

IN CONVERSATION WITH

DR. JOSEPH PONTEROTTO



THE QUINTESSENCE SERIES:
Interdisciplinary and International Work by SCPs

International & Interdisciplinary Presence

Dr. Ponterotto is well known for his research and teaching in the areas of multicultural counseling, immigration, psychobiography, multicultural personality. His research on multicultural personality matrix model has international implications. Scan the QR code to see a list of selected references on psychobiography and multicultural personality.

PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY VS BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Ponterotto distinguishes psychobiography from biography using the iceberg metaphor. Biography is the tip of the iceberg and psychobiography is the vast area under water.



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Source of Motivation

Dr. Ponterotto reflects on his early life growing up in Bronx, NY as Italian American and then living abroad in Rome, Italy at the age of 8 as being crucial in the solidification of his bicultural identity. Having to fight to be accepted as an Italian American in Italy at the age of 8 increased his empathy about the impact of stereotypes and prejudice.

Pursuing PhD at UC Santa Barbara under the mentorship of Dr. J Manuel Casas was another experience that Dr. Ponterotto states as being influential in shaping his research interests.

Psychobiography

According to Dr. Ponterotto, psychobiography which is an in-depth psychological study of an individual, comes closest to the practice of psychotherapy. This approach takes into account a person's history, social context, ancestry, and time period.

As a research technique, psychobiography is interdisciplinary and involves collaborations with translators, historians, journalists, ethicists, legal advisors, sociologists. It requires proficiency in both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Dr. Ponterotto highlights that South Africa is ahead of the U.S. in psychobiography research and has successfully used this method for social justice advocacy.

Navigating Challenges and Barriers



Dr. Ponterotto describes psychobiography as a time consuming methodology which is often a challenge to pursue in academic settings. He reflects on his own journey as a psychobiographer which started after being a tenured professor.

Another challenge in psychobiography relates to ethics. Dr. Ponterotto notes that psychobiography researchers must consider the implications of their writings on public perceptions.

Learnings and Impact

- Dr. Ponterotto expresses joy in being able to mentor students and in turn learn from them. He views mentorship as personally and professionally empowering.
- He teaches careerography, an iteration of psychobiography in helping students learn career theories.
- By publishing in journals such as the American Psychologist, Dr. Ponterotto has helped increase the visibility of psychobiography as a research approach.

Advice for Graduate Students

- Be open to research experiences and pursue collaborations outside of your personal research interests.
- Craft more interdisciplinary collaborations by joining teams outside of your department.
- Suggest interdisciplinary faculty members to your advisors if you wish to form a collaboration
- Don't loose sight of family and self care.
- Use your skillset in ways that offer you a desired work balance.