

Introducing Qualitatively-Driven Mixed-Method Designs

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With increasing frequency, *Qualitative Health Research* (*QHR*) has often been receiving only the qualitative “half” of mixed-method articles, with the other half, the quantitative component, presumably submitted to another journal that accepts quantitative articles. This leaves all of us—editors, reviewers, and readers—frequently wondering and asking questions such as, “Is this the best half?” “What does the other half add?” and sometimes, “Where is the other half?”

We have been frustrated at only receiving a part of the study and, therefore, having to grapple with the significance of the whole. This is especially so given that we have argued in a previous editorial, “mixed-method design consists of one complete project,” and is “. . . one study that may be published by itself *that includes* an additional supplemental strategy that uses a different analytical technique and is not comprehensive enough to stand alone” (Morse & Cheek, 2014, p. 3). All of these questions lead us to yet another set of related questions about the submission: Have these authors violated rigor by splitting their study, thereby damaging the purpose, comprehensive design, and conduct of a mixed-method study? Or, if each part is sufficiently developed to be able to stand alone and be published in its own right, do they really have a multiple methods study?

Added to these concerns, there remains the million dollar question: Where is the point of interface (i.e., “the position in the research process in which the two components meet,” Morse & Niehaus, 2009, p. 55) in a mixed-method study that is only partly reported? Mixed-method design is more than simply using two or more research approaches or parts thereof in a single study. It is the point of interface of those approaches and the consequent integration of the results of the various components in the research that makes the study a mixed-method design. By publishing the study in various pieces, the strength that comes from integration of the whole is lost. If these findings are “part of” a mixed-method study, it must be made clear how the “parts” actually interface and where their point of interface is within that mixed-method study. After all, such integration is the key in mixed designs, both to the design and to the significance of the study.

Our final concern was that mixed-method studies that use both a qualitative core and supplementary component

(*QUAL-qual*) are not published in the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (*JMMR*), so we contacted Donna Mertens, the past editor of *JMMR*, for the story. The background was that *JMMR* decided not to publish qualitative mixed-method articles (*QUAL-qual*), based on the assumption that authors had the option of submitting their qualitative mixed-method manuscripts elsewhere. The research community has misinterpreted this decision to mean that mixed-method research consists only of qualitative and quantitative combinations. Therefore, we felt there was a need for qualitative researchers to have a venue for publishing their *QUAL-qual* mixed-method work, rather than being excluded on the basis of method alone. We needed to have these conversations as full players in the discussion—not from the periphery, but from the center. Consequently, *QHR* has taken action to redress this imbalance, beginning in 2014 with our editorial, “Making Room for Qualitatively-Driven Mixed-Method Research.” (Morse & Cheek, 2014)

As explained in the 2014 editorial, the Board saw it as part of their remit to stimulate debate and discussion about intersections between qualitative inquiry and qualitatively-driven mixed-method research, by publishing excellent articles about these issues. Issues of particular concern and significance to qualitative inquiry are those demonstrating the importance of dynamic reflexivity in qualitatively-driven mixed-method design and/or examples of excellent studies using qualitatively-driven mixed-method research designs: *QUAL-quan* or *QUAL-qual*. We also wanted to make a space for qualitatively-driven multiple method studies to be reported as an integrated whole. Thus, we have created a new section in *QHR*: *Qualitatively-Driven Mixed- and Multiple-Method Research*, with Julianne Cheek serving as the section editor. Submitted articles for the section must be qualitatively-driven designs, either *QUAL-qual* or *QUAL-quan*, or highlight the qualitative contribution to quantitative

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research. Alternatively, they may be reports of qualitatively-driven multiple-method studies that focus on the way the individual studies were integrated if the individual studies have been published. This is an exciting development for mixed- and multiple-method designs and for *QHR*, particularly at this time, when funding agencies such as the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) are recognizing the importance of patient-centered research.

However, if we are to achieve our goal of adding qualitative inquiry to the center of mixed-method and multiple method debates, we need to do more than simply create a new section. Thus, from the outset, we decided to be transparent about how articles would be reviewed and about decisions for the acceptance/rejection of mixed-method and multiple method articles. These criteria were published in 2014 (Morse & Cheek, 2014) and should help authors through the review process, address the questions for authors that often remain unanswered, and consequently strengthen qualitative mixed-method and multiple method research. We were also very insistent about the need for clarity in the use of terms such as mixed-method as opposed to mixed methods, and between mixed-method and multiple methods in manuscripts submitted—something imperative in a field that is still contested and in development (Morse & Cheek, 2014).

