



# Undergraduate Research in Theatre

## A Guide for Students

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ROUTLEDGE UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SERIES



# 4

## HUMAN PARTICIPANT RESEARCH IN THEATRE

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### **Summary**

The focus of this chapter is human participant research in theatre. We consider the applicability of oral history exclusion from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review, and ethical approaches to performance and civic practice. We define and discuss the role of the university IRB in reviewing, approving, and monitoring research involving human participants, in order to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines. We provide an overview of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI training), including information for students about what to expect and a rationale for participating in the training. A brief synopsis of Rebecca Skloot's book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is included as a means of illustrating the far-reaching effects of unethical research methods, even when the researcher is well intentioned. This chapter culminates with a case study of an undergraduate research project that received IRB approval for the creation of a play based on narratives from women affected by genocide.

### **Considerations for human participant research in theatre: oral history guidelines and performance and civic practice in creative inquiry**

For good reason, human participant research is strictly regulated in university settings by the IRB if it warrants their review (see discussion about IRB processes later). There are some cases in theatre and performance research, however, that include human participant material but do not require IRB review. When a study does not attempt to make systematic analyses or claims for generalizable knowledge based on the contributions of human participants, but instead

features the story of the participant as an individual, it may abide by the requirements for exclusion from IRB review won by oral historians. Louis Kyriakouides (2020), the Co-Executive Director of the Oral History Association, provided a recent update about the exclusion from IRB review hard won by historians over many years of advocating for the change for the following reasons:

Many universities and research organizations that accept federal research funds required oral historians to present their research protocols to their IRB for approval. Often, this led IRBs to require burdensome conditions that directly violated accepted principles and best practices of oral history in the name of addressing nonexistent risks. Overall, oral historians have found the IRB process poorly suited to the consensual, shared authority interview methods that are the foundation of sound oral history practice. Furthermore, IRB policies that mandated confidentiality, and even the destruction of interviews after a period of time, directly contradict the principle of narrator ownership of copyright and best practices on archival preservation.

Similar to the practices of oral history, theatre creative scholarship that involves human participation, by way of interviews or artistic co-creation, derive methods from its own disciplinary perspective that value mutual exchange and collaborative creation, which sometimes require named participants and the preservation of the performance artifact as a contribution to the theatre archive. The Center for Performance and Civic Practice ([thecpcp.org](http://thecpcp.org)) and many devising and applied theatre resources provide guidance for ethical practices for engaging community members and co-creators (Rohd, 1998; Conquergood, 2013; Boal, 1979). Chapter 5 discusses research methods and assessment practices in theatre, and chapter 9 on devising and chapter 10 on applied theatre discuss ethical approaches to research methods that involve community members. While a research project may not require IRB review, it, of course, should only be undertaken in the most ethically rigorous manner under the mentorship of informed theatre faculty familiar with applied theatre theory and ethics. These practices require informed consent (more on informed consent later), release forms, and sometimes a letter of agreement. University templates typically exist for documents to acquire informed consent, release forms, and letters of agreement and can be adapted for use by undergraduate theatre researchers.

### **Human participants research subject to IRB review**

When a particular group of humans is being researched for generalizable results and systematic analysis beyond an individual's story, it will require IRB review. The traditional term *human subjects* is still used in most training programs and the U.S. federal guidelines, including those governing research conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services. Since the 1980s, though, largely

due to the work of those engaged in research into the AIDS epidemic, the term *human participants* has often been used to refer to the people involved in a research study of any kind (Bayer, 1995). When AIDS was first identified, those who had contracted the disease, especially gay men and people who had used intravenous drugs, were acutely vulnerable to social stigma as well as incarceration. Being LGBTQ+ was considered a crime in over half of the states in the United States, was a disqualifier for teaching jobs and military service, and was often used as grounds for taking away parental rights. AIDS researchers needed to take thorough care not only to protect identifying information of patients but also to ask questions with sensitivity and without apparent judgment regarding patients' sexuality or drug use.

In a remarkable and quite unusual process, all the more striking since it occurred during the conservative Reagan years, representatives of gay organizations entered into a complex set of negotiations over the nature of the confidentiality protections that were to be afforded to AIDS research subjects.

(Bayer, 1995, para. 12)

Together, leaders of LGBTQ+ rights organizations and medical researchers established standards for informed consent that effectively changed the role of AIDS patients in the research process from *subjects* to *participants*.

A *participant* is an active and willing member who is voluntarily contributing to the work, while the term *subject* implies passivity—the person on whom research is conducted. Research involving humans is vastly different from research conducted on more easily observable and controllable subjects such as plants. The main difference lies in humans' ability and right to choose what they do and what is done to them. Humans must be fully informed about research in which they participate, so they can either consent or not to the study.

### ***Informed consent***

Informed consent is fundamental to conducting research with humans that is legal and ethical. As bioethicist Jessica De Bord (2014) explained, informed consent traditionally refers to the process by which a competent adult agrees to, or refuses, a medical procedure, based on thorough understanding of the reasons it is being recommended and its potential benefits and risks. Informed consent originates in the legal and ethical rights of adults to determine what happens to their own bodies (De Bord, 2014). Informed consent laws now extend far beyond medical procedures to all forms of research or intervention involving people. People can benefit from and be harmed by a much broader realm of research than that involving medical procedures. Imagine, for a moment, a psychological study that could trigger post-traumatic stress disorder in some participants. Because myriad forms of research involving human beings have the potential for harm,

no matter how seemingly minor, ethics and federal laws require that people participating in research give informed consent to participate.

## The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

The 2010 book by Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, was researched for over a decade to bring to light the far-reaching consequences and injustices of unethical research practices. It is about a

poor black tobacco farmer whose cells—taken without her knowledge in 1951—became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, *in vitro* fertilization, and more. Henrietta’s cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can’t afford health insurance.

*(Skloot, 2010, back cover)*

Used across the United States as a first-year student convocation and summer reading book, it won many awards including the 2010 Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, the 2010 Wellcome Trust Book Prize, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s Award for Excellence in Science Writing. Over 60 book critics named it as one of the best books of the year (“Rebecca Skloot,” 2018). “It’s a story inextricably connected to the dark history of experimentation on African Americans, the birth of bioethics, and the legal battles over whether we control the stuff we’re made of” (Skloot, 2010, back cover). The compelling story of Henrietta Lacks provides undergraduate researchers an example of why human participants need to be informed, consulted with, and treated fairly when involved in research studies. Even if your study does not involve human participants, the whole topic of ethics in research methods is something with which you as a researcher should be familiar. Just about every area of research holds some ethical considerations, even if not as directly as the research conducted on Henrietta Lacks.

