



# Towards a social constructionist, criticalist, Foucauldian-informed qualitative research approach: Opportunities and challenges

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## Abstract

In this paper, I delve into the application of a social constructionist, critical, and Foucauldian approach, and shed light on the complexities and nuances that arise when studying human behaviour and societal dynamics. While social constructionism offers valuable insights into how social action is constructed within everyday interactions in political and socio-cultural contexts, it also prompts further inquiries that extend beyond its epistemological scope. To address these broader questions, I propose a threefold approach that combines a critical perspective, a Foucauldian methodology, and social constructionism. By incorporating these complementary lenses, researchers can more effectively explore the intricate relationship between participant meaning and power imbalances within society. Additionally, this approach allows for an examination of how specific ways of being and doing become privileged as truth, while alternative perspectives and experiences are marginalised or excluded. The article serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding social constructionism, critical psychology, and Foucauldian methodology. It offers readers a comprehensive guide and a set of reflective tools to enhance their qualitative research practices. By considering the complexities of social legitimacy, critique, power imbalances, and the construction of truth, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena they investigate. Ultimately, this multifaceted approach contributes to a more nuanced and insightful analysis of social phenomena and facilitates a more inclusive exploration of diverse perspectives and versions of reality.

**Keywords** Social constructionism · Foucauldian methodology · Critical theory · Qualitative data analysis · Power/knowledge

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## Introduction

Qualitative research focuses on understanding how individuals interpret their social reality, recognising that researchers' own experiences and perspectives shape the meaning-making process (Grossoehme 2014). This recognition includes factors such as one's positioning, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, and class, to name a few, regardless of the chosen analytical approach (Lune and Berg 2017). While some scholars view the presence of the researcher as a challenge, such a presence is a valuable contribution to research, as qualitative inquiry aims to analyse and interpret individuals' experiences and understanding of their social world (Cooper and White 2012; Flick 2022). Qualitative research is rooted in the lived experiences of individuals and therefore should adopt an interpretive stance (Grossoehme 2014). It involves observing the dynamic and context-dependent meanings, knowledge, notions of reality, and social world. Rather than assuming a fixed and predetermined social reality, qualitative research acknowledges the complexity of social life, including networks of meaning, language, symbols, and culture (Cooper and White 2012). Throughout the research process, the qualitative researcher engages with this complexity, considering and interpreting the socio-culturally constructed meaning of individuals' experiences (Flick 2022). This process of consideration and interpretation is further influenced by the inherent uncertainty, mystery, astonishment, and deconstruction involved in understanding social phenomena (Silverman 2020). Qualitative research generates knowledge through individual reflection rather than relying on numerical data, measurement, and causal analysis (Lune and Berg 2017). It emphasises capturing the richness and depth of human experiences and perspectives, offering insights that quantitative approaches may overlook.

Qualitative researchers engage in the interpretive role, and during the research process, they navigate various tensions and perspectives related to ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Silverman 2020). The choice of qualitative data analysis is influenced by factors such as the social production and collection of data, as well as the context, purpose, rationale, and contributions of the research (Grossoehme 2014). Qualitative research goes beyond basic descriptions and normative assumptions, serving a valuable purpose regardless of its design and analysis (Lune and Berg 2017). One common approach employed by qualitative researchers in guiding how knowledge is constructed is social constructionism, which explores established knowledge and subjective processes (Burr 2015; Galbin 2014; Gergen 1985). However, this perspective does not fully address the power dynamics, success, and legitimacy of existing ways of being and doing in society, not does it consider how these can be deconstructed, and alternative voices promoted (Alcoff 2005; Foucault 1972). By adopting a critical, Foucauldian approach, power dynamics can be considered, allowing previously silenced individuals to be seen as legitimate sources of information in the research process (Rabinow 1984). A critical, Foucauldian approach recognises alternative ways of being and doing as legitimate, understanding power as complex, circulating through various relations, sources, and modes of existence

(Riley and Wiggins 2019). Incorporating these approaches in qualitative research enables researchers to observe specificity, highlighting what is different and lacking, rather than assuming universal, similar, and normative contexts (Rabinow 1984). Consequently, qualitative research that embraces these processes and practices can deconstruct social legitimacy and foster a critical analysis of social conditions, practices, and knowledge.

In this paper, the historical origins and epistemological developments of social constructionism, critical psychology, and Foucauldian methodology are explored, providing a comprehensive overview. The drivers, assumptions, processes, and outcomes of research conducted within this theoretical framework are offered, with a detailed account of the concepts utilised in these approaches outlined, which serve as a guide for qualitative analysis. In conclusion, how the social constructionist epistemology, critical psychology theoretical perspective, and Foucauldian methodology synergistically complement each other when employed within a qualitative framework is discussed.

### **Unveiling the foundations of social constructionism: Shaping realities and challenging paradigms**

Social constructionism informs us of how realities and knowledge can be socially constructed through utilising language, stories, histories, and narratives that exist within specific interpersonal and social influences (Galbin 2014; Gergen 1985). Social constructionism criticises the traditional paradigms of knowledge (e.g., positivism, empiricism) that posit how knowledge can be discovered in the natural world, instead proposing the shaping, and reshaping, of knowledge by social processes (Burr 2015). The individuals' understanding and perspective of the world, shaped by their culture and history, is fundamental (Gergen 1985). Additionally, how individuals and groups interact with others constructs their perspectives, and over time, this can allow for the forming of mental representations informing the self, others, and the world (Andrews 2012). Social constructionism seeks to analyse and challenge the ways in which society understands and constructs various aspects of reality, taking a critical stance towards any existing representations, and questions the commonly accepted, and under scrutinised, societal assumptions (Burr 2015). The goal of utilising a social constructionist epistemology is to examine specific knowledge systems, and assess how they may favour certain interests or groups over others. By engaging in such a critique, social constructionists explore how such critique can lead to new possibilities for action and bring about social change in the future.

