

Meta-ethnography

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**Trusted evidence.
Informed decisions.
Better health.**



Conflict of Interest Statement

I have no actual or potential conflicts of interest
in relation to this presentation

Kate Flemming





Overview of whole program

Introduction to qualitative research and qualitative evidence synthesis [October 2021]

Jane Noyes, Professor in Health and Social Services Research and Child Health, Bangor University, UK
Kate Flemming, Professor of Hospice Practice

Question formulation and searching for qualitative evidence

Professor Andrew Booth, Professor in Evidence

Selecting studies and assessing methodological quality

Jane Noyes, Professor in Health and Social Services Research, University of Exeter, UK
Professor Andrew Booth, Professor in Evidence

Making sense of framework and best fit framework synthesis

Professor Andrew Booth, Professor in Evidence

25th April, 2022

GRADE CERQual

Megan Wainwright, consultant in qualitative research, Portugal & member of the GRADE-CERQual coordinating team.

SIGN UP

16th May, 2022

Integrating qualitative evidence syntheses with intervention effect findings

Angela Harden, Professor of Health Sciences, City, University of London.

James Thomas, Professor of Social Research & Policy, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, London.

Thematic Synthesis [February 2022]

Angela Harden, Professor of Health Sciences, City, University of London.

James Thomas, Professor of Social Research & Policy, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL Institute of Education, London.

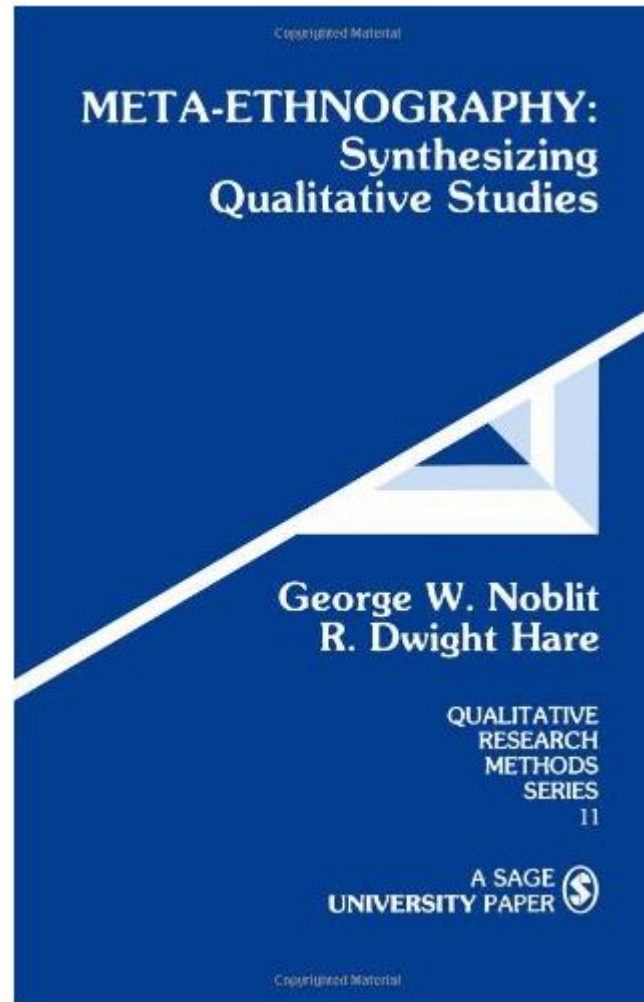
Aims of the session

- Introduce meta-ethnography and its historical development
- Explore the processes associated with meta-ethnography
- Examine some of the questions a meta-ethnography can answer
- Introduce the reporting guideline eMERGe, specifically developed for the reporting of meta-ethnographies

With thanks to Ruth Garside, Emma France and Jane Noyes

This is where it all began.....

George Noblit



R Dwight Hare



So what's it about?

'The meaning of meta-ethnography for us is as a form of synthesis for ethnographic or other interpretive studies'
p14

We use this term [meta-ethnography], in part, because of the analogy to meta-analysis. We share the goal of those proposing meta-analytic and integrative research reviews of "putting together" all the research available to us. p 25

(Noblit & Hare 1988)

A quick poll



Meta-ethnography

- A widely used method of qualitative synthesis
- Enables a systematic and detailed understanding of how studies are related, through the comparison of findings within and across studies. These are coded and condensed into themes which ultimately provide an interpretation of the whole body of research (Noblit and Hare 1988)

However from the interpretive perspective how this is done depends on the substance of the individual studies and how they relate to each other



Meta-ethnography – some background

- It was developed to synthesise ethnographies of education studies
- In its original form, only described the methods for synthesis – not the other steps in a systematic review
- Was given a resurgence as a result of methodological work synthesising qualitative findings about the ways in which patients take the medicines prescribed to them (Britten et al 2002, Campbell et al 2003, Pound, 2009)
- The ‘synthesis’ component of meta-ethnography is now usually used as part of a complete QES approach
- Meta-ethnography is a core QES method for Cochrane

When might a meta-ethnography be useful?

