FIFTH EDITION

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN NURSING
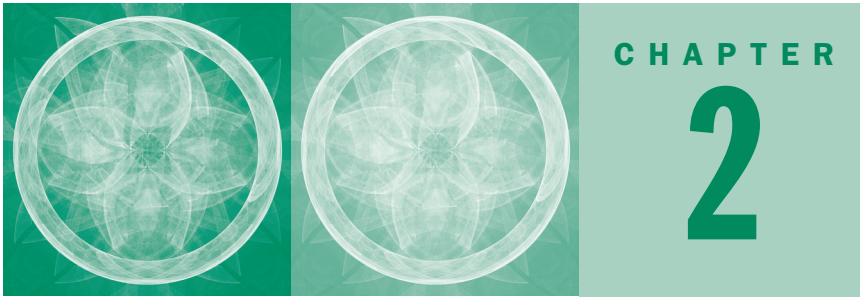
ADVANCING THE HUMANISTIC IMPERATIVE

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The Conduct of Qualitative Research: Common Essential Elements

*E*videnced-based practice drives much of our health-related inquiry. As the push for evidence increases, questions surface regarding the "fit" of qualitative inquiry in the current era of research. The nurse researcher seeking to use qualitative inquiry must clearly understand the motivation for choosing qualitative research methods. Is the researcher selecting the method to address a political agenda, funding priorities, or to some other externally driven foci? It remains primary that nurses focus on development of nursing knowledge. And because the time and energy required to conduct research are significant, it should be work that nurse researchers are deeply interested in. Therefore, doing qualitative research to advance an important question that has meaning for the researcher is essential. Volante (2008) offers that there is much complexity in nursing and nursing research and that there has been a shift from focusing on individuals to studying the "in-between of the action and interaction of everyday life" which necessitates that researchers reflect and share both their findings and philosophical propositions in an effort to produce evidence (p. 5).

As the conversation regarding best practices and evidence-based interventions continues, it will be important to clearly identify the value of qualitatively derived interventions. Morse (2006) provides six broad

areas of qualitative inquiry that can be used to identify, apply, and test interventions (p. 591). These are offered to assist the researcher in understanding the value of qualitative research in developing and testing nursing interventions.

1. Qualitative inquiry provides a theoretical foundation for nursing interventions, so that affective interventions are theory driven.
2. Qualitative inquiry provides a means for identifying covert interventions.
3. Qualitative inquiry is a means for making standard interventions more than a mechanical task.
4. Qualitative inquiry enables increasing the scope of practice by identifying the scope of practice.
5. Qualitative theory expands the definition of "interventions" to include theoretical approaches and qualitatively derived theory.
6. Qualitative methods enable the assessment of interventions (Morse, 2006, pp. 591–593).

Nurse researchers spend significant time developing their research questions and clarifying what it is they are planning to study. It is important that research studies be based on sound rationale and a clear understanding of the research question. Denzin (2000) suggests that in addition to carefully developing the research question, researchers must also examine the political nature of their work. All research represents a political enterprise that carries significant implications. The more nurses understand the motivating factors involved in their work, the more explicit they can be about its benefits.

Once the research question is clearly articulated and the researcher has an understanding of the problem and what impact the research activity will have on those studied, the discipline, and those to whom the results may be meaningful, the researcher will need to decide which research paradigm will most appropriately answer the question. This chapter offers the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach to inquiry, describes the common elements of the qualitative research process, and shares with the reader very practical information regarding how to enter the field. Based on this overview of the important aspects of qualitative research, readers will be able to assess whether qualitative inquiry offers an opportunity to explore the questions that arise from their practice.

Undoubtedly, to fully engage in one of the methods discussed in this book, the reader will need a solid understanding of the method and its assumptions. In addition, it is essential to engage a research mentor (Morse, 1997). As Morse has offered, one cannot learn to drive a car by reading the manual; hence, the researcher should not assume that one could conduct a qualitative study by reading this or any other qualitative research text. A mentor will make "shifting gears" a more effective process.

