# Qualitative Research Synthesis

Qualitative Research Methods 750

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# Abstract

Throughout this semester of Qualitative Research Methods 750, I was exposed to the skill set for qualitative research in counseling and psychotherapy, including qualitative design, approaches, methods, practices, cultural relevance, and publication. The purpose of this paper is to present the knowledge gained from John McLeod’s book *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy,* and the knowledge gained fromthe intensive experiences. This paper includes pre-intensive reflections and themes and post-intensive reflections, themes, and conclusions. Additionally, the paper will present the experiences I had during the intensive, including reflections on the creative arts personal growth group, reflective journaling, as well as intensive-based reflections, themes, and synthesis of experiences and knowledge gained from the course.

*Keywords:* qualitative research, reflective practices, creative arts personal growth

# Title of Paper Should Appear Here

Qualitative research plays a significant role in counseling and psychotherapy. The narrative nature of qualitative research, coupled with the everyday experience, contributes to the evidence base of counseling and psychotherapy (McLeod, 2011). In counseling and psychotherapy, both quantitative and qualitative research help determine whether an intervention is effective or not. However, qualitative research can be more effective in that it highlights clients’ lived experiences (Vandenbussche et al., 2019) and helps the researcher understand human experiences and development better (McLeod, 2011). Through my observations concerning the role of qualitative research in counseling and psychotherapy, I present the importance of qualitative research in counseling and psychotherapy. The principal concept of qualitative research involves understanding meaning and how the social world is constructed (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, the emersion nature of qualitative research helps to capture some degree of an aspect of social life, the techniques to convey those experiences to others, and new and effective ways to do therapy (McLeod, 2011).

Historically speaking, qualitative inquiry has been in the background of disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry. Qualitative inquiry helps researchers understand and explore human experiences that are otherwise unknown. For example, quantitative research often results in conflicting outcomes that yield puzzling findings, otherwise known as the equivalence paradox by qualitative research strategies. Using interviews in qualitative research supports explaining the reason for a paradox (McLeod, 2011). Qualitative studies help uncover the experiences of clients and the impact a qualitative study has on counseling outcomes. Furthermore, it is worth noting the fundamental similarities between qualitative researchers and professional counselors related to examining human behavior. Both utilize case studies, life histories, and narratives (Berríos & Lucca, 2006). In addition, the findings of qualitative inquiries provide an invaluable resource-base for counseling and psychotherapy (McLeod, 2011). The following sections will include pre-intensive, intensive, and post-intensive reflections, themes, and conclusions concerning qualitative research.

# Pre-Intensive: Reflections, Themes, and Qualitative Research Conclusions

This section presents reflections on the pre-intensive assignment and experiences. The pre-intensive involved two assignments, including critical analysis and synthesis of McLeod (2011), and a qualitative research project of a “lived experience,” honoring a strongly held personal value in daily life. A synthesis of the pre-intensive experience will be presented in three sections, including reflections, themes, and conclusions.

## Reflections

Prior to reading *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (McLeod, 2011), I experienced many questions and struggles regarding qualitative research. I was completely clueless about the role, and the link qualitative research plays in counseling and psychotherapy. Therefore, I started reading the book with the goal of comprehending the concept and practices of qualitative research. The paper assignment included a summary, reflection, and critical analysis of each chapter’s main points. Consequently, I made a huge revelation. I realized that the understanding I had concerning qualitative research as I read the book was different from my understanding as I was writing the paper. Writing the summary, the critical analysis, and the reflection was highly impactful. I recognize that it was the most powerful means of teaching.

As I read *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy (*McLeod, 2011), I immediatelybegan to see the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methodology. For example, quantitative research methods deal with statistics and numbers, and the findings work towards the domain of stories. On the other hand, qualitative research is rooted in the narratives, experiences, and themes derived from personal feedback (McLeod, 2011). While both qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other, qualitative research is critical to explain people’s lived experiences in the field of counseling and psychotherapy. As I continued to read McLeod’s book, I became more enlightened about qualitative research and its impact on human lives.

