

Chapter Four

Research Methodology – a step by step approach

*“Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo – Strong in action, gentle in method”
(Latin proverb, Browning, 1982, p.317).*

Introduction

For this study, a qualitative research design is chosen as research methodology. The previous chapters aimed to describe the constructs and concepts that are found in literature, in accordance with the topic of study. Constructs are explained and models explored.

The purpose of the chapter is to describe how the research study was conducted, thus giving an overview of the overall practical process of the study. The ontology and epistemology of qualitative research is discussed, the methodology is explicated and the narrative approach used in the study is defined. The research validity of qualitative research is tested and accounted for, not merely by describing the work, but by an audit - an idea from Kelly (1999), in Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) - plus the principles of qualitative research (Kvale, 1996), which will be adhered to in the research audit.

The existing literature is seen as the public narrative of the topic that is being described. In contrast, collected conversations are viewed as the private narrative of the persons who contributed to this study, by becoming conversational partners in the process of research. This private narrative in turn, has the aim to merge with the public narrative to create new understandings. Thus, a circular growth pattern of exploration and integration emerges, rather than a linear research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Lawler, 2002.)

Aims of the research study

The research aim is to explore the fortigenic experiences of psychotherapists in full-time private practice, in order to come to an understanding of their lived reality - or their experiences in private practice.

Full-time private practice means conducting psychodiagnostic and psychotherapeutic sessions everyday for almost every week of the working year. For practical purposes for the research, full-time private practice as a psychotherapist is defined as a time of at least a period of ten years without interruption. *Psychotherapists* are psychologists in private practice, which professionally are sub-divided either in one or more of the professional registration categories clinical, counselling and educational psychology.

Questions which arise are: What are their personal coping skills, what fortigenic coping strategies do they have which equip them to maintain a full-time private practice for longer than ten years?

A second objective is to determine if this study can contribute to the theory of positive psychology. It seems that the theory (as in chapter 3) is still in a process of development and that certain structures need to be reconsidered and put into place towards the unification of ideas.

Qualitative research design

A qualitative research design is an appropriate approach for the current research topic. Through exploratory conversations, narrative material is collected from the experiential world of the conversational partners in the study.

The aim is not to impose a pre-selected framework on the study, but rather to look at the personal experiences and fortigenic strengths of the psychotherapists through exploratory conversations.

The qualitative research design also allows for a reflection on the researcher's background and experience of developing as a psychotherapist in private practice, also known as self-reflexivity (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 1997). By keeping a personal research journal during the entire research process, I as the researcher can access and reflect on my own process of development in the field of qualitative research. This self-reflexivity allows me to be able to give account of my personal involvement in the qualitative research process (King, 1996).

As opposed to quantitative research, which utilises elaborate and complex statistical formulas to discover absolute answers, a qualitative research design has a different focus. Quantitative research lies within a modernistic, experimental approach; qualitative research lies within a post-modern trend (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Macleod, 2002; Neuman, 1994).

Epistemology and ontology of a qualitative research design

The question of epistemology and ontology deals with the assumptions about the way in which knowledge can be known (epistemology) and the nature of reality (ontology). In a qualitative research design, reality is interpreted or constructed, where quantitative approaches attempt to discover a stable external reality (Gilhooly & Green, 1996; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In our everyday life we do not experience life as a story. But ontologically, the narrative approach views life as a narrative or storied reality. Therefore, knowledge rooted in such a reality is seen as constructed in the narrative and expressed in language (epistemology).

An explanation of this thinking can be described as the difference between a miner and a traveller (Kvale, 1996). This example is helpful in explaining the difference between the quantitative and qualitative research designs. Where the miner digs to find the absolute truth that exists below (quantitative), the traveller journeys in exploration and description of what is encountered (qualitative)(Kvale, 1996).

Rabinow and Sullivan (1979) refer to an 'interpretive turn' in the epistemology of the social sciences, thereby referring to the shift from research aimed at discovering 'universal truths', to making sense of the human experience within the context and perspective of the experience. Human experience is understood from social, linguistic and historical features. Thus knowledge is created, reflected and communicated to the reader (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Language is used to describe the world (Potgieter & Heyns, 2006; Silverman, 1997).

Another development that occurs in the history of thought is the 'linguistic turn', which seems to be even more important. This is where the underestimated role of language in our construction of the world is given more importance (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). It refers to the idea that reality is constructed through language, as this is the most prevalent means by which we express or represent ourselves. Language thus does not only reflect meaning, but rather produces it and creates social reality. Thus, there is a continual co-creation of the self and reality. We then study the language that we use to express our reality, in order to know more about our reality (Viljoen, 2008).

The social constructionist paradigm is applicable to the study, where the narratives are seen as co-created during the conversations between the conversational partners. These private narratives of the research conversations are reflections of the greater life narratives of the psychotherapists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Macleod, 2002; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999;).

The research process entails an exploration of the narratives of the conversational partners, where the research conversations are co-created between the researcher and conversational partners. These private narratives reflect the life narratives of the psychotherapists in long-term full-time private practice and are rich descriptions, which add to the understanding of the research topic.

Narrative approach

Qualitative research can be applied through a variety of different approaches. For this topic of study, the narrative approach is a good fit (Kaminer, 2006; Lawler, 2002; Robertson, Venter & Botha, 2005). The narrative approach is a better option than, for example, using discourse analysis, as discourse analysis focuses on the society as a whole while this study deals with individuals (Du Preez & Roos, 2008). Furthermore, the narrative approach, also called narrative inquiry or narrative analysis, reflects the narrative experience of the present through the conversation or story that is co-created or constructed (Du Preez, 2004; Kvale, 1996). This approach is therefore, applicable to this study as it relates to the exploration of the experiences of psychotherapists in psychotherapeutic private practice.

The narrative approach used in this study is an example of social constructionism, as the reality is co-constructed in the interview as the narrative emerges (Kvale, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The process starts early in the project and guides the subsequent production of narratives in the conversations. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 1995, 1999, 2000) and Lindsay (2001, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Lindsay & Smith, 2003) clearly explicate the narrative inquiry approach in qualitative research.