Research that appears to have absolutely no risk of harm and/or may even benefit participants is not off the hook from informed consent. Informed consent means people are agreeing or declining to participate *with full knowledge*, even when there are no known risks either way. Informed consent also includes people agreeing or declining to participate in research that may benefit themselves or others. Each of us has the legal right to opt in or out of participating in research without explaining our reasons. Informed consent ensures that people are making the decision with knowledge about what they are agreeing to or declining.

## IRB review process

How do researchers know that they have provided enough information to participants to meet the legal standard of informed consent? How do we guard against

unintentionally harmful or ethically questionable research practices? The primary gatekeepers protecting human participants from potential harm or manipulation, and preventing researchers from making ethical or legal violations (even inadvertently), are members of the IRB. Every institution in the United States in which research involving humans is conducted—every college and university, research hospital, school district, and any other type of research facility—has, by law, a committee typically known as the IRB. Other countries have similar ethics boards that go by different names, such as Canada’s Tri-Council (made up of representatives of three major granting agencies), the United Kingdom’s Research Ethics Committee, and the European Union’s Ethics Committee. The 1964 “Declaration of Helsinki” by the World Medical Association established international ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects (World Health Organization, 2001).

According to U.S. federal law, an IRB is made up of at least five experts in biomedical and social-behavioral research ethics. Members of the IRB are charged with protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects/participants in research conducted by anyone affiliated with the institution, including faculty, staff, and students of a college or university. The IRB must review and approve all research involving humans (unless excluded from IRB review, see earlier) before the research may commence. The chairperson of the IRB is responsible for posting readily accessible (usually online) information about ethical and legal requirements for research involving humans, training sessions for researchers, and the IRB review process.

The IRB review process involves the main researcher, known as the *principal investigator* (PI)—usually the faculty member overseeing the undergraduate research—and the *co-investigator(s)*, who are the student(s) and anyone else collaborating on the research (e.g., community partners or faculty colleagues of the PI). The PI submits the IRB application and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the research is carried out in accordance with what is described in the application, after it has been approved. None of the research involving human participants can begin before IRB approval—not even recruitment of the participants.

In addition to requiring a description of informed consent, IRB applications call for the following explanations:

- 1 How the PI and co-investigators will protect the privacy and confidentiality of all human participants
- 2 How the participants will be recruited
- 3 How the participants will be compensated, if applicable
- 4 Where the participants’ confidential and/or identifying information will be stored (e.g., on a password-protected hard drive and/or a locking file cabinet)—and who will have access to it
- 5 How the PI and co-investigators will dispose of confidential and/or identifying information after the study is complete and a certain period of time has

passed (e.g., by fully deleting computer files and shredding paper records). Note that IRBs often require the PI to retain records in a secure location for a set period of time, typically three years, after the completion of the study.

If the study includes a survey, a final copy of the survey must be attached. If the study includes interviews and/or focus groups, a list of questions to be asked—often known as the *interview guide* or *protocol*—must be attached. Researchers must stick to the questions on the interview guide, though related follow-up questions are permissible.

The IRB may require revision of the research protocol or even reject the application if required information is missing or incomplete, or if the board determines that the risks of the research are too great. The risks of research are highest when *vulnerable or protected populations* are involved; vulnerable populations include children, people in prison, and people with cognitive disabilities, to name a few.

Most U.S. college and university IRBs require everyone conducting research with human participants subject to IRB review to complete human participants research training every three years. That requirement includes undergraduate researchers. The training is provided by the CITI, which offers several different online courses and modules. Everyone involved in human participants research takes the Responsible Conduct of Research CITI course and/or the Human Subjects Research CITI course, which has a Social–Behavioral–Educational track. Additional modules or courses may be required depending on the nature of the research.

Requiring researchers to take online CITI courses and pass the quizzes helps colleges and universities ensure that research conducted in their name and with their support is done so with ethical integrity. Those who have completed CITI training are much more likely to carry out their research legally and ethically. They are informed about appropriate research protocols and the reasons for particular rules.

Completing training in human participants research confers benefits on the researchers themselves, beyond the knowledge they gain about ethical research practices. Practically speaking, completing CITI training dramatically decreases the chance that a researcher will submit an IRB application that gets rejected or requires revision. Having to resubmit an IRB application requires extra time and can cause stress for the researchers. It can significantly delay the start of the study, sometimes for weeks, as protocols need to be rewritten and then reviewed again by the IRB. (At a large university, waiting a month or more for a decision from the IRB is not unusual.) Students working within the confines of a semester have no time to waste. Another benefit of completing CITI training is having ethics course certification among your experiences—a distinctive credential for your résumé and/or graduate school applications.

The IRB chairperson will let the PI know if CITI training is required for the planned research and, if so, which courses need to be taken. Each CITI course

takes a few hours but does not need to be completed in one sitting. If you need to complete CITI training, you will not need to pay for the courses. Each college and university has a CITI subscription that covers faculty, staff, and students of the institution. Before creating an account on the CITI website, find out from the IRB chairperson how your institution handles student registrations and which courses you need to complete. Most likely you will be directed to create an account at [www.citiprogram.org/index.cfm?pageID=22](http://www.citiprogram.org/index.cfm?pageID=22) by entering the name of your institution. After each course module, you will be quizzed on its content. The score considered “passing” is set by the IRB. Of course, you need a passing score to receive certification of completion.

The following case study by Alger and Armstrong details the ethnodramatic process of creation for an original work that included human participant research. The original work *Tell Me about the Other Side* created generalizable knowledge about how women experience genocide and involved a highly vulnerable segment of human participants, therefore requiring IRB review and approval.

### **Women, genocide, and healing through the arts**

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*Tell Me about the Other Side* uses techniques from documentary theatre and ethnodrama to create a play centered around stories of women in post-genocide democracies. The focus is on three different areas of the world, Germany/Poland, Kosovo/Croatia, and Rwanda, each of which has had its own experience with genocide during different time periods, and examining the ways they intertwine, compare, and contrast. Historically, in cases of ethnic cleansing and mass conflict, women are targeted differently than men—often experiencing trauma via rape, silencing, and sexual abuse. The long-lasting effects of torture and ethnic cleansing not only impact women but the country’s overall health and developing democracy as well. Based on an interview method approved for human subjects research, I interviewed survivors and advocates from each country. I explored women’s complex roles in such conflicts, focusing on the healing that occurs in future generations and the ways that theatre and the arts can assist in times of healing. Documentary theatre built through research allows for a framework for personal narratives to be delivered to a wider audience through storytelling devices. I plan to create a piece of theatre with an ensemble of women that shows the ways in which forgiveness and justice intertwine in the healing process, on both a national and a personal level. The process has been guided by models like the Vital Voices Project’s play *Seven* (Cizmar et al., 2009) that weaves together stories of women activists across the world. Research challenges include questions such as how to interview about such sensitive topics, how to navigate



cultural and religious differences, what dramaturgical structures serve as an ethical representation in documentary theatre, and how to articulate the importance of such a project to various audiences. The project provides an opportunity for significant dramaturgical research, as well as a deeper understanding of theatrical production and playwriting, giving me a chance to become a more empathetic artist and researcher. In a broader sense, this project will contribute to a greater understanding of these political conflicts for audience and actor alike, and an enhanced appreciation for the resilience of the human spirit.

