Qualitative Research: Design & Methods

Selected Articles from
Research Design Review **Published in 2019**

Margaret R. Roller MA

Research Design Review – www.researchdesignreview.com– is a blog first published in November 2009. RDR currently consists of more than 220 articles and has 650+ subscribers along with nearly 780,000 views. As in recent years, many of the articles published in 2019 centered on qualitative research. This paper represents a compilation of 14 articles pertaining to qualitative research design (4 articles) and various methods (10 articles). The articles on qualitative research design touch on basic yet important considerations when choosing a qualitative approach; specifically, the critical thinking skills required of the researcher to integrate quality principles in the research design, effectively derive meaning from the human experience, and understand the important role of reflexivity. The 10 articles on research methods covers focus group discussions (e.g., building rapport, the asynchronous mode), in-depth interviews (e.g., strengths and limitations, mitigating interviewer bias), case-centered and narrative research (e.g., a case study exploring communication with educators among working-class Latino parents in urban Los Angeles), and an ethnographic case study.

w w w . r o l l e r r e s e a r c h . c o m

r m r @ r o l l e r r e s e a r c h . c o m

J a n u a r y 2 0 2 0

Table of Contents

Critical Thinking in Qualitative Research Design

The following is a modified excerpt from Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 20-21).

Many researchers and scholars have advanced strategies, criteria, or frameworks for thinking about and promoting the importance of "the quality" of qualitative research at some stage in the research design. One such strategy is the framework developed by Levitt et al. (2017) that centers on methodological integrity. Another is the Total Quality Framework (TQF) which has been discussed throughout *Research Design Review*, as in the article titled "The 'Quality' in Qualitative Research Debate & the Total Quality Framework."

The strategies or ways of thinking about quality in qualitative research that are most relevant to the TQF are those that are (a) paradigm neutral, (b) flexible (i.e., do not adhere to a defined method), and (c) applicable to all phases of the research process. Among these, the work of Lincoln and Guba (e.g., 1981, 1985, 1986, and 1995) is the most noteworthy. Although they profess a paradigm orientation "of the constructionist camp, loosely defined" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 116), the quality criteria Lincoln and Guba set forth nearly 30 years ago is particularly pertinent to the TQF in that it advances the concept of trustworthiness as a major criterion for judging whether a qualitative research study is "rigorous." In their model, trustworthiness addresses the issue of "How can a [qualitative researcher] persuade [someone] that the findings of a [study] are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). That is, what are the criteria upon which such an assessment should be based? In this way, Lincoln and Guba espouse standards that are flexible (i.e., can be adapted depending on the research context) as well as relevant throughout the research process.

In answering, they put forth the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative research study are internally valid (i.e., accurate). Credibility is established through (a) prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observation, (c) triangulation, (d) peer debriefings, (e) negative case analysis, (f) referential adequacy, and (g) member checks. Transferability refers to the extent to which other researchers or users of the research can determine the applicability of the research design and/or the study findings to other research contexts (e.g., other participants, places, and times). Transferability is primarily established through thick description that is "necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Thick description and transferability are key elements of the TQF Transparency component.

Dependability is the degree to which an independent "auditor" can look at the qualitative research process and determine its "acceptability" and, in so doing, create an audit trail of the process. To that end, the Transparency component of the TQF deals directly with the idea of providing the user of the research with an audit trail pertaining to all aspects of the research in the final research document. Confirmability refers to utilizing the same dependability audit to examine the evidence

in the data that purportedly supports the researcher's findings, interpretations, and recommendations.

Regardless of the quality framework researchers use, the important objective is to stretch researchers' understanding of how design decisions impact the integrity of qualitative data. By developing these kinds of critical thinking skills, researchers ensure a quality approach that ultimately delivers useful outcomes to the users of the research.

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, *29*(2), 75–91.

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, *4*(1), 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082

Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(3), 275–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100301

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, *30*(1), 73–84.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97–128). Sage Publications.

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Image captured from: https://www.wabisabilearning.com/blog/critical-thinking-questions-subject

Making Sense of the Human Experience with Qualitative Research

The following is a modified excerpt of the introduction to [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) *(Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 1-2).*

Human beings engage in some form of "qualitative research" all the time. This is because there is not a context in which humans engage that does not require some process of taking in (i.e., gathering) information from the environment and developing that information into an interpretive nugget that can then be used to make sense of and react to particular situations. Humans do this so routinely that they are rarely aware of the information-gathering stages they process, or even their constant and natural proclivities to do so. Although some human beings may be more successful at processing contextual information than others, humans generally do not consciously think about the quality of the information they take in and the quality of the decision-making processes they apply to that information as they go through their daily lives.

As a formal method of inquiry, qualitative research—with its emphasis on the individual and the role that context and relationships play in forming thoughts and behaviors—is at the core of what it means to conduct research with human subjects. Qualitative research assumes that the answer to any single research question or objective lies within a host of related questions or issues pertaining to deeply seeded aspects of humanity. A qualitative inquiry into breast cancer treatment, for example, might begin by asking "How do women cope with breast cancer treatment?", from which the researcher considers any number of relevant personal issues around "coping" and then addresses further and deeper questions, such as "What is the quality of life among women undergoing breast cancer treatment?", "How do various aspects of this quality of life compare to life before their cancer treatment, before breast surgery, and before breast cancer diagnosis?", "What words do women use to describe their life experiences and what is the relevance (personal meaning) of these word choices?", "Which people in these women's lives have the most impact on their ability to cope?", and "How strong is their motivation to continue treatment and what is the biggest contributor to this motivation?"

Qualitative research is about making connections. It is about understanding that good research involving human beings cannot be anything but complex, and that delving beyond the obvious or the expedient is a necessary tactic in order to understand how one facet of something adds meaning to some other facet, both of which lead the researcher to insights on this complexity. A purpose of qualitative research, then, is to "celebrate the moment"—the in-depth interview, the group discussion, the observation, or the life story—and the intricacies revealed from that moment. Qualitative research celebrates the fact that the complexities and intricacies—the connections—revealed at any one moment may or may not exist in another moment in time, reflecting the ever-changing reality of being human. Qualitative research embraces this reality and, in so doing, savors the nuances inherent in what people say, what they do, and how they think. Identifying, connecting, and finding meaning in these often vague, fleeting qualities of human reality comprise what it means to conduct a qualitative research study.

Image captured from: https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/20-quotes-to-inspire-connectedness/

"Did I Do Okay?": The Case for the Participant Reflexive Journal

It is not unusual for an in-depth interview (IDI) or focus group participant to wonder at some point in an interview or discussion if the participant "did okay"; that is, whether the participant responded to the researcher's questions in the manner in which the researcher intended. For instance, an interviewer investigating parents' healthy food purchases for their children might ask a mother to describe a typical shopping trip to the grocery store. In response, the mother might talk about the day of the week, the time of day, where she shops, and whether she is alone or with her children or someone else. After which she might ask the interviewer, Is that the kind of thing you were looking for? Is that what you mean? Did I do okay in answering your question? The interviewer's follow up might be, Tell me something about the in-store experience such as the sections of the store you visit and the kinds of food items you typically buy.

