

Introduction to Special Section of the *Journal of Family Psychology*, Advances in Mixed Methods in Family Psychology: Integrative and Applied Solutions for Family Science

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Mixed methods in family psychology refer to the systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques to represent family processes and settings. Over the past decade, significant advances have been made in study design, analytic strategies, and technological support (such as software) that allow for the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods and for making appropriate inferences from mixed methods. This special section of the *Journal of Family Psychology* illustrates how mixed methods may be used to advance knowledge in family science through identifying important cultural differences in family structure, beliefs, and practices, and revealing patterns of family relationships to generate new measurement paradigms and inform clinical practice. Guidance is offered to advance mixed methods research in family psychology through sound principles of peer review.

Keywords: mixed methods, qualitative, quantitative, peer review

Family settings and processes can be represented by text and words (e.g., categories, narratives, stories, events, and scripts); by numbers (scales, variables, mathematical models); and by images, sounds, and smells (photos, videos, etc.). Representing family settings and processes in more than one of these ways can often produce results that would not otherwise have been found and can bring us closer to understanding complex family circumstances such as contextual influences on relationships, changes over time, the bidirectional nature of relationships, and the role of meanings, interpretation, and beliefs in social interactions.

Mixed methods refer to the integration of these kinds of quantitative and qualitative techniques for representation in the study of family settings and family processes—integrating the use of text and words, numbers, and images to better represent the family processes we are trying to understand. Over the past decade, significant advances have been made in study design, analytic strategies, and technological support (such as software) that allow for the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods and for making appropriate inferences from mixed methods. This

special section of the *Journal of Family Psychology* highlights recent research that advances the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative techniques that can be applied to issues of key concern to family psychologists.

Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, and Way (2008) recently outlined the circumstances under which mixing qualitative and quantitative methods is appropriate for developmental science, and there is considerable overlap with the needs of family psychology researchers. As in developmental research, family contextual constructs are difficult to capture using one type of measurement strategy (e.g., the effects of extreme poverty on caregiving requires understanding multiple setting and ecological influences); the reciprocal effects of individual-level and broader systems-level factors (e.g., the usefulness of follow-up interviews with caregivers in large national data sets about day care beliefs); detecting mechanisms of change (e.g., in-depth analysis of after school programs and how they might affect children and parents); and identification of new phenomena require mixed methods given that quantitative scales may entirely miss them (e.g., study of “outliers” in family composition, relationships, and routines).

Cultural differences in family structures, beliefs, and practices can be dramatic and require qualitative and quantitative measures to capture and understand (Therborn, 2009; Weisner, 2011). Therborn (2009) characterizes seven broad cross-cultural patterns in family systems around the world, for example: Christian European, Islamic West Asian/North African, South Asian Hindu, Confucian East Asian, Sub-Saharan African; Southeast Asian, and Creole (U.S. South, Caribbean, Brazil, parts of South America). Each of these seven broad family patterns differs in social dimensions that have profound influences on the pathways of social development for children. Including these context

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and setting features of family requires both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

In addition, family psychologists must also take into account nested designs and nonindependence of reporters, units of analysis beyond the individual or the dyad, generational effects, and recursive designs. Family processes linking parenting and family settings to child outcomes are important, yet difficult to measure directly (Tseng & Seidman, 2007). Establishing construct validity of family assessments is also difficult. Furthermore, the family is a unit of analysis that is difficult to define even within a cultural community, much less cross-culturally; it changes constantly over time and overlaps in complex ways with the kinship group and household. Research with direct application to families, such as family intervention and prevention research in health, violence, and relationship competence, also often requires mixed methods.

