The Evolving World of Qualitative Methodology as a Tool for Nursing Knowledge Development

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The Nature of Clinical Knowledge

Patterns and Processes that Inform Clinical Reasoning

Theoretical Knowledge

Empirical Knowledge

Pattern Recognition

Infinite Variation of Pattern

Knowing the Patient
The Nature of the Knowledge that Nursing Requires

Two equally compelling dimensions:

- knowing that which is shared by persons in similar situations, and knowing that which is particular to the lived experience of an individual person
- population patterns, correlations, and tendencies among aggregates
- individuals in context

Quantitative methods
Qualitative methods
Paradigmatic Distinction from Science as Nursing Knew It
Early Explorers of Qualitative Methods in Nursing
Methodological Roots of Qualitative Methods

Natural philosophy

- Natural science
- Science
- Social science

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<th>Anthropology</th>
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<td>Ethnography</td>
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Nursing’s Epistemological Hardwiring
Wholes and Parts

- Context for the conceptual understanding of a system in which all parts interact and are meaningful to one another.
Commonalities and Differences

• Context for understanding the nature of scientific claims about human health status, health experience and health care delivery
Experience and Ideas

- Context for coming to know what we know and the basis upon which we know it within an applied practice profession.
Nursing Knowledge

Never static, fixed truths, but rather:

• Processual
• Systematic
• Flexible
• Infinitely Adaptive
The Standardizing Tone of an Evidence Agenda
The Moral Implications of a Justice Mandate

- Research as participation, action, intervention
The Relationship Between General & Particular

General knowledge

Particular case
History of Confronting Resistance for early qualitative researchers

- Health science community
- Social scientist colleagues
- Grant reviewers/journal editors
- Paradigmatic thinking
Rule Bound Methods
Methodological Rigidity

The problem of rigor in qualitative research

There are few explicit discussions in nursing literature of how qualitative research can be made as rigorous as it is relevant to the perspective and goals of nursing. Four factors complicate the debate about the scientific merits of qualitative research: the varieties of qualitative methods, the lack of clear boundaries between quantitative and qualitative research, the tendency to evaluate qualitative research against conventional scientific criteria of rigor, and the artistic features of qualitative inquiry. A framework for understanding the similarities and differences in research approaches and a summary of strategies to achieve rigor in qualitative research are presented.


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Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited

QUALITATIVE methods of inquiry have increasingly been accepted as relevant to and congruent with the perspective and goals of nursing, but they continue to be criticized for failing to pass tests of methodological rigor. Although there are few explicit discussions in nursing literature of how qualitative research can be made rigorous without sacrificing its relevance.


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THE PROBLEM OF rigor in qualitative research continues to arouse, beguile, and misdirect. As researchers, we have a much clearer understanding of the challenges involved in producing good qualitative work and of techniques that can be used to ensure its trustworthiness. Yet we also remain in danger of succumbing to the “illusion of technique”1,2: of making a fetish of it at the expense of perfecting a craft and of

1

Notes.
Methodological Orthodoxy in Qualitative Nursing Research: Analysis of the Issues

Sally E. Thorne

In this analysis, the applicability of orthodox qualitative research traditions to the questions of nursing science is considered from a critical perspective. The theoretical traditions of ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory are examined in light of their relationship to the larger projects of anthropology, philosophy, and sociology. From that perspective, the questions inherent to nursing science are distinguished, revealing major departures from the process, product, and even purpose of the original inquiries. This analysis provides a platform on which the possibilities for a uniquely nursing approach to qualitative inquiry can be envisioned. In this spirit, ideas about what that methodological perspective might entail are proposed.

