



# Issues and Challenges around Synthesis ing Qualitative e Research

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## **Systematic review of qualitative studies: Some questions...**

Can we combine qualitative studies?

Do we have tools to synthesize qualitative studies?

Do we have arguments to combine these studies?

Who can achieve this task?

Are there challenges along the process?

Should we or can we exclude studies due to “poor quality”?

What can we do about all this?

# Why do this review? “Reflexivity”

- When I have to do research for health policy or read reports for health policy I see that “something” is missing
- There is a need to include qualitative evidence within these reports
- Is this possible?
- I don’t know how to feel about combining qualitative studies.

# To try and answer some of these questions...

- Learn from what others have done...
  - Systematic review of qualitative studies about synthesis methods...

# Objective

- 1. To identify studies about methods in order to combine qualitative studies
- 2. To identify studies that have combined qualitative studies
- 3. To describe the most commonly used methods to combine qualitative studies

# Method

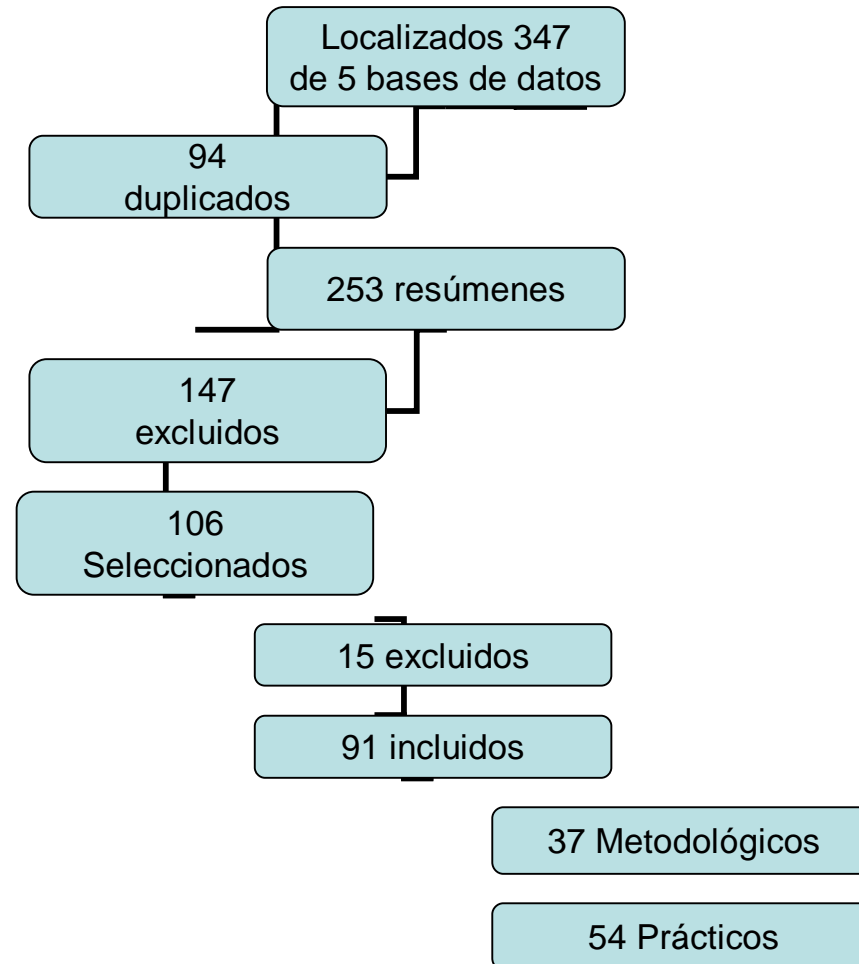
- Databases: EBM, Cinhal, Embase, Medline, Psycinfo
- Year: from 1988 until may 2005
- Search strategy: meta synthesis, meta ethnography, meta narrative, meta interpretation, qualitative meta analysis, and meta study....

