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## Meta-ethnography to build middle-range theories: an exploration in three case studies

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020

12:45 – 14:00 GMT

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A lecture followed by a Q&A session



**If you have questions**

**please click on the icon to raise your hand, and wait to be given the floor**

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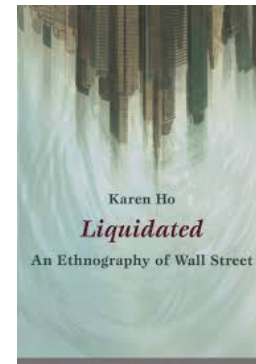
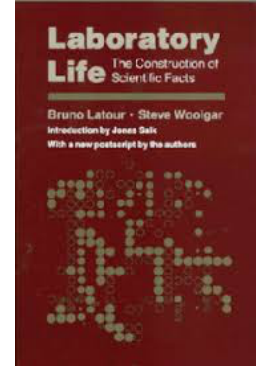
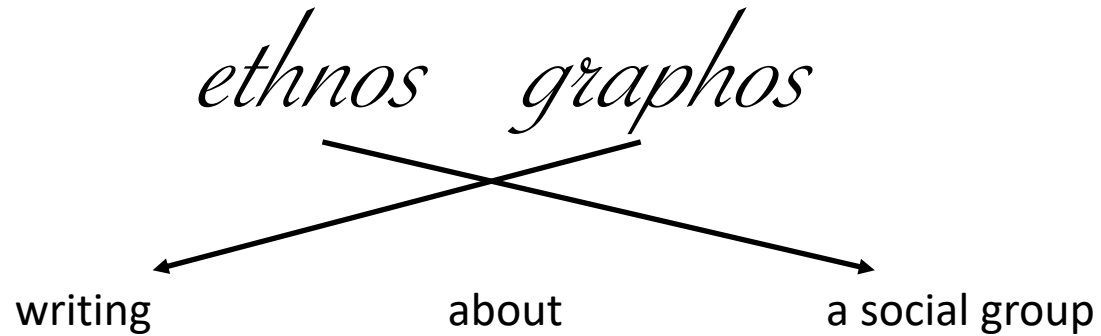
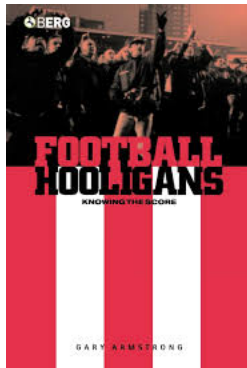
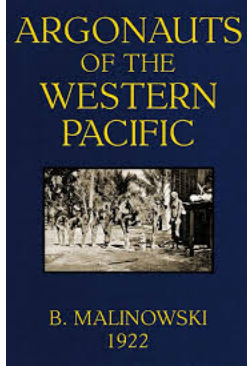
LONDON  
SCHOOL of  
HYGIENE  
& TROPICAL  
MEDICINE



# THIS TALK

- Defining meta-ethnography and middle-range theories
- Meta-ethnography to build middle-range theories: examples
- Improving the practice of meta-ethnography

# ETHNOGRAPHY



# WHAT IS META-ETHNOGRAPHY?



A short video on the history of meta-ethnography  
with Dr Eldrin Deas & Dr George Noblit

Noblit GW & Hare RD (1988). Meta-ethnography: synthesizing qualitative studies. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.



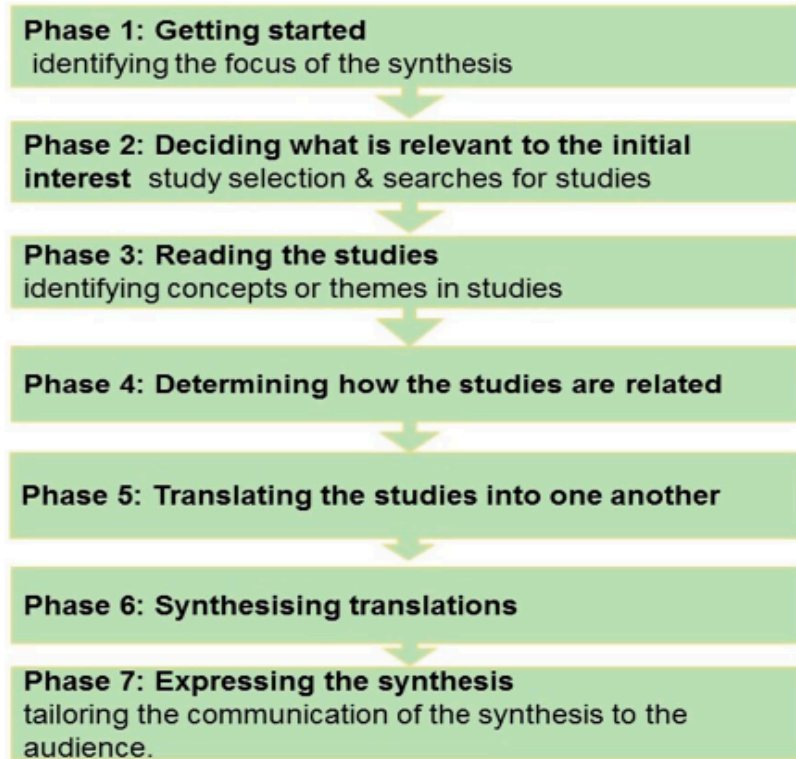
# THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES

CLIFFORD GEERTZ

'one of the most original and stimulating anthropologists of  
his generation' *Contemporary Sociology*



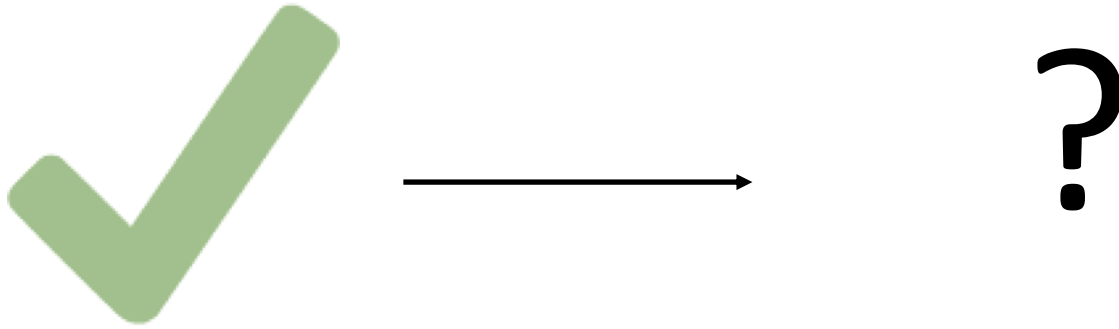
# NOBLIT & HARE APPROACH



There are 3 possible types of translation/ synthesis depending on how the studies are related:

- 'Reciprocal translation' - concepts in one study can incorporate those of another.
- 'Refutational translation' - concepts in different studies contradict one another.
- 'Line of argument synthesis' - the studies identify different aspects of the topic under study that can be drawn together in a new interpretation

# THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSPORTABILITY

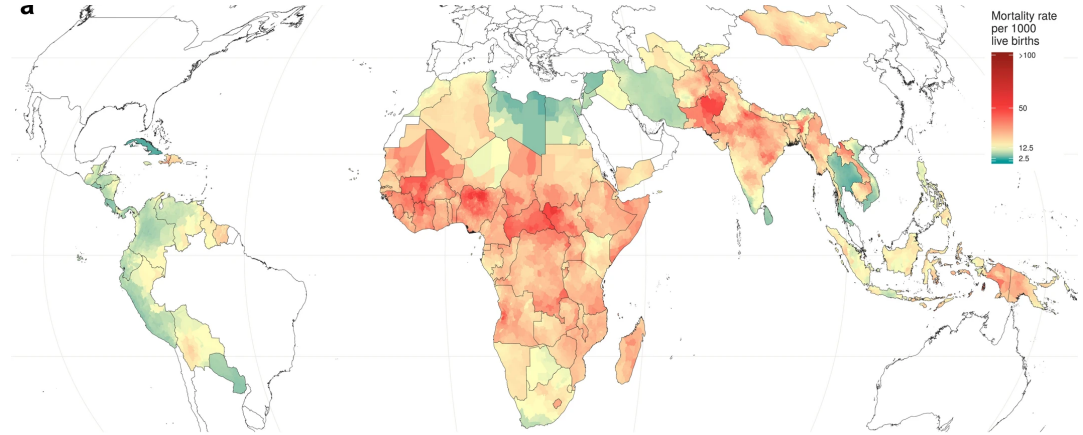


WHO recommendation  
on community mobilization  
through facilitated  
participatory learning and  
action cycles with women's  
groups for maternal and  
newborn health

2014



# TRANSPORTABILITY?



## Neonatal mortality rates (2000-2017)

Rath S et al. BMC Int Health Human Rights 2010; 10: 25.

Morrison J et al. [International Journal for Equity in Health](#) 2019; 18: 55.

Rosato M et al *Malawi Medical Journal* 2011: 22.



