SelfDesign Graduate Institute

Research, Inquiry and Ethics Handbook 2019

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SelfDesign Graduate Institute Research Ethics Policy

A Post-Modern Perspective

In conventional research, the researcher presents their plan for gathering data from their subject at the start of such an activity and asks for "informed consent" from the subject. Once consent has been given, the conventional norm is that all data gathered from the subject becomes the property of the researcher and may be used in any way that the researcher chooses.

From a post-modern perspective, there are three ethical problems with this policy.

1. While a researcher may explain their intentions to a subject, there is no realistic way that the subject, likely a lay person in the context of the research, can fully understand all of the implications of the planned research, including possibly unanticipated consequences. In practice, people often give "informed consent" because they like the researcher, or perhaps they are interested in the research topic, not because they fully understand every possible impact of the research on their lives.

2. The researcher's fellow human beings cannot be subjects. Once someone is viewed as a subject, that person inevitably begins to be objectified by the researcher. A subject is used, a subject is observed, a subject is questioned. In contrast, when the researcher views the people from whom she/he is gathering data as persons – as equals – even as colleagues in the investigation, there is a greater likelihood that the relationship between these people will be guided by mutual respect rather than objectification and utilitarian calculation.

   Given this intention for mutual respect, the researcher should seek to ensure that some actual benefit is received by the interviewee, respondent, and/or community being studied.

3. If the subject is not a subject but is a person of equal value, then the person who is providing the data, the source, must always retain ownership of her/his own narrative and data.

   There is an inevitable intrusion when an outsider enters any social environment which is occupied according to respected norms that are not immediately visible to the outsider/researcher. To the extent possible, the researcher should be aware of their own perspectives and should approach the research project with a tender and humble stance, a view to observe and learn and to make judgments and reach conclusions with great care.

These three problems with modernist research norms provide the basis for a policy of research ethics for the SelfDesign Graduate Institute that requires informed consent from all research subjects.

Creating a Proposal for Research Involving Human Participants

The following elements should be included in your research proposal. For research involving human participants, you must also create an Informed Consent document. A template for this document is found on page #. Replace all *italicized red text* with information specific to your project.

When you have completed the proposal, submit it to the Academic Dean who will review it, and submit it to the Academic Programs Committee for approval.

Study

Describe the purpose of the study
Cite relevant publications that inform your study

Methodology

Describe your research methodology

Participant Inclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria you plan to employ for including participants in the study population

Recruitment Protocol

Describe how you plan to recruit participants for the study

Data Gathering Protocols

Describe your planned data collection procedure(s)

Risks

Describe any risks that you foresee in relation to this study

Benefits

Describe the potential benefits of the study
Describe the potential benefits to the participants in the study

Informed Consent process and documentation

Include a sample Informed Consent Form that participants will sign
Indicate how the "Participant Bill of Rights" will be presented to participants

Informed Consent

Research Participant Bill of Rights

You have the right to ...

- be treated with dignity and respect
- be given a clear description of the purpose of the study and what is expected of you as a participant
- be told of any benefits or risks to you that can be expected from participating in the study

- know the researcher's training and experience
- ask any questions about the study
- decide to participate or not without any pressure from the researcher or his or her assistants
- have your privacy protected within the limits of the law
- refuse to answer any research question, refuse to participate in any part of the study, or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative effects to you
- be given a description of the overall results of the study upon request
- discuss any concerns or file a complaint about the study with the SDGI Academic Dean.

LETTER OF INFORMATION / INFORMED CONSENT FORM

[Title of Research Project]

[Date]

Researcher:
[insert name and contact info]

Supervisor:
[insert name and contact info]

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled '*your project title here*'.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand enough about its risks, benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision.
Please contact the Researcher, *your name here* if you have any questions about the project or would like more information.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Introduction
My name is *your name here* and I am a *insert degree program* student at SelfDesign Graduate Institute. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about *briefly describe the project in lay terms 1 – 2 sentences*. I am conducting this project under the supervision of *your supervisor's name here*.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?
You are being invited to participate in this project because *describe why this person might qualify for participation in the research project*.

What is the purpose of this research project?
Describe the purpose of the research, including what research question the project hopes to answer.

What will you be asked to do?
Describe the nature of the participation, including methods of data collection (e.g. audio or video recorded interview, in-person interview, hard copy or online survey completion, etc.), the expected length of time it will take (provide a realistic estimate of the time, frequency and effort that will be required of the participant) and state where the participation will occur (e.g. "The interview would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule"; "You may complete the survey at any time convenient to you between x date and x date").

State whether any follow-up conversation would be scheduled to review the interview transcript and whether opportunity will be given to participants to alter/clarify their comments.

