Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Social Science Research

3x5 Card

- NAME & NICKNAMES
- MAJOR OR FIELD OF STUDY
- YEAR IN SCHOOL (FR, SO, JR, SR, GRAD)
- CONTACT INFORMATION (E-MAIL, PHONE NO.)
- REASON FOR TAKING COURSE
- OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION

What are DATA?

Data are the empirical evidence or information that one gathers carefully according to rules or procedures.

-Neuman, p. 7

Types of Data

Quantitative:

Expressed as *numbers*.

The job of the researcher is to convert ideas to numbers, then find patterns (or relationships) in the numbers.

Types of Data

Qualitative:

Expressed as *words*, *text*, *pictures*, *images*, *objects* or other *symbolic representations*.

The job of the researcher is to identify important representations to a group, then discern the meaning that group members attach to these representations.

Where Do We Get Data?

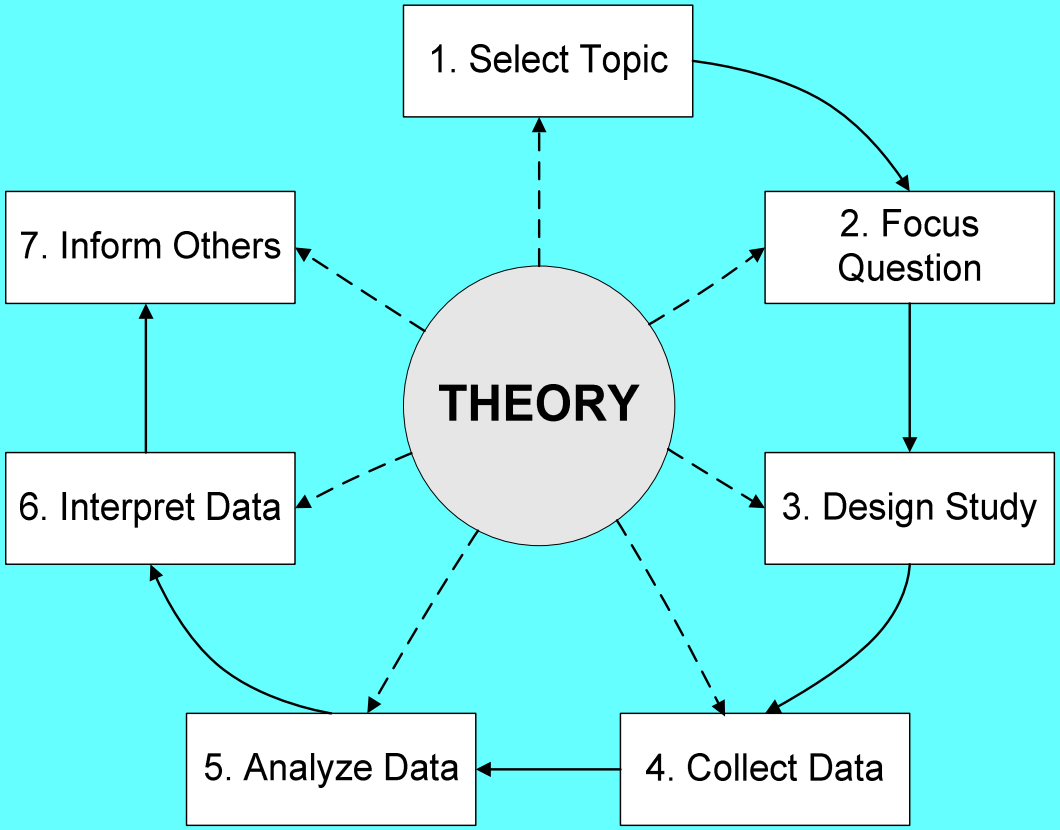
Quantitative Data

Survey

Qualitative Data

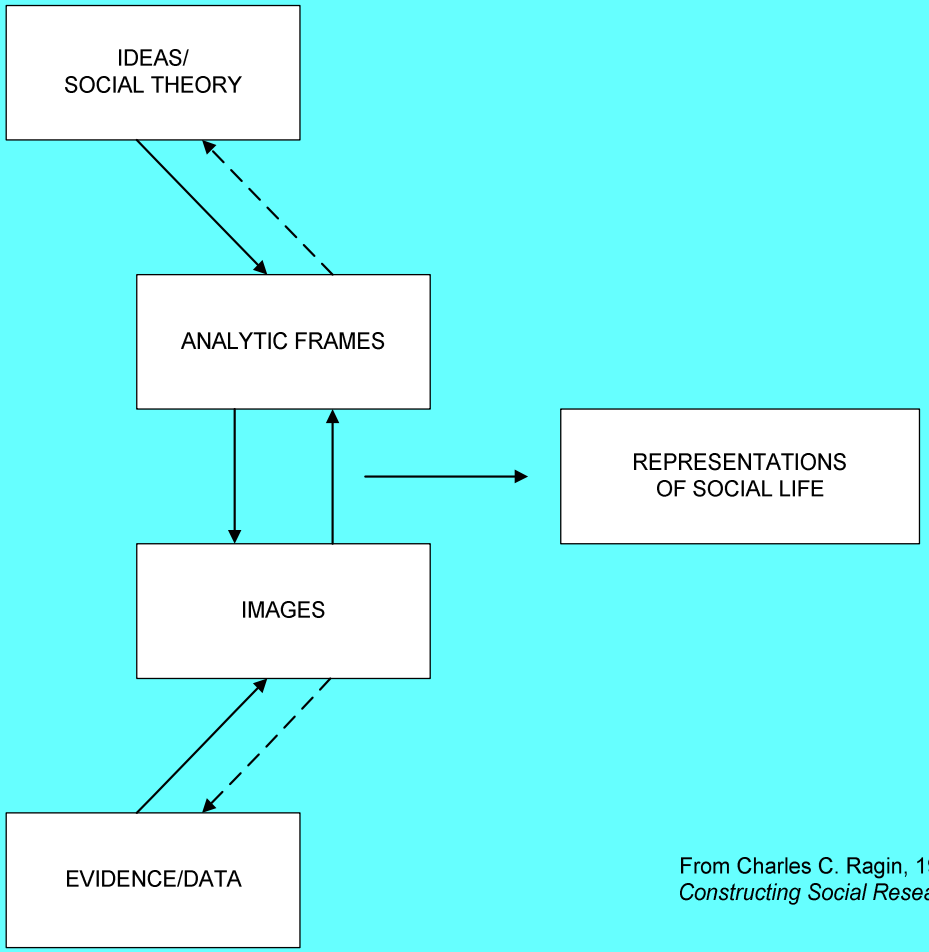
Participant-Observation

Steps in the Research Process



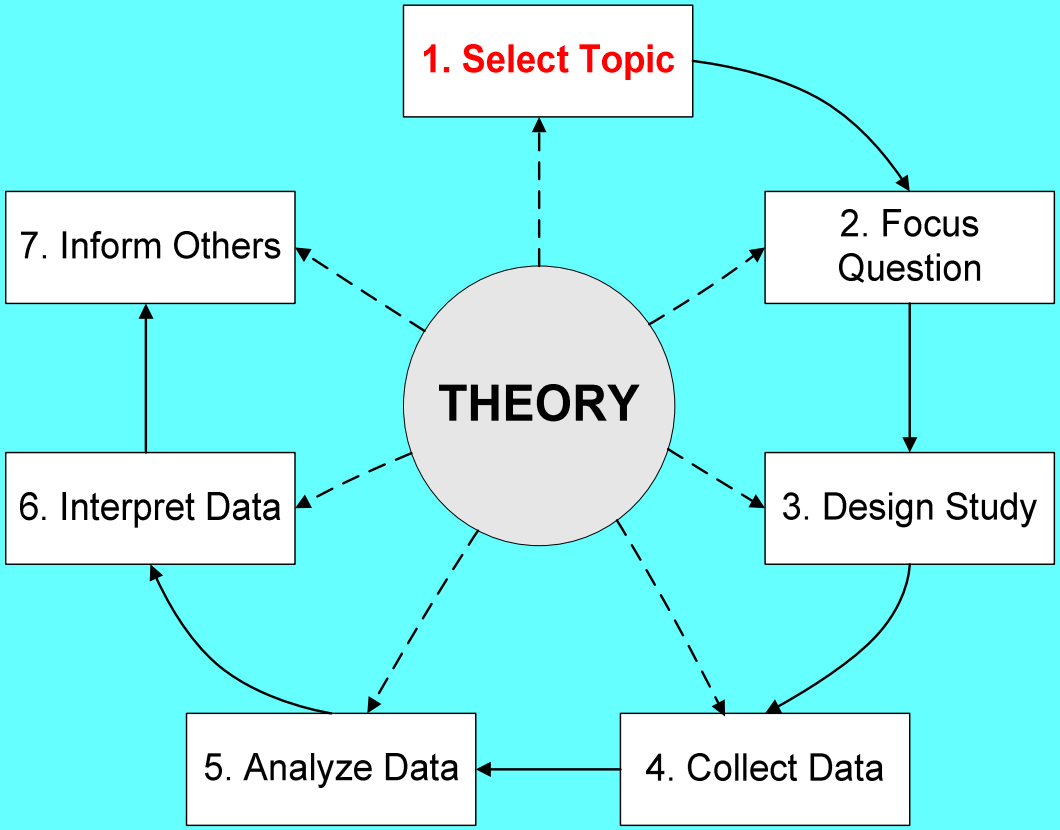
From W. Lawrence Neuman, 2003
Social Research Methods

