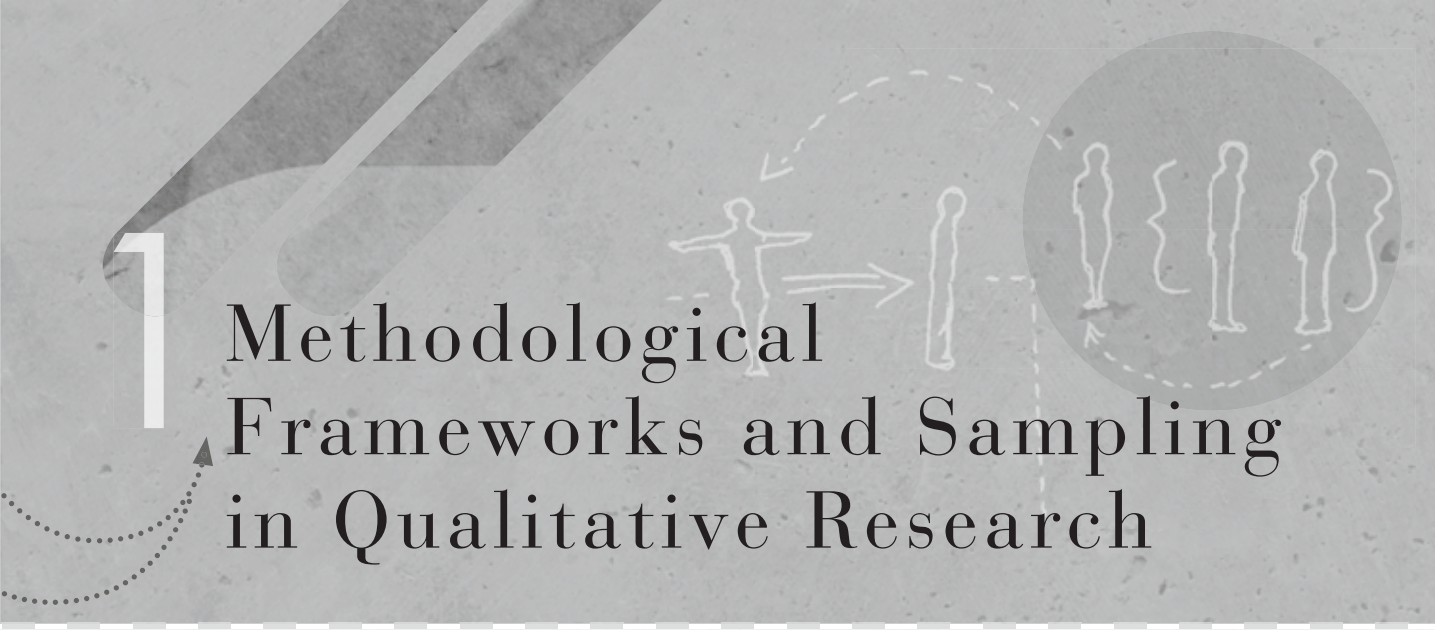

1 Methodological Frameworks and Sampling in Qualitative Research

To understand a theory is to experience a shift in one's mental structure and discover a different way of thinking. To understand a theory is to feel some wonder that one never saw before what now seems to have been obvious all along. (Anfara Jr & Mertz 2006, p. xvii)

In some ways, the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods involve trade-offs between breadth and depth … Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases. (Patton 2002, p. 227)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents two foundational issues in qualitative enquiry: methodological frameworks and sampling strategies. Once researchers have decided on the research questions they wish to explore or find answers to, it is important that they should carefully consider the methodological framework of their study because this will influence the choice of method or methods they will employ. Hence the first part of this chapter will be dedicated to discussion of methodological frameworks in qualitative research. Following on from the methodologies and methods, researchers need to think about their potential research **participants**. How will they recruit the participants? How many will they select for their research? And how can they find them? The success of qualitative research also depends on sampling issues. This will be addressed in the second part of this chapter.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Methodology, according to Dew (2007, p. 433), refers to 'the principles underlying particular research approaches, as distinct from "methods", which are ways of collecting **data**'. Methodology determines a method for researchers to produce data for analysis (Carter & Little 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). It is crucial that qualitative research should be situated within a methodological framework. According to Avis (2003, p. 1003), researchers need to provide their 'methodological justification' by discussing the reason why they select a particular method in their research. Often, researchers simply suggest the use of a specific method, for example an **in-depth interview** or focus group, without giving the theoretical context or methodological framework (Avis 2003; Carter & Little 2008). It is a responsibility of qualitative researchers to create 'methodologically convincing stories' (Miller & Crabtree 2005, p. 626) by providing a strong rationale for their research based on an informed knowledge of a methodological framework (Carpenter & Suto 2008; Carter & Little 2008). Dew (2007, p. 433) contends that the methods researchers select and what they expect to get out of those methods is strongly formed by their 'methodological position'. It is crucial for qualitative researchers to have a good understanding of the methodology so that they are able to 'interpret data sensibly and with insight, and not simply interpret data in the light of preconceptions and prejudice—and so potentially perpetrate unsatisfactory or inappropriate understandings of the phenomenon of interest'. Without methodological frameworks, the **rigour** and value of qualitative research can be weakened (Carpenter & Suto 2008).

There are a number of methodological theories that researchers may adopt in qualitative research. However, I shall only focus on those that are more relevant to the methods I include in this book. It is beyond the scope of this book to provide all methodological frameworks in qualitative enquiry, and I would encourage readers to read further for other theories.

Qualitative research has its roots in early American sociology and anthropology, but it is also linked to English and French traditions (Bogdan & Biklen 2007). As readers will see, many of the methodological frameworks I shall include in this chapter stem from these traditions.