As I was completing the reading assignment, I began to think about changing my dissertation research method from quantitative to qualitative, specifically considering the approach of phenomenology. My research interest is African immigrants and parent-child communication on sexual health. Being an African, I am very familiar with cultural communication barriers such as cultural taboos, myths, and sexual silence. However, I am not sure about the experiences of African immigrants who live in the United States related to parent-child communication on sexual health. So, I thought that to understand immigrants’ struggles; phenomenology is a suitable methodology. Human experiences can be complex, misunderstood, and even sometimes unknown to society. Hence, the essence of phenomenology, which focuses on everyday human experiences, meanings, and themes (McLeod, 2011). Another aspect of phenomenology that I found interesting is the task of the method. Phenomenology seeks to answer the *why* of the human condition underneath their experiences and highlights ways to solve problems (McLeod, 2011). With this understanding in mind, I knew that carrying out qualitative research among immigrants would help me know their struggles. Also described in the course material are four activities involving phenomenology, including describing, interpreting, persuading, and committing (McLeod, 2011).

Through the activity of interpretation, I also came to understand what led to the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermes was the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, of which I believe Christians adopted the idea and established scripture interpretation (citation). For me, the Bible is full of examples of phenomenology. The Bible is a Holy Book of God, filled with human experiences involving their culture, their experiences with God, and how they understood these experiences. For example, Luke recorded,

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word. (Luke 1:1, King James Version)

In my view, Luke was making a point that the people who wrote the gospel and how the gospels were compiled together was phenomenology done by the work of the Holy Spirit. The account was based on the lived experiences of people who experienced an encounter with Jesus Christ. What is so beneficial about phenomenology is how it is incorporated into many counseling approaches, such as person-centered therapy (McLeod, 2011).

### Living Out Personal Value Paper

During the pre-intensive, the class also undertook another project, living out a personal value. I think that the experience of honoring a strongly held personal value in daily life was impactful. I chose communication as a value, and throughout the week, I was to live out the value of communication. I became more alert about how I talked to people. I also became more aware of myself, including my own shortcomings as they relate to communication. I noticed my family communication style, and I found that my middle daughter was influencing my youngest child through her communication style. Through that experience, I learned the benefits of researching a lived experience, as meanings become more evident as one attempts to explain lived experience.

## Pre-Intensive Themes

Themes are a huge part of qualitative research. McLeod (2011) argued that themes are the primary aim of qualitative inquiry. Understanding how themes represent the data and findings of a qualitative inquiry, three themes emerged from both reading the course material and the lived experience of my value system (i.e., communication), including a) *understanding*, or the ability to understand something, b) *lived experienced*, or personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, firsthand involvement in everyday events, and c) *culture*, or the lifestyle and traditions that reflect my background.

### Theme 1: Understanding the Concept of Qualitative Research

Throughout the pre-intensive period, ideas of gathering meaning emerged and reflected a theme of understanding. For example, I initially struggled with trying to know to differences between qualitative and quantitative research. So, reading about the similarities and differences between the two research methods was helpful and supported my understanding of differences in research methodologies. In addition, I understood how our entire life is a form of qualitative methodology. I became aware of how the Bible is full of a lived-experiences of people and how these examples reflect the approach of phenomenology and support identifying experiences of specific groups and situations. I also discovered that I gained understanding through the actions of generating a summary, reflection, and synthesis of the course material.

### Theme 2: Lived Experienced

Ideas of gaining personal knowledge about the world through direct, firsthand involvement in everyday events supported the second theme of lived experience. I discovered that just reading through a book is not as impactful as writing a summary, synthesis, and reflection of literature. Through a synthesis of information, I found that meanings became clear. The action of reading and reflecting created a new experience of meaning-making, and this lived experience created a new perspective on the impact of gaining knowledge.

### Theme 3: Culture

My lifestyle and traditions reflect my African culture, which is unique from other traditional U.S. cultures. Experiences that are unique to my heritage support the third theme of culture. I learned that qualitative research could help society understand a culture better. The pre-intensive assignments convinced me that the best means of understanding immigrants’ struggles is through qualitative research, specifically, phenomenology. For example, as I reflected on living out my value system, these reflections made me understand how my communication style is different from my family members. These findings were something I did not know before. Differences in culture can emerge as helpful findings from a qualitative inquiry.

## Pre-Intensive Conclusion

In the synthesis paper, I discussed the different concepts and ideas I learned during the pre-intensive COUC 750 Intensive Qualitative Research Methods course. It included a critical analysis and synthesis paper of McLeod (2011) and a qualitative research project to explore a lived experience of honoring a strongly held personal value from my daily life (communication). These two experiences helped me understand the benefits of qualitative research methods.