INITIATING THE STUDY: CHOOSING A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Exploring the Common Characteristics of Qualitative Research

In the conduct of research, certain attributes are common to the discovery process. This is true of both qualitative and quantitative designs. This section explores those common characteristics of qualitative research. Table 2-1 offers a comparison of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative researchers emphasize six significant characteristics in their research: (1) a belief in multiple realities; (2) a commitment to identifying an approach to understanding that supports the phenomenon studied; (3) a commitment to the participant's viewpoint; (4) the conduct of inquiry in a way that limits disruption of the natural context of the phenomena of interest; (5) acknowledged participation of the researcher in the research process; and (6) the reporting of the data in a literary style rich with participant commentaries.

The idea that multiple realities exist and create meaning for the individuals studied is a fundamental belief of qualitative researchers. "Qualitative researchers direct their attention to human realities rather than to the concrete realities of objects" (Boyd, 2001, p. 76). Instead of searching for one reality—one truth—researchers committed to qualitative research believe that individuals actively participate in social actions, and through these interactions that occur based on previous experiences, individuals come to know and understand phenomena in different ways. Because people do understand and live experiences differently, qualitative researchers do not subscribe to one truth but, rather, to many truths. Qualitative researchers believe that there are always multiple realities (perspectives) to consider when trying to fully understand a situation (Boyd, 2001).

Table 2-1 • Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods	
Quantitative	*Qualitative*
Objective	Subjectivity valued
One reality	Multiple realities
Reduction, control, prediction	Discovery, description, understanding
Measurable	Interpretative
Mechanistic	Organismic
Parts equal the whole	Whole is greater than the parts
Report statistical analyses	Report rich narrative
Researcher separate	Researcher part of research process
Subjects	Participants
Context free	Context dependent

Qualitative researchers are committed to discovery through the use of multiple ways of understanding. These researchers address questions about particular phenomena by finding an appropriate method or approach to answer the research question. The question leads the choice of method rather than the method leading the question. In some cases, more than one qualitative approach or more than one data collection strategy may be necessary to fully understand a phenomenon. For example, in a study of the culture of Taiwanese nursing homes, Chuang and Abbey (2009) used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and examination of related documents to understand nursing home life for older residents. All the data were recorded in either field notes or verbatim to determine how nursing home residents view their day-to-day living situation. The interviews provided the researcher with individual perceptions of the culture of the nursing home. The participant observations and document review offered additional data to further the understanding of culture of a Taiwanese nursing home. In this instance and in other qualitative research studies, researchers are committed to *discovery*. The discovery process in qualitative research provides the opportunity for variation in the use of data collection strategies. Method and data collection strategies may change as needed, rather than being prescribed before the inquiry begins. As Maggs-Rapport (2000) suggests, "there are benefits to be derived from an approach which combines . . . methods and methodologies, provided that methodological rigor is applied without compromising the underlying value of any one methodology" (p. 224). This process differs from the way traditional or positivist science is developed.

Commitment to participants' viewpoints is another characteristic of qualitative research. Use of unstructured interview, observation, and artifacts grounds researchers in the real life of study participants. Researchers are co-participants in discovery and understanding of the realities of the phenomena studied. Qualitative researchers will conduct extensive interviews and observations, searching documents, and artifacts of importance to fully understand the context of what is researched. Context is critical to authenticating participants' descriptions. As Topping (2006) offers, "to strip the context from the study is to remove the person from the place where the experience was enacted and hence devalue the understanding gained from the experience" (p. 6).

The purpose of the extensive investigation is to provide a view of reality that is important to the study participants, rather than to the researchers. For example, in an ethnography completed by Hunter, Spence, McKenna, & Iedema (2008), the authors were interested in learning how nurses learned from each other in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Hunter et al. (2008) spent 12 months in fieldwork conducting observations and in-depth interviews with nurses, doctors, and allied health clinicians in the 20-bed NICU in order to fully understand the ways that clinicians learn from each other. Their findings offer a perspective on the very complex environment in which nurses practicing in the NICU in Australia find themselves. Their

research closely examines social interaction that is so important in understanding the context of learning and the transfer of knowledge that ultimately leads to higher quality nursing practice (p. 664).