# Eligibility of studies

## **Inclusion criteria:**

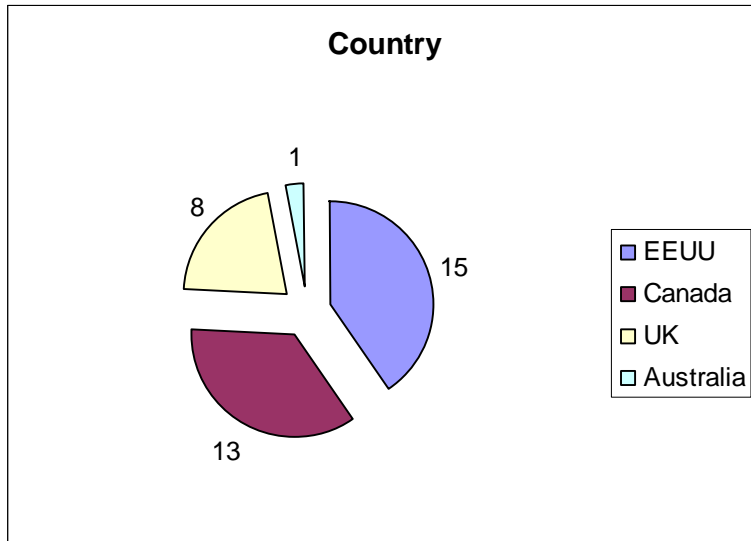
- Manuscript in English or Spanish
- Qualitative studies
- Combines studies
- Methodological studies about combining primary studies

This is what happen...