It is one thing to misinterpret the intention of a researcher's question – e.g., detailing the logistics of food purchasing rather than the actual food purchase experience – but another thing to adjust responses based on any number of factors influenced by the researcher-participant interaction. These interaction effects stem, in part, from the participant's attempt to "do okay" in their role in the research process. Dr. Kathryn Roulston at the University of Georgia has written quite a bit about interaction in research interviews, including an edited volume *Interactional Studies of Qualitative Research Interviews*.

The dynamics that come into play in an IDI or focus group study – and in varying degrees, ethnographic research – are of great interest to qualitative researchers and important considerations in the overall quality of the research. This is the reason that a lot has been written about the researcher's reflexive journal and its importance in allowing researchers to reflect on their contribution to the data gathered. Many articles in *Research Design Review* – such as "Interviewer Bias & Reflexivity in Qualitative Research" and "Reflections from the Field: Questions to Stimulate Reflexivity Among Qualitative Researchers" – and elsewhere – including an August 2017 issue in *Qualitative Psychology* devoted to reflexivity and a host of articles such as Shari Goldstein's "Reflexivity in Narrative Research" – have discussed reflexivity and the role of the reflexive journal in the validity of the outcomes.

And yet, with the exception of scholars such as Kathy Roulston, relatively little has been discussed concerning the participant's actual experience of the research event (i.e., the interview or group discussion) and its potential to undermine the validity of qualitative data. In particular, it would be of interest to understand how the participant's actual experience *from the participant's perspective* shaped the outcomes. That is, a participant reflexive journal. Not unlike the reflexivity practiced by researchers, *what if* participants were asked to reflect on their role in the research process. *What if* participants were asked to reflect on introspective questions such as:

- What affect did the interviewer's race or ethnicity have on my responses?
- How did the physical space in which the interview was conducted affect my responses?
- Did the moderator's handling of the group dynamics stifle ideas and experiences I wanted to share?
- The interviewer didn't seem to like me, how did that alter the veracity of my responses?
- How did the differing opinions expressed in the focus group change my own opinions?
- Did I agree or disagree with certain ideas to simply go along with everyone else in the group discussion?

In this way, the participant reflexive journal empowers participants to answer the question so often asked – "Did I do okay?"

Image captured from: https://www.pexels.com/search/reflection/

Giving Voice: Reflexivity in Qualitative Research

Homegoing, the debut novel by Yaa Gyasi, is a moving tale of slavery and its translation across generations. At one point, we read about a descendant in Ghana who teaches history and on the first day of class stumbles on a lesson concerning "the problem of history." The problem he refers to is that history is constructed from stories that are handed down over time yet "We cannot know which story is correct because we were not there." He goes on to say to his students

We believe the one who has the power. He is the one who gets to write the story. So when you study history, you must always ask yourself, Whose story am I missing? Whose voice was suppressed so that this voice could come forth? Once you have figured that out, you must find that story too. From there, you begin to get a clearer, yet still imperfect, picture. (pp. 226-227)

The month of February seems like an appropriate time to reflect on power and what we as researchers are missing in our studies of vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population. After all, with the exception of participatory research, we are typically the ones who control the design and implementation of data collection along with the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings.

Reflection on our role in the research process should be common practice. But our reflection takes on new meaning when our participants are those with the weakest voice. As we sit down with our reflexive journal and consider our prejudices and subjectivities (by asking ourselves the kinds of questions outlined in this *RDR* article), researchers might do well to pay particular attention to their assumptions and beliefs – What assumptions did I make about the participant(s)? and How did my personal values, beliefs, life story, and/or social/economic status affect or shape: the questions I asked, the interjections I made, my listening skills, and/or my behavior?

Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) address this in their discussion on interviewing Black women on sensitive topics. As Black women themselves, they felt no less obligated to reflect on their status.

As Black feminist qualitative researchers, we are particularly attuned to how we become the research instruments and the primary sieves of re/presentation in our exploration of Black womanhood. (p. 213)

By way of this reflection, the authors make recommendations toward the interviewing of Black women on sensitive topics, including such concepts as "contextualizing self in the research process." The authors also come to the realization that "the diversity of Black experience has been misrepresented [by] traditional family studies orientations," asserting that "the persistent matrix of intersectionality that Black women endure, succumb, and overcome" cannot be fully addressed if "researchers debate and deconstruct out of existence the 'critical essences' (i.e., race, class, and gender) that matter to Black women's existence and survival in this world" (p. 213).

So, take another look at your reflexive journal. Take another look at your research with the vulnerable and marginalized. And, if not already there, consider adding these queries – so well put by Gyasi – to your journal: Whose story am I missing? Whose voice has been suppressed? Whose story do I need to seek out to help me gain a clearer, more complete picture of the people and the phenomenon I hope to illuminate through my research? How, indeed, have I used my power as a researcher to give center stage to the "critical essences" of society's minority voices?

Few, A. L., Stephens, D. P., & Rouse-Arnett, M. (2003). Sister-to-sister talk: Transcending boundaries and challenges in qualitative research with Black women. *Family Relations*, *52*(3), 205–215.

Image captured from: https://jennymackness.wordpress.com/category/connectedcourses/

Building Rapport & Engagement in the Focus Group Method

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 150-152).

The ability to quickly build rapport with focus group participants and then maintain it throughout the discussion session is a necessary skill of all moderators. Regardless of mode (in-person, telephone, or online), focus group moderators must learn how to effectively engage participants to generate accurate and complete information. Rapport building for the moderator begins even before the start of a group discussion, when he/she welcomes the participants as they arrive at the facility (for an in-person discussion), on the teleconference line (for a telephone focus group), or in the virtual focus group room (for an online discussion), and it continues beyond the introductory remarks during which the moderator acknowledges aspects of the discussion environment that may not be readily apparent (e.g., the presence of observers, the microphone or other device being used to audio record the discussion), states a few ground rules for the session, and allows participants to ask any questions or make comments before the start of the discussion. In the in-person mode, the moderator's rapport building goes beyond what he/she says to participants to make them feel at ease to also include the physical environment. For example, business executives might feel comfortable and willing to talk sitting around a standard conference table; however, in order to build rapport and stimulate engagement among a group of teenagers, the moderator needs to select a site where teens will feel that they can relax and freely discuss the issues. This might be a standard focus group facility with a living or recreation room setup (i.e., a room with couches, bean bags, and rugs on the floor for sitting) or an unconventional location such as someone's home or the city park.