The aims of meta-ethnography are :

- to produce new configurations or interpretations from the included qualitative evidence
- to preserve “meaning in context”
- support the development or extension of theory.

Meta-ethnography is suitable for emergent review questions that seek to explore perceptions, experiences and behaviours in order to produce new theory or conceptualisations about them.

Thus, it is an **interpretive** method of synthesis, not an aggregative one

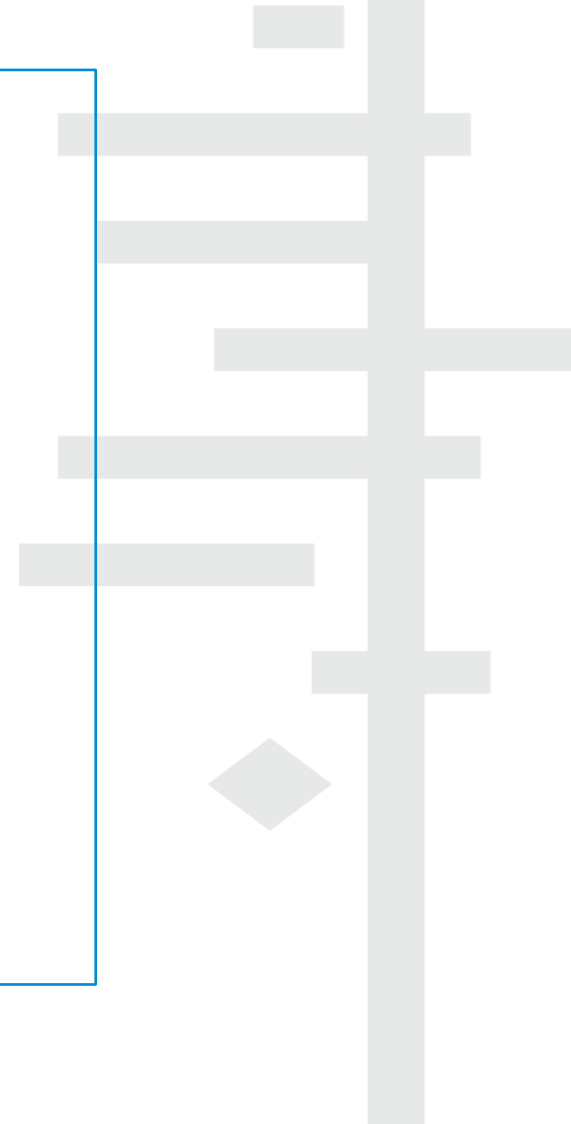
(Noblit and Hare 1988).

Pause for questions



The Seven Steps of Meta-ethnography

1. Getting started
2. Deciding what is relevant
3. Reading the studies
4. Determining how the studies are related
5. Translating the studies into one another
6. Synthesising the translations
7. Expressing the synthesis



The Seven Steps of Meta-ethnography

1. Getting started

Noblit and Hare say this is *'finding something that is worthy of a synthesis effort'* p26

Need to consider....

- Is a meta-ethnography appropriate for the question?
- Is a synthesis on this topic needed?
- What experience does the team need?



**THINK-
'RETREAT'**



Research Question	Epistemology	Time	Resources	Expertise	Audience & Purpose	Type of Data
What question is the review trying to answer?	What type of knowledge is the review trying to access?	How long has Team got?	How much money/people are available?	What skills are required?	Who are audience and how will they use it?	What types of data will it include?

Booth et al (2018)

International Journal of Drug Policy 65 (2019) 8–23

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)



International Journal of Drug Policy



Aim to explore how substance use features in survivors' and perpetrators' accounts of intimate partner violence perpetration


perpetration: A meta-ethnography

Gail Gilchrist^{a,*}, Fay Dennis^{a,1}, Polly Radcliffe^a, Juliet Henderson^a, Louise M. Howard^b, David Gadd^c

Check for updates

Pain Medicine

Aim to identify qualitative research that explored the experience of living with chronic pain and to understand the process of recovery

Francine Toye , PhD,* Joletta Belton, MSc,[†] Erin Hannink, DPT,[‡] Kate Seers, DSc,[§] and Karen Barker, PhD* doi: 10.1093/pm/pnaa373

2. Deciding what is relevant

Scope of searching:

- May aim to be comprehensive, or may be more targeted or purposive in approach
- It depends on the topic and context of the review

Question formulation and searching for qualitative evidence [November 2021]

Professor Andrew Booth, Professor in Evidence Synthesis, School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield, UK.

