Methodology and Procedures

The first purpose of the section on methodology and procedures, which is included in Chapter I, is to demonstrate your familiarity with the particular research methodology you intend to use. (Note that this discussion uses the term methodology, singular, though your research may draw on one or more specific research methodologies.) The second purpose of this section is to describe, at least tentatively, specific procedures that you anticipate adopting for your thesis. In other words, this section succinctly articulates specific procedures for addressing your research problem and what you intend to do to answer your research question. The methodology and procedures sections include a concise discussion of your methodology, participants, materials, and procedures.

Research Methodology

The criteria for the thesis in the Counseling Psychology program were stated previously (see pp. 33-34) as follows:

Within the context of the Institute’s guiding vision, students are encouraged to select a particular topic that they wish to explore in depth. Towards this end, the student is asked to

- pursue an area of individual interest relevant to the issues of counseling and depth psychology (e.g., therapeutic issues, psychological motifs, clinical procedures);
- ground this particular area of interest in a conceptual framework (e.g., background information, findings, concluding evaluation);
- demonstrate competency in researching a specific area and in expressing ideas with clarity and precision; and
- submit a thesis that meets all criteria for the completion of the thesis and is worthy of submission to ProQuest for publication as determined by the Research Coordinator.

In order to satisfy these criteria and to assist future researchers, the student will select a methodology or methodologies suitable for the research problem and research question and write a statement regarding research methodology in the thesis proposal for CP 620-Research in Psychology, in the thesis outline for CP 650-Directed Research I, and in both the Abstract and Chapter I of the thesis itself. In Chapter I, in addition to naming the research methodology utilized, the statement will include information about participants, materials, procedures, and the limitations of the chosen research methodology. Additionally, if the data gathering process has included the use of human participants or co-researchers, the final, approved ethics application will be included as an appendix in the thesis.

Quantitative Methodology

Though the use of quantitative methodology is rare in Counseling Psychology theses, you are and will be consumers of quantitative research and therefore need to be familiar with this approach. Also, some students use the thesis as a pilot project for what becomes a doctoral dissertation, which may involve the use of quantitative research methods.
In a quantitative study there must be a testable hypothesis and the hypothesis must include concepts that can be measured by numbers. In quantitative studies the experimental methods must be appropriate and well designed and the statistical applications and tools must be appropriate. Quantitative studies are conducted with a variety of research designs. One form involves distinct experimental and control groups. In this form, to research clinical interventions, a study might be designed so one group receives the intervention and one group does not. The group that does not receive the intervention is called the control group. Other forms of quantitative studies may not have a separate control group.

ABAB designs, for instance, have one group that alternates back and forth between control and experimental conditions. This design can yield important results. ABA and ABBA designs are similarly important.

Quantitative research is a process of disproving the null hypothesis. Such a study tries to prove that there will be no difference in response between the experimental and control groups. If a difference in response occurs 95% of the time, then the null hypothesis, which states that there is no meaningful difference between the group receiving the treatment and the control group, has been disproved by the study. When this occurs the opposite of the null hypothesis, which the researcher surmised was the case, is proven.

Quantitative methodology takes care to control the variables studied and to determine which variables are cause, which variables are effect, and which variables are correlative. An important consideration is choosing a sample in which both the test group and the control group are large enough to provide statistically significant results. Sample groups chosen can be representative or random samples. A quantitative study needs to be described sufficiently in the literature so that it can be replicated by other researchers.

In quantitative methodology the researcher tries to be objective and to present a blank screen to the research participants. Nevertheless, ethical considerations are paramount, and, though neutral, the researcher must ensure the participants’ rights and well-being.

Suggested Reading:


**Qualitative Methodology**

Many types of qualitative studies share common aspects. They are descriptive, and rather than proving or disproving a hypothesis, they explore some aspect of human experience in depth. A description of some behavior (e.g., a therapeutic strategy or approach) is offered as something described, not as a proven approach. The sample size of a qualitative study varies and can include one or more participants. Usually three or four is best if participants are other than oneself; and six participants is usually the maximum for the thesis project.

In qualitative studies, the focus is on the wholeness of the experience rather than its parts. The focus is also on meanings and essences of experience rather than parts of the experience that can be measured more easily. The purpose of qualitative studies is to develop ideas and theories about human experience rather than quantified, replicable comparisons of identified groups of people. The interest is therefore in the subjective experience of oneself as the subject or in the experience of co-researchers. Data from co-researchers can be obtained from interviews,
observations, or historical records and is open-ended and nonquantitative. Often the findings are
shared with the co-researchers and this process informs the design of the research and
investigation of the research. Below are a few qualitative research methods that might be used in
the Counseling Psychology thesis.