Another aspect of the physical environment in in-person discussions that impacts rapport and consequently the quality of the data gathered is the seating arrangement. For instance, Krueger and Casey (2009) recommend that the moderator position a shy participant directly across from his or her seat in order to "maximize eye contact." Other moderators prefer to keep particularly talkative and potentially domineering participants in seats close to them so that they can use their proximity to better manage these participants as needed. The "ideal" seating arrangement will vary depending on the physical environment; the number, type, and homogeneity of participants; and topic of discussion (e.g., for a potentially "explosive" topic such as women's rights, individuals who are particularly active and opinionated on the issues should not sit together where they may form a subgroup or coalition that could end up dominating and skewing the discussion).

A few of the more critical considerations in building rapport to maximize the [credibility](#) of group discussion data include the following:

- Group participants should be **contacted** on behalf of the researcher(s) at least twice after they have agreed to participate in a focus group—once immediately after recruitment to confirm the date and location, and again via telephone the day before the discussion.

- Not unlike the in-depth interview method, a necessary ingredient to building rapport with group participants is the moderator's ability to show **genuine interest** in the discussion as a whole and with each participant's contribution to the discussion. Demonstrating this interest involves frequent and relevant follow-up probing questions as well as helping participants engage with each other.

- The moderator should be attuned to any **verbal and nonverbal cues** that signal participants' level of engagement and, hence, the extent of rapport among the participants. Indeed, "one of the most difficult skills to teach in focus group training is how to ignite an interactive environment where participants engage with the moderator as well as with each other" (see "Seeking Interaction in the Focus Group Method").

- Rapport building is especially difficult in the asynchronous **online mode** because the moderator does not have direct visual or verbal contact with the participants and therefore has less control over the rapport-building process. The online moderator can, however, identify participants who are not logging into the discussion very often or are leaving only short, non-descriptive responses to the moderator's questions. In these cases, the moderator can send each of these participants a private email to inquire why he or she has not been more active in the discussion and offer to assist with any difficulties the participant may be having with logging in or otherwise accessing the discussion. The moderator may also choose to call this participant on the telephone in an attempt to establish a more personal connection that may encourage the participant to become more active in the session.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Image captured from: https://www.centropsicologicocpc.es/sabes-lo-que-es-el-rapport/

First Consider In-person Focus Group Discussions

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 115).

The online asynchronous mode of focus group discussions has been discussed elsewhere in *Research Design Review,* including ["Credibility & the Online Asynchronous Focus Group Method"](#) and ["The Asynchronous Focus Group Method: Participant Participation & Transparency."](#) Although this approach to focus groups is important, e.g., in gaining cooperation from certain segments of the population and for particular research topics, there are many reasons to first consider in-person focus group discussions.

Group interviewing in the in-person mode has the advantage of being a **natural form of communication**. Even in the social media, online world we live in today, the scenario of people sitting together and sharing their opinions and experiences is generally considered a socially acceptable form in the everyday lives of humans. And it is this natural way of communicating that ignites the dynamic, interactive environment that is, in many ways, the raison d'être of the focus group method. As the primary strength of the group discussion method, participant interaction is maximized in the in-person, face-to-face mode where the back-and-forth conversation can be spontaneous and easygoing. For example, Nicholas et al. (2010) found, in their study with children suffering from a chronic health problem (e.g., cerebral palsy), that "most preferred to express themselves verbally" (p. 115) in the face-to-face (vs. online) format because it allowed them to (a) give input immediately without waiting for typed responses, (b) gain feedback from the other participants straightaway, (c) show the emotional intensity of their feelings (i.e., display visual cues), and (d) potentially develop relationships with their peers beyond the confines of the specific focus group in which they participated.

This last point (i.e., **potentially developing relationships**) is particularly relevant to group discussions conducted with a wide variety of target populations. In the author's experience, it is common for men who have recently hiked the Appalachian Trail, for example, to exchange tips on hiking gear or share photographs at the conclusion of a group discussion; or for special education teachers to swap contact information so they can continue to share teaching methods; or for business executives to stay after a focus group to chat and learn more about each other's work.

In-person, face-to-face group discussions also offer the moderator, as well as participants and the observers, the advantage of seeing the **nonverbal signals**—for example, a nod of the head, loss of eye contact, a blush, smile, frown, grimace—that people consciously or unconsciously exhibit in the course of discussion.

Furthermore, the in-person focus group mode significantly **broadens the scope of the discussion interview**, as well as the cache of **interviewing techniques** at the moderator's disposal, compared to either the telephone or online group discussion approach. The facilities where in-person focus groups are conducted are typically well equipped with (a) wall railings to display visual stimuli; (b) built-in audiovisual equipment for presenting videos, websites, and other material to participants;

(c) easel pads to note participants' comments or illustrate a concept; and (d) an abundance of writing pads, pens/pencils, and other supplies for use by the moderator for participant activities during the discussion. These facilities are also in service to provide **refreshments** to the participants, contributing to the relaxed social nature of the discussion; as well as **immediate payment** to participants of their earned incentive for participating in the discussion.

These advantages offer the qualitative researcher plenty of reasons to think first of the in-person mode when considering the focus group method.

Nicholas, D. B., Lach, L., King, G., Scott, M., Boydell, K., Sawatzky, B., … Young, N. L. (2010). Contrasting Internet and face-to-face focus groups for children with chronic health conditions: Outcomes and participant experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *9*(1), 105–122.

Image captured from: https://www.indiamart.com/proddetail/focus-group-discussions-6628206333.html

The Asynchronous Focus Group Method: Participant Participation & Transparency

There is a great deal that is written about transparency in research. It is generally acknowledged that researchers owe it to their research sponsors as well as to the broader research community to divulge the details of their designs and the implementation of their studies. Articles pertaining to transparency have been posted [throughout *Research Design Review*](#).

The need for transparency in qualitative research is as relevant for designs utilizing off-line modes, such as in-person interviews and focus group discussions, as it is for online research, such as asynchronous focus groups. A transparency detail that is critical for the users of online asynchronous – not-in-real-time – focus group discussions research is the level of participant participation. This may, in fact, be the most important information concerning an asynchronous study that a researcher can provide.

Participation level in asynchronous discussions is particularly important because participation in the online asynchronous mode can be erratic and weak. Nicholas et al. (2010) found that "online focus group participants offered substantially less information than did those in the [in-person] groups" (p. 114) and others have underscored a serious limitation of this mode; that is, "it is very difficult to get subjects with little interest in [the topic] to participate and the moderator has more limited options for energising and motivating the participants" (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2012, p. 79) and, indeed, researchers have found that "participation in the online focus group dropped steadily" during the discussion period (Deggs et al., 2010, p. 1032).

