Overview of the Research Process

Research at Pacifica has a dual purpose: to contribute to the domain of counseling and depth psychology and to develop depth psychological approaches to understanding psychological life and service. We describe five primary stages of research in counseling and depth psychology as it is commonly experienced by M.A. students in the Counseling Psychology program

- Approaching research
- Articulating a question
- Gathering data
- Analyzing data
- Reporting the research outcome

The discussion of each of these stages is not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive but merely to indicate general standards and parameters for M.A. level research.

Approaching Research

Pacifica Graduate Institute recognizes that that all research, regardless of how objective it purports to be, grows out of a particular philosophical stance that defines the possibilities and limits of research. All research is informed by this philosophical stance. This stance constitutes one’s position vis-à-vis the nature of reality (ontology) and human knowledge (epistemology). The recognition and understanding of one’s own philosophical stance is an invaluable resource in designing, conducting, and evaluating research. Pacifica, therefore, strongly encourages students to examine their epistemological position vis-à-vis the nature of reality and human knowledge. In examining their own approach to research, students need to consider not only the nature of their particular research interests and their philosophical assumptions about psychology in general, but also their own personal temperaments. Clearly students’ approach to research is significantly influenced by their research question.

Articulating a Question

Perhaps the most significant feature of research is the identification and articulation of a passionate and worthwhile question. Pacifica’s commitment to counseling and depth psychology makes special demands of students: The Institute assumes that students’ research questions will grow out of important domains of their private and professional lives. Students are required to examine the autobiographical origins of their research questions and their predispositions or transferences to their topics. The self-assessment involves both identifying and managing predispositions and transferences for the purpose of maximizing openness and minimizing distortion and bias.

Another important aspect of articulating a question is establishing and clarifying its potential significance for the field of psychology. Developing a research question involves, first and foremost, establishing how the research question is germane.
Gathering Data

Having selected a relevant research question, students’ next concern is to decide what kind of data they will draw upon to answer their questions. Psychological research is based on three general kinds of data: participant-based data, text-based data, and arts-based data.

Participant-based data. Participant based data are data that are gathered directly from selected research participants, sometimes referred to as co-researchers. The particular kind of data provided by such participants depends on the research methodology. All participant-based studies deal with empirical data, that is, the actual, concrete responses in behavior, gesture, and language of real persons. Naturally, because these data are obtained from the responses of human participants, all such studies must adhere to specific ethical procedures and guidelines established by The American Psychological Association, Pacifica Graduate Institute, and any other institution directly involved in the research project. Two different kinds of data are used in participant-based studies: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative data. Quantitative, participant-based data are generally used in studies designed, for example, to demonstrate the relationship between two or more psychological variables; to prove a specific psychological hypothesis; to compare similarities or differences between particular social, ethnic, or developmental populations; or to evaluate certain psychological interventions. Such data may be gathered in a number of ways including, for example, psychological tests such as the MMPI-2, multiple choice or Likert scale survey questionnaires, or surveys requiring only brief responses from participants. In each of these cases, the data that are gathered are analyzed using established statistical methods.

Qualitative data. Qualitative, participant-based data refers to various forms of descriptive data, that is, descriptions of human experience in written or recorded form. Such data may be gathered in a number of ways depending on the methodology. For example:

- **Phenomenological** studies are usually based on descriptive, qualitative data from solicited written narratives or open-ended, face-to-face interviews.
- **Interdisciplinary qualitative studies** such as grounded theory or case studies are based on first person reports, observations, or documents describing concrete human events or behaviors.
- **Ethnographic and participant observation studies** are based on descriptive, qualitative data usually in the form of field notes, some form of electronic recordings, or both.
- Certain **hermeneutic studies** may also be based on descriptive, qualitative data, such as a case study drawing on a client’s lived experiences, therapeutic dialogue, or descriptive data from interviews.

Regardless of whether the design of a study is phenomenological, hermeneutic, or ethnographic, counseling and depth psychological research often includes autobiographical data derived from the lived experience of the researchers as participants in their own studies.
**Text-based data.** The second general kind of data upon which research at Pacifica is based is textual or, as it is sometimes called, archival. Text-based data are generally drawn from published or unpublished texts or manuscripts of a scholarly, scientific, literary, or theoretical nature.