The emergence of social constructionism dates back approximately 30 years where the collective efforts of British, North American, and continental writers influenced its product (Burr 2015). Social psychology, hermeneutics, social history, and existential phenomenological psychology, are listed as just some of the intellectual and epistemological roots of social constructionism. In the early stages, ideas proposed by Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, and Giambattista Vico reflected constructs of both social constructionism, and constructivism, from both individualistic

and collectivist assumptions (Conrad and Barker 2010). Additionally, the musings of Karl Mannheim, W.I. Thomas, and Emile Durkheim echoed nuances evident in social constructionism (Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg 2005). Over time, gradually, social constructionism established from the influence of several sources, most distinctively, ethnomethodology proposed by Harold Garfinkel in the 1950s and 1960s, symbolic interactionism via Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman (Mead 1934), and phenomenology as proposed by Blumer and Schutz (Vance 1991). Major contributions were then publicised by Berger and Luckmann (1966) who proposed that the production and sustaining of social phenomena assisted by social practices was engaged in by humans, and that the social reality observed daily can be constructed via the network of interpersonal and socio-cultural interactions that occur in life. German American sociologist Burkart Holzner extended on the above research, detailing the social construction of reality in agreement with Berger and Luckmann (Holzner 1972). Holzner (1972) illuminated the interpretations of reality from past and present, as well as individuals' experiences, to anticipate future reality, alongside the collective cognitive and symbolic universe of meaning. Where Holzner focused more on the control and social distribution of reality construction, this differed from Berger and Luckmann's premise, who focused more on how the shared symbolic world can be constructed when considering both subjective and objective reality.

### **Deconstructing reality: Social constructionism's challenge to established paradigms and categories**

Social constructionism aims to problematise claims surrounding the nature of the world, its phenomena, and knowledge being derived from objective observations of events (Burr 2015). Concepts of accuracy and truth are contested and challenged within this epistemological position based on social constructionism's relativist positioning. By adopting this epistemology, it is recognised that there would never be one final, 'true', and objective account of events and phenomena, rather, multiple perspectives are held as various accounts of events and knowledge relate to the many people that exist in the world. Different ways of being, knowing, and thinking coexist in parallel; none are viewed as the 'one' truth, rather, a sceptical and critical attitude is adopted toward ways of understanding the world that are often taken for granted and assumed (Gergen 1985).

The case made by the social constructionist epistemological position is that the interactions between individuals allow for social and psychological phenomena to manifest in the social aspects of their lives (Andrews 2012). These interactions, and the phenomena that manifest, is structured and conceptualised by the society and culture in which we live, the power relations which we are embedded within, as well as the economic structure of our society (Galbin 2014). Societal conditions consistently and constantly change over time and location, where the conditions in which individuals conceptualise and construct themselves, and others, can vary and change depending on context (Foucault 1982). As such, definitive answers about social and human phenomena can never be given, rather, social constructionism asks why, and

how, these specific constructions emerge. This can include constructions of concepts and theories relevant to psychology (specifically, social, and critical psychology) where we then pose questions about culture and history (Burr 2015). Questions we ask allow for us to understand the evolution of psychological and social life, extending our questioning beyond the individual level, to explore the impact and influence of economic, political, and social domains (Gergen 1985).

The social constructionist epistemological position critiques the conceptualisations of people and *'things'* that work to categorise our current ways of thinking and using language (Galbin 2014). Categories and dichotomies, such as male and female, individual and society, mental and physical, and urban and rural, are used in our society, where social constructionism proposes this move away from objective categories and descriptions of society and the world, and move towards these ideas as human constructions that grow and develop depending on the context and culture of the times (Willig 2013). This supports the notion that contemporary conceptualisations of theories and *'things'* are quite different to what they were many years ago, and as such, vary drastically from ways of being and thinking from non-western, industrialised contexts (Foucault 1982). With the assumption that current ways of thinking and being are better than the past based on truth and accuracy, social constructionism argues that we avoid falling into this *'trap'* as this has resulted in the imposing of ways of being onto other contexts and cultures (e.g., the imperialist, colonising view of psychology and replacement of Indigenous perspectives of life and being; Willig 2013).

Individuals cannot exist without an existing social network, being introduced into a context where language, norms, customs, and social relations exist, which then constructs them as individuals who are capable of producing meaning and conduct (Foucault 1977). As such, no element of an individual's way of being and doing does not have origins in society, culture, and context in some way. Our sense of self, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts all emerge out of interacting with other individuals, with Gergen (1985) proposing that we are a network of various voices from the past, and the present. The way that we evaluate ourselves and other individuals depends on these voices, where we deconstruct and challenge the self/other dichotomy, becoming more open to perspectives, views, beliefs, and attitudes from social interactions of all kinds (Willig 2013).

### **Unravelling social constructionism: Exploring macro and micro perspectives on discourse and identity**

Considering social constructionism from a macro level argues the need to understand how society privileges ways of talking about, or representing, people and *'things'* (Foucault 1972; 1977; 1982). The discourses work to both construct and perpetuate the way that we, as a society, understand individuals, phenomena, and ways of being in society. The way that we, as individuals, conceptualise *'things'* can be framed as expressions of discourses, whereby they are spoken through *'us'*, by society (Galbin 2014). The macro view of social constructionism determines how individuals are the carriers of discourses constructed by them in a manner which

is deterministic in nature, where identities can become malleable, changeable, and multiple across the discourses that work to construct us (Willig 2013). Prevailing discourses have been conceptualised and constructed within the interests of those who are viewed as powerful (Willig 2013). Observing the social constructionist epistemology from a macro level allows for us to distinguish how the relatively powerful in society have had greater opportunities to conceptualise, construct, and disseminate discourses, and based on their status, further authorises, and legitimises them, while marginalising and oppressing other individuals who do not fall under this construction (Burr 2015).

Considering social constructionism from a micro level draws on theories surrounding discursive psychology, and the construction of discourse as our everyday linguistic ways of being, specifically, the spoken interactions of individuals (Andrews 2012). While the micro level does not focus on the conceptualising power of predominant discourses, rather, the focus is on the interacting nature of individuals in relation to how they construct versions of themselves and events that work for them (Willig 2013). For example, individuals vary in relation to their version of events, where their 'talk' or discourse changes dependent on the moment-to-moment needs of each interaction (Galbin 2014). This can include the justification of one's actions, needing to create a good impression, or working to attribute blame to another individual for the outcome of particular events that have occurred (Andrews 2012). While constructing social constructionism from both a micro and macro level can potentially recreate the division between the individual and the society, these approaches are not incompatible with one another.

### **Beyond the surface: Critiquing social constructionism and exploring critical and Foucauldian approaches in qualitative research**

Social constructionism has indeed gained prominence in qualitative research due to its ability to offer insight into the complex social actions and experiences of individuals. However, a critical examination of this approach reveals certain limitations and pragmatic pitfalls, which in turn, make room for the application of more critical, and Foucauldian, approaches.

While social constructionism acknowledges the concept of realities being constructed, it can be critiqued for maintaining elements of the modernist approach. This can be seen in how it still holds onto certain Enlightenment ideals about rationality, knowledge, and truth, albeit by casting them as perspectival or relative, rather than absolute (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2016). This raises questions about whether social constructionism truly challenges the underlying assumptions of traditional epistemological paradigms or if it simply provides an alternative framework that still engages with these foundational concepts.

