**HHS 4U FAMILIES IN CANADA INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Methodology**

### What is the purpose of a “Methodology” section?

- In a social sciences research paper, the Methodology section describes the rationale for the application of specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, and analyze information – i.e., what research method you chose, and why.

- The Methodology section of the paper provides readers with information regarding what *methods* were applied in order to understand a specific research problem and/or prove a specific hypothesis. This is critical, as it emphasizes the validity and reliability of your work.

- The Methodology section of a research paper answers two main questions:
  - How was the data collected or generated?
  - How was the data analyzed?

### How do I write a Methodology section?

*An effectively written Methodology section should:*

1. **Introduce the overall methodological approach for investigating your research problem.** Is your study qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both (mixed method)?

2. **Indicate how the approach fits the overall research design.** Your methods should have a clear connection to your research problem. In other words, make sure that your methods will actually address the problem. *One of the most common issues found in research papers is that the proposed methodology is not suitable for achieving the stated objective of your paper.*

3. **Describe the specific methods of data collection you are going to use.** These include surveys, interviews, questionnaires, observations, and/or archival research. If you are analyzing existing data, such as a data set or archival documents, describe how it was originally created or gathered, and by whom.

4. **Explain how you intend to analyze your results.** Will you use statistical analysis? Will you use specific theoretical perspectives to help you analyze a text or explain observed behaviors? Describe how you plan to obtain an accurate assessment of relationships, patterns, trends, distributions, and possible contradictions found in the data.

5. **Provide background and a rationale for methodologies that are unfamiliar to your readers.** Very often in the social sciences, research problems and the methods for investigating them require more explanation/rationale than widely accepted rules governing the natural and physical sciences. Be clear and concise in your explanation.
6. **Provide a justification for subject selection and sampling procedure.** For instance, if you propose to conduct interviews, how do you intend to select the sample population? If you are analyzing texts, which texts have you chosen and why? If you are using statistics, why is this set of statistics being used? If other data sources exist, explain why the data you chose is most appropriate for addressing the research problem.

7. **Describe potential limitations.** Are there any practical limitations that could affect your data collection? How will you attempt to control for potential confounding variables and errors? If your methodology may lead to problems you can anticipate, state this openly, and show why pursuing this methodology outweighs the risk of these problems cropping up. *If you’re not sure what constitutes as a limitation, visit this page for helpful suggestions.*

8. **Your writing should be direct, precise, and always written in the past tense.** Be sure to avoid . . .

   a. irrelevant detail (*i.e.*, background information that doesn’t directly help the reader understand the chosen methods)

   b. unnecessary explanation of basic procedures (*i.e.*, the focus should be on how you applied a method rather than the mechanics of the method)

   c. problem blindness (*i.e.*, pretending that your methodology was flawless – you are bound to encounter some issues!)

   d. missing citations (*i.e.*, not giving credit to theories, studies, etc. that informed the choice and application of a particular method)

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**Example**

**Method**

Data was collected from 83 women at a private Midwestern university. Preliminary examination of the data revealed that one participant was an outlier on several measures (scores from three to six standard deviations from the mean), and consequently data from this individual was not used in any of the analyses reported in the paper. The final sample consisted of 82 participants.

The participants were between the ages of 18 and 36 years (M = 24.36; SD = 4.73). Forty-seven of the participants described themselves as white, 19 described themselves as African-American, 5 as Asian-American, and 4 used the term “other” to describe their racial background. Seven of the participants identified as Hispanic. Forty-four participants were of traditional college age (18–23 years). Participants
received either extra credit or entry into a raffle for a $40 Visa gift card in exchange for their participation.

The following measures were implemented in the collection of data:

*Dating scenarios.*

Participants were assigned to one of two conditions of the study based on the month in which they were born. This method of condition assignment was selected due to the functionality of the online survey software used for the study. Participants were presented with scenarios about hypothetical first date situations. One scenario (online meeting) described a situation in which the participant met someone on Facebook with whom she was interested in going on a date. Facebook was chosen as the online meeting facilitator because its use is fairly common among college students, with more than 50 million individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 having Facebook accounts. Online dating Web sites (e.g., Match.com, eHarmony.com) may not be used as frequently by college students because these individuals are in social situations that put them in regular contact with potential relationship partners. The online meeting scenario read as follows:

You have been corresponding with someone on Facebook and have exchanged comments and e-mails a few times. He is a mutual friend that you met on the site whom you do not know much about and have not met in person. You like his profile information and find him attractive. He asks you to go on a date with him and meet him for the first time in person. You are currently not in a relationship and are excited about meeting him.

The second scenario (face-to-face meeting) described a situation in which the participant met someone whom she was interested in dating from one of her classes:

You have been talking with one of your classmates from school. You only know him from being in your class and from a few brief conversations you have had before and after class. You like him and find him attractive. He asks you to go on a date with him and see him for the first time outside of school. You are currently not in a relationship and are excited about meeting with him.

In both the online and face-to-face meeting scenarios, the two people going on the date shared a common social network, but had minimal personal interactions.

*Dating Self-Protection Against Rape Scale.*
Participants’ intent to engage in self-protective behavior was measured using the Dating Self-Protection Against Rape Scale (DSPARS) developed by Moore and Waterman. On this measure, respondents are asked to report how important safety-related behaviors (e.g., letting a friend or family member know where you are; meeting in a private place instead of a public place) would be when going out on a date with the person described in the scenario. The unidimensional measure consists of 15 items on a Likert-type scale from 1 = “not at all important” to 6 = “very important,” with higher scores indicating greater self-protection intent. Moore and Waterman’s study demonstrated a high level of internal consistency for the DSPARS ($a = 0.82$). Strong internal consistency ($a = 0.86$), as well as convergent validity of the measure, have been demonstrated by other scholars.

*Dating background and Internet usage questionnaire.*

A dating background questionnaire was created to gather information about the participants’ previous and current dating experiences. Participants were asked to report whether or not they were presently in a relationship, how many different people they estimated they had gone on dates with in the past, how frequently they went on dates, and how appealing Internet dating seemed to them. Participants were asked whether they had ever met someone in person who they had only known previously online, and those who answered affirmatively were asked to indicate whether they had met the individual for a date. Finally, participants were asked to estimate the number of hours per week they spent on Facebook.

The measures were presented to participants using web-based survey software. After providing consent, the participants were presented with one of the two dating scenarios. After reading the scenario, participants filled out the items on the DSPARS to measure their intent to self-protect if they were in that situation. Afterward, participants completed the dating background and demographic questionnaires. They were then debriefed regarding the purposes of the study.

## Methodology Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Level Four (100-80)</th>
<th>Level Three (79-65)</th>
<th>Level Two (64-50)</th>
<th>Level One (49-0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp; Understanding</td>
<td>expertly</td>
<td>satisfactorily</td>
<td>vaguely</td>
<td>ineffectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes a clear, concise summary of the approach used for the study, providing a rationale for the methods selected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking &amp; Inquiry</td>
<td>expertly</td>
<td>satisfactorily</td>
<td>vaguely</td>
<td>ineffectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discusses how the approach will be of benefit to the research, justifying the parameters of the study (eg., sample groups; procedures; etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>expertly</td>
<td>satisfactorily</td>
<td>vaguely</td>
<td>ineffectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides a thorough, accurate description of the specific methods used to collect data, noting how the results will be later analyzed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>expertly</td>
<td>satisfactorily</td>
<td>vaguely</td>
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<td>Edits carefully for spelling and grammatical errors, ensuring clarity and flow of writing.</td>
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**COMMENTS**