Lindsay (2006b) defines narrative inquiry as the discovery and exploration of how an experience matters or is significant, in the construction of identity and knowledge. This echoes the opinion of McAdams (2005) who states that integrative life narratives serve to reconstruct reality in such a way as to give life unity, purpose and meaning. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 2000) utilise the method of narrative analysis to view the reconstruction of stories; accordingly, narrative life history and storied life compositions reflect the person's life history and their social milieu. The reconstruction or co-creation of research narratives can thereby explore connections and explicate experiences which were previously unknown, highlighting what these experiences might mean. The narrative becomes both auto-biographical, as well as, a reflection of the social context and interpersonal relationships that define everyday life (Lindsay, 2006b). Thus as our lives tell our narratives, so our stories reflect our lives – in exploring a story we gain access to an exploration of our lives, Lindsay (2006b, p.33) calls this a *“privileged place where meanings can come together to shape, and be shaped by our shared experience.”* Therefore, the exploration of experience is a key concept in narrative inquiry.

Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) describe narrative research as conducted according to a broad, holistic three-dimensional approach – focussing on interaction, situation and continuity; or in a more linear, narrow problem-solution approach – focussing on events, sequence and action. The researcher needs to choose which is the more appropriate approach for the research study. The holistic-content approach is for understanding the meaning of an individual's story or as in the case of the current study, exploring the experience of the individual (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; 2000). Or a more linear problem-solving approach could be implemented for example, for a research study focussing on finding solutions to questions or problems, which is not applicable to the current study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

The main concept highlighted by the work of Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002, p.330) is “*restorying*” which is defined as “*reading the transcript, analysing the story to understand the lived experience and then retelling the story.*” The stories represent both personal and social experience and they are continuous. The researcher analyses the stories by paying attention to the narrative elements, such as characters, plot, scenes, themes, patterns, tensions, conflicts and resolution (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rich detail is included to describe the experience in the narrative, it is usually a first-person restorying or re-telling and it has a beginning, middle and end (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Kvale (1996) describes how narrative analysis treats interview analysis as a form of narration or a continuation of the story told by the participant. Du Preez (2004; Du Preez & Roos, 2008) describes the analysis as a condensation or reconstruction of the conversations into a richer, more condensed and coherent story.

I agree with Kvale’s (1996) description of the process of narrative research, but find it difficult to ascribe to the concept of analysis. It is a term used very often in various contexts, and most often analysis reflects a reductionistic perspective.

The definition of “**analysis**: a detailed examination of the elements or structure of a substance etc., the act or process of breaking something down into its constituents parts, examination, investigation, scrutiny, dissection, breakdown or division” (Tulloch, 1993, p.49).

It is more appropriate to the current study to refer to the concept of data synthesis (Viljoen, 2008). This concept will be the way to look at this process from a fortigenic perspective within the field of positive psychology. Within the fortigenic perspective the focus is shifted away from the negative, reductionistic perspective towards a more enriching, strength perspective (Strümpfer, 2005).

This process is applied in describing the reductionistic term of analysis in a more fortigenic way, as the synthesis of narratives.

The definition of “**synthesis**: *the process or result of building up separate elements, esp. ideas, into a connected whole, esp. into a theory or system, a combination or composition, union, amalgamation, integration, fusion or unification*” (Tulloch, 1993, p.1585).

According to Viljoen (2008) the concept of synthesis originates from the Hegelian dialectics, where one finds a conversation between ideas (theses) and counter-ideas (antitheses). The result will be the synthesis or a combination of propositions with qualitative change according to the conversation. This is then, an appropriate method for working with the research data. The research conversations will communicate with each other and with the theoretical concepts to produce a new, whole system or theory. New concepts are created and the qualitative research process is close to the narrative, drawing meaning from words (Neuman, 1994).

The stories of the conversational partners are the private narratives, while the existing literature and formal academic theory can be seen as public narratives (Kaminer, 2006; Lawler, 2002; Robertson, Venter & Botha, 2005). The interaction between the public and private narrative creates a new coherent story (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The private narratives join the public narratives or contribute to the broadening or enrichment of the public narratives.

Method: Sampling conversational partners

The process of selecting participants and their inclusion in the research study depended upon the persons who voluntarily decided to contribute to the emergence of this study, by becoming conversational partners in the process. These are psychotherapists in the registration categories clinical, counselling or

educational psychology, in full-time private practice in excess of ten years. The specification of maintaining private practice for longer than ten years is included in order to find psychotherapists as conversational partners that are maintaining full-time private practice in psychology as a long-term career.

The principle of word of mouth and personal contacts in the professional community introduced conversational partners to the research study. This is described as convenience, or snowball sampling (Neuman, 1994). This process is originated from personal contacts, which I have established in my own capacity as a psychotherapist. Conversational partners also contributed names of any other possible conversational partners from their peer group. The conversational partners were approached and requested to peruse the “Information leaflet and informed consent for the psychotherapist” (Appendix A).

Inclusion in the research study depended on the psychotherapists being in full-time, long-term private practice. It also depended upon the interest of the psychotherapists and their willingness to enter into a conversational relationship, thereby committing time to the research study. I requested them to carefully read the “Information leaflet and informed consent for the psychotherapist” and sign two copies of this document. I as researcher, plus a witness, then signed both of the documents.

The conversational partners received a copy of their signed consent form, as do I. The purpose of this is to ensure that each conversational partner will be very clear on the ethical considerations and voluntary nature of the study, and will have a document in their possession to refer back to at any time, if necessary.

The number of conversational partners is determined by the amount of conversations required to reach a synthesis of ideas, as the narratives are co-constructed by the researcher and the conversational partners. An open-ended invitation was made to conversational partners for voluntary participation in the

study. With the option of email communication add-ons, which can be used as a method of reflection on the open-ended nature of the conversation.

The number of conversational partners selected from those willing to participate was seven. The selection criterion was based on the experience of psychological private practice for longer than ten years. Of these conversational partners six were female and one a male person. Two were registered counselling psychologists, four were clinical psychologists and one an educational psychologist. All were more than ten years in private practice, the longest was 20 years. Their age range was from late 40s to almost 70 years of age.

Two females were divorcees, two were widowed, two married and one was single. Five of the conversational partners had a family with children.