Another characteristic of qualitative research is conduct of the inquiry in a way that does not disturb the natural context of the phenomena studied. Researchers are obligated to conduct a study in a manner that least disturbs the natural setting. Using ethnographic research to illustrate this characteristic, the ethnographer would study a particular culture with as little intrusion as possible. Living among study participants is one way to minimize the intrusion and maintain the natural context of the setting. It is unrealistic to believe that the introduction of an unknown individual will not change the nature of the relationships and activities observed; however, the researcher's prolonged presence should minimize the effect of the intrusion.

All research affects the study participants in some way. The addition of any new person or experience changes the way people think or act. The important factor in qualitative research that makes the difference is the serious attention to discovering the *emic view*, that is, the insider's perspective. What is it like for the participant? Qualitative researchers explore the insider's view with utmost respect for the individual's perspective and his or her space. As stated earlier, prolonged engagement by the researcher has the effect of reducing overt changes in behavior of those studied. Therefore, a nurse interested in conducting a qualitative study must provide adequate time for building a trusting relationship and eliminating the distractions created by introducing someone new in the setting.

Researcher as instrument is another characteristic of qualitative research. The use of the researcher as instrument requires an acceptance that the researcher is part of the study. Because the researcher is the observer, interviewer, or the interpreter of various aspects of the inquiry, objectivity serves no purpose. Qualitative investigators accept that all research is conducted with a subjective bias. They further believe that researcher participation in the inquiry has the potential to add to the richness of data collection and analysis. Objectivity is a principle in quantitative research that documents the rigor of the science. In qualitative research, rigor is most often determined by the study participants and consumers of the study. From the participants' points of view: Do they recognize what the researcher has reported to be their culture or experience? From the consumer's perspective: Does the researcher stay true to the participants' expressions of their experience? Is enough evidence provided so that the consumer can assess this? The acknowledgment of the subjective nature of qualitative research and the understanding that researchers affect what is studied are fundamental to the conduct of qualitative inquiry.

Regardless of the approach, qualitative researchers will report the study findings in a rich literary style. Participants' experiences are the findings of qualitative research. Therefore, it is essential these experiences be reported from the perspective of the people who have lived them. Inclusion of quotations,

commentaries, and narratives adds to the richness of the report and to the understanding of the experience and context in which they occur. Table 2-1 describes the contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research.

These six characteristics guide qualitative researchers on a journey of exploration and discovery. Doing qualitative research is similar to reading a good novel. When conducted in the spirit of the philosophy that supports it, qualitative research is rich and rewarding, leaving researchers and consumers with a desire to understand more about the phenomena of interest.

Selecting the Method Based on Phenomenon of Interest

Agreement with the basic tenets of qualitative research is the first step in deciding whether to initiate a qualitative research study. Once researchers understand that these essential elements will guide all that they do, they can begin to explore various qualitative methods. It is important to note that all qualitative approaches "share a similar goal in that they seek to arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomenon" (Woodgate, 2000, p. 194). What the researcher will need to determine is which approach will answer the research question. The choice of method depends on the question being asked.

Because each method is explained in depth in the following chapters, the examples that follow serve only as an introduction to method selection based on the phenomena of interest. While reading the examples, keep in mind that the qualitative nurse researcher is more concerned with values, beliefs, and meaning attached to health and illness than to aggregates of conditions (Hayes, 2001).

For example, a nurse educator working in the community health setting finds her students reluctant to engage clients despite adequate knowledge of the students' previous successes in communicating with patients. There is something about the individual students' behaviors that has her perplexed. The method she selects is phenomenology. The purpose of phenomenology is to explore the lived experience of individuals. Phenomenology provides researchers with the framework for discovering what it is like to live an experience. Using this method, she can interview each of the students and begin to understand what their lived experience of community health is.

