Doing Qualitatively Driven Mixed Methods and Pluralistic Qualitative Research

Nollaig Frost and
Deborah Bailey-Rodriguez

Contents

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Learning Goals

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Describe the values, underlying philosophy and epistemological principles of qualitatively driven mixed methods;
- Know more about methodological pluralism;
- Understand the rationale for a qualitatively driven mixed methods study in the context of other mixed methods;
- Be aware of differences and overlaps between analytical, within-method* and across-method pluralistic research;
- Understand the implications of applying a 'both/and' position when exploring the elements that produce change;
- Know more about pluralism and pragmatism, including understanding more about the implications of paradigmatic flexibility, 'paradigmatic peace' and how methodolatry privileges certain research methods and underlying frameworks;
- Have considered how to ensure quality (including ethics) when conducting pluralistic research;
- Understand practical aspects of being a pluralistic researcher working alone, or working as part of a team, and conducting a pluralistic case study.

Introduction

Many researchers and clinicians take an 'either/or' position regarding factors responsible for change when conducting research (Cooper and McLeod 2007). Some methods emphasise lived experience, others focus on identity construction, and yet others focus on cognitive processes and so on. In this chapter, we will explore how these *together* can produce change and may be important to the reality of the individual. We will specifically look at the application of a *qualitatively driven mixed methods* approach to produce more holistic and multi-dimensional insight into phenomena by using a combination of methods.

A qualitatively driven mixed methods applies a *both/and* position when exploring the elements that produce change, or that are under investigation, which can be of particular value to counselling and psychotherapy research. There are various ways of engaging with qualitatively driven mixed methods, and pluralism in qualitative research (PQR) is one such method, and is the focus of this chapter.

Pluralistic Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy Research

A pluralistic approach seeks to minimise reductionism and enhance more holistic understandings of experiences, changes and practices of behaviours in context by engaging with a plurality of meanings. Counsellors and psychotherapists recognise that all understanding is dependent on experience. In a complex world, humans will have a variety of experiences and likely a degree of disagreement and contradiction, in addition to some consensus (Rescher 1993).

Pluralism views peoples' experience as multi-dimensional and as something which requires the adoption of multiple theoretical and methodological frameworks (Chamberlain et al. 2011; Frost 2011). Further, it is worth highlighting the overlap between therapeutic practice and pluralistic qualitative research, of the multiplicity of meanings and multi-layered understandings of client experiences, illustrating the suitability, value and importance that this approach brings to counselling and psychotherapy research. Mono-method approaches cannot capture multi-layered understandings around behaviour. Therefore, the application of a pluralistic qualitative approach when inquiring into counselling or psychotherapy allows for a deeper engagement with the subjective meanings attached to multi-dimensional experiences and behaviours (Josselin and Willig 2014).

Mixed Methods and Qualitatively-Driven Mixed Methods

People's experiences and lived realities are, as suggested, multi-dimensional; and if phenomena have different layers, then choosing to view these phenomena from the perspective of a single dimension may mean that our understanding is inadequate and incomplete (Mason 2006). Mixed methods research refers to the use of two or more methodological strategies in a single research study with the purpose of gaining insight into another aspect of the phenomenon under investigation which cannot be accessed by use of one method alone. Therefore, mixed methods research is a systematic way of using at least two research methods in order to answer a single over-arching research question; these research methods can be either all quantitative or all qualitative, or can be both quantitative and qualitative (Morse and Niehaus 2009). The value of combining methods is that it provides a more enhanced understanding than using a single method (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007), which in turn offers a more balanced perspective of phenomena (Morse and Chung 2003). Furthermore, mixing methods goes beyond solely the mixing of type of data, such as whether it is quantitative or qualitative, and rather, it is also concerned with the mixing of worldviews and ways of understanding these as well (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006).

Activity

- What is your favoured research approach? Consider some of its key advantages.
- What might another method bring or add to your study?

Qualitatively driven mixed methods privilege the qualitative approach. It is a particularly suitable approach when there is a lack of clarity in a theoretical framework and when exploring areas which have not received much attention (Hesse-Biber et al. 2015). Drawing on qualitatively driven mixed methods offers the opportunity to generate multi-dimensional material (Gabb 2009) and permits a more holistic insight into experiences that can be understood from a combination of epistemo-

logical and ontological stances (Frost and Nolas 2011), suggesting that the ability to perceive these layers is rooted in paradigmatic flexibility. Qualitatively driven mixed methods offer the opportunity to explore and understand phenomena and their complexities in a manner that is not bound by methodological dogma and constraints (Elichaoff et al. 2014). This approach also pursues access to unique perspectives on experience and seeks to highlight the dynamism and complexity of phenomena by its use of multiple paradigms (Hesse-Biber et al. 2015).