# Intensive: Reflections, Themes, and Qualitative Research Conclusions

The one-week intensive course included a Creative Arts Personal Growth Group (CAPG) project, practicing prayer and identifying a safe place, sharing reflections, journaling teamwork, and a qualitative research methods overview. During the intensive, Dr. Sosin began each day with prayer before classes started. Right after prayer, she would ask us to get into our safe place and spend a quiet time with God. Next, we would share our individual experiences with the class. Following moments of sharing, Dr. Sosin would introduce the lesson for the day. The daily activities also included reflections throughout the day, as well as sharing from our group teams. The following sections present reflections of the intensive program and experiences, themes that emerged from the reflective journals and feedback of group participants, and a conclusion of the group experience.

## Reflections

Reflection is paramount in education and life. It is an intentional process of creating meaning from the past (Van Manen, 1995). A study by Regmi et al. (2013) confirmed reflection as a fundamental part of professional education and development. During moments of reflection, I recognized how I had learned a lot about myself, qualitative research, my schoolmates, CAPG, and anchoring exercises.

### Reflections on Prayer and Anchoring Exercises

The anchoring exercise remarkably changed my life. Anchoring skills were composed of deep breathing, systematic relaxation, imaginal safe place, and depicting a safe place using art. For example, I was extremely nervous about coming to class on that Monday morning. I was nervous about if I could grasp the concept of qualitative methods. However, the anchoring exercise reduced my anxieties. During the anchoring skills, I would see images of me, God, and creation. Here are a few of my experiences; a) I saw myself sitting on top of a mountain. Then, I thought to myself; I am naturally afraid of heights; how am I able to sit on top of a mountain feeling so at ease?; b) I saw myself standing under a tree full of branches and feeling the hand of God over me. I know that one scripture that means a lot to me is Mathew 3:17, “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased standing under a tree full of branches, Gods hand over my head.” So I felt connected to the image of “God’s hand over me” to show me love and a sense of safety; c) I saw myself sitting on a rock. I wondered could this be God’s way of telling me that I cannot be moved because I am standing on solid rock? I pondered; d) I saw myself sitting at the back of my car relaxing; and e) Finally, I saw that I was standing at a door, and I saw a big light shining towards me. As I pondered over these images, I thought about creation and how God uses it to speak to us. Then, immediately a scripture came to my heart, **“**They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters” (Psalm 107:23).

There were also times during the anchoring, where I felt like I was connecting to the center of peace. Then I was reminded of how God would visit Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Finally, I had a very spectacular experience during Dr. Sosin’s prayer. I saw that Jesus was sitting on a chair, and children, including me, were sitting with Him; just at that time, Dr. Sosin mentioned the feet of Jesus in her prayer. So, I asked the question, why does God use symbols to talk to us? One classmate explained that God knows how to speak to us through things that will mean something to us, and while my classmate was talking, I got teared up because I saw myself as a palm tree and number nine on a soccer team. Both of these images reflect meanings that are valued by me.

### Reflections and Journaling

Reflective journaling is critical in qualitative research (Castleberry et al., 2016). Studies have indicated that reflective journaling improves students learning (Iqbal et al., 2019). During reflection, one is able to record experiences, ideas, and thoughts (Iqbal et al., 2019). The role of reflective journaling cannot be overemphasized. Hussein (2018) argued that reflective journaling affords students with the opportunity to reflect on their learning. Students become aware of their learning skills (Boud et al., 1998). I learned a lot about myself during the reflection process that I did not know before. During reflecting on my development of identity, I drew three circles. The first circle symbolized my brokenness but being healed by the power of God. The second circle stood for a broken world with psychological issues, emotional issues, relationships, and marriage issues. Then the third circle was my circle coming into the world to be a representative of Christ to heal the world. This reflective experience helped me understand the phrase “a broken healer to a broken world.”

### Reflections on Anchoring with Clients

As I reflected on how anchoring was helping me to connect to my authentic self, I thought about how to utilize it in my counseling practice. I thought that anchoring skills, including deep breathing, systematic relaxation, and imaginal safe place, could help my clients experience some level of calmness. In particular, I liked the way Dr. Sosin began the class with anchoring skills. I feel like anchoring skills work the same way as mindfulness. The efficacy of mindfulness has been confirmed in literature. For example, a study by Chambers et al. (2008) showed that mindfulness helps decrease depressive symptoms. Thus, I was impacted during anchoring; furthermore, I was enlightened by the importance of mindfulness. This practice is something I will always include in my practice.