Another notable critique lies in the tendency of social constructionism to overlook marginalised, silenced, and/or untold voices and experiences. While the approach challenges established and taken-for-granted ideas, it does not necessarily address, or resist, entrenched power structures and relations that perpetuate these marginalisations. In the context of qualitative research, it becomes essential to not

only question dominant narratives, but also, to actively seek out and amplify voices that have been historically silenced.

Moreover, one of the concerns raised is that social constructionism might focus primarily on the surface-level meanings of texts and actions. By analysing categories and patterns, it can miss the depth and complexity of social reality. This is a limitation when it comes to understanding the intricate interplay between discourse and power. Constructions, even though they are malleable and subject to change, can become mechanisms that perpetuate certain social practices and actions while excluding others, thereby maintaining existing patterns and inequalities (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2016).

In light of these criticisms, a more (1) critical, and (2) Foucauldian approach, can offer valuable insights. These perspectives can delve deeper into the ways power operates, examining how discourses shape and regulate knowledge, identities, and social norms (Rabinow 1984; Riley and Wiggins 2019). Unlike social constructionism, which may at times only scratch the surface, such analyses can expose the mechanisms by which power is exercised and resisted within different contexts (Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg 2005). Social constructionism is still important to acknowledge taken-for-granted knowledge, stating that knowledge is not objective nor inevitable, and that the way we engage in our world historically and culturally is considered through the production of knowledge as components of social processes (Galbin 2014; Gergen 1985). While this assists us to focus on how we make meaning about our daily lives, and how knowledge is produced via symbols and institutions, the complementing of other approaches with it allows for the analysis of power relations intertwined with the meaning of social practices and actions.

### **Unveiling critical psychology: Examining theoretical frameworks, influences, and diverse approaches**

The theoretical perspective of critical psychology offers a framework for examining institutional governance, the issues surrounding how institutions shape individuals, the relationship between society and individual subjectivity, and the dynamics of power (Montero 2011; Teo 2015). It originated during the 1970s in Germany, influenced by feminist and Marxist values (Papadopoulos 2009). Critical psychology takes various forms worldwide, but they all share the belief that individual actions are influenced by social forces. In practice, critical psychology considers the impact of dominant social values on specific groups of individuals (Papadopoulos 2009). It also emphasises the need for self-reflection in the research process, the use of appropriate methodologies for change in different contexts and acknowledging the researcher's position in the research process (Teo 2015). Additionally, adopting a critical psychology perspective involves critiquing both mainstream psychological science, and the prevailing social order (Jovanovic 2010).

The formation of the critical psychological theoretical perspective has been influenced by various thinkers. Two significant theorists, Klaus Holzkamp and Friedrich Nietzsche, played a pivotal role in introducing critical psychology. Informed by Foucauldian philosophy, their ideas aimed to inspire the examination and analysis of



discourse and power (Teo 2015). Additionally, movements such as feminism, post-colonial theory, and elements of social constructionism, and postmodernism, have been suggested as influential in shaping critical psychology (Wigginton 2017). Critical psychology in different parts of the world incorporates diverse approaches, including liberation psychology, Indigenous psychology, hermeneutic-inspired approaches, and cultural psychology. These variations are essential in understanding the historical development of critical psychology (Montero 2011; Teo 2015).

### **Deconstructing norms and empowering change: The role of critical psychology in challenging power and shifting paradigms**

Jovanovic (2010) argued that a primary focus of critical psychology is to investigate how the individual's subjective experience in everyday life (i.e., subjectivity) can be studied. Moreover, it was proposed that examining power's role within traditional psychology is crucial, specifically exploring how psychology has functioned as a dominant form of knowledge within the context of imperialism (Teo 2015). Additionally, critical psychology involves critiquing prevailing social values and the established order with the aim of promoting social justice and action. The goals of the critical psychological theoretical perspective, as outlined by Montero (2011), encompass challenging ideology and power structures, while advocating for social action.

Critical psychology plays a vital role in challenging the prevailing state of affairs within society. This state of affairs is constructed based on a web of assumptions about the world, which shape the beliefs and propositions that are deemed true (Jovanovic 2010; Teo 2015). Society assigns value to certain ideas as truth based on their alignment with these particular ways of thinking. Some ways of thinking are overt and widely recognised in the public consciousness, while others are more subtle and ingrained in the societal subconsciousness (Adam 2012). Regardless, these ways of thinking establish what is deemed acceptable or normal (Jovanovic 2010). These ideas form the foundation of public thought, referred to as the episteme. Over time, the interplay of political, historical, and economic factors, along with the context-specific limitations of prevailing ways of thinking, evolves, and the episteme can gradually undergo change or transformation into a different form (Adam 2012; Montero 2011). Consequently, the status quo, or the privileged notion of truth, can be shifted and reconstructed.

### **Contextual power and collective resistance: Exploring the foundations and objectives of critical psychology**

Critical psychology operates under the assumption that human beings are deeply embedded within cultural, social, and historical contexts, similar to the principles guiding the social constructionist epistemology (Wigginton 2017). These contexts shape our identities, construct our lives, and reflect the interplay between culture, society, and history with our subjectivities. What distinguishes critical psychology from other theoretical perspectives is the collective recognition that societal power



differentials have tangible consequences for how individuals navigate their lives and shape their subjectivities (Jovanovic 2010). From a critical psychological standpoint, it is crucial to engage in reflexive examination of these elements, exploring individual agency, modes of praxis, potential avenues of resistance, and understanding the researcher's own thoughts, feelings, and actions within the process.

Researchers working within the framework of critical psychology aim to challenge societal structures that perpetuate psychological control, injustice, and the adjustment of individuals (Teo 2015). Instead of attributing issues solely to the individual or group, critical psychology posits that problems arise from their experiences within institutions and societies. Discourses and practices permeate and contribute to the prevailing state of affairs, exerting dominance over society, and shaping knowledge about individuals and their behaviours (Jovanovic 2010). Individuals navigate and encounter the societal context, which, through its embeddedness and dominance, has become an instrument of power (Montero 2011). Critical psychology is driven by a commitment to critique these social practices and goes beyond that by seeking to reconstruct these practices, as well as re-evaluate history, social arrangements, theory, and norms within a given context.

### **Framing real-world problems: Methodological versatility and collaboration in critical psychology research**

Critical psychology research methods exhibit a distinctive emphasis on engaging with real-world problems, standing in contrast to the conventional approach of selecting research topics based on convenience, or the compatibility with established methodologies (Teo 2015). This approach underscores a deliberate move away from privileging certain methodologies merely due to their widespread acceptance. Instead, the focus rests on the pressing issues themselves, driving researchers to adopt a versatile toolkit of methodologies that can effectively address these issues. This inclusivity of methodologies reflects the acknowledgement that complex problems often demand diverse approaches for comprehensive understanding and resolution.