- Scientific texts might include reports or analyses of research in various domains of study, including, of course, psychology.
- Scholarly texts might include works from literature, religion, history, or the arts; for example, essays offering cultural, scientific, or literary criticism are one such kind of scholarly text.
- Literary texts include, for example, poetry, short stories, novels, folk stories, mythology, biographies, letters, or published diaries.
- Theoretical texts are works presenting theoretical perspectives on psychological life including the domains of personality theory, human development, social existence, ethnicity, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. Texts may be authored by widely known thinkers such as Freud, Jung, Winnicott, Klein, Bion, Hillman, and Corbin as well as Institute scholars like Romanyshyn and Corbett.

A theoretical study using hermeneutic methodology is an intensive analysis of text-based data. It involves analyzing texts to extract central themes, form connections, and possibly to construct a fresh theory or some unprecedented way of understanding the topic.

All researchers will, in the preliminary stages of research, do intensive analysis of text-based data because a key feature of writing a review of literature is relevancy to the chosen topic. Known as the Literature Review, it features a cogent analysis of the texts that establish the ground of the research question by providing knowledge on the topic, evaluating the quality of research that has been done, and identifying gaps in the field. The preliminary use of texts for a literature review, which all students conduct in preparation for their research, should not be confused with the methodology students propose to use to address their research questions.

**Arts-based data.** Because Pacifica is committed to interdisciplinary study of psychological life, research in counseling and depth psychology often draws upon material emanating from the arts. Primary arts-based data can include the following:

- Classical paintings, drawings, sketches, photography, and sculptures
- The artistic creations of patients in psychotherapy
- Motion picture, theater, music, and dance productions
- Cultural or ethnic ritual, dance, or song
- Historical artifacts such as ancient engravings or woodcuts (e.g., the Rosarium or Thurneisser woodcuts), or illuminated manuscripts (e.g., *Les Vaisseaux D’Hermes*)
- Architecture, archeological ruins, or the artifacts of ancient cultures

In most cases, arts-based data is used to supplement, corroborate, or strengthen findings grounded primarily in participant-based or text-based data. In some cases, however, arts-
based data provides the primary evidence from which studies in counseling and depth psychology draw and which form the heart of artistic-creative research methodology and production theses (see Production Theses, pp. 61-62).

**Analyzing Data**

Having examined the approach to research, developed a research question, and decided which kind of data is most appropriate for their study, students’ next concern is choosing a methodology and procedure for analyzing their data. Obviously, the research question and the nature of the research data will influence students’ choice of methodology for data analysis.

Data requires researchers to make sense of a whole body of information. Researchers can conduct either a quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis, or use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Analyzing quantitative data.** Quantitative data invariably require some form of analysis using specific statistical techniques. Initially, the outcome of such an analysis is given in mathematical language and usually presented in tables and charts. Nevertheless, such data always require some kind of verbal analysis which involves the selection and discussion of salient findings as well as a discussion of the implications of these findings for knowledge in the field of psychology.

**Analyzing qualitative data.** Qualitative data require some kind of qualitative analysis. Methods for analyzing qualitative data include ethnography, phenomenology, hermeneutic, heuristic, and grounded field theory. At Pacifica, the most frequently used methodologies to analyze qualitative data are phenomenology, hermeneutic, and heuristic. Each of these methodologies also is an approach to data analysis, carrying with it specific assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, as discussed earlier.

**Reporting the Research Outcome**

The preceding four stages of research are the prelude to conducting the research itself. Each stage—one, examining one’s a research approach; two, developing a research question; three, deciding on which kind of data is most appropriate for the study; and four, choosing a methodology and procedure for analyzing data—is part of the overall research design. The fifth and final stage includes carrying out the research and documenting the outcome, which results in the complete thesis manuscript.

