

REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY ON
 PSY 323.3: QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LIVES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES
 UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA

This course is one of several, low enrollment (maximum of 20 students) research offerings that are available to Psychology majors in the third year of their programs. It is offered in the fall term and is paired with PSY 324.3 which is offered in the winter term to an even smaller cohort of students (maximum 15) and which involves the design, execution, and write up of a small qualitative research project. PSY 323.3 is preceded by a fairly standard sequence of courses consisting of an introductory psychology course in first year, followed by specific content courses and an introduction to statistics and research design in second year. The research design course focuses on experimental and quasi-experimental design, but also briefly introduces students to qualitative research. The PSY 323.3/324.3 sequence is intended to enable Honours students to complete a qualitative research project for their thesis. Our undergraduate curriculum has been highly research-intensive for many years, and qualitative research has gained acceptance after first being introduced at the graduate level in the early 1990s.

The focus of PSY 323.3 is a general overview of qualitative research in psychology. Because the course culminates in students' preparation of a research proposal, I structure the course so that the main components of carrying out a research project are covered. I begin with an overview of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and method in an effort to make the distinctions between these terms clear. Because students need to understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions they are making when conducting research, and because they typically arrive at this course with a vague understanding of realism, objectivism, and post-positivism, I re-visit these notions while introducing them to constructionism and critical realism. My hope is that the contrasts in these positions will better assist students in understanding them, and sensitize students to the importance of choice of language in their oral and written communication of their research. The first assignment – comparison of the assumptions in the two articles – is intended to show how ontological and epistemological positions manifest in the language of research reports. Early in the course I touch briefly on how to decide on a topic and to formulate research questions because I want students to be working on the preparation of their research proposals over several weeks.

I continue with my emphasis on the diversity of qualitative inquiry by introducing students to a few of the many ways of generating data, e.g., interviews, focus groups, online, material objects, mapping, as well as to the challenges associated with these methods of data generation. One of the challenges I experience is to communicate to students the importance of choosing the method(s) of data generation on the basis of their research question(s) rather than out of familiarity with a particular method (and unfamiliarity with others). The second assignment is

intended to get students to think broadly and creatively about sources of data that might inform their research question(s).

I then turn to methodology, again with the goal of introducing students to what presently constitute primary methodologies used in qualitative inquiry in psychology. At this point in the course, my hope is that students are developing a sense of how ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions come together to shape data analysis. I involve students in the presentation of five of these methodologies – phenomenological psychological analysis, intuitive inquiry, grounded theory, narrative research, and discourse analysis – not so much as primary presenters, but rather as guides to me and stimulants for discussions by their classmates. I present the broad contours of the methodology to the class and, for their third assignment, a small group of students formulates reactions to and questions about a particular methodology that are shared with their classmates. The objective of this assignment is to elicit comments and questions about each methodology in a forum that encourages student participation.

To provide students with a sense of how data analysis might proceed from a particular methodology, I assign more detailed readings on discourse analysis, the methodology with which I am most familiar. For their fourth assignment, I assist them in employing some of the analytic principles, concepts, and strategies of discourse analysis to a few short extracts of text.

To assist in the preparation of the research proposal, I provide students with a fairly detailed list of what should be included in each of three sections that comprise the proposal (introduction and review of the literature; method; data analysis), along with a statement of purpose of each section. Writing the proposal enables students to bring together all the components of the research process covered in the course. My goal is to de-mystify the proposal so that students who go on to PSY 324.3 and/or the Honours thesis do not feel overwhelmed about the prospects of conducting a qualitative research project.

I conclude the course with a discussion of some of the ethical issues and dilemmas that can occur in the process of designing and conducting qualitative research and with a presentation of a few of the many criteria for quality control that have been developed. The final examination is typically structured as a set of “Top 10” questions that might be posed by someone who is familiar with experimental/quasi-experimental research grounded in a post-positivist epistemology but who is unfamiliar with qualitative research, e.g., How can qualitative researchers justify the use of small samples?; Isn’t all qualitative research just subjective?; Qualitative research enables us to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in *particular contexts*; but isn’t this a problem for generalizability?. I typically give these questions to the students in advance of the exam with the hope that they will be able to prepare thoughtful answers, to continue to learn from this preparation, and perhaps be armed with answers should such questions be posed to them in a thesis defence.