## Creative Arts Personal Growth Group

The CAPG exercise was an eye-opener for me. I had not experienced creative arts in a group before, so I learned how creative arts play out in therapy sessions. The leader of the group, Dr. Sosin, passed out the handout and explained in great detail each component and how the group work would proceed. The combination of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness involved in the CAPG has a great advantage. In my therapy experience, I have often wondered, does CBT work for every depressive client? Because there are times that clients have told me that they think CBT does not work for them. In my counseling practice, I have found some clients respond well to CBT while other clients respond better to mindfulness. Therefore, the combination of the two practices increases positive results. Another remarkable discovery I found was how shame could hurt my well-being and effective ways to challenge my maladaptive thoughts with CAPG.

## Creative Arts Personal Growth Group Sharing

During the CAPG research project, each classmate shared their experiences with the class. Classmates’ reflections about CAPG indicated how the process helped them realize their feelings and ways to deal with their feelings. Many of the classmates said the CAPG process, at its core, helped them to identify that they were not alone in their struggles. They expressed the importance of the group and the feeling of universalism. For instance, Jennifer said,

I received from my group, who validated everything in my depiction, was phenomenal and helped me to grasp this identity even more. Sharing our experience and thoughts with the whole group is always so uplifting and encouraging, especially when you realize that everyone struggles with the same things that I do primarily.

Another classmate, Charity, who was struggling with balancing school, work, and home responsibility, said,

This brought up a memory of a recent social gathering with friends that was particularly meaningful because of the sense of acceptance and connection we had as friends. I noticed how we joined together in an accepting way, but we also joined around similar interests that united us while we were together.

For Jennifer, hearing the group sharing their individual struggles encouraged her, Jennifer said, “Sharing our experience and thoughts with the whole group is always so uplifting and encouraging, especially when you realize that everyone struggles with the same things that I do primarily.” It humanized the experience even though we were in all the corners of the country. I appreciated giving time to some of the serious concerns voiced by members of the larger group. It reminded me that giving space to our thoughts and feelings is important. “

Another classmate who was also impacted by the CAPG project was Johanna; she said,

It humanized the experience even though we were in all the corners of the country. I appreciated giving time to some of the serious concerns voiced by members of the larger group. It reminded me that giving space to our thoughts and feelings is important.

## Creative Arts Personal Growth Group Teams

We had team sessions that were more intimate than the class. During teams, we gave each other feedback, which was quite encouraging. For example, during identity development in our respective teams, my team member, Jon, gave feedback that was very impactful. He said, “Kwame, it looks like the more you write about your multiple identity, the more insight you get.” Furthermore, Jon shared how he struggled with his multiple identity; he is a pastor, a counselor, a Ph.D. student, and he is dealing with who he is. I also shared with him that I have also struggled with multiple self-identities. So, both of us experienced universalism.

Participants also shared their experiences during teams. For example, Jennifer said, “The experiences that group members shared were indeed encouraging and supportive. I felt that I was not alone in my struggles. The sharing helped me normalize my struggles.” These components also allowed participants to know that they are not alone and that what they were feeling was based on needs and what others often experience as well. For Danette and Donna, Danette explained,

Donna and I were in a small group together. Donna and I are in a similar life stage and are both on track to graduate about the same time. We have been paired together in other classes before, and I always appreciate her passion toward integrating spirituality into the counseling experience.

## Creative Arts Personal Growth Group and Qualitative Research

I was looking to understanding the concepts of the qualitative research method. However, while we did not have enough time to go through the qualitative research concept, I learned a lot as Dr. Sosin explained the concepts and the five parts. For example, I wrote this during my reflective journaling, “Dr. Sosin simplified the parts of qualitative research into five parts, including introduction, literature reviews, research methods, findings, and discussions.”

Another thing I learned from the intensive experience was the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. One huge difference is that qualitative research depends on trustworthiness, while quantitative research utilizes statistical analysis. Next, quantitative research utilizes measures such as a Likert Scale using yes and no questions. Qualitative research, on the other hand, uses open-ended discussions to collect narrative data (Merriam, 2002). Other classmates also described what they learned and their struggles with qualitative research (see Appendix B for CAPG impact). For example, Jessica said, “I did not fully understand a few qualitative research methods, and I wish we could have more time discussing qualitative research methods.” Similarly, Donna was so impacted by the concept of qualitative research and said, “What I have learned about qualitative research has settled me more about how important this type of research is for me.” Another classmate expressed what she learned about qualitative research, sharing, “Later, during the qualitative reflection about death, I experienced the difference between quantitative and qualitative research firsthand, as I reflected on the death of a close friend that I experienced and was able to remember and discuss how I experienced shame and sadness during the last visit I had with her.”