The use of several paradigms may incur tension, but the dialogue between contrasting ideas can provide a space for new insights and understandings (Creswell 2009). Gabb (2009) puts forward the notion of 'messiness' of research in analysis and representations of phenomena, rather than the tidying away of experiential loose ends that illustrate lived lives. The retention of messiness in the representation of findings does not indicate that analytical rigour is at risk. Rather, it reflects the complexity of experiences that may otherwise be lost; loose ends do not mean frayed ends (Rodriguez and Frost 2015). This may go some way to further illustrate how the richness of multi-dimensionality can be understood through the use of qualitatively driven mixed methods. Therefore it is recognised that multi-dimensionality and multi-methodological perspectives offer some means to access these additional layers, conflicts, contradictions and messiness (Frost et al. 2011), where a co-operative relationship between question, epistemology, paradigm and researcher is part of an ongoing reflexive process (Chamberlain et al. 2011).

Another way of acknowledging and upholding the multi-dimensionality of experience is through a pluralistic qualitative approach. This recognises that different perspectives produce distinct pictures of meaning-making, and the layering of different approaches creates a tapestry of insights of the same phenomenon (Josselin 2013).

Pluralism in Qualitative Research (PQR)

A qualitative pluralistic approach recognises that there are multiple ways of viewing phenomena rather than there being a single 'truth', and it also understands that different methods set out to achieve different things, and thus provide diverse insights into the same phenomena. Reality and existence are seen to be multiple (Johnson 2015), and as previously alluded to, people's experiences are multi-dimensional as well as fragmentary and contradictory. Pluralism argues that a single method cannot convey everything there is to know about a phenomenon, and therefore a choice should not have to be made between which method to use, as employment of two (or more) can provide multi-perspectival and holistic understanding (Frost 2011; Willig 2013). Consequently, the presence of multi-ontological stances and the tensions they generate are strengths of a pluralistic approach, which involves moving away from an 'either/or' position to a 'both/and' position (Frost and Nolas 2011). Furthermore, analytical rigour is strengthened by making explicit the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the different methods, demonstrating the researcher's conceptual clarity of these (Barbour 1998), as well as by highlighting the gaps and divergences arising from the separate

analyses (Frost and Nolas 2011). In addition, by analysing the data in this manner and acknowledging the 'experiential loose ends' without tidying it up to construct a coherent and neat story represents the messiness, uncertainties and contradictions of human experience (Gabb 2009), which may be particularly salient in counselling and psychotherapy research.

Pluralism in qualitative research mixes different qualitative approaches, where the use and status of each method is determined to combine with others in order to provide a more holistic insight into phenomena than can be gained using one method alone. Crucially, this approach recognises the plurality of epistemological and ontological paradigms underlying each of the qualitative approaches (Nolas 2011), and values the tensions and benefits of combining methods within paradigms as well as across them. It does not confine individuals to being understood from only one epistemological stance, and allows for flexibility by building up layers of insight which can provide multiple understandings of a person's reality. This can be particularly helpful in research that seeks to understand the complexity of perspectives of those for whom reality and meanings can change (Frost 2011), such as for clients in psychotherapy or counselling. Therefore, a qualitative pluralistic approach seeks to avoid reductionism and allows for a holistic view of phenomena which would not be possible with the use of a mono-method approach (Frost 2008).

How to do Pluralistic Qualitative Research

Doing qualitative research pluralistically means combining methods and analytical techniques to bring different perspectives to a research focus. This is not to say that an 'anything goes' approach is appropriate in pluralistic research. Methods are not selected at random, and careful thought must be given regarding why and how they are being combined, as well as to which methods are chosen and how they are employed.

Human experience or behaviour tends to be the research focus in pluralistic research, with the openness to different views that this approach allows. This enables researchers to gain a more rounded insight into how humans live their lives and make sense of the events and experiences within them. For pluralistic researchers, human experience is seen as fragmented, lived in different dimensions and as having meanings influenced by context and other factors. To best explore this requires a flexibility that may mean, for example, using different types of data, gathering views on a topic from different stakeholders or employing different methods of analysis to ask different questions of the same data. Whichever approach is taken, pluralistic research strives to keep the research focus central, and to resist falling into methodolatry where arguments over methods can become more important than the research focus itself (Chamberlain 2000; Chamberlain et al. 2011; Curt 1994).

