

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

The social constructionist perspective, which is clearly outlined in chapter 3, provided the reader with an overview of the researcher's epistemology in approaching the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers. There is, however, a need to translate this epistemology into the language of research.

In this chapter, the methods used to operationalise the eliciting of subjugated narratives will be examined. The aim will be to arrive at the most effective design to allow for the generation of rich descriptions of incestuous fathers' emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour. There is no wish to develop a database that may be utilised to generalise incestuous fathers' emotional experiences across contexts, but rather a hope that the descriptions generated here will be deemed as meaningful as possible by the participants themselves.

These descriptions may also prove to be useful for other researchers and therapists in their work with incestuous fathers, but it should be borne in mind that descriptions generated here describe realities that may not be pertinent to

all incestuous fathers. There is, thus, no singular experience that can be captured or accessed in these descriptions.

This chapter will provide an outline of the research approach and methodology. Firstly, qualitative research as chosen research approach for this study as opposed to a traditional quantitative research approach will be delineated. The specific characteristics of a qualitative research design as well as the reliability and validity with reference to this study will be discussed. This will be followed by a justification for choosing the qualitative research approach. Sampling and selection as well as the collection of the data will be outlined. A description of the hermeneutic method of data analysis and how it will be applied in this research will be provided. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations relevant to this study.

2. A QUALITATIVE VERSUS A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The essential differences between a qualitative and a quantitative research approach can be described in terms the conceptualisation of constructs such as reality, truth, knowledge and objectivity.

Quantitative research is consistent with the modernist epistemology discussed in the previous chapter. The main assumption of this modernist epistemology is that there is a reality out there that can be discovered through the use of empirical, scientific methods that are quantitative in nature (Durrheim, 1999b).

From this point of view, psychological research is only valid if it adheres to the rules of precise measurement, involves the manipulation of variables using an experimental design, and the articulation of specific hypotheses (Rogers, 2000). According to Bogdan and Taylor (cited in Guba, 1978, p. 11), quantitative research “seeks facts or causes of social phenomena with little regards for the subjective states of individuals”.

In contrast, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding “the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved” (Moon, Dillon and Sprenkle, 1990, p. 358).

According to Goetz and LeCompte (cited in Moon et al., 1990, p. 358), social science research can be described along four continua. They argue that qualitative research is more “constructive”, “generative”, “inductive”, and “subjective” than quantitative research, which they delineate as more “enumerative”, “verificative”, “deductive”, and “objective”.

Moon et al. (1990) argue that all qualitative research reflects a phenomenological perspective. Qualitative researchers “attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interaction in context, from the point of view of the participants involved” (Moon et al., 1990, p. 358). These researchers look for universal principles by examining a small number of cases intensively. Durrheim (1999b, p. 42) concurs that,

[q]ualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth, openness and detail as they identify and attempt to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data.

Thus, qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research furnishes an affluent source of data. However, qualitative research covers a wide range of approaches, and some approaches may still embrace some of the assumptions of modernism (Gergen, 1994). According to Moon et al. (1990) qualitative research designs share common characteristics that are different from quantitative research designs. These key characteristics will be described below.

2.1 Characteristics of qualitative research designs

2.1.1 Theory

Qualitative research is either explicitly or implicitly informed by theory (Moon et al., 1990). The specific theoretical approach determines the researcher's epistemology that provides the researcher with a specific lens for looking at the world.

2.1.2 Purpose and questions

The purpose of research is clearly stated before the research project is commenced (Moon et al., 1990). The purpose of the research is to gain understanding as opposed to making predictions. Qualitative researchers as

opposed to quantitative researchers are less concerned with finding universal truths, and focus more on making sense of “human experience from *within* the context and perspective of human experience” (Kelly, 1999b, p. 398). Qualitative research questions are generally open-ended, exploratory and may change as the research proceeds. The investigator asks ‘what’ rather than ‘why’ questions. Stiles (1993, p. 607) asserts that “‘what’ questions elicit material of which clients have direct knowledge”. These questions generate stories. Therefore, ‘what’ questions are more appropriate to gain knowledge of lived experiences and are more suitable for telling stories.