If the nurse researcher is interested in the community health agency in which her students work, given the outstanding community health practiced in the agency as well as its political antecedents, a historical inquiry is the research approach of choice. For a historical study, review of institutional documents such as meeting minutes, policy manuals in addition to community meeting minutes, personal documents, diaries, research papers and proceedings, newspaper articles, commentaries, narratives, and personal interviews will provide the necessary information to chronicle the contribution the agency has made in the care of community.

Another related question that might be important to answer is the following: What is it like to make decisions to improve community health in times of diminishing resources? Based on the preceding comments, phenomenology may be the method of choice; however, assume that it is not the experience of being a nurse in the agency that is of interest to the researcher but, rather, the process that the administration goes through to arrive at the decision about how best to allocate limited resources. In this case, the research method selected would be grounded theory. The researcher is more interested in understanding the process of choosing between multiple, competing demands for resources rather than what the individual nurse experiences as a result of working with limited resources. The purpose of the inquiry is what drives the choice of method. More specifically, the grounded theory researcher interested in the process of choosing among competing priorities in difficult financial times is committed to developing a theory, that being, understanding the process that the agency administration goes through to arrive at that decision.

In a related situation, a nurse might be interested in studying the health practices of one or more neighborhoods served by the agency. The nurse researcher would want to observe and collect information about group members, their activities, values, meaningful artifacts, and life ways, as well as participate in group sessions. In doing so, a full understanding of the culture of the neighborhood's health would become evident. In this case, ethnography would be the method of choice.

If a nurse researcher is interested in social change as it relates to community health and the ability of a selected agency to affect health outcomes for a particular neighborhood, an action research study might be the appropriate choice. By working with agency employees and neighborhood residents to study the interaction between the agency and the neighborhood and how relationship affects health outcomes, the researcher, neighborhood residents and agency employees have the potential to learn from the experiences and build on mutual successes or co-create structures to improve underserved priorities. If the researcher is committed to a collaborative research approach that facilitates participation and action, then action research is an appropriate choice. When researchers choose action research, they serve two masters: theory and practice (Jenks, 1995).

This limited description demonstrates that there are a number of research methods to address specific practice questions. Researchers need to clearly identify the focus of the inquiry and then choose the method that will most effectively answer the question.

Understanding the Philosophic Position

After researchers have identified the research question and have made explicit the approach to studying the question, a thorough understanding of the philosophic assumptions that are foundational to the method is

essential. Too frequently, novice qualitative researchers develop and implement research studies without having a solid understanding of the philosophic underpinnings of the chosen method. This lack of understanding has the potential of leading to sloppy science, resulting in misunderstood findings. For instance, phenomenology is an approach that can be used to study lived experience. Based on the philosophic position supported by the researcher, different interpretations might occur. To further illustrate this point, phenomenologists who support Edmund Husserl—a prominent leader of the phenomenological movement—and his followers believe that the purpose of phenomenology is to provide pure understanding. Supporters of the philosophic positions of Martin Heidegger and his colleagues believe that phenomenology is interpretive. Neither group is incorrect; rather, each approaches the study of lived experience with different sets of goals and expectations.

The comments offered here should help the reader develop an appreciation for the importance of understanding the method chosen and its philosophic underpinnings. Making explicit the school of thought that guides an inquiry will help researchers to conduct a credible study and help those people who use the findings to apply the results within the appropriate context.

Using the Literature Review

In the development of a quantitative research study, an interested researcher would begin with an extensive literature search on the topic of interest. This review documents the necessity for the study and provides a discussion of the area of interest and related topics. It helps the researcher determine whether the planned study has been conducted, and if so, whether significant results were discovered. Furthermore, it helps the researcher refine the research question, select a theoretical framework, and build a case for why the topic of interest should be studied and how the researcher will approach the topic.