This means there is no one way to engage in pluralistic research as it provides a way to conduct exploration in accordance with research questions and is not limited in what it can ask of data, such as might be the case if using only one

method. In practice, this can mean that pluralistic studies are designed from the outset to include different methods or forms of data, or evolve in response to new research questions arising from findings and observations of the data. Regardless of the manner in which the pluralistic research process develops, there must be a clear rationale for including different methods in the study that demonstrates how these are selected and combined, and how they address the research question. There is a vast range of qualitative methods available to ask different questions of data in order to understand more about how meaning is made by humans of their experiences. It may seem to a novice pluralistic researcher that it is simply a matter of matching a method to a research question and carrying out the research according to steps or stages delineated by each method. In practice, however, it will soon become clear that almost all qualitative methods offer only guidelines as to how they should be employed – all recognise the subjective element of qualitative research and the reflexive engagement of the researcher with the data. This means that in addition to the systematic analysis the method offers, the findings that are constructed will also depend on how the method is used, the worldview of the researcher, the ways they have adapted the method, and the personal elements of its employment (deciding which aspects of the transcript to focus on, what is important and is not important to them, and so on).

In the next sections, we consider some of the ways in which this can be done.

Methodological Pluralism

Methodological pluralism refers to drawing on multiple methods of data collection to enable insight into different dimensions of human experience. Widely employed in sociology (although not without debate, e.g. Baker et al., 1998, who warn of a dilution of methods, and Payne et al. 2004, who do not regard all methods as equal), it offers a way of examining data drawn from different artefacts such as documents, photographs and interviews, and may include observation, asking questions and ethnography. Methodological pluralism takes the view that human experience is formed by a variety of dimensions (affect, vision, discourse and so on) and is thus best understood by exploring different forms of data.

This approach can be useful in counselling and psychotherapy research because accessing transcripts of sessions, or audio recording them for research purposes, is not always possible. With a methodological pluralistic approach, a researcher may, for example, gain access to institutional and training documents or ask participants to keep diaries about their experience of counselling, and can conduct interviews with them about the process. Although this process relies on participant recall rather than relating their here and now experience, bringing a pluralistic approach allows consideration of what is said about counselling sessions in official documents, how therapists are trained to deliver counselling sessions and what participants say about sessions, thus enabling a multi-perspectival picture from which consensual and disensual insights can be gathered.

Analytical Pluralism

Analytical pluralism refers to the mixing of several methods of qualitative data analysis on a single dataset (Clarke et al. 2015).

> Pluralistic qualitative research recognises that a data set can tell us about a number of different things, depending on the questions we ask of it. A pluralistic approach involves asking a series of questions of the same data; each new question that is asked of the data requires that the researcher returns to the data and interpret it in a new way (Willig 2013, p. 19).

Use of multiple methods of qualitative data analysis enables different things components of the data to be attended to, as diverse forms of knowledge are produced through different methods of analysis. Therefore, a pluralistic analysis produces multi-layered and multi-perspectival interpretations which allow for a richer understanding of phenomena. These various forms of knowledge do not attempt to achieve an ultimate 'truth' or consensus (Dewe and Coyle 2014) but are instead viewed as complementary rather than in competition with each other; each analysis reflects another dimension of the experience (Frost et al. 2011).

Therefore, analytical pluralism uses different methods of data analysis to understand, usually textual, data. Generally, accounts are gathered from participants using semi-structured interviews that aim to gather rich data about the experience or phenomenon that is the research focus. However, if it is possible to analyse a transcript of a counselling or psychotherapy session, then a pluralistic approach to analysing it can be very valuable in accessing more meaning than would be possible using one method alone. In this case, a researcher may choose to explore language use and function using discourse analysis, as well as conversation analysis to understand the dynamics of the interaction, for example. Combining narrative analysis to understand how stories are used by the counselling client, together with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to understand the lived experience being recounted in the counselling setting, may also be of interest.

Analytical pluralism can use either a within-method or across-method approach, which are explained in the sections below.

Within-Method Pluralistic Research

Within-method pluralistic research refers to using the same method to analyse data in different ways, but with an underpinning of the same philosophical assumptions. The aim remains to explore the data in a way which is as open as possible, whilst addressing an overarching research question. For example, this could mean using different methods within narrative analysis to construct different meanings from the content form and function of stories within the same data corpus from textual data, as described below, or to understand experiential meanings within data from different reflexive standpoints using a method such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (e.g. King et al. 2008).