The primary purpose of the thesis manuscript is to report the focus, structure, outcomes, and implications of the research to colleagues in the field, to the academic community as a whole, and, ultimately, to the community of scholars at large. Although the specific form, organization, and language of this manuscript is largely dependent on the particular topic, the researcher, the research process, and the research findings, a number of general matters should always be addressed within the manuscript. These matters include, among others, the topic, research question, literature review, methodology, findings, evaluation and implications of the findings for the field of psychology, and suggestions for further research.
Early Stages of the Research Process

A great deal of preparation goes into the development and design of a thesis research project. Much of this preparation occurs prior to ever putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. What follows are some basic considerations in the early stages of developing the thesis.

Imagining the Thesis

The first questions that face students in considering doing thesis research are “What shall I investigate?” and “How shall I go about it?” A depth psychological approach to research recognizes, however, that a number of attitudes and assumptions that can significantly influence students’ decisions and subsequent actions underpin these questions.

Some Obstacles on the Path

Years of experience in educational institutions plus related experiences in family and everyday life can contribute to the development of complexes that can be awakened in the thesis process. Such complexes underscoring attitudes and beliefs can easily hinder one’s progress. Three particularly common obstacles are worth noting here: insecurity, grandiosity, and misconstruing the intent of thesis research.

Insecurity. For many students, writing a thesis presents psychological challenges in addition to the more obvious logistical demands. Insecurities may emerge about their ability, intelligence, worth, knowledge, and sheer capacity to create a major piece of psychological writing. Whereas the completed thesis is often the first permanent and universally available record of their scholarship in psychology, anticipating doing such substantive, important work often brings up the self-doubt that has plagued students in the past.

Although few, if any, students find the writing of a thesis easy, anyone who has completed their graduate coursework already has the capacity to complete this final assignment. To reach this point, students must have had many successes along the way. Nonetheless, self-doubt may inspire students to assess their work honestly, in a way that is critical without being self-demeaning. It may be helpful to conceive of thesis research not only as an opportunity to make a contribution to the field, but also as an opportunity for self-knowledge, self-reflection, and self-development.

Grandiosity. If insecurity is one potential pitfall for researchers, the opposite, grandiosity is just as challenging. Some students for example, harbor wishes that their theses will change the whole field of psychology and significantly impact culture. Others have difficulty recognizing that their research rests on the contribution of scholars who have devoted entire lifetimes to research in psychology and that eminence in this field, as in so many others, is slowly earned over a lifetime of careful craft.

Grandiosity, like insecurity, grows out of longstanding complexes and should be addressed because it can easily inhibit or even paralyze a student’s work. A healthy capacity for self-doubt, when balanced with a relatively healthy narcissism, can serve students as a critical psychic asset for the long and arduous work of thesis research. It is helpful to bear in mind that your work is unlikely to change significantly the fields of
your work certainly has the potential for making a meaningful contribution to the field, particularly within a fairly circumscribed area.

**Misconstruing thesis research.** Unfortunately, many students misconstrue the purpose of thesis research as one of writing a book or, perhaps, a series of topically related essays that develops and defends an idea or position. The intent and tone of such work is polemical rather than exploratory, using rhetoric to demonstrate researchers’ intelligence, insight, and authority, and to establish the correctness of their points of view. These are not appropriate objectives for a thesis.

Given the fact that M.A. education in counseling psychology has required writing many papers, it is understandable that students might think of the thesis this way. Although being intelligent, insightful, and literary are certainly required for thesis research, these are not the ends but the means to the goal. The goal, as stated earlier, is to make a modest and deserving contribution to the fields of counseling and depth psychology with a sound piece of research that is exploratory, rather than polemical, in tone.

**Approaching Research**

Pacifica Graduate Institute recognizes that that all research grows out of a pervasive philosophical stance or approach. It constitutes one’s position vis-à-vis the nature of reality (ontology) and human knowledge (epistemology). A researcher’s approach, therefore, includes basic philosophical assumptions that shape the very way one goes about understanding the world.

Examining one’s approach orients researchers to their topic and shapes and delimits both methodologies and findings. In examining their own approach to research, students need to consider the nature of their philosophical assumptions about psychology as well as their own personal temperaments. Naturally, one’s approach is also significantly influenced by the focus and nature of a student’s particular research project. A key element to remember is that one’s approach to research is a philosophical stance towards knowledge in the field.