Procedures and recording strategies

Interviews were collected through research conversations with the voluntary conversational partners. The psychotherapists who participated in the research study are referred to as conversational partners.

Neuman (1994) describes this type of interviewing as unstructured, nondirective, in-depth and informal in nature. The research interviews opened in an unstructured manner and moved towards more semi-structured interviews. The process of the conversations will be described further.

Firstly, I visited on appointment with the psychotherapist and met in the private practice location. It was more convenient for them, because they were willing to contribute valuable time to the research study. After introductions, the information leaflet and informed consent document was read and signed (see Appendix A).

A short voice test was conducted with the Dictaphone, in order to make doubly sure that the device was recording accurately. The opening of the interview focussed the topic and started in an unstructured manner (Neuman, 1994). Emotional reflections and content reflections were used at this point, as the conversations unfolded. The interviews then proceeded to a second more semi-structured phase where the fortigenic approach was introduced by the researcher. As the conversation emerges between the researcher and the conversational partner, I use various interviewing techniques, such as:

- Probing – pursuing the answer by probing for content but without stating what dimensions are to be considered (Kvale, 1996);
- rephrasing or reframing – *“To reframe...means to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the “facts”: of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning”* (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974, p.95);
- clarifying- asking for clearer explanations of answers to resolve confusion (Kvale, 1996); and
- exploring – asking about the deeper meaning of answers or meaning in the conversation (Kvale, 1996).

A checklist highlighting broad theoretical themes was developed from the literature for the second phase of the exploratory conversations². This checklist does not serve as a rigid guideline, but rather a broad outline, gained from the process of familiarisation with the theoretical literature in fortology. It simply highlights various themes from the literature, which I can utilise as prompts, in the event of me needing to use these prompts during the emergent conversation. The final phase of the conversations included the closure with an e-mail connection possibility.

² See Appendix B for checklist for exploratory conversations.

Emerging conversations

The understanding that emerges from the conversations between the conversational partners and me as the researcher can be seen as collaborations. In a sense the conversation is co-created by the two parties present in the conversation (Viljoen, 2004). Thus it is not a search for an absolute truth, but rather an exploration and description of the narrative of the psychotherapist (Kvale, 1996).

This approach is appropriate for this research study as the psychotherapists are narrating their life stories and life experiences in long-term full-time private practice. There cannot therefore be only one truth or reality, but rather the construction of several unique life narratives of the individuals (Kvale, 1996; Potgieter & Heyns, 2006).

The collaborative process is one of description and a developing of understanding as the knowledge emerges from the conversations between the conversational partners. Based on this, I as the researcher have to account for my contribution in this narrative and cannot stand aside claiming objectivity. There must be a sense of self-reflexivity, where I am aware of this meta-process occurring (Kvale, 1996).

The result of the research is the emergence of life narratives, mingled or integrated, between the researcher, who is broadly guided by the previously identified themes from literature, and the psychotherapist, who resonates themes and shares personal experiences from the person's own life narrative.

Personal conversation and reflection on process

Another component of the research is the reflective effect that the conversations might have. I, as the researcher, mention how I notice how the narratives

develop. During the research process I use a research journal for the purpose of observation and reflection (Kvale, 1996). The majority of the conversational partners reflect on the impact of thinking back over one's life work. It appears to have a nostalgic, emotional impact, yet the scope of this is not the focus of the current study. Furthermore, the process of observation and reflection was also scrutinized and evaluated by the supervisor as an extension of the research process.

Procedures

The research conversations are initiated by the researcher asking the research question:

“Tell me about your experience of maintaining private practice for longer than ten years.” (Appendix B)

The conversation continues until the psychotherapist indicates the completion of the narrative. The researcher thanks the psychotherapist for their time and participation. The researcher then leaves the conversation with the open-ended option of an email add-on, which can be sent to the researcher, if the psychotherapist wants to (voluntarily). This facilitates the open-ended nature of the emerging narrative and accommodates for a process of reflection to occur.

Transcription

The research conversations are transcribed verbatim, in order to have the transcripts in a format that can be attached to the research report. These transcriptions are attached in Appendix C of the study, in order to make them available for inspection by the reader. Any identifying data is removed from the transcripts, in order to protect the confidentiality of the conversational partners.