Ethnography

Qualitative ethnographic research has its deep roots in the study of culture in anthropology. Theoretically and as a methodology, culture is the essence of **ethnography**. Early anthropological studies focused on 'exotic' cultures of the 'primitive' world (such as the work of Malinoswki [1922] and Mead [1928]). Later on, culture was seen as 'local, less distant, and more immediate' (Daly 2007, p. 85). Hence ethnography was shifted from its origins in anthropology to sociology. While anthropology worked with 'distant cultures', sociology was more interested in 'local subcultures'. Among sociologists in the mid-1900s, ethnography became a prominent methodology as a means of understanding the exotic within a home culture. For example, ethnography was adopted for understanding hidden and 'deviant' subcultures such as those of drug users and gang members. The study of culture has also become an important focus within cultural psychology. These research disciplines are interested in how human beings create meanings and behave within their cultural contexts.

Ethnography allows researchers to understand the 'contexts of practice and the cultural rules that people have for making sense of their worlds' (Daly 2007, p. 85).

Ontologically, Daly (2007, pp. 84–5) argues, 'if we wish to understand the nature of being human, we must understand humans as they are embedded in culture'. Ethnography is related to the description of the 'cultural ways of human life' (Vidich & Lyman 2003). Its main aim is to understand how things function from the perspective of the person in that particular cultural context (Daly 2007). According to Sharkey and Larsen (2005, p. 168), ethnography aims to provide 'an insider perspective on everyday life through the researcher's engagement with people over time and [to] explore human experience and social interaction as well as the meaning people apply to their experiences, that is, their symbolic world'.

Ethnography underscores **cultural relativism**, which is a perspective affirming that cultures must be understood within their own social and cultural contexts. Importantly, cultures should not be judged by the values and beliefs of others, particularly of more powerful cultures (Fetterman 2010). Cultural relativism challenges **ethnocentrism**, which is the 'denigration of cultures other than one's own' (Padgett 2008, p. 31). Within ethnography, researchers adopt 'a holistic perspective, viewing all aspects of the phenomenon under study as parts of an interrelated whole' (p. 31).

Ethnography is based on the premise that through extensive and prolonged interaction with research participants, researchers will be able to understand the way individuals express their values, beliefs, and actions in and through culture. This prolonged interaction will provide the stories, patterns of living, and cultural **themes** out of which researchers can generate the ethnographic account. Such an account is a standard form of reporting for an ethnographic study. It is referred to as '**thick description**' (Geertz 1973) and as 'a cultural account that emphasises descriptive detail' (Daly 2007, p. 87).

Traditionally, ethnography was also referred to as '**fieldwork**'. This requires that the researchers fully immerse themselves in the culture they are working with. They make use of 'all the senses to take in the sights, sounds, and smells of everyday life fully, with the aims of generating a detailed portrait of the activities and practices of the culture being observed' (Daly 2007, p. 86). This full immersion can only be achieved by placing oneself within the culture. **Participant observation** is therefore the primary method that has traditionally been employed for understanding the way a culture operates within an ethnographic methodology (Daly 2007; Liamputtong 2007a). However, as Angrosino (2005, 2007) suggests, ethnographic researchers tend to use several methods of collecting data in order to make sense of the cultural issues. In-depth interviews, focus groups, life histories, and **unobtrusive methods** are also employed by researchers in ethnography (Liamputtong 2007a; Carpenter & Suto 2008).

Phenomenology

Among the methodological theories in qualitative research, **phenomenology** is the most commonly used. Phenomenology became closely linked with European philosophy in the early 1900s. It stems from the works of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1913 in German, translated in 1931) and French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/1996). Human consciousness as the way to understand social reality was Husserl's main interest. In particular, he was interested in how an individual 'thinks' about his or her experience. In other words, he was preoccupied by 'how consciousness is experienced'. Husserl believed

that 'consciousness is always "intentional"; that is, it is directed at some phenomenon'. To know how consciousness functions will allow us to understand how 'individuals create an understanding of social life' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011, p. 19).

It was Alfred Schutz, a colleague of Husserl, who introduced phenomenology to American sociology. Schutz was especially interested in how people 'process experience in their everyday lives' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011, p. 19) and was instrumental in introducing phenomenology into the scientific enquiry of social research. Schutz (1972) was interested in developing 'pathways' for carrying out scientific research that would 'allow for the "sympathetic understanding" of the conscious experience of everyday life' (Daly 2007, p. 94).

The word 'phenomenon' derives from the Greek *phaenesthai*, which means 'to show itself' or 'to appear' (Carpenter & Suto 2008, p. 64). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), phenomenology is, at one level, a philosophy (as in the work of Husserl, Schutz, Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty). It is also a research methodology for understanding the lived experiences of individuals (as in the work of Giorgi 1985, 1997; van Manen 1990; Moustakas 1994; Giorgi & Giorgi 2003). Phenomenology is a popular methodological framework within the social and health sciences, particularly in sociology, psychology, education, nursing, and health sciences (Willis 2007; Padgett 2008; Creswell 2012).

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that attempts to generate knowledge about how individuals experience things (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). A phenomenological study aims to examine 'the lived experience' of a person or several people in relation to a concept or phenomenon of interest (Daly 2007, p. 97; Creswell 2012). The aim of phenomenological research is to 'understand and describe the participants' experiences of their everyday world as they see it' (Daly 2007, p. 98; see also Willis 2007; Carpenter & Suto 2008; Padgett 2008). Phenomenologists are interested in a question like how does a person experience a phenomenon (such as motherhood, living with HIV/AIDS, being a prisoner, depression, divorce and dying)? To this end, people must have 'lived experience' rather than second-hand experience (Patton 2002, p. 104).

In order to examine how a specific aspect of lived reality is constructed, the researcher must bracket that reality. This means that researchers need to suspend any prejudgments about that reality so that they may 'see it as the participant would see it' (Daly 2007, p. 98; Carpenter & Suto 2008). Thus phenomenological studies often employ in-depth interviews as a means to generate detailed descriptions of this reality (Daly 2007; see also Patton 2002; Todres 2005; Willis 2007). Nevertheless, phenomenologists use a number of qualitative methods, including observation, in-depth interviews, life history, and narrative. Others may examine written records of experiences such as diaries, journals, art, poetry, and music (Daly 2007; Creswell 2012).