The other part of *QHR*'s strategy for making room for qualitatively-driven mixed-method research was to put out a call for a special issue specifically focused on qualitatively-driven mixed-method and the contribution of qualitative inquiry to quantitative research. Our January 2015 call for articles, initially about qualitatively-driven mixed-method, received a very enthusiastic response, and some of those received are included in this special issue.

This issue of *QHR* begins with several commentaries about the mixed-method and multiple methods area and its intersection with qualitative inquiry. Pertti Peltto challenges us to think twice about the presumed newness of mixed-method design. He suggests that researchers in anthropology have been mixing since the 1930s, but initially, this research was not called "mixed-method." The second article, by Jennifer Greene, speaks to the introduction of specific terminology for, and naming of, mixed-method research in evaluation. She asks significant questions regarding the way the contemporary "mixed methods" emerged, the development of mixed methods over recent decades, and where the next steps will be.

Four qualitatively-driven research articles follow these commentaries. The first research article is a retrospective armchair walkthrough of a study about mindfulness training in schoolchildren. Cheek et al. allow us

inside the decisions they made during the course of their study and the effect of using such reflexivity with design changes from an initial QUAN-*qual* mixed-method study to a qualitatively-driven QUAL + QUAL + QUAN multiple method study.

In the second study, Gibbins et al. report on caregiver's inference of pain in extremely low gestational age infants. Interviews with caregivers, Likert-type questions, and focus groups (QUAL + *quan* + *qual* design), and the subsequent integration of the findings from these design components, enabled assessment of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and clinical observations used by caregivers when assessing these fragile infants.

The third of these four research articles explores influences on the "healthfulness" of prostate cancer survivors' diets. Coa et al. use in-depth interviews with 20 survivors and three 24-hour dietary recall interviews to understand dietary patterns more holistically. The results of the interface of these research design components provide rich and important insights into reasons for the dietary choices among prostate cancer survivors.

In the fourth article, which describes the purpose of refining an assessment tool for physician perspectives on colorectal cancer surveillance care, Zapka et al. conducted a qualitatively-driven mixed-method study. They began with key informant interviews with physicians and also collected participant feedback to improve the assessment tools validity and reliability.

These articles are followed by a keynote address given in 2014 by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber at the 6th annual Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Methods Festival, at St. Catherine's College, Oxford, UK. Here, she reminds us that one of the significant challenges in mixed-method research is the impact it is having, and might have, on qualitative concepts. These concepts are now being used more tightly in mixed-method research (bounded), perhaps due to the formalization of the qualitative component of mixed-method designs, trust in the synergy of "mixing methods," the pragmatic approaches to mixing methods, and an underlying push for certainty in design.

The next section of this special issue illustrates qualitative contributions to quantitative methods. This section commences with commentary by David Morgan in which he describes the movement from qualitative themes to generate hypotheses for quantitative testing. He is interested in procedures ranging from operationalization to the development of complex models. But he goes further—exploring also the quantitative-qualitative interaction both with respect to a single project and the members of the "mixed" project team.

Next, two articles focus on validity issues: Story describes validating the measurement of social capital in Bangladesh, and Hanson et al. validate a survey for

American Indians using the think aloud and test–retest measures. Such qualitative validation is an extremely important use of qualitative methods. The final article in this section, by Krentzman et al., is a secondary analysis of data obtained from a randomized control trial. The study explores well-being, testing a gratitude intervention in a sample of individuals with alcohol-use disorders. The measurement scale used to identify and rate emotions in the sample group produced an unexpected finding, and this enabled the investigators to develop a conceptual framework. The authors concluded that emotions regulation is a significant topic for these individuals, and one that should be given more attention in future research.

Thus, without doubt, mixed-method and multiple-methods designs open up the possibility for new and exciting opportunities: Qualitative researchers may use their thick descriptions and theory building, and report statistical findings. However, it is important to be clear that *QHR* will continue primarily to publish qualitative research—research that uses meticulous detail and provides a foundation to

understanding. But now we have made space to publish something more: quantitative support for qualitative inquiry.

However, qualitative research and the outworking of all its principles, such as social justice, human experience, evidence, and calls for action that can make a difference to the lives and health of individuals, remain the driving force and central frame of *QHR*'s remit. We hope that this added dimension to *QHR* will contribute to the development of these principles in new and fascinating ways. We have acquired a new string to our already powerful bow.

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