# HOW CAN WE ASSESS TRANSPORTABILITY?



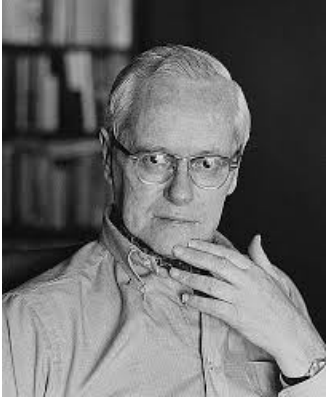
*Form*

versus



*Function?*

# MIDDLE-RANGE THEORIES

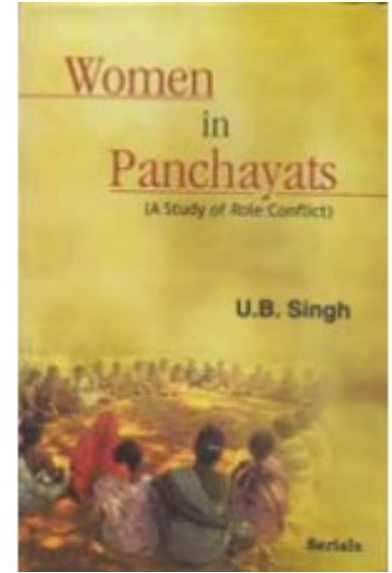


“lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social change.” (Merton, 1967)

# EXAMPLE MIDDLE-RANGE THEORIES

Role conflict theory

Nudge theory



Singh, 2011

Getzels JW & Guba EG. Role, Role Conflict, and Effectiveness: An Empirical Study. *American Sociological Review* 1954; 19: 164-175.

Singh UB. *Women in Panchayats: a study of role conflict*. New Delhi: Serials Publication, 2011.

Thaler R and Sunstein S. *Nudge*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008.

# REALISTS

- Context
- Mechanism
- Outcomes pattern
- CMO configuration!



# USING SYNTHESIS TO DEVELOP MRTs

In high-mortality settings, Participatory Learning and Action will reduce neonatal mortality by including the poorest, building their self- and collective efficacy to identify and solve problems, and in so doing increase preventive essential newborn care practices and institutional delivery rates.

Participating in problem identification and problem-solving makes solutions identified by groups more relevant.

## *Generalisability*



High n of contextual conditions to trigger mechanism, applied to narrow set of outcomes

Low n of contextual conditions to trigger mechanism and applies to a range of outcomes

# WHAT CAN MIDDLE-RANGE THEORIES DO?

- We hope that MRTs can help transport knowledge by proposing how causal processes (mechanisms) will play out in new contexts.
- We can refine MRTs by testing whether their predictions with regard to interventions in specific contexts are correct.

# COMPLICATING THINGS: IT'S THE TANGLE...



“Theory is not a set of propositions, nor a set of models [...]. It is [...] a **rich set of interlocking practices**. The **credibility of our scientific activities depends on the richness of this set** and the interlacing of the activities that make it up, each done with a look over the shoulder to the others.”

Could meta-ethnography help add richness to the tangle?

Cartwright N. Middle-range theory: Without it what could anyone do? *Theoria* 2020

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# EXAMPLE 1: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH

Jamal et al. *BMC Public Health* 2013, **13**:798  
<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/13/798>



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Open Access

### The school environment and student health: a systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research

Farah Jamal<sup>1\*</sup>, Adam Fletcher<sup>2</sup>, Angela Harden<sup>1,3</sup>, Helene Wells<sup>4</sup>, James Thomas<sup>5</sup> and Chris Bonell<sup>6</sup>

Jamal F, Fletcher A, Harden A, Wells H, Thomas J, Bonell C.

The school environment and student health: a systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research. *BMC Public Health* 13: 798.

Bonell C, Harden A, Fletcher A, et al. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2016;70:329–330.



# EXAMPLE 1: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH

Students feel teachers do not understand realities of their lives  
Disciplinary rules set without consultation with students  
Being treated like children



SCHOOL SYSTEM

STUDENT SYSTEM

Adolescent students engaged in process of identity construction  
Set up their own parallel versions of school institutional processes  
Construct 'tough' identities based on aggression, including dating and relationship violence, and substance use  
Toughness becomes a shared norm

Interventions should challenge attitudes and perceived norms concerning gender stereotypes & violence and support the development of skills and control over behaviour

## EXAMPLE 2: HOUSEHOLD-LEVEL CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION



Head, L., Gibson, C., Gill, N., Carr, C. and Waitt, G. 2016. A meta-ethnography to synthesise household cultural research for climate change policy. *Local Environment* 21: 1467-1481.