## Group Participants

The participants in the group study included Ph.D. graduate students consisting of one male and two females (see Appendix A for demographics). Two participants live in rural areas while the other live in a suburban area. Two of the participants are married and one was divorced. The age group of the participants ranged from 50-55. Two participants were Caucasian and one group member was an African immigrant. All the participants had experienced bullying in their lives. All the participants had jobs. The highest income was 100K followed, 30K, and $1,200 monthly. Group discussions were used for generating themes.

## Themes

Using the feedback from group participants, four themes emerged from the Creative Arts Personal Growth Group (CAPG), including

1. A safe place to talk and share
2. Normalizing
3. The role of the leader
4. Anchoring

### Theme 1: A Place to Explore Shared Experiences

All the classmates shared that CAPG afforded them a safe place where they could share similar struggles. Jennifer provided the group with an example, stating, “Sharing our experience and thoughts with the whole group is always so uplifting and encouraging.” Jennifer was so inspired by the groups’ sharing that she felt a sense of support and acceptance.

### Theme 2: Normalizing

In his debriefing survey, Jon described how he felt when others shared similar struggles. The debriefing survey question was, What impact did the following components of CAPG have on you today? Jon shared how being with other people sharing helped increase his personal insight and reflection. Normalizing was expressed with phrases such as, “oh, I feel that way too” (Jon). Jon had expressed that whatever struggles he was dealing with were normal. It encouraged him to realize that he was not alone. Other classmates also had similar experiences. Donna said, “The group members learned about each other, and from each other’s knowledge, which deepened their acceptance and knowledge of each other’s doctoral journey. It revealed what the members had in common and what was different among them.” Expressions of shared feelings and situations were common among the group and supported a theme of normalizing.

### Theme 3: The Role of the Leader

Although all the classmates expressed what they benefited from the leader, Dr. Sosin, they expressed different outcomes. This is illustrated here by feedback from participants Jessica and Rachel. Jessica shared, “The leader, Dr. Sosin, was enthusiastic about her qualitative research interests, and I appreciate her motivation and energy. I could feel her positive aura virtually. She provided a safe space for us to share our vulnerable moments.” However, participant Rachel shared how, “Dr. Sosin was positive, warm, empathic, and encouraging. She modeled appropriate professional behavior and humanized the class. She overcame difficult boundaries with distance and technology.” Although participants both shared positive experiences with the group leader, their perspectives on the role of the leader differed.

### Theme 4: Anchoring

Participants described the impact anchoring had on them. The theme of anchoring is supported using feedback from participants Jessica and Raschel. Jessica shared how

Anchoring is a wonderful tool to rediscover yourself. I picked up what I have lost in my childhood; for example, I realized my core value, kindness, is significant. Also, the group process allowed me to be vulnerable in the group. Being vulnerable brings me closer to God. I felt good about myself and my relationship with God after the class ended on Friday.

Similarly, Rachel noted, “Sharing insights from the CAPG made this more meaningful and humanized our relationships. I saw people soften and begin to relax. Parts of ourselves that are disowned, neglected, or that we are unaware of seemed to have emerged.”

## Qualitative Research Conclusion

Reflective of qualitative inquiry, the experiences of the week-long intensive helped me recognize how qualitative research differs from quantitative. Through activities and sharing of individual experiences, I was part of an experience that could be described through one of many perspectives. Through sharing ideas and thoughts with classmates, I was experiencing the role of a researcher that is interviewing participants and using open-ended questions to gather details and thoughts. I realized how important details and perspectives are to the qualitative process. Perspectives that are unique to a specific experience offer insight that quantitative research cannot provide.

# Post-Intensive: Reflections, Themes, and Qualitative Research Conclusions

This section presents reflections on the post-intensive assignment and experiences. Post-intensive information involves the analysis and synthesis of my coursework, assignments, and experiences. A synthesis of the post-intensive experience will be presented in three sections, including reflections, themes, and conclusions.