The integrity and ultimate usefulness of focus group data hinge solidly on the level of participation and engagement among group participants. This is true regardless of mode but it is a particularly critical consideration when conducting asynchronous discussions. Because of this and because transparency is vital to the health of the qualitative research community, focus group researchers employing the online asynchronous method are encouraged to continually monitor, record, and report on the rate and level of participation, e.g., how many and who (in terms of relevant characteristics) of the recruited sample entered into the discussion, how many and who responded to all questions, how thoughtful and in-depth (or not) were responses, how many and who engaged with the moderator, and how many and who engaged with other participants.

This transparent account of participant participation offers the users of asynchronous focus group research an essential ingredient as they assess the value of the study conducted.

Qualitative Research: Methods – Focus Group

Deggs, D., Grover, K., & Kacirek, K. (2010). Using message boards to conduct online focus groups. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-4/deggs.pdf

Murgado-Armenteros, E. M., Torres-Ruiz, F. J., & Vega-Zamora, M. (2012). Differences between online and face-to-face focus groups, viewed through two approaches. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, *7*(2), 73–86.

Nicholas, D. B., Lach, L., King, G., Scott, M., Boydell, K., Sawatzky, B., … Young, N. L. (2010). Contrasting Internet and face-to-face focus groups for children with chronic health conditions : Outcomes and participant experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *9*(1), 105–122.

Image captured from: https://uwm.edu/studentinvolvement/student-organizations-2/our-communityinvolvement/

Individual Thinking in the Focus Group Method

Focus group discussions can be an effective method for learning about a range of attitudes and behavior associated with a particular topic. An important strength of this method is the diversity of perspectives to be gained *as well as* the associated verbal and nonverbal dynamic that ensues among group participants. It is this group interaction that defines the focus group discussion and makes it a valuable qualitative research method. Two earlier articles in *Research Design Review* – one from 2018 and another from 2013 – discuss group interaction and encourage researchers to hone their skills in fostering participant interaction as well as sharpen their analytical sensibilities of "interactive effects" and the implications of these effects in the interpretations and reporting of the outcomes.

This emphasis on group interaction may leave researchers wondering what, if any, role individual thinking plays in the focus group method. Yet each participant's thinking about a topic or issue is critical to understanding focus group data. It is, after all, the reason researchers carefully screen and recruit group participants, i.e., to hear about experiences and attitudes that will vary from individual to individual.

This is also why moderators are trained on, not only how to engage participants in an interactive discussion but also, how to "draw out" and hear from each participant, especially the less social or more timid individual. At the end of the day, the moderator's job is to come away with useful insights pertaining to the research questions that stem from the group interaction *in conjunction with* the moderator's knowledge of the individual thinking gained from each person in the discussion.

There are two important moments in a focus group (either in-person or online) when the moderator can (and should) capture individual thinking. One of these moments is at the very start of the discussion and the other is at the end of the discussion. In both instances, the moderator asks participants to privately write (or type) their responses to a few questions specific to the subject matter without the influence from other participants' discussion or comments. It is in this manner that the moderator comes to understand the individual thinking among the participants related to the topic which can then be effectively incorporated into the moderator's conduct of the discussion while also adding important new information that might otherwise go undetected.

Image captured from: https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/differentiation-strategy-standing-out-among-the-competition

Strengths & Limitations of the In-depth Interview Method: An Overview

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 56-57).

Strengths

The potential advantages or strengths of the in-depth interview (IDI) method reside in three key areas: (1) the interviewer–interviewee relationship, (2) the interview itself, and (3) the analytical component of the process. The relative closeness of the interviewer–interviewee relationship that is developed in the IDI method potentially increases the credibility of the data by reducing response biases (e.g., distortion in the outcomes due to responses that are considered socially acceptable, such as "I attend church weekly," acquiescence [i.e., tendency to agree], and satisficing [i.e., providing an easy "don't know" answer to avoid the extra cognitive burden to carefully think through what is being asked]) and nonresponse, while also increasing question–answer validity (i.e., the interviewee's correct interpretation of the interviewer's question).

An additional strength of the IDI method is the flexibility of the interview format, which allows the interviewer to tailor the order in which questions are asked, modify the question wording as appropriate, ask follow-up questions to clarify interviewees' responses, and use indirect questions (e.g., the use of [projective techniques](#)) to stimulate subconscious opinions or recall. It should be noted, however, that "flexibility" does not mean a willy-nilly approach to interviewing, and, indeed, the interviewer should employ quality measures such as those outlined in ["Applying a Quality Framework to the In-depth Interview Method."](#)

A third key strength of the IDI method—analyzability of the data—is a byproduct of the interviewer–interviewee relationship and the depth of interviewing techniques, which produce a granularity in the IDI data that is rich in fine details and serves as the basis for deciphering the narrative within each interview. These details also enable researchers to readily identify where they agree or disagree with the meanings of codes and themes associated with specific responses, which ultimately leads to the identification of themes and connections across interview participants.

Limitations

The IDI method also presents challenges and limitations that deserve the researcher's attention. The most important, from a [Total Quality Framework](#) standpoint, has to do with what is also considered a key strength of the IDI method: the interviewer–interviewee relationship. There are two key aspects of the relationship that can potentially limit (or even undermine) the effectiveness of the IDI

method: the interviewer and the social context. The main issue with respect to the interviewer is his/her potential for biasing the information that is gathered. This can happen due to (a) personal characteristics such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, and education (e.g., a 60-year-old Caucasian male interviewer may stifle or skew responses from young, female, African American participants); (b) personal values or beliefs (e.g., an interviewer with strongly held beliefs about global warming and its damaging impact on the environment may "tune out" or misconstrue the comments from interviewees who believe global warming is a myth); and/or (c) other factors (e.g., an interviewer's stereotyping, misinterpreting, and/or presumptions about the interviewee based solely on the interviewee's outward appearance). Any of these characteristics may negatively influence an interviewee's responses to the researcher's questions and/or the accuracy of the interviewer's data gathering. A result of these interviewer effects may be the "difficulty of seeing the people as complex, and . . . a reduction of their humanity to a stereotypical, flat, one-dimensional paradigm" (Krumer-Nevo, 2002, p. 315).

The second key area of concern with the IDI method is related to the broader social context of the relationship, particularly what Kvale (2006) calls the "power dynamics" within the interview environment, characterized by the possibility of "a one-way dialogue" whereby "the interviewer rules the interview" (p. 484). It is important, therefore, for the researcher to carefully consider the social interactions that are integral to the interviewing process and the possible impact these interactions may have on the credibility of an IDI study. For example, the trained interviewer will maximize the social interaction by utilizing positive engagement techniques such as establishing rapport (i.e., being approachable), asking thoughtful questions that indicate the interviewer is listening carefully to the interviewee, and knowing when to stay silent and let the interviewee talk freely.