# EXAMPLE 3: FACE MASKS DURING AND AFTER EPIDEMICS

Pregnant woman and mural in Hong Kong - Anthony Wallace/AFP







[WHO guidance on](#) face masks



Greenhalgh et al. *BMJ* 2020;  
369 :m1435



Dr Venki Ramakrishnan, Current President Royal Society, Chair of DELVE

# 'CULTURE' & MASKS: IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

- 'Courtesy masks' in collectivist societies
- History of previous epidemics (e.g. SARS)
- Air pollution
- Social firewalls in dense urban worlds
- Differences in mask-wearing with the community can lead to stigma and discrimination

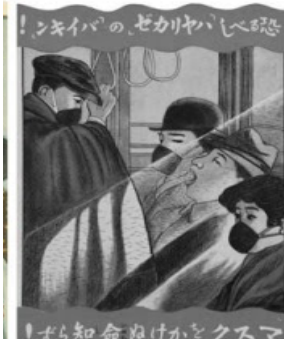
# THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MASKS

- In the oldest anthropological sense, a mask is a powerful social signifier defined by the relationships that constitute it – liminality & contagion risk)
- Biopolitical technology of modernity deployed to emphasise individual or collective moral responsibility
- Not just a 'sign', but an object that both exists through. and creates social relations and enables negotiations between different spheres of social life