## Reflections

In counseling, an intensive is a 3 to 5-day commitment to a concentrated time of reflection, discussions, and therapy. For this course, the pre-intensive phase included assignments that would prepare participants for the focus of the intensive activity. The pre-intensive period included a reading assignment and a paper assignment that would involve a summary, reflection, and critical analysis of information on qualitative research based on the work of McLeod (2011). During the pre-intensive period, I realized that writing a critical analysis was influential towards my gaining an understanding of the differences in methodologies and approaches of qualitative research. As I reflect upon the pre-intensive assignment, I understand how qualitative and quantitative methods may complement each other; however, qualitative research is necessary to explore people’s lived experiences and perceptions in the field of counseling.

After the pre-intensive phase was complete, a one-week intensive was scheduled for all class members, and this included group projects, participating in prayer, identifying a safe place, reflecting journaling, and discussions on qualitative research. Reflecting upon the practices that were included in the intensive, I came to appreciate some new activities that I would consider beneficial to my counseling services.

## Post-Intensive Themes

Themes are a huge part of qualitative research. Themes were used in the prior sections to synthesize information gathered during the pre-intensive activities and from the experiences shared of the intensive program. Reflecting on the course experiences, activities, and experiences, as a whole unit of study, three themes emerged that reflect the post-intensive experience. These themes include a) community, b) adult learning, and c) fellowship.

### Theme 1: Community

In my pre-intensive work, I noted how human experiences are complex. Without research to support the perceptions and consensus of a group, experiences can be misunderstood or can even be unknown to society. Looking over my pre-intensive notes, my thoughts on phenomenology support a theme of community. Coming from a unique African culture, phenomenology is a qualitative approach that focuses on the everyday experiences of specific individuals or groups. The Bible is also a good example of understanding community through a phenomenological lens. Many cultures and communities are represented within the scripture, and these instances provide followers with an idea of what different groups were experiencing and feeling.

### Theme 2: Adult Learning

In my pre-intensive experiences, adult learning was a present theme. There are many different theories of knowledge; however, Merriam and Bierema (2013) noted how andragogy is the study of adult learning. Andragogy highlights how adults continue to learn through their experiences. One of the assignments in the pre-intensive phase included identifying a personal value to explore. By identifying a value, I could become more aware through conversations and observations on how my values differed from others. This process of introspection helped me learn more about myself.

Through that experience, I learned the benefits of researching experiences through conversations and observations. My selected personal value was communication. Through a week-long period of reflection, I realized how my communication style differed from other close family members. I also recognize the importance of learning through the use of reflective journaling. This reflection is important to recognize as reflective journaling is essential to qualitative research. Anchoring was a new process that I learned about during the intensive. Recognizing how anchoring helped me connect to my authentic self, I considered how this activity would be beneficial in my counseling practice.

### Theme 3: Fellowship

During the intensive activity, I was able to connect with my instructor and fellow classmates. Examining my reflections on the intensive and my interactions with other classmates, my experiences reflect the theme of fellowship. For example, in a time of reflection, a classmate shared how God speaks to us in ways that we will understand. During the group project of the intensive, classmates shared their experiences and indicated how the group project helped them realize ways to deal with their feelings and validated a sense of belonging to a group that understood their struggles. Hearing the accounts of each classmate was inspiring and helped provide encouragement to one another.

## Post-Intensive Conclusion

The activities of the pre-intensive and post-intensive provided me with an abundance of experiences, ideas, and encouragement. Experiencing learning through various activities helped me understand the qualitative study approach, and my experiences prompted more in-depth learning compared to basic reading assignments. The benefits of qualitative research methods and intensive experiences are essential to the field of counseling. Working closely with individuals that represent various backgrounds, cultures, and lived experiences, requires learning through observation and communication. Conversations that involve open-ended questions help qualitative researchers and counselors explore the perceptions and feelings of individuals.

# Comprehensive Analysis and Synthesis: Pertinent Themes Regarding My Lived Experience in the Qualitative Research

Prior to this course, I struggled with the differences of methodologies used among researchers, specifically qualitative research. I was unsure of the role that qualitative research plays in my professional field, counseling, and psychotherapy. However, the assignments of the course prompted me to work beyond reading McLeod’s (2011) work on qualitative research for the sake of reading. Assignments included reflection and synthesis of information that caused me to look closely at how qualitative research differed from quantitative methods and helped me recognize the value of qualitative inquiry to the field of counseling. Throughout the intensive, I participated in experiences that I felt would also be beneficial to my clients. For example, anchoring helped me to connect to my authentic self, and I realized the anchoring skills, including deep breathing, systematic relaxation, and imaginal safe place, could help my clients experience some level of calmness. As qualitative research is often used to explore the experiences and perceptions of participants, my experiences were reflective of the qualitative inquiry process. My ideas and perceptions of qualitative inquiry were challenged, and I learned from my experiences. The activities of the course were designed to immerse the participant in the qualitative process, and my reflections on the experiences are an example of the nature of the qualitative process.

