



Energy Medicine Research: A Call to Action, Part 4

In the past three columns,^{1,2,3} Dr. Rolle-Whatley and I have provided a broad-brush look at designing and performing research. We left until last the expansive area of qualitative research with its five major research approaches: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

These approaches are inter-disciplinary, open-ended, inclusive of client experiences and inductive (i.e., how the world works is inferred from specific experiences) rather than deductive (hypotheses are deduced about how things work). Narrative research originates from the humanities and social sciences, phenomenology from psychology and philosophy, grounded theory from sociology, ethnography from anthropology and sociology, and case study from human and social sciences as well as applied areas such as evaluation research.^{4,5}

When a problem or issue needs to be explored in all its complexity, qualitative research becomes appropriate. It is especially useful when that exploration incorporates study of a group or population along with the desire to identify specific variables (i.e., elements that change over time, like the number of sessions needed to decrease pain) and context (i.e., what the group being studied has in common, like the environment, emotional pain, culture). Qualitative

research allows for flexibility in presentation; that is, writing can incorporate prose and flow non-academically. Qualitative research is also used to:

1. follow up quantitative study findings to help explain mechanisms or linkages deduced by cause-and-effect experiments and
2. promote quantitative studies by identifying basic psychosocial behavioral processes that would benefit from quantitative investigation.

Narrative research represents an account of event(s) and/or action(s) spoken or written by a single person in chronological order (e.g., the long-term Energy Medicine experiences of a chronic pain sufferer).

Phenomenology research describes and interprets the lived experiences that a group has in common around a certain concept or phenomenon (e.g., the lived experiences of breast cancer clients using Energy Medicine).

Grounded theory moves beyond description to formulate a general explanation (a theory) of a basic social psychological process, action or condition (e.g., the process of developing resilience in a foster-care system). Actual participant experiences are the field data that ground the theory in reality. Ultimately, grounded theories explain behavior, interpret and predict a field-tested pathway for change.

Ethnographic research studies an entire culture to explore shared patterns of belief, behavior and language. Through cultural immersion, the researcher studies the meaning of lived experience within the culture (e.g., a veterans' club or a neighborhood gang).

Case study research involves investigation of an issue over time and through detailed, in-depth data collection of multiple sources of information (e.g., interviews, documents, reports, etc.) around a particular case (i.e., a setting, a context). Case study research results in a detailed description with resultant produced themes.

In a previous article,² I mentioned how quantitative research follows a prescribed scientific structure: abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion and references. Qualitative research modifies this scientific method somewhat because of its inductive (i.e., bottom up) orientation. You begin by asking questions that generate thoughts and reflections, and collecting these as data directly from participants rather than with a statement of the research gap and your



hypothesis. An iterative data analysis process follows during which you identify core concepts and finally, findings.

Here are a few key differences between quantitative and qualitative research.

1. Quantitative research produces results from objective, deductive reasoning that tests theory and uses numbers and statistical analysis as a basis of knowing the relationship between cause and effect.
2. Qualitative research produces findings from subjective, inductive reasoning that develops theory and uses words and narrative as a basis of knowing meaning and discovery.
3. Quantitative research generally costs more money since there are usually lab tests, equipment and statistical analysis involved in the study.
4. Qualitative research requires more time than money.

As long as your participants have provided informed consent and you have a way to record their interviews, you can start taking data.

Ultimately, choosing a research methodology will depend upon your own skills, time and interests. Whatever choice you make, the learning curve will be exciting if you pick a topic that intrigues you and brings with it a sense of satisfaction in the work.

Since January, Dr. Rolle-Whatley and I have discussed research methodology because research is critical for taking Energy Medicine forward into partnership with other medical professionals and gaining a consistent place on the client's health care team.

All of us should examine our interests and abilities with an eye towards conducting research involving Energy Medicine. If you happen to be a Healing Touch practitioner, consider contacting the Co-chair of the Healing Touch Research Advisory Council (www.healingtouchresearch.com/contact) to help you with your research questions or proposals. If you are a member of the American Holistic Nurses Association, you may wish to use the AHNA One-on-One Research Consultation Service (www.AHNA.org/research). The more you read research, the more ideas you will generate, building scientific evidence in support of Energy Medicine techniques and modalities. €

References:

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