**Selecting a Research Topic, Problem, and Question**

One of the most challenging aspects of thesis research is actually choosing a topic or problem to investigate. This is especially challenging at Pacifica where students are encouraged to choose topics of personal interest which at the same time have potential to contribute to the development of counseling and depth psychology as well as to the growth of knowledge or understanding in the field of psychology as a whole. In addition, Pacifica encourages students, in all of their academic activities, to be mindful of the implications of their studies for their own personal and professional development.

**Begin with yourself.** In selecting a research topic, Pacifica encourages students to begin with their own experience in life as persons and as professionals. What has a profound sense of personal vigor and relevance is likely to be valuable to others. Whereas it is certainly acceptable to select a topic for its extrinsic value (e.g., it will help one get a job or media exposure or will satisfy an employer’s needs), choosing research with intrinsic intellectual interest helps carry you through the many months of labor
ahead. Without such intellectual passion, a project can easily grow cold before the thesis is complete.

Students who intentionally select a topic on the basis of personal or professional interests face special challenges. Such a topic is likely to come with significant emotional intensity that merits two words of caution. First, consider whether it generates so much emotion that it is impossible to maintain the open, inquiring attitude that is crucial to good research. This may indicate that you have not adequately worked through the issue. Second, it is especially crucial to attend to the depth psychological dimensions of the research. How will you be steadily vigilant of your personal predispositions, transferences, and complexes in relation to the problem throughout the research process?

Consider the other. Once you have begun to have a sense of what general topic or problem may have sufficient intrinsic intellectual interest to merit the devotion of so much time, energy, and expense, you must ask how this topic or problem may be of concern to others. Essentially this means identifying ways in which your topic is of value to other members of your society, including, of course, other psychotherapists. You should therefore seriously ask yourself how the topic might contribute to the development of thought, knowledge, and practice in counseling psychology. In short, how might knowledge and understanding of your topic make a difference to others in your field? How might future scholars use your work to advance their own? What insights into problems or issues might your work yield? How might your research findings be used in teaching, parenting, psychotherapeutic practice, or other applied settings? If the answers to all of these questions are unclear, the area may lack theoretical or practical relevance. Research that begins to feel like “busy work” will drain your intellectual energy. In order to be sustainable, a topic should carry academic, personal, and community meaningfulness.

An important aspect of identifying the significance of your topic for others is surveying relevant literature in the field. As you survey the literature, uncovering from 25 to 75 references in the first run is a good sign; this number demonstrates that the need for research on the problem is recognized but, at the same time, not overly worked. Admittedly, many excellent topics will yield fewer or more references than this number. Although it is remotely possible that you have selected a topic that is so new or so unusual that no author has written about it, this is rarely the case. In such instances, as noted above, your challenge is to determine whether or not your topic actually should be of concern to psychotherapists in spite of the lack of apparent historical interest.

Hone the question. One of the greatest difficulties beginning researchers have is developing an appropriate focus for their investigation. Students tend to be too general in their research aspirations. This hinders their ability to design an effective research plan that has a realistic chance of addressing the problem and answering the question. A study on gender identity, for example, is not only likely to yield thousands of articles and books to survey but is also so broad as to contain innumerable potential research questions. In such a circumstance, you would be prudent to delimit your question by selecting a specific aspect of gender identity, a specific population to investigate, or a specific, untried, approach to the problem. Of course, you could choose to delimit your problem in all three ways.
Once having identified a research topic and problem, your challenge is to sharpen and structure your research further by formulating a specific research question. This may well be a lengthy process characterized by confusion and ambiguity as much as clarity. Often, the researcher is confronted with the challenge of tending to what is unknown, in doubt, elusive, and unarticulated and is “sitting with” the topic in very much the same way a therapist sits with a client. So, although the goal is sharpness and structure, the process of achieving it is often quite fluid and protean.

The following example illustrates one possible way to move from topic to problem to question, tightening the focus at each step.

*Research Topic:* gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males

*Research Problem:* No current literature or research in psychology offers a depth psychological understanding of gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males.