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# Appendix A Demographic Information of Participants

During the qualitative intensive experience, a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness was introduced to the group participants.

**Table 1**

*Data Analysis:* *Demographic Information of Participants*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Jennifer** | **Rachel** | **Kwame** |
| **Age** | 53 | 50 | 55 |
| **Gender** | Female | Female | Male |
| **Race** | Non-Hispanic | White, Non-Hispanic | African American |
| **Disabilities** | None | None | None |
| **Spirituality** | Christian | Christian | Christian |
| **Sexual Orientation** | Heterosexual | Heterosexual | Heterosexual |
| **Experience Bullying** | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Political Affiliation** | Conservative | Moderate | Conservative |
| **Marital Status** | Married | Divorced | Married |
| **Marital Status of Parents** | Married | Divorced | Married |
| **Income** | 100K | $1200/m | 30K |
| **Location** | Rural | Suburban | Rural |

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of Ph.D. graduate students including one male and two females. Two participants live in rural areas while others live in a Suburban area. Two of the participants are married while the other is divorced. The age group of the participants ranges from 50-55. Two participants were Caucasian, one was an African immigrant. All the participants had experienced bullying in their lives and had jobs. The highest income was 1000k followed, 30k and &1200 monthly.

# Appendix B Impact of CAPG on Group Members

The following table presents data analysis of the CAPG experience on three group members.

**Table 2**

*Data Analysis: Impact of CAPG on Group Members*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant | Theme 1  ***A Place to Explore Shared Experiences***  Quotes | Theme 2  ***Normalizing***  Quotes | Theme 3  ***The Role of the Leader***  Quotes |
| Jennifer | Sharing our experience and thoughts with the whole group is always so uplifting and encouraging. | Especially when you realize that everyone struggles with the same things that I do primarily. | Her tone and choice of dialog are such an important piece of that and encourages and invites all of us to participate even if this is not normally something that we might enjoy. |
| Rachel | I liked that this class affirmed my core identity as a Christian, a mother, and as a potential scholar. I felt strengthened in my identity | I also felt affirmed when Dr. Sosin said, “we know ourselves through relationship.” It is through my relationship with God and others that I define myself. | She helps to create an environment that is conducive for growth and acceptance |
| Kwame | I felt relieve sharing freely in the group. I felt encouraged by the stories of the classmates. | I felt that I was not alone in my struggles. The sharing helped me normalized my struggles. | Dr. Sosin is remarkably knowledgeable about CAPG and articulates it well. She offers support when needed and connects well with the participants. |