A Simple Model of Social Research



From Charles C. Ragin, 1994
Constructing Social Research

Steps in the Research Process



From W. Lawrence Neuman, 2003
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Select a Topic

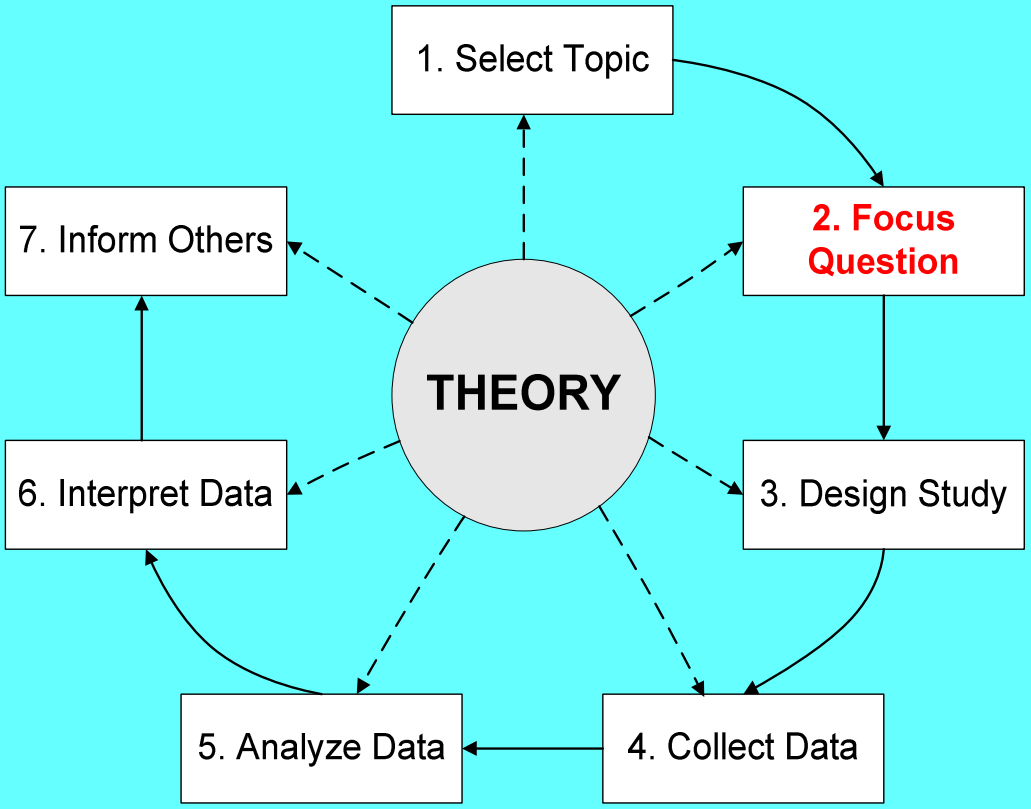
What is your general *area of interest?*

What do you *know* about?

What have *others* said on this topic?