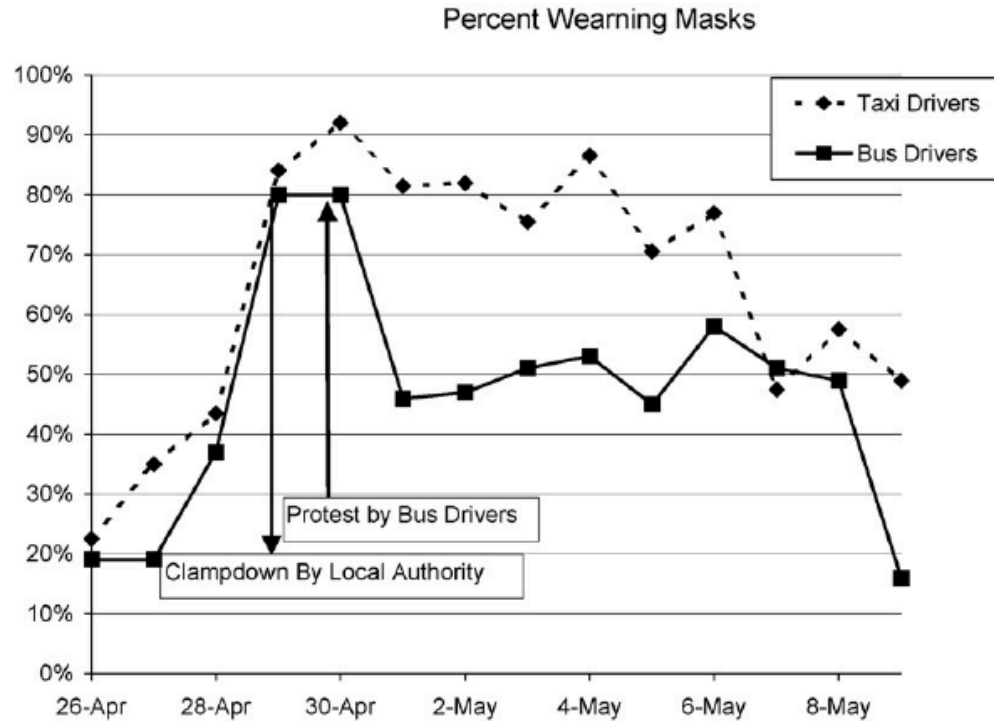
*The Way of the Masks*



CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS



# MASK PROMOTION DOESN'T ALWAYS 'WORK'



*Condon Health Policy 2010; 50-56.*  
H1N1 Mexico city Mask wearing

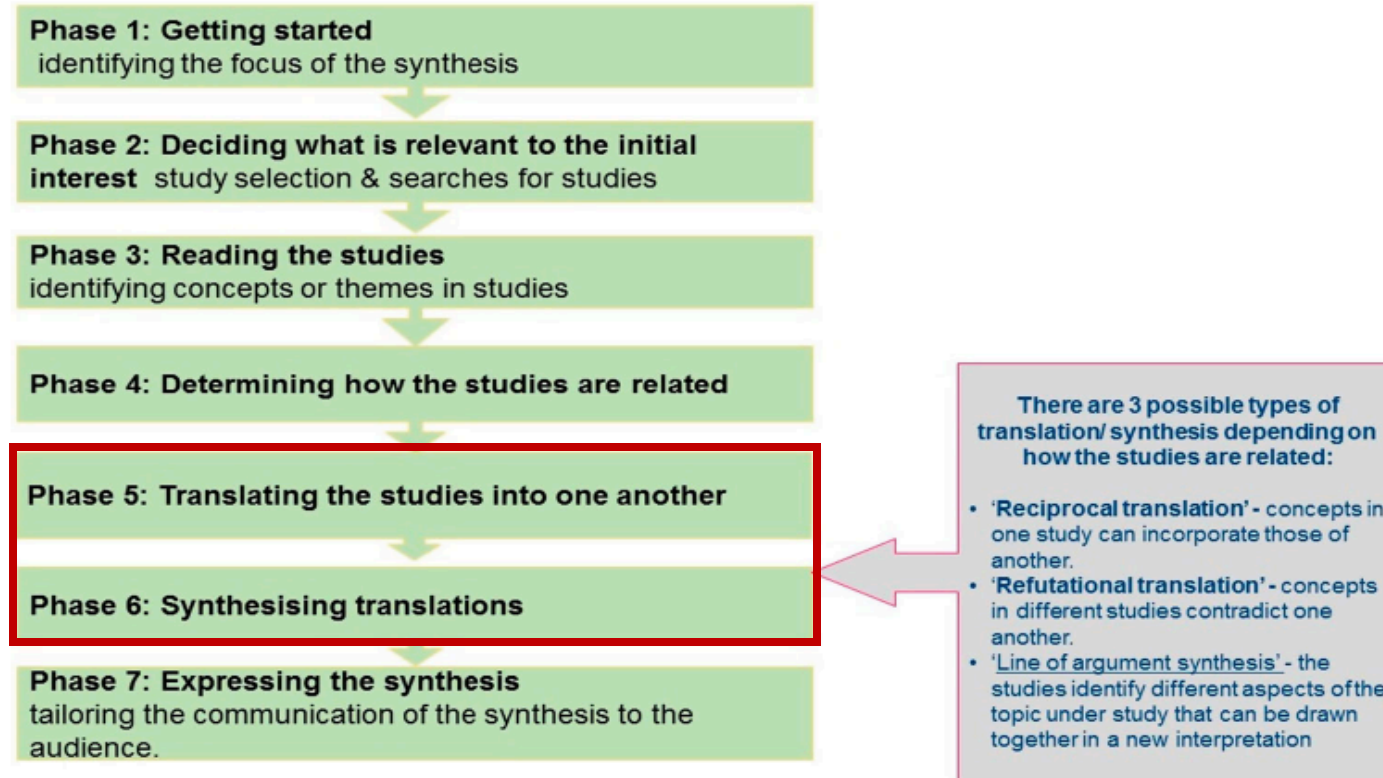
# RQ: What factors influence the uses of face masks in the community during and after epidemics?

What makes a biosocial intervention like the facemask successfully 'portable'?

Social, behavioural and historical studies reporting qualitative methods or a mix of qualitative and quantitative Studies in English, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, French, Mandarin and Cantonese

- Retrieved 4096 studies
  - 4053 deemed not relevant after title and abstract screening
  - 43 taken forward for full text review
  - 10 relevant to research question
  - An additional six studies identified through bibliographies
  - 16 primary studies included in total
- Incorporated concepts from an additional eight ethnographic studies on epidemics (ebola, HIV, SARS) and our own experiences
- Work in progress, with Dr Po Man Tsang

# NOBLIT & HARE APPROACH



# TRUST IN WHO?

**Trust in a shared collective identity enables the promotion of mask-wearing as a show of solidarity but...**

The 'collective' that is appealed to can range from the family, health-workers, the city/area or the State, depending on political regimes and existing levels of trust in political authorities

Misalignment can hurt

“Wearing a facemask was a way to tell others that you were exercising civic responsibility and that you cared a lot about Hong Kong. You did not want to spread the virus to others, so you wore a facemask. [...] Wearing a facemask was a sign of solidarity and civic responsibility at that time.” (Siu, 52 year old woman, Hong Kong) *International Journal for Equity in Health* (2016) 15:73

# BUT THERE IS MORE...

- Critical massk
- Place
- Time
- Gender
- Materiality



Mexico City 2009



London 2020

Lynteris, C. *Ethnographic Plague: Configuring Disease on the Chinese-Russian Frontier*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Abney K. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 41:4, 270-283. [S Africa]

Burgess A & Horii M. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 2012; 34: 1184–1198 [Japan]

Condon BJ, Sinha T. *Health Policy* 2010; 95: 50-56. [Mexico]

Maria Shun Ying Sin *Critical Public Health* 2016; 26: 88-98 [China]