Suggested Reading:


**Ethnographic.** Ethnographic research methodology arose primarily in anthropology and sociology. This methodology includes entering into the field; doing fieldwork; gathering information through direct observation, interviews, and photographs; and using materials and artifacts available to members of the group or culture.

This method is often informal and can appear unsystematic. The researcher observes events as they arise and things that appear obtuse may become clear over time. Researchers attempt to find key informants who can direct them toward what they need, or they choose those in the sample group deemed to be appropriate members of the group, creating *judgmental sampling*. The data is then organized into a portrait that conveys a holistic cultural impression. The attempt is to describe a culture or social group in a full and complex manner through immersion with the group at a personal level.

Suggested Reading:


**Case study.** The use of case study research methodology also developed in the fields of anthropology and sociology and has roots similar to ethnographic studies. Unlike ethnographies that study entire social systems or cultures, case studies usually focus on smaller units like a specific program or an individual. Case studies are an exploration over time through detailed, in-depth data collection. It is important to clarify the rationale behind the choice of the case that is being studied, and this is known as *purposeful sampling*. After the participant is identified, data is collected, a detailed description of the case is given, themes or issues are analyzed, and interpretations about the case are proposed. Data is collected through observations, interviews, documents, audio-visual material, artifacts, or archival records. A case study is contextualized within its physical, historical, and socio-economic setting.

Suggested Reading:


Phenomenological. Phenomenological research is experiential and qualitative. Nevertheless, detachment is important. The researcher tries to *bracket out* his or her own biases and expectations. Though bracketing is not fully achievable, an effort is made by the researcher to be as open as possible to what the data are revealing. In terms of methodology, often, a number of in-depth interviews are conducted. They are open-ended and oriented to gathering personal descriptions of lived human experience. The focus is usually more on a particular aspect of human experience as it occurs in several people rather than on describing in a more total manner the experience of one person.

In phenomenological research, it is important to attain immediacy. Participants to be interviewed are chosen for their close involvement with what is being studied; however, the participants themselves are not the primary focus in the process of descriptive analysis. Phenomenological research instead attempts to engage with the essence of the experience. An effort is made to find the meaning of the experience and to seek general and more universal meanings arising from these explorations. Phenomenological research permits conclusions that are more definitive than in heuristic research.

Suggested Reading:


Hermeneutic. Hermes was the Greek god of communication. Traditional hermeneutics involves the search for meaning in and between different contexts including texts, stories people tell about themselves, films, and art. Hermeneutic methodology places concepts in dialogue with one another to look for deeper meaning through exploring their relationships to each other and involves the comparative study of various source materials.

Theoretical theses involve hermeneutic methodology and often focus on philosophical questions concerned with rational structures, organizing principles, and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Theoretical theses may evaluate existing theories or propose new theories.

Alchemical hermeneutics, a new research framework proposed by Robert Romanyshyn (2007), posits that one is chosen by the research rather than the reverse, as in traditional hermeneutics. As an imaginal and depth-oriented methodology, the task of alchemical hermeneutics is to make philosophical hermeneutics more psychologically aware. This approach perceives the soul as a landscape that can be accessed through continuous dialogue within psyche. The methodology asks that the intentions of the researcher’s ego be differentiated from the soul’s voice in the work. Research is a *re-membering* and a *re-turning* to the source. All interpretation is seen as filtered through a complex, which is Carl Jung’s way of describing important archetypally-based structures occurring in the psyche which powerfully influence behavior (e.g., father-complex, mother-complex, hero-complex).

In the alchemical hermeneutic approach, transference “dialogues” take place, in which the soul of the work is invited into dialogue with the ego’s intentions. Reflection, reverie, synchronicity, dreams, visions, revelations, and all manifestations of the *mundus imaginalis* are sources of data.
The researcher is transformed as the research progresses, and therefore the work is considered alchemical in nature.

Suggested Reading:


**Heuristic.** Heuristic research encourages relationship and connectedness rather than detachment. In heuristic research, a particular phenomenon in the researcher’s personal experience is explored over time. The approach is more autobiographical than found in phenomenological research, and the researcher usually is personally called to the topic. Heuristic research seeks immediacy and meaning. The researcher then synthesizes the experience and writes about the structure and meaning of the entire study.

Methodologically, the first step is the initial engagement of the researcher to discover a question with intense interest. The second step is total immersion of the researcher in the question. The third step is incubation, which is like tending to or sitting on one egg waiting for it to hatch. The fourth step is illumination and is a change in consciousness in which the constituents of the experience come alive and rearrange themselves with new meaning and relevance. The fifth step in this methodology is explication, in which the researcher examines the various levels of meaning arising through these processes. The final step is creative synthesis, in which the researcher expresses the findings.