Are you interested in *theory* or *policy?*
(Basic vs. applied research)

Steps in the Research Process



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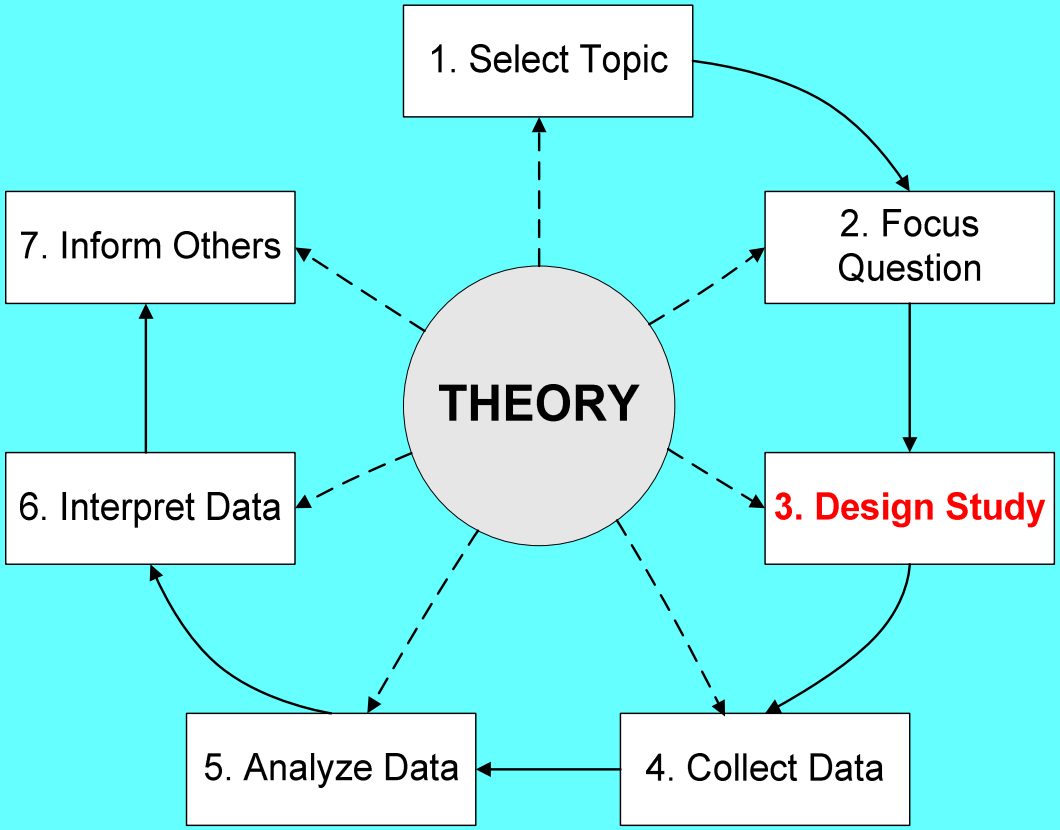
Focus a Research Question

What is a *Research Question*?

Does your question prompt an *explanation*?

Can your question be addressed within the parameters of an accepted approach and technique?

Steps in the Research Process



From W. Lawrence Neuman, 2003
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Design Study

Is your research question inherently *interpretivist* or *positivist* in orientation?

