, state officials who want to know everything, and researchers' views on academic freedom. Some researchers may have a professional *duty of care* which overrides other considerations. If, in an interview, a doctor admits abusing a patient, a researcher who is a health worker would have a duty to report this.¹⁵ In some countries, France for example, there is a legal requirement to report suspected crime.

Laws can seem an irrelevant irritation to researchers. But before simply ignoring them, it is worth considering the penalties for being found doing research illegally in another country. The police are likely to take any reports very seriously, and charges may amount to terrorism or spying.¹⁶ Being caught without the right papers in a foreign country can suddenly cause a surprisingly short, or shockingly long, stay.

5.3 'Others' and 'othering'

The *othering* of people within world research has been common (C2.1), and it was often done with meticulous methodology. It is easy to look back and criticize practices a century ago. But it is less easy to identify unethical representations of others in the present-day. Professional bodies such as the *American Anthropological Association* publish useful online ethical codes. Yet there are ongoing arguments, for example about the use of ethnic group names – such as Khoisan, Bantu and Bushman – in the biogenetics literature.¹⁷

How will future academics judge present-day medical researchers who sell photos taken in clinical settings to sites such as *Documenting Reality*, which shows 'Human Deformities and Medical Problems' or 'Africa Diseased and Deformed' to make money from the accompanying advertisements? How should we judge modern missionaries who use similar photos of children with major facial disfigurements, such as cleft

lip and *noma*, on their websites, for fundraising? Health researchers can unwittingly become implicated in similar practices.¹⁸

The unthinking repetition of *politicized terminology* is common in international studies. International reports often use a lazy style that conflates the political leaders of a nation and ordinary people – many North Koreans, Somalis, Congolese, Israelis or Americans are the victims, not the perpetrators, of state abuses of power. Terms such as 'illegal immigrant' often describe asylum seekers and others who are more accurately 'undocumented immigrants' because they have not been found guilty of any illegal action. Naming disasters after places rather than perpetrators punishes the victims and hides the villains – the 'Bhopal disaster' is more correctly 'Union Carbide negligence', and 'Minamata disease' should be the 'Chisso Company poisoning' (C10.10).¹⁹

Present-day human rights organizations such as *Survival International* argue that *stereotypical portrayals*, even if well meaning, can fuel harmful politics against indigenous peoples, and anthropologists continue to be criticized. Jared Diamond's book, *The World Until Yesterday*, was questioned for claiming that, 'tribal societies offer an extraordinary window into how our ancestors lived for millions of years'.²⁰ This assumes that tribal peoples, past and present, can be treated as a distinct homogeneous group, and that modern humans are also one distinct homogeneous group. Would a study of present-day nomadic Bedouin in Palestine help us to understand how the nomadic tribes of Moses lived? And would that help us to better understand modern Israelis?

The *intellectual property rights* of people in less wealthy countries are often ignored. The *Society for Ethnomusicology* advises, 'Sensitivity to proprietary concerns regarding recorded materials, photographs, and other documentation.'

Ethnomusicologists recognize the need to be informed regarding copyright and other laws pertaining to the ownership of intellectual and cultural property and to be aware of the potential protections and liabilities of contractual arrangements dealing with depositing, licensing, and distributing musical sound and audiovisual recordings.²¹

Similar concerns should apply to indigenous art and design (often copied to create "ethnic" factory-made fabrics), poetry, aural histories, and other intellectual and creative assets that the originators may not recognize as their property. UN-WIPO researches international disputes, for example when a US company wanted to patent Basmati rice, and a Japanese company, curry. NGOs like *Light Years IP* research intellectual property issues for indigenous groups, for example the use of the brand name 'Masai' by *Louis Vuitton*.

In the past and present, the dynamics are the same. Unethical othering, in the guise of research, enhances the power of the powerful through disregard for those less powerful, and usually has a racist or nationalistic aspect. And online research raises new questions (below 5.4).

thinking zone: should avatars be treated ethically?

avatar ethics

Online, an avatar represents a user in some way. When researching and analysing avatars:

- Should avatar participants be asked for their consent?
- Should any material, including avatar names, be kept confidential?
- Is it OK to misrepresent how avatars behave?
- Would it be acceptable to try to 'unmask' and identify the humans behind the avatars?
- If an avatar behaves unethically – racist hatred, being violent to women, sexually abusing children – should this be reported?
- If a researcher created a game or online environment to research human behaviour through avatars, what would be the ethical considerations, for example about closing the site when the research ends?
- The word 'avatar' comes from Hindu, meaning a godlike being that manifests itself on Earth in another form. Might Hindus view the ethics of avatar research differently?