In heuristic research, whatever presents itself to the researcher can be considered data. The researcher is both the object and subject of the research. The researcher goes back and forth from experience to witnessing to experience. The methodology requires developing the capacity to be objective about self while delving deeper into subjectivity. It requires simultaneously being the researcher, the object of the research, and the comparative researcher as readings and the literature review cast light on the experience. In heuristic methodology, the subject remains visible throughout the process of research and is portrayed as a whole human being. Heuristic research retains the essence of the subject in the experience. It leads to meaning on an essential and personal level and leaves room for paradox and inconclusive results.

Suggested Reading:


Artistic-creative. Artistic-creative methodology involves engagement in the creative process combined with thorough understanding of the theoretical contexts of the work and its implications. Immersion in the material studied and the arising of material from the unconscious are both legitimate aspects of artistic-creative qualitative research. A production thesis contains both a production component and a theoretical analysis of the production (see Production Theses, pp. 61-62). The nature of the production is a creative, original piece of work, completed during one’s time as a student at Pacifica. Production theses have included multimedia, media, art, literature, and cultural interventions such as performance and ritual.

Suggested Reading:

Grounded theory. Grounded theory research attempts to construct integrated, new theories from a careful, systemic analysis of a variety of data such as field notes, interviews and the review of written materials. The theory is constructed during the process and not prior to beginning the study. This approach is inductive—the data comes first, and then the theory arises from it. The emphasis is on developing a theory born of the analysis of the data. To accomplish this, the focus is on unraveling the elements of experience and letting the theory grow out of the process. Grounded theory, which incorporates feminist theory, recognizes context and social structure as core constituents of the data and therefore the resultant theories.

Suggested Reading:

Participatory action and appreciative inquiry. In research that is participatory action or appreciative inquiry based, students and researchers seek to do more than report on what they find following a research study or project; their purpose is to engage the research environment to promote, initiate, or sustain social or organizational change. Very often, the nature of this dual purpose—research and change—requires the researcher to use nontraditional approaches that bridge the theory-practice gap. The researcher must be willing to risk his or her biases and prejudices. The methodology includes beginning with a thorough review of the literature, proposing questions, selecting participants, collecting data, keeping a log or journal, analyzing the data, and communicating the final results. Currently, no measures of validity and reliability have been developed for this methodology.
Intuitive inquiry. Intuitive inquiry is inclusive of transpersonal experiences and can be blended with other research methods. This methodology is based upon compassionately informed research using intuition and altered states of consciousness as sources of amplification and refinement of data observed. Dreams, visions, somatic experiences, and contemplative practices can provide insights that are considered intuitive. This approach seeks to incorporate subjective and objective knowledge. It posits that the personal is universal and that the intersubjective field between the researcher, participants, and audience is primary, as all can be changed by the research.

The steps in intuitive inquiry are first to choose a research topic or text (e.g., a song, painting, ballet, interview transcript, or image) that is usually not the researchers own text. The researcher then engages the text daily, recording impressions. A specific topic emerges from this initial cycle. In the second cycle, with the topic in mind, a new set of texts is engaged to help clarify the initial structure and values the researcher brings to the topic. These become lenses for interpretation and can develop and change as the researcher moves through cycles of interpretation. An interactive template is generated comprised of clustered lists of texts. This cycle concludes with a literature review. The third cycle begins with the collection of original textual data through interviews or collected narratives. This original textual data is used to modify, refine, and expand the researcher’s understanding of the topic. The imaginal is engaged as a subjective source of knowledge in a circular relationship with more objective knowledge. Metaphors, similes, symbols, and poetic writing or poetry may be used to convey the richness and fullness of experience. Embodied writing is encouraged, using the physical and visceral wisdom of the body.

The goal of intuitive inquiry is to ensure that the researcher has expanded beyond his or her projections and has obtained some kind of breakthrough and synthesis of findings that can be communicated through empathic resonance, with validity formed through consensus building with participants and audience. Currently, no standards have been developed for data analysis.

Suggested Reading:


Participatory epistemology. Participatory epistemology, a new philosophical framework proposed by Richard Tarnas (2007), is comprised of the recognition that meaning is neither outside of the human mind in the objective world waiting to be discovered (the
paradigmatically modern/structuralist worldview), nor simply constructed or projected onto an inherently meaningless world by the subjective human mind (the paradigmatically postmodern/poststructuralist worldview). Rather, participatory epistemology posits that meaning is enacted through the participation of the human mind with the larger meaning of the cosmos. The mind draws forth a meaning that exists in potentia in the cosmos, but which must go through the process of articulation by means of human consciousness.