Linda McMullen

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

PSYCHOLOGY 323.3 (01)

Fall 2015

Qualitative Study of Lives and Social Practices

Instructor: Linda McMullen, Ph.D; telephone: 306-966-6666; office: Arts 67;
e-mail: linda.mcmullen@usask.ca

Time: Tuesdays 1:00 p.m. - 3:50 p.m. – Arts 31

Office hours: By appointment or drop in

Course Description and Objectives:

Psychology in North America has been built upon post-positivist assumptions that typically are paired with experimental and quasi-experimental research methodologies as routes to gaining knowledge. The widespread acceptance of this approach in psychology can leave the impression that it is *the* way to understand the world and frame research rather than simply *a* way of doing so. This course is designed to introduce students to alternative ways of doing research (commonly referred to as qualitative research) that are grounded in different epistemologies and theoretical perspectives and appeal to different criteria for their validation.

We will begin by considering the philosophical and historical foundations of qualitative approaches to research and will cover a variety of methods of data generation and methodologies. The course culminates in students' development of their own research proposals.

The objectives are: (1) to provide you with an understanding of how to situate qualitative methodologies vis-à-vis quantitative methodologies in psychology; (2) to introduce you to the wide range of topics and research questions that can be pursued via qualitative inquiry in psychology; (3) to familiarize you with the range of qualitative methodologies and methods of generating and analysing data; (4) to provide a basic, hands-on experience with analysing discourse; (5) to begin to prepare you to conduct qualitative research in the future; and (6) to hone your skills in written and oral communication.

Required Textbook, Recommended Textbook, and Weekly Readings:

Required: Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology*,

grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry. New York: Guilford.

Recommended: Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Additional weekly readings will be available through our course page on PAWS or via personal download from the U of S library.

Class Formats: Seminar, Lab, Student Presentations:

Lectures will comprise at least part of most of our weekly classes. During class times set aside for working on assignments, you will be actively engaged in a research-related task, e.g., analysing journal articles or an excerpt of discourse. During student-facilitated class discussions, you will prepare questions for discussion by the members of the class and lead the discussion.

Attendance and Preparation:

While regular attendance and class preparation are important in any course, they are particularly crucial in a course that involves the high level of participation that this course requires. Your participation directly affects the learning experiences of your classmates. ***It is expected, then, that you will attend class regularly. In addition, you will be expected to have read the assigned material before class, to have prepared a list of questions and comments to present during the class, and to participate in class discussion.***

Assignments and Research Proposal:

Four short assignments and a research proposal are required. **Although you will work as a class or in groups on each of the assignments, you will be required to write up each assignment on your own. The research proposal must also be your own work.** All written work must be typed and double-spaced. APA style is expected for the research proposal.

(1) Analysis of assumptions in articles – Due September 29, 2015

For this assignment, you are required to identify and compare the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions in the research on pro-anorexics' and recovering anorexics' linguistic internet self-presentation by Lyons, Mehl, and Pennebaker (2006) with those in the research on identity construction on 'pro-ana' websites by Giles (2006). Your written submission should be 4-5 pages in length, and must be evidence-based. I will provide a set of orienting questions to stimulate your thinking and to guide your response.

(2) Methods of data generation – Due October 13, 2015

This assignment requires that you think creatively about how to generate data related to a particular research question supplied by me. After being introduced to several types of methods of data generation, your task is to find samples of data from one of the types of methods that could be used to inform the research question and to consider the constraints and possibilities that are afforded by this method. Again, I will provide a set of orienting questions that will guide your 4 to 5-page written submission.

(3) Methodology presentations – October 20 to November 3, 2015

Groups of approximately 3-4 students will work with me on presenting to the class one of five methodologies (phenomenological psychological analysis, intuitive inquiry, grounded theory, narrative research, or discourse analysis) that has been employed in the analysis of the same data set. I will present the main features of the methodology, and you are required to discuss its application to the data set, and to encourage lively discussion among your classmates. You might want to consider the following questions in developing your points for discussion:

- What kinds of research questions is this methodology typically used to address?
- With which epistemological and theoretical orientations is it compatible?
- What strikes you as unique, interesting, or confusing about this methodology?
- What questions are you left with after reading the chapter that illustrates the application of this methodology?

During the class discussion, you should be prepared to respond to questions and to raise your own queries and responses for the class to consider.

(4) Discourse analysis – Due November 24, 2015

This assignment provides you with the opportunity to engage in some of the practices involved in doing discourse analysis. You will be supplied with textual material and will be required to analyse a short excerpt or two. You are required to submit a 4 to 5-page written analysis based on a set of guiding questions supplied by me.