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with 'the subjective meaning individuals attribute to their activities and their environments' (Flick 2006, p. 66). This approach is based on the premise that individuals construct their perceptions and meanings as a result of their interaction with others.

Symbolic interactionism is closely associated with George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1938, 1969). Historically and recently, it has a prominent role in

qualitative research. As a theoretical framework it characterises the position of theory and practice within the Chicago School of Sociology in America. A number of prominent sociologists such as Anselm Strauss, Barney Glaser, Norman Denzin, Howard Becker, and many others adopt symbolic interactionism in their research. In the 1970s, Blumer's (1969) methodological position of symbolic interactionism had a paramount impact on methodological discussions among social science researchers (Flick 2006; Pascale 2011).

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism for qualitative research was a prominent approach in sociology for much of the 20th century. In fact the popular use of this theory implies that all qualitative enquiry is situated within the theory of symbolic interactionism. Like phenomenology, the essence of symbolic interactionism is 'subjective meaning'. According to Willis (2007, p. 177), symbolic interactionists theorise that:

> The study of humans is not the study of 'real' or concrete events in the external world. Symbolic interaction research studies human interaction and emphasizes the need to keep in mind that human interaction is not based solely on the way the external world 'really' is. That interaction is based, instead, on how humans interpret their world. It is thus symbolic meaning rather than concrete meaning that is most important in symbolic interaction studies.

Symbolic interactionism is a framework that emphasises the essence of meaning and **interpretation** as crucial human processes. As Patton (2002, p. 112) suggests, individuals 'create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality'.

According to Blumer (1969, p. 2), there are three premises of symbolic interactionist approach. First, 'human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them'. Second, 'the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'. And third, 'these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters' (see also Denzin 1995; Patton 2002; Angrosino 2007). These three premises suggest that research should begin with the idea that there are 'different ways in which individuals invest objects, events, experiences, and so on, with meaning'. And 'the reconstruction of such subjective viewpoints becomes the instrument for analysing social worlds' (Flick 2006, p. 67; see also Pascale 2011).

These three premises led Blumer to argue that qualitative enquiry is the only appropriate way to discern how individuals see, understand, and interpret their world. According to Patton (2002, p. 112), Blumer believed that 'only through close contact and direct interaction with people in open-minded, naturalistic enquiry and inductive analysis could the symbolic interactionist come to understand the symbolic world of the people being studied'. Blumer was among the first few sociologists who used group discussion and interview methods with key **informants** in their research. He carefully recruited a group of well-informed people and invited them to act as a 'panel of experts … who would take the researcher inside the phenomenon of interest' (p. 112). As we have witnessed, group interviews and **focus groups** have become prominent methods and are widely adopted in qualitative research. However, this framework is also used in other qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, ethnography, narrative research, memory-work, and grounded theory. Symbolic interactionism continues to have a prominent influence on qualitative research nowadays. It has been adopted extensively by researchers in sociology, anthropology, criminology, psychology, and education (Angrosino 2007; Willis 2007; Pascale 2011).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics comes from the Greek *hermeneuein*, meaning 'to interpret or translate' (Patton 2002, p. 114; Dombro 2006, p. 111). According to Packer (2011, p. 83), hermeneutics is 'the theory of interpretation, named for Hermes, messenger of the Greek gods and interpreter of their messages for confused mortals'. Hermeneutics offers 'a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose' (Patton 2002, p. 114). The theory reminds us that 'what something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted' (Patton 2002, p. 113).

Friedrich Schleiermacher is seen as the earliest theorist who developed hermeneutics as a study discipline. Wilhelm Dilthey (1923/1988, p. 27), who was a philosopher and historian of philosophy, regarded Schleiermacher as 'the father of scientific hermeneutics'. However, Dilthey's work was especially authoritative. It emphasised the necessity to perceive 'text' or data as only 'one element of understanding within the broader framework of historical knowledge'. Dilthey saw 'historical knowledge as an interrelationship between experience, expression and understanding'. He suggested that 'it was the human spirit that drove human studies, and that all experience was contextualized in terms of past and future possibilities' (Rapport 2005, pp. 125–6).

Originally, the term hermeneutics was applied to the study of sacred texts like the Talmud or the Bible (Willis 2007, p. 104), but it has gradually been broadened to include the understanding of human action within its ambit (Packer 2011). Although there are several versions of hermeneutics, Smith (1989) contends that they all focus on two common features:

1. Language is the essence of understanding. Only language makes possible what we can say and limits what we can say.
2. The context, particularly the historical context, 'is used as a frame for understanding. Human behaviour and ideas cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, they must be understood within context' (Willis 2007, p. 104).

Hermeneutics is also known as hermeneutic phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology (Rapport 2005). It is 'the science of interpretation of texts, whereby language, in its written or spoken form, is scrutinized to reveal meaning in phenomena' (p. 125).

> The hermeneutic phenomenologist emphasizes the 'ordinary language' of everyday experience, the words we use on a day-to-day basis, to describe and explain cultural mores, behaviours, events and actions and the relationship between 'ordinary language' and daily social life. Hermeneutic phenomenologists strive to understand the nature of human beings and the meanings they bestow upon the world by examining language in its cultural context; the way language is given meaning and is interpreted. (p. 125)

Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) was a student of Edmund Husserl who critiqued the capability of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. He theorised that human experience is 'already within the world', meaning that 'we relate to the world in an integral way, not as subjects related to objects, but as beings inseparable from a world of being'. This situation was described by Heidegger as 'Being-in-the-world', which was 'the fundamental **ontology**—the meaning of being in general and the ground upon which the human sciences could be constructed' (Rapport 2005, p. 127). Unlike Husserl, Heidegger focused on understanding

and individuals' interpretation of phenomena. He believed that it was only 'through language and speech that our "Being-in-the-world" was both manifest and understood'. Hermeneutic researchers who follow a Heideggerian tradition would 'emphasize the interpretive approach to understanding phenomena'. They attempt to make sense of the world 'through understanding and the clarification of speech and language'. And through this, hermeneutic researchers 'develop notions of the way human beings give meaning to experience, behaviour and action' (p. 127).