Posited as a mode of integral thought, participatory epistemology is inclusive of the insights of transpersonal psychology, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. As a philosophical framework for qualitative research, participatory epistemology can be blended with other research methods.

Suggested Reading:


**Organic inquiry.** Organic inquiry is based upon feminist and transpersonal psychology. This orientation validates the personal and a nonhierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. Research is considered sacred and is entered into with an attitude of reverence. The researcher’s attitude is exploratory and oriented toward discovery.

Like many other qualitative methodologies, organic inquiry is more descriptive than interpretive. The methodology involves a thorough excavation of old ways of thinking and the genesis of an initial concept for the study arising from the researcher’s personal experience. The first step is a descent into one’s own story, allowing the chthonic to emerge, and honoring the imaginal. Co-researchers may be involved, and the data are personal stories and interviews that are semistructured or unstructured. The primary material is seen as a personified image, muse, or deity who has universal teachings that need to be shared. It is posited that a connection with the numinous emerges. The analysis is the harvesting of the stories. No structure for harvesting them is specified. Interview analysis, narrative analysis, sequential analysis, heuristic inquiry, or resonance panels may be employed. Organic inquiry is anti-method and unique results are expected.

Suggested Reading:


**Participants**

When describing your methodology, if your thesis involves a study with participants, it is crucial to include the number of participants and the rationale as to why you selected them. In a phenomenological study, for example, it is often essential to choose participants who are able to articulate their lived experience of the world. Regarding your choice of participants, state any relevant inclusion or exclusion criteria such as age, ethnicity, education, absence of severe psychopathology, diagnosis, or comorbidity. One of the main purposes for such criteria is that
you want to insure that your selection of participants will adequately represent the variable(s) you are studying. Conversely, you want to make sure they will not confound your results.

**Materials**

Many studies utilize materials such as tests, images, or apparatus. It is thus important to describe these materials. Frequently, formal psychological tests are used, such as the Beck Depression Inventory-II, Myers Briggs Types Indicator, or the MMPI-2. These should be listed along with their number of items, response format (True-False, Likert, self report, ratings by clinician), reading level, and psychometric properties. If using arts-based images, a description of these and their source would be important.

**Procedures**

This final major component of your methodology section describes the processes and procedures you employed throughout the conduct of your study. This section will provide a confident sense of your own direction and activity as a researcher. It will also provide your readers with an unambiguous understanding of the specific research actions you undertook. Your description of processes and procedures also provides a basis for readers eventually to evaluate the nature, integrity, and veracity of your findings. For quantitative studies, it is also essential that your description of procedures is specific enough for other investigators to replicate them if necessary or desired. For qualitative studies, your procedures should be clear enough for other researchers to learn from them how to conduct similar, related, or follow up studies.

**Procedures for gathering data.** For participant-based studies, this includes procedures for selecting participants (or sites); procedures for obtaining informed consent and insuring confidentiality; procedures for instructing participants; and procedures for conducting and documenting interviews (e.g., notes, audio tape recording, video tape recording, etc.), for gathering solicited written narratives, or for participating in social settings. For text-based and arts-based studies, include criteria and procedures for selecting texts and other materials and procedures for gathering and documenting data (e.g., written notes, voice recorded notes, reference cards, etc.).

**Procedures for analyzing data.** Regardless of the kind of data used for your study, you need to articulate the specific steps and procedures followed in analyzing and interpreting the data. This means identifying and discussing your overall theoretical lens (e.g., psychoanalytic, Kleinian, object relations, Jungian, archetypal, existential, phenomenological, etc.) and also any particular conceptual lens you plan to employ (e.g., transference, self, primary process, splitting, projective identification, transference, complexes, archetypes, developmental stages and processes, etc.).

**Limitations and Delimitations.** Discuss ways in which you have, in advance, intentionally set certain parameters (delimitations) on your study, specifically in relation to the scope of your research question or the demographics of your choice of participants, texts, or other primary research data. Also, discuss ways in which you anticipate that your research design itself may establish certain limitations with respect to such matters as the generalizability of findings. Finally, discuss, at least briefly, the ways in which you anticipate relevant socio-cultural-historical contexts influencing the outcomes and implications of your study.
**Organization of the study.** In this section, you present a brief prospective overview of the anticipated thesis manuscript as a whole. Readers are well served with a clear sense as to the direction of your study.