Krumer-Nevo, M. (2002). The arena of othering: A life-story study with women living in poverty and social marginality. *Qualitative Social Work*, *1*(3), 303–318.

Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(3), 480–500.

Image captured from: https://upgradedhumans.com/2015/10/21/a-mile-wide-and-an-inch-deep/

In-depth Interviewer Effects: Mitigating Interviewer Bias

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 83-84).

The outcome of a qualitative in-depth interview (IDI) study, regardless of mode, is greatly affected by the interviewer's conscious or unconscious influence within the context of the IDIs—that is, the absence or presence of interviewer bias. The interviewer's demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race), physical appearance in face-to-face IDIs (e.g., manner of dress), voice in face-to-face and telephone IDIs (e.g., a regional accent), and personal values or presumptions are all potential triggers that may elicit false or inaccurate responses from interviewees. For example, imagine that an IDI study is being conducted with a group of public school teachers who are known to harbor negative feelings toward the district's superintendent but who express ambivalent attitudes in the interviews as the result of the interviewers' inappropriate interjection of their own personal positive opinions. In this way, the interviewers have caused the findings to be biased. In order to minimize this potential source of distortion in the data, the researcher can incorporate a number of quality enhancement measures into the IDI study design and interview protocol:

- The IDI researcher should conduct **a pretest phase** during which each interviewer practices the interview and learns to anticipate what Sands and Krumer-Nevo (2006) call "master narratives" (i.e., the interviewer's own predispositions) as well as "shocks" that may emerge from interviewees' responses. Such an awareness of one's own predispositions as an interviewer and possible responses from interviewees that might otherwise "jolt" the interviewer will more likely facilitate an uninterrupted interview that can smoothly diverge into other appropriate lines of questioning when the time presents itself. In this manner, the interviewer can build and maintain strong rapport with the interviewee as well as anticipate areas within the interview that might bias the outcome.

For example, Sands and Krumer-Nevo (2006) relate the story of a particular interview in a study among youth who, prior to the study, had been involved in drug use and other criminal behavior. Yami, the interviewer, approached one of the interviews with certain assumptions concerning the interviewee's educational background and, specifically, the idea that a low-level education most likely contributed to the youth's illicit activities. Because of these stereotypical expectations, Yami entered the interview with the goal of linking the interviewee's "past school failures" to his current behavior and was not prepared for a line of questioning that was not aimed at making this connection. As a result <!–more–Read Full Text>of her predisposition, Yami failed to acknowledge and question the interviewee when he talked about being a "shy, lonely boy" and, consequently, stifled the life story that the interviewee was trying to tell her.

- The interviewer should use **follow-up and probing questions** to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on a response (e.g., "Can you tell me more about the last time the other students harassed you at school?"), but not in a manner that could be perceived as seeking any particular "approved" substantive response.

- Using **a reflexive journal** is an important and necessary feature of an IDI study design. This device enhances the credibility of the research by ensuring that each interviewer keeps a record of his/her experiences in the field and how he or she may have biased interview outcomes. The interviewer reflects carefully after each completed IDI and records how he or she may have distorted the information gathered in the interview (inadvertent as it may have been) and how the interviewee's behavior and other factors may have contributed to this bias. This "reflexive objectivity" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) helps the interviewer gain "sensitivity about one's [own] prejudices, one's subjectivity" (p. 278) and consider the impact of these influences on the credibility of the data. This objectivity might also reflect on any personal characteristics of the interviewer (e.g., voice parameters, personality traits, demographics) that affected the interview and resulted in unintended variation across all IDIs. By way of the reflexive journal, the research is enriched with a documented firsthand account of any interviewer bias or presumptions as well as variations in the interviewer's handling of interviews throughout the study.

- A reflexive journal can also be used in **the triangulation of interview data**. From a Total Quality Framework perspective, a best practice is to have an impartial research team member review the audio or video recordings from one or more IDIs to identify how and under what circumstance the interviewer may have biased interviewees' responses. In turn, this review can be used in cross-reference with the interviewer's reflexive journal and discussed with the interviewer to help him/her better understand lapses in self-awareness. This journal also becomes an important component of the study's audit trail and a tool in the final data analysis and interpretation.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sands, R. G., & Krumer-Nevo, M. (2006). Interview shocks and shockwaves. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(5), 950–971. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406288623

Image captured from: http://www.jeannievodden.com/light-effects-11-x-15-c2009/

Distinguishing Between the Research IDI & Everything Else

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 51).

The research in-depth interview (IDI) method has been compared to interviewing styles employed outside of qualitative research—such as the interviews used in journalism, psychotherapy, and law enforcement—with the assertion that "there are not necessarily hard-and-fast distinctions between these interview forms" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). It is true that, in every case, the IDI consists of an interviewer who enters into a one-on-one dialogue with an interviewee in order to discover some aspect of personal information about and from the interviewee. The interviewer is typically in control of the questions that are asked and, when the interviews are completed, the information is analyzed in order to create a story or narrative that conveys an understanding of some topic of interest. Whether it is an interview with a cancer survivor in a qualitative IDI study, the new city mayor for the local newspaper, a psychotherapist's request for more details related to the patient's mood disorder, or a police detective's interrogation of a crime suspect, the IDI approach is "the method by which the personal is made public" (Denzin, 2001, p. 28) to the researcher and the information is used to convey a story about a person or phenomenon.

The qualitative research IDI does, however, differ from these other forms of interviews in two important aspects: the **goals** of the interview and the interviewing **strategy**. Whereas the goal of the journalist is to gather the facts for a news story, and the psychologist's objective is to alleviate an individual's mental suffering, and the police detective interviews witnesses and suspects to eventually gain a confession, the qualitative researcher conducts IDIs to obtain intricate knowledge, from a small number of members in a target population, based on a well-thought-out research design constructed to maximize credible and analyzable outcomes. Research IDIs are ultimately utilized to make changes or improve the lives of the target population as well as other target groups in similar contexts. With divergent interviewing goals, it is no wonder that qualitative researchers employ interviewing strategies that are partially at odds with especially those of the journalist or detective.

Interviewer training in the unique and necessary skills and techniques associated with the IDI method is mandatory. Unlike other variations of the IDI, the interview approach in qualitative research is not inherently combative or confrontational and does not purposely create conflict to provoke the interviewee but rather centers on building a trusting relationship where all input is honored and candid revelations can thrive because it is understood that they will remain confidential unless the interviewee permits them to be disclosed. Indeed, the interviewer–interviewee relationship is the cornerstone of the research IDI, making this one of the most personal of all qualitative research design methods.