As Heidegger's student, Hans Georg Gadamer was deeply influenced by the works of both Husserl and Heidegger. He extended the work of Heidegger into a more practical application (Laverty 2003). The result was a philosophy of Gadamerian hermeneutics. Gadamer (1975/1996) focused on 'how language reveals being, building on the idea that all understanding is phenomenological and that understanding can only come about through language'. For Gadamer, language, understanding, and interpretation were 'inextricably linked' (Rapport 2005, p. 128).

Gadamer suggested that although 'language is the precondition for understanding', it does two things. It transmits objects of thought into a format that individuals can understand. And once it turns into a written text, it transforms into 'an object of interpretation'. This can only happen when there is 'a reciprocal question–answer relationship between text and interpreter'. What this suggests is that 'meanings that come to us through interpretation are given to pose further questions and further puzzles to be understood and interpreted in different ways'. Text can only be understood within the historical context that pervades human understanding. And through historical context, 'understanding becomes meaningful' (Rapport 2005, p. 129).

Data collection within hermeneutics, according to van Manen (1990), has its foundation in 'the act of writing'. Such data include lived experiences written in diaries, journals, protocol writing, and descriptions in literature. Hermeneutics is employed extensively in the unobtrusive methods where researchers attempt to understand written texts from published materials (newspapers, magazines), reports (government policy papers, health records), and private documents (personal diaries and wartime memoirs).

However, as van Manen suggests, researchers may also use in-depth interviewing to collect personal stories from research participants. But hermeneutic interviews differ from orthodox in-depth interviews in that they support the establishment of 'conversational relationships' between the researcher and the participant 'through in-depth discovery and intimacy'. This aims to establish trust within the relationship by allowing opportunities for the participants to translate 'knowing into telling' (van Manen 1990). By doing so, the researchers must include their own perspectives in the process of interpretation in order to identify their own 'Being-in-the-world' (Rapport 2005, p. 134).

Feminist methodology

In feminist methodology, women and their concerns are the focus of investigation. One intention of feminist research is to undertake research that is beneficial *for* women, not only *about* women. The ultimate aim of feminist research is to 'capture women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge' (Campbell & Wasco 2000, p. 783; Angrosino 2007). According to feminist methodology, the process of research is as important as its outcome.

To undertake feminist research is to witness resistance. Feminist research opposes methods that are the products of standard procedures like those of positivist, or quantitative, science (Allen & Walker 1992; Angrosino 2007). As such, feminist research calls for qualitative enquiry that is less structured and more flexible than that of positivist science. Primarily, but not exclusively, feminist methods are qualitative (see Harding 1987; Stanley 1990; Allen & Barber 1992; Renzetti 1997; Reiger & Liamputtong 2010). Feminist research asserts that because of the standardised nature of positivist science, much of what happens to individuals and groups involved in the research, including both researcher and researched, remains 'unsaid and unanalysed' (Allen & Walker 1992, p. 201).

The concern of feminism and feminist research is to construct knowledge that 'writes women into his-story and exploring, challenging, resisting and changing sexual and social inequalities' (O'Neill 1996, p. 131). A consciously feminist methodology must provide a way in which the researchers can include their own experiences, as women and researchers, in the conduct of their research and in a sharing of their subjectivities with their research participants (Moran-Ellis 1996, p. 177). Within the research domain, there is now recognition of the need to pay more attention to the experience of carrying out research and the impact of that experience on data collection, analysis, and presentation (Angrosino 2007; Liamputtong 2007a). Within a feminist sociology, Stanley and Wise (1993) argue strongly for incorporating personal and research experience in the data collection and the analysis of those data. This is also crucial in the formation of theories.

Feminist research advocates **reflexivity** (Few 2007; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli 2012). It is argued that reflexivity provides insight and crucial scrutiny of the research process (Fonow & Cook 1991). Feminist researchers tend to admit unashamedly that the process of carrying out their research transforms them in some ways. In feminist scholarship, the researcher's emotional closeness to the research is made public. Feminist research not only involves thinking but is also about feeling. Feminist methodologists advocate that the researcher's articulation of self must be made public so that the research has veracity and integrity (see also Campbell 2002; Spalek 2005).

Feminist methodology embraces qualitative methods (see Olesen 2011), although contemporary feminist researchers promote both qualitative and quantitative approaches (see Campbell & Salem 1999; Campbell & Wasco 2000; Campbell 2002; Katsulis 2009; Hesse-Biber 2010; Scott 2010). More often, feminist methodology employs familiar methods of data collection in qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, **memory-work**, ethnography, and narrative research, and particularly life and oral histories (Campbell & Wasco 2000; Angrosino 2007; Liamputtong 2007a). However, Reinharz (1992) and Campbell and Wasco (2000) suggest that feminist methodology tends to embrace and create more innovative ways of data collection. This encourages the use of multiple methodologies that are more flexible and collaborative, like ethnography and **participatory action research (PAR)**, and in some circumstances more innovative methods such as **photovoice** (see Wang 1999; López et al. 2005a,b; Brooks et al. 2008; Castleden et al. 2008) and drawing methods (see Guillemin 2004a,b; Guillemin & Westall 2008; Morgan et al. 2009; Westall & Liamputtong 2011). But whether adopting traditional methods such as individual interviewing, or more unusual techniques such as collaborative group interviews or memory-work, feminist researchers strive to 'strengthen connections between researchers and participants'. A unique feature of feminist research is a more caring research environment that is non-hierarchical (see Liamputtong 2007a; Neuman 2011).