## Questions for discussion

What will happen if I don't take the appropriate steps to protect the rights of participants in my study?

What kinds of ethical approaches or training are necessary for my research with human participants?

Is the oral history exclusion from IRB review applicable to my research study or creative project with human participants?

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# 5

## RESEARCH METHODS AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN THEATRE

*Michelle Hayford and Jenny Olin Shanahan*

### Summary

This chapter explains the importance of sound research methods, documentation, and assessment of theatre practices. Performance is evaluated by its aesthetic and/or impact success, and tools for the assessment of artistic practice are shared. Major research strategies are described including library research exploring primary sources, research journals, field notes, survey research, and interviews. Students are introduced to qualitative and quantitative research methods, providing overviews of each. The main differences in methods between arts and humanities scholarship and social science research are described. The chapter concludes with a case study about data collection through audience survey that demonstrated the efficacy of pursuing a more diverse production season.

### Conquergood's dialogic performance framework and performance assessment tools

Dwight Conquergood's (2013) contributions to the field of performance studies include the "Moral Mapping of Performative Stances toward the Other" in the article *Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance*. This map is instructive for guiding a conversation with theatre undergraduates about the positionality they assume in relationship to their community partners in performance ethnography research. The map provides a visual representation of "dialogical performance" at the ideal center where the performance ethnographer engages in "genuine conversation," with the optimum balance between "identity" and "difference" on one pole and "detachment" and "commitment" on the other. The map provides guidance to avoid the four failed approaches to performance ethnography: "the Custodian's Rip-Off," "the Enthusiast's Infatuation," "the Curator's Exhibitionism," and "the Skeptic's Cop-Out." The

undergraduate student needs to be informed about the pitfalls of performance ethnography work and armed with the tools to engage in performance ethnography in ethical ways that prioritize mutual exchange and reciprocity with the goal of dialogic performance.

It is difficult to create assessment tools for theatre and performance that can fully capture the subjective lived experience of audience members. Theatre by definition requires an embodied experience of presence and liveness, and theatre students need practice and mentoring to develop the language to skillfully assess performance with an aesthetic and critical eye. Audience reception theory tells us that theatre-makers cannot control how their art will be received. Perhaps this is why we seek to understand the audience experience. Theatre scholars have created various assessment tools for performance and many survey methods. Increasingly, with theatre-making and civic engagement practices becoming more commonplace, granting bodies require documentation and assessment of the efficacy of performance to impact communities. Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, provides the best assessment language for describing the work of art-making in communities, with their “Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes for Excellence in Arts for Change,” available at [animating-democracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives](http://animating-democracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives). The Animating Democracy attributes of assessment for community-engaged performance are Commitment, Communal Meaning, Disruption, Cultural Integrity, Emotional Experience, Sensory Experience, Risk-Taking, Openness, Coherence, Resourcefulness, and Stickiness. This last attribute of “Stickiness” describes the impact of the performance in the community, its meaning-making processes and potential, and engagement with the issues it raised. These attributes provide a great framework for undergraduate theatre students to assess their own and other civically engaged creative scholarship.

A staple of theatre assessment is an internal process for the creative team called a post-mortem, in which the production processes and outcomes are discussed by all the collaborators to determine what worked and what could be improved. The stage management, designers, director(s), and producer(s) gather in a post-mortem after every production in order to improve future processes and performances. The common denominator for the creative team in entering a post-mortem should be the dedication to improving and learning from what worked. Most often, poor communication and/or lacking collaboration skills explain failed process or production errors—this underscores the importance of modeling and mentoring these most important team-building skills for our undergraduate students. Students can engage in post-mortems as the final act of their own creative scholarship processes. Empowered to be content creators and work collaboratively in creative teams, undergraduates will learn these valuable communication and team-building skills.

To encourage the most productive post-mortems, they should be well planned, not too long, and focused on what was learned from what went right and how to improve what went wrong. I’ve (Hayford) found that incorporating tools and resources from other industry assessment processes for team projects has improved the morale and productivity of our post-mortems. Sometimes called

“retrospectives” in other fields, theatre is not alone in needing efficient and effective templates for assessing team processes and products. I encourage all theatre-makers to experiment with the various tools for assessment of teams from any sector and see how they might apply to your next post-mortem. I recommend the “Recess Kits” at [recesskit.com](http://recesskit.com), developed by Certified Scrum Trainer and Agile Coach Adam Weisbart, to run a fun, performative, and interactive post-mortem, like the “Welcome to Hollywood” recess kit, which, like all the kits, uses role-play, collective tasks, and games to facilitate insights and improvements about the process and product of the performance, while employing a strict timetable and always delivering a positive close to the experience. Regardless of how you endeavor to make post-mortems a productive experience, the key is a willingness to reflect openly, and rededicate to improved processes, while keeping team morale intact.

### Importance of sound research methods

Research is a methodical investigation or inquiry aimed at answering a specific question or creating something new. The *methodical* approach is what gives a research study or creative project rigor and trustworthiness. After learning what is primarily known about the topic area through a review of the literature (see chapter 2), scholars develop a focused and significant question or goal (see chapter 3). As this chapter lays out, scholars then plan their own *methods* or *processes* for addressing the question or achieving the goal. They determine which sources of *data*, or information, would help answer the question or achieve the goal and how to access those sources. Purposefully planning methods of data collection and carrying out the project according to that plan (as well as adapting the methods as needed, also based on thoughtful planning) are at the heart of conducting scholarly work.

The strength of a research study or creative project, therefore, depends most on its *methods*—the processes used to gather data/information and address the question or goal. Scholars who carefully select the methods best suited to the project set themselves up well for success. A successful study is not necessarily one in which the hypothesis or expected conclusion is proven or in which the goal precisely comes to fruition, but one in which something new and interesting is discovered or created. That new and interesting discovery/creation is reached with sound methods or processes.