There are many distinguishing facets of the IDI method that researchers think about in order to maximize the integrity of their data and the usefulness of the outcomes. A few of the many articles on the subject matter in *Research Design Review* include "Applying a Quality Framework to the In-depth Interview Method," "Rapport & Reflection: The Pivotal Role of Note Taking in In-depth Interview Research," and "Designing a Quality In-depth Interview Study: How Many Interviews Are Enough?"

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (2001). The reflexive interview and a performative social science. *Qualitative Research*, *1*(1), 23–46.

Image captured from: https://animals.mom.me/distinguishing-characteristics-madagascar-sunset-moth-5375.html

Case-Centered Research in Education: Bridging the Cultural Divide

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 329-331). This excerpt discusses a case study illustrating how the author utilized many [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) design considerations, e.g., disclosure of the sampling method, a discussion of researcher bias, and processing plus verification procedures, that ultimately led to [useful outcomes](#).

Multiple methods and case-centered qualitative research is the subject of other articles in Research Design Review – see "[Multi-method & Case-centered Research: When the Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts](#)." Multiple methods, of course, refers to combining two or more qualitative methods to investigate a research question. Case-centered research is a term coined by Mishler (1996, 1999) to denote a research approach that preserves the "unity and coherence" of research subjects throughout data collection and analysis. It consists of two fundamental and unique components: (a) a focus on the investigation of "complex" social units or entities (also known as "case[s]") in their entirety (i.e., not just one aspect captured at one moment in time), and (b) an emphasis on maintaining the cohesiveness of this entity throughout the research process. Two prominent case-centered approaches are case study research and narrative research. (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 350).

The following case study is from Auerbach (2002) who used multiple methods within a case-centered narrative study design to explore schooling and communication with educators among working-class Latino parents in urban Los Angeles. This case is discussed around the four components of the TQF – Credibility, Analyzability, Transparency, and Usefulness.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the problems that Latino parents in urban Los Angeles face related to the schooling of their children and communication with educators. More specifically, this research utilized one particular college-access program for high school students to investigate the use of storytelling among a marginalized group of working-class Latino parents to examine whether "listening to the stories of parents of color may help urban educators and policy makers bridge the divide between students' home cultures and the culture of school" (p. 1370).

Method

A case-centered approach is a popular form of qualitative research among educational researchers. Stake (1995), Qi (2009), Bennett et al. (2012), Clandinin and Connelly (1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and Randall (2012) are just a few of the researchers who have applied either case study or narrative research to issues in education. The study presented here is another example of

case-centered research in an educational setting. This was a fitting approach, given the researcher's access to and involvement with the "Futures Project"—a longitudinal study conducted in conjunction with
an experimental college-access program for high school students—which fostered a case-centered study design relying on multiple methods within a narrative framework.

DESIGN

Credibility
Scope
The target population for this study was parents of high school students participating in the Futures Project. This project was conducted in partnership with UCLA to trace the trajectories of 30 students who participated in an experimental college-access program. The researcher used this population to draw a purposive sample consisting of 16 Latino or Black parents who were selected because of their diversity in race/ethnicity, educational attainment, English fluency, as well their students' grade point average (GPA) and gender. All 16 parents cooperated with the research. The researcher acknowledges that this sample was not representative of the target population but emphasizes that the goal was not to generalize but to build on critical race and sociocultural theory. Among the 16 parents who participated in this study, the researcher selected four Latino parents to further analyze; these parents are the focus of this paper. These four individuals were chosen because their stories stood out as "signature pieces" that expressed many of the concerns of other Futures parents, offering particular insight into family–school relations (which was a key research objective). The researcher admits that the four selected parents were not representative of the target population; indeed, they were better educated, more articulate, and more fluent in English compared to other parents. These parents did, however, represent a range in the "Latino immigration experience" and conveyed "struggles" similar to those expressed by others.

Data Gathering
This case-centered research involved a series of in-depth interviews (IDIs), conducted by the researcher in English and Spanish, over a 3-year period. In this same time period, the researcher also completed participant observations involving "family–school interactions" and program activities (e.g., conferences, fairs), as well as analyzed Futures program data such as school documents, transcripts from parent meetings, and student interviews.

The researcher acknowledges the potential for researcher bias in the study design. In particular, she points to the fact that she was a [complete participant observer](#) whose participation in events may have potentially biased the data (although she utilized a [reflexive journal](#), peer debriefings, and member checks to remain mindful of this possibility). The researcher also concedes that her status as a White, middle-class woman potentially made her an outsider to the working-class Latino parents in this study, which may have hampered gaining candid input and/or her ability to truly understand these parents' concerns from their perspectives.

Analyzability
Processing
The researcher showed flexibility by embracing an iterative approach to data collection and analysis, with one informing the other simultaneously and throughout the fieldwork.

All IDIs conducted in the 3-year period were recorded and transcribed verbatim in English and Spanish. The researcher also used field notes; however, she does not state whether these notes were transcribed. Transcriptions of the parents meetings were also available.

The researcher used several aids to identify themes across individual cases while attempting to maintain the entirety of the single case, including case summaries and data displays. The researcher "scrutinized" the IDI transcripts along with the transcripts from the parents' meetings. The researcher used "narrative analysis"; however, it is not made explicit what this analysis entailed.

Parents' stories were analyzed from various perspectives: topically, theoretically, and in vivo codes (direct use of parents' words).

The researcher derived three "distinct narrative genres" from the data: (1) parents' life stories of their own struggles with school, (2) stories of being rebuffed by the school staff, and (3) counter-stories that challenged the status quo of the bureaucratic system.

Verification
The researcher used multiple verification techniques that included triangulation (i.e., comparing and contrasting data from the various methods), peer debriefings (i.e., discussions with research colleagues during the field period concerning her subjectivity), member checks (i.e., discussing her findings with parents), prolonged engagement in the field (i.e., 3 years), and reflexive memos.

Transparency
The researcher does not provide sufficient detail (e.g., the interview guide, the observation grid [if there was one], the documents reviewed, the data displays, or transcriptions) to enable another researcher to transfer the design to another context with a high degree of confidence. However, much of the research paper is devoted to the three genres of stories emerging from the research data, including commentary and interpretation of each story type as well as excerpts from parents' stories and relevant details in the analysis, which help to give the reader a real sense of the basis by which the researcher isolated these three classes of stories. Other researchers should find these details useful in investigating marginalized groups in similar school environments. Her coverage also provides an engaging report format. Although not included in this paper, the researcher strongly suggests that an audit trail of the research findings as well as a thick description were provided in her final document.

Usefulness
This research adds to the knowledge of family–school relations among marginalized groups and of the impact narratives can have in improving the former and empowering the latter. The researcher discusses three specific ways that narratives can have a positive impact as well as the implication for policy makers and educators. As far as a next step, the researcher suggests that additional research be conducted to examine whether the three narrative genres are "common" among parents of color.