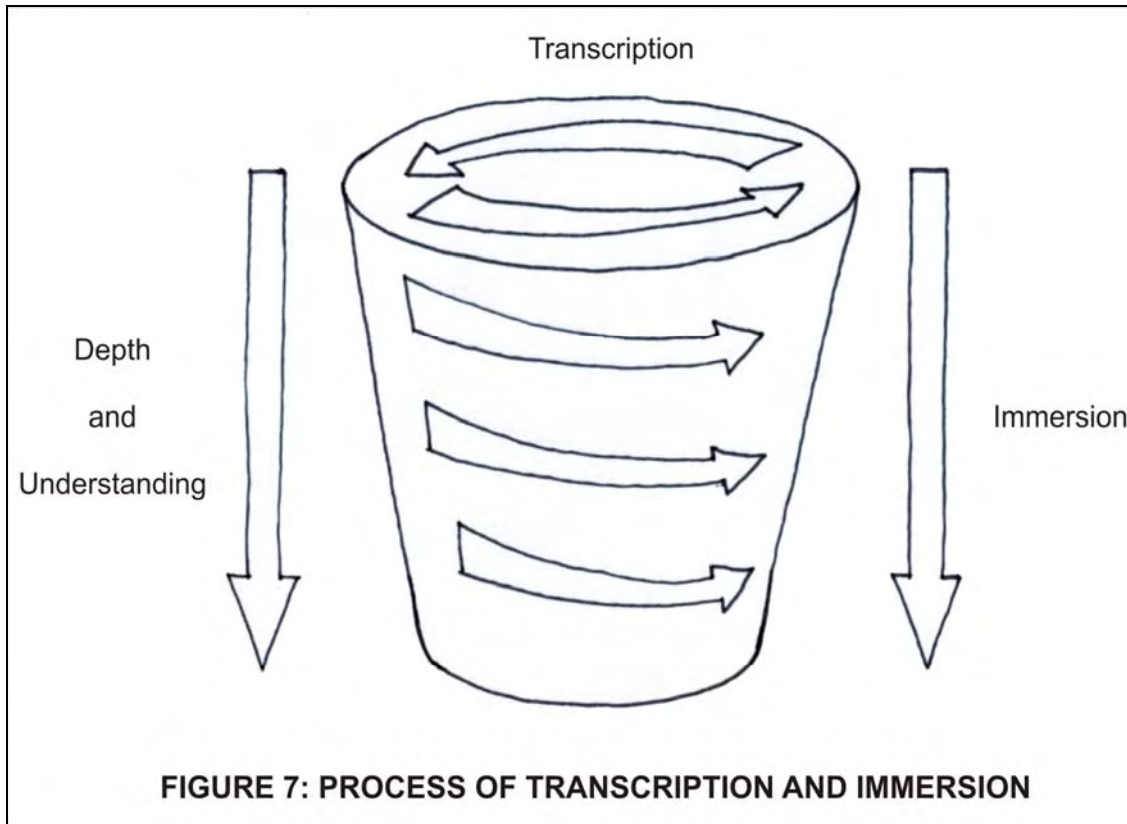
Immersion

The next important step in the research process involves the process of immersion (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This is the process whereby I familiarise myself with the research data. This typically starts at the onset of conducting the interviews, goes on through the transcription of the conversations and is continued as the transcriptions are read and re-read. In this way I immerse myself in the conversations (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This step in the research is very important as it pre-empts any further development of the research process, i.e. one cannot continue if you are not familiar with what has been collected thus far.

I need to become familiar and comfortable with the content as well as the process of the research conversations. The audio versions of the conversations, which are initially recorded, can also be utilised for the process of familiarisation. Listening to the original copy of the conversation over and over until familiar, allows me as the researcher to have a clear idea of what understanding emerges in the conversations. It is important to note that this process of immersion is cyclical in nature, where, once the conversations are collected, the researcher will return to the transcripts again at various points in the research process (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

My own experience of the process of immersion involves an awareness or consciousness of the depth of the conversations – the more I immerse myself in the conversations, the richer the narratives become for me. Furthermore, I am aware that there is a wealth of understanding that cannot all be presented in the limited scope of this one research study. This realisation brings me to ponder the fact that a research narrative is in fact never closed or ended, but remains open not only to content interpretation but also to process, as a snapshot of a continuing life narrative (Kaminer, 2006; Lawler, 2002; Robertson, Venter & Botha, 2005).

I include a diagram (Figure 7) of my understanding of the process of transcription and immersion. It is characterised by a cyclical process deepening the understanding of the research conversations.



The process of data synthesis

The procedure of synthesising the narratives involves paying attention to the various components that the narratives consist of e.g., moments of transformation, progress and characters, themes, nodal points, and dramatisations (Lawler, 2002). I as both the researcher and the conversational partner co-create the conversation. During the conversation I am informed from the background of the theoretical concepts and the conversational partners approach the conversations from their individual larger personal narrative of life.

The conversations are reconstructed and transcribed from personal stories into research stories, in order to discover new meaning in the interaction between private and public narratives (Lawler, 2002). Then the focus is deepened in the stage of immersion, where the transcriptions are read and re-read, in order for me as the researcher to familiarise myself with the data. The audio recordings are kept in digital form, in case it is necessary to refer back to them for clarity. This is because the original audio recordings can be listened to repetitively if need be, to aid the researcher in coming to a deeper understanding of the communication from the conversational partner. The audio recordings reflect the deeper nuances of intonation in voice or hesitation, which give a deeper understanding when listened to several times.

The process of narrative synthesis includes describing patterns, tensions and themes either across or within experiences, and integrating these components (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; 2000). Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that narrative analysis is employed to bring order, structure and interpretation to the volumes of collected text. Narrative synthesis also creates structure and interpretation, but moves beyond that to where the conversations interact with each other to create a composition or integration³.

Thus the conversations begin to communicate with each other regarding, for example, areas where they agree or reiterate an opinion, or where there is disagreement and why these nuances occur. This process even explores possible factors that contribute to these understandings. It then follows that the literature – the public narrative – would also be in conversation with the research data.

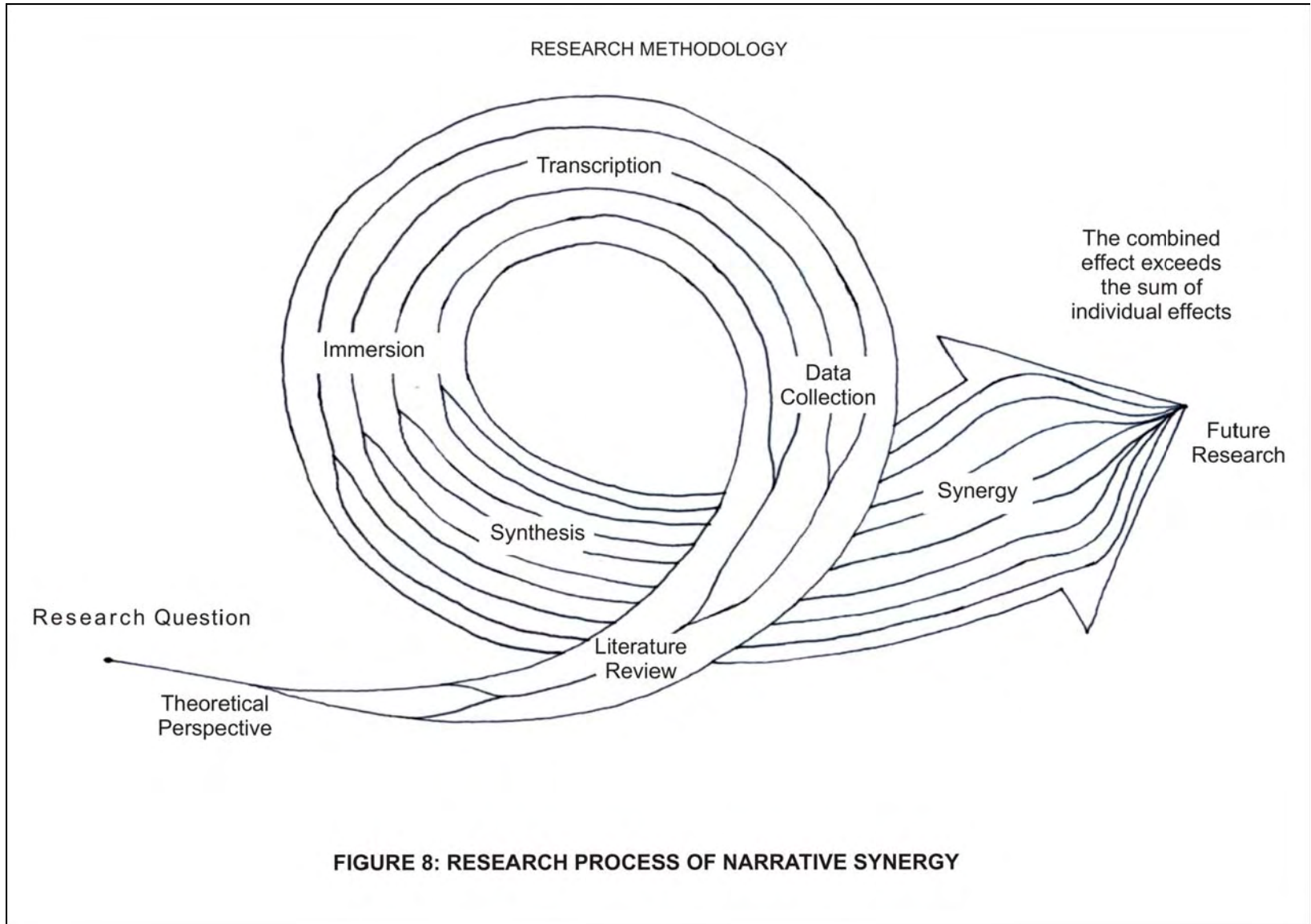
³ For the researcher this is described by a metaphor of a “coming together of the minds.” This is where there is collaboration between the literature, the researcher, the supervision and the conversational partners in the study.