One of the common missteps we have observed in our mentoring of undergraduate research is a rush to decide on methods or processes that are obvious and readily accessible. We have had students who tried to rely entirely on secondary sources located through online research, for example, because they were most familiar with that method of information-gathering, even though additional sources of evidence would significantly strengthen their claims. And we have had to guide students away from simply conducting surveys of their peers as their primary research method; although gathering opinions from a group of friends, acquaintances, and/or classmates may be handy, that narrow group of people likely will not provide enough diversity of thought or richness of

information to develop a full-fledged conclusion. This chapter is intended to guide student-researchers to more thorough, well-planned methods—methods that are well aligned with the research question or goals of the project.

Sound methods are critical to the success of your entire project because the results depend on the quality of the data, and the quality of the data depends on the ways they were collected, recorded, and analyzed. Your process of gathering and analyzing the data must be made evident before your results are presented, in any dissemination of the work, such as a performance, conference presentation, or research paper. The audience's trust in your findings will either be buttressed or undermined by how well you carried out the study and how well you explained carrying it out.

## Establishing credibility as a researcher

Well-selected research methods—a careful process chosen precisely because it gets at the particular research question or project goal—lead to trustworthy results. In addition to setting up a successful project, sound methods give credibility to you as a researcher. For at least 25 centuries of human thought, the credibility of an author has been a foundation of effective argument, or *rhetoric*. In the fourth century B.C.E., the classical Greek scientist, philosopher, and teacher Aristotle explained that appealing persuasively to an audience requires *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. Those three parts of a persuasive argument are now known as the *rhetorical triangle*. *Logos* refers literally to the *logic* of one's argument—the reasons, evidence, and explanation that convince others of one's points. *Pathos* concerns appeals to the audience by connecting with them through emotions and values. Statistics can be used as a form of *pathos* as well, such as by demonstrating how prevalent the often-hidden practice of human trafficking of immigrants in the United States actually is, perhaps stirring audience members' righteous anger about an ongoing crisis.

*Ethos* relates to the character of the writer/speaker. The importance of *ethos* to rhetoric/argument derives from the idea that audience members will only be persuaded by the logic of the claims (*logos*) and the appeals to their values (*pathos*) if they trust the person making the argument. That trust is established when those making claims explain with transparency how they arrived at their conclusions—in the case of research, how they gathered their data and why they went about it in the ways they did. If, on the other hand, the audience is not convinced of the credibility and quality of the work of the researcher, they have no reason to accept the claims.

## Triangulated, intentional, and impartial data collection

### *Triangulation of data*

Establishing your credibility as a scholar and ensuring, as well as possible, the success of your study require collecting data in *triangulated*, *intentional*, and *impartial*

ways. *Triangulated data collection* refers to gathering information in a variety of ways as a system of data “checks and balances.” Data from one source can be corroborated or disputed by a different source. When multiple sources of information are brought to bear on a research question, the researcher can attain a more reliable and comprehensive understanding. Only by culling information from numerous sources and synthesizing it into a multifaceted claim could a researcher on the topic arrive at an informed and insightful argument. That work of drawing from multiple sources is triangulation. Although the term *triangulation* has led some of our students over the years to conclude that they need exactly three sources of information, the reality is more nuanced than that. The three legs of a simple camp-stool give it stability; take one away, and the stool topples over, but adding legs solidifies it. We prefer to think of triangulation in terms of that metaphorical camp-stool’s overall stability rather than its literal three legs. In other words, triangulated research might require only three sources of information to stand solidly on its claims, but it may need more.

### ***Intentionality in data collection***

Lest it sound as if more and more sources automatically make research better, we move to the second criterion of sound research methods: intentionality. *Intentional data collection* refers to the careful thinking involved in determining which sources to pursue. What types of data will allow you to gain the information you need? By selecting sources of information intentionally and then explaining why you collected data in the ways you did, you avoid a scattershot (random and overly general) approach to research.

### ***Avoiding bias, ensuring impartiality, and situating the author***

The third expectation of credible researchers, *impartiality*, requires effort to reduce potential bias and errors. Biased or otherwise sloppy scholarship undermines the study itself as well as the credibility of the researcher. Bias in research comes in many forms, some of it unconscious on the part of the scholar. It might include preference for or prejudice against a particular outcome that leads to overemphasis (or ignoring) of certain results. If a researcher expects members of a focus group to be enthusiastic about a shared experience, the researcher might glom on to a few stray comments that fit that expectation. On the flip side, if members of the focus group suspect the researcher is hoping for particular responses, they might accommodate that expectation, especially if they have a relationship with the researcher that would benefit from positive reinforcement. For those very reasons, the best practices of focus-group research include having a neutral person facilitate and record the discussion, without the researcher even in the room.

Similarly, the ways in which survey questions are worded may reveal the biases of the researcher and skew responses. Using validated survey instruments designed by researchers with expertise in survey design mitigates those

tendencies toward unconscious bias. If you need to develop your own survey, we recommend studying the elements of good design, starting with guidelines for beginning survey researchers, such as Vannette's (2015) "10 Tips for Building Effective Surveys," and asking for feedback on your draft questions from professors who teach research methods.

Even peer-reviewed research articles are likely to reflect the values of the journals that publish them, so overreliance on sources from one journal should be avoided. As these examples indicate, impartial research design requires vigilance. Consistently asking yourself how sources of data could be obtained with the least possibility for bias can lead to helpful ideas for fair and even-handed methods. Explaining in your method section the steps you took to reduce bias and the chance of errors demonstrates your impartiality and credibility as a researcher. Informed readers can and should be attentive to signs of prejudice and imprecision in reports of research. They will appreciate indications that you collected data carefully and as impartially as possible.

It should be noted that impartiality in the methods used to conduct research is not the same as *situating oneself* as an author. In performance studies research, it is common and best practice for an author to identify their social location, assert their identities, and how their life experiences have informed their scholarship. Performance studies often aligns with work in social justice and centering of the marginalized. Performance ethnography as a field attracts researchers who position themselves as artists, activists, and scholars.

## Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research

How do you decide on the types of research data to triangulate, select intentionally, and collect impartially? One rough breakdown of the types of research data you might gather is *quantitative* and *qualitative*. *Quantitative data* are numerically measurable and reportable information. Quantitative data literally show the calculable quantity or amount of something. Examples include the number or percentage of participants who gave a particular response to a survey question; the average increase in scores between participants' pretest and posttest; the amount of time needed to complete a series of tasks; and even the results of a structural analysis of the complexity of a sound design.

