

*Does qualitative story
completion have potential
for health research?*

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Outline (loosely)

- What is *qualitative* story completion (and where did it come from)?
- What can it offer health research?
- When and why might we use the method?
- And how?

Context: Self-report vs other qualitative “data production” approaches

- Provide participants with some kind of stimulus
 - Questions (interview, focus group, qual survey etc)
- Get responses based on:
 - Knowledge
 - Experience
 - Perspectives
 - (Reported) practices
 - etc





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 - etc
- Participatory approaches...
- Creative approaches...



Creative methods to get at things beyond the easily articulable



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 - etc
- Participatory approaches...
- Creative approaches...
 - Storytelling
 - Qualitative social completion

What does the method look like?

Like the rest of the country, Alex has been under significant COVID-19 restrictions for a while, and is feeling frustrated and 'cooped up'. As tomorrow is going to be warm and sunny, Alex is thinking about going for a drive to the beach, 30 minutes from their home...

Please continue the story of Alex and write about what happens next. There are no limits to the scope of your story, but we ask you to consider these three elements:

- *Alex's decision-making process*
- *What 'decision' Alex reaches*
- *The outcomes or consequences of that decision*

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Moller, N. (2020). Pandemic tales: Using story completion to explore sense-making around COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. In H. Kara & S.-M. Khoo (Eds.), *Researching in the Age of COVID-19* (Vol. III: Creativity and Ethics, pp. 39-47). Policy Press.

Chris has decided to eat healthily, but needs clear guidelines to do this. After some online research, and talking to friends, Chris is ready to start...

Please write a story of at least 200 words. The scope of your story is completely open, except we would like to you include something about Chris's rationale and decisions around eating healthily, what 'healthy eating' involves for Chris, and any outcomes or consequences.

Please use your own current knowledge to write this story – please do not search for information on other websites to write the story.

McDonald, A., & Braun, V. (2022). Right, yet impossible? Constructions of healthy eating. *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health*, 2, 100100.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2022.100100>

(Qualitative) story completion is ...

- A qualitative 'data generation' tool
- A creative (written) method



“The very method of story completion was inevitably going to gather stories from participants that would range from dramatic, to humorous, to wildly creative, what with instructions asking participants not to relate personal experiences and to be as creative as they liked.” (Gibson & Beattie, 2024, p. 184)

(Qualitative) story completion is ...

- A qualitative 'data generation' tool
- A creative (written) method
- A (potentially) fun task for participants



Jane has decided to stop removing body hair... at the start, there is no difference, but after 3 days, she find the hair on her leg and oster is growing too fast, just two days, it already 5 cm long. she realized maybe is because she always removing the hair so it make hair growth faster and bolder. but she already decided to stop removing her body hair, and winter is coming, she doesn't need to wear vest and shorts, so nobody gonna see it. after 2 week, she find the hair is still growth, it is already 20cm long, it is still hair but not the normal hair. actually she trying to remove the hair when she found the hair still growing after 10 cm, it is already too long, she can feel it every time when she walking and move the arm, as well as the hair on upper lag, it is not long, but its hard, like needles. so she decided to remove it, but when she cut the armpit hair, she feel pain!!! it is no longer are hair! it become something like shredded meat with hair's looking, it is bleeding when she cur it, the shank-feathering is so hard so she have to use garden shears to cut it. she can't go to school or street or any public place, she just stay at home, lie on the bad, the shank-feathering make lots of small puncture on her sheet and quilt, she lock herself in the room, nobody can come in .after 1 month, her landlord come to her room ask for for rental fee, but nobody answer, so the landlord open the room. The whole room was filled with a variety of hair, a straight, curved, soft and hard, and there are move around and swept around the room, they are attached to a dry body on bed.

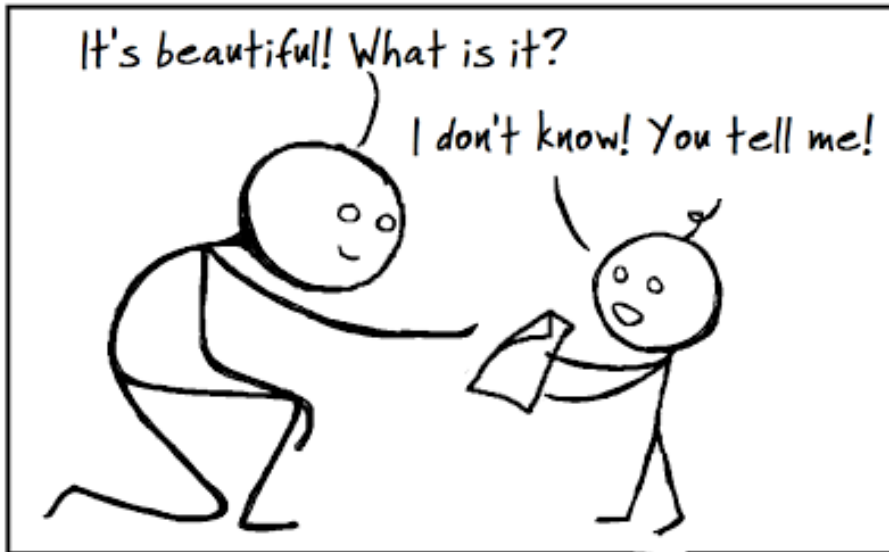
(Qualitative) story completion is ...

- A qualitative 'data generation' tool
- A creative (written) method
- A (potentially) fun task for participants
- A projective technique



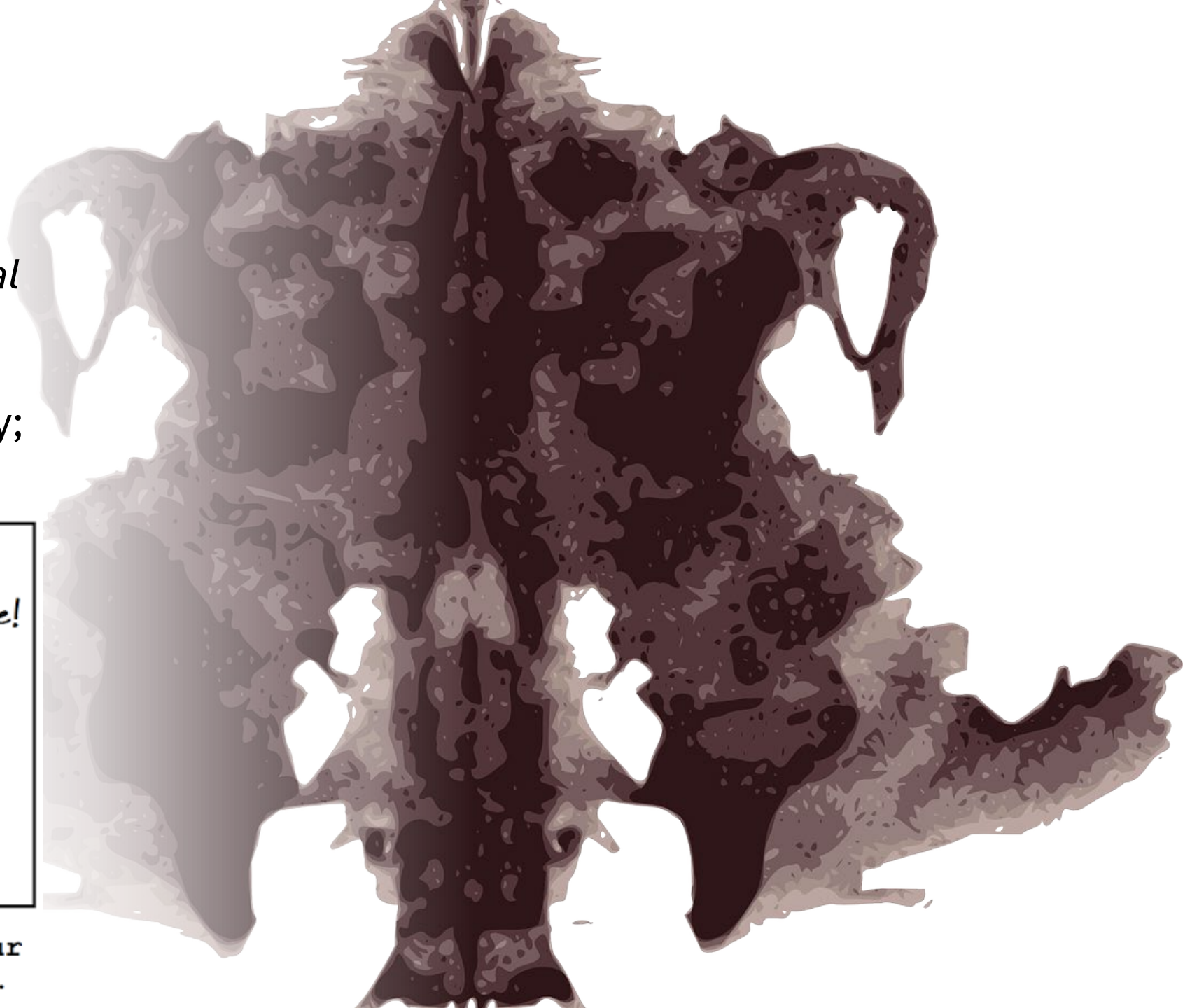
Context/history

- Therapeutic practice – projectives
- Stories in response to *visual* stimuli
- Attachment research (developmental psychology; quantitative)



raisedbymydaughter.blogspot.com

That moment when you realize your toddler is psychoanalyzing you.





Emerging interest in (qualitative) story completion

- Feminist psychology in 1970s
- Feminist psychology in 1980s and 1990s
- Feminism & counselling psychology from 2010s (story completion research group at UWE, UK)
- Increasing use of method across various disciplines and in different designs



Story completion: An exciting qualitative method

Welcome to our story completion resource and information pages! We are the [Story Completion Research Group](#) – a group of qualitative psychologists who are story completion enthusiasts. We use story completion in our own research, supervise students using story completion, teach story completion to students, give presentations about the story completion method at conferences, seminars and other events, and [publish about the method](#). We are not the only ones excited by and using this method – [others](#) are using this method in a range of contexts.

Why stories for qualitative research?

- Stories don't require our participants' opinions or perspectives
 - Our selves are not *at stake* in the story we provide
 - Can get at the 'unsayable' or 'different' stories
- Telling stories requires sense-making practices
- Stories are part of our human worlds... Key in meaning-making across cultures

Stories as a part of health

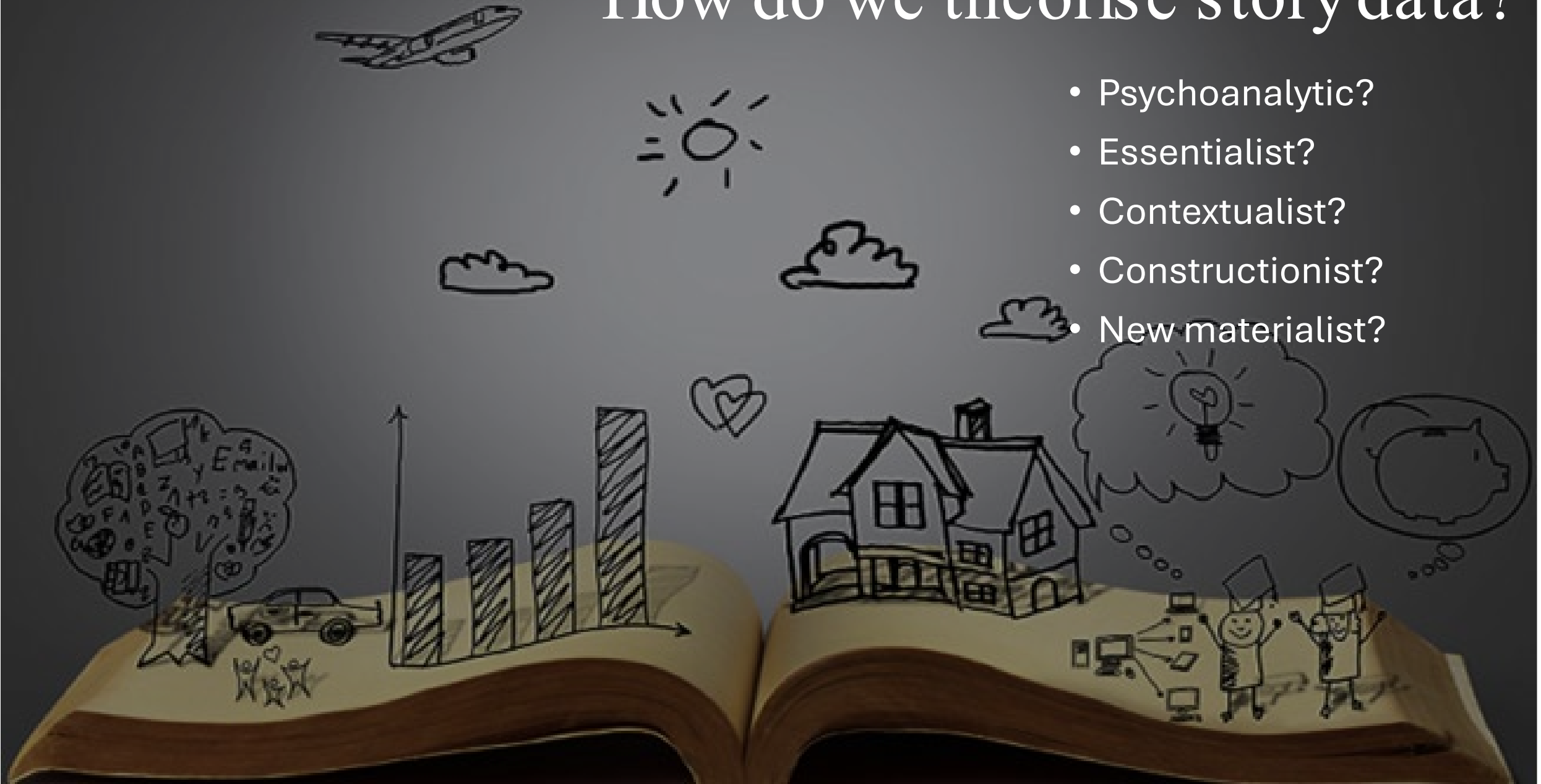
- Stories part of sense-making around health & illness
 - Identity (transformation) work
 - Illness narratives
 - Making meaning across time and space
 - Communicating health experience (etc)
- Narrative approaches common in health research
 - Structure, form, and meaning of stories
- Narrative inquiry as a mode of getting at 'rich descriptions of experience' and to 'explore meanings that people give to those experiences'

Contemporary use of qualitative story completion

- Still a *new* method
- Wide range of uses
 - Disciplinary
 - Design
 - Conceptual

How do we theorise story data?

- Psychoanalytic?
- Essentialist?
- Contextualist?
- Constructionist?
- New materialist?



An essentialist (writers' inner truths) perspective

- Women's perceptions of ambiguous (sexual) risk cues, and decision making...
- Scenario with intoxicated man
 - Calling a woman from a bar with an invitation to come out
 - Later arrives at her home with beer and pizza
- Women's stories suggested they could manage or limit any risk
- Their own safety wasn't prioritised in the stories
- Stories interpreted as reflecting the women's thoughts, feelings, etc.

A contextualist interpretation (on perceptions of fat therapists)

- What perceptions do young people have of fat counsellors
- Context of widespread anti-fat perspectives
- Fatness equated with lack of psychological health
- Rendered the counsellor “unfit” and “unable to assist”

A constructionist take (on ‘healthy eating’)

- Constructionist analysis of a single stem
- Exploring how the social phenomena of ‘practicing healthy eating’ is constituted and made meaningful
- Four themes – tell and overall story of “impossible rightness”
 - healthy eating is constantly under threat (tactics are required)
 - to separate fact from fiction
 - can you afford not to (eat healthily)?
 - healthy eating takes a particular type of person

New-materialist/more-than-human possibilities

- Exploring co-constituted assemblages of the human and non-human in/with/through stories
- Considers affordances (what is rendered available) and affects and relational connections in exploring topics
- Research *on health information seeking*
- 3 stems (health/fitness; sadness; STI)
 - Generated evocative data of affected forces shaping health (information) seeking in space and place



Be clear on how you theorise your
data...

Analytic approaches (used so far)

- Horizontal/patterning approaches
 - Thematic
 - Discourse
 - Rhizomatic
 - Post-qualitative/more-than-human theory
- Narrative – combining both horizontal and vertical flows of meaning
- Vertically-oriented analysis
 - Story mapping?
 - Poetic Inquiry

An example of poetic inquiry (Isabelle's Story; Lupton 2021)

Has tried many things before
but has always lost heart
cannot exercise in public, hates gyms
always feels self-conscious, judged, shy
fat rolls to deal with
doesn't do Lycra and protein shakes
a bit wary about competitive friends
Finds way too much information online
so many blogs and stories on social media
crazy fad diets
celebrity stories
all the before-and-afters
Complicated life
it all seems too hard
more trouble than it is worth

maybe being fat wasn't so bad
If only there was a magic pill for loving fitness
She asks around
decides to speak to her friends, asks them what
they do
finds a walking group
a fitness trainer gives her some good advice
a step-tracking app gives her motivation
"What does health mean to me?"
Things that matter
walk, swim, dance, laugh
buy local veggies and cook them
She keeps walking absolutely everywhere
settled and determined
makes some new friends
Chooses contentment

Consider adding SC to your methodological toolkit for health knowledge production

- When and why might we use the approach?
 - When self-report isn't necessary
 - When we want to access 'meaning' indirectly
 - When we're interested in socially-available meaning making
 - When we don't want to burden participants
 - When the ethics or practicalities of direct questioning may prove challenging
 - Inexperienced researchers and sensitive topics...
 - When resources are limited



“a few days into data collection, the Qualtrics data report flagged a poor-quality response (a 6% quality response was detected in this study vs. 74% and 81% in the first two studies” (p179)

In contrast to human generated stories, “the AI-generated stories glaringly lacked any signs of human affect and embodiment.” (p. 186)

“Reading this story felt ‘off’ from the very beginning for us: descriptions of the characters appeared to us to be slightly odd (e.g., a man whispering to another in a crowded café). Word ‘choices’ also did not ring true, in that they were often quite stilted or formal in register (e.g., ‘full of friendliness and closeness’), rather than more colloquial words we had previously seen in participants’ stories. What did come through was a moralistic or didactic tone of what one ‘should’ do in such a situation.”



To sum up, story completion...

- Can generate rich data
- Can get at 'unexpected' accounts
- Can be fun for participants (and circumvent *some* ethical challenges)
- Can be creative (and not just written)
- Can be 'quick' and 'easy' data production
- Can offer researchers access to a range of different things
- *Is* worth a try, if it might generate data suitable to the research question.

Thank you for
listening!

Time for questions
and comments...



A few starting resources

www.storycompletion.net

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Frith, H., Malson, H., Moller, N., & Shah-Beckley, I. (2019). Qualitative story completion: Possibilities and potential pitfalls. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 16*(1), 136-155.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Moller, N., & Tischner, I. (2019). Qualitative story completion: A method with exciting promise. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 1479-1496). Springer Singapore.

Clarke, V., Braun, V., Frith, H., & Moller, N. (2019). Editorial introduction to the special issue: Using story completion methods in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 16*(1), 1-20.

Lupton, D. (2020). The story completion method and more-than-human theory: Finding and using health information. In *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. Sage.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529715194>

Moller, N. P., Clarke, V., Braun, V., Tischner, I., & Vossler, A. (2021). Qualitative story completion for counseling psychology research: A creative method to interrogate dominant discourses. *Journal of counseling psychology, 68*(3), 286–298.