Within the framework of critical psychology, researchers share a common dedication to historical contextualisation, social activism, and a profound questioning of the prevailing societal norms (Jovanovic 2010). This commitment to historical perspectives facilitates the recognition of how existing power dynamics have shaped contemporary paradigms and constructs. Moreover, this perspective aligns with the philosophy of challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin much of our understanding of the world.

Critical research methodologies also usher in a fundamental shift in the researcher-participant relationship. Instead of perceiving participants as passive data sources, critical psychology recognises their agency as active agents in the knowledge production process (Teo 2015). This shift transforms research into a collaborative exchange, where the insights, experiences, and perspectives of all involved parties contribute to the co-creation, dissemination, and transformation of knowledge.

This approach recognises the richness that emerges from valuing the diverse perspectives inherent in this exchange.

Within this collaborative exchange, the researcher's role goes beyond the traditional boundaries. Critical researchers are compelled to critically examine their own involvement in the research process, probing into their conceptualisations of research objectives, underlying personal, social, political, and economic interests, and the potential impacts of the research itself. This self-examination serves not only to rectify past injustices, but also, to dismantle any power dynamics that may inadvertently influence the research process. By understanding the complexities of power dynamics both in theory and practice, researchers can strive for a more equitable and emancipatory research process that aligns with the principles of critical psychology.

### **Empowering change: Critical psychology research methodologies and transformative potential**

Critical psychology research methodologies aim to encapsulate the dynamic circumstances and challenges of the world, possessing practical and theoretical relevance that can contribute to questioning or eliminating oppressive social situations (Wigginton 2017). Applied research methodologies that implement a critical perspective are employed with the intention that both the research process and findings can inspire positive social change. In essence, the research should have transformative capacity that attends to the prevailing state of affairs and provides knowledge and information on how to bring about change (Montero 2011; Teo 2015). These methodologies, as described by Sandoval (2000), are referred to as methodologies of the oppressed, wherein the generated knowledge examines psychosocial processes from the marginalised perspective. The researcher does not merely document the individuals' experienced reality, but actively engages with them, enabling a perspective that explores biased modes of social existence embedded within exploitative, ideological, or oppressive practices.

### **Enriching social constructionism: Exploring power dynamics and agency through critical psychology**

Incorporating critical psychology into the discourse on social constructionism enriches the theoretical framework by providing a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of power dynamics, agency, and social transformation. While social constructionism offers insights into the socially constructed nature of realities and knowledge, critical psychology augments this understanding by delving into the underlying power structures that shape these constructions (Wigginton 2017).

Social constructionism, with its focus on language, narratives, and cultural influences, emphasises how meaning and reality are generated through shared understandings. However, it can fall short in comprehensively exploring how these constructions perpetuate or challenge existing power differentials (Jovanovic 2010). Critical psychology (and, embracing a Foucauldian lens), extends this understanding

to unveil the intricate ways in which power operates to regulate, exclude, and maintain dominance (Sandoval 2000).

Such perspectives introduce the concept of power as a central force in shaping individual and collective experiences. It addresses the gap in social constructionism by acknowledging that the construction of reality is not a neutral endeavour, but one inherently tied to power dynamics (Jovanovic 2010). By emphasising power's role in shaping knowledge and constructing societal norms, critical perspectives can provide a more nuanced understanding of how certain realities are privileged while others are marginalised (Sandoval 2000; Teo 2015).

Furthermore, critical perspectives amplify the agency of individuals within the realm of constructed realities. While social constructionism acknowledges the role of shared narratives, it may not fully explore how individuals can actively resist or challenge these narratives (Jovanovic 2010). Critical psychology, drawing from its commitment to social action, highlights that individuals are not passive recipients of constructed realities but active agents capable of disrupting and transforming them. This emphasis on agency adds a dynamic layer to the understanding of how constructions are negotiated and transformed (Montero 2011; Teo 2015).

Moreover, critical psychology's focus on historical perspectives and challenging the status quo aligns with its commitment to social justice. While social constructionism exposes the malleability of reality, critical psychology pushes the discourse further by advocating for the deconstruction of oppressive power structures (Jovanovic 2010). By emphasising the need to critically engage with prevailing norms and values, critical psychology provides a more robust toolkit for addressing systemic inequities and injustices that may be overlooked by a purely constructionist perspective.

### **Amplifying understanding: The synergy of critical psychology, social constructionism, and Foucauldian perspectives for examining power and social change**

Critical psychology brings to the forefront issues of agency, social justice, and the examination of prevailing norms, however, its focus on historical context and power dynamics can be further amplified through the lens of theories proposed by Michel Foucault. Combining such theories offers a powerful synergy that enriches our understanding of the intricate interplay between power, subjectivity, and social change (Brown 2009). Foucauldian perspectives illuminate the mechanisms by which power operates, exposing hidden hierarchies, discursive formations, and the ways in which knowledge is constructed and maintained (Foucault 1972; 1977, 1988). By supplementing critical psychology and social constructionism with Foucauldian insights, we gain a more refined understanding of how power shapes individual experiences, societal structures, and the potential for transformation. This combined approach enables researchers to dissect the complex relationship between constructed realities and power dynamics, fostering a more nuanced analysis of how marginalised voices are silenced, and how resistance and emancipation can be strategically pursued (Rabinow 1984). Thus, such a synthesis enhances the depth and

scope of analysis, offering a comprehensive framework to challenge existing power structures, and cultivate meaningful social change.

### **Foucauldian methodology: Unveiling power, discourse, and subjectivity in critical and constructionist research**

As a methodology, Foucauldian philosophy can be conceptualised as constructionist based on the construction of meaning of social practices and actions which utilises a power relations lens (Foucault 1972; 1977, 1988). Foucauldian methodology was derived from structuralism, against a historical backdrop of societal movements and occurrences in the West and beyond. These movements included the second wave of Feminism, the Vietnam war, the American civil rights movement, and the historical student movement at the Sorbonne in Paris, of which the intellectual movement of poststructuralism then emerged in the 1960s (Rabinow 1984). Of particular interest here is the challenging of the historical legacy and popularity of structuralist reductionism, where the understanding of the world through the deconstruction lens was promoted. Transitioning from structuralism to poststructuralism had an evident and philosophical effect on social ways of thinking and being, challenging the very premise of key aspects of the Enlightenment legacy, as well as humanism (Brown 2009). Poststructuralists (and those who are informed by Foucauldian philosophy) propose there is no single point of reference, truth, or reality that is ultimate, rather, reality is subjective, relative, and a creation of the human mind (Rabinow 1984). Nuance is provided where we can critique the basic, embedded myths and illusions we see in modern society, such as the focus of measurement, generalisability, and the scientific method (Brown 2009).