2. Deciding what is relevant

Qualitative studies whose findings are conceptually rich or contain rich description are best suited to meta-ethnographic synthesis because the data can be further interpreted

Descriptive studies which lack conceptual (and contextual) detail are not well-suited to synthesis using meta-ethnography

*This means that meta-ethnography **cannot** be selected as an appropriate method until relevant qualitative papers to be synthesised have been identified and their richness assessed*





2. Deciding what is relevant

May seek to sample from a larger body of potentially included studies eg

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

International Journal of
Older People Nursing WILEY

Meta-ethnography of the purpose of meaningful occupation for people living with dementia

Katherine Strick MSc, PhD Student¹  | Rebecca Abbott PhD, Research Fellow²  |
Jo Thompson Coon PhD, Professor²  | Ruth Garside PhD, Professor¹ 

Included conceptually rich studies first

Then examined the remainder of the includable articles and sampled based on their ability to refute or advance the emerging conceptual framework.

3. Reading the studies

‘Repeated re-reading of the accounts’ p28

- Initial careful reading and re-reading of the studies helps the reviewers to familiarise themselves with the studies and their findings
- Similar to being immersed in the data during primary qualitative analysis
- May identify potential additional areas of enquiry – either topic based or theory based - may be identified, necessitating further targeted searches
- Can allow the identification of an “index paper”

4. Determining how the studies are related

Refers to how do you start to put the studies together:

‘We think it makes sense to create a list of the key metaphors, phrases, ideas, and/or concepts in each account’ p28

‘When we talk about the key metaphors of a study, we are referring to what others may call the themes, perspectives, organizers, and/or concepts revealed by qualitative studies’ p14

Then look at the relationship between them.

4. Determining how the studies are related

The data on which meta-ethnography focuses are the authors' interpretations in included papers - sometimes called "second-order constructs"

1st order constructs:

Everyday ways of making sense of our world (seen as participant quotes)

2nd order constructs:

Social science researchers' interpretations of this "common sense world" to academic concepts and theories

3rd order constructs:

Reviewers' interpretations of the researchers' interpretations.

(after Schutz, 1962)

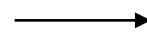
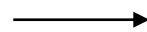
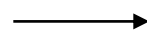
Participant quotes supporting concepts/second order constructs can be extracted together with the concepts

5. Translating the studies into one another

The approach to synthesis depends on how the studies are related, and uses constant comparison to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of interest

Studies may be related to each other in one of four ways:

1. They can be about different things
2. They can be about roughly similar things
3. They can be studies that refute each other
4. They can be studies that progressively build a line of argument



Meta-ethnographic technique:

- No point in synthesising!
- Reciprocal translation
- Refutational synthesis
- Lines of argument synthesis



5. Translating the studies into one another

The goal of translation is to develop concepts or metaphors which embody more than one study