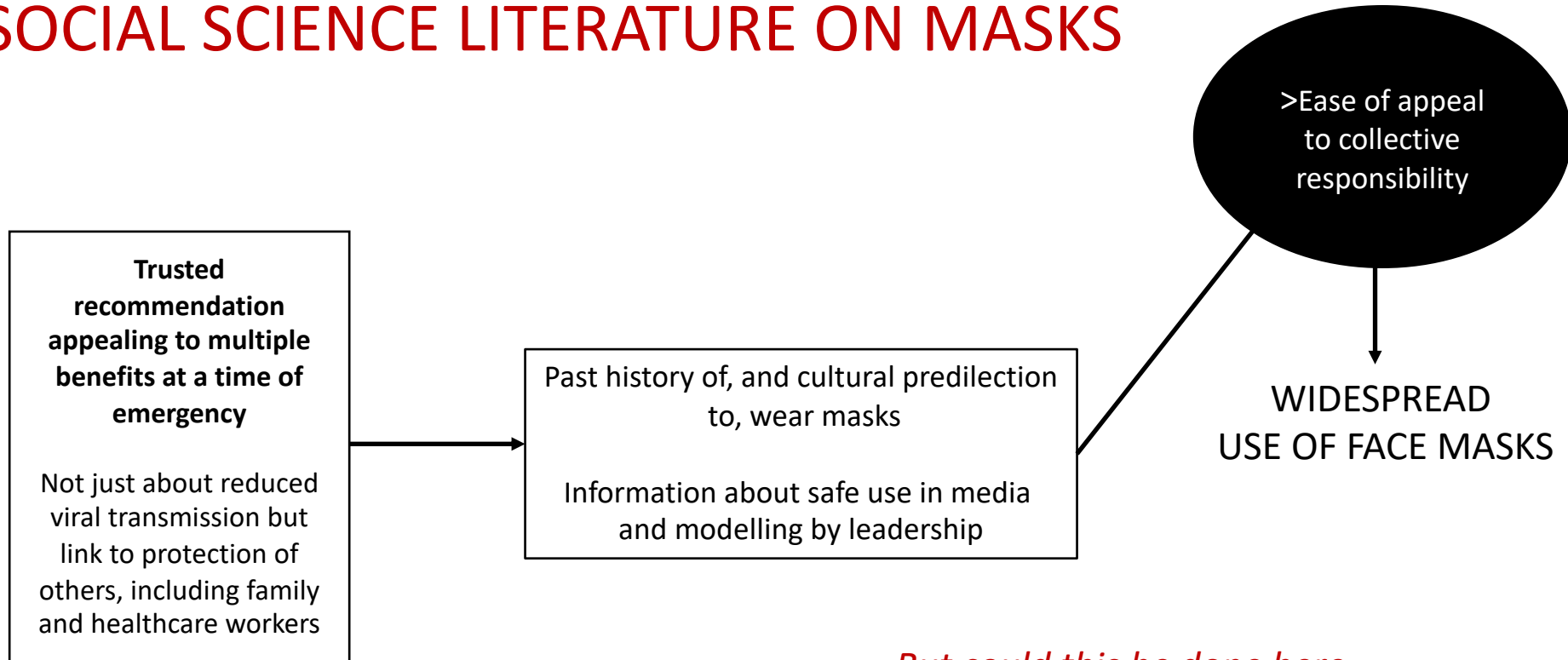
Ferng YHJ et al. *Public Health Nursing* 2010; 28(1):18–28. [USA]

Koji W et al. *BMC Public Health* 12:1065. [Japan]

Lau JT et al. *Infection* 2008; 36: 434–443.



# CURRENT INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE LITERATURE ON MASKS



*But could this be done here  
and if so with what consequences?*

# WHAT A META-ETHNOGRAPHY SHOWS

## CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Trusted  
recommendation  
appealing to multiple  
benefits at a time of  
emergency**

Not just about reduced  
viral transmission but  
link to protection of  
others, including family  
and healthcare workers

Lowered financial barriers to use (HK, Mexico)

Having only a small range of masks avoids creating a  
'social hierarchy of protection and risk' in the community

One of many tools including physical distancing, hand hygiene & TTI

Consider areas with highest exposure areas as those  
where people are most inclined to wear masks  
(e.g. transport) (Japan)

Materiality: how design, fabric, re-use, numbers needed  
affect use and people

*Intersecting social dimensions  
that affect access and use are addressed: location, gender, ethnicity,  
ability (Mexico)*

Time \* (HK, China, Mexico)

>Ease of appeal  
to collective  
responsibility

**SAFE & WIDESPREAD  
USE OF FACE MASKS**

<Stigma &  
discrimination by  
association with  
disease (HK, South  
Africa)

\* Meanings, use (and therefore effectiveness) might change as epidemic evolves

# IT'S OK, IT'S JUST THE TANGLE...



The dispute over masks is a manifestation of the cross-disciplinary tangle (rich set of interlocking practices) in public health.

But isn't the richer picture the better picture?