The philosophy of Michel Foucault is regarded as valuable for enhancing the examination of power, resistance, and subjectivity within critical and constructionist research. Foucault, a French philosopher, and historian, dedicated his work to uncovering and investigating the connections between power, knowledge, institutions, disciplines, and social practices (Rabinow 1984). Foucauldian methodology provides a framework for examining various forms of power and knowledge, specifically investigating their influence on discourse, subject positions, subjectivities, and ways of being (Riley and Wiggins 2019). Foucault suggested that it is valuable to analyse how discourse can enable or constrain what individuals can say in specific settings and time periods, and how this shapes their experiences (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008). Taking on Foucault's viewpoint permits an examination of the participants' perspectives and realities by delving into the discourse and narratives they express. This approach reveals the specific roles and positions they hold, and sheds light on how they shape and interpret specific phenomena within their experiences by utilising discursive resources within a discursive economy (Alcoff 2005). One can argue that individuals can simultaneously occupy multiple positions, and these positions can represent various possibilities that offer different perspectives and ways of existing in the world. By exploring the discursive realms and the subject positions made available to individuals, it can have implications for how they experience their environment (Alcoff 2005; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008).

## **Deconstructing reality: Foucauldian insights into knowledge, power, and discourse**

Foucault argued that his approach to understanding the world enables a critical examination of social practices that are commonly perceived as normal and unquestioned. By engaging in this process, individuals can explore how these conditions have come into existence, how they are maintained, and how they could potentially be different (Foucault 1972). The exercise of power plays a role in constructing and organising reality, making certain aspects visible and comprehensible, while simultaneously limiting and excluding alternative views of reality (Foucault 1982). Foucault also acknowledged that knowledge can be seen as both a product of discursive practices, and a producer of discursive perspectives on reality. It is important to recognise that this construction of knowledge presents only a partial perspective of reality, shaped by the specific focus or framework that determines what is seen (Burr 2015).

Foucault suggests that reality is not a fixed or complete entity, but rather, a partial and situated construct. According to him, knowledge and discourse are not merely descriptions of reality; instead, they actively shape, and are shaped by, specific understandings of reality (Foucault 1972). The aim is not to arrive at a definitive understanding of how reality operates, but rather, to examine the reasons behind particular ways of being, subjecting them to critical scrutiny (Alcoff 2005). This process is not necessarily linear or uniform, as it is acknowledged to be complex. In essence, the Foucauldian analyst seeks to explore the connections between discourse and people's thoughts, emotions, actions, and the contextual conditions in which these experiences unfold. Furthermore, Foucault argues that knowledge from the past can help us understand the present reality and context (Foucault 1988). By integrating knowledge from the past and present, we can also gain insights into the type of knowledge needed to shape a desired future.

### **The power of discourse: Shaping reality and constructing knowledge**

Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to the way in which we think and talk about different aspects of reality (Foucault 1972). Discourses operate in specific ways that help to structure and order our understanding of reality. In society, there can exist multiple discursive frameworks or perspectives that shape how we think, write, and speak about reality (Foucault 1982). Foucault argued that language should be seen as a means of constructing how individuals can think, act, and speak, rather than simply as a cultural resource that individuals draw upon. Discourse is thus understood as a governing force in social practices, shaping particular ways of being and doing within specific contexts (Foucault 1972). It is important to note that not all discourses are given equal opportunity, presence, and authority in each context, as their value and normativity are determined by societal norms and power dynamics (Foucault 1982).

Foucault proposed that discourses are shaped by historical and socio-cultural factors, which aligns with the social constructionist epistemology. These discourses are understood as reflecting regulated ways of thinking, acting, and speaking that are specific to particular groups of people and time periods (Willig 2013). The dominant discourse, or the established and accepted rules of inclusion and exclusion in society, plays a role in producing and defining different roles for individuals and subjectifying them (Foucault 1977). For instance, the understanding of sexuality, particularly, homosexuality, in Western society, has undergone transformation over time. Previously, being 'gay' was viewed as a mental illness, and associated with criminal behaviour, with individuals being labelled as 'homosexuals' (Hooker 1993). However, in contemporary Western society, there has been a shift towards a more accepting discourse that recognises diverse forms of sexuality, and the term 'homosexual' is now seen as outdated due to its historical association with pathology, and its problematisation within the fields of psychology and medicine (Herek 2010; Hooker 1993). This shift has been influenced by research demonstrating that identifying as 'gay' is not linked to mental illness or criminality, and that harmful perspectives surrounding sexuality are associated with prejudice, discrimination, and authoritarianism (Herek 2010; Hooker 1993).

In his work, Foucault did not explicitly adopt a specific epistemological or theoretical stance, but scholars drawing on both perspectives discuss the notion of 'absolute' truths and argue that multiple discourses can coexist for a given discursive object (Burr 2015; Foucault 1972). For instance, Pierre (2019) provides an example using 'gun ownership' as the discursive object. Gun ownership can be situated in two different discursive locations: as a practice of self-preservation, or as a threat to public safety. Each location, or version, of discourse enables specific language, thoughts, and actions. In the discourse of self-preservation, a gun owner may discuss their right, agency, and autonomy to protect themselves and their loved ones, receiving both gratitude, and criticism, for engaging in this practice. In the discourse of public safety, a gun owner may express concerns about guns increasing the risk of crime and victimisation, while also being judged on their ability to protect their loved ones. This analysis focuses on the regulated social practices, rather than providing a mere description of the object (Rabinow 1984). Therefore, discourse has the potential to construct knowledge. Discourse governs by establishing categories of knowledge and collections of text, determining what can, and cannot, be discussed (Foucault 1972). Consequently, discourse is closely connected to the exercise of power. Discourses can simultaneously produce, and reproduce, power and knowledge, shaping what is valued and controlled within a specific context (Foucault 1978).