What would be the answers to these questions if the researchers were from another planet, and we were just avatars in their game?

5.3.1 Inclusion and participation

The focus on world issues can lead to ignoring problems that are familiar everywhere, but become hidden in some countries. There are often forms of **double discrimination** which ethics discussions should consider – disabled people from minority groups,²² disadvantaged children in repressive countries,²³ people in psychiatric institutions in war zones.²⁴ And powerful people deserve the same basic ethical standards as anyone else, unless there are clear reasons why they should be treated differently.²⁵ In relation to minority groups, it is well established that a research design should aim for the best possible **integration** ('inclusion') of the people that the research concerns, for example disabled people, within the whole process. Many books explain how,²⁶ and sites such as *inclusiveresearch.net* exemplify good practice.

Full integration means involvement in:

- *deciding what to research* – What are the important issues, and the hidden details that a project needs to investigate?
- *writing research proposals* – Which funders might respond best to participatory grassroots research, which will be more impressed by expert involvement, and how can proposals secure funding by optimizing all levels of involvement?
- *planning* – What are the strengths and weaknesses of those who should be involved?
- *creating ethical protocols* – How can the ethics be decided by, and presented appropriately for, those who the study concerns?
- *carrying out research tasks* – How can tasks be adapted for those with special needs and abilities (languages, disabilities, qualitative-quantitative skills, analysis, reflexive practice, writing and presentation skills)?

- *presenting findings* – What are the most appropriate, accessible and ethical ways to present at conferences and in the media, in printed or online formats, through video, theatre, poetry and other arts.²⁷
- *profiting from the study* – Who can gain financially, emotionally, reputationally, or by having fun, from doing a study?

NGOs, health researchers, anthropologists and development studies researchers implement these ideas within *participatory research* frameworks.²⁸ Disability sites about access technologies, like *Ability.net*, not only show how to include people with disabilities as participants and researchers. They test and explain devices that can be helpful to any researcher.

But the reason for an integrated (inclusive) approach is not just ethical. It improves the design, implementation and outcomes of the whole project. And that means working with everyone who is involved in the research, in every aspect, including the ethics decisions. Visual methods explaining ethics can apply to anyone who cannot fully understand formal research ethics. And this probably includes everyone, including the trained researchers.

5.4 Online and remote research

Online research is increasingly important for international work (C6.5). There are distinct ethical questions,²⁹ but few agreements about standards.³⁰ The best starting point is simply to follow the *terms and conditions* of individual sites, such as the *Facebook Community Standards*. The broad ethical discussions revolve around the

- **Intrusiveness** – Discuss to what degree the research conducted is intrusive ("passive" analysis of internet postings versus active involvement in the community by participating in communications).
- **Perceived privacy** – Discuss (preferably in consultation with members of the community) the level of perceived privacy of the community. (Is it a closed group requiring registration? What is the membership size? What are the group norms?)
- **Vulnerability** – Discuss how vulnerable the community is: for example, a mailing list for victims of sexual abuse or AIDS patients will be a highly vulnerable community.
- **Potential harm** – As a result of the above considerations, discuss whether the intrusion of the researcher or publication of results has the potential to harm individuals or the community as a whole.
- **Informed consent** – Discuss whether informed consent is required or can be waived. (If it is required how will it be obtained?)
- **Confidentiality** – How can the anonymity of participants be protected? (If verbatim quotes are given originators can be identified easily using search engines, thus informed consent is always required.)
- **Intellectual property rights** – In some cases, participants may not seek anonymity, but publicity, so that use of postings without attribution may not be appropriate.

Figure 5.2 Ethical considerations for online qualitative research

Source: Eysenback, G. and Till, J. E. (2001) 'Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities', *British Medical Journal*, 323: 1103–1105.

questions, are websites *private* or *public* spaces, and what is the distinction between *human-centred*³¹ and *non-human centred* research? Health researchers have identified the basic considerations, but there are still few finite conclusions. The *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* provides an ongoing discussion and the website lists the main issues. The considerations are often qualitative, not just technical (Figure 5.2).