Cartwright N. Middle-range theory: Without it what could anyone do? *Theoria* 2020

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# META-ETHNOGRAPHY AUTHORS: FROM WEIRD TO DEEMED

**Western**  
**Educated**  
**Industrialized**  
**Rich**  
**Democratic**

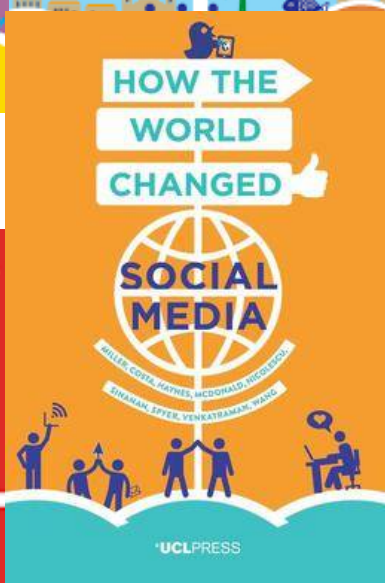


**Diverse**  
**Educated**  
**Engaged**  
**Multilingual**  
**Empirical**  
**Democratic**

**PUT THE ETHNOGRAPHY  
BACK INTO META-ETHNOGRAPHY!!**



Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman, Wang – 15 months each in 9 locations