### **Deconstructing discourse: Unveiling assumptions and exploring knowledge construction**

While there is agreement among many scholars that Foucauldian perspectives are diverse, Foucault himself argued that thoughts cannot be formed independently of discourse, as discourse plays a crucial role in their construction as the appropriate object of study (Foucault 1972). He posited that discourse cannot be seen as

transparent or devoid of value; rather, it acquires specific meanings through the interplay between speakers and listeners, contingent upon the context (Foucault 1978). In examining the value of discourse, Foucault presented three significant questions:

1. *Why was this particular statement made instead of another?*
2. *Why were these specific words utilised to shape reality?*
3. *How do the connotations of these words relate to further ways of talking about the world?*

When assessing the value of discourse, and considering these important questions, Foucault (1972) suggested that uncovering implicit assumptions allows for an exploration of how knowledge and discourse originated. Adopting the Foucauldian philosophy enables us to describe both the fragmented and interconnected chains of knowledge embedded in layers of discourse within a system. This approach facilitates critical reflection and deep exploration of the normalising power of discourse (Rabinow 1984). It allows us to investigate how discourse constructs subjectivities and organises work and knowledge. By scrutinising the assumptions underpinning the text, one can speculate on how to position knowledge within a broader context, understanding the actual contexts and the limitations that arise when attempting to contextualise knowledge (Foucault 1972, 1978).

### **Unveiling power dynamics in discourse: Foucauldian inquiries and interrogations**

Foucault (1988) asserted that the functioning and impacts of discourse within specific contexts can be brought to light by examining the exercise of power. He presented four significant questions that shed light on power relations and their influence on discourse:

1. *What principles enable certain statements to be articulated?*
2. *What regulations govern these statements?*
3. *What criteria assist us in determining the truth or falsity of statements?*
4. *What principles authorise the creation of explanations, models, or classifications of specific elements within the text?*

Foucault suggested that contemplating these questions allows readers to recognise how discourse can be constructed, shaped, and organised within its social and historical context.

### **The interplay of power and knowledge: Foucauldian perspectives on productivity and constraint**

Foucault (1980) proposed that power and knowledge are closely intertwined, and their connection is symbolically represented by their joint existence. Existing scholarly works support this view, highlighting the inseparability of power and



knowledge, as one cannot exist without the other (Brown 2009). Foucault condensed his understanding of power into four theoretical emphases: power is productive, power cannot be owned or possessed, power regulates the body through disciplinary mechanisms, and power gives rise to resistance.

Foucault conceptualised power as a network or interconnected web that facilitates the production and dissemination of specific knowledge (Burchell et al. 1991; Foucault 1980). Power has significant effects as it permeates individuals' lives, influencing their bodies, actions, attitudes, discourses, learning processes, and everyday experiences (Foucault 1980). This network-like structure of power circulates through social relations, operating in a capillary manner (Burchell et al. 1991). Consequently, we are constantly entangled within power relations that exert influence on us. Foucault emphasised viewing power not as a possessive entity but as a force in action. Power is both productive and constraining (Foucault 1977, 1988). On one hand, power is productive, shaping knowledge construction, self-formation, and the definition of oneself and others (Foucault 1977). Individuals can produce and seek knowledge, influencing their own experiences and positions. Over time, certain truths, and their authorised proponents, become privileged, establishing social norms and authoritative figures. In this process, individuals draw upon dominant discourses to assert authority and exclude alternative discourses or ways of being (Foucault 1972). Consequently, specific discourses and institutions gain more power than others through this productive process. On the other hand, power also acts restrictively, limiting what can be known in certain situations (Foucault 1977). Thus, power can be seen as influencing others' knowledge and shaping their future actions. It operates not only directly and immediately, but also indirectly, impacting existing actions or those that may occur later (Burchell et al. 1991).

### The dynamic nature of power: Foucault's theoretical conditions and implications

In Foucault's conceptualisation of power, the following conditions summarise his theoretical journey:

1. *Power is understood as an interactive process.* Unlike other philosophers, Foucault viewed power as relational, goal-oriented, and self-organising, leading to tensions between individuals or groups. It is not seen as a unidirectional, singular phenomenon with given instances of application, nor as a conscious approach used by some individuals over others (Foucault 1988).
2. *Power is seen as a contextual and relational process.* Foucault recognised that power is best understood in terms of power relations, where it operates through constant struggles and conflicts that alter, reinforce, or reverse relations between resistance and power (Rabinow 1984).
3. *Power is best understood as a web or system of interacting influences, supported by specific relations and tensions.* Each element is necessary for the other, and these concepts shape and are shaped by one another (Foucault 1977).
4. *Power is characterised by the tensions and contradictions between power and resistance,* and its understanding is contingent on specific contexts and individuals (Foucault 1977).

5. *Power is discerned through the specific strategies and practices by which power relations become effective* (Foucault 1972).

These conditions lead to several conclusions about Foucault's perspective on power. Power is enacted through unequal and evolving force relations within specific contexts, producing immediate embodied effects (Foucault 1988). Moreover, power is not solely exercised in a top-down manner, but can operate through larger-scale forces that result from interconnected elements and redistributions of power (Burchell et al. 1991). Foucault argued that power relations are not intentionally oppressive, but can be evaluated as micro-practices that have inadvertent consequences (Foucault 1988). While specific ways may appear explicit and intentional, the underlying logic of power relations is not necessarily oppressive. This means that individuals can simultaneously be subjected to power while also acting as agents within power relations (Foucault 1977). Essentially, individuals who are subjected to power can also contribute to the articulation of power relations.

### **The panoptic paradigm: Power, discipline, and surveillance in modern society**

The examination of power also highlights how power relations can function to discipline populations. Instead of being solely punitive, discipline, in this context, refers to the practice of normalisation (Foucault 1977). A crucial aspect of normalisation and disciplinary power is surveillance. According to Foucault, surveillance began to replace physical punishment, as it appeared to be more effective and advantageous (Foucault 1988). In contemporary society, Foucault claimed that surveillance has become internalised to the extent that it now operates as a mechanism of self-regulation (Rabinow 1984). Foucault conceptualised the incorporation and control of social practices, structures, and discipline through surveillance by referring to Jeremy Bentham's model of '*The Panopticon*', proposed in 1795.

The concept of The Panopticon originated in the context of the prison system, where all prison cells were exposed to a central power, allowing constant observation. Inmates had no direct contact with one another, but were always within the view of the panoptic tower (Bentham 1795). The crucial aspect was that individuals never knew whether they were being watched at any given moment, but they had to believe that they could be always observed (Foucault 1977). This created a sense of constant surveillance. Bentham saw this model as a way to reform prisons and even proposed it as a blueprint for how society could function. The effectiveness of the system relied on the belief that anyone could be under observation at any time, which internalised surveillance, power, and control. Foucault expanded on this concept and argued that,

*He [sic] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he [sic] makes them play spontaneously upon himself [sic]; he [sic] inscribes in himself [sic] the power relation in which he [sic] simultaneously plays both roles; he [sic] becomes the principle of his [sic] own subjection (1977; p. 202–203).*

Both Bentham and Foucault's concept of The Panopticon can be applied to demonstrate advancements in our modern society, such as the use of technology by governments to monitor individuals' movements and behaviours through various means like census data, phones, social media, the internet, credit cards, and surveillance cameras (Mills 2003). According to Foucault, the panoptic model has been adopted in contemporary carceral culture, influencing the functioning of different contexts, including workplaces and institutions like medical and psychiatric hospitals, prisons, schools, and higher education (Armstrong and Murphy 2011). The application of the panoptic model is justified based on specific contextual needs. Depending on the setting, it may aim to rehabilitate prisoners, provide treatment to patients, educate students in schools, confine the mentally ill, or supervise workers in the workplace (Foucault 1977).