Postmodernism

Qualitative researchers under the influence of **postmodernism** reject the idea that there is a single reality or truth (Angrosino 2007). Rather, there are many realities and many truths. Postmodern researchers attempt to deconstruct the meanings that participants have about their lived experiences and the language they use. They scrutinise similarities and differences in the meanings people claim to give to their lived experiences (Campbell & Wasco 2000; Liamputtong 2007a).

Postmodern researchers also reject the grand narratives of positivist science, which ignore the differences between individuals and the social contexts of those individuals (Angrosino 2007; Borer & Fontana 2012). Instead, they attempt to tease apart these grand narratives in order to remove the established power of objectivist (positivist, quantitative) science (Grbich 2004). Postmodernism challenges traditional premises and attempts to deconstruct them. It aims at theorising society as 'a series of fragments in continuous flux'. It also invites researchers to focus their attention on the fragments, 'the minute events of everyday life', and to 'understand them in their own right rather than gloss over differences and patch them together into paradigmatic wholes' (Grbich 2004; Borer & Fontana 2012, p. 46).

Postmodernism argues that realities are constructed within a specific social and cultural context, so the meaning of those realities can only be understood within this particular context. Postmodernism, according to Angrosino (2007, p. 13), 'embraces the plurality of experience'. Rather than relying on general 'laws' of human behaviour, postmodernism 'situates all social, cultural, and historical knowledge in the contexts shaped by gender, race, and class'. Postmodernism argues that 'realities are multiple'. Realities are not static but always in flux; they are formed and re-formed, constructed and reconstructed. The interpretation of the individual is authoritative. There is no one true reality. Truth and reality are situated within the meanings individuals create according to their perceptions of their everyday lives and their own subjective experiences (Grbich 2004). I contend that this is how we perform qualitative research and the ways we represent the voices of research participants.

Under the postmodern framework, the focus of research moves from large-scale to small-scale qualitative research. Postmodernist researchers 'focus on smaller parcels of knowledge'. They seek to understand 'society in its fragments, in its daily details' (Borer & Fontana 2012, p. 45). Postmodernism focuses on phenomenological examination of small, in-depth **grounded theory** studies and participatory action research. Grbich (2004) argues that under postmodernism, multiple methods are perceived as crucial.

Grbich also argues that within postmodernism, all stories and expressions are valid and no one story or expression is privileged over others. Individuals have different stories and different ways of telling their stories. All stories and ways of expressing them are legitimate. Subjective experiences are superior to external or objectified ones. Multiple identities are permitted. Different identities are created or become the focus by different people, in differing contexts and within different situational circumstances. And the researcher and the researched are no longer divided (Borer & Fontana 2012).

According to Hesse-Biber and colleagues (2004, p. 18), postmodern theory has resulted in the 'emergence of new epistemological and methodological practices'. With the attempt to permit the voices of the research participants to be heard loudly and to be seen as having more credit, both the data collection methods and the components of data have been transformed

(Fontana 2002; Grbich 2004). Researchers have developed and utilised many alternative methods in their research. Arts-based enquiry (Finley 2005, 2008; Liamputtong & Rumbold 2008) and **online** research (Mann & Stewart 2002; Liamputtong 2006a; Fielding et al. 2008) are good examples of various forms of postmodern qualitative research. The emergence of autoethnography is another example of the influence of postmodernism in qualitative tradition (Borer & Fontana 2012); it has become popular among postmodern researchers (see Ellis & Bochner 1992, 1996, 2000; Ellis 2004, 2008, 2009; also see Chapter 18). Postmodernism has also greatly influenced the ways researchers write about their research and their findings (Richardson 1997, 1999, 2002; Richardson & St Pierre 2005; Angrosino 2007; Neuman 2011; also see Chapter 18). Postmodernist researchers and writers have doubts about and are impatient with the standard reporting style in quantitative research (Rosenblatt 2002; Richardson & St Pierre 2005).

SAMPLING ISSUES

Qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding of the issue under examination. It relies heavily on individuals who are able to provide rich accounts of their experiences. For this reason it usually works best with small numbers of individuals. Morse (2006, p. 530, original emphasis) says: 'Qualitative researchers sample for *meaning*, rather than frequency. We are not interested in how much, or how many, but in *what*'. Qualitative research aims to examine a 'process' or the 'meanings' that people give to their own social situations. It does not require a generalisation of the findings as in positivist science (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). There are largely two main types of sampling.

Purposive sampling

Qualitative research relies heavily on **purposive sampling** strategies (Patton 2002; Morse 2006; Teddlie & Yu 2007; Holloway & Wheeler 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011; Neuman 2011; Bryman 2012; Padgett 2012). These strategies are also termed qualitative, theoretical, non-probability, or judgment sampling (Teddlie & Yu 2007; Carpenter & Suto 2008). Purposive sampling refers to the deliberate selection of specific individuals, events, or settings because of the crucial information they can provide that cannot be obtained so well through other channels (Carpenter & Suto 2008). For example, purposive sampling in a research concerned with how cancer patients cope with pain will require the researcher to find participants who have pain instead of randomly selecting any cancer patients from an oncologist's patient roster (Padgett 2008).

According to Patton (2002, p. 230, original emphasis), 'the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth'. Information-rich cases are individuals or events or settings from which researchers can learn extensively about the issues under examination. Hence the term 'purposeful sampling' is used. Information-rich cases offer in-depth understanding and insights into the findings instead of empirical generalisations.

Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling allows researchers to access individuals who are conveniently available and willing to participate in a study. This sampling strategy differs from purposive sampling because it does not involve the explicit use of conceptual frameworks or theoretical focus characteristics of the sample (Carpenter & Suto 2008). Convenience sampling may become crucial if it becomes difficult to find individuals who meet some specified criteria such as age, gender, ethnicity, and social class, which may happen more often in research that requires the conduct of fieldwork, such as ethnography. Researchers need to find key informants who are able to provide in-depth information on the research issues and site. Often, researchers decide on 'who is available, who has some specialized knowledge of the setting, and who is willing to serve in that role' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011, p. 46).

