Advanced qualitative methods in poverty research and analysis: Dialogical Analysis

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Overview

- The aim of this session is to examine the use of qualitative methods in researching and analysing poverty. The research methods that will be considered address poverty as a 'dialogical' unit of analysis which is based on inter-subjective meanings

- Hermeneutic approach to social science research: highlights fundamental relationship between text, context and consequence in the study of the social world

- Various perspectives are employed to examine the issues of identification and causation in qualitatively-oriented poverty research. Five themes will be examined as listed below with the support of case studies from different income-group country contexts

Themes

- Poverty as a "dialogical" unit of analysis

- The ethics and politics of qualitative research on poverty

- Critical policy analysis approaches and problem representation

- The use of Grounded Theory in poverty-related research

- Participatory approaches in poverty research

- Synthesis: how can qualitative research enhance and challenge how social science defines poverty and explains its causes

Epistemological principles: Hermneutics (vs empiricism)

- Interpretive understanding of social phenomena: intersubjective meanings

- Associated with continental philosophers such as Heidegger, Weber and Wittgenstein: importance of language and "forms of life"

- The subject/object distinction is impossible and undesirable: understanding inter-subjective meaning requires participation in a dialogic+ process

- The social world is pre-interpreted: therefore, to interpret it requires participation
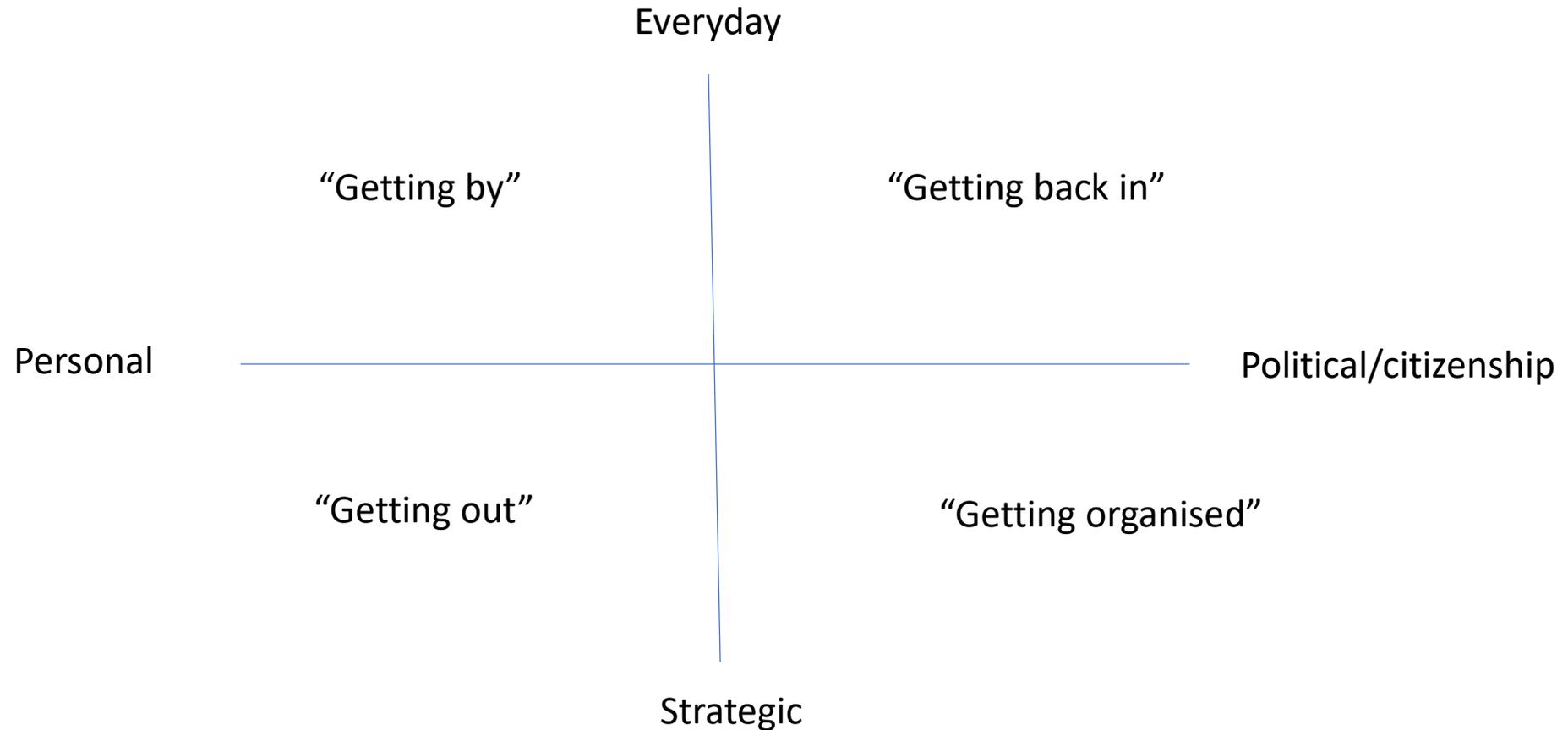
Question to discuss