(5) Research Proposal – Due December 8, 2015 at the beginning of class.

An 8-10 page research proposal is required. Your written proposal must be prepared solely by you. The proposal must include a short review of relevant literature, a statement of and justification for your research question, an explication of and justification for how your choice of methodology and methods is consistent with your epistemological position and of how your research question and your choice of methodology and methods are linked, and an explication of

how you will analyse your data. I will provide you with a more detailed outline of what should comprise the proposal.

Final Examination:

The final examination will be scheduled by the Registrar and will comprise short and long answer questions covering the course content or the application of course content to a piece of research.

Grading:

Completion of all assignments, presentations, and exams is required to obtain a final grade in this course. Your final grade will be determined by a weighted summation of all the assignments and the final exam, and in consideration of the guidelines established by the Department of Psychology. Grades will be assigned using the following weights:

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Assignments #1, #2, #3, and #4: 10% each | = 40% of final grade |
| Research proposal: 30% | = 30% of final grade |
| Final examination: 30% | = 30% of final grade |

Assignments must be handed in to me at the start of class (i.e., 1:00 p.m.) on the dates specified above. Assignments handed in late (i.e., after 1:00 p.m. on the due date) will be levied a penalty of 5% per day.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Should you require academic accommodations due to a disability, please speak to me as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Disability Services for Students to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations and to access any needed support services. The office is located at 60 Place Riel Student Centre (966-5673).

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious academic offences. Any suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported and appropriate action taken. Please read the attached statement.

A Final Note to Students: You will likely find the months of September and October to be particularly heavy in this course. I would suggest that you plan your work schedule carefully

during this time so that you can stay on top of all readings, assignments, and presentations. Please come to me for help if you are having difficulty.

Course Schedule

(subject to slight modifications with notice)

September 8: Overview of the course and introduction to qualitative research in psychology

- McMullen, L.M. (2002). Learning the languages of research: Transcending illiteracy and indifference. *Canadian Psychology*, 43, 195-204.
- Willig, C., & Stainton-Rogers, W. (2008). Introduction. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 1-12). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

September 15: Overview of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and method; Review of post-positivism and introduction to constructionism

- Hesse-Biber, S.N., & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (pp. 12-44)
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London, UK: Sage Publications. (Chapter 1 Introduction: pp. 1-17)
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London, UK: Routledge. (Introduction: pp. 1-16)

September 22: Work on class assignment #1; Formulating a rationale for a qualitative study

Assignment #1: Identify and compare the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions in two journal articles:

- Lyons, E.J., Mehl, M.R., & Pennebaker, J.W. (2006). Pro-anorexics and recovering anorexics differ in their linguistic internet self-presentation. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 60, 253-256.
- Giles, D. (2006). Constructing identities in cyberspace: The case of eating disorders.

British Journal of Social Psychology, 45, 463-477.

Formulating a rationale for a qualitative study:

- Haverkamp, B.E., & Young, R.A. (2007). Paradigms, purpose, and the role of the literature: Formulating a rationale for qualitative investigations. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35, 265-294.

September 29: Methods of data generation (CLASS ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE)

- Suzuki, L.A., Ahluwalia, M.K., Arora, A.K., & Mattis, J.S. (2003). The pond you fish in determines the fish you catch: Exploring strategies for qualitative data collection. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35, 295-327.
- Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2, 281-307.
- Kitzinger, J., & Barbour, R.S. (1999). Introduction: The challenge and promise of focus groups. In R.S. Barbour and J. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Developing focus group research: Politics, theory and practice* (pp. 1-20). London, UK: Sage Publications.

October 6: Methods of data generation (continued); work on class assignment #2; sign-up for methodology presentations

- Orgad, S. (2009). How can researchers make sense of the issues involved in collecting and interpreting online and offline data? In A.N. Markham & N.K. Baym (Eds.) *Internet inquiry* (pp. 33-53). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sheridan, J., & Chamberlain, K. (2011). The power of things. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 8, 315-332.
- Futch, V., & Fine, M. (2014). Mapping as method: History and theoretical commitments. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11, 42-59.