The Panopticon operates in intricate and nuanced ways. It can serve as a spatial arrangement for individuals in a specific context, shaping their relationships and interactions with one another (Bentham 1795). This model can establish hierarchical structures within which individuals are controlled and monitored through various instruments and mechanisms of power (Foucault 1977). When examining settings where multiple individuals are subjected to tasks or imposed behaviours, Foucault argued that the panoptic model can be employed to critique such environments. He proposed that the model had the potential to extend its influence throughout society, becoming a generalised function (Foucault 1977). Additionally, he emphasised that we are not mere spectators in an amphitheatre or actors on a stage, but rather participants within the panoptic machine, subject to its power and part of its mechanism (Foucault 1977). Consequently, within our contemporary carceral culture, we exist within the panoptic machine, which shapes and governs our actions and ways of life.

### **The dynamics of resistance: Power, freedom, and countercultures in Foucauldian perspective**

Foucault's consideration of power/knowledge highlights the significance of resistance, a dimension that is often overlooked or unquestioned within the social constructionist epistemology. Taking a Foucauldian approach necessitates a reflection on resistance, as it is integral to the process. According to Foucault, "...where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 1982, p. 95). The existence of power relations relies on the possibility of engagement and resistance; without resistance, power cannot materialise (Armstrong and Murphy 2011). Resistance can be seen as a manifestation of freedom, aligning with Foucault's understanding of the interplay between freedom and power. Both power and freedom must coexist for each to have meaning. Like Foucault's conception of power, resistance is not confined to a singular locus of control, but is distributed in society (Foucault 1988). It can take various forms, emerge at any time, and occur in numerous places.

It is crucial to critically analyse the complexities of resistance, recognising that engaging in social practices does not necessarily indicate acceptance of dominant discourses (Armstrong and Murphy 2011). Conversely, the absence of engagement does not automatically imply resistance. Power is intertwined with the freedom to

resist, which can manifest in various ways, such as constructing alternative ways of being that align with one's subjectivity, openly opposing prescribed subject positions, or disengaging from systems where dominant power is exercised (Foucault 1982). Within social settings, certain individuals may find themselves positioned in ways that perpetuate disadvantage and inequality, and this can be explored by critiquing the formation of society (Jovanovic 2010; Teo 2015). Individuals can react to such inequality in diverse ways, drawing upon a range of potential meanings to counter what they perceive as unacceptable (Armstrong and Murphy 2011). Furthermore, from a critical perspective, resistance is seen as essential for understanding social power structures and their effects (Teo 2015).

Certain individuals engage in alternative forms of resistance that involve the creation of new subjectivities, as suggested by Gergen and Gergen (2003), who refer to these as countercultures. In countercultures, the fundamental explanations of individual deviance are transformed by the collective 'other' into recognised ways of navigating the system, effectively reclaiming power from the dominant group. Other forms of resistance can include joining forces with more influential individuals or participating in social action to catalyse social change (Gergen and Gergen 2003). Foucault (1982) argues that resistance is essential for the existence of power, and for power relations to shift, an examination of how resistance manifests within the social context is necessary. Foucault (1982) underscores the importance of exploring the interplay between resistance, freedom, and power, stating that the analysis, questioning, and contestation of power relations, as well as the inherent conflict between such relations and the intransitivity of freedom, constitute an ongoing political task embedded in all social existence.

### **Governmentality and subjectivity: Shaping citizens and autonomy through technologies of power and self**

According to Foucault, governmentality pertains to the methods and mechanisms through which institutions of power seek to shape and produce citizens who align with the goals of these institutions (Foucault 2008). When referring to technologies, Foucault argued that institutions employ various rationalities and techniques to achieve a collective purpose, motivating individuals to act in ways that serve the interests of the State and the population, while still allowing them to perceive their actions as autonomous (Bignall 2008; Cotoi 2011). Consequently, governmentality encompasses the ways in which individuals' well-being and agency are indirectly disciplined and regulated.

In the framework of governmentality, subject positions are shaped through the interplay of technologies, specifically, the technologies of the self, and the technologies of power (Foucault 2008). The technologies of power refer to the methods employed by disciplinary practices to shape the population in ways that are more productive, less risky, and conforming to specific modes of existence (Foucault 1978). As time progressed, Foucault (1986, 2008) introduced the concept of technologies of the self, which highlights individuals' capacity to resist the practices that seek to discipline or control them. Technologies of the self encompass the

process through which individuals actively construct themselves as subjects. Rather than being passive recipients of dominant discourses, individuals actively replicate, or resist, these dominant discourses (Armstrong and Murphy 2011). Through this agency, individuals have the autonomy to shape their own subjectivity. However, Foucault (1986, 2008) argued that these forms of subjectivity and practices are rooted within the dominant culture, suggested, and necessitated by the larger social, cultural, and political context, rather than being individually devised. Thus, Foucault proposed that the socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts in which individuals are situated determines the range of possibilities for ways of being. While individuals are not compelled to conform to dominant modes of existence in society and institutions, their choices may be constrained by the available options (Foucault 1986).

### **Converging perspectives, meaning, power, and reality through social constructionism, critical psychology, and Foucauldian methodology**

Adopting a social constructionist approach provides a strong foundation for understanding how meanings are constructed within specific contexts. However, it is important to recognise that this approach has its limitations when it comes to addressing the complexities of power dynamics and their influence on these constructions. While social constructionism acknowledges the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of reality, it tends to overlook the intricate interplay between these constructions, and the broader socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts in which they emerge, evolve, and resist (Galbin 2014; Gergen 1985; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2016). This is where the integration of a critical, Foucauldian lens becomes highly valuable. By incorporating this perspective, we move beyond the surface-level analysis of what is said, and not said, and delve into the mechanisms that govern the construction of meaning. Social constructionism may identify discourses and prevailing meanings, but it falls short of exposing the underlying power relations and strategies that sustain and legitimise these discourses. A critical, Foucauldian methodology facilitates an exploration of the hidden dimensions of power that shape and are shaped by language and discourse.

