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Qualitative Research Approaches: Descriptive Phenomenology in the Healthcare Field

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Qualitative research approaches: Descriptive phenomenology in the healthcare field

Emily Goble, Karyssa Stonick, Alison Wong, & Deanna Britton



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I. Qualitative research

- A. Method of inquiry developed around human and social sciences to better understand psychological and social aspects of the world
- B. Data is often rich, descriptive, and non-numerical
- C. Qualitative research design models grew out of and continue to develop alongside human and social science disciplines
 - 1. *Examples:* case studies, Indigenous research, descriptive phenomenology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, narrative research, historical research (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Renjith et al., 2021; Wilson, 2008)

Figure 1
Similarities and Differences of Three Interpretive Approaches With Respect to
History, Goal, Philosophy, Methodology, Analytic Method, and Product

	Phenomenology	Discourse Analysis	Grounded Theory
HISTORY	European Philosophy	Linguistics/Semiotics	Sociology
PHILOSOPHY	There exists an essential, perceived reality with common features	Knowledge and meaning is produced through interaction with multiple discourses	Theory is discovered by examining concepts grounded in the data
GOAL	Describe the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon	Understand how people use language to create and enact identities and activities	Develop an explanatory theory of basic social processes
METHODOLOGY Formulating a research question	"What is the lived experience of [the phenomenon of interest]?"	"What discourses are used and how do they shape identities, activities, and relationships?"	"How does the basic social process of [X] happen in the context of [Y environment]?"
Sampling	Those who have experienced the phenomenon of interest	Those situated in one or more of the discourses of interest	Those who have experienced the phenomenon under different conditions
Data Collection: Observations	Observe participants in the context where the phenomenon is experienced	Observe participants in conversation in their natural environment	Observe participants where the basic social process takes place
Interviewing strategy	Participant describes experience, interviewer probes for detail, clarity	Both engage in dialogue; interviewer probes for intertextual meaning	Participant describes experience, interviewer probes for detail, clarity
ANALYTIC METHODS Decontextualization & Recontextualization: Process of coding, sorting, identifying themes and relationships, and drawing conclusions	Identify descriptions of the phenomenon, cluster into discrete categories; taken together, these describe the "essence" or core commonality and structure of the experience	Examine how understanding is produced through a close look at the words. Interested in <i>how</i> the story is told, what identities, activities, relationships, and shared meaning are created through language	Open, axial, & selective coding; Examine concepts across their properties & dimensions; develop an explanatory framework that integrates the concepts into a core category
Role of Analyst's Views	Bracket views	Examine own place in the discourse(s)	Bracket views
AUDIENCE	Clinicians, practitioners & others who need to understand the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest	Policy makers & interventionists who need to understand the discourses in use to craft effective messages	Researchers & practitioners who seek explanatory models upon which to design interventions
PRODUCT	A thematic description of the pre-given "essences" and structures of lived experiences	Description of language-in-use; identify how different discourses shape how identities, relationships, and social goods are negotiated and produced	Generate theory from the range of the participants' experience

(Starks & Trinidad, 2007)

II. Descriptive phenomenology

- A. Origins: early-20th century philosophy (Edmund Husserl), psychology, education
- B. Objective: describing a lived phenomenon, understanding a particular experience; gaining insight into lived meaning or experiences
- C. Unit of analysis: individuals with similar experiences of a phenomenon
- D. Inductive (vs. deductive)
- E. Powerful approach for:
 - 1. Exploring new areas with limited existing theory
 - 2. Supporting person-centered healthcare models



- D. Data collection: interviews, naturalistic observation, document review, focus groups
- E. Data analysis: identify and code descriptions of the phenomenon
- F. Product: a thematic description of the essential meaning and structures of a lived experience
- G. Key terms:
 1. **triangulation**: use of multiple methods or data sources to gain a multidimensional view of complex phenomena
 2. **member checking** (AKA participant validation): process in which data or results are shared with participants to verify accuracy and representativeness
 3. **data saturation**: the point at which study data provides a robust and solid understanding of the phenomenon, and new information or patterns are unlikely to emerge
- H. Ensuring rigor: Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) (Tong, et al., 2007)

III. Patterns of and experiences with dysphagia in people with hypermobile Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (hEDS) with or without dysautonomia (Stonick et al., 2022)

A. Rationale for research design

B. Research question:

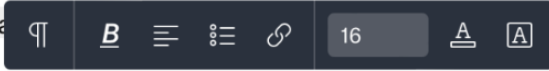
1. Population: people with hEDS with or without dysautonomia
2. Context: dysphagia
3. Outcome: patterns and experiences

C. Data collection: interviews, medical records, questionnaires

1. 6-10 participants

D. Data analysis: Atlas.ti software to comment on data, derive and apply codes

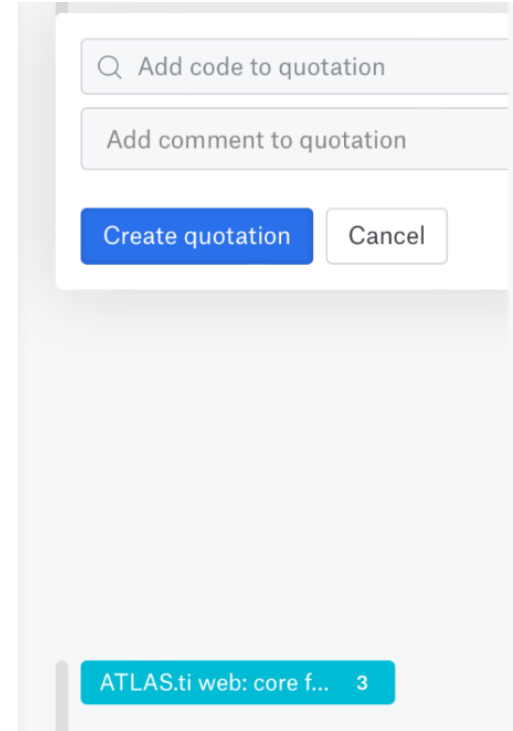
identity. It will decidedly not be just some web-based clone of the classic ATLAS.ti. Rather, it will explore and develop its very own approaches to various questions. Some of the new functions we can expect to see in ATLAS.ti Web down the road are further developments of the core functions, group comparisons, but also new features like auto speech transcription and various forms of a



We will also see a whole new set of visualization tools to go far beyond the "classic" network view that ATLAS.ti pioneered and has perfected over its long history. These new visualizations will aid more the efficient output of user' results (for example, code frequencies), i.e. support presentations and publication (whereas network views also aid the analytic process).

In the same vein, different output formats and perhaps even an individual API could be envisioned, the latter allowing external developers to write their own extensions.

But having said all that, the main focus will both initially and in the long run clearly be on the core functionalities such as segmenting and coding. Rest assured that just like in the other



In conclusion...

- Descriptive phenomenology allows researchers to describe **lived experiences** and derive **themes**
 - inductive approach → theory development
- Descriptive phenomenological data analysis is an iterative, inductive process used to derive themes from descriptive data
- Qualitative research for person-centered healthcare is a collaborative, translational process that involves **cross-checking** at numerous points
- There exist specific criteria for evaluating rigor in qualitative research

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