SAMPLING STRATEGIES

Although the sampling approach is purposive, there are strategies that qualitative researchers often use to identify their research participants. As with the categories discussed earlier by Patton (2002), Teddlie and Yu (2007) propose five main strategies that are sketched below.

Representative or comparative sampling techniques

These techniques, according to Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 80), are adopted when the researchers need either to choose a purposive sample that will characterise as closely as possible a broader group of cases, or to compare different categories of cases. There are several kinds of purposive sampling strategies within this group: typical case, extreme or deviant case, intensity, maximum variation, and homogeneous sampling.

Typical case sampling will recruit members of the groups who are typical or average; for example, men from a lower socio-economic background who represent a typical profile of this **population** group. According to Patton (2002, p. 236), the typical site-sampling strategy suggests that 'the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual'. This strategy is frequently adopted in sampling typical villages for community development studies in developing nations.

Extreme or deviant case sampling means choosing cases that are unusual or extreme in some ways (Neuman 2011). For example, the case may represent outstanding successes or noticeable failures related to the research topic. Such extreme successes or failures are expected to provide particularly valuable information about the topic under examination (Teddlie & Yu 2007). This technique is also referred to as 'outlier sampling' since 'it involves selecting cases near the "ends" of the distribution of cases of interest' (Teddlie & Yu 2007, p. 81). Extreme or deviant cases are interesting people or situations that can be used as contrasts with others and that allow researchers to make comparisons between cases (Teddlie & Yu 2007). For example, individuals with severe depressive conditions who have made several suicide attempts are examples of extreme or deviant cases (Padgett 2008). According to Neuman (2011, p. 269), researchers would 'learn more about social life by considering cases that fall outside the general patterns of including what is beyond the main flow of events'.

Intensity sampling is similar to extreme case sampling, but the cases are not so unusual as in the extreme or deviant cases (Padgett 2008, 2012). Researchers seek 'excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases' (Patton 2002, p. 234).

Maximum variation sampling involves finding heterogeneous samples across wider sample groups; for example, recruiting breast cancer survivors who undergo all types of biomedical therapy such as chemotherapy and radiation as well as those who reject such treatments and seek natural therapies instead (Padgett 2008). It 'aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation' (Patton 2002, p. 234; Seale 2012b). With this strategy, researchers may include participants that cut across age, gender, ethnicity, social class, geographic location, health status, nationality, and so on.

Homogeneous sampling is in contrast to the maximum variation strategy. For example, researchers may narrow the sample group to include only cancer survivors who rejected biomedical therapies. In research concerning parent education programs, the sample may include single-parent female heads of households (Patton 2002; Padgett 2008, 2012; Holloway & Wheeler 2010). The aim of this strategy is to examine some specific sub-group in greater depth. Homogeneous sampling is used extensively in focus group interviews. Sampling strategy for focus group research typically recruits individuals who come from similar backgrounds and/or have common experience with qualitative research projects (see also Chapter 4).

Special/unique case sampling technique

This sampling technique is the focus of qualitative research in anthropology and sociology. Teddlie and Yu (2007) suggest that researchers may decide to sample special or unique cases, which will occur when the case itself (or a particular group of cases) is a main focus of the research (instead of an issue). This is often referred to as an intrinsic case study and is used in **case study research** where 'the case itself is of primary importance, rather than some overall issue' (Teddlie & Yu 2007, p. 81; see also Stake 2008; Yin 2008; see Chapter 10). There are several types of purposive sampling techniques that characterise special or unique cases and I will mention the following: revelatory case sampling, critical case sampling, and criterion sampling.

Revelatory case sampling means identifying as well as obtaining access to a single case that may represent an issue or phenomenon that had been 'inaccessible to scientific investigation' (Yin 2003, p. 42, 2008). These cases are difficult to find and/or difficult to examine, but they will provide extremely valuable data about the unknown (Teddlie & Yu 2007).

Critical case sampling involves cases that are specifically crucial for the research. As Patton (2002, p. 236) suggests, 'a clue to the existence of a critical case is a key informant observation to the effect that "if that group is having problems, then we can be sure all the groups are having problems"'. In order to identify critical cases, researchers must recognise 'the key dimensions that make for a critical case'. For example, in a study that intends to examine whether people will accept or resist a new welfare program in a local community, a critical case may be drawn from a particularly difficult location. It may be more useful for the researcher to study the location 'where resistance to the program is expected to be greatest to provide the most rigorous test of program recruitment'. If the program is accepted in that particular location, it should also be accepted in other locations (Patton 2002, p. 237).

Criterion sampling is the selection of cases that meet a predetermined specific criterion that is crucial for the research; for example, new mothers who have given birth in the last six months or young homeless men who seek health care from a local community health centre. This technique will allow researchers to select those who are able to provide rich information relevant to the research project.

Sequential sampling techniques

Sequential sampling techniques are adopted when the samples need to evolve as data are being collected or when the aim of the research project is to generate theory (as in grounded theory) (Teddlie & Yu 2007). Four kinds of purposive sampling techniques come under this heading: opportunistic, confirming and disconfirming cases, **snowball sampling**, and **theoretical sampling**.

Opportunistic sampling occurs when there is an opportunity to sample during the course of data collection (Carpenter & Suto 2008; Holloway & Wheeler 2010). It is also known as emergent sampling. Patton (2002) says that in carrying out research, new opportunities may present themselves and the researchers need to make on-the-spot decisions to include them in the research. This is part of the strength of qualitative research, and researchers should follow where the data take them. This sampling technique 'takes advantage of whatever unfolds as it unfolds' (Patton 2002, p. 240).