The divergent theoretical underpinnings of qualitative (naturalistic) and quantitative (positivistic) research paradigms demand incompatible approaches to the conduct of all phases of

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Focus on Qualitative Methods: An Alternative for Developing Nursing Knowledge

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Abstract: Despite nursing’s enthusiastic endorsement of the applicability of qualitative research approaches to answering relevant clinical questions, many nurse researchers have been hesitant to depart from traditional qualitative research methods. While various derivations of phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography have been popularized within qualitative nursing research, the methodological principles upon which these approaches are based reflect the foundations and objectives of disciplines whose aims are sometimes quite distinct from nursing’s domain of inquiry. Thus, as many nurse researchers have discovered, nursing’s unique knowledge mandates may not always be well served by strict adherence to traditional methods as the “gold standard” for qualitative nursing research. The authors present the point of view that a non-categorical description, drawing on principles grounded in nursing’s epidemiological mandate, may be an appropriate methodological alternative for credible research toward the development of nursing science. They propose a coherent set of strategies for conceptual orientation, sampling, data construction, analysis, and reporting by which nurses can use an interpretative descriptive approach to develop knowledge about human health and illness experience phenomena without sacrificing the theoretical or methodological integrity that the traditional qualitative approaches provide. © 1997 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Res Nurs Health 20: 169–177, 1997

Keywords: research method; qualitative research; interpretative description

The history and tradition within qualitative nursing research originates in the methodologies of several different disciplinary traditions. Just as quantitative scientific approaches proved insufficient for answering all of nursing’s theoretical and practical questions, the qualitative approaches derived from other disciplines have not always met the unique demands of nurse researchers. We examine some of the reasons that nurse researchers have felt compelled to depart from traditional methods, despite a concurrent concern for retaining methodological integrity in their work. We take the position that it may be an appropriate time in our history to consider noncategorical qualita-
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<td>Assumptions not Predicated on Interactional Material</td>
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<td>Basic Social Processes</td>
<td>No Presumption of Underlying Mechanisms</td>
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<td>Individual Account as Access to Fundamental Explanation for Social Behavior</td>
<td>Individual Account as Window into Possibilities in Shared Aspects</td>
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<td>Cultural Immersion</td>
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<td>Interconnectedness of Whole Cultures</td>
<td>No Preconception of Shared Cultural Understandings</td>
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<td>Challenge Subjective Understandings with Behavioral Observation</td>
<td>Invite Interpretation &amp; Explanation</td>
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Further Influences

• Funding body requirements (eg predetermined sample and design; assumptions of relevance)
• Social science norms (eg theoretical frameworks; saturation)
• Journal manuscript length (depth & richness)
Resultant Body of Qualitative Material

- Too many small studies
- Confusion over role of theory
- Essentializing claims
- Abdication of generalization
- Overuse of metaphoric representations
Phenomenological Question
- What is the lived experience of pain?

Grounded Theory Question
- What are the stages of adaptation to diagnosis of a terminal condition?

Nursing Question
- How will I recognize and interpret my patients’ diverse pain expressions?
- What can be learned about providing support from patient perspectives on the experience of being diagnosed with a terminal condition?
Applied Qualitative Methodology
The Next Generation
Interpretive Description

- Logic model derived from disciplinary epistemology
- Borrows the best of technique without the theoretical baggage
- Allows for focused reflective studies oriented to the knowledge needs of the discipline
What it adds to the available methodological options

- Freedom to depart from methodological rules invented for the intellectual projects of other disciplines
• Drawing on nursing epistemology rather than borrowed theory

The core structure of nursing thought as philosophical underpinning
• Creativity in the use of data sources and inquiry approaches
• Knowledge translation built into the initial design
Orientation toward a body of more relevant and useable qualitatively derived knowledge
Putting Qualitative Research to Better Use

• Challenging current assumptions & ideologies
• Explaining exceptions & variance
• Illuminating complexity
• Inspiring empathy
• Filling the gaps where population research ( & other quantitative findings) cannot go
Qualitative research as a corrective to big science
Explicitly emphasizes both commonalities and diversities
Allows us to appreciate variance
Invites the researcher to articulate:

- Nature of disciplinary forestructure
- Justification for this particular study at this point in time
- Implications of data collection and analytic approach choices
- Influence of context on conclusions
- Implications of findings on practice insight (including new questions)
Credibility Criteria that Ring True for Nurses

• Epistemological Integrity
• Representative Credibility
• Analytic Logic
• Interpretive Authority
And the work continues...