*Research Question:* What is an object relations understanding of gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males?

Although you might have only a hunch or intuition about your topic at first, eventually you will have to formulate an appropriate and effective research problem and research question. One of the most common impediments to this process is a researcher’s ambitions. It is not at all unusual for students to wish to answer a number of often widely divergent questions on the same topic. In the example presented, in addition to the above question, a student may ask such questions as these: Is gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males in some way related to gang affiliation? How does gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males influence their educational experience? Does gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males eventually impact the rates of teenage pregnancy among Latino youth? How does gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males correlate with adult employment records? How does gender identity in pre-adolescent Latino males correlate with adult criminality? Not only do such questions imply a number of unexamined assumptions and biases, they also inordinately add to the demands that are placed on the research and, therefore, inevitably on the researcher.

Prudent researchers try to reign in their ambitions and focus on the least possible number of unknowns. Nothing is at all wrong and, indeed, much is right with asking a single, carefully worded research question. The more questions you ask, the more you have to answer. The more words you have in each of your questions the more words you will have to explain. Along with relevance, parsimony and elegance are preeminent values for researchers to embrace in asking their research questions, not only for their own sake, but for that of their eventual readers as well.

Please note that if you are doing a quantitative study, this process of honing your research question may take a somewhat different form, often concluding with the statement of a research hypothesis. Nevertheless, clarity and parsimony are just as crucial for quantitative studies as they are for qualitative ones.
Reviewing the Literature

A thesis is rarely conceived or written in the order suggested in the Overview of the Thesis presented in this handbook (pp. 78-79). Most students are refining the various elements of the thesis as they progress through the process of researching and writing. This discussion on reviewing the literature does not represent the order of appearance of the parts of the thesis in the final product, but rather illustrates a likely progression of stages in the process of creating a thesis. Your research into the literature influences the formation of the research problem and question, whereas the Literature Review itself comprises Chapter II in the actual thesis.

When beginning to review the literature, it is useful to think of research in stages, in which the topic unfolds as the search deepens and the search deepens as the topic unfolds. Initially, it is necessary to learn how to search for relevant literature. One needs to learn to construct search strings in appropriate databases so that the net result is neither minimal nor overwhelming. Sometimes, this process is simply a question of language—learning how to think of or discover synonyms for terms that initially come to mind as relevant search terms. Also, where a student searches for information is affected by the stage of research. Someone who has a very preliminary idea of a topic can often begin by searching encyclopedia collections for broad discussions and consult the reference lists in sources (e.g., Web sites, articles, books) for further reading. If the student has a compelling idea that is beginning to solidify as the focus of research, the ProQuest database is useful for recently published theses and dissertations and to generate reference lists. Once the research problem and question are established, EBSCO is extremely useful. At this point adjusting a search engine’s settings for preferences on how the search results are displayed (e.g., by relevance, by publication date, etc.) becomes important. Also, the more detailed information available in a journal article can be overwhelming in the beginning if one’s topic is not clear, yet may be perfect when the research question is established.
Statement of the Research Problem and Question

Your statement of the research problem and research question, though brief (usually 1-2 pages in Chapter I, the Introduction), is the very heart and soul of your thesis. What you write here not only defines your entire research, but also provides the most reliable and effective grounds for guiding and evaluating your work as it progresses as well as for eventually evaluating your research results. Effective statements of the research problem and question tend to include at least the following three components: a brief reiteration of the problem, a lucid and concise statement of the primary research question along with relevant auxiliary questions, and clear unambiguous definitions of key terms.

Statement of the Research Problem

Briefly summarize or synthesize your present understanding of the research problem and its relevance for the field of counseling and depth psychology. One to two well-written paragraphs should be sufficient.

Naturally, how you express the research problem depends on the selected methodology. Quantitative research often leads to the articulation of specific, testable hypotheses. In contrast, qualitative research requires the articulation of a broader research question. Formulating the research problem and research questions should be done in conjunction with the faculty thesis advisor.