Confirming and disconfirming cases can be used to confirm or disconfirm the data. Often, in the early part of a research project, researchers will collect data and examine emerging patterns. But as the research progresses, researchers may need to find cases they can use to confirm or disconfirm their findings. Confirming cases are those that sit neatly within the emergent themes. They help to 'confirm and elaborate findings, adding richness, depth, and credibility'. But researchers may need to find examples that do not fit the pattern and these are referred to as disconfirming cases. According to Patton (2002, p. 239), these cases are 'a source of rival interpretations'.

Snowball sampling is similar to opportunistic sampling and requires researchers to initially select a few research participants and ask them if they know others who meet the criteria of the research and who might be interested to take part. A snowball effect develops and successive research participants become involved in the study (Liamputtong 2007a; Carpenter & Suto 2008; Holloway & Wheeler 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011; Neuman 2011; Bryman 2012; Seale 2012b). Morse (2006, p. 531) also calls snowball sampling a 'nominated sample'. Neuman (2011, p. 269) refers to it as 'network, chain referral, reputational, and respondent-driven sampling'. Snowball sampling is employed extensively in research with groups whose members are difficult to locate or unlikely to be willing to take part without referral from others in their own network (Dattalo 2008; Seale 2012b). These difficult-to-access groups may include gang members, drug users, members of a religious sect, ethnic communities, homeless people, sex workers, and so on (Liamputtong 2007a, 2010b; Padgett 2008; see also Chapter 15). Wang and colleagues (2007) employed a respondent-driven sampling technique to recruit 249 illicit drug users in three rural Ohio towns to identify substance abuse and health care needs among this group of hard-to reach people (see also Heckathorn 1997, 2002).

Theoretical sampling involves the construction of a sample that is essential 'because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria that contribute to the development and testing of an

emerging theory or argument' (Carpenter & Suto 2008, p. 79; see also Chapter 11 on grounded theory; Holloway & Wheeler 2010; Bryman 2012; Seale 2012b). The study on 'awareness of dying' carried out by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the originators of grounded theory, is an excellent example of the theoretical sampling technique. Glaser and Strauss collected their data from different sites that were relevant to their emerging theory regarding different types of awareness of dying. These sites included premature baby services, intensive care units, emergency services, cancer wards, and neurological services with comatose patients. They collected data from each site that was not revealed in previous research sites. They continued to collect data from different sites in order to refine their theory of awareness of dying.

Theoretical sampling, which occurs when the data are being analysed, allows researchers to find additional participants. Padgett (2008, pp. 54–5) provides a good example here. A grounded theory study of recovery from drug addiction finds that individuals with spiritual beliefs appear more likely to manifest a 'natural recovery' without formal treatment. Further sampling of individuals who have experienced 'natural recovery' would explore whether they had also used formal treatment and the extent of their spiritual beliefs.

Having presented different sampling techniques, I also suggest that because of the complexity of the issues being researched, qualitative researchers will often make use of more than one sampling technique in a piece of research. The important thing to remember, as Patton (2002, p. 242) tells us, is that 'the underlying principle that is common to all these strategies is selecting information-rich cases—cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study'.

SAMPLE SIZE

> Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully. (Patton 2002, p. 230)

A crucial point in qualitative research is to select the research participants meaningfully and strategically, instead of attempting to make statistical comparisons or to 'create a representative sample' (Carpenter & Suto 2008, p. 80; Patton 2002).

The important question to ask when deciding about the sample size in qualitative research is whether the sample provides enough data to allow the research questions or aims to be thoroughly addressed (Mason 2002). In phenomenological research, for example, Todres (2005, pp. 109–10) maintains that sampling within this enquiry is about 'quality' but not 'size'. The aim of phenomenological research is

> not to count how many people have had a particular experience or to make quantitative comparisons between different populations of people. Rather, the aim is to understand a phenomenon more deeply through adequate exposure to the qualities of the phenomena that are given by the living of the phenomenon.

In qualitative research, no set formula is rigidly applied to determine the sample size, as is the case in quantitative research (Morse 1998; Patton 2002; Padgett 2012). The sampling process is flexible, and at the start of the research the number of participants to be recruited is not definitely known. However, data saturation, a concept associated with grounded theory,

is used by qualitative researchers as a way of justifying the number of research participants, and this is done during the data collection process. Saturation occurs when few new data are being generated (Bowen 2008; Padgett 2008, 2012; Bryman 2012). The number of samples are adequate when 'the emerging themes have been efficiently and effectively saturated with optimal quality data' (Carpenter & Suto 2008, p. 152) and 'sufficient data to account for all aspects of the phenomenon have been obtained' (Morse et al. 2002, p. 12). However, it is important that researchers separate the notion of saturating participants from data saturation (Morse et al. 2002). For grounded theory research, saturation occurs when new information fits into the categories that have already developed in the data analysis process (Carpenter & Suto 2008). See Chapter 11 on saturating participants in grounded theory.

It is also important to note that there are many other factors to consider in making decisions about the sample size. These include the scope of the research, the nature of the research question, the amount of useful information gained from each participant or research source, and the methodology and methods adopted in the study (Morse 2000a; Carpenter & Suto 2008). If the scope of the research question is broad, more participants or data sources will be essential. And it means that data saturation will take longer to reach. Some research topics are sensitive and it is difficult to locate the participants. It may mean that researchers can include only a small number of participants in the research and saturation may never be reached.

The focus of sample size in qualitative research is on 'flexibility and depth'. A fundamental concern of this research is quality, not quantity. Qualitative researchers sample until they become saturated with data they require in their research, but they do not intend to maximise the breadth of their research (Padgett 2008, 2012). See Guest and colleagues (2006) for their exploration of the question of saturation from their qualitative study of sex workers in West Africa.