2.1.3 Participants and the role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the participants’ and researcher’s roles are more active and participatory than in quantitative research (Moon et al., 1990). In some instances researchers are seen as co-researchers and collaborators. The researcher is said to become the tool during the research and “must have the ability to observe behaviour and must sharpen skills necessary for observation and face-to-face interview” (Graham, cited in Janesick, 2000, p. 386).

Qualitative researchers often “draw upon their own experiences as a resource” during their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 367). It is, therefore, important that these researchers, as the primary data collection instrument, must clarify their roles as researchers and acknowledge their biases (Moon et al., 1990).

2.1.4 Sampling and selection

Durrheim (1999b, p. 44) states that sampling involves “decisions about which people, setting, event, behaviour and/or social process to observe.” There are many types of sampling. Since qualitative research is concerned with in-depth analysis and detail, qualitative researchers usually deliberately select small samples that fit the research aims (Moon et al., 1990).

According to Moon et al. (1990, p. 360) selection means that

the researcher delineates the relevant unit(s) of analysis precisely, using criteria based on specific considerations, and then selects participants and/or phenomena for study that meet those criteria.

According to Goetz and LeCompte (cited in Moon et al., 1990), a variety of selection types may be used. These include comprehensive selection, convenience selection, quota selection, unique-case selection, extreme-case selection, reputational-case selection and typical-case selection.

2.1.5 Data collection

Data are usually verbal and/or visual rather than statistical and can be collected using both interactive and non-interactive methods (Moon et al., 1990). Therefore, the data can be collected by means of participants and researchers' observations, interviewing and document analysis, and can be in the form of field notes, videotapes or audiotapes.

2.1.6 Data analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed in various ways so that patterns can be discerned (Moon et al., 1990). In some cases, elaborate coding systems are used and patterns emerge from, rather than being imposed on, the data that the researcher received. The focus is more on the process than on a set of fixed procedures. Therefore, the continuous analysis of data is important during qualitative research (Rabinov and Sullivan, cited in Durrheim, 1999b). Since, analysis involves a great deal of interaction between the researcher and the data, the researcher needs to have first hand knowledge of the data. This approach to data analysis can be both labor and time intensive.

2.1.7 Results

The results of qualitative data analysis are usually termed “assertions” (Moon et al., 1990, p. 362).

2.1.8 Reporting

According to Moon et al. (1990, p. 362) a qualitative research report should discuss the:

- theoretical framework that informed the study,
- purpose of the study (see chapter 1),
- guiding research questions and any changes that occurred in these questions as the study progressed,
- research tradition and/or design employed,
- selection techniques,

- participant(s), setting(s), and context(s),
- researchers role(s) and potential biases,
- data collection and analysis strategies,
- findings, and
- discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Qualitative research findings should be regarded as another construction to be taken into account in the move towards consensus. Researchers can do no more than relate their stories of a story and then leave it up to those who read it to create their own stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.1.9 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are conceptualised differently in qualitative research from how they are conceptualised in quantitative research.

According to Durrheim (1999a, p. 88) qualitative research conceptualises the term reliability as the “dependability of a measurement instrument, that is, the extent to which the instrument yields the same results on repeated trials”; and validity as the “degree to which the researcher can produce observations that are believable for her or himself, the subjects being studied and the eventual reader of the study” (Durrheim, 1999b, p. 46).

Reliability and validity should be coherent with the methodology, and, in qualitative research designs, refer to trustworthiness and credibility that can be assessed in terms of a number of specific strategies. Stiles (1993) has

outlined what he considers to be good qualitative research and focuses on the requirements of procedural trustworthiness rather than objective implications of attaining reliable and valid research. Therefore, reliability refers to “the trustworthiness of observation or data” and validity refers to “the trustworthiness of interpretations or conclusions” (Stiles, 1993, p. 601).