*Qualitative data* cannot be measured numerically; they are descriptive information about the qualities of people's ideas or behaviors or any other subject of study that requires interpretation rather than calculation. Examples of qualitative data include transcripts of interviews; open-ended written responses on surveys; analysis of the emotions expressed in a theatre audience; observations of people's behaviors described in field notes; and evaluations of the aesthetics and impact of theatre performances.

Sources of information are rarely exclusively quantitative or qualitative; many can be analyzed in different ways for quantitative or qualitative data, such as pre- and posttests that could be evaluated in terms of how many responses were

correct (quantitative measure) and/or analyzed for patterns in the open-ended responses (qualitative interpretation). Likewise, researchers often benefit from obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, an audience survey that utilizes both multiple-choice questions and write-in answers will yield more usable data. Using both types of information to get at different facets of the research question is known as *mixed methods research*.

### **Quantitative methods**

The following are the most common quantitative methods used by undergraduate researchers in theatre:

- *Surveys/questionnaires with multiple-choice or Likert-scale responses:* Surveys and questionnaires capture demographic and/or opinion data that are self-reported by individuals. A Likert scale is usually made up of five or seven choices aimed at measuring degrees of agreement, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, for example. A Likert scale provides a more nuanced set of responses than simple agree-or-disagree binary choices.
- *Tests of content knowledge, ability, attitude, or skill:* Pretest and posttest data are often used to determine whether an intervention, such as a new teaching technique or a particular experience or performance, may have affected participants' knowledge or attitudes. The pretest and posttest ask for the same information at different points in time—before and after a show, days, weeks, or months apart.

Pre- and posttests may be given to one group of participants to measure change over time, or distributed to two sets of participants known as the *experimental group* and *control group* in order to make a comparison between them. The experimental group participates in the intervention being studied (“the experiment”), such as a new method of teaching. The control group continues with the status quo. Experimental and control groups usually share basic demographics in common. Completing a quantitative *structural analysis of performance or other paratextual sources* entails some form of counting, such as the words that came up most frequently on an online discussion board. Completing a *statistical analysis* of data gathered by oneself or previous researchers is a sophisticated quantitative research skill. Statistical data include a vast array of evidence, from individuals' personal/demographic information to immense sets of organizational and national information.

### **Qualitative methods**

These are the most common forms of qualitative data in undergraduate research in theatre:

- *Surveys/questionnaires with open-response questions.* Open-response questions invite survey-takers to write out answers to questions that do not lend



themselves to either—or or multiple-choice responses. They allow participants to convey a range of ideas, attitudes, and examples, often providing rich information for researchers. (Many surveys of course include both quantitative and qualitative questions.)

- *Interviews.* Interviews, which are typically one-on-one interactions in which the participant answers a set of questions posed by the researcher/interviewer, may be audio or video recorded with the permission of the participant. Whether the interview is recorded or not, the interviewer usually takes extensive notes during and immediately following the interview.
- *Focus groups.* Focus groups are akin to group interviews. A group of people with something in common that is of interest to the researcher (e.g., students in a summer undergraduate research program; attendees of the same production; survey respondents who checked the box at the end of the survey indicating their willingness to be contacted for follow-up research) are invited to participate in a discussion about the topic. The group should be small enough that everyone can contribute a response to some or all of the questions—usually between 5 and 20 participants. The facilitator poses questions to the group and may either encourage a free exchange of responses or suggest a means of equitable participation. Focus groups may be audio or video recorded with the informed consent of each participant. Often a note-taker accompanies the facilitator so that the facilitator can attend to the group dynamics without the additional task of writing notes.
- *Document analysis:* Some student researchers get the extraordinary opportunity to work with primary sources in an archive or more accessible online collection. *Primary sources* are original documents or artifacts created in the time period being studied, such as diaries/journals, original manuscripts and script drafts, letters and other correspondence, and video recordings. Archives around the world preserve original documents of historical and cultural significance in secure, fire-proof cabinets in temperature-controlled, low-humidity rooms, all to ensure that they will not be lost to current and future generations. University library archives, as well as many archives associated with museums, historical societies, and other public and private libraries, offer rich troves of primary sources for student researchers. You may be required to get a brief training from the archivist and to wear archivist gloves—or you may have to view fragile, high-value pieces through plastic or glass—but those precautions are well worthwhile, as there is nothing quite like the thrill of working with primary artifacts.

Digitized library and museum collections have made primary source research possible from your own computer or your university's library database. Digital photos of documents and recordings of performances bring the archives right to you.

Anything that interprets or is otherwise at a remove from a primary text (e.g., an article that includes excerpts of letters) is a *secondary source*. Your notes

in a journal—capturing key quotations as well as your own textual analysis and observations—are invaluable sources of qualitative data.

- *Case study*: Empirical observation and analysis of one important case (or small number of cases) may give deep insight into a broader issue. The “case” may be a person, course, performance, event, or other phenomenon.
- *Observation* (also called *field observation* or *direct observation*): Conducting observations on behaviors or other phenomena in a certain setting can be a valuable qualitative research method when carried out by rigorous researchers who are doing much more than simply watching. Observation research requires detailed field notes about what is observed—a crucial aspect of its methodological rigor. Sometimes the field notes are structured to include certain behaviors or participants while purposely ignoring others in order to focus on a predetermined set of data. Other field notes are open to everything that catches the researcher’s attention, without a prediction of what to expect.

If the observation is to be conducted covertly (without the knowledge and consent of those being observed), privacy must be protected, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need to review whether the research could be conducted effectively with informed participants instead. If the participants know they are being observed, the researcher must consider the Hawthorne Effect, the psychological phenomenon of people changing their behavior because they are being observed. Such decisions about covert or overt observations are usually discussed in the method section of a research paper.

- *Participant observation*: Conducting observations on the behaviors of a group of people while involved with them over a period of time offers a more intimate angle on observation research. Like other forms of observation, participant observation requires detailed field notes, though the notes may have to be written immediately after the observation time because participating and note-taking simultaneously may not be possible. Sometimes called auto-ethnography in the performance ethnography field, a study that positions the researcher as both participant and observer is particularly prevalent along with performance ethnography studies, in the performance studies discipline (see the section “Conquergood’s dialogic performance framework and performance assessment tools”).

Some forms of research can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, depending on the types of information to be gathered. Two examples are listed here.