HOW TO ACCESS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There are many ways that researchers may adopt to access their potential participants. The snowball sampling method has been extensively adopted in qualitative research, especially when it is related to vulnerable or marginalised participants who are often difficult to reach otherwise (Liamputtong 2007a, 2010b; Hennink et al. 2011). Umaña-Taylor and Bámaca (2004, p. 267) and Madriz (1998) refer to this approach as the 'word-of-mouth' techniques in their study with Latinos in the USA. They assert that this approach is extremely useful in research with ethnic minorities because potential participants are more likely to take part if someone they know is also participating. In their study with drug injectors in New York City, Cooper and others (2005, p. 676) started their snowball sampling through individuals who were identified by a local council member and community board staff. Once Cooper managed to locate parks, soup kitchens, and other places where the users tended to congregate, she started to have some informal conversations with them. This attempt generated new snowballs for the study.

Gatekeepers have been used to gain access to potential research participants (Liamputtong 2007a, 2010b, 2011a; Hennink et al. 2011; Kawulic 2011). Gatekeepers can distribute

information sheets or flyers to potential participants. Takahashi and Kai (2005) recruited Japanese women who had survived breast cancer through the assistance of surgeons in breast surgery clinics in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Goodman (2004) recruited Sudanese refugee youths from the resettlement agency that held legal guardianship of the youth. In his research of a crack-dealing gang, the Black Kings, in Chicago's low-income housing projects, Vankatesh (2008) had difficulty accessing his research participants at the beginning. Luckily, he became acquainted with a sympathetic gang leader who acted as the gatekeeper for both the gang's activities and the housing project. Without this gatekeeper, Vankatesh would not have been able to hang out in the area to recruit his participants. However, 'gatekeepers can also take it upon themselves to deny access to some participants who might otherwise be willing to take part' (Barbour 2008, p. 76; see also Wiles et al. 2006; Liamputtong 2007a, 2010b, 2011b; Porr et al. 2012).

Advertising can be used to recruit participants. This can be done by placing an advertisement in specific areas (health centre, hospital, shopping malls and hair studios) or through specific means (radio, bulletin boards, internet and ethnic newspapers) (see Porr et al. 2012). Most human ethics committees prefer advertising for people to volunteer because it is less likely that they will be coerced into participation (Padgett 2008). However, some groups of participants will not respond to advertised recruitment (Liamputtong 2007a). Furthermore, advertising may only reach certain groups of potential participants; placing an advertisement in a local health centre, for example, will be unlikely to reach those who do not attend such centres.

More often, researchers employ a combination of methods to gain access to research participants. For example, in their study with single mothers who left their abusive partners in New Brunswick and Ontario, Canada, Wuest and colleagues (2003a,b) recruited their participants by placing advertisements in local newspapers, posters in grocery stores, community sites, and libraries, and by contacting agencies and their personal contacts. Leipert and Reutter (2005), in their study exploring how women in geographically isolated settings in northern Canada maintain their health, used several methods to access their participants. Because of logical constraints caused by distance, terrain, and weather, they recruited the women by television and radio interviews. They also placed advertisements about the research in local newspapers, and posters were displayed in tack-and-feed stores and auction markets. They also recruited participants by word of mouth. With these efforts, more than a hundred women from across the north responded in order to participate in the study. In a recent study on establishing therapeutic relationships with single mothers living in low-income situations in Canada, Porr and college (2012, p. 385) did the following: 'Flyers inviting study participation were posted on bulletin boards (as approved by owners/managers) in public health units, laundromats, restaurants, and grocery stores. In addition, nursing and support staff members of several public health units spoke to potential mothers about the study.'

CONCLUSION

> [Theory] influences the way the researcher approaches the study and pervades almost all aspects of the study. It is a 'lens' … framing and shaping what the researcher looks at and includes, how the researcher thinks about the study and its conduct, and, in the end, how the researcher conducts the study. (Mertz & Anfara Jr 2006, p. 189)

In this chapter, I have first discussed an essential part of qualitative enquiry: the methodological framework of qualitative methods. A methodological framework provides 'ways of seeing' (Morgan 1986, p. 12) in the conduct of qualitative research. As Avis (2003) suggests, qualitative researchers must defend the adoption of their methods based on an appropriate methodological framework. It is not enough to say that we will use an in-depth interview in our research to examine the experience of living with chronic illness among our research participants. We must provide some framework to justify our method. In this case, we may say that we are interested in the lived experience of participants and hence phenomenology will be our methodological framework, and with this type of research an in-depth interview is appropriate because it will allow participants to tell their stories in great depth. As Mertz and Anfara Jr (2006, p. 190) argue, qualitative researchers should pay great attention to the role that theory plays in their research: 'research cannot be conducted without the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theory.' At the same time, it must be noted that each theory will be more appropriate for some research questions than others. It is the task of qualitative researchers to consider carefully which theory is more useful and suitable for their research projects.

Second, I have discussed sampling strategies in qualitative research. I have pointed out a number of strategies that qualitative researchers have adopted to find their potential research participants as well as what we should think in terms of the number of participants in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers must defend the use of small numbers of research participants for the sake of 'depth' in their research. This sets qualitative research apart from positivist science, which strives for a broad canvas in order to generalise its findings.

These two issues are crucial for any piece of qualitative research. I anticipate that after you are familiar with several matters I have included in this chapter, you will be able to commence your research project with rigorous foundations. You will be in a stronger position to defend your qualitative research with confidence.

Tutorial exercises

1. You are a doctoral student and you are pursuing your research on the work and family life of rural men and women. You need to defend your choice of methodological framework and method, and you need to demonstrate that you have selected methodology and the method appropriate to your research. What methodology and method will you use for this project?
2. In the same project, you need to decide on your research participants. Who will you select for this project? What type of sampling strategies will you employ? How will you find them? How many will you recruit to provide answers for your research?
3. You are a research assistant who works with a criminologist who asks you to design a research project on the lived experiences of criminal acts among women who are ex-prisoner females. You have to design your methodology and to identify your method and how you can find your research participants. How will you go about this, taking into account of what has been discussed in this chapter?

Further reading

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