We know that the world is not linear and additive, and families surely are settings that are complex in every way. Qualitative methods—the use of holistic, meaning-centered evidence—can help us understand this complexity. The articles in our special section use both symbolic (beliefs, goals, rules) and behavioral (customs, practices, actions) kinds of qualitative data. Nor is the world in any case inherently qualitative or quantitative: “. . . it is the act of human representation through numbers or non-numeric signifiers like words that make aspects of the scientific enterprise qualitative or quantitative” (Yoshikawa et al., 2008, p. 345). Of course, for *analytical* purposes, we attempt to model and understand family processes using quantitative methods that assume linear, variable-centered, generalizable, and additive processes, and these techniques are very valuable. Qualitative methods also can be systematic and show patterns. Integrating these ways of representations of families can, we believe, add significant value to our findings.

The articles in this special section illustrate a variety of ways of approaching the integration of methods and address a range of issues important to family psychologists. Mixed methods are particularly important for comparative cultural research in settings where family beliefs, practices, and household arrangements are different. Raval and Martini (2011) studied families in urban Gujarat State in North India and used qualitative understanding of emotional regulation in joint and conjugal household Hindu families in that cultural context, with quantitative assessments adapted from Western scales. They argue that relational and interdependent socialization goals in urban middle-class India, such as techniques to control emotions such as anger or sadness or physical pain, mean that optimal child functioning may depend on parent interpretations of child behaviors in cultural context. The Simpkins, Vest, and Price (2011) article on Mexican immigrant families shows how discontinuous parent experiences with organized activities that their children are engaged in emerge from different cultural experiences as well as from the goal of parents to provide new and different lives for their children. The Simpkins et al. article also goes from quantitative evidence of differences in organized activity participation and continuity and then uses

those quantitative groups in analyzing patterns in qualitative interview data.

Harkness and colleagues (2011) report on five middle-class European and U.S. community samples comparing four major activities (meals, family time, play, and school- or developmentally related activities). The cultural meaning of these activities, as well as quantitative comparisons across the sample families' daily diaries, are presented to illustrate how cultural meanings and themes are woven into parents' organization and understanding of their children's daily lives. Interview text was scored and typical days are summarized based on modal diary and questionnaire patterns, showing, as the authors say, that “. . . qualities can be counted, and quantities can be described” (Harkness et al., 2011, p. 811).

Mixed method approaches can reveal patterns in the data when reliance on a single method may obscure important findings. Sechrist, Sutor, Riffin, Taylor-Watson, and Pillemer (2011) used a sequential quantitative and qualitative analysis to uncover significant differences in the ways that Black and White mothers emphasize relationships within the family. These findings were then applied to develop a measure of familism. Thus, mixed method approaches also can be generative in producing new family-level measurements. Jarrett, Bahar, and Taylor (2011) similarly went inside the worlds of poor neighborhoods that are dangerous and have few places for play and family activities and low collective efficacy. Jarrett and colleagues' interviews with mothers in Head Start programs showed, nonetheless, that mothers found ways to overcome these difficulties. Their research revealed seven caregiver management strategies that promoted child physical activity among these African American families, despite multiple neighborhood barriers. These included ecological appraisal, boundary enforcement, chaperonage, kin-based play groups, collective supervision, local resource brokering, and extralocal resource brokering. These practices, identified through parent conversations about their family practices, now form the basis for further systematic identification in larger scale surveys and neighborhood observational studies.

Mixed methods approaches can inform clinical interventions. Monaghan, Sanders, Kelly, Cogen, and Streisand (2011) integrated qualitative interviews into program evaluation when designing a clinical trial for the treatment of Type 1 diabetes. Although findings from quantitative surveys suggested that the program was satisfactory, follow-up interviews revealed that greater attention to parent support and an alteration in timing of the intervention would potentially improve retention. The addition of a mixed methods design to program evaluation may save time and money for family researchers conducting large randomized clinical trials. Similarly, Winter, Fiese, Spagnola, and Anbar (2011) had children with asthma complete story stems relating to routine family events in everyday life such as meals. They then coded these for how secure the child felt about the family and its support. Not only did more severe asthma severity predict more internalizing and externalizing symptoms in children, the narratives children reported that were coded as less secure were associated with more child inter-

nalizing symptoms. The open-ended completion of sentences and stories can be a qualitative way to gain indirect evidence of children's thoughts and feelings about what family relationships and experiences mean to them, which they cannot or are not able to report in other ways.