Qualitative researchers do not generally begin with an *extensive* literature review. Some qualitative researchers would suggest that no literature review should be conducted before the inquiry begins. Others accept that a cursory review of the literature may help focus the study or provide an orienting framework (Creswell, 2003, p. 30). The reason for not conducting the literature review initially is to reduce the likelihood that the investigator will develop suppositions or biases about the topic under consideration. Further, by not developing preconceived ideas about the topic, it is assumed that the researcher will be protected from leading the participants during the interviewing process in the direction of the researcher's beliefs. For instance, if a researcher is interested in developing a theory about the process a client goes through in accepting the necessity of an amputation, a review of the literature before the study might lead to the development of preconceived

notions about amputees. The researcher may not have held these beliefs before the review, but, following it, now has information that could affect how he or she collects and analyzes data. Creswell states, "in a qualitative study, use the literature sparingly in the beginning of the plan in order to convey an inductive design, unless the qualitative strategy-type requires a substantial literature orientation at the outset" (p. 33).

It is, however, essential to conduct the literature review after analyzing the data. The purpose of reviewing the literature in a qualitative study is to place the findings of the study in the context of what is already known. Generally, qualitative researchers do not use the literature review to establish grounds for the study or to suggest a theoretical or conceptual framework. The purpose of the literature review in a qualitative study is to tell the reader how the findings fit into what is already known about the phenomena. It is not meant to confirm or argue existing findings.

Explicating the Researcher's Beliefs

Before starting a qualitative study, it is in the researcher's best interest to make clear his or her thoughts, ideas, suppositions, or presuppositions about the topic, as well as personal biases. The purpose of this activity is to bring to consciousness and reveal what is believed about a topic. By bringing to consciousness the researcher's beliefs, he or she is in a better position to approach the topic honestly and openly. Explication of personal beliefs makes the investigator more aware of the potential judgments that may occur during data collection and analysis based on the researcher's belief system rather than on the actual data collected from participants. One of the best ways to make one's beliefs known is to write them down. Writing out what one believes before actually conducting the study gives the author a frame of reference. Journaling during the time that one is engaged in the research also helps to keep an open mind and differentiate what the researcher's thoughts are versus the ideas, comments, and activities of the participants. As qualitative researchers conduct their studies, they can use their journal to "reality-test" what is being observed or heard against what they have written down (the researcher's ideas or presuppositions).

As an example, let's say that the topic of interest is quality of life for individuals diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). The researcher has an interest in the topic based on a long history of working with individuals with end-stage disease. Based on the researcher's experience, his or her perception is that people with MS live sad, limited existences. If researchers do not explicate these perceptions, they may lead informants to describe their experiences in the direction of the researchers' own beliefs about what is real or important. This can occur as a result of the questions asked. In asking questions, the researcher might try to validate his or her ideas about MS without really discovering the meaning of MS for those who live with it. Remember, the way the questions are worded can affect the outcome of the interview

and sometimes impose answers on respondents (McDougall, 2000). The act of expressing one's ideas should help remind the researcher to listen and see what is real for the informants rather than what is real for the researcher. Schutz (1970) recommended that researchers follow this process of describing personal beliefs about their assumptions to help them refrain from making judgments about phenomena based on personal experiences.

Once the researcher has explicated his or her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about phenomena, it is recommended that the researcher bracket those thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. *Bracketing* is the cognitive process of putting aside one's own beliefs, not making judgments about what one has observed or heard, and remaining open to data as they are revealed. Specifically, in descriptive phenomenology, this activity is carried out before the beginning of the study and is repeated throughout data collection and analysis. In ethnographic work, keeping a diary of personal thoughts and feelings is an excellent way to make clear the researcher's ideas. Once revealed, the researcher can set them aside. *Setting them aside* means to be constantly aware of what the researcher believes and trying to keep it separate from what is being shared by the informant. By conducting this self-disclosure, researchers are more likely to be able to keep their eyes open and to remain cognizant of when data collection and analysis reflect their own personal beliefs rather than informants' beliefs.