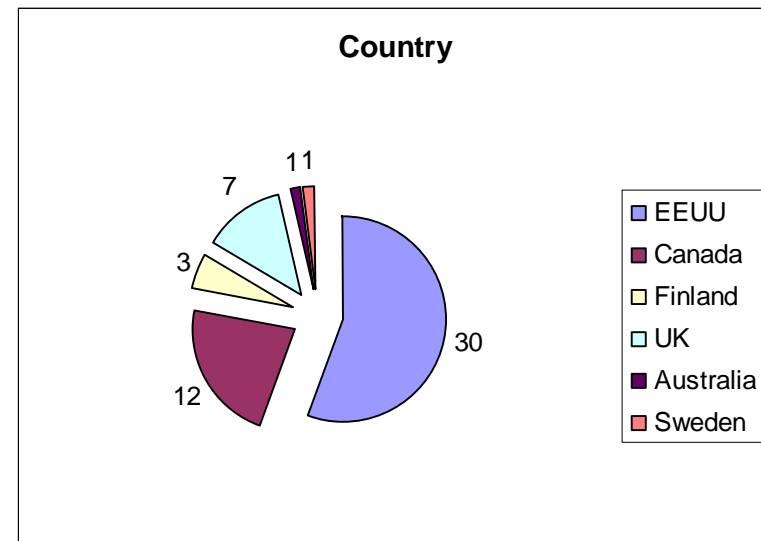


# Country...

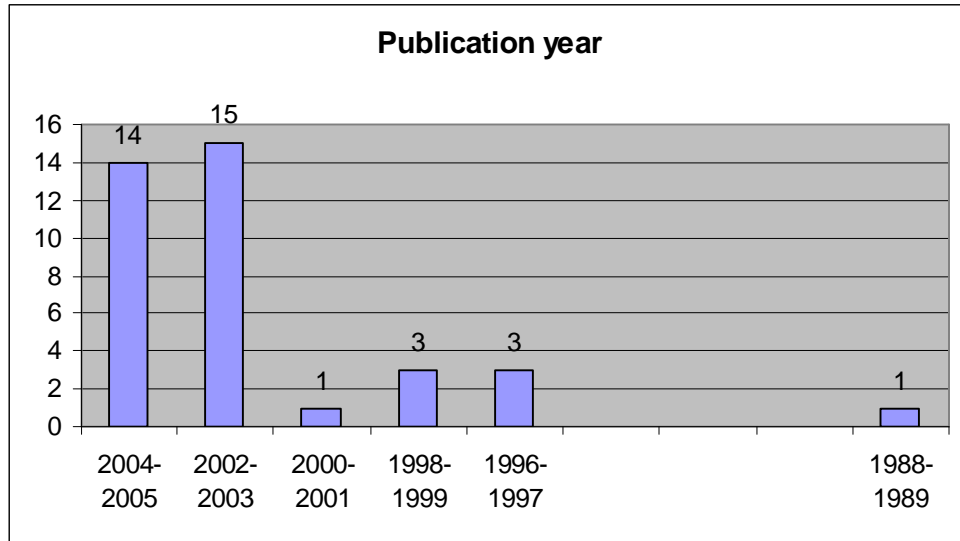


**Graphic 1. Country**  
(Methods papers)

**Graphic2. Country**  
(Worked examples)

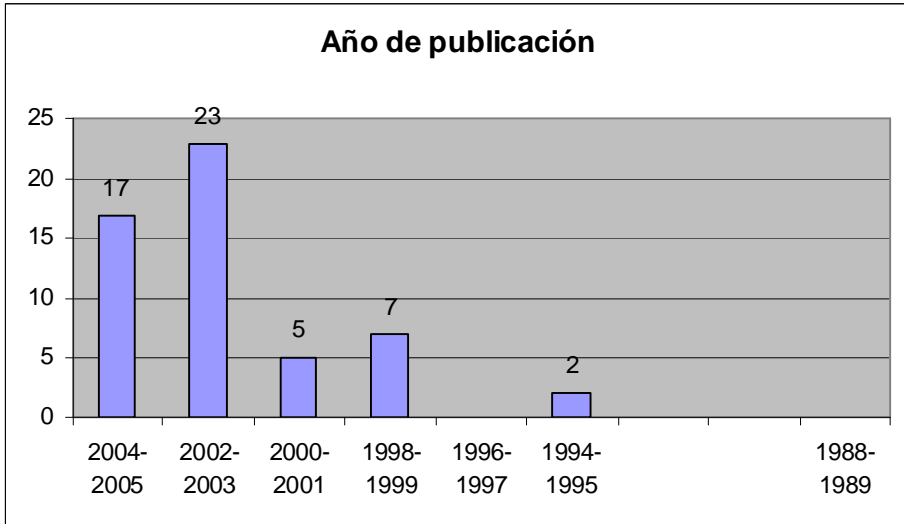


# Publication year...

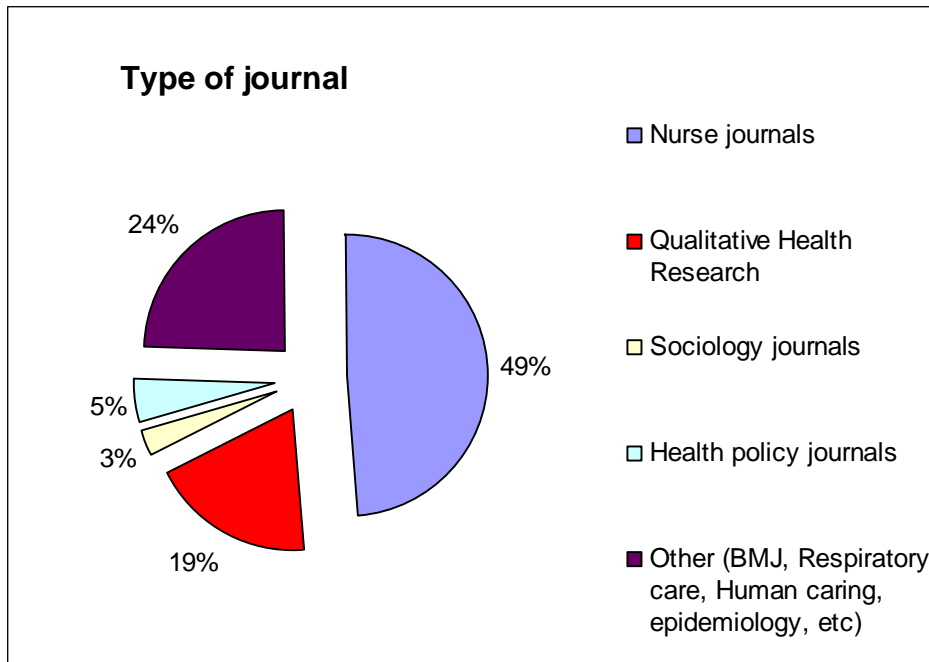


**Graphic 3. Publication year.**  
Methods papers

**Graphic 4. Publication year**  
(Worked examples)

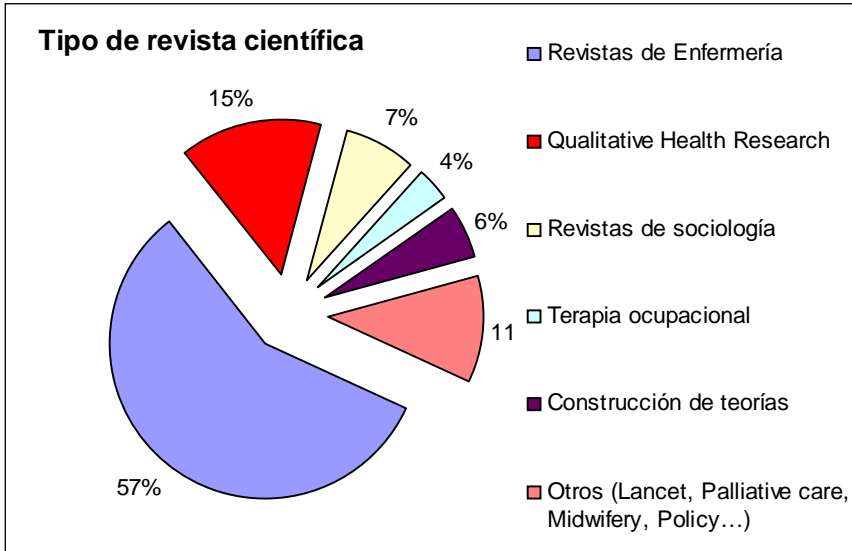


# Type of journals...

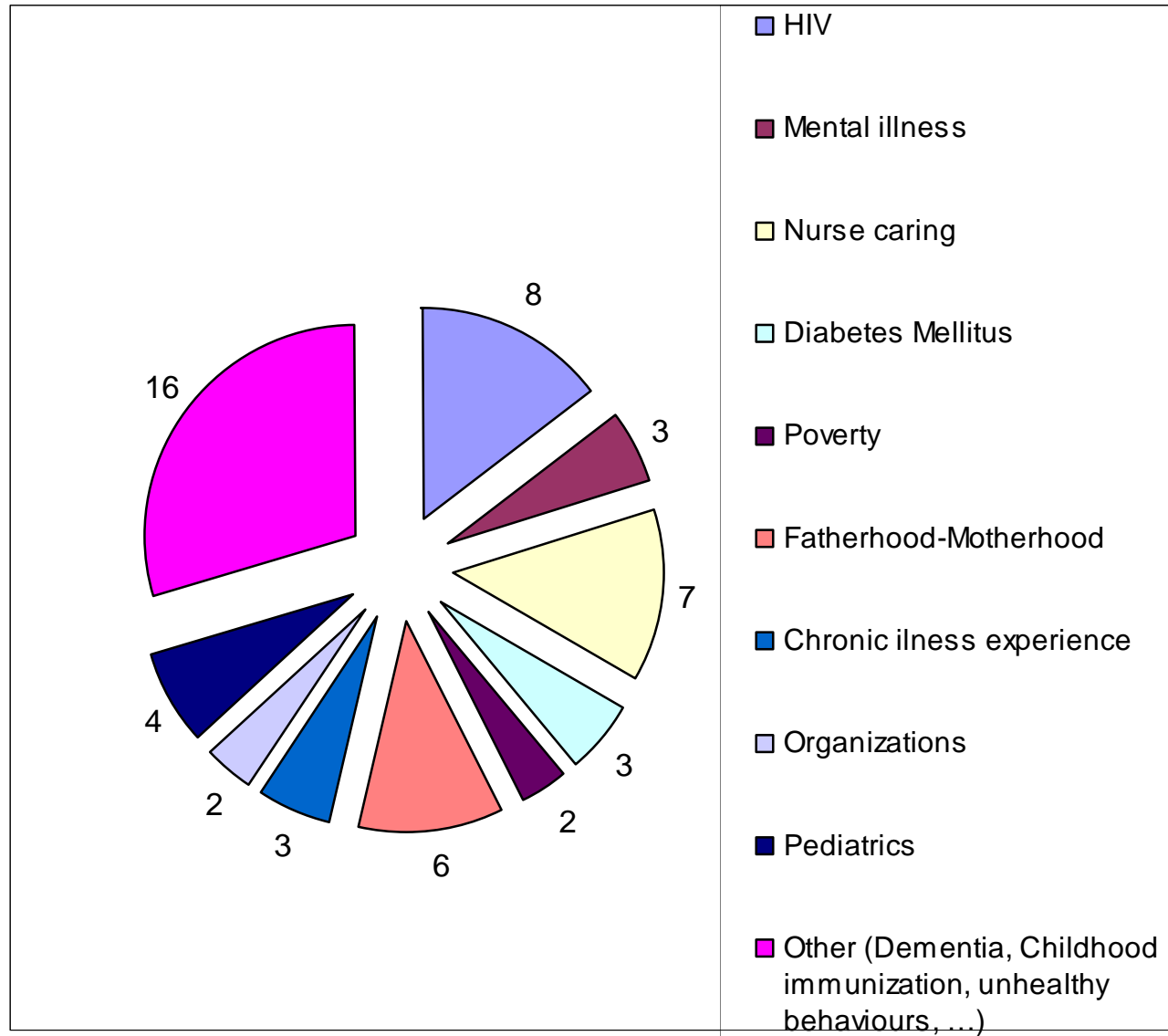


**Graphic 6. Type of journal (Worked examples)**

**Graphic 5. Type of journal (Methods papers)**

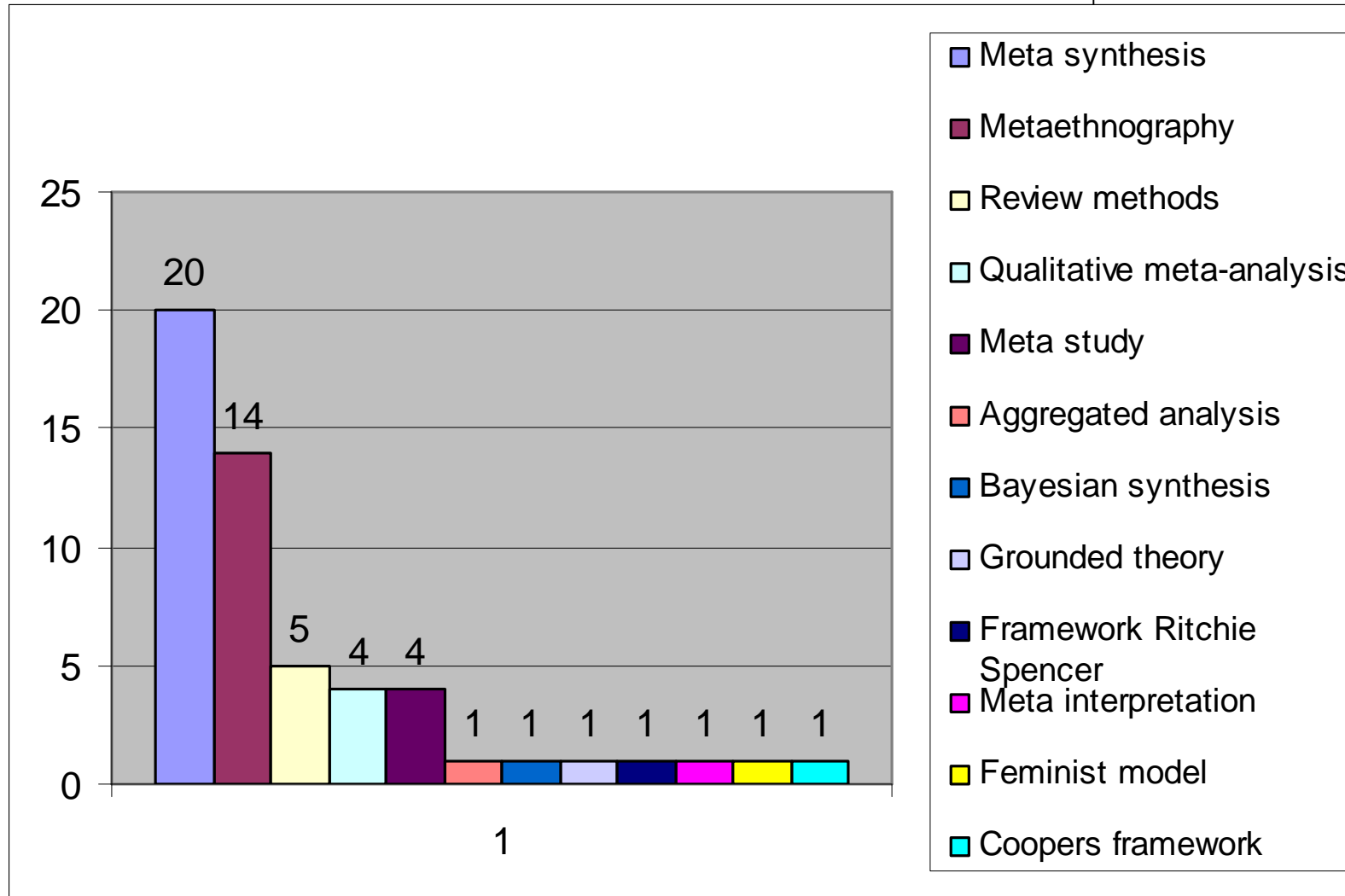


# Topics...



# Terminology...

**Graphic 8.**  
**Terminology**  
(Worked examples)



# The three little tigers...

## **We identified 3 main problems:**

1. Retrieval and searching primary studies
2. Quality evaluation- Critical appraisal issues