From a hermeneutic perspective, what might be the limitations of survey research that explores attitudes?

Ethics and Politics of Researching Poverty: Structural Perspectives (Lister, 2004)

- How is poverty a political problem?

- Structural factors versus the agency of the poor for example, class, gender, ethnicity, geography, age, disability

- **Example 1:** "feminization of poverty": female-headed households, notably single mothers or pensioners – UNDP (1995): 70% of the world's poor are women

- **Example 2:** race/ethnicity: men of Caribbean or Asian origin in the UK have worse health, housing and employment outcomes

Lister (2004): Agency of the poor

Everyday

"Getting by"   "Getting back in"

Personal ————————————————————————— Political/citizenship

"Getting out"   "Getting organised"

Strategic

How do we conceptualize and investigate poverty from a qualitative approach?

- **Consumption approach to poverty analysis:** rooted in micro-economic analysis

- **Dialogical approach to poverty analysis:** rooted in social anthropology and participatory rural appraisal

Dialogical Approach: Main Features

- **Dialogic techniques:** focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews with the aim of reaching locally-relevant meanings of poverty

- Delineating the multiple dimensions of poverty and understanding their interrelationships

- Based on dialogue to understand meaning (emic)

- Can also incorporate the observation of behavior (etic)

Dialogical Study of Poverty

- Better understand what is meant by poverty

- What categories are relevant in thinking about wellbeing

- What types of relationships are important when analyzing social change?

Integrating locally relevant meanings of poverty into surveys

- Barahona and Levy (2007): Malawi

- Devereux and Sharp (2006): Ethiopia

- **1ˢᵗ stage:** Participatory approaches used to identify local leanings: food security and dependence on others for sustenance

- **2ⁿᵈ stage:** Standardised into a survey for probabilistic sampling

Identification stage of poverty analysis (Shaffer, 2013)

- Site selection or sampling: agro-ecological zones, remotes, ethnicity, main livelihood activity

- Eliciting locally meaningful definitions of poverty: dialogical approaches, inter-subjectivity, participatory poverty assessments (PPAs)

- Identifying relevant households: techniques to identify invisible or silent groups

Critical analysis of poverty policy (Dryzek, 2013)

- "Analysts are interlocutors in a multidirectional conversation, not whisperers in the ears of the sovereign"

- Applying critical policy analysis to international development interventions:
- Accommodation-ist
- Technocratic
- Critical policy analysis

- "Agents of impairment" (Lindblom, 1990); "discourse closures" (Veit-Wilson, 2000)

- Text, Context and Consequence (Bacchi, 2014): policy documents vs institutions

Critical analysis of poverty policy (Dryzek, 2013)

- Explication of dominant meanings in policy content and process

- Identification of "agents of impairment" that suppress alternative meanings: ideologies, dominant discourses, lack of information, lack of education, bureaucratic obfuscation, restrictions on the admissibility of particular kinds of evidence and communication, and processes designed to baffle rather than enlighten

- Identification of the ways in which the communicative capacities of policy actors might be equalized

- Evaluation of institutions in terms of communicative standards

- Participation in the design of institutions that might do better

Critical analysis of poverty policy: Orders of Discourse (Fairclough, 2003)

- In line with this focus on text and semiosis, an "order of discourse" is defined as the "semiotic dimension of an event" and represents a "social ordering of relationships between different ways of meaning-making" (Fairclough, 2013: 233).