Ahern (1999) states that the process of bracketing is iterative and part of a reflexive journey. She states that it is important to process your thoughts about the phenomenon of interest. As suggested earlier, writing down your thoughts is one of the best ways to be aware of what you believe. Once they have been written down, you should reflect on what you have written and try to understand why you have written what you have, what values are inherent in your statements, and how do they affect your analysis. It is essential that the researcher be aware of the potential impact that imposing personal agendas can have on the process of data collection and analysis. Bracketing is essential if the researcher is to share the informants' views of the studied phenomena.

Choosing the Setting for Data Collection

The setting for qualitative research is the field. The *field* is the place where individuals of interest live—where they experience life. The inquiry will be conducted in the homes, neighborhoods, classrooms, or sites selected by the study participants. The reason for conducting data collection in the field is to maintain the natural settings where phenomena occur. For instance, if an investigator is interested in studying the culture of an intensive care unit (ICU), he or she will visit an ICU. If a researcher is interested in studying the clinical decision-making skills of nurses, he or she will go to nurses who use this process and ask them where they want to be interviewed or observed.

Being in the field requires reciprocity in decision making. The researcher is not in control of the study setting or those who inform the inquiry. Participants will decide what information they share with the researcher. For instance, if the researcher is interested in studying the experiences of people who live in a nursing home, he or she would need access to people who have this life situation. The researcher will then enter the setting and select appropriate individuals to interview based on specific criteria. However, because of the frailty of the participants they may not wish to share their thoughts or feelings in one sitting or at all. Visiting frequently and building a trusting relationship can help the participant feel more comfortable in sharing sensitive information and provide the element of control that may be very important to the participant. It is essential to remember that using qualitative research methods requires good interpersonal skills and a willingness to relinquish control. The mutual trust that develops based on the reciprocal nature of decision making will enhance the discovery process by allowing access to personal information and private spaces usually reserved for significant people in the lives of informants. The conduct of qualitative research with its requirement of close social interaction may create situations that can either limit or enhance access to information. The close social interaction also has the potential to create ethical dilemmas that need careful attention (see Chapter 4). Only by being aware of the distinctive nature of the interactions and being in the field will the researcher be truly aware of the strengths and potential weaknesses of this form of research.

Selecting Participants

Qualitative researchers generally do not label the individuals who inform their inquiries as *subjects.* The use of the terms *participants* or *informants* illustrates the status those studied play in the research process. "Individuals cooperating in the study play an active rather than a passive role and are therefore referred to as informants or study participants" (Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001, p. 31). The participants' active involvement in the inquiry helps those who are interested in their experiences or cultures to better understand their lives and social interactions.

Individuals are selected to participate in qualitative research based on their first-hand experience with a culture, social process, or phenomenon of interest. For instance, if a phenomenologist is interested in studying the culture of women with anorexia, then the informants for the study must be those women who are anorexic. The participants are selected for the purpose of describing an experience in which they have participated. Unlike quantitative research, there is no need to randomly select individuals because manipulation, control, and generalization of findings are not the intent of the inquiry. The outcome of a qualitative study should be greater understanding of the phenomena (Krasner, 2001). Therefore, the researcher interested in women who are anorexic should interview as many anorexic

women as necessary to obtain a clear understanding of the culture. This type of sampling has been labeled *purposeful sampling* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). It has also been called *purposive sampling* (Field & Morse, 1985). A similar type of sampling is *theoretical sampling* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1980). Theoretical sampling, used primarily in grounded theory, is one particular type of purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997). Theoretical sampling is a complex form of sampling based on concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory (Coyne, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). More specifically, Glaser (1978) states,

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (p. 36)

Theoretical sampling "is a valuable way of encouraging studies to develop and build on theory at an early stage" (Thompson, 1999, p. 816).