The aim of the research process of narrative synthesis is narrative synergy. There is then a collaboration or a flowing together of research data and research literature in order to create new thinking or theory in a systemic and circular way.

The definition of “**synergy**: *the combined effect exceeds the sum of their individual effects, a working together, coaction and uniting*” (Tulloch, 1993, p.1583).

The above definition can be applied to the research, where all the various components of the research process and the research project come together, creating a combined effect. This concept of flowing together also resonates with the theoretical perspective of Csikszentmihalyi (1999), cited in the literature review, and the general principles of fortigenesis and positive psychology.

The process of narrative synergy is then the coming together of all the parts of the research, flowing together in unity to co-create the exploration and description of the fortigenic qualities of psychotherapists in full-time private practice. The purpose of this research process is not to discover some final truth, but rather to use conversation, exploration and co-construction to come to a deeper understanding and rich description on the journey of the research process (Du Preez, 2004).



The diagram (Figure 8) visually depicts my understanding of the research methodology of the research process of narrative synergy.

Narrative synergy is where there is a flowing together or a collaboration of research material and research literature in order to stimulate or create new thinking or theory. This process is systemic and circular in nature⁴. The purpose is not to find one final end point of ‘truth’, but rather to explore a rich description of the topic. Future research would then take the conversation further, broadening the range and scope of knowledge creation.

In this research study, qualitative research is presented as a synergistic, integrative process. This perspective resonates with the basic principles of the fortigenic perspective, as fortigenesis is an integrative approach (Strümpfer, 2005). This integration allows for the application of the research process of qualitative methodology to fortigenesis as theoretical foundation of the study and to the product of the study – the new narrative.

The concept of resonance emerges as the process of synergy produces new understanding. “**Resonance:** *meaning to resound, echo, reinforce or reflect*” (Tulloch, 1993, p.146) is then the conversation or song that occurs between the various components of the research study. This process is systematic and integrative in nature, and there is a complexity that develops in the study. On the content level of exploration, the narratives are woven together in synthesis to create synergy, while on a process level this synergy is reflected between all the components of the research that flow together (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The same process of integration resonates throughout the various complex levels of the research. In this study the process of self-reflexivity and supervision allows this complexity to emerge on a process level. The concept of resonance aligns with the qualitative research concept of coherence.

⁴ A rather simplistic metaphor, which helps me to understand, is the idea of the weaving together of the rich narratives. Weaving a tapestry of different coloured threads eventually creates and displays a picture, which can be observed and interpreted by the next person.

Kelly (1999, p.434) describes coherence as *“the ability to accommodate the answers to the questions of interest within a narrative and make them intelligible therein.”* Coherence is a vital part of rhetoric and narrative (Kvale, 1996). The new enriched narrative of Chapter Six presents a coherent story about the possibilities that are unlocked through the research process. The current thesis also emerges as a coherent narrative addressing and exploring the research topic. In this way, the various complex levels of the research process resonate the same process and form a coherent text (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Kvale (1996) mentions an important point – because therapists listen to people all day as an occupation, they become experts at paying attention to the essential parts of a narrative. I took this as a personal guideline or reminder where, added to the research procedure, I as researcher bring components of myself into the narrative synergy. It is important to highlight this factor, as I cannot view myself as completely separate from the research process, but rather, as a part of the new, co-constructed narrative. And I have to be accountable for this. I cannot take responsibility for how the reader interprets the narrative, as this is then the next step of synthesis in the research where reader and research combine to co-create new understanding. This highlights the progressive and creative nature of the research (Kvale, 1996).

Kvale (1996) notes that narrative is a mode of reasoning and representation and that it gives powerful access to human experience. In this research the narrative form is applied, as it is useful to explore and understand the experiences of the psychotherapists in long-term full-time private practice.

The product of narrative synthesis and synergy

The focus of the narrative synergy is to highlight and explore the fortigenic qualities of the psychotherapist in full-time private practice. This is in accordance

with the aims of the research study. The seven narratives collected are stories that intersect with one another and that work in synergy with the literature.