Strategies to ensure reliability and validity with reference to this study have been adapted from Stiles (1993, p. 602-607) and will be discussed accordingly.

2.1.9.1 Reliability with reference to this study

In this research, the following actions were taken to ensure reliability:

- The research approach and epistemology were disclosed.
- The social and cultural context of the researcher, participants and of the research setting, were explained.
- The researcher described the impact that the research had on her.
- The researcher attempted to establish a relationship of trust with the participants and she strived to understand their experiences.
- The researcher engaged closely with the material and repeatedly listened to and read the material. Her observations changed and evolved in the process.
- Themes and interpretations were grounded by linking them to excerpts from the interview text.

- The researcher asked ‘what’ instead of ‘why’ questions in an effort to ground experiences in a context and to illicit a rich description of the personal meaning of the participants.

2.1.9.2 Validity with reference to this study

In this research, the following actions were taken to ensure validity:

- The researcher clearly stated the aim of this study (see Chapter 1).
- The researcher’s questions had personal meaning and significance for the participants (Bannister, cited in Reason & Rowan, 1981).
- Testimonial validity was ensured by the researcher who continuously clarified her understanding and interpretation of the words and meanings.
- Reflexive validity was ensured because the researcher’s interpretations kept changing and were continuously evaluated.
- Validity was ensured through triangulation from multiples voices (Kelly, 1999a). The researcher used information from her supervisor against which she checked her own position.
- The coherence, or quality of the fit of the interpretation, was ensured in consultation with the researcher’s supervisor.
- The researcher did not attempt to generalise the findings of the research to different types of persons, settings and times.
- The researcher did not claim that her description and understanding of the participants’ emotional experiences is the absolute ‘truth’ as her descriptions and understanding will be self-referential (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

2.2 Justification for choosing a qualitative research approach

Since this study aimed to explore the lived emotional experiences of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour, it was evident that quantitative research did not fit with the researcher's chosen epistemology, namely social constructionism. Although there is a place for quantitative methods in social constructionist research (Gergen, 1994), it would be ill fitting with the aims and intentions of this researcher.

A qualitative design is seen to be more consistent with the epistemological assumptions of social constructionism and was, therefore, implemented. The view of qualitative research of understanding people in context and regarding each person as having his or her own reality is consistent with the social constructionist principles of the whole and of multiple realities (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Furthermore, the qualitative approach ascribes to the discovery of subjective meanings and the description of specific cases (Neuman, 1997). Therefore, the qualitative approach is particularly appropriate since the researcher inquired about people's lived experiences and particularly since the results of this study are not meant to be generalised to a larger population.

In qualitative research, the researcher continuously negotiates and re-negotiates the outcome of the research, as punctuations are dependent on the researcher's subjectivity (Stiles, 1993). This is consistent with the social constructionist principle that the researcher co-constructs a reality together with the participants, remaining aware of her social and cultural context as well as the personal 'biases' she may have (see Chapter 1).

Having discussed the qualitative research approach and how it fits within a social constructionist epistemology attention can now be given to the research methods/procedures applicable to this study.

3. SAMPLING AND SELECTION

As already stated, there are many types of sampling that a researcher could use. Research participants for this study were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. This means that the selection of participants took place with a specific purpose in mind, namely, to gain a better understanding of the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour. Therefore, participants who could provide rich descriptions of their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour were selected. Criterion-based sampling was used to select these participants. The specific criteria for participants were the following:

- The participants had to be fathers who engaged in incestuous behaviour with one or more of their children.
- Their incestuous behaviour had to comply with incestuous behaviour as defined in this study. According to this definition incestuous behaviour includes any sexual contact or behaviour for the purpose of sexual stimulation, between an adult and a child related within a family structure (Cole, 1992).
- The child, with who the participant has engaged in incestuous behaviour with, could be of any sex and of any age. He/she may be related

biologically or could be an adopted or stepchild or a child under the guardianship of the incest perpetrator.