Questions when doing online research should consider human aspects and content, and include the following.

• **Human participants:**

- How do we *define* 'human participants', online?
- When is *consent* needed to use communications between people (blogs, *Twitter*, chat rooms, *Facebook*)?
- Should *different* people be treated in different ways – children, older people, religions, nationalists, ethnic groups, gender – and if so, how does the researcher know who people are?
- Is *anonymity* required when information is already part of the global commons of the internet? Does *public interest* sometimes override privacy?³²
- Do the originators of online material need (or want) to be anonymous or do they want recognition? Should material be disguised at different levels ranging from – 'none, light, moderate, to heavy'.³³
- How can *rapport* between researcher and participants be developed across cultures, online?
- How can researchers *protect participants* from harm, or *evaluate* local threats, from a distance?
- How do researchers *protect themselves* and assistants, for example from cyber-attacks?
- Should researchers use *false IDs*, and can they use different IDs for different parts of a study or different studies, and if so how do they remain *accountable* for their conduct?
- Can *participants freely use materials* that show researchers – recordings of *Skype* interviews, video conferences, emails? (Perhaps the 'participants' are actually covert researchers, and if so should they have admitted to this when they were recruited online?)
- What is the *power relationship* between researchers and participants, and how can this be assessed internationally?
- What special *training* should online researchers have?

• **Online content:**

- When is *consent* needed to use general 'global commons' material – what are the *copyright* issues?
- Who is being *excluded*, and what is being ignored, for example when online big data is being used, and how does that bias results?
- Should *user-generated* content (tweets, responses to BBC news items) be treated differently from content created by *site owners* (*Twitter* terms and conditions, BBC news items)?
- To what degree can internet material be *sampled* properly, and does it matter?
- If *crowdsourced material* (contributed resources, crowdmaps, analytical discussion) is being used (C6.4), what is the responsibility towards the 'crowds', especially if they are in repressive countries?³⁴
- If online project content is *taken over* by others (hijacked, or goes viral) after it formally ends, who is then responsible for how it is used?

Whatever the final agreements about online ethics among academics, it is very likely that commercial and government researchers will be operating to different standards. That raises the question, can academics therefore adopt the standards of the commercial or government researchers, when researching commercial or government entities online?

Remote research from a "home" country is increasingly attractive to reduce cost and increase speed, and goes beyond standard online research, for example by using satellites or drones (UAVs – Unmanned Aerial Vehicles). Analysing what an interviewee says during a TV interview in another country might appear reasonable, as the interviewee has seemingly already consented to that interview. But would they consent if they knew that it was not their words that were being studied, but their dress and body language in terms of sexuality? How are we sure that ordinary interviewees have consented in any way, and are not just following orders from powerful people? Similar considerations apply to analysing online material from the ICC and other international courts, particularly if the defendant is eventually acquitted. A court camera can pick up details about stressed people, which are far more intrusive than what could be observed by researchers who are present in a courtroom.

Robots can now fulfil basic research roles, for example to collect information from hospital patients in waiting rooms, and in the form of remote doctors controlled by physicians many miles away. Increasingly, robots are able to take autonomous decisions. Weapons are being developed which can take decisions about how to behave, which can include killing people. Research robots could evolve similarly, for example by using natural language processing to invent questions. Should the ethics of robot research be different from online and other research ethics, and if so, how?

thinking zone: what are the ethics for robot researchers?

rules for robots

In *Runaround*, Isaac Asimov determined 'Three laws of robotics' (1942)³⁵:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

How should these 'laws' relate to robot researchers?

Should robots be free to:

- select who to interview?
- suggest that there may be consequences from not answering questions?

(Continued)

(Continued)

- report interviewees who say they have done something illegal?
- discard extreme or unintelligible data?
- create their own questions?
- choose what to research?

[See References for further information.^{36]}

5.5 Ethics committees

Ethics committees are an increasing concern among international academics.³⁷ Committee members sometimes have little experience or knowledge of work outside their own country, and sometimes seem more concerned to protect themselves than to protect others. Researchers who have worked in dangerous countries sometimes explain that they only described the safe part of their work to their research ethics committees, to avoid complications.