October 13: Preparing a research proposal: Question formulation, design, sampling, recruitment; Introduction to Five Ways Project (CLASS ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE)

- Hesse-Biber, S.N., & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (pp. 49-59)

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (**Introduction: pp. 1-12; Chapter 4: pp. 103-23**)

October 20: Introduction to methodologies

Phenomenological psychological analysis:

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (**pp. 52-56; Chapter 5: pp. 124-64**)

Intuitive inquiry:

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (**pp. 66-69; Chapter 9: pp. 243-276**)

October 27: Introduction to methodologies (continued)

Grounded theory:

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (**pp. 56-60; Chapter 6: pp. 165-204**)

Narrative research:

- Murray, M. (2003). Narrative psychology and narrative analysis. In P.M. Camic, J.E. Rhodes, and L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (**pp. 95-112**). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden,

E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (pp. 63-66; Chapter 8: pp. 224-242)

November 3: Introduction to methodologies (continued); Brief introduction to one way of analysing discourse

Discourse analysis

- Potter, J. (2003). Discourse analysis and discursive psychology. In P.M. Camic, J.E. Rhodes, and L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 73-94). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (pp. 60-63; Chapter 7: pp. 205-223)
- Wood, L.A., & Kroger, R.O. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd. (Chapter 8: pp. 91-116)
- Example of discourse analysis: McMullen, L.M., & Herman, J (2009). Women's accounts of their decision to quit taking antidepressants. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19, 1569-1579.

November 10: No class – mid-term break

November 17: Work on assignment #4; Comparisons of methodologies; The participant's response

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. (Chapters 10 and 11: pp. 279-352)

November 24: Other methodologies; Preparing a research proposal: analysis and writing;

(CLASS ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE)

Thematic analysis

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.

Case studies

- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press. **(Chapter 9: pp. 100-113)**
- Example of case study: McMullen, L. M., & Stoppard, J. M. (2006). Women and depression: A case study of the influence of feminism in Canadian psychology. *Feminism & Psychology*, 16, 273-288.

Participatory action research

- Park, P. (1993). What is participatory research?: A theoretical and methodological perspective. In P. Park, M. Brydon-Miller, B. Hall and T. Jackson (Eds.) *Voices of change: Participatory research in the United States and Canada* **(pp. 1- 19)**. Toronto, ON: OISE Press.
- Example of participatory action research: Fine, M., & Torre, M.E. (2006). Intimate details: Participatory action research in prison. *Action Research*, 4, 253-269.

Preparing a research proposal

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. **(pp. 87-94)**

December 1: Ethics; Consultation on proposal development

- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York: Guilford. **(pp. 353-367)**

December 8: Quality indicators; Course wrap-up; teaching evaluation; preparation for final examination

- Morrow, S.L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 250-260.

REMEMBER THAT YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSALS ARE DUE NO LATER THAN 1:00 P.M. TODAY.

Assignment #1

The two articles that form the material for the assignment are based in different epistemological positions. The first article (Lyons, Mehl, & Pennebaker, 2006) is based in an objectivist epistemology, while the second article (Giles, 2006) proceeds from a constructionist epistemology. **For this assignment, you are to identify some of the assumptions informing the research in these articles.**

In order to begin learning how to adopt an analytic stance that is consistent with doing qualitative research, think about the following questions as you read these articles:

- What do I observe about each article? What do I make of these observations?
- What are my reactions to each article? What do I understand as having produced these reactions?
- Do I find one article easier to understand than the other? If so, what about the articles contributes to this difference? If not, what contributes to the ease of/difficulty in reading the articles?
- Do I resonate more to one article than the other, i.e., does one fit my conception of psychological research better than the other? If so, or if not, what about the articles contributes to this reaction?
- Does one article seem more credible, valid, and/or authoritative? If so, or if not, what contributes to this judgement?
- What are my impressions of the style and tone of the articles?
- Did one article stimulate my curiosity about the topic and/or bring new research questions to mind more than the other article?

These kinds of questions are helpful in reminding you to use yourself as the research tool and to link your observations and reactions to evidence.

In the maximum 5 pages allotted to this assignment, identify the assumptions informing the research, and provide evidence from the articles for your claims. Again, use the following questions as a guide.

- What assumptions do the researchers make about the nature of the topic (anorexia; pro-anorexia; pro-ana language/talk on internet websites) being investigated? How do the researchers frame the topic for investigation (as an hypothesis or a research question)?
- How does the language the researchers use provide clues to her/his assumptions? Provide a few examples, e.g., what is assumed by the use of ‘attitude’ vs. ‘identity’?
- How do the researchers present (or position) themselves in the article? How are the participants presented? What do these presentations tell you about the researchers’ assumptions regarding the role of themselves and the participants?
- What do the researchers say about the context from which the data were derived, i.e., pro-ana websites?
- What do the researchers assume about their methodology, i.e., the use of categorization?