Statement of the Research Question

Whereas the process of arriving at a worthwhile research question is often characterized by confusion and uncertainty, your goal should be a concise, focused statement. Do your best to achieve clarity, parsimony, and elegance. Avoid unexamined assumptions or biases in your question, closed-ended questions that can be answered with a yes or no, and questions that imply their own answer. Remember the function of a research question is to open up the unknown, not fill it with hidden agendas and convictions. Imagine yourself as an explorer of the psyche, heading toward terra incognita, rather than someone traveling a well-worn and comfortable path. When asking your research question you should find yourself reminded of what it is you do not know or understand and what you hope to discover or comprehend.

Though it is not necessary to have auxiliary questions, they may be useful but only if they relate directly to your main question. In other words, they should support your primary research question rather than add tangential or related problems to consider.
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.

Suggested Reading:


**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.
Production Theses

Arts-based research may be included in all theses, but production theses utilize artistic-creative methodology as the primary methodological approach to the research problem and research question. A production thesis must have two components: one is a production, and the other is a theoretical analysis of the production. Though the center of gravity of a production thesis is based on artistic-creative methodology, in all cases the production must be accompanied by a theoretical, written analysis (often utilizing hermeneutic methodology) that demonstrates how the production together with theoretical component contributes to the advance of research and a deepened understanding of counseling and depth psychology.

The production itself must demonstrate psychological insights and qualities; that is, the creative, original component of the thesis must both be creative and have significance for counseling and depth psychology. It must be completed during your tenure as a student at Pacifica—in other words, you may not submit a work completed prior to your admission to the program.

A production can take many forms and formats. It can be presented as the core of the thesis in Chapter III, or as an appendix. The production can be presented in toto (e.g., a complete novel; a complete movie script) or in part (five chapters of a novel; two episodes of a series). Enough material should be included to give a clear or persuasive sense of the work's longer trajectory. A production might take the following forms:

Multimedia: Hypertext, CD-ROM, art installation with multimedia dimensions, interactive website, computer art and animation, video games, interactive programs for children or adults.

Media: Video, film script, film, radio documentary, television series.

Art and Literature: Painting; sculpture; Photoshop art; writing of a novel or script, a collection of poems, or a series of short stories. Images must be scanned or printed on the page rather than glued or attached to the page.

Cultural Intervention: Creation and performance of a dance, ritual, storytelling, choreography, opera libretti.

Production theses are often accompanied by a disc that contains the multimedia component. This disc must be labeled properly containing information regarding the program necessary to open the media component (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Reader, Internet Explorer, QuickTime, Windows Media Player, etc.). (See p. 81 and p. 102 for labeling instructions. Also, see Appendix B, Guide for the Use of Multimedia Materials.)

Regardless of whether the production component of the thesis is in Chapter III or an appendix, in Chapter III you must introduce your creative piece of work, describe its relationship with your research problem and research question, and discuss its relevance and significance to counseling and depth psychology.

The length of a production thesis varies. A traditional thesis is fully edited and 60 to 120 pages long, using Pacifica/APA style guidelines. In a fully edited production thesis, however, the length may be greatly reduced to roughly 40 to 60 pages, not including
pages in appendices. It is impossible to give a precise number of pages for the theoretical presentation of such a thesis, since it depends on the nature and extensiveness of the research involved in the production, and on the kind of production. If your production is, for example, an art installation in a gallery, with a video or catalogue presentation in an appendix, you may have to write a lengthy theoretical text, perhaps as long as a traditional thesis, to explain how your artistic vision may challenge, expand or inform depth psychology. In all cases, the length, structure, and content of the theoretical presentation of a production thesis should be discussed with your thesis advisor and the Research Coordinator.

All needs for special equipment or special expertise are the responsibility of the student. Also, a production thesis may require guidance or assessment by people with competencies not possessed by any core or adjunct faculty. In such cases, it is the student's responsibility to seek and, if necessary, to pay outside experts who can advise or guide the production.
The Literature Review

The Nature of the Literature Review

The literature review has two purposes: first, it demonstrates your preliminary familiarity with relevant literature; and second, it locates your topic effectively within the literature of counseling and depth psychology.