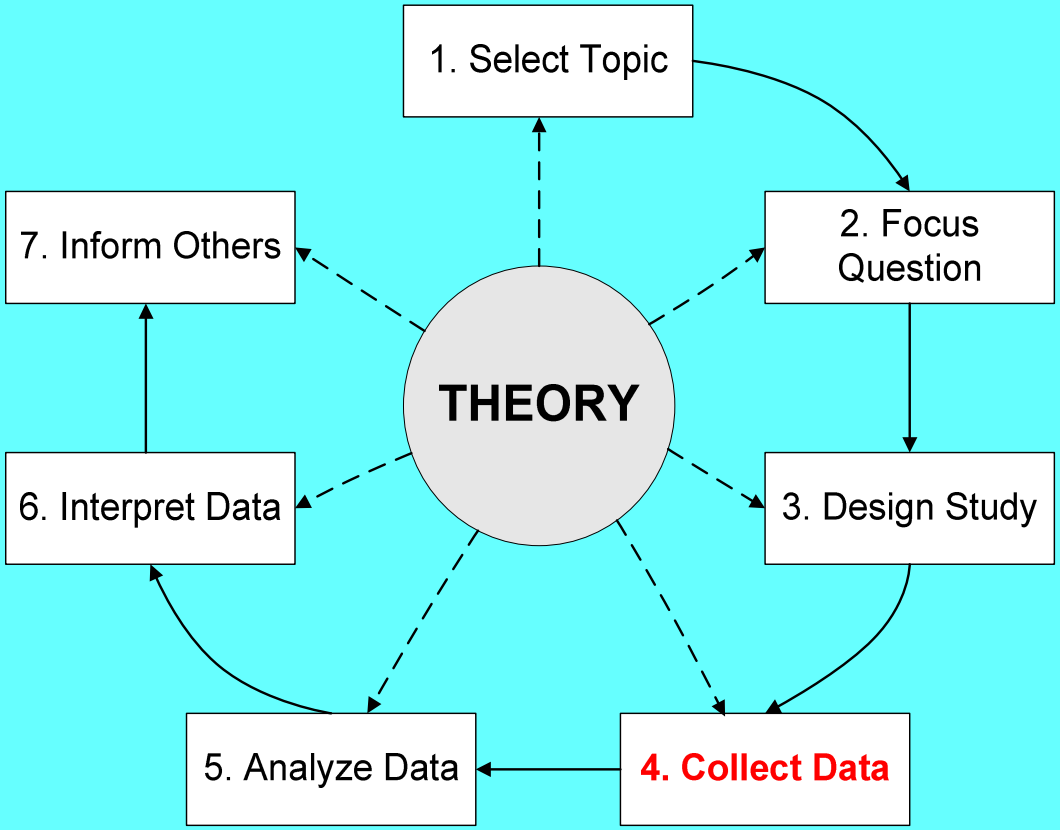
What are your important *constructs* and *concepts*?

How will you *measure* these concepts?

Who will your *subjects* be? How will you select them?

How will you know if the information you collect is accurate?

Steps in the Research Process



From W. Lawrence Neuman, 2003
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Collect Data

Will you look for *qualitative* or *quantitative* data?

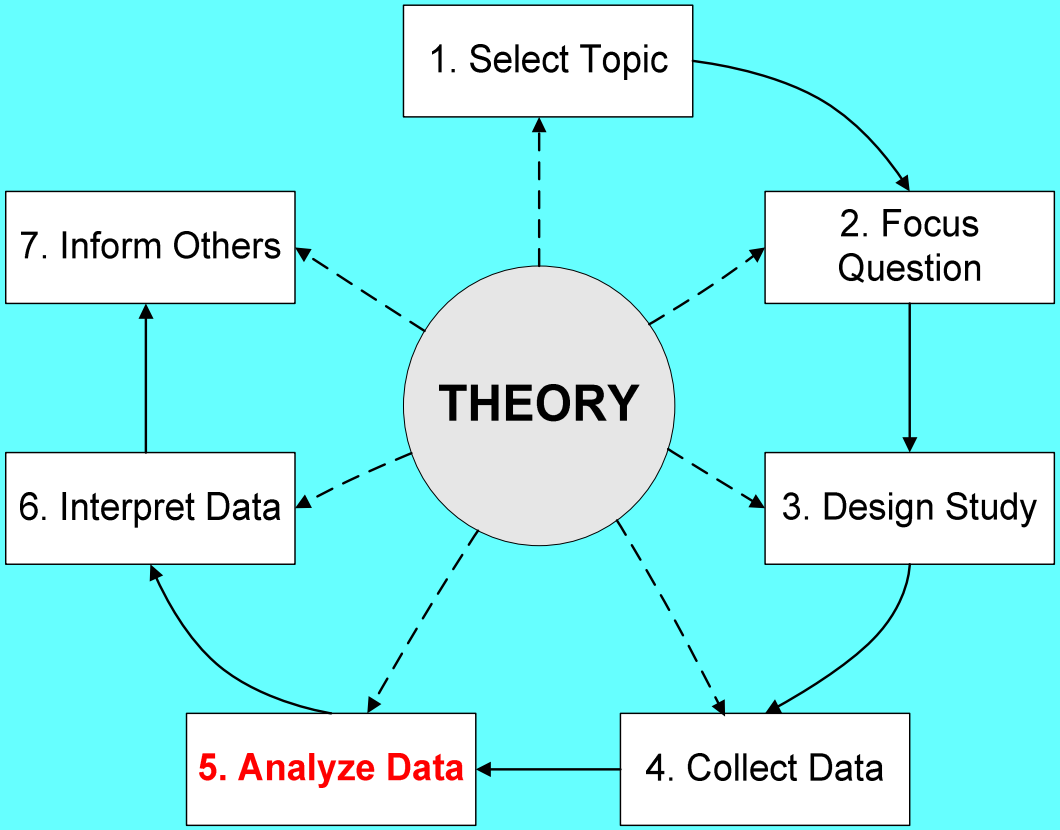
What *questions* will you ask people?