- An order of discourse is a "pre-condition for and a constraint on action", hence the relevance of analysing social protection orders of discourse in this paper and what avenues for social policy interventions they espouse.

- Extant and oral text are not static: their content is borrowed, absorbed reformulated and interpreted in new contexts or fields

Problem definition: Policy Document Analysis

- "text, context and consequence" (Taylor, 1997; Diem et al. 2017)

1. who are the main authors of the policy documents?
2. how are policy problems defined?
3. is there social/political resistance or acquiescence to their policy discourses?
4. are existing social inequalities reproduced through the types of progammes espoused by the policy documents on social protection?

Problematizations in Health Policy: Questioning How "Problems" Are Constituted in Policies (Bacchi, 2016)

- **Problem Representation (WPR Approach)**

- **Question 1:** What's the "problem" of ("discrimination," "poverty") represented to be in a specific policy?

- **Question 2:** What presuppositions—necessary meanings antecedent to an argument—and assumptions (ontological, epistemological) underlie this representation of the "problem"? This question involves a form of Foucauldian archaeology

- **Question 3**: How has this representation of the "problem" come about? This question involves a form of Foucauldian genealogy

- **Question 4:** What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

- **Question 5:** What effects (discursive, subjectification, and lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

- **Question 6:** How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated, and defended? How has it been and/or can it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

WPR Illustration: Income Quarantining Policy in Australia (Bacchi, 2016)

- A WPR analysis brings different questions to "evaluation": rather than evaluating policies in terms of their abilities to "solve" problems, we need to study the ways policies constitute "problems." →→→ _governing takes place through the formation of "problems," that is, through problematizations_

- In these terms, the proposal to quarantine the income of welfare recipients, Indigenous and otherwise, produces the "problem" as inappropriate use of income

- This policy reveals an individualistic understanding of poverty: It directs itself at altering the behaviour of individuals and the way they spend their income, not at the wider context in which such "individual" decisions are made

- Targeting the behaviors of specific groups of "significant disadvantage" produces "poverty" as a residual condition restricted to "dysfunctional communities" who need to be "advanced in a developmental sense: So they can be caught up to the rest of 'us,' the affluent, western, mainstream"

Grounded Theory (Kathy Charmaz)

- Sociologically-informed Grounded Theory draws from the symbolic interactionist tradition (Charmaz, 1990) which is concerned with how social action is dependent on frameworks of subjective meaning-making (semiosis)

- Social justice research: addresses structural frameworks of power relations and inequalities