A large group of outstanding reviewers assisted us in evaluating these articles. We noticed that some experts in the substantive topics covered in the articles (e.g., intergenerational relationships, race, and clinical interventions) were reluctant to review submissions that used methods they were not experts in (either quantitative or qualitative) in spite of their expertise on the *topics* of the submission. We persuaded some to review the submissions anyway, and we hope that this priority of putting concerns regarding method expertise over substance is changing. Studies that bring new evidence in a field should be of interest for that reason, regardless of the methods used, or at least would not be excluded from our attention because of methods alone. There are widely used standards for higher quality qualitative methods, just as there are for quantitative methods—although these are debated, just as quantitative methods are at times. The term *methodocentrism* describes identification with certain methods as a personal identity or ideology, as opposed to methods as tools for representing the family topics we are trying to understand. The studies and the authors in our special issue use several strong methods, but are not methodocentric. The masthead of the *Journal of Family Psychology* includes the following statement:

This premier family research journal is devoted to the study of the family system, broadly defined, from multiple perspectives and to the application of psychological methods to advance knowledge related to family research, patterns and processes, and assessment and intervention, as well as to the policies relevant to advancing the quality of life for families.

Mixed methods approaches have the potential to advance knowledge in family psychology from all of these vantage points. We encourage all family scholars to apply their substantive expertise when reviewing mixed methods submissions for this journal and others.

The same publication standards hold true for mixed methods approaches as for high-quality quantitative and qualitative manuscripts. We applied the following principles in selecting these outstanding articles for this special section: Is the rationale for a mixed methods approach clearly specified? Are the qualitative and quantitative data systematically integrated in such a way that maximizes the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of each approach? Is the form of data integration clearly specified? Do the authors clearly identify how they integrate quantitative and qualitative data either through merging, connecting, or embedding data (Creswell, Klassen, Plano-Clark, & Clegg Smith, 2011)? At what phase of the study was the mixed methods approach introduced (e.g., pilot phase, program evaluation, embedded in longitudinal study)? Is the method of data collection clearly specified for both the quantitative and qualitative data? If interviews or videorecorded data were used, how were the questions or video samples derived? How were the qualitative data reduced and summarized? If the qualitative data were coded, how were the coders

trained? What were the rules for transcription? How was consensus reached? If the report is part of a larger study (as many mixed method studies are embedded in larger studies), how is it distinct from other published reports or those under review? Do the textual or narrative examples provide sufficient detail (without being redundant) to illustrate key findings? Does the discussion highlight the advantages and limitations of a mixed methods approach?

The future of research in family psychology will require not only advances in mixed methods but the ability to integrate findings from multiple disciplines interested in the well-being of families. A recent report published by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2011) concludes that an integrated science of research on families will require innovative approaches, including mixed methods, conducted by multidisciplinary teams. The scholarly backgrounds of the authors of these published reports represent diverse disciplines including sociology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, psychological anthropology, and interdisciplinary social sciences. The Institute of Medicine report also concludes that it is challenging to publish mixed methods family research in high-quality peer-review journals because of space limitations and reviewer bias. We are appreciative of Nadine Kaslow, editor of the *Journal of Family Psychology*, who had the vision to allocate valuable editorial space to this important topic. We are also appreciative of the many reviewers who provided fair, constructive, and unbiased reviews of the articles that appear in this special section. The *Journal of Family Psychology* looks forward to advancing mixed methods research not only as innovative methods but as a means to providing real solutions for the challenges that families face in everyday life.

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Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorships of **Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behavior Processes**, **Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied**, **Neuropsychology**, and **Psychological Methods** for the years 2014–2019. Anthony Dickinson, PhD, Wendy A. Rogers, PhD, Stephen M. Rao, PhD, and Scott E. Maxwell, PhD, respectively, are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2013 to prepare for issues published in 2014. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Search chairs have been appointed as follows:

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