► Example

Frost (2006, 2009) applied a within-method pluralistic approach to narrative analysis when exploring the transition to second-time motherhood. Labov's structural narrative analysis (1972) was applied to the data to explore how stories are constructed, followed by the application of Gee's poetic model of narrative analysis (1991), which is useful for identifying changes of topics within sections of text. Applied together, these models of narrative analysis helped identify what stories were told and what aspects of them were significant to women when they were asked to talk about their experiences of second-time motherhood. In turn, this allowed for more informed and considered interpretation of the meanings within the narratives (see Frost 2006, 2009).

Another example of a within-method pluralistic approach can be seen in King et al.'s (2008) study which applied a phenomenological analysis to an interview on the topic of mistrust. There were six members of the group, and each researcher analysed the text using different approaches to phenomenology. For example, one member was committed to a Heideggerian worldview and centrality of participants' experiences, which enabled features such as selfhood, sociality, temporality, spatiality, embodiment, project and discourse to be tended to. Another member drew on Kelly's analysis of self-characterisation sketches (Kelly 1955) which paid attention to the close interaction with the interviewer and how this impacted the shape the particular narrative took. Yet another member made use of the *epoché* by upholding an open and curious phenomenological standpoint as well as constant reflection, which allowed for a deeper understanding of her meanings as well as what was being revealed about the participant's experiences of mistrust (see King et al. 2008). ◄

Whatever the reason for employing the same method in different ways, it is always important for the researcher(s) to make as explicit as possible their reflexive engagement with the research so that their impact on it is as transparent as possible. In this way, the research is grounded in theoretical foundations appropriate to the research question, as well as being rigorous. The findings of each layer of analysis can be considered separately to address the question brought to the data by the use of individual methods, and together to build a fuller picture than possible with the use of one application of the method.

Across-Method Pluralistic Research

In contrast to within-method pluralism, across-method pluralistic research refers to using different methods to analyse data in different ways, and so this approach may be underpinned by differing philosophical viewpoints (e.g. social constructionism *and* interpretivism). All qualitative methods have assumptions about what they are looking for in data: stories, language, themes, lived experience and so on. Using different methods allows for distinct ways of exploring the data, so that by applying multiple methods of analysis to the same data, researchers can inquire into language used through a discourse analysis, *and* stories told through a narrative analysis, *and* themes generated through a thematic analysis, for example. By

combining, the pluralistic researcher assumes that meanings can be accessed in different ways, and that meanings constructed from the analysis are not constrained by what one method is able to tell them. Sometimes meanings found using different methods can complement each other, but the pluralistic researcher is always open to new findings, or findings that contradict those of another method. This is not a problem in pluralistic research as its aim is not to triangulate, but instead to understand the many ways in which human experience can be understood in different contexts and with different audiences.

► Example

Bailey-Rodriguez (2017) applied an across-method pluralistic approach when exploring the attachment behaviours of a couple relationship during their transition to second-time parenthood. Narrative analysis was used to understand how identities were formed and reformed over the longitudinal period, and gave insight into how the participants made sense of their feelings and emotions. A psychosocial reading of the data enabled understanding of some of the internal and external conflicts that the participants negotiated during this period. The plurality of philosophical paradigms brought by the different methods highlighted the complex variation and intricate manners in which the couple's emotion regulation strategies affected the dynamics of their relationship (see Bailey-Rodriguez 2017).

Another example of an across-method pluralistic approach can be seen in Josselin's (2013) counselling psychology doctorate which explored the meanings attached to self-harming and experiences of this. IPA was applied to understand how the participant made sense of their repetitive self-injury behaviour. The application of narrative analysis allowed for the framing of the personal significance of the self-injury experiences in the context of the life story, as well as a focus on the linguistic properties of the data. Finally, a psychosocial approach drew out contradictions and underlying psychic structures around the meaning-making of the self-injury behaviours. Together, these different methods created a rich, complex and multi-layered understanding of the experiences of self-injury (see Josselin 2013). ◄

In both case study examples the reflexive awareness and stance of the researcher(s) is, again, paramount. It is only by making transparent what a researcher understands they have brought to the analysis and interpretation of the data that the process is credible and trustworthy. Pluralistic researchers see the use of each method as contributing to an overall understanding of the experience at the centre of the research, even if this means there is an apparent lack of coherence in the meanings that are derived. As previously discussed, the strength of pluralistic research is that it is seen as reflecting the complexity, and messiness, of human experience and emotion. Although this can present challenges in deciding how to present the research, pluralistic researchers maintain that this is true to the ways in which humans do make sense of their relationships, experiences and sense of self.