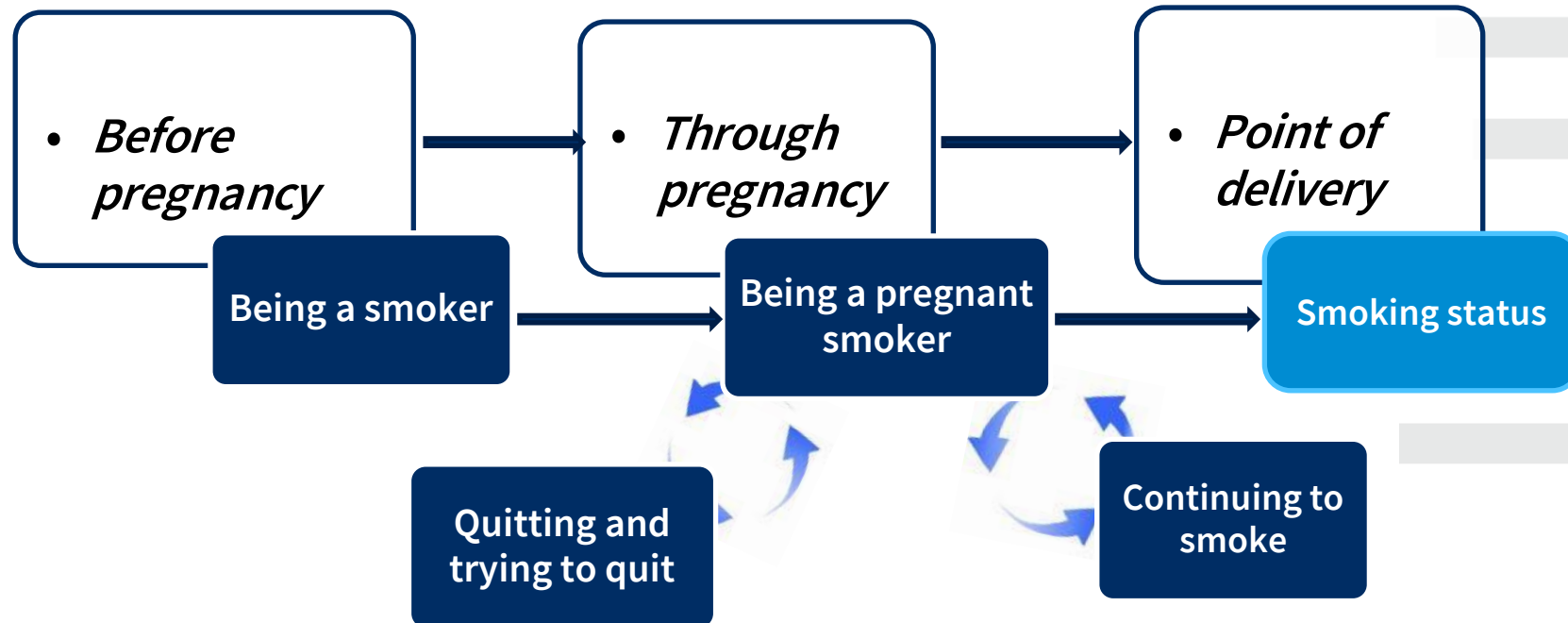
- **Reciprocal translation analysis**— in an iterative fashion one study is translated into another
- **Refutational synthesis** – studies amenable to general meta-ethnographic approach, but refutations are examined more closely
- **Lines of argument synthesis** – more about interpretation ‘what can we say about the whole based on the selective studies of the parts?’

‘Translations need to protect the particular, respect holism & enable comparison’ p28

6. Synthesising translations

- Synthesis refers to making a ‘whole’ which is more than the ‘sum-of-the-parts’ alone imply
- Translations, as a set, are one level of meta-ethnographic synthesis
- The translations can be compared with one another to determine if there are some that can encompass others
- This presents the second level of synthesis and is often presented as a ‘line of argument’

‘Context constrains positive behaviour change’



7. Expressing the synthesis

“involves determining the meanings of the meta-ethnography for the intended audience”

May be expressed as a new theory, model or conceptual framework eg

- Atkins et al (2008) produced hypotheses and a model of adherence to tuberculosis treatment.
- Hildebrandt et al (2008)'s meta-ethnography of patients with colorectal cancer led to a new model showing the iterative process of achieving mastery over cancer.

How do you go about telling people what you've done?

Generally written for academic audiences

So.....

Meta-ethnography a useful method of qualitative evidence synthesis

Aims to provide an interpretation greater than the sum of the parts of the individual studies

Particularly useful in examining issues related to people who are vulnerable, marginalised or who experience inequality or inequity

Time consuming.....but isn't any synthesis??

Reporting Guidance for meta-ethnography

eMERGe

Published in 2019 in multiple journals

- organised by the phases of meta-ethnography
- asks authors to describe their processes and to justify choices made
- similar to other reporting QES guidance BUT
- difference seen in the specifics of the analysis and synthesis phases

Structured in three complementary parts:

1. **The Guidance Table** summary of the 19 reporting criteria which also indicates where each criterion might be reported in a publication.
2. **The Explanatory Notes** expand on how and why to apply each reporting criterion and describe further reporting considerations.
3. **The Extensions to Reporting Criteria** how to report components that will not apply to every meta-ethnography



Received: 13 June 2017 | Revised: 22 June 2018 | Accepted: 3 July 2018
DOI: 10.1111/jan.13809

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH - METHODOLOGY

WILEY | JAN

Improving reporting of meta-ethnography: The eMERGe reporting guidance

Emma F. France¹ | Maggie Cunningham¹ | Nicola Ring² | Isabelle Uny¹ | Edward

Some Resources

Booth A, Noyes J , Flemming K , et al (2018) Structured methodology review identified seven (RETREAT) criteria for selecting qualitative evidence synthesis approaches. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 99:41-52

Flemming K, Noyes J. Qualitative Evidence Synthesis: Where Are We at?. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 2021 Feb 19;20:1609406921993276.

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Tong, A., Flemming, K., McInnes, E. *et al*. Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research: ENTREQ. *BMC Med Res Methodol* **12**, 181 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-12-181>

Cochrane Handbook Chapter 21 and **Cochrane QIMG Supplementary Guidance** [https://www.jclinepi.com/issue/S0895-4356\(18\)X0003-1](https://www.jclinepi.com/issue/S0895-4356(18)X0003-1)

Questions