How will you *record* responses?

Are you treating your subjects *ethically*?

How will you know when you are done?

Steps in the Research Process



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Analyze Data

Do you want to *describe* or draw *inferences*?

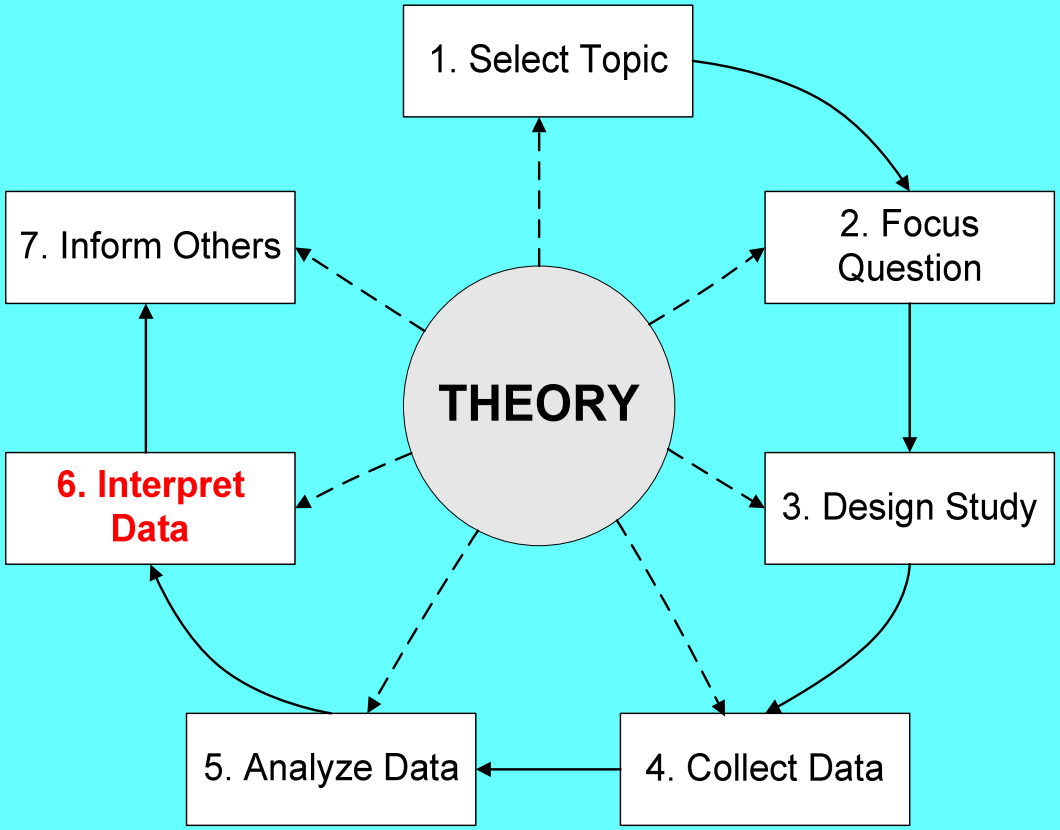
Are you *building* or *testing* theory?

How are your data measured? (i.e. *level of measurement*)

What is your *theoretical model*? Ideal types? Controls?

What sort of *coding* scheme will you use?