- *Longitudinal study*: Empirical observation and analysis of something over a significant period of time
- *Pilot study*: Collecting data about a new intervention or process while it is carried out for the first time, and analyzing the data to determine the intervention’s longer-term efficacy

Note that IRB review is required for all of these forms of research except when the research goal is not generalizable knowledge about a group. If your research includes participants whose data will not be used to make systematic analyses about a group, it is excluded from IRB review (see chapter 4 for more on human participant research in theatre). IRB review is not required for use of *archival data*—information already collected by other researchers (who had IRB approval) that is now available, with no personally identifiable information, for new researchers to analyze.

## Arts and humanities methods

You may notice that in some scholarly papers in the arts and humanities, research methods are discussed only briefly or may even be implicit (not explicitly identified). That occurs when the author is using a widely accepted method with which the intended audience would be familiar. An ethnographic study published in a journal dedicated to ethnography, for example, would omit some of the rationale for the selected method. For undergraduate research papers and presentations, however, the method should be made apparent, as the audience is rarely limited to narrow experts.

That said, you may also notice explanations of scholarly processes that are referred to in other terms. Many scholars in the arts and humanities would not use the word *method* to describe their process of collecting information, as it is traditionally associated with research that is *empirical* (verifiable by observation) or *experimental* (based on scientific tests). Much of the scholarly work conducted in the arts and humanities is *theoretical*: It builds on existing knowledge to explain or create new concepts/phenomena. Theoretical scholarship is distinct from empirical and experimental research in many ways, as indicated by the different terminology.

Scholars doing theoretical and creative work may or may not use the term *method* to describe their process. Alternative terms include *process*, *technique*, *approach* (including *theoretical approach* and *critical approach*), *study*, and *analysis*. Various terms may be used in different contexts, but whatever phrasing is used, scholars are expected to describe the methods of their inquiries.

## Social science methods

Some scholarship in the field of theatre, such as research in theatre education and drama therapy, would be characterized as social science research, which is mainly *empirical* (verifiable by observation), though social scientists also conduct theoretical research. Social scientists may conduct theoretical research in the reverse order: Rather than analyzing an existing theory and applying it to one's own work, researchers sometimes develop a new theory from their research findings. The term for that form of research is *grounded theory*. The new theory emerges from the “ground” up. A scholar may discover something through empirical

research that is not explainable with existing theories. The discovery could be a fluke or a simple anomaly. But if the discovery can be replicated in a different context or otherwise leads to new understanding, the researcher might develop a grounded theory.

## Organizing the method section of a social science research paper

The scholarly methods or processes are usually explained in a paper after the introduction and the review of the literature. Many professors, journal editors, and other readers of your written work, especially in the social sciences, expect research papers to follow a standard format:

- 1 *Abstract*, a brief overview (anywhere from 60 to 250 words, depending on the particular guidelines provided) of the whole paper, with a focus on the methods, results, and implications of the research
- 2 *Introduction*, the purposes of which are to orient readers to the topic of inquiry and inspire interest in it
- 3 *Literature review*
- 4 *Method*
- 5 *Results*
- 6 *Discussion*
- 7 *Conclusion*, which typically offers next steps and implications of the research

Academic posters often include each of those sections as well, though the order may be moved around as needed for column space and visual appeal. Oral presentations may also cue the audience when moving to each section, to clarify distinctions between what came from the review of the literature, for example, as opposed to what was learned in the speaker's own research study.

### ***Subsections of the method section***

Within each of those sections, researchers usually include *subsections* to delineate and organize further the points that go together within each section. Subsections are particularly helpful to aid the reader's understanding of long research papers. We focus here on typical subsections of a method section. The subsections of a literature review (see chapter 2) and results and discussion sections (discussed later) are unique to each paper because they emerge from the themes of the particular research study.

The method section of a research paper or poster, however, often includes three standard subsections, organized under their own subheadings:

- 1 *Participants*: A description of the human participants involved in the study and how they were recruited or observed, if applicable. In most cases,

participants should not be identifiable. Typical information to provide about participants:

- Number of participants, which may include the number recruited as well as how many actually participated, if applicable
- Gender breakdown
- Race and ethnicity breakdown
- Range of ages and median age

Information particular to your participants should be included as well; for example, “All participants were undergraduate students at a large public university in the southwestern United States.” This subsection could also describe briefly how participants were recruited.

- 2 *Materials*: Information about the things used to collect data and/or conduct measurements (e.g., surveys, timed tests, materials the participants read or watched on video). This subsection is termed *Apparatus* when the data were gathered through the use of technical equipment or research instruments (e.g., noise-canceling headphones, eye-movement tracking device, analytical software) or *Apparatus and Materials* if a mixture of mechanisms were used to collect data. Please note that this subsection may need a different subheading that more accurately captures what kinds of things were used to obtain information (e.g., *Survey Instrument* may be a better subheading than *Materials* if the only research material was a survey).
- 3 *Procedure*: An explanation of how the data were collected, verified, and analyzed. The procedure section usually includes a discussion of *variables*, or factors that can change and therefore could affect the results of the study. Rigorous research attempts to control for as many variables as possible, such as by selecting participants with similar self-reports. Any such attempts to limit the number of variables should be noted. Explain the variables that could not be controlled (e.g., participants’ attitudes about theatre) and acknowledge how they could affect the results.

Variables that may weaken the results of the study are a form of *Limitations*. The limitations of your research methods should be acknowledged either as you discuss each method or in summary at the end of the method section.

While those three subsections are fairly standard, students are often not required to include them in exactly that way nor to be limited to those three. In a paper on a complex research study, additional subsections are often needed to delineate aspects of the research methods.

Our students often ask us how much detail is needed in the method section. As you can imagine, anyone who has conducted a long, complicated research project could go on and on about each step of the process, but an exhaustive account would not be of interest or need to most audiences. A widely accepted

consideration for the degree of detail in a method section is whether future researchers would have enough information to replicate the study in their own settings. One aspect of research is the reliability of results: the extent to which the results would be consistent if the study were carried out again with similar conditions. Reliability can only be tested if each researcher's methods are spelled out with enough clarity for others to run the investigation again. We recommend trying to strike a balance between presenting clear, replicable information about stages of your research process and not going into excruciating detail. Reading method sections of published papers in your topic area is the best way of understanding where that balance lies.

## Results and discussion

The *results* (or *findings*) of your study constitute what you have learned from the research process. The results include the data along with your analysis or interpretation of the data. Merely reporting the data is not enough. The point of research is the *analysis* and *interpretation* of what the data signify.

In most reports of scholarly work, the results/findings are explained right after the methods/process. In APA-style, social science papers, the *results* are reported separately from the *discussion*. The results section gives a basic explanation of the data, and the subsequent discussion section provides more thorough interpretation of the results and explains the wider implications of what was discovered. In papers and presentations in the arts and humanities, however, the results or findings are usually interpreted while they are reported. There is no divide between the results and discussion—or between the results and the researcher's interpretation and statement of implications.