Carla Willig (2017) and others extend this thinking to 'dual focus' methodology–the combining of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) and IPA to examine the phenomenological repercussions of being positioned within dominant dis-

courses (Willig 2017). In other words, dual focus methodology explicitly looks to understand the role of language in shaping experience.

So far we have discussed some of the different ways in which pluralistic research can be undertaken and have emphasised the importance not only of choosing appropriate methods, but also of making clear how each method is being used. We have considered different approaches to combining methods with the aim of developing more holistic insight into the meaning of experiences. We have also discussed the importance of maintaining a theoretical foundation by clearly linking each choice of method and rationale for its use to the research question.

Activity

By using a method that examines the role of language with another method that seeks to understand experience, the interplay between language, culture and experience can be explored, and subjective experiences situated within their socio-cultural contexts. For example, Colahan (2014) explored relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual couples, and analysed the data using FDA and IPA in order to draw out the complexity of the relation between the private-subjective, the interpersonal and the social life worlds of 'satisfied' partners (p. i).

- *Return to ► Chaps. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in this book about IPA, Narrative research and Grounded theory. Try to think of a problem in the fields of emotional wellbeing and mental health which might benefit from a combination of those approaches. Consider a problem which benefits from being researched from what we describe as a 'multi-dimensional, holistic' insight into experiences? Consider the options of drawing from either analytical, within-method and across-method pluralistic research.*

Whatever form of pluralistic research is used, access to and skill in a range of different methods is required. As a researcher you may know what it is you want to find out but are unsure or unskilled in the appropriate method that can aid you to achieve this. This is a fundamental consideration in pluralistic research, and in the next section we turn to more pragmatic aspects of working pluralistically.

Practicalities of Pluralistic Research

We have seen that in order to carry out pluralistic research there is the same need for rigour and accountability that is expected in all qualitative research.

Later on in this chapter we will discuss how to ensure quality when conducting pluralistic research, but first we will turn to the practical aspects of (a) being a pluralistic researcher working alone, (b) being a pluralistic researcher working as part of a team and (c) conducting a pluralistic case study.

Being Pluralistic Alone

Working as a lone pluralistic researcher requires skills in a number of qualitative methods so that you can choose the most appropriate methods to combine. This means knowing the assumptions and underpinnings of several methods, as well as what each method aims to find out, and the techniques of data collection and analysis with which they do this. Experienced researchers may have become familiar with a number of different methods in their research career, but new and trainee researchers may still be discovering methods they are interested in using. It can be frustrating to know that further expertise would be beneficial to the research as new questions emerge from it, or you may feel that there is more in the data than the methods being used allow access to. If enough time has been factored into the research design (an essential consideration for all qualitative research but, arguably, particularly for pluralistic qualitative research), then the lone researcher can either teach themselves or undertake training in another method if they know the type of knowledge they are seeking from the data and how a different method may help to access it. Working as a lone pluralistic researcher and its challenges will be particularly salient for counsellors and psychotherapists in training. However, the adoption of a pluralistic approach will inevitably enrichen the lone researcher's research experiences and toolkit.

Alternatively, if possible, the lone researcher can recruit other researchers to contribute their skills in another method, perhaps in return for their name on any publication. Sometimes, as a lone researcher, it is just not possible to bring other methods and this can sometimes lead to a sense of compromise, of having to 'settle' for a less than desirous approach. If this happens, it is often useful to highlight the new avenues of research or potential insights gleaned from the study, and to highlight methods that can be used in future research instead.

Working as Part of a Team

Working as one researcher in a team can be rewarding, challenging and productive. If the team is working well, more work can be carried out in a shorter space of time than can be achieved by a researcher working alone. A range of methods, carried out to the required standards, can be brought to the research, and choice and use of each method will be explicitly justified and accounted for. By providing a rationale to team members, listening to their rationale for using other methods, and addressing any questions that arise about methods and their use means that a parallel pluralistic process takes place in which the many perspectives brought by group members are carefully considered in relation to the research focus. This process highlights and enhances many of the quality criteria of qualitative research such as reflexivity, transparency and trustworthiness, ensuring that they are all brought to the study.

By contrast, though, frustrations regarding working as one of a team can emerge. Bryman (2007) found that in mixed methods research, individuals often have an unconscious bias towards their preferred method. This can mean that

when it comes to considering the findings of a pluralistic study, the findings of one method may be prioritised over those of another. This can mean that one or more methods are treated as secondary, or that one or more may play less of a role in the development of the overall insight. This can be averted to some extent if the status of each method is determined and agreed by the team at the outset of the study (if it is pluralistically designed from the start), or with the introduction of new methods as the study progresses. If, for example, a method has been brought in response to findings in the data, then this decision should be made clear, and the choice of method explained in the write-up.

