

# Hermeneutic phenomenology to maintain focus upon participant involvement

*Hermeneutic phenomenology relates to the interpretation of a phenomena in which the first person experience is central and includes the recognition of time and place. This concept aligns well with the reflective and reflexive context of midwifery (Plested 2014).*

## Perceptions of vulnerability

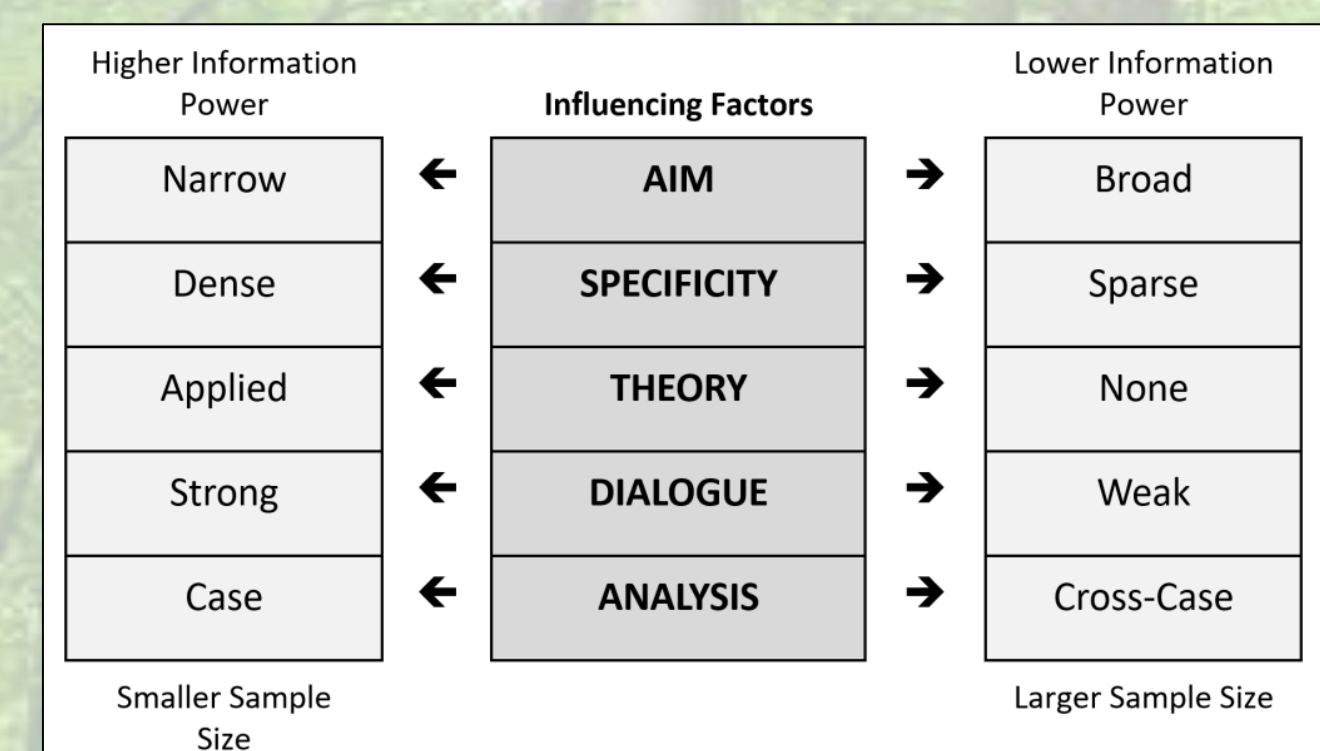
The concept of vulnerability is often conflated with socioeconomic disadvantage with social capital considered to mitigate it. However, all individuals sharing personal experiences may be vulnerable, particularly those with factors causing women to doubt their own or the baby's wellbeing.

## Relationship building

Within midwifery the 'woman centred approach' ensures a focus on the mother, similarly the key to data collection is the complete focus on participants. Hermeneutic phenomenology relies upon the relationship between researcher and participants, with researchers utilising previous experience and study. Wilkins (2010) argues that we need to develop a midwifery research paradigm that reflects this relationship rather than align ourselves to the medical research paradigm.

## The issue with numbers.

Within qualitative research the discussion on participant numbers is thorny. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to gain insight into lived experience, thus data saturation can never be achieved. Instead detail of data obtained and the depth of analysis are used to draw findings. Malterud et al (2016) refer to this as information power.



## Returning to the Path.

**A hermeneutic phenomenological study of parental expectations and the meaning of transition to early parenting in couples with a pregnancy conceived using in-vitro fertilisation.**

**Method:** A Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological study using in-depth data analysis. Three couples expecting their first child, a singleton non-donor pregnancy conceived using IVF were purposively selected and interviewed on three occasions: at 34 weeks pregnant, six weeks following birth and at three months post birth. The study design enabled a unique combination of both time point and longitudinal data analysis.

**Findings:** 'Returning to the Path' was identified as the point at which couples felt they were where they had anticipated being several years earlier, drawing on three over-arching themes: Seeking the Way, Returning to the Path and Journeying On. These were considered using Heideggerian concepts, focussing upon the meaning parents attributed to their experiences. This included a tentative path of pregnancy, the influence of gendered responsibility, the role of technology and relationships with others.

**Conclusion:** Infertility is a deviation from the life path that a couple anticipated; the point of and influences on returning to that path is the key phenomenon identified in this study, which occurs at different times for different couples and is influenced by differing factors. The pregnancy may be experienced as a 'tentative' progression, however following birth, parenthood was embraced with an instinctive, baby-led style. Transition to parenthood was aided by social support and reliance on the couple relationship. Consideration of potential siblings was an issue which arose in early parenthood, as couples recognised ongoing implications of the path they had travelled.