Hammersley and Atkinson provide a useful reminder of reality and balance:³⁸

Some discussions of the ethics of social research seem to be premised on the idea that social researchers can and should act in an ethically superior manner to ordinary people, that they have, or should have, a heightened ethical sensibility and responsibility. There is also a tendency to dramatize matters excessively, implying a level of likely harm or moral transgression that is far in excess of what is typically involved...Yet the ethical problems surrounding ethnographic research are, in fact, very similar to those surrounding other human activities...Above all, in everyday life ethical issues are subject to the same uncertainties and disagreements, the same play of vested interest and dogmatic opinions, and the same range of reasonable but conflicting arguments. All that can be required of [researchers] is that they take due note of the ethical aspects of their work and make the best judgments they can in the circumstances. Like anyone else, they will have to live with the consequences of their actions; and, inevitably, so too will others. But then this is true of all of us in all aspects of our lives.

Ethics discussions can be the most significant part of a project, or they can become self-fulfilling iterations of personal righteousness by people who themselves have done little world-scale research. The academic response to unreasonable objections by ethical committees might be, "Do you have any significant evidence that this has ever caused serious harm?"

Ethics committees should be an informed source of expertise that can help researchers to recognize and address new and difficult world ethics problems. This has become more evident for medical research,³⁹ but less so for other international work. New technologies, such as satellites and robots, raise new questions – what are the ethics of NGOs and academics remotely monitoring sovereign states without consent from their governments?⁴⁰ Ethics committees should create regularly updated online codes because issues change rapidly, but this rarely happens. Domestic ethical standards usually need further consideration when applied internationally (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 Adapting research ethics for world research

Principle	General considerations	World research considerations
<i>Voluntary participation</i>	Research participants should be acting freely and not pressured or coerced into taking part in a study.	In some cultures certain people – women, children, subordinates – may want to seek permission before participation in an interview. If they are told or asked to take part by a superior, is that still 'voluntary'?
<i>Informed consent</i>	Research participants should understand the research and its implications, and agree to take part. Informed consent should be recorded. But this usually does not apply to observation in a public space.	Illiterate people from remote areas might not be able to understand the idea of research. Recording consent could be meaningless, or even dangerous to participants. Media and online research raises new questions. Satellites and drones (UAVs) are increasingly used for remote observation, by both government and commercial and civil society researchers, but there is little discussion of the ethics of this when private places are observed.
<i>Privacy, confidentiality, secrecy, anonymity and disclosure</i>	Data and participants should be protected and disguised.	For international organizations this has distinct implications, and international human rights law protects <i>privacy</i> . Is anonymity always possible, or wanted, in relation to public figures holding specific posts that will inevitably identify them? If they want privacy, to what extent is it acceptable to investigate the private lives of public figures, particularly if wrongdoing is suspected? If someone mentions a criminal or abusive act, should that be reported further?

Further examples on the website.

The significant world consideration is that, while other forms of research might harm local communities, or even occasionally cause the death of individuals, the scale is limited. Domestic research does not usually have the potential to contribute

to genocide as in Nazi Germany, decades of hatred of people labelled 'communist', racial tensions as in Africa and America, animosity among East Asian countries through book titles such as *The Rape of Nanjing*, or wars resulting from the misleading presentation of intelligence research as in Iraq.⁴¹ The best, but not perfect, guiding principle is the 'Golden Rule' of *reciprocity* – behave to others as you would like them to behave to you. At least this has multicultural roots, and could potentially make ethical committees more ethical.

thinking zone: what would my brain want if it were theirs?

reciprocity

The 'Golden Rule' occurs in many philosophies and religions:

- That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another – Egypt, Late Period papyrus 664–323BC (trans. R. Jasnow, 1992).
- Do not do to others, what you would not want for yourself. 己所不欲，勿施於人。 – China, Confucius, 552–479BC, Analects XV.24.
- Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others – Greece, Isocrates, 436–338BC, Nicocles, 6.
- Treat others as you treat yourself – India, Mahābhārata Shānti-Parva (9th–8th centuries BC, 167:9).
- Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful – India, Buddha, 563–circa 483BC, Udanavarga 5:18.
- Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets – Roman Syria, Jesus, Matthew 7:12 (circa 100AD).

are ethics free?