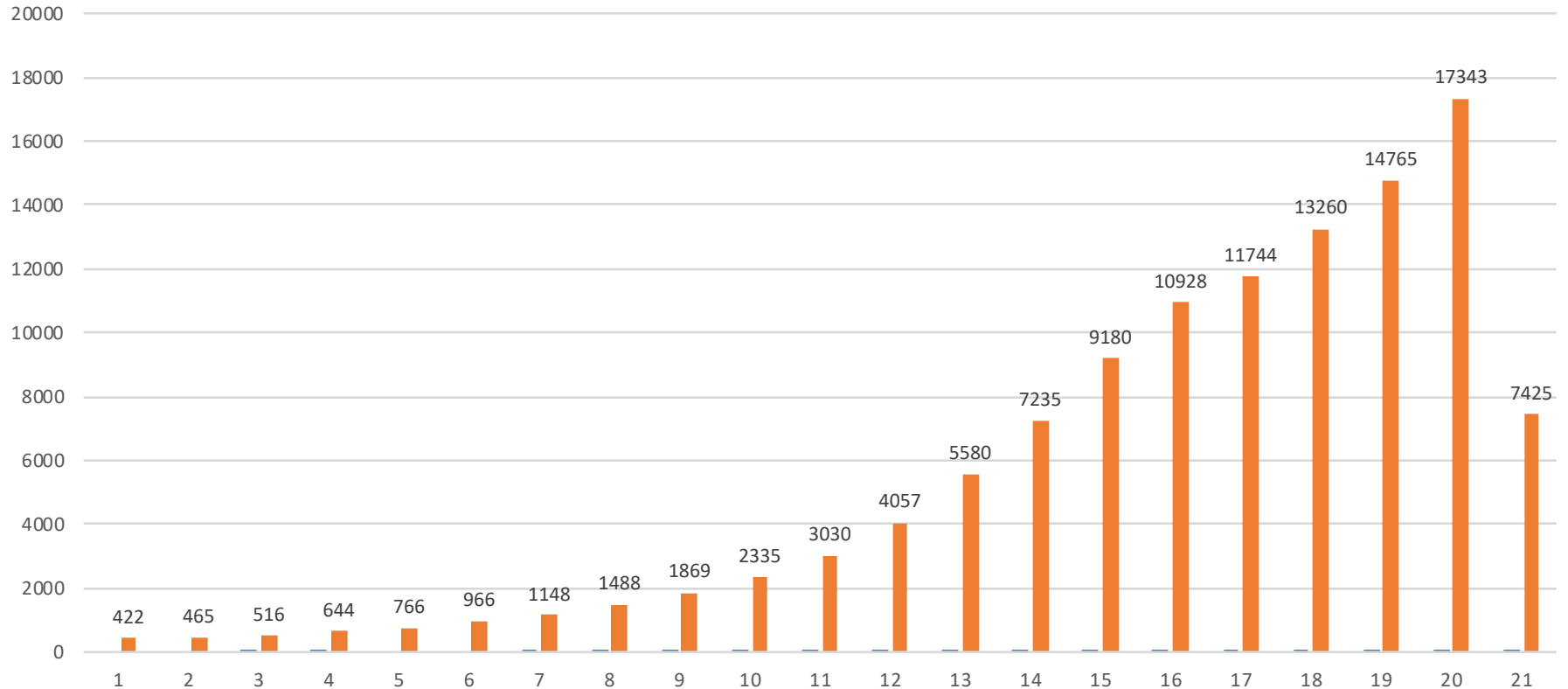




<https://emergeproject.org/>

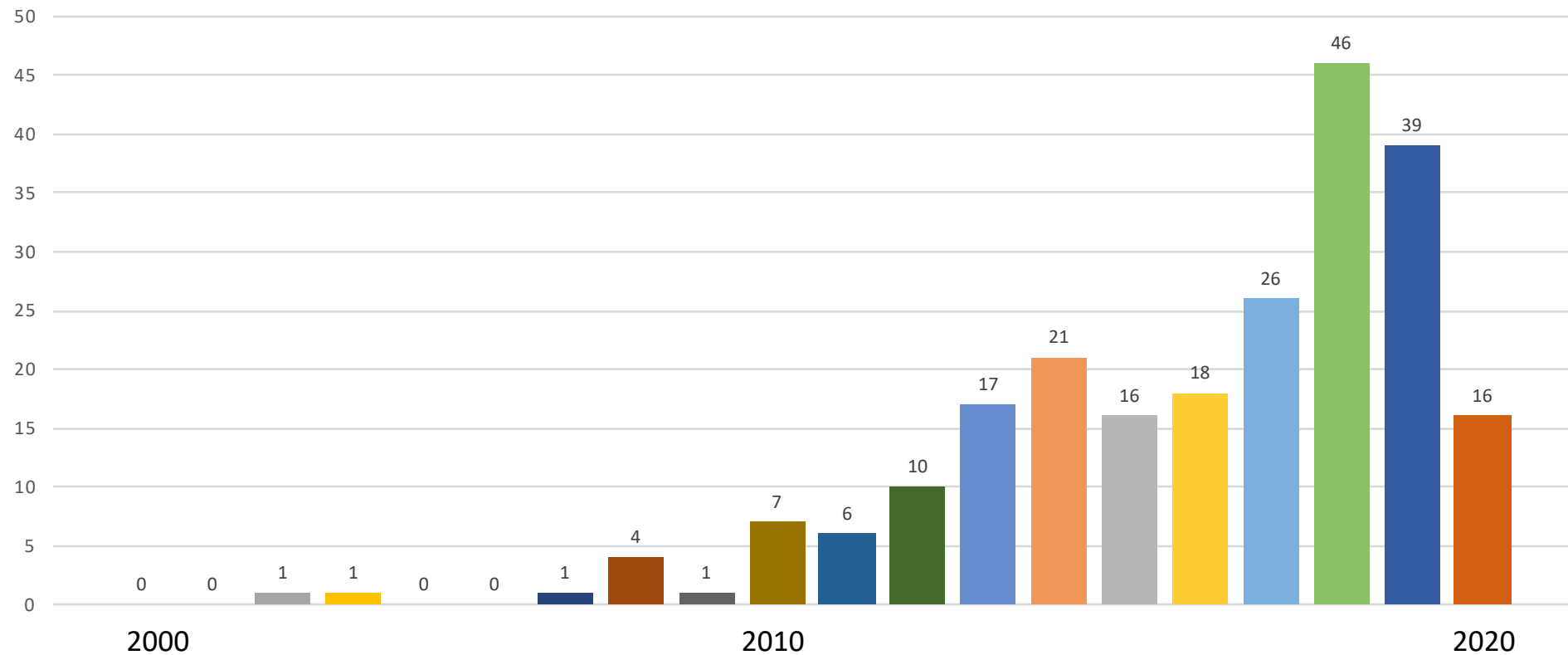


# THE RISE OF QUANTITATIVE META-ANALYSIS



Number of articles featuring 'meta-analysis' in the title in PubMed from 2000-2020

# THE RISE OF META-ETHNOGRAPHY...



Number of articles featuring 'meta-ethnography' in the title in PubMed from 2000-2020

# KEY ARGUMENTS: META-ETHNOGRAPHY

- Still an underused approach in public health & sustainable development
- Can help inform intervention development & transportability
- Can be further enhanced for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

# THANK YOU

Dr Po Man (Prilla) Tsang

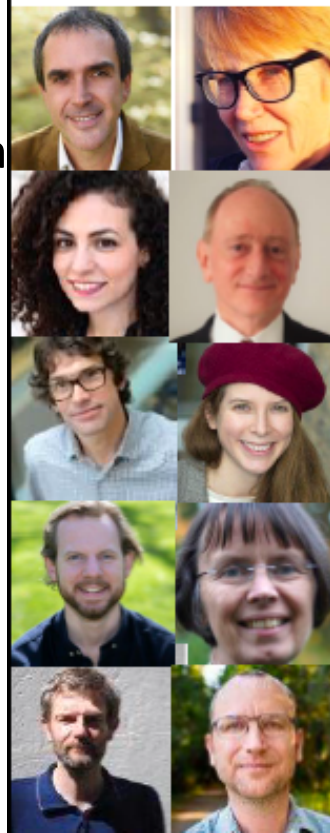
Students of the UCL MSc in Global Health  
& Development

Ekjut colleagues & Suhas Shewale

CEDIL team

Sapna Desai (Population Council India)

Lu Gram (UCL)



Co-authors	Discipline
Nancy Cartwright	Philosophy
Edoardo Masset	Economics
Macartan Humphreys	Political Science
Audrey Prost	Anthropology
David Gough	Evidence Synthesis
Sandy Oliver	Evidence Synthesis
Syreen Hassan	Public Health
James Hargreaves	Public Health
Chris Bonell	Public Health
Calum Davey	Public Health