One of the critical insights that Foucault's approach provides is the understanding that truth and meaning are not fixed or inherent. Instead, they are constructed within specific power-laden contexts. This prompts us to ask deeper questions: Who holds the authority to produce knowledge, and what motivates them? Which perspectives are privileged, and which are marginalised and silenced? How do specific discourses maintain and reinforce existing power structures? These questions challenge us to go beyond the apparent meaning of words and uncover the underlying power dynamics that shape how reality is understood and conveyed.

The adoption of a social constructionist, critical, and Foucauldian perspective enriches qualitative data analysis by bringing attention to the significance of silences. While other common analysis methods might overlook what is not explicitly expressed, this combined perspective recognises the potency of what is left unsaid. Silence, within this context, is not merely an absence, but

a deliberate, and socially produced, element (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008). By attending to silences, we gain access to unspoken narratives, subtle forms of resistance, and the potential for new interpretations that challenge dominant norms and structures.

While other forms of data analysis, such as thematic analysis, are popular, they often fail to represent socially produced silences. These approaches tend to privilege spoken and 'valued' voices, disregarding the significance of what is not expressed, or conveyed, through words alone (Galbin 2014; Gergen 1985; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2016). However, silence can hold strength in qualitative data analysis as it allows for the emergence of untold and unspoken narratives, fostering the creation of something new, rather than reproducing pre-existing societal structures. Therefore, the silence of participants can serve as a valuable resource in analysis, offering diverse expressions and possibilities.

By employing a constructionist, critical, Foucauldian methodology, we can attentively listen to these socio-culturally formed silences in qualitative data analysis. We can investigate and question how reality is recognised within power relations, examining who shapes and legitimises particular social realities, instead of merely describing a singular reality and excluding alternative versions (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008; Burchell et al. 1991; Foucault 1980). Adopting this perspective allows us to deconstruct, challenge, and critique the context, exploring the factors that construct embedded social realities and questioning their claims to truth. By positioning ourselves as researchers outside the existing regimes of truth, we can gain a fresh perspective and critically examine the assumptions and practices that govern the formation of discourses, often hidden from view.

Adopting a social constructionist, critical, and Foucauldian perspective allows us to go beyond merely what is said, or not said, and instead, focus on what meaning does, the procedures and rules that enable the governance and intelligibility of objects, and how it intervenes in the relationships between what is known, said, or practiced (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008). This approach facilitates research that understands the constitutive and political effects of social actions, where analysis can be centred around power and investigate how discourses construct versions of our social world and context analytically. Researchers employing this approach are interested in how individuals think, what they know, and how they articulate their understanding of the world and their context. The cultural embeddedness of knowledge also becomes a focus of exploration within this approach. It allows for the uncovering of the multiple versions in which discourses construct different realities, which can be linked to the diverse objectives and power dynamics of various institutions (Rabinow 1984).

Incorporating a social constructionist, critical, Foucauldian methodology into qualitative analysis requires us to step outside the conventional boundaries of truth and knowledge. It encourages us to question the assumptions that underpin dominant discourses, to critically examine the processes through which power relations construct our understanding of reality, and to explore the intricate ways in which power operates through language, discourse, and social practices (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008; Burchell et al. 1991; Foucault 1980). Ultimately, this approach empowers researchers to engage with data more deeply, unveil hidden

power dynamics, and contribute to a more nuanced and transformative understanding of the world.

## In conclusion

The rationale supporting the convergence of a social constructionist, critical, and Foucauldian perspective stems from the recognition that each of these perspectives individually offer valuable insights into understanding human experience, meaning making, and power dynamics within various contexts. While a social constructionist approach highlights the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of reality, it can overlook the intricate interplay between these constructions, and the broader socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts. Additionally, critical psychology highlights the significance of power dynamics and questions dominant narratives, but it may fall short in fully addressing the complexities of discourse, and their connection to broader societal structures. Moreover, Foucauldian analysis unveils the hidden mechanisms of power and its effects on knowledge production and social practices, yet it may require further integration with social constructionism and critical psychology to encompass the full complexity of human experience.

By converging these perspectives, researchers can attain a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of meaning, the impact of power relations, and the shaping of reality. Integrating social constructionism acknowledges the central role of language in meaning-making, while critical psychology introduces a critical lens to challenge existing power dynamics. The incorporation of Foucauldian methodology amplifies this analysis by uncovering how power operates through language, discourse, and social practices, thus delving into the deeper layers of power's influence.

The convergence of these perspectives brings to light the interwoven nature of language, power, and reality, addressing the limitations of each approach when used in isolation. By adopting a holistic framework, researchers can explore how meanings are constructed within specific power-laden contexts, analyse the ways in which power relations shape discourses, and identify the mechanisms that govern the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This combined approach also facilitates the exploration of silenced narratives, and the cultural embeddedness of knowledge, enriching qualitative data analysis, and providing a more nuanced understanding of social realities.

Ultimately, the convergence of a social constructionist, critical psychology, and Foucauldian methodology allows researchers to examine the complexities of human experience, unveiling the hidden motivations behind texts and social actions. This integrated perspective empowers researchers to critically engage with data, uncover underlying power dynamics, challenge dominant discourses, and contribute to a transformative understanding of the multifaceted interplay between meaning, power, and reality.

In this paper, I have delved into the potential for qualitative researchers to embrace a comprehensive approach that merges social constructionism, critical perspectives, and Foucauldian methodology. This integrated approach offers a profound



grasp of intricate human experiences, spanning from basic communication to the intricate analysis of power dynamics. These perspectives introduce diverse realities and truths, uncovering the challenges that researchers probe into. Throughout the paper, I have explored the historical origins, growth, and theoretical foundations of this combined epistemology, theoretical stance, and methodology. By dissecting the implicit assumptions and intricate elements within these complexities, my intent is to assist researchers as they navigate participant perspectives, interpretations, and their influence on either contesting, or perpetuating dominant narratives tied to research inquiries. While the approach proposed embraces a spectrum of theories rather than prescribing a specific method, the goal is to equip readers with a road-map, as well as reflections to consider when conducting qualitative research. This research approach specifically explores topics of social legitimacy, critical examination, questioning prevailing norms, the interplay between participant meaning and societal power dynamics, and how established truths exclude alternative versions. Ultimately, the paper offers a framework that fosters critical scrutiny, engages with power dynamics, and scrutinises truth construction, fostering a more nuanced comprehension of social phenomena within qualitative research.

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## Declarations

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