Auerbach, S. (2002). "Why do they give the good classes to some and not to others?" Latino parent narratives of struggle in a college access program. *Teachers College Record*, *104*(7), 1369–1392. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9620.00207

Bennett, S., Bishop, A., Dalgarno, B., Waycott, J., & Kennedy, G. (2012). Implementing Web 2.0 technologies in higher education: A collective case study. *Computers & Education*, *59*(2), 524–534. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.12.022

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1998). Stories to live by: Narrative understandings of school reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *28*(2), 149–164.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(5), 2–14.

Mishler, E. G. (1996). Missing persons: Recovering developmental stories/histories. In R. Jessor, A. Colby, & R. A. Shweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and human development: Context and meaning in social inquiry* (pp. 73–100). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Mishler, E. G. (1999). *Storylines: Craftartists' narrative of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Qi, S. (2009). Case study in contemporary educational research: Conceptualization and critique. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, *5*(4), 21–31.

Randall, W. (2012). Composing a good strong story: The advantages of a liberal arts environment for experiencing and exploring the narrative complexity of human life. *Journal of General Education*, *61*(3), 277–293. https://doi.org/10.1353/jge.2012.0026

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Image captured from: https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/

Navigating Narrative Research & the Depths of the Lived Experience

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 298-300).

Narrative research investigates the stories of what narrative researchers call "lived experiences."

These may be firsthand experiences of individuals, groups, organizations, and even governments. Regardless of the entity, it is the story that is the case or object of attention and the focal point of the research. Unlike the structured or semi-structured in-depth interview (IDI), where the interviewer–interviewee relationship is directed by the researcher's question agenda that serves to extract information from the interviewee, the narrative researcher allows the narrator (i.e., the interviewee in narrative research) to be the guide, welcoming the narrator's stories wherever they may lead, by conducting a form of unstructured IDI whereby the researcher makes broad inquiries such as, "Tell me what happened when you joined the army," "Tell me about your life as a health care worker," "Tell me how you became a regular coffee drinker."*

The belief in narrative research is that it is the narrated story—whether told orally, via some form of text or documents, and/or through the use of visual data (e.g., photographs, video, drawings)—that allows researchers to learn about individuals, society, and history, and that, indeed, "narrative inquiry [is] the study of experience as story" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 22).

For the most part, there are three (not mutually exclusive) ways to consider narrative inquiry, by the type of:

- Narrative being studied: for example, life history, life story, biography, autobiography, or autoethnography.
- Analytical approach used by the researcher: for example, thematic, structural, dialogical/performance, or visual (Riessman, 2008).
- Scholarly discipline applied to the research: for example, psychology, sociology, or education.

The variations of narrative research across fields of study demonstrate that there is no one way to think about narrative inquiry and, indeed, the three delineated types—narrative, analytical, and discipline—are often co-mingled. For example, various factions of psychology have embraced the use of narrative: with heroin addicts to understand "how individuals phenomenologically wrestle with decisions at crucial transition points in their lives" (Singer, 2013, p. 46); in identity research, by which people's life stories can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, including the "small stories" within the "big stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), as well as the conditions that shape their stories and how the stories shape their life experiences (Esteban-Guitart, 2012); and to

explore the connection between social stigma (e.g., not being accepted, being the target of discrimination) and intimacy in same-sex relationships (Frost, 2013).

Sociologists such as Cederberg (2014) have considered the biographical narratives of migrants and how public discourse potentially molds these narratives of their lived experiences. And Luttrell (2003), also a sociologist, elicited visual and performance narratives from pregnant teenagers who were better able to express their life stories in these less structured approaches than in response to conventional narrative interviews, explaining that "the more I stayed out of their way, the more the girls would talk and free associate while doing these self-representations activities. For me, this meant giving up my more immediate desire to ask questions, make sense of, or put order into the girls' creative expression or their conversations" (p. 150).

Scholars from many other disciplines are also using narrative research. For example, educational researchers such as Clandinin and Connelly (1998) used "narrative histories" to study school reform by investigating the school as a "living place" where "teachers and the principal come to the landscape living and telling a complex set of interwoven stories of themselves as teachers, of children in this school, of the community" (p. 160). Austin and Carpenter (2008) used narrative research with mothers of children who are "disruptive" in the classroom (i.e., who have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) to explore the "harsh and judgmental treatment" these mothers experience "from medical professionals, teachers, friends and family" (p. 379).

Examples of the anthropological uses of narrative include such work as the analysis of the narrative elements in Eskimo folktales (Colby, 1973), and the use of historical narratives as "cultural tools" to examine the presentation of events in post-Soviet Russian textbooks (Wertsch, 2000). Communication and health care researchers have explored "illness narratives" by way of online conversations among people suffering from drug addiction in order to understand their life experiences and the effectiveness of online support (Jodlowski, Sharf, Nguyen, Haidet, & Woodard, 2007). Scholars in social work have demonstrated the challenges and benefits of conducting narrative research with marginalized segments of the population, such as teenage mothers (Harlow, 2009), young people from the child welfare system (Martin, 1998), and heterosexual serodiscordant couples (Poindexter, 2003). And, social scientists engaged in performance studies, such as Madison (2003), have used the performing arts to communicate the stories of significant political moments in history.

Navigating the waters of narrative research is a rewarding experience that takes the researcher into the uncharted depths of human behavior and attitudes to exact meaning and bring about change for the social good.

* The critical role that storytelling plays in research methods is also discussed [in this *Research Design Review* article.](#)

Austin, H., & Carpenter, L. (2008). Troubled, troublesome, troubling mothers: The dilemma of difference in women's personal motherhood narratives. *Narrative Inquiry*, *18*(2), 378–392.

Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, *28*(3), 377–396.

Cederberg, M. (2014). Public discourses and migrant stories of integration and inequality: Language and power in biographical narratives. *Sociology*, *48*(1), 133–149.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1998). Stories to live by: Narrative understandings of school reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *28*(2), 149–164.

Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A. M. (2007). Navigating sites for narrative inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *58*(1), 21–35.

Colby, B. N. (1973). A partial grammar of Eskimo folktales. *American Anthropologist*, *75*(3), 645–662.

Esteban-Guitart, M. (2012). Towards a multimethodological approach to identification of funds of identity, small stories and master narratives. *Narrative Inquiry*, *22*(1), 173–180.

Frost, D. M. (2013). Stigma and intimacy in same-sex relationships: A narrative approach. *Qualitative Psychology*, *1*(S), 49–61.

Harlow, E. (2009). Eliciting narratives of teenage pregnancy in the UK: Reflexively exploring some of the methodological challenges. *Qualitative Social Work*, *8*(2), 211–228.