Another challenge of working pluralistically as a team can be that some methods of data analysis are regarded as needing less time to carry out than others. This can lead to a sense of unfairness or resentment amongst team members, either feeling that one method is holding up completion of the study or, conversely, that not enough time is being allowed by the rest of the team to ensure that the analysis is carried out rigorously. The value of the contribution of different methods may be questioned, and time pressures applied to try to chivvy analysts along at an unrealistic pace. A reminder that careful planning at the design stage of team-based pluralistic research projects should include agreement of the status of each method and its analysis, and sufficient time for all analyses to be carried out.

Case Studies

A case study allows for in-depth investigation by focussing on one participant, group or setting. Case study approaches which centre on one 'unit', whether that is an individual, a couple, a group or a setting, can be used to generate rich accounts by seeking depth rather than breadth in producing context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2006). This may be of particular relevance to counsellors and psychotherapists and other clinicians who draw on research to inform practice (Radley and Chamberlain 2001).

The adoption of a single case study in pluralistic research not only provides the opportunity to show how the focus of the research unfolds in an insightful and detailed manner, but also enables the ability to work in a justified way that aims to access as much meaning as possible in the data. Furthermore, the single case study approach facilitates an extensive and multi-layered pluralistic analysis of one set of data, which would otherwise not be possible with a mono-method approach.

As with all pluralistic research there is no one way to conduct a case study. Once the unit of analysis is clear, the researcher must then decide what knowledge they wish to generate from its investigation and how best to access this knowledge. This is clearly related to the research questions and identifying the best methods to address them, but also requires the researcher to think about issues such as whether the case study is to be longitudinal or not.

The research examples provided earlier for both Josselin (2013) and Bailey-Rodriguez (2017) respectively adopted a single case study pluralistic approach. Josselin (2013) conducted three separate semi-structured interviews lasting between one hour and one hour and a half with the same participant at weekly intervals.

This allowed for the opportunity for an in-depth exploration which was built on a more trusting relationship between Josselin as the researcher, and the participant. Bailey-Rodriguez (2017) gathered interviews, photos and diary entries over a period starting at pregnancy and ending some four months after the second child was born. This allowed for a rich and prospective understanding of the changes over time for this couple across a significant life event.

Pluralistic case studies focus on one experience or the experiences of one participant (or couple). In the examples above, the researchers identify the pragmatic considerations as well as the conceptual ones when making their decisions to conduct their research as a single case study. They wanted to carry out an in-depth investigation in which they did not have to compromise on time or data, and the pluralistic case study approach enabled this. Undertaking research as part of a busy counsellor or psychotherapy training course may be of particular relevance and an asset for conducting a pluralistic single case study.

Pluralism and Pragmatism

8

Differing philosophical assumptions allow for differences in their beliefs about the nature of existence and reality (ontology–what is there to know?), and they also differ in their beliefs about the nature of valid and reliable knowledge (epistemology–how and what can we know?) (Willig 2013). Criticisms have been put forward regarding the incompatibility and mutual exclusivity of these underlying philosophical assumptions, which has served to further perpetuate the divide between positivist quantitative and constructivist qualitative research, resulting in a paradigm war when attempting to integrate these stances. There remain some concerns around the issue of incommensurability in mixing the sometimes discordant and conflicting methods of analysis undertaken in a qualitative pluralistic approach. Such concerns centre on the tensions and discord between the different beliefs of the underlying philosophical assumptions which are seen to be in conflict with each other.

Nevertheless, ensuing debates around the mixing of methods have led to the achievement of ‘paradigm peace’ (Bryman 2006) as alternative conceptual frameworks underpinning mixed methods have been put forward (e.g. Mertens 2012; Shannon-Baker 2016). One such framework which overthrows the dogma of the paradigm wars and supports the mixing of methods is pragmatism, which focuses on determining the meaning of phenomena (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). The pragmatic approach breaks down the hierarchies between positivist and constructivist paradigms by looking at what is meaningful from both, and understands that different knowledge claims arise from different ways of engaging with the world (Biesta 2010) (see ◘ Fig. 8.1). It achieves this by placing the research question in a central position in order to attain the richest possible response to it and by basing itself on the assumption that there is not a single set of methods that is correct (Mertens 2012). Choice of method(s) is subsequently driven by the aim of finding those that are best suited to addressing the research question rather than being hindered by debates of incommensurability (Elichaoff et al. 2014).