What are the risks and benefits?
Describe any potential adverse effects, including physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual risks. Describe how these adverse effects will be dealt with.

Identify any benefits to the participant. If an incentive is being offered to participate, or costs are to be reimbursed, include a clear statement describing the incentive or reimbursement and the manner in which it will be distributed (e.g. Participants will receive $12.00 reimbursement for their parking costs; Participants will receive a $20 gift card for [state name of company] following the interview as a thank you; Participants will be entered into a draw for a [state the item] to be drawn on [indicate the date of the draw]). State explicitly if there are no direct benefits to the participant.

Do you have to take part in the entire project?
*Describe how participants can **stop** and/or end their participation during the data collection (e.g. ending an interview partway through; exiting a survey before submitting) and what will be done with any data collected up to that point.*
Discuss any consequences that withdrawal may have on the participant (e.g. if incentives have been offered).
Note that the participant may remove her/his data from the study at any point in time.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure.

- *Include a statement about how participants' privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. If confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (e.g. participants may be identifiable due to specific characteristics in the sample population), specify the limits to confidentiality.*

- *Describe any other limitations to confidentiality that may be applicable [if there is a likelihood that reportable information may arise during the research project (e.g. protected populations, revelation of illegal or heinous act), include a specific statement to address this. "All information will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported."*

How will your anonymity be protected?
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

*There is a difference between anonymous **participation** and anonymous **data.** For example, participants' anonymity cannot be guaranteed if data is collected in a group setting, but the data obtained from that participation can be reported without identifiers.*

Limits to anonymity, of participation and/or data, should be explained.

In some cases, some participants may not wish to be anonymous, (e.g. in community-based or participatory research), and this option should be given as long as it does not negatively affect

and/or identify other participants who do wish to remain anonymous.

If anonymity is desired, researchers should assure participants that "Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity; you will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission."

How will the collected data be stored?

- *Indicate how data will be stored, whether it will be disposed of and if so, how, and when*
- *Identify all individuals/agencies who will have access to data from the research project, or the report, now or in the future (e.g. supervisor(s); organization(s)).*
- *Describe the procedures/methods that will be employed to protect confidential data in all its forms (e.g. password protections and encryption on electronic data; use of pseudonyms (false names) or data codes; locked filing cabinets for hard copy data)*
- *Describe any anticipated future secondary use of the data, stating clearly that further ethics approval would have to be sought if a later project is designed.*

Online surveys

Take time to familiarize yourself with the privacy policy of the website you are using. If the website is hosted in the United States, include the following statement regarding data storage and privacy:

> The on-line survey company *insert name of company* hosting this survey is located in the United States. The US Patriot Act allows authorities to access the records of internet service providers. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. If you choose to participate in this survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored for a time (i.e. until it is transferred from that company's server to the principal researcher's computer) and may be accessed in the US during that time. The security and privacy policy for the web survey company can be found at the following link: *insert link to the company's privacy policy*.

Who will receive the results of the research project?

Describe how and where results of the research project will be disseminated and whether or how they will be made available to interested participants.

- *Be sure to comment on whether direct quotations or personally identifying information (with permission only) will be reported; or whether reporting is only in aggregate or summarized form.*
- *State what information or feedback on the research project will be available or provided to participants after the project is complete (e.g. report, executive summary, poster presentation). Indicate how/if participants can access the project results without having to contact the researcher (e.g. report is available on researcher's website).*

Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by e-mail *insert e-mail address* or *insert any other means of contact you wish to use* or my supervisor by *insert e-mail address or phone number*. If you are ready to participate in this project, *please complete and sign the attached Consent Form and return it by* [*provide directions on who, where, how and by when]*

OR *please proceed to review the following consent and complete the survey.*

Thank you.

[nsert Researcher's name]

This project has been reviewed by the SelfDesign Graduate Institute Academic Programs Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Academic Dean by e-mail at … or by telephone at …

The remainder of your form should include ONE of the sections below:

Option 1 *– for hard-copy forms; OR*
Option 2 *– for forms that will be provided online*

OPTION 1- hard-copy consent forms
Please indicate your willingness to participate in the following forms of data gathering.

These are some common examples, not an exhaustive list. Include only the checkboxes that are relevant to your project. If you require consent for something not listed, insert more rows/checkboxes as required.

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to be video-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to be photographed	◯	◯
I agree to the use of direct quotations	◯	◯
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this project	◯	◯
I allow data collected from me to be archived in *insert name/description of archive here*	◯	◯
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript.	◯	◯
	◯	◯

Your signature below confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits.
- You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You agree to participate in this research project.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records.

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, any potential risks and that he or she has freely chosen to participate.