What both purposeful and theoretical sampling represent is a commitment to observing and interviewing people who have had experience with or are part of the culture or phenomenon of interest. The goal for qualitative researchers is to develop a rich or dense description of the culture or phenomenon, rather than using sampling techniques that support generalizability of the findings. A particular purposeful sampling technique is *snowballing*. Snowballing uses one informant to find another. This technique is especially useful when those you wish to interview are difficult to locate. For example, if you were interested in studying the experience of undocumented workers access to health care, it would be difficult to locate individuals willing to talk to you in one place. However, if you know of one undocumented worker who is willing to talk to you, he/she may be willing to refer you to another. Sixsmith, Boneham, and Goldring (2003) offer that although this strategy may be very helpful, it also has the drawback of potentially limiting those in your study who are from similar backgrounds.

Cohen, Phillips, and Palos (2001) discuss the value of including cultural minorities in qualitative research studies. They share that it is not only valuable to include minorities but also mandated by the National Institutes of Health. Therefore, when studying a particular culture or phenomenon, the qualitative nurse researcher should be aware of the importance and overall benefits of including minorities in the study when appropriate. Cohen and colleagues discuss the potential skepticism that may be encountered when nurses of different cultural backgrounds try to enlist members of other cultures. They suggest that nurse researchers engage diverse populations by using some of the following strategies: (1) seek endorsement and support from community leaders; (2) commit to giving back something to the group you wish to study; (3) develop an ongoing relationship of trust and respect; (4) develop cultural competence and sensitivity; (5) become well acquainted with the group before you approach them; (6) recognize the

heterogeneous nature of a group; and (7) use anthropologic strategies when conducting the research (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 194).

Finally, Kirkevold and Bergland (2007) discuss the difficulty of interviewing participants with significant health problems in a traditional interview format lasting from 60 to 90 minutes. They suggest that certain populations such as those with chronic illness may not be able to sustain long, uninterrupted narratives. These authors suggest strategies such as enlarging or varying your sample; maximizing the quality of the interview; repeating the interview over days, weeks, or months; or combining interviews with observation. This may help to build the rich narrative so important in qualitative research.

Choosing the setting and participants appropriately will assist in developing a successful research study. Knowing how to access the site, knowing what to expect from those who are part of a particular group, and knowing how to most effectively develop a trusting relationship with those from whom you intend to learn will support achievement of the research goals.

Achieving Saturation

A feature that is closely related to the topic of sampling is saturation. *Saturation* refers to the repetition of discovered information and confirmation of previously collected data (Morse, 1994). This means that rather than sampling a specific number of individuals to gain significance based on statistical manipulation, the qualitative researcher is looking for repetition and confirmation of previously collected data. For example, Flinck, Astedt-Kurki, and Paavilainen (2008) were interested in describing "intimate partner violence as experienced by men and to formulate the common structure of meanings of experiences of men exposed to intimate partner violence" (p. 322). Their sample included men between 36 and 56 years who were recruited through personal contacts. Flinck et al. stated that saturation was reached when no new themes emerged. Each of the 10 participants was interviewed twice to reach this degree of closure. At the end of the 10 interviews, the researchers were able to recognize the repetition in the data and determined that the new information was surfacing. The repetitive nature of data is the point at which the researcher determines that saturation has been achieved.

Morse (1989), however, warned that saturation may be a myth. She believes that if another group of individuals were observed or interviewed at another time, new data might be revealed. The best that a qualitative researcher can hope for in terms of saturation is to saturate the specific culture or phenomenon at a particular time.

SUMMARY

*I*n this chapter, an explanation of the commonalities of qualitative research have been offered to provide an informed framework for deciding whether qualitative research best suits you as the researcher and the research question you wish to pursue. Introduction to the process is offered to help

the reader understand what the similarities and differences are between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. The intent is to offer the reader an exposure to the processes and terms that are important to qualitative research approaches. It is essential that the reader understands and then embraces the similarities and differences in research paradigms before launching into implementation of a qualitative study. In the next chapter, a description of qualitative data generation and management will be provided to ground the reader in the language and processes of qualitative research. The intent is to offer the reader of this chapter and Chapter 3 a general understanding of qualitative research. In the chapters that follow, a more intensive description of specific approaches will be offered to more completely engage the reader in understanding many of the important qualitative research approaches.

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