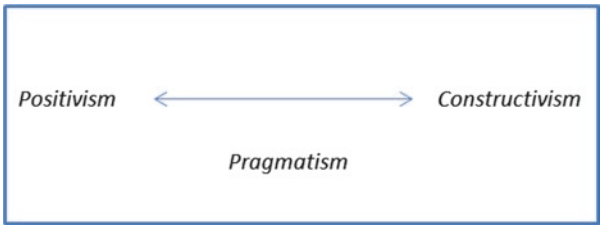

Fig. 8.1 Pragmatism as a paradigm to overcome incommensurability issues

Qualitative pluralistic approaches are interested in prioritising the research focus over the methods used, and achieve this by ensuring clear theoretical foundations that link the research question to the choice of methods employed. This enables a renewed focus on the need to understand and highlight the ways in which research questions are addressed. Such a focus allows for flexibility in research design that promotes the seeking of tailored insight into the complexities of human experience (Frost 2011). Furthermore, adopting a pragmatic approach helps to avoid the issue of methodolatry, where the privileging of certain research methods and their underlying frameworks, as opposed to the topic under investigation, discourages the adaptation of methods to suit said research topic (Chamberlain 2000; Chamberlain et al. 2011). A pluralistic approach addresses this concern of methodolatry by its consideration of several qualitative methods within the context of the same study.

Ensuring Quality in Pluralistic Qualitative Research

Evaluating the quality of qualitative research can be complex due to the heterogeneity of the many approaches. Pre-defined sets of quality criteria may not be applicable to all qualitative methods due to their differences (O'Reilly and Kiyimba 2015). Similar to issues arising from the application of quantitative quality criteria to qualitative research–such as validity, reliability and generalisability–it is also troublesome to judge qualitative research conducted within one paradigm using criteria developed from another one (Collingridge and Gantt 2008). Nevertheless, some researchers have recognised the heterogeneity within qualitative research and have attempted to develop universal criteria (e.g. Tracy 2010; Yardley 2008). However, others have voiced their concerns about the appropriateness of these universal checklists and emphasise the risk of accepting this 'one size fits all' as it may engender role reversal in qualitative research and quality criteria, resulting in 'the tail wagging the dog', where the quality standards become the main focus, and the actual qualitative research is rendered a subsidiary (Barbour 2001, p. 1115). Therefore, qualitative researchers are advised not to succumb to meeting the demands of a fully unequivocal set of universal quality standards as it is the characteristics of the specific qualitative approach that prescribe what the quality criteria should be. Therefore, undertaking a universal approach may not necessarily align with the particular requirements of the research (Hammersley 2007).

Table 8.1 Spencer et al.'s (2003) quality guiding principles

Principle	Description
Contributory	Contributes to advancing wider knowledge
Defensible in design	The design includes strategies which address the research question
Rigorous	Systematic and transparent data collection, analysis and interpretation
Credible	Claims should be credible, grounded and plausible in relation to the evidence generated

This is particularly pertinent in the case of a pluralistic qualitative approach as it is not possible to maintain the same quality measures across the different methods (Barker and Pistrang 2005), and the epistemological scope of this approach to research may be too broad for universal quality standards. Spencer et al. (2003) developed four overarching guiding principles based on a review of published quality frameworks devised in extensive consultation with qualitative experts. The review found that all frameworks have been recognised to have a primary concern with identifying good practice in qualitative research, and that it is up to the researcher to judge the overall value of the research based on choice of the most relevant principles.

As Spencer et al.'s (2003) guiding principles are at a sufficiently high level of abstraction to encompass a diversity of qualitative approaches, they meet the quality demands of a pluralistic qualitative approach; Table 8.1 shows the principles and their descriptions.

Reflexivity is also considered to be an essential quality standard as the researcher unavoidably influences the conduct of the inquiry. Therefore it is important that the researcher reflects on their role in the research process and considers the ways in which they may have had an impact (O'Reilly and Kiyimba 2015). Qualitative researchers are encouraged to disclose relevant personal background, as well as relevant personal characteristics, and describe any first-hand experience with the phenomenon under investigation that may have influenced how the data were collected and analysed (Barker and Pistrang 2005). This is also relevant to pluralistic approaches.