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date

OPTION 2 – online consent forms
By completing this *survey/questionnaire* you confirm

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits.
- You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You agree to participate in this research project.

One of the following about data removal, as applicable

- You understand that this data is being collected anonymously and therefore, once you submit this survey your data **cannot** be removed

OR

- You understand that if you choose to withdraw, you may request that your data be removed from the project by contacting the principal investigator before *insert cut-off date here.*
- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records.

Clicking *Insert term here (e.g. accept / continue / start survey)* **below and submitting this survey constitutes your consent.**

Managing Study Results

- If you intend to publish any material that you have received from a source via email, interview, sharing of documents, or other means, show that material to the source and ask for permission to publish it. If the source chooses to withhold permission for any part or all of this material, you must honor that request. If the source wants to edit or revise any part of that material, we ask you to honor that request. (Publishing includes sharing your completed document with faculty and colleagues within the Institute.)

- Give a copy of your completed document to all persons who have contributed any material to your research, on their request.

Resources for Research and Inquiry

Research Methodologies

The range of research methodologies has expanded significantly in recent years. Up-to-date overviews of options can be found in these and other texts.

The Sage Handbook on Qualitative Research (fifth edition) by Norman Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (2017)

Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches by Patricia Leavy (2017)

Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research by John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark (2017)

Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts by Margaret Kovach (2010)

Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice (second edition) by Patricia Leavy (2015)

Research Quality Factors

Qualitative Validity

Depending on their philosophical perspectives, some qualitative researchers reject the framework of validity that is commonly accepted in more quantitative research in the social sciences. They reject the basic realist assumption that there is a reality external to our perception of it. Consequently, it doesn't make sense to be concerned with the "truth" or "falsity" of an observation with respect to an external reality (which is a primary concern of validity). These qualitative researchers argue for different standards for judging the quality of research.

For instance, Guba and Lincoln proposed four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research and explicitly offered these as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. They felt that their four criteria better reflected the underlying assumptions involved in much qualitative research. Their proposed criteria and the "analogous" quantitative criteria are listed in the table.

Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research	**Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research**
internal validity	credibility
external validity	transferability
reliability	dependability
objectivity	confirmability

Credibility

The credibility criterion involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. The person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is.

Dependability

The traditional quantitative view of reliability is based on the assumption of replicability or repeatability. Essentially it is concerned with whether we would obtain the same results if we could observe the same thing twice. But we can't actually measure the same thing twice -- by definition if we are measuring twice, we are measuring two different things. In order to estimate reliability, quantitative researchers construct various hypothetical notions (e.g., true score theory) to try to get around this fact.

The idea of dependability, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The research is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study.

Confirmability

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can take a "devil's advocate" role with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. The researcher can actively search for and describe and *negative instances* that contradict prior observations. And, after he study, one can conduct a *data audit* that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

There has been considerable debate among methodologists about the value and legitimacy of this alternative set of standards for judging qualitative research. On the one hand, many quantitative researchers see the alternative criteria as just a relabeling of the very successful quantitative criteria in order to accrue greater legitimacy for qualitative research. They suggest that a correct reading of the quantitative criteria would show that they are not limited to quantitative research alone and can be applied equally well to qualitative data. They argue that the alternative criteria represent a different philosophical perspective that is subjectivist rather than realist in nature. They claim that research inherently assumes that there is some reality that

is being observed and can be observed with greater or less accuracy or validity. If you don't make this assumption, they would contend, you simply are not engaged in research (although that doesn't mean that what you are doing is not valuable or useful).

Perhaps there is some legitimacy to this counter argument. Certainly a broad reading of the traditional quantitative criteria might make them appropriate to the qualitative realm as well. But historically the traditional quantitative criteria have been described almost exclusively in terms of quantitative research. No one has yet done a thorough job of translating how the same criteria might apply in qualitative research contexts. For instance, the discussions of external validity have been dominated by the idea of statistical sampling as the basis for generalizing. And, considerations of reliability have traditionally been inextricably linked to the notion of true score theory.

But qualitative researchers do have a point about the irrelevance of traditional quantitative criteria. How could we judge the external validity of a qualitative study that does not use formalized sampling methods? And, how can we judge the reliability of qualitative data when there is no mechanism for estimating the true score? No one has adequately explained how the operational procedures used to assess validity and reliability in quantitative research can be translated into legitimate corresponding operations for qualitative research.

While alternative criteria may not in the end be necessary (and I personally hope that more work is done on broadening the "traditional" criteria so that they legitimately apply across the entire spectrum of research approaches), and they certainly can be confusing for students and newcomers to this discussion, these alternatives do serve to remind us that qualitative research cannot easily be considered only an extension of the quantitative paradigm into the realm of nonnumeric data.