The chosen literary genre is loosely based on a short story. This is the most useful for the presentation of the research and resonates with the narrative approach of the research project. According to this genre or narrative structure there is a story line or plot, which is the research topic – the fortigenic qualities of psychotherapists in full-time private practice (Peck & Coyle, 1992). There are major and minor issues, where the emergent ideas and understandings of the research conversations are explored. There is also a development of the plot where the issues are complicated, and the narratives weave together enriching the exploration. Finally there is a resolution or a conclusion to the story (Peck & Coyle, 1992).

My aim is to give a description of the research with elements of a short story, as it is adapted to the research. There is a single narrator to the story as I facilitate the synthesis and synergy of the research conversations. Traditionally, it was assumed that the meaning of the story is the one intended by the author, but recent critical thinking emphasises that the reader possibly creates the meaning of the text to some extent, and that there are inadequacies in all hermeneutic interpretations (Peck & Coyle, 1992; Potter, 1991). These ideas need to be kept in mind by the reader when reading the new narrative. Potter (1991) highlights that according to post-modernist approaches, the writer encourages the reader to keep in mind that the story is a constructed work of literature open to examination and investigation. It is not viewed or presented as a final truth or representation of true reality, but rather a co-constructed narrative of literary nature.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) highlight that when a text is read, the very act of reading introduces new questions and new understandings. They note that this generative quality is cited by Gergen (1985) as one of the major strengths of

qualitative research. I believe that this process will spark future development and exploration of the topic of research.

McAdams (2005) utilises a variety of narrative techniques and methods in his research in the field of positive psychology. He states that integrative life stories serve to reconstruct reality in such a way as to give life unity, purpose and meaning. Furthermore life narratives can be seen as continually evolving over the life span. Therefore, the life narratives of the conversational partners continue into their futures (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). In a recent study narrative research and life stories are combined with a quantitative coding approach (McAdams, Bauer, Sakaeda, Anyidoho, Machado, Magrino-Failla, White & Pals, 2006). The research of McAdams et al. (2006) coincides with the narrative field of this research, but different methodological approaches are utilised. Another exciting development in the field of positive psychology is the research of McAdams et al (2006), exploring narratives and personality. This new development will hopefully contribute towards a further qualitative research focus in the field of positive psychology and personality development. This in turn, can contribute towards developing foundational theory in the field of positive psychology.

Research trustworthiness and validity

The trustworthiness and validity of narrative research used as an explorative and interpretive technique in qualitative research needs to be accounted for (Du Preez & Roos, 2008). Kvale (1996) highlights various important concepts in the qualitative research process, which are vital in accounting for the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These will be discussed in the following section.

Traditionally, the criteria for measuring and evaluating research in the social sciences are the quantitatively-orientated measures of reliability, generalisability and validity (Kvale, 1995). Although the applicability of each will be discussed, it

is pivotal to note that for narrative research the criterion of validity is most relevant. The perspective of this study is that perhaps the evaluation of qualitative research should move beyond to a point where each method deserves its own judgement criteria. The measures of credibility, stability and self-reflexivity are introduced and discussed, and proposed towards enhancing the trustworthiness and therefore the validity of the research study (Du Preez & Roos, 2008; Kvale, 1996).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research process (Kvale, 1996). In qualitative research the consistency of the research refers to the ability to replicate the research process of the study, and care is taken to describe the entire research process in detail and rigorously, in order to facilitate replication of the process, if necessary. The process of research and methodology can therefore be applied in other contexts and with other research topics (Kvale, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Generalisability

Generalisability traditionally refers to whether the research is representative of the larger population, and this was determined through statistical methods (Neuman, 1994). This criterion is less relevant in qualitative research as this type of research aims to explore rich descriptions of the topic of research (Kvale, 1995). Yet, generalisability can also be viewed from the perspective of the judgement whether the findings from the research study could in fact be applicable to another situation. This evaluation is based on the applicability of the research analysis, rather than on statistical measures. Therefore, by explicating the process of research analysis, the reader can follow the soundness of the analysis. While the research does not claim generalisability, the measures that ensure the validity of the study, could support analytical generalisations. As the

research is read more widely, it also becomes more possible to generalise and the possibilities for further research and development increase (Kvale, 1995). One can also explore the potential to generalise the research findings with regards to application on a practical or pragmatic level, i.e. can the research contribute to theory or practice?

Validity

Traditionally, research in the social sciences was deemed valid, true and correct if it reflected the objective reality. Yet, post-modern perspectives argue that validation depends on the choosing of an interpretation (Kvale, 1996). When one looks at the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research methods Kvale (1995) reports that for qualitative research the modernistic concept of truth as a mirror of reality is not applicable, but rather the validity and quality of the research is determined as a co-created construction of reality. This is the process that occurs throughout the research process and it occurs both in creating the conversations between researcher and conversational partner, and between the research study and the reader. From this perspective, the conversations continue on from the research study on these different levels (Kelly, 1999).

Validity requires continual reading, and re-reading, checking, questioning and theoretical interpretations of findings (Kvale, 1996). It is therefore, important to ensure that all the evidence is provided for the reader to be able to follow the trail of interpretation from the original texts. This process allows validation to be built into the research process with continual checks on the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The measures of credibility, stability and self-reflexivity can be utilised in the process of accounting for the validity and trustworthiness of narrative research (Kvale, 1995).

Credibility

Credibility highlights whether the research method indeed explores what it intends to explore and there are three important concepts to consider: correspondence, coherence and pragmatic utility (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). *Correspondence* looks at whether the knowledge presented in the study corresponds to, or is ever the same as, the knowledge co-created by the researcher and the conversational partners in the conversations. This can be facilitated by making sure that all evidence of how the data was gathered, how it was analysed and interpreted is supplied for the reader. The conversational partners, peer reviewers and supervisors can assist in this process of checking whether the research findings in fact correspond to the original data (Viljoen, 2004). In the current study the conversational partners each received a copy of the research study for the purpose of review. The supervision process also facilitates this validation.

Coherence refers to the consistency and internal logic of the research. This takes into consideration the logical flow of the research process by asking: “Does it make sense?” Can the research process and methodology be repeated for future research purposes? This criterion evaluates how well the research product’s findings fit together, how well the narrative is constructed and how well the research fits into existing and previous research in the field of study. *Pragmatic utility* looks at whether the research is related to practical consequences. There is a suggestion to publish the insights of the research to contribute towards the general body of knowledge on the subject (Du Preez & Roos, 2008; Kvale, 1996).