## Analyzing research data

Knowing the etymology (origin) of the verb *analyze* can be a useful means of understanding what is really called for when you are asked to analyze information. The Latin origin of *analysis* translates to the “resolution of anything complex into simple elements” (“analysis,” 2010). In that original concept of analysis as the breaking down of complex ideas, analysis is posited as the opposite of *synthesis*, which refers to putting parts back into a coherent whole. That idea effectively informs the task of data analysis, which is very much about breaking apart complex information into simpler parts. The Greek etymology of *analysis* adds another facet to this understanding: “a breaking up, a loosening, releasing”; the verb form in Greek is “to set free; to loose a ship from its moorings” (“analysis,” 2010). Analysis is an act of setting free into the world the knowledge contained in quantitative and qualitative data. The analyzer's work of breaking the data apart helps others make sense of the information. The researcher's analysis could even be described as loosening up the densely packed evidence, allowing others to see and understand the component parts.

Analysis is what gives meaning to the quantitative and qualitative data you have collected. The data do not hold meaning in and of themselves; it is your analytical work that translates for others what the information actually signifies. This chapter offers tools and techniques for doing that important work of making meaning from data.

### ***Data analysis exercise***

Examine each piece of data and freewrite answers to the following questions:

- What is interesting/exciting/notable about this piece of information?
- What is the story it can tell?
- Do you think this data point misrepresents what is really going on?
- What, if anything, is disappointing about it?
- Is it consistent with anything you found in your review of the literature? Does it contradict anything you read in the research literature?
- How could it be most effectively presented? In narrative form? In tables or graphs? Key quotations? (Quotations may come from textual analysis, from research participants, from your own research journal, etc.)

### ***Identifying themes in the data***

The analysis of data is about figuring out the *implications* (or conclusions that can be drawn) of what was discovered. To help our students start to organize their research results, we ask them to list and then freewrite about the three to five themes they have learned from their research (the implications). The next step is to compose a topic sentence for each of those themes: a specific, clear, supportable claim about what the data indicate.

We recommend going from there (composing topic sentences on a few clear themes) to organizing data around each of those topic sentences—perhaps by creating an outline or flow chart. Structure the outline by those topic sentences rather than by each piece of data. This is important: the data do not organize themselves. You as the researcher are the agent. You decide the ordering of points, and you plug in the data as evidence for those points. We have seen it go the wrong way too many times: the surveys say *a*, the primary sources say *b* and *c*, and many of the secondary sources seem to corroborate the survey respondents (*a*), but a few others say something entirely different (*d* and *e*). When research reports are organized by the data, they are messy and confusing, whipping around from one piece of evidence to the next without a sense of control or clear meaning. Successful researchers analyze the data first to identify the implications/themes. The implications of the research are the most interesting points. Then researchers figure out which pieces of data support each of those implications. The difference is enormous between listing a bunch of data that needs to be made sense of and stating clear, focused claims backed up by data.

The data may be represented as evidence in many different forms, including textual evidence (quotations and paraphrases); quotations from survey responses, interviews, or focus groups; and/or tables or graphs of quantitative data. However the data are represented, remember that they play a supporting role. They are the back-up to the claims you make.

## Analyzing quantitative data

A full explanation of how to analyze quantitative data is beyond the scope of this book. Students who have taken a course in quantitative research methods may be able to conduct a *multivariate analysis* of their data, which involves the examination of multiple variables in the data in relationship to one another (e.g., correlations among 300 college student participants' ages, genders, years of acting, and number of minutes in rehearsal per week). However, that level of analysis requires statistical calculation skills that are not typically expected in the field of theatre. This discussion sticks to the terms and types of calculations involved in *univariate* (single variable) and *bivariate* (two variables in interaction with each other) quantitative analysis.

If your research involves a quantitative survey, questionnaire, and/or tests, you have an array of software platforms for building the research instrument, distributing it, collecting data, and even doing preliminary analysis. Platforms such as Survey Monkey, Wufoo, and Qualtrics generate reports and allow users to download data into Excel to create customized spreadsheets and conduct analysis. While those user-friendly ways of reporting data help even those without statistical training to capture and compare data, the researcher's own analysis is needed to explain the relationships within and significance of the information. The following explanations are intended to guide that analysis with regard to fundamental quantitative data. The terms used here apply to most types of quantitative data: surveys/questionnaires, pre- and posttests, structural analysis, and statistical analysis.

### Correlation

Correlation is the relationship between two or more data points, such that when one piece of data changes for a certain sample of the population, the other changes too—either in the same or opposite direction. For example, there is a statistical correlation, or relationship, between the highest level of education a group of people have completed and their income levels. There is also a correlation/relationship (though in the opposite direction) between a population's highest level of education completed and their rates of cigarette smoking. Correlation is not the same as *causation*. Correlation indicates that a relationship exists but does not on its own show that one thing caused the other.

### **Direct correlation/positive correlation/direct relationship**

These three interchangeable terms all refer to a “positive” relationship between two or more data points. A positive relationship means that when one data point



increases, the other does too; when one decreases, so does the other. For example, a population's highest level of education completed and their income levels have a positive correlation or direct relationship, according to many studies. When one is high, the other tends to be too; when one is low, the other usually is as well.

### ***Inverse correlation/negative correlation/inverse relationship***

These interchangeable terms all indicate an inverse or negative correlation between two data points; the data points go in opposite directions when there is a negative correlation. When one increases, the other tends to decrease, and vice versa. Using the same example set above, one would see in many studies that highest education completed tends to have an inverse relationship with rates of cigarette smoking. In other words, the more education a person completes, the less likely that person is to smoke cigarettes on a regular basis. The negative correlation occurs the opposite way too: Someone who smokes cigarettes frequently is less likely to have completed college.

### ***Frequency distribution***

A frequency distribution is a display of how often (how frequently) members of a particular population sample gave particular responses (or did particular behaviors or said particular words). A frequency distribution table shows how many participants gave each response (on a survey or test question) or how many times a phenomenon occurred (in a structural analysis).

### ***Basic statistical terms***

- *Mean*: Average of all the scores. (Using the mean has drawbacks when there are extreme or outlier scores, which skew the mean.)
- *Median*: The middle score when all responses are ranked.
- *Mode*: The most frequently occurring score or phenomenon.
- *Range*: The difference between the highest and lowest responses.
- *Standard deviation*: How much participants' scores differ from the mean (average) score (i.e., the deviation of each score from the mean/average).