- The incestuous behaviour had to involve contact such a sexual fondling, indecent exposure, masturbation, hand-genital contact, oral-genital contact, or intercourse, or such activities as showing erotic materials or making sexually suggestive comments to a child.
- Participants had to be able to articulate their experiences and willing to give complete and sensitive accounts.

Since the researcher worked within the qualitative framework that is concerned with in-depth analysis and detail, she deliberately selected a small sample that fitted the research aims. Therefore, considering the purpose and scope of this study, the sample comprised two participants from whose experiences she elicited as much detail as possible.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic of incest, difficulties in obtaining appropriate participants were possible. Therefore, the specific selection method that was used was convenience selection. The researcher contacted various therapists. These therapists obtained the clients' permission and provided the researcher with names and contact details of clients that were currently in therapy and would fulfill the criteria. Participants were contacted telephonically and asked if they would be willing to participate in this study. The nature and aim of the study were briefly explained and arrangements were made to meet with them.

4. DATA COLLECTION

4.1 The 'case study approach'

Lindegger (1999, p. 255) refers to a case study approach as an “intensive investigation of particular individuals.” According to Stake (2000, p. 436) a case study approach implies, “both a process of inquiry about the case as well as the product of that inquiry”. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the uniqueness of the ecology of a specific individual can only be captured satisfactorily through the use of the case study method. Therefore, in this research, the case study approach was preferred, as it accommodates a description of the multiple aspects of reality of the incestuous fathers.

Stake (2000, p. 442) refers to the information obtained through the case study inquiry as us coming “to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience.” Therefore, this approach provided an opportunity to present data by means of the constructions that are used by the incestuous fathers. In other words, using this approach, the researcher attempted to provide readers with a glimpse of the incestuous fathers' emotional experiences through the use of their own language.

4.2 In-depth interviewing

Before commencing the in-depth interviews, the incestuous fathers' participatory and reflexive characteristics of their involvement in the research were carefully explained to them (e.g. that they will be asked to describe as fully as possible their emotional experiences). Thereafter, the researcher

obtained written consent of the participants to record the conversations and to use the information exclusively for the purposes of research. The researcher explained to the participants that taping was necessary for accuracy and would enable us to talk more naturally (rather than slowing the process by taking verbatim notes).

Personal data such as name, address, occupation, race, marital status, age at the time of the incestuous behaviour, age at the time of the interview, and personal details of the child were also obtained in the initial face-to-face interview. The interview as described above was used as a definition of the context in which to have conversations about the emotional experiences regarding incestuous behaviour. It also served to ease the participants into the more sensitive material.

The qualitative in-depth interview was chosen as the data collection tool since the aim was to gain an understanding of the incestuous fathers' emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour, as expressed in their own words. The researcher did not look for any particular type of accounts, nor did the researcher test any specific hypothesis. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.153) in-depth interviewing as a method of data collection, allows the researcher to remain sensitive for 'linguistic patterns' that emerge during the interview, whilst reaching a deep level of understanding. Since the topic of incest has very subtle sensitivities, the qualitative in-depth interview was a more appropriate manner of collecting data regarding the emotional experiences of incestuous fathers.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to interact with the participants on a personal level. Priority was given to establish good rapport and to create a feeling of safety and comfort. Indeed, due to the sensitivity of the subject, an unusual degree of rapport needed to be established with the participants. The established rapport between the researcher and the participants allowed the participants to feel free to steer the conversation toward their emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour. During each interview, the researcher attempted to maintain a client-centered style of interaction with the participant. This entailed exhibiting warmth, empathy and unconditional positive regard, so as to encourage the participant to speak freely and congruently about his experiences.