Stability

The stability of the research pertains to the consistency of the research findings. This needs to be checked at various stages in the research process. An example of how to create stability includes *interviewer stability*. This is where the same

researcher or interviewer conducts the conversations with each of the conversational partners. The same person explores and describes the research data, thereby giving research stories consistency (Kvale, 1996). There is also *intersubjective stability*, where the conversations are typed and transcribed by the same person. Various people, such as peers and supervisors, are given access to the research material in the form of transcripts to comment upon, and the steps and process of the synthesis of the research material is described in detail. Another example is *inherent logic*, which is promoted as the conversations reach a synthesis of ideas and the research narrative is presented in the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This criterion is evaluated by asking whether the insights that are provided are readily understandable and astute, whether they are suited to the area of study from which they are derived and provide sufficient understanding of the phenomenon (Du Preez & Roos, 2008; Kvale, 1996).

Self-reflexivity

This section on self-reflexivity addresses the co-creation of knowledge in qualitative research and the ethics of self-reflexivity. It is important in that I, as the researcher, explicate my own presuppositions and thereby include this, in a disciplined manner, in the research process (King, 1996). This process of self-disclosure does not have to be of personal nature, but rather as it pertains to the process of the research. I as the researcher cannot be excluded from the process and am a part of the research process. For that reason self-reflexivity is included and accounted for (Viljoen, 2008; Kvale, 1996). I can include segments of my research journal as self-disclosure, as it pertains to the research topic. Furthermore I can include an account of the personal effect that the research process might have on me as researcher (King, 1996). By focussing awareness on the self-reflexive component of the research process the quality and elegance of the research is enhanced (Kvale, 1996).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) mention the concept of auditing qualitative research to promote the ethics and validation of the research. This is the way in which the critical evaluation of the research project should be viewed, as an audit. The researcher is expected to give a full and comprehensive account of the research methodology that is followed in conducting the research, hereby giving accountability for the research process.

Kvale (1996, p.279) notes, *“it is sometimes easier for interview researchers to carry out conversations with their subjects, than to enter into conversation with colleagues about the conversations with their subjects.”*

Critical audit of the research project

Kvale (1996, p.284) highlights various considerations for evaluating qualitative research. He identifies the ten most common negative reactions in evaluating qualitative research and in the following section these ten questions are explore.

The guidelines that Kvale (1996) highlights are used as a framework in this chapter to critically audit the qualitative research study (Kelly, 1999). Kvale (1996) states:

Qualitative research is not scientific, but only reflects common sense; it's not objective, but subjective; it's not trustworthy, but biased; it's not reliable, it rests on leading questions; it's not intersubjective, different readers find different meanings; it's not a scientific method, it is too person dependent; it's not scientific hypothesis testing, only explorative; it's not quantitative, only qualitative; it's not generalizable, there are too few subjects and it's not valid, it relies on subjective impressions (Kvale, 1996, p.284).

It is very important that this list also paradoxically mentions some of the strongest and most valuable qualities of qualitative research. It is imperative to notice that it depends on the perspective held by the person who is evaluating the research.

“Qualitative research is not scientific, but only reflects common sense”

There is no general measure by which the research conversations can be defined as scientific or non-scientific. The purpose of science can be seen as a methodical production of new, systematic knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Therefore an evaluation of the research conversation depends on how these terms are understood in relation to the research topic. In this study the process is systematically described and accounted for and there is a new product – the new narrative that is systematically explored and developed, which contributes to the creation of new knowledge.

While conversations are seen as part of our daily lives and might therefore be seen as non-scientific, the research conversation is a specific development from the context of conversation (McAdams et al, 2006). The research conversation is co-constructed between researcher and conversational partner; and reflections on the understandings that emerge from these narratives explore and enrich our insights into our world or our conversational reality. The very strength of the research conversation is its privileged access to the understandings of the conversational partners and their worldview on the topic of fortigenesis (McAdams et al, 2006).

“It’s not objective, but subjective”

Kvale (1996) explains that these concepts are ambiguous. If the meaning of objectivity is accepted as an inter-subjective agreement based on two peoples’ observation of a phenomenon, then objectivity can in fact be viewed as a rather subjective concept. Yet, the purpose of the research process extends beyond the

juxtaposition of subjective and objective, to the inter-subjective. In this context valid knowledge is explored and described through an experiential discussion by conversational partners in the narrative. Language is the vehicle of the narrative and cannot be evaluated as objective or subjective (Kvale, 1996). Du Preez (2004) mentions that the purpose of the research process is to come to a deeper understanding and rich description of the research process journey. The purpose of the research process and narrative synthesis is then not to discover some final objective truth, but rather to explore and describe the experience of the psychotherapist in full-time private practice.

“It’s not trustworthy, but biased”

What or who is it, that cannot be trusted? Experimental studies have shown how expectancies of both the researcher and participant can unintentionally influence the results of an experiment (Kvale, 1996). There is an interpersonal interaction in the conversation between the researcher and the conversational partner. Unacknowledged bias could influence the construction of the research narrative. Yet, a recognised bias or subjective perspective could in fact highlight specific aspects of the topic, bring new aspects into the process and contribute to the research. For this reason, the component of self-reflexivity is given careful attention, where the researcher takes the opportunity to explicate personal presuppositions. As self-reflection is included in the research process, it becomes a tool that enhances the depth and finer nuances of the research understandings. It explicates how the researcher’s own private narrative enters into conversation with the research narrative through the medium of the research journal (Kaminer, 2006; King, 1996; Lawler, 2002; Robertson, Venter & Botha, 2005).

“It’s not reliable, it rests on leading questions”

Reliability refers to the ability to replicate the research process of the study (Kvale, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In this research study, care is taken to rigorously and in detail describe the entire research process to facilitate the replication of the process in future research. The process of research and the specific methodology of this project can therefore be applied in other contexts and with other research topics.