Matthew cites his source as Jesus, and Jesus attributes the idea to 'the law and the prophets', but not to any of the earlier international thinkers. Is it ethical to plagiarize ideas about ethics?

but

'Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same', advised George Bernard Shaw in *Maxims for Revolutionists* (1903).

So, if a masochist said to a sadist, "Hit me", what is the ethically correct answer for the sadist?

"Yes" or "NOOOOO"!?

neuro-ethics

The 'Golden Rule' is seen as a 'neuro-ethical principle' – an ethic honed by evolution, which is fundamental to the survival of the whole human species. How might this idea be applied to:

- the study of comparative ethics?
- the formation of international law?
- international research ethics?

[See References for further information.⁴²]

main ideas

When using **ethical guidelines** for international work consider:

- whose ethics take *priority* – those of the researchers' "home" country, or the countries where the research is happening, or both?
- the difference between causing *harm*, and *deceit*.
- how decisions are made when *consent* is not possible – 'best interests', 'substituted judgement', 'public interests'.
- the tendency to fuss about *small* moral details, which makes us feel good, and *big* issues that are easy to ignore but can fuel wars, commercial exploitation, and life-long problems for local people.
- *reciprocity* – how would I want "them" to behave to "us"?

When thinking about the **law**, consider:

- the need for research visas.
- local rules – taxes, currency exchange, import/export laws.
- restrictions on recording in public places – photos, videos, audio.
- copyright and defamation.

When working with '**others**', consider how research:

- has often *demeaned* people, and caused *hatred* and *conflict*.
- can be fully *integrated (inclusive)*, at all stages, including decisions about ethics.

When using **online** and **remote** methods, consider:

- if, and why, people online, and/or in other countries, should be treated *differently*.
- the distinction between *human-participant* and *non-human participant* research.
- whether internet sites are *private* or *public* spaces.

key reading

Dawson, J. and Peart, N.S. (2003) *The Law of Research: A Guide*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Halai, A. and William, D. (2012) *Research Methodologies in the 'South'*. Karachi: Oxford University Press Pakistan.

Hammersley, M. and Traianou, A. (2011) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Robinson-Pant, A. and Singal, N. (eds) (2013) Special issue. 'Researching ethically across cultures', *Compare*, 43(4).

Swan, N. et al. (2011) *Ethics Protocols and Research Ethics Committees*. Sonning Common: Academic Publishing International.

Ward, S.J.A. (2010) *Global Journalism Ethics*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press.

 online resources

To access the resources – search on the name in italics, use the http, or search on the generic term in 'quote marks'.

Social Research Association – ethics guidelines

Singapore Statement on Research Integrity – an attempt to identify global principles

EU *RESPECT* project

Yale University – conducting research abroad – http://world-toolkit.yale.edu/research_overview

UNESCO – European cross-national research – www.unesco.org/most/ethissj.htm

International research ethics subject guide – medical research – <http://bioethics.iu.edu/reference-center/ireguide>

World Association of Professional Investigators – www.wapi.com

Inclusive Research Network – research by and with people with learning disabilities – www.inclusiveresearch.net

Internet research ethics – www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_elgesem.html

MORE ON THE WEBSITE

SIX

Choosing research frameworks

- 6.1 Studying peoples
- 6.2 Studying places
- 6.3 Studying world systems
- 6.4 Crowdsourcing research
- 6.5 Online research

Buildings have different frameworks – steel, concrete, wood – which provide the main structure. And within these frameworks different, or similar, materials are used – carpets, paint, heating. Similarly, *research frameworks*¹ (also called 'strategies',² 'approaches',³ or 'designs'⁴) provide a structure within which different, or similar, data collection methods are used (C7–C13). A research design may be based on more than one framework, frameworks may overlap, and a framework can involve a combination of different data collection methods and analysis.

In the past, research design often started with a decision to use either a *quantitative*⁵ (*positivist* – numbers, measurement, statistics) or *qualitative*⁶ (*interpretive*⁷ – words, images, meanings) framework.⁸ World research can use the standard frameworks, and many methodology books explain these,⁹ so they are only outlined here (Figure 6.1). But the qualitative–quantitative distinction is not now so clear-cut. New technologies are producing data that does not fit neatly into the old paradigms. Satellite images are visual data, but the images can be measured quantitatively (the number of tanks in a