1. defining relevant processes,
2. demonstrating their contexts,
3. specifying the conditions in which these processes occur,
4. conceptualising their phases,
5. explaining what contributes to their stability or change,
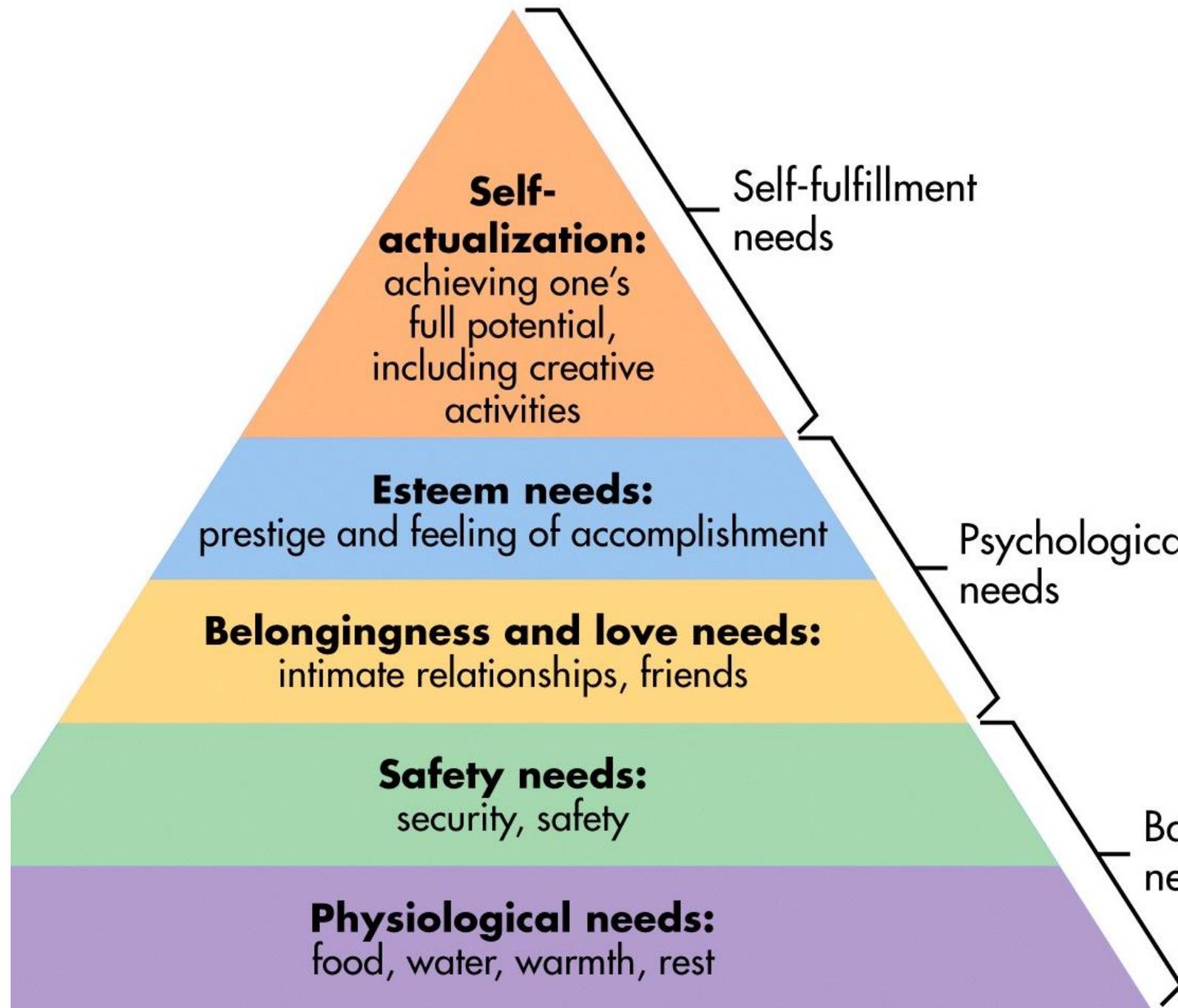6. outlining their consequences

Grounded Theory: Two key analytical processes were employed

- "constant comparison and continued questioning" (Charmaz, 1990). Data analysis involves coding, memo-writing and theoretical sampling aimed at checking the coherence of concepts