In a qualitative research conversation, leading questions are well suited to check the reliability of answers given by the conversational partners. The importance is not whether the question leads or not, but rather where to it leads the conversation. The questions are therefore very important tools in the co-construction of the research narrative between researcher and conversational partner. The questions lead to a deeper understanding of fortigenesis and to new co-constructed knowledge (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

“It’s not intersubjective, different readers find different meanings”

When the purpose of the research process is to create rich, new understandings of the fortigenic qualities of psychotherapists in full-time private practice, then several interpretations of the same conversation serves to further enrich the narrative (Du Preez, 2004). It is then a strength of the research conversation, in that it stimulates further interpretation and knowledge creation, which continue beyond the boundaries of the current study. The criticism of inter-subjectivity again relates to the debate of objectivity and subjectivity, where Kvale (1996) highlights that the meaning of objectivity is an inter-subjective agreement based on two peoples’ observation of a phenomenon, which is, in fact, a rather subjective concept.

In the current research project, meaning is co-constructed in the research interviews with the conversational partners, as the understanding of the topic is described, explored and enriched (Kvale, 1996). As different readers enter into conversation with the research study, further meanings are developed and explored between the reader and the research study, and thus this process of creating meaning continues (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

“It’s not a scientific method, it is too person dependent”

The research conversation is flexible, dependent on the context and sensitive to the interpersonal interactions between researcher and conversational partner. It would be a futile attempt to try to eliminate this interpersonal component. It should rather be viewed as a strength of the research process, as the new understandings emerge from the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the conversational partners (Lawler, 2002). The interpersonal component of the conversations is then a tool in the research process, through which the research data is created, or co-constructed in the interaction between the researcher and conversational partners (King, 1996). The importance of the researcher as an instrument or tool of knowledge-creation places a demand on the researcher for craftsmanship, empathy and knowledge (Kvale, 1996).

“It’s not scientific hypothesis testing, only explorative”

Scientific hypothesis testing is not the goal of the current research study. The aim is the exploration and description of the topic (Kvale, 1996). The various nuances of the experiences of the conversational partners in private practice have intrinsic value and are strengths of the qualitative research model. Through this exploration new understandings emerge and knowledge is created. The explorative potentialities of the conversations open the qualitative descriptions of the topic (Lawler, 2002).

“It’s not quantitative, only qualitative”

In the social sciences there is a prevailing focus on quantitative research methods where qualitative methods are downplayed (Kvale, 1996). This is related to a history of predominant research in the natural sciences (King, 1996). For the purpose of this study, however, the focus remains with the quality, depth and richness of the research rather than a quantitative element. Using a qualitative research approach is therefore the most useful and appropriate method for this study. The narrative approach is well fitted to the nature and purpose of the research topic, which explores the fortigenic qualities of psychotherapists in full-time private practice (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The research conversations and the new narrative product of the research are also in the narrative form and fit in with the methodology of narrative synthesis and qualitative research.

“It’s not generalizable, there are too few subjects”

There is a potential in generalising the knowledge created in a qualitative research study with regards to the application of the new knowledge on a practical and pragmatic level (Kvale, 1996). The question of whether the research can contribute to theory and practice is answered as the research is read more widely. In the current study, the research findings can be of value for any other psychotherapist in private practice wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and experiences of this profession. This also increases the possibilities of further research and development of the topic.

The current qualitative research study discusses various practical and pragmatic applications of the research. These can be found in the final chapter under recommendations. Practical recommendations are made regarding the fortigenic qualities in long-term private practice, as well as suggestions for psychotherapists in full-time, long-term private practice.

“It’s not valid, it relies on subjective impressions”

In qualitative research the modernistic concept of truth as a mirror of reality is not applicable, rather the trustworthiness and validity of the research is determined as a co-created construction of reality (ontology) (Kvale, 1995). This is then the process that occurs both in creating the research conversation between researcher and private narrative of the conversational partners, between the public narrative of the literature and the research narrative, between the research study and the personal journal narrative of the researcher, between the researcher and the supervisory readers, and finally between the research and the reader (Kelly, 1999). Therefore, knowledge rooted in this narrative reality is seen as being co-constructed in the narratives and expressed in language (epistemology) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The critical audit of the research is useful in that it addresses various common critiques, thereby also enhancing the accountability and legitimacy or trustworthiness of the study (Kvale, 1995). The process of the above evaluation also follows an integrative process of questions and discussion. In the above process of critical evaluation the various strengths of the qualitative approach are identified; which resonates with the research topic of fortigenesis, where the focus is a strengths perspective. The critical evaluation can thus in itself be viewed as a fortigenic or strength-enhancing process. This process creates coherence between the text and the thoughts, or theoretical perspective of the study (Kelly, 1999).

Ethical considerations

There are various ethical considerations, which had to be clarified for the research. The ethical considerations of this study include obtaining permission and co-operation from the various experienced psychotherapists for the following points.

Participation in the research conversations

For this purpose the research ethics committee of the University of Pretoria had to approve the ethics of the study. The research proposal for the study also had to first be approved by the departmental research committee.

Digital recording of the conversations

I acquired a Dictaphone digital recorder, which was utilised to record the conversations. The conversational partners are first made aware of the digital device and then again asked for verbal permission prior to the start of the recording. This verbal permission is a second confirmation of the signing of the consent form prior to the conversations taking place.

Presenting the conversations as part of the requirements of a doctoral study

The conversational partners are made aware of the purpose of the study in the information leaflet and consent form of the study.

Publication of findings

According to the requirements of the University of Pretoria research committee, the consent form needs to state the following:

All information that is obtained during the course of the study is strictly confidential. Any information that will be presented as part of the requirements of a doctoral study or that may be reported in scientific journals will not include any information, which identifies you as a participant in this study. If you wish to withdraw from the study, all relevant information provided by you, will be destroyed (Appendix A).

Issues of confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, and the conversational partners are referred to as conversational partner A, conversational partner B, and so on.

Remembering that they are active members of the community – who have built up their full-time private practices over a period of more than ten years, using their names and identities in marketing – it was important to protect the confidentiality of their personal narratives. They are professionals in the community and city in which they work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the purpose is to describe how the research study is conducted. The process and steps of the research are explained, and various facets of qualitative research are discussed and explored. The validation of qualitative research is accounted for and an audit is conducted.