Jodlowski, D., Sharf, B. F., Nguyen, L. C., Haidet, P., & Woodard, L. D. (2007). "Screwed for life": Examining identification and division in addiction narratives. *Communication & Medicine*, *4*(1), 15–26.

Luttrell, W. (2003). *Pregnant bodies, fertile minds: Gender, race and the schooling of pregnant teens*. New York: Routledge.

Madison, D. S. (2003). Performance, personal narratives, and the politics of possibility. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (Vol. 3, pp. 469–486). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Martin, F. E. (1998). Tales of transition: Self-narrative and direct scribing in exploring care-leaving. *Child & Family Social Work*, *3*(1), 1–12.

Poindexter, C. C. (2003). Sex, drugs, and love among the middle aged: A case study of a serodiscordant heterosexual couple coping with HIV. *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, *3*(2), 57–83.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Singer, J. A. (2013). Living in the amber cloud: A life story analysis of a heroin addict. *Qualitative Psychology*, *1*(S), 33–48.

Wertsch, J. V. (2000). Narratives as cultural tools in sociocultural analysis: Official history in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. *Ethos*, *28*(4), 511–533.

Ethnography: A Case Study in a Quality Approach

As discussed elsewhere in *Research Design Review*, the Total Quality Framework (TQF) is "a useful tool for qualitative researchers to apply in designing, conducting, and interpreting their research so that the studies are more likely to (a) gather high-quality data, (b) lead to more robust and valid interpretations of the data, and (c) ultimately generate highly useful outcomes." The basic research principles that underlie the TQF can be applied to various qualitative methods.

The following is an excerpt from *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach* (pp. 227-229) which summarizes an ethnographic study conducted by Todd (2012) concerning religious network organizations and their association with social justice at the local community level. This case study exemplifies many of the principles supported by the TQF approach — illustrated by the clearly stated purpose, the stated justification for the chosen method, and the attention to quality-enhancing details throughout the study.

Purpose

Religious networking organizations are structured groups consisting of people from multiple religious congregations that meet regularly to discuss common interests. The primary purpose of this study was to examine how and why these organizations work for social justice in their local community and how religion is integrated into the organizations' work in social justice.

Method

An ethnographic approach was considered appropriate because of the distinctive insight it could give into the organization members' personal experiences, as well as the proven benefit of ethnography, by other researchers in community psychology, in identifying and understanding the storied lives of individuals and social processes within community-based environments.

Design

Credibility (Data Collection)

Scope

Two networking organizations were included in this study. Both organizations are located in the same Midwestern community. The researcher became aware of, and was introduced to, these organizations by way of contacts (gatekeepers) within the community. The researcher assumed the role of an overt participant observer, attending monthly 2-hour meetings at both organizations for approximately 1½ years. The ethnographer's involvement with the organizations ended (i.e., his observational study concluded) when common patterns or themes in the data reappeared and no new

observations were witnessed (i.e., when the researcher believed he had reached the point of saturation), and the researcher felt that he was clear on the knowledge he had gained on the constructs of interest.

The researcher discussed his research and interest in conducting participant observation with key informants (organizations' leaders and group members). He received approval from both organizations as well as from the university IRB. In lieu of written informed consent, the researcher obtained passive assent by reading a short script at the beginning of each network organization meeting. This script stated the researcher's university affiliation; his role as an ethnographer (specifically, participant observer); his intent to take field notes and write one or more academic papers at the conclusion of the study; and his contact information with instructions to notify him or a key informant (an organization leader) if any member did not want notes taken of his/her activity. The researcher took the added ethical precaution to brief any member who arrived at the meeting after his script was read and omitted the member from the field notes if his/her assent was not obtained.

Data Gathering

Observations at each meeting were directed by an observation guide that focused on the core construct of interest—how networking organizations understood and worked for social justice in the community—along with the topics/issues discussed, manner in which decisions were made, interaction among members, key events or incidents during the meeting, variations or deviant patterns, manner in which members attached meaning to their own behavior, sensory cues such as sights and sounds, physical layout of the meeting room (mapping), members' language during discourse, use of anecdotes and quotes, and the researcher's personal, reflective reactions or thoughts.

The ethnographer was mindful of the potential for observer bias. One concern was the brevity of the script he read at the start of each meeting, which was purposely kept short so as to not disrupt the meeting. Still, the researcher questioned whether it was sufficient to explain his role and intentions (however, there was no indication from the members that this was a problem). The researcher was careful to refrain from interjecting questions or statements into the meeting that would only serve his research purpose. He was also careful to limit his involvement during the group meetings. In his report, the ethnographer (someone with a graduate degree in theology as well as psychology) acknowledged that his own assumptions prior to involvement with the organizations were potentially biasing his analysis, and, with this awareness, he continually reflected on his interpretations of the data.

Analyzability (Analysis)

Processing

The ethnographer reflected on the field notes throughout the study, and his personal reflections were integrated with the field notes. By continually reviewing and assessing these notes, the researcher used this information and insights to better understand future meetings where past observations were either affirmed or denied. This iterative, grounded analytical approach became a form of "focused coding" that identified key concepts and categories that were confirmed, or not, by additional observations. During analysis, the field notes were reread many times and organized by

themes, patterns, processes, group activities, and around the key construct: how and why these organizations understood and worked for social justice in the community.

Verification

In addition to the observations, the researcher triangulated his data during analysis with the meetings' agendas, handouts, announcements, and minutes. Other triangulation techniques included deviant case analysis (e.g., looking for and exploring observations, relationships, or categories that were contradictory) and member checking by debriefing members after the initial observations and presenting a report to each organization after the analysis and interpretation, asking for member feedback on the findings.

Transparency (Reporting)

As shown in this brief account, the ethnographer provided a detailed report of the research covering the scope, data-gathering, and analysis processes. Importantly, the researcher was very forthright and specific on particular issues regarding the construct of interest, participant consent, his own prejudices and the potential for bias, and the limitations of the study (e.g., the differences between the organizations). By way of the researcher's documentation, the reader is able to understand (a) how the research was conducted, (b) the obstacles or issues that may have impacted the data, (c) the process the researcher went through to reach the final interpretations, and (d) how the research might be applied in similar contexts.

Usefulness (Doing something of value with the outcomes)

The findings from this ethnographic study broadened the existing research on religious organizations and introduced a new religious setting—the religious networking organization—as an important entity in the shaping of positive behavior and attitudes. In particular, this research contributed to the literature the idea that these organizations work for social justice in the community and create social capital. This research called on community psychologists to partner with religious networking organizations to better their local communities and "create a more just and equitable society" (p. 243).

Todd, N. R. (2012). Religious networking organizations and social justice: An ethnographic case study. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *50*(1–2), 229–245.

Image captured from: https://nccj.org/resources/social-justice-definitions