The interviews were conducted in such a manner that they resembled a conversation rather than a formal questioning session. Questions were open-ended and focused on 'what' and 'how', rather than on 'why' (Stiles, 1993), thus, eliciting personal information and enriching the participants' stories. These questions and the researcher's honest display of interest, attentiveness and respect encouraged the participants to share their narratives and contextually enriched the participants' stories. However, the researcher attempted not to interrupt the participants' narratives, since information that did not have direct relevance to the nature of the research questions, emerged. These narratives were recognised as valuable descriptions of the participants making sense of their lives within their contexts (Coale, 1994). Open-ended questions were also used to avoid imposing any moral, ideological, or theoretical frame of reference onto the participants' experience, thereby leading

the participants to a particular way of describing their experiences (Giorgi, 1995).

As the interviews progressed, the researcher used reflections and clarification in order to verify her understanding of the participants' narratives and also to help the participants to elaborate on their descriptions. The aim was to elicit as much detail as possible about the participants' emotional experiences regarding their incestuous behaviour and to co-construct meanings and experiences through conversation.

After each interview, the researcher kept notes of her emotions experienced, and her thought provocations. This was done in an effort to remain in continuous dialogue with the context of research that she entered. All interviews were recorded on tape, and transcribed immediately after the interview for the purpose of data analysis.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 The Hermeneutic method of data analysis

The emotional experience of incestuous fathers is a very sensitive topic. Therefore, the analysis of data needed to be a sensitive process whereby order, structure and meaning needed to be imposed on the mass of data that was collected during the in-depth interviews. Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 111) described it a "messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process".

An interpretative approach for analysing the data was selected for this study. According to Kelly (1999b), an interpretative approach to research aims at understanding, describing and interpreting people's feelings. Furthermore, this approach believes that it is imperative to look at people in their social and historical contexts in order to gain a better understanding of their experiences. In this light, an interpretative approach fits well within the social constructionist stance.

Hermeneutics, as method of data analysis,

emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text, which could refer to a conversation, written words, or pictures. The reading is to discover embedded meaning. The theory says that people carry their subjective experience to a text. When people study the text, they absorb or get inside the viewpoint it presents as a whole, and then develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the meaning of the whole Neuman (1997, p. 61).

According to Wilson and Hutchinson (1991, p. 265) hermeneutics

emphasizes the human experiences of understanding and interpretation and is presented as people's detailed stories ('thick description'), which serve as exemplars and paradigm cases of everyday practices and "lived experiences".

Hermeneutics is thus consistent with an interpretive approach. Therefore, in order to make sense of the data collected during the interviews, hermeneutics was selected as method of data analysis for this study.

Hermeneutics as a form of qualitative research fit within the social constructionist epistemology, as it aims to “discover meaning and to achieve understanding” (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p. 226) or to make sense of “that which is not yet understood” (Addison, 1992, p. 110).

According to Barrell et al. (1987, p.435) hermeneutics discovers the “many sides of something” rather than “what it is.” From the hermeneutic process, new understandings arise that create new questions and a continuation of the process. This is called “the hermeneutic circle”. From this circle, information and interpretation emerge and result in an ever-broadening understanding of the experience under investigation. It is important when entering this hermeneutic circle that “the researcher must be faithful to the performance or subject, must always be rooted in context and must be both apart from and part of the dance” (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 10). This process does not attempt to end somewhere or to conclude. It simply continues to broaden and deepen one’s understanding of experiences being explored, i.e. the emotional experiences of the incestuous fathers.

5.2 Hermeneutics and the current research

Hermeneutics does not have a set of prescribed techniques to which the data has to be analysed (Addison, 1992). The following steps that were used in the

analysis of the stories for this research were a combination of techniques adapted from Addison (1992), Stiles (1993), Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999), and Wilson and Hutchinson (1991).

Step 1:

To avoid 'cross-pollination' the taped interviews of each participant was transcribed and analysed individually before continuing with the next participant's story (i.e. steps one to five were completed for each participant before analysis of the next participant's story).