Ethical Considerations in Pluralistic Qualitative Research

The ethical considerations given to planning and conducting pluralistic qualitative research do not differ significantly to those required to carry out all qualitative research. However, the capacity to gather perspectives from different stakeholders and methods means there are additional issues to consider in ensuring ethical clarity for all those taking part. By considering 'ethics at every step' (Palmer 2017), practi-

cal realities can be addressed and potential challenges minimised whilst also attending to researcher positions and roles as the study unfolds. In addition, adopting a positive ethical stance (Knapp, VandeCreek and Fingerhut 2017) promotes the understanding and appreciation of traditionally marginalised groups, and strives to maximise participant involvement, and thus may be particularly relevant to studies undertaken by counsellors and psychotherapists.

Box 8.1 Kvale's (1996) Five Ethical Questions

- What are the benefits of carrying out this research?
- How is informed consent ensured?
- How are participants assured of confidentiality?
- What are the consequences of conducting the study?
- What is the researcher's role in the study?

In an ethical chain Palmer (2017) interlinks procedures and practice of ethics whilst acknowledging that the links in the chain can be lengthened or shortened in response to the unpredictable nature of qualitative research (► Box 8.1):

Practice and procedure are connected and always underscored by the researcher position. This is useful in pluralistic research when researcher positionality is likely to vary according to who data is being gathered from and the method being used to analyse it. The flexibility of the ethical chain, and its presence throughout the research process, allows for different worldviews to be accommodated and for changes in status of different methods as they are brought to the research simultaneously or sequentially (◘ Fig. 8.2).

Kvale (1996) suggests five ethical questions to be addressed when planning and carrying out research, and it is useful to consider these in relation to pluralistic research.

Kvale's (1996) five questions provide a useful framework to think about ethical considerations in pluralistic studies. The process can be further enhanced by adopting an explicit positive ethical stance. This approach aims to actively think about how psychologists can do better in helping those they conduct research with (Knapp, VandeCreek and Fingerhut 2017). This is done by seeking to place participants as central to the research, striving to form high-quality relationships with them, and regarding them as moral agents rather than as a 'means to an end'. For pluralistic researchers, this means equipping themselves with as much knowledge as necessary of the different fields that participants from different groups represent, and disseminating the research appropriately to a range of scholarly communities (Nolas 2011), so that the value of the research can be accessed by the diverse audience to whom it may have meaning. The relationships with participants can be

Procedural ethics --- Ethical positions --- Ethics in practice --- Writing about ethics

◘ **Fig. 8.2** The ethical chain. (Adapted from Palmer, 2017)

enhanced by developing trust in all aspects of the research process, from explaining decisions and changes in the research as it develops if necessary, to making transparent the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and being open about the researcher role. Working alone as a pluralistic researcher requires ongoing review and reflection on these issues, whilst pluralistic researchers working as part of a team can be accountable to and question each other, to ensure an ongoing consideration of ethical concerns.

Pluralistic research often involves gathering and analysing data from different stakeholders, each with different perspectives on a topic. Benefits can be directly applicable to some or all of the stakeholders–for example, those developing services may understand more about the importance of accessibility to counselling for people who have been bereaved by considering accounts of clients gathered as part of the research–and it may also be of indirect benefit to a wider audience such as counsellors wishing to know more about the value of, say, individual counselling compared to group counselling. Ultimately, the findings can be of interest to policy-makers and other support providers who read about the study and take from it the aspects of most relevance to their perspective. The key thing to remember is that the pluralistic nature of the study allows for different expressions and understandings of human experience and this requires the researcher to think carefully about its impact on, and benefit to, all those taking part.

This thinking has to extend, of course, to ensuring that consent is fully informed. There may be a need in a pluralistic study to explain differently to different stakeholders what the study aims are, for example if data is to be collected from children as well as adults. Similarly, it should be made clear to all participants that the data will be analysed in different ways, and why this is.

If the study involves service users, providers and developers, there is a need to ensure that all those taking part understand and agree with what their involvement in the study means. There may be different consequences for participants from different groups who may be required to talk about their experience of counselling services, for example. It is ethically essential that all participants are fully apprised of what data is being sought from them, how it is to be collected and what will be done with it, before they consent to taking part.

Similarly, in a pluralistic study, it is important to ensure that all participants are clear about how confidentiality will be ensured. Data in different forms such as photographs, drawings, diaries and interview transcripts may be gathered and each may require different considerations of how best to disguise its author. Similarly, it may be very important that different stakeholders are not identifiable to each other. Participants should be assured that their data will be kept confidential from others taking part in the study, as well as from wider audiences, unless the researcher has reason for legal concerns about safeguarding or child protection. Pluralistic studies also need to consider all the researchers