### **Analyzing qualitative data**

The metaphor of unpacking luggage is an apt description of how to analyze qualitative data, including primary and secondary source texts, research-journal notes, participant responses (from open-response survey questions, interviews, or focus groups), and any other information that cannot be quantified. Imagine taking each piece of qualitative data, one by one, out of its place and holding it up for examination. What is interesting about it? How is it different from the other things (the other data points) right next to it? With what else does it logically go?

Asking and answering those kinds of questions about qualitative data help bring the information to life. Thinking about the interesting qualities of each piece of data helps you to put together a meaningful story from your own interpretation of the data.

### **Coding**

*Coding* occurs when similar data—or pieces of data that share the same idea—are coded by theme. The coding can be done by hand on hard copies using colored highlighters or annotations by pen or pencil (e.g., asterisk as one code, checkmark as another) or on computer using the highlighter function or symbols in word-processing programs. For large data sets, coding can be done using analytical software (e.g., SPSS, Nvivo, Dedoose) that organizes pieces of text by code/theme.

### **More about acknowledging the limitations of the research**

Every research study has certain limitations: it is limited by the number of survey respondents or the amount of time over which a change is studied or the inherent bias of the researcher, just to name a few examples. Some limitations are unavoidable and expected.

When the limitations will undermine the results of your research, you need to use an alternative method of data collection. When the limitations are avoidable (such as when your presence in a focus group could prompt less-than-honest responses, and someone else could facilitate the focus group instead), you are expected to do your best to prevent them.

Unavoidable limitations that you anticipate ahead of time should be noted in the method section. What are the limitations in each form of data you are collecting? For example, were you only able to study one group of people (an experimental group) without a control group for comparison? Were there distortions in the digital video recording you analyzed? Was the single semester you had for your capstone project an insufficient amount of time to measure significant differences in pre- and posttests? There is no need to document each and every imperfection in your research process; only the factors that likely weakened the project in noticeable ways need to be acknowledged. Later, when you discuss the results, you can speculate on how some results may have been affected by the limitations.

### **Other means of organizing research methods**

Earlier in this chapter we noted that various disciplines use different terms for *methods*, as well as different ways of organizing scholarly writing. Those differences are not arbitrary or accidental, of course. Each academic discipline is distinguished by its *epistemology*, or its theories and ways of knowing. Epistemology

encompasses why and how people in a particular field of study gain knowledge: How do we know what we know? Which methods are used to teach and discover knowledge? Which forms of evidence are considered valid? Where does the knowledge originate? and What are the limits of that knowledge? It stands to reason that scholars operating under different epistemologies would pursue new knowledge in divergent ways and therefore write and speak about their processes in divergent ways.

A good example of the different terminology reflecting different epistemologies is the word *Procedure*, which is particularly suited to empirical and experimental research. Scholars making empirical observations or running experiments must take great care with their research protocol, or procedure. To guard against bias in their observations, to measure accurately, to make equal comparisons, and for many other reasons, empirical and experimental researchers need to follow established procedures. They know that their results will only be meaningful if their data are collected and recorded in precise, methodical steps. Detailing their procedure in the method section of a research paper is understandably expected.

The procedures followed by theoretical and creative scholars are not usually so rigorous or clear-cut—nor do they need to be. A great deal of the scholarly work done in the arts and humanities is interpretive. There is no single, established procedure for analyzing a performance, much less for creating one. Individual scholars take their own approaches to theoretical and creative projects, and those approaches are not necessarily linear or prescriptive. Students conducting scholarly work that does not fit the methods and terminology of empirical or experimental research have an array of options for describing their processes, including the following two, which could also serve as subheadings:

- *Research design*: A summary of the investigation (the research question/goal and a few objectives of the study) and the major stages of gathering information to address the question/goal. The stages of information gathering may be organized *chronologically* (starting with the first step and concluding with the last) or *thematically* (clustering related steps together).
- *Theoretical approach* (also called *critical approach* or *methodological approach*): An explanation of the theory or theories that were foundational to the research and how that existing theory was applied to your own study. We recommend starting by summarizing the theory and then demonstrating its relevance to your research question or project goal. A theoretical idea may be used as a lens for examining primary or secondary sources or other qualitative data; it may offer a methodological approach that you can adapt for your own investigation; and/or a theory may be brought into dialogue with other theories to create a richer understanding of the topic of study.

In the following case study, Sanders, Blakeslee, and Chaffee used survey data to prove the positive impact of diversifying productions on audience turnout.

## Using survey data to prove the efficacy of decentering whiteness

Carson Sanders, Political Science and Theatre Performance undergraduate, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, United States

Katarina Blakeslee, Theatre Performance undergraduate, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, United States

Amy Chaffee, Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre and Dance, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, United States

In the 2019–2020 season, the researchers proposed 10 play-readings at Tulane University with works by authors who were identified as “International” or “Playwrights of Color” for *Live from the Lab*. This was done because, historically, Tulane has centered whiteness in mainstage productions. Most frequently, the reason cited for this blanching was “availability of race/age/gender appropriate actors” or “audience interest.”

Our research posed the questions: Could audiences be more engaged if a more racially and culturally diverse range of voices was presented? And, how could we attract different audiences and performers to the department? Our research demonstrated that a mainstage season does not need to be centered around whiteness to succeed. Of the 9 performances that occurred (COVID-19 cut the season short), the average attendance was 18 audience members per show, a substantial gain (on average 62%) over the 2018–2019 season.

No change in ticket prices, accessibility, marketing, or production level existed from the previous year. The methods of researching audience engagement were executed through a Google Form which was given via QR Code and email at the beginning and end of every performance. This form analyzed reported audience enjoyment, likelihood to attend another reading, and feedback on how to better engage communities through our work. The most profound responses were seen in the shows *Baby Camp* by Nandita Shenoy and *Bird in the Hand* by Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas with 30 and 24 audience members attending, respectively.

Over the course of the season, only 4 out of 51 surveyed audience members indicated that they would not be interested in attending another reading. Given a scale from 1 to 5, 98% of respondents ranked their experience a 4 or above. Actors for the reading of *Soldado Razo* by Luis Valdez specifically expressed their joy in having a performance space where speaking Spanish was accepted and celebrated in a play focused on the story of a Chicano young man.

## Questions for discussion

What are the ways that my topic may make use of the Animating Democracy Aesthetic Attributes?

Why is the value of dialogic performance at the center of Conquergood’s moral mapping for performance ethnographers?

Which data collection methods are appropriate for my topic?

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