A literature review is a thoughtful initial overview of published literature. Your review should cover the most important works or studies that touch upon your thesis topic; however, you need to be quite selective because you cannot possibly include all the relevant works available. You also need to be concise in your discussion of the research and examine only the most central issues, omitting more peripheral research or merely citing it.

It is important to remember that your purpose is not merely to review the literature for its own sake, as one does in an annotated bibliography, but to clarify the relationship between your proposed study and previous work on the topic. To do this, organize your literature review thematically, based on the nature and focus of your investigation. Ask yourself questions such as these:

- What does this work have to say about my topic?
- What aspect of my topic has not been addressed by this work?
- What are the limitations of this research?
- What additional research should be done?

When complete, your literature review should provide a systematic, coherent introduction to relevant texts; convince readers you are knowledgeable about existing works; and, more significantly, provide a rationale for the proposed study to demonstrate why it is important.

The Content of the Literature Review

The literature review is always subordinate or subservient to your research topic. Likewise, a literature review is not the place for you to make unexamined truth claims or assert ideological arguments but rather for you to critically examine how each work contributes and/or fails to contribute to knowledge or understanding of the topic as well as how the various works discussed relate to one another. Whenever you make claims in the process of critiquing the literature or clarifying your perspective, such claims must be adequately cited (using Pacifica/APA style guidelines) and, wherever appropriate, qualified (e.g., “X said . . .” or “Some are convinced . . .”). As with theses as a whole, the most effective literature reviews are written in the voice of a seeker, an investigator who is careful to report and describe, as objectively as possible, his or her observations as they occur. Careful description, systematic organization, critical reflection and evaluation, and a sense of genuine interest characterize the thoughtful literature review.

It is imperative that you thoroughly and appropriately document your entire literature review with citations for quotations. Your citations should always follow Pacifica/APA style guidelines and all works that you cite or quote must be placed in your list of
references at the end of your thesis. It is important to remember that whether you are quoting a single new idea, a few words or phrases, or whole sentences or paragraphs, correct acknowledgement is required including author(s), date of publication, and, where appropriate, page numbers. The purpose of such thoroughness is to provide your readers direct access to sources so they can substantiate your work or investigate further on their own.

You may find it helpful to write your literature review with two kinds of readers in mind. On one hand, imagine providing informed readers with evidence of your familiarity with and critical mastery of the bodies of literature that are relevant to your topic. On the other hand, imagine providing uninformed readers with a clear, coherent, and self-explanatory introduction to those same bodies of literature. Another way to imagine your literature review is as an intensive course on your topic presented to an intelligent and interested but not necessarily sympathetic audience. Your job is to educate this audience about what is already known about your topic and closely related issues and contexts, to inform them of similar and contrasting points of view with reference to the topic, and then indicate what is yet unknown or understood that you hope to learn in the research upon which you are about to embark.

The Organization of The Literature Review

You may choose any one of a number of different ways to organize your literature review depending on your own style as a writer and the particular demands of the research itself. A writer might begin by reviewing the broad context of works within which his or her topic falls and then gradually narrow down the focus, step by step, to reach the specific circumscribed domain of the chosen topic. In a study of some aspect of the self psychological view of the idealizing transference, for example, the literature review might begin with therapeutic practice, then move to self psychological views of transference, and, finally, to current research on the topic.

Other writers, particularly those conducting interdisciplinary studies, may choose to organize their literature reviews according to the relevant disciplines, subdisciplines, or theoretical approaches. Such a literature review would go about systematically showing how the literature of each particular discipline or theoretical approach has addressed the research topic and helps illuminate and define the research problem. Other writers may structure their literature review historically or chronologically; dialectically, with respect to opposing or contradictory points of view; or, conceptually, according to those basic concepts most salient to the research topic. Once again, your choice of how to organize your literature review depends both on your own style as a writer and on the particular demands of the research itself.

Naturally, as with all other writing in connection with your thesis, this review should be organized in accordance with Pacifica/APA style guidelines for the structure, format, and use of headings and subheadings (see Section III, Headings, p. 90 in this handbook). Judicious use of headings and subheadings can help structure and guide the discussion. Taking some time to study the requirements for headings will benefit both you and your reader in terms of clarity and transparency.