Step 2:

The researcher then carefully listened to the tape recordings while simultaneously reading the transcribed interviews. The researcher repeated this listening and reading a couple of times. By doing this, the researcher immersed herself in the world of the data. This enabled her to become familiar with the story and to get a 'feel' for the overall story and the different emotions experienced. During this step, the researcher attempted to make sense of the participant's world.

Step 3:

During this step, the analysis progressed from a content level to an interpretive level. The researcher read the transcript with the intention of inferring themes, relevant to the research context, i.e. the emotional experiences of the incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour. These themes were underlined on the original transcript using different coloured pens. Thereafter,

these themes were organised so that all the statements that follow a theme were under that heading.

Step 4:

In this step the generated themes were explored more closely to gain a fresh view and deeper meanings than was possible from the original coding system. This resulted in changes in the original coding system. Dialoguing occurred between what the researcher read and the contexts in which the participant found himself, between the researcher and her supervisor, between the researcher and the account itself, her own values, assumptions, interpretations and understandings.

During this step, the researcher also maintained a constantly questioning attitude, looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper meanings, alternative meanings, and changes over time, as she moved “back and forth between individual elements of the text and the whole text in many cycles, called the ‘hermeneutic circle’” (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 10).

Step 5:

The inferred themes were discussed and excerpts from the original texts were used to support these proposed themes. The stories of each participant were thus constructed around the identified themes (see Chapter 5).

Step 6:

After the above was repeated with both of the participants' stories, common patterns and themes among the participants' experiences were identified and discussed (see Chapter 6).

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research on the sensitive topic of incest required extreme ethical caution.

The participants were informed as to the nature and process of the research, the researcher's vested interest in carrying out this research, and the time expectation of their participation. The researcher assured the participants of strict confidentiality and anonymity since information disclosed could be highly threatening to them. The participants were invited to choose a pseudonym as a step in the process of remaining anonymous. Names of people and places were also changed in order to ensure the participants' anonymity.

As previously mentioned, the researcher carefully explained the participants' participatory and reflexive characteristics of their involvement in the research to them before commencing the in-depth interviews. Thereafter, the researcher obtained written consent of the participants to record the conversations on tape and to use the information exclusively for the purposes of research (see Appendix A).

Potential risks that could be harmful to the participants were carefully considered, and these included for example, the problem of disclosing emotional and personal experiences in an uncontained environment. The researcher, therefore, attempted to ensure that the setting for discussing the participants' emotional experiences was safe and supportive. Due to the sensitivity of the topic of the interviews, the researcher also attempted to ensure that the respondents were at ease with the degree of intensity and exploration during the interviews. The researcher furthermore encouraged the participants to contact their therapists if they felt distressed due to the nature of the perturbation of the interviews.

Furthermore, the researcher was under constant supervision whereby she could discuss ethical concerns and express any concerns and perturbations regarding the interviews. The researcher also adhered to the ethical code of professional conduct as stipulated by the Professional Board for Psychology in making ethically informed decisions.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter is fundamental in drawing together the threads of the epistemology, the application of the research design and the actualisation of the research methodology of the present research.

From this chapter, it is evident that the qualitative research approach and the characteristics thereof, which are consistent with the epistemological

assumptions of social constructionism and is suitable for this study as it focuses on people's lived experiences.

Furthermore, the qualitative research approach seems to hold the most appropriate research procedures the research principles of the social constructionist epistemology. The researcher would like to reiterate that research procedures were not applied in an attempt to discover the ultimate 'truth'. It was merely utilised to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional experience of incestuous fathers regarding their incestuous behaviour.

Since this research explored the sensitive topic of incest, ethical issues such as, informed consent, confidentiality and potential risks that could have been harmful to the participants, were considered.

Having drawn the threads of, epistemology, application of the research design and actualisation of the research methodology, together, the chapter that follows will focus on the meaning generating process of the interviews. The emerging themes will be highlighted according to the researcher's frame of reference and will, therefore, be *her* story of the participants' stories.