**Grading Rubric: Qualitative Research Synthesis Paper**

**Place a copy of this Grading Rubric at the end of your paper and fill it out as a self-evaluation.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Section and Quality Indicators** | **Specific Comments and Feedback** | **Comments** |
| **Abstract** | | |
| A. Clearly and succinctly presents the paper’s contents in the order covered in the paper. |  | **I tried to do my best since this is my first time of writing qualitative paper** |
| B. Includes key words |  |  |
| **Introduction** | | |
| A. Clearly introduces the paper with references to the scholarly literature on the importance and role of qualitative research in counseling |  | **I used close to 20 lit reviews to understand the role of qualitative research.** |
| B. Ends with a transition statement that contains a summary or key points of the paper and an overview of the content of the remaining sections. |  | I am still working on my transition statements. |
| **Pre-Intensive: Reflections, Themes, and Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research** | | |
| A. There is an introduction that describes:  1. The content and organization of the section  B. Presents each component of the pre-intensive experience (subheadings). For each pre-intensive component include these sub-headings:  1. Reflections on My Pre-Intensive Experience  2. Themes Developed from These Experiences  3. Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research  4. Substantiate your writing with scholarly literature related to qualitative research throughout the section. Cite this literature and include it in the reference section. |  | As I understand, for the pre-intensive, I wrote about the course material and the lived experience of a value system. I also presented each component with headings and subheadings. |
| **Intensive: Reflection, Themes, and Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research** | | |
| B. There is an introduction that describes:  1. The content and organization of the section  2. The specific literature reviewed to substantiate the themes you described in the section. This literature is also cited in the section.  B. Presents each component of the intensive experience (subheadings). For each intensive component include these sub-headings:  1. Reflections on My Intensive Experience  2. Themes Developed from These Experiences  3. Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research  4. Substantiate your writing with scholarly literature related to qualitative research throughout the section. Cite this literature and include it in the reference section. |  | I provided introduction without the heading  “introduction”  I cited all the references used for the paper. All the components of the paper were presented with heading and subheadings.  For each section, I substantiated with scholarly literature and cited them in the paper.  I am not sure if I followed the directions as I was supposed to but I did my very best. |
| **Post-Intensive: Reflection, Themes, and Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research** | | |
| A. There is an introduction that describes:  1. The content and organization of the section  2. The specific literature reviewed to substantiate the themes you described in the section. This literature is also cited in the section.  B. Presents each component of the post-intensive experience (subheadings). For each post-intensive component include these sub-headings:  1. Reflections on My Post-Intensive Experience  2. Themes Developed from These Experiences  3. Conclusions Regarding Qualitative Research  4. Substantiate your writing with scholarly literature related to qualitative research throughout the section. Cite this literature and include it in the reference section. |  | The post intensive was a bit challenge however, I did my best synthesizing all the three parts of the paper with scholarly literature |
| **Comprehensive Anaylsis and Synthesis: Pertinent Themes Regarding My Lived Experience in the Qualitative Research Class** | | |
| 1. Presents a synthesis of your learning.  2. The paper closes with a strong conclusion making the “take-home message” clear to the reader.  3. Includes the following appendix items after the reference section:  A. APA formatted table entitled **Data Analysis: Demographic Information of Participants**: Create a table with everyone’ demographic information aggregated.  B. APA formatted table entitled **Data Analysis of the Impact of CAPG on Group Members**: Analyze the collection of debriefing and group evaluation surveys for themes related to how each component and aspect of CAPG impacted participants. This is an abbreviated analysis. For an actual study it would entail more stages. For this analysis, as discussed in class, follow these steps:  1. Print the data set you want to start with  2. Read the debriefing surveys and highlight what the member reported was impactful during each session  3. Read the group evaluation and do the same.  4. Once you’ve highlighted the whole document, go back and re-read it, writing in the margins what you sense is a “theme.” Include a few brief words that define the theme.  4. Do this with each subsequent data set.  5. Re-read the whole set of data sets again. Determine from your notes and highlights the repetitive and most commonly reported themes.  6. Define this set of final themes.  7. Select three especially poignant verbatim quotes from the data that capture the essence of the themes you selected.  8. Create a comprehensive APA-formatted table with the final themes (and their definitions) and the three especially meaningful vignettes for each  9. Briefly narratively summarize your analysis findings in the context of the final paper within the post -intensive section |  | I included an appendix including two tables |
| **Writing Style and Composition:**  The paper is written in first person and is appropriately scholarly. The writing is clear, precise, and avoids redundancy. Statements are specific and topical sentences are established for paragraphs. The flow of words is smooth and comprehensible. Bridges are established between ideas. |  | I wrote the paper in first person. I think that the flow of words and paragraph to paragraph is smooth. |
| **Organization and Form**  The paper  A. is logically and comprehensively organized, using subheadings where appropriate.  B. has a professional, scholarly appearance.  C. is written with correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.  D. includes citations for the following: direct quotations (which are few and brief), paraphrasing, facts, and references to research studies.  E. in-text citations are found in the reference list. There are at least 10-15 references to the scholarly literature, at least five of which are from the counseling journals.  F. **EVERYTHING** is in correct APA format (title page, abstract, headings, pagination, in-text citations, reference page, etc.) |  | While I tried to organize the paper logically and comprehensively, I think that I am a work in progress. I checked my grammar, and punctuations. However, I may miss a few.  I used close to twenty references including.  All criteria was met |

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What a joy to review this engaging, strategic, purposeful, and comprehensive reflective synthesis of your experience in COUC 750 this term. Clearly, you’ve met the learning outcomes designed for this course! I am delighted that you’ve developed a stronger appreciation and understanding of this compelling and highly meaningful form of research Kwame!

May you continue to grow as a CES researcher and scholar Kwame. As always, it was a great joy and privilege to hear your heart and to learn with you this term.