## **3. Synthesis of results**



## Third tiger: synthesis tools

### One classification...

- Specific methods to synthesize qualitative studies:
  - **Metasynthesis**
  - **Metaethnography**
  - **Metastudy**
  - **Metainterpretation**
  - **Aggregative review**
- Generic methods also used for quantitative studies:
  - **Bayesian methods**
  - **Literature review**
  - **Integrative review, Coopers framework**
  - **Metaanalysis qualitative**
- Primary Qualitative methods applied to secondary studies:
  - **Grounded theory**
  - **Ritchie and Spencer framework**
  - **Feminist model**

# Other classification

## Going 'beyond' the primary studies.

Barnett-Page E and Thomas J. Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: a critical review. BMC Medical Research Methodology. 2009

Transformation	Translation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Textual narrative synthesis</li><li>•Ecological triangulation</li><li>•Framework synthesis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Meta-ethnography</li><li>•Grounded Theory</li><li>•Thematic synthesis</li><li>•Meta-narrative</li><li>•CIS</li><li>•Meta-study</li></ul>



# Other classification

Methods of Research Synthesis (Weed M. "Meta Interpretation":  
A Method for the Interpretive Synthesis of Qualitative Research. FQS. Volume  
6, No. 1, Art. 37 – January 2005)

## **3.1 Aggregative approaches to synthesis**

3.1.1 Literature review

3.1.2 Systematic review

3.1.3 Meta-analysis

3.1.4 Meta-ethnography

## **3.2 Non-aggregative approaches to synthesis**

3.2.1 Grounded theory

3.2.2 Cross-case comparison

3.2.3 Secondary analysis of primary data

3.2.4 Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)

# Case 1

What could be the research question?



What are the synthesis options?

# Case 1. Product 1 Aggregative





# Always bear in mind...

*“ Any qualitative methasynthesis of findings thus constitutes an interpretation of at least 3 times removed from the lives represented in them: it is the synthesis's interpretation of the researcher's interpretation of research participant's interpretation of their lives.” (Sandelowski and Barroso)*

# Case 2



What could be the research question?

What are the synthesis options?

# Case 3



What could be the research question?

What are the differences with the previous ones?

What should we do now in this case?  
Synthesis options?



# Summary

- The synthesis method choice should be transparent and justified
- Factors which will influence the choice are:
  - Research question
  - Type of product needed/Goal
  - Type of primary studies available
  - Skills of the researcher/research team
  - Time and resources



....and the 3 little tigers are not so sad now...