(Categorization is used in both studies, but it is employed very differently.) Try to describe how it is used in each article.

- What methods of data analysis are used? What does the use of these methods tell you about what the researchers assume is meaningful?

Assignment #2

You have been introduced to five ways of generating data for qualitative studies: interviews, focus groups, participant observation, physical sources (documents, objects, visual material), and electronic sources. This assignment requires that you choose one of these methods of data generation, answer the following questions, and find or generate an example of data from this method. If you choose either individual interviews or focus groups, your example can be the list of questions you might pose to your participant(s).

Choose a broad topic, e.g., HIV/AIDS, climate change and human behaviour, love, terrorism, beauty, etc., from which to address the following questions. Please feel free to choose your own topic.

1. What kind(s) of research questions is this method suited to addressing? Think in terms of 'how' or 'what' questions.
2. What kind(s) of data will you generate from this method?
3. What will this method of data generation obscure, i.e., what aspects of your topic will you be less likely to explore?
4. What kinds of relationships will you, as the researcher, have with your participants/objects of study? For example, what will your role be? how will you interact with them?
5. What issues about your selected method of data generation must you keep in mind, e.g., access, sampling, ethics, etc.?
6. What are the strengths and limitations of this method of data generation?
7. Find or generate an example of data based on this method. What do you observe about this example of data?

PSYCHOLOGY 323.3

Assignment #4

For assignment #4, you are to analyse part of a thread that occurred on a depression message board at dailystrength.org. Here is a set of orienting questions that you should use in your analysis.

- As you did for assignment #1, take note of your first impressions of, and immediate reactions to, the postings. What are the features of the postings that are producing these reactions? **You do not have to include these impressions in your written assignment, but, if they can assist in your analysis, make use of them.**
- From what institutional context are these postings derived? How does this context influence what is generated by the posters?
- How are the posters positioned by themselves and by each other? (Try reading just the talk of one user at a time; then read the talk as it actually occurs).
- What are the users talking about in the excerpt? What are the themes?
- What are the main linguistic resources used (e.g., categories, arguments, narratives, speech styles, sentence structures, etc.)?
- How do the posters employ these resources, e.g., what actions are being performed through the use of these resources?
- What are some possible functions and consequences of these social actions?

REMEMBER THAT YOU NEED TO PROVIDE EVIDENCE FROM THE POSTINGS IN ORDER TO SUPPORT YOUR CLAIMS.

Outline for Research Proposal

PSY 323.3 Qualitative Study of Lives and Social Practices

Introduction and Review of the Literature

The purpose of this part of the proposal is to provide a review of the literature that is relevant to your research topic. Use the existing literature in a planned manner, such that it leads logically to your research question(s). The review should enable you to formulate the gaps in the literature that occasion a new study.

This section should include:

- the topic of your research
- the relevant literature (theoretical and empirical) that bears on this topic
- how your study is going to contribute to the body of knowledge that you have reviewed
- why your study is necessary or important
- your research question(s)
- a rationale for conducting qualitative research to address these questions

Method

The purpose of this part of the proposal is to outline your epistemological assumptions, methodology, method, participants, sampling procedure, and sources of data.

This section should include:

- a statement of your epistemological assumptions
- a statement of your methodology (e.g., grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, participatory action research, narrative research, case study, focus groups, etc.) and justification for why this methodology is appropriate for addressing your research question(s)
- a statement of how your personal background affects your research and of the assumptions/biases with which you approach your research question(s)
- a description of your participants, if you are using participants in your study (who are they?)
- a description of, and justification for, your recruitment process (how will you access your participants or other data sources?)
- a description of, and justification for, your sampling procedure (how will you choose among potential participants? or how will you choose documents or

- material from electronic sources?)
- a statement of the anticipated roles/relationships you (as researcher) will have with your participants
- a statement of your method(s) and data sources (e.g., interviews, participant observations, textual/visual documents, etc.) and a rationale for using multiple data sources if you choose to use more than one

Data Analysis

In this section, provide a brief statement as to how you will manage and analyse your data. For example, you might mention how you will organize your data, that you will transcribe interviews (if you are using this method), that you will immerse yourself in the data, etc. Briefly outline the data analytic techniques that are specific to the methodology you have chosen (e.g., theme identification, thick description, constant comparison, cycles of interpretation, coding). Specify what will be produced from your analysis, e.g., a theory, a narrative, a life history, a plan for social action, claims about what discourse is doing, etc.