

## The Role of the Researcher

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In quantitative studies, the researcher's role is, theoretically non-existent. That is in the *perfect* quantitative study, participants act independently of the researcher as if he or she were not there. In experimental studies, a double-blind placebo controlled study is the gold standard and is used to try and remove biases and subjectivity from the study. Quantitative studies ideally should be repeatable by others and, under the same conditions, should yield similar results. In correlational studies, the data are collected without regard to the participants or the person collecting the data.

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is quite different. The research is considered an *instrument* of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This means that data are mediated through this *human instrument*, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. To fulfill this role, consumers of the research need to know about the human instrument. The qualitative researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, any expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). In addition, it is a useful for the qualitative researcher to keep a research journal explicating personal reactions and reflections, insights into self and past, in a separate journal, and how bracketing takes place.

The qualitative researcher should also explain if their role is emic -- an insider, who is a full participant in activity, program, or phenomenon, or the role is more etic -- from an outside view, more of an objective viewer. There could be a great deal of variations in between -- sometimes a researcher starts as an outsider and then becomes a member of the group. Or the reverse can occur -- the researcher starts as a member of a group then becomes a more objective observant (Punch, 1998).

A good qualitative researcher asks probing questions, then listens, then thinks, then asks more probing question to get to deeper levels of the conversation. An effective qualitative researcher seeks to build a picture using ideas and theories from a wide variety of sources.

### References

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