Steps in the Research Process



From W. Lawrence Neuman, 2003
Social Research Methods

Interpret Results

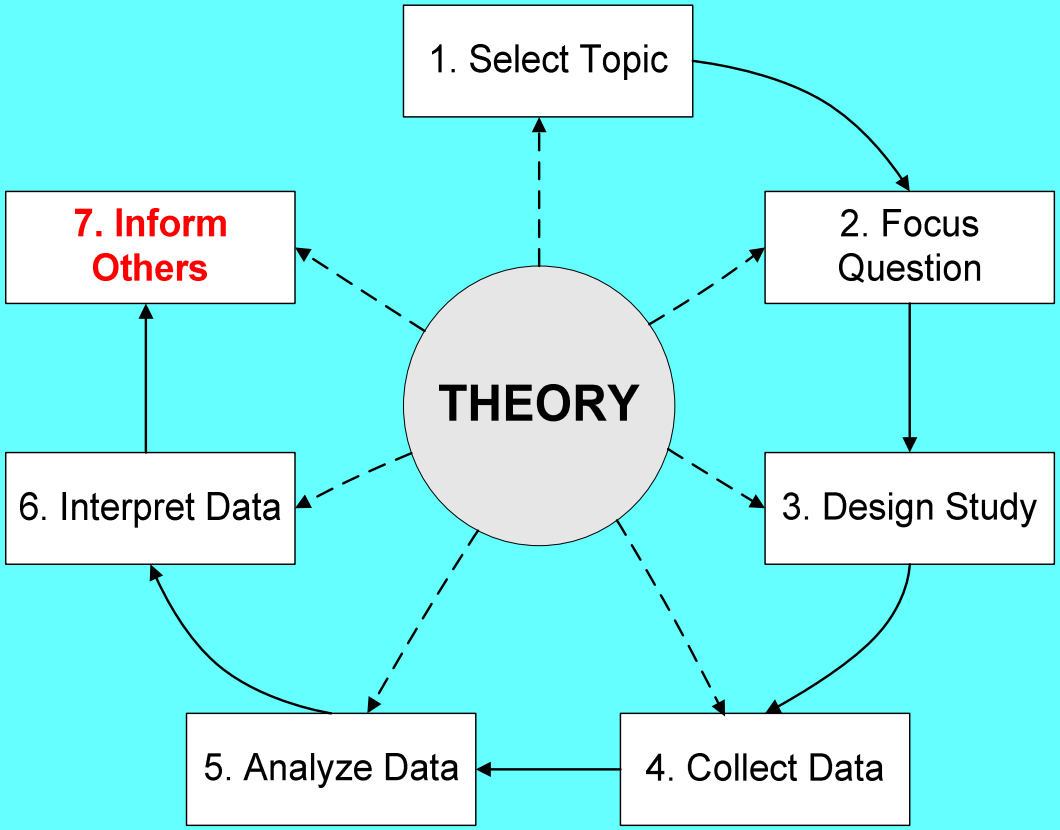
What do these results tell us about *social life*?

What is the *story* in your results?

What *tensions* or *paradoxes* emerge from your results?

What problems complicate your study?

Steps in the Research Process



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Inform Others

Who will be interested in these results?
Who do you want to tell them to?

How will you present your results?
Conference, book, journal article

Where is this debate occurring?
Which field or journal is interested.

A Philosophical Conundrum

If a tree falls in the forest,
and there is no one there,
does it make a sound?

Methodological Paradigms: Positivism

Positivist social science is an organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity.

-Neuman (2006), p. 82

Methodological Paradigms: Interpretivism

The interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds.

-Neuman (2006), p. 88

Comparing Methodological Paradigms

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Purpose of Social Science Research	Discover and document universal causal laws of social behavior	Understand how people construct meaning through social interaction
Fundamental Nature of Social Reality	Essentialist; Reality exists external to the individual	Constructionist; Reality exists in the human brain, based on perceptions
Basic Nature of Human Beings	Rational (self-interested): Respond to causes in predictable ways	Interactive, Creative; Always construct systems of meaning
Role of Human Agency	Deterministic; Conditioned by external forces, probabilistic laws	Voluntaristic; Conditioned by subjective perceptions
Science and Common Sense	Science is a privileged form of knowledge, better than alternatives	Science & common sense offer alternative ways to interpret reality
What Does a Theory Look Like?	Expresses causal relationships; generalizable	Descriptive; Idiographic (Thick Description); Emic (Subjective)
How is "Truth" Determined?	Truth must be logical and must be consistent with observed facts	Truth must be consistent with the perceptions and lives of the subjects
What Constitutes Good Evidence?	Empirical (observed with senses); Measureable	Contextual; Fluid; Embedded within a system of meaning
Utility of Social Science	Instrumental; Allows people to control their social environment, to predict social outcomes	Practical; Allows people to understand hidden meanings within their social contexts
Role of Values	Science is objective and value-free	Science is relative and value-laden

Adapted from Neuman (2006)