- "sensitising" concepts and criteria for document searches (Charmaz, 1990) identify data sources, explore relations between data categories and analyse the properties of the emerging social protection categories so that data saturation is reached
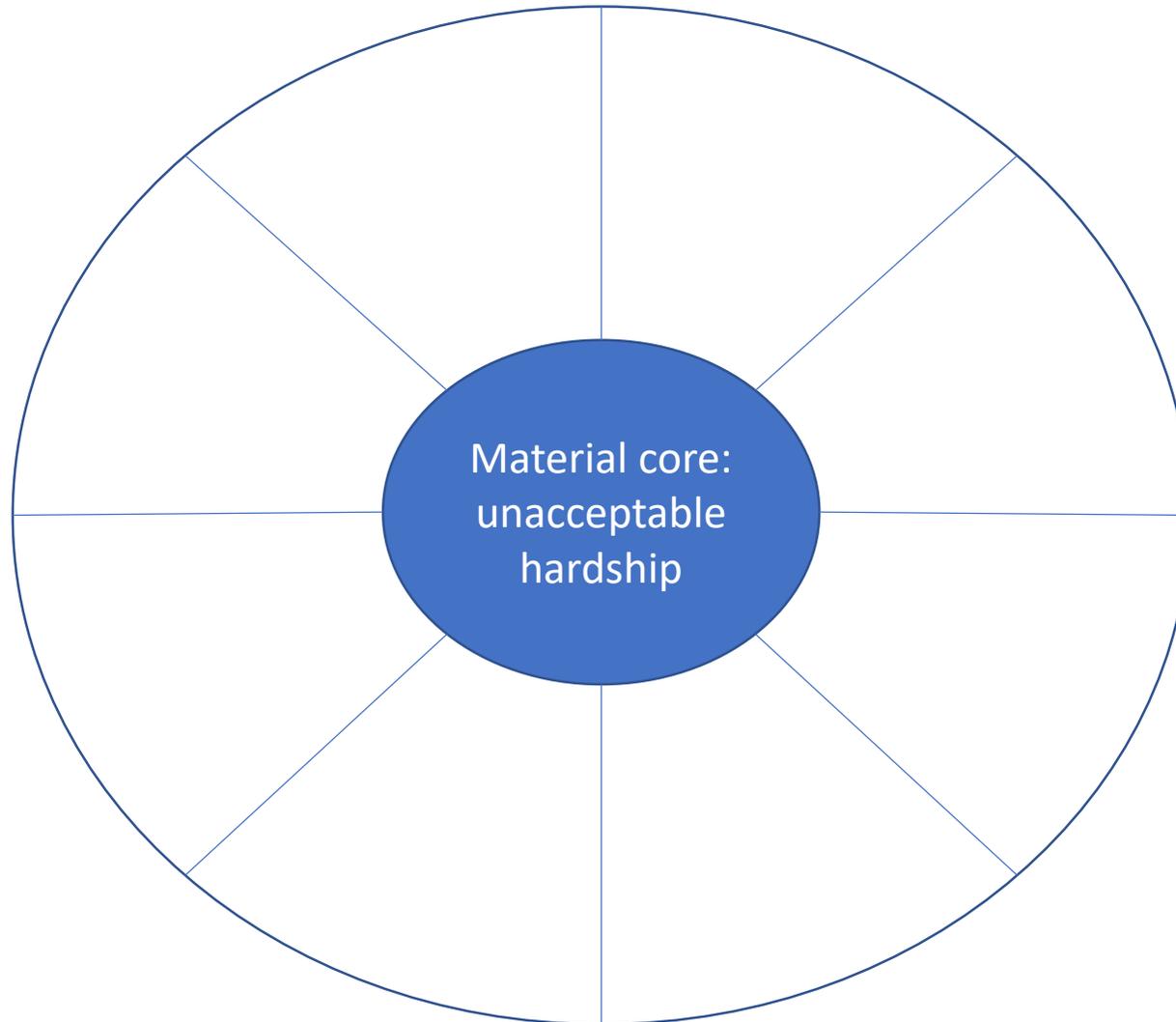
Participatory Approaches to Poverty Analysis

- Since the 1980s, participatory poverty assessments in the Global South

- Robert Chambers (1983)

- World Bank (1998) *Voices of the Poor:* lack of money, social networks, physical violence

- Baulch (1996): not about establishing poverty line but improving understanding of what poverty is

Pyramid of needs?

Lister (2004): Wheel of Poverty

Relational-symbolic aspects:
- Disrespect
- Humiliation
- Shame and stigma
- Assault on dignity and self-esteem
- Othering
- Denial of human rights
- Diminished citizenship
- Lack of voice
- Powerlessness

Material core: unacceptable hardship