Can we combine qualitative studies? **Maybe**

Do we have tools to synthesize qualitative studies? **There is a wide variety of them**

Do we have arguments to combine these studies? **It seems we have interesting information available**

Who can achieve this task? **Bilingual researchers or multidisciplinary teams which include experts in qualitative research**

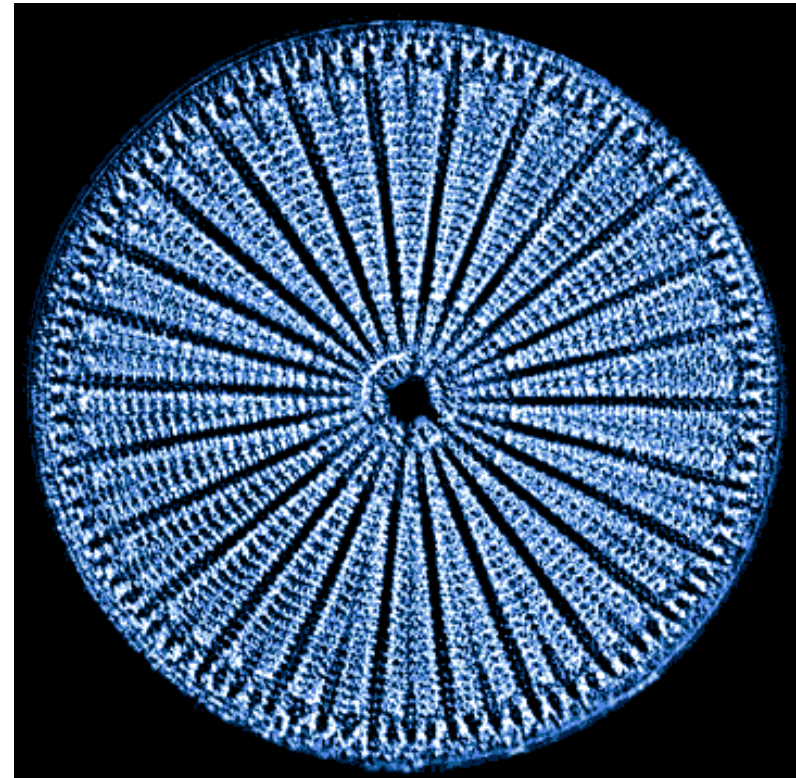
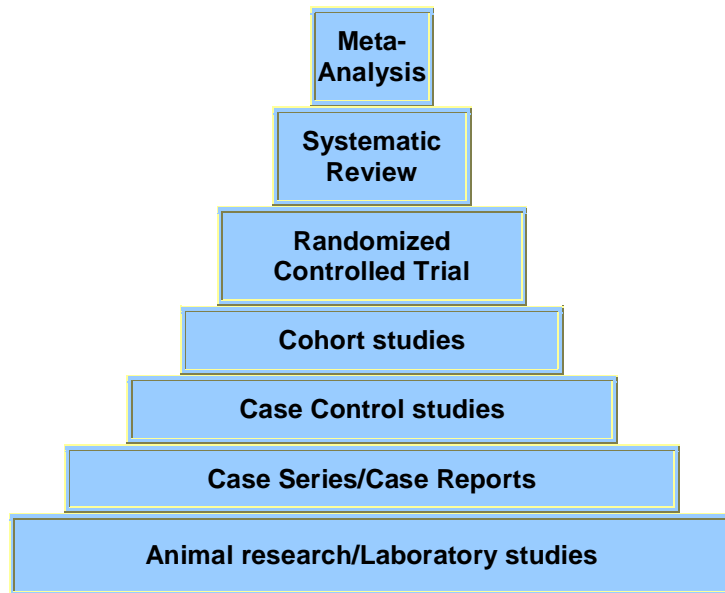
Are there challenges along the process? **Yes, many**

Should we or can we exclude studies due to “poor quality”? **There are no clear guidelines, you need to make a choice**

What can we do about all this? ....

**Work together with other disciplines as sociologist,  
anthropologist, etc  
and understand that we can not do systematic  
reviews of qualitative studies in the same way as  
we do the quantitative studies, as we can't apply  
the same criteria.**

## From the pyramid towards the mandala...



# Some References...

- Mahtani V et al Methods to incorporate qualitative research in health technology assessment.  
[http://www2.gobiernodecanarias.org/sanidad/sescs/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=42&lang=es](http://www2.gobiernodecanarias.org/sanidad/sescs/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=42&lang=es) (sorry it is in Spanish but references might be useful)
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- Thorne S, Jensen L, Kearney M, Noblit G, Sandelowski M. Qualitative. Metasynthesis: Reflections on Methodological Orientation and Ideological Agenda. Qualitative Health Research 2004; 14(10):Dec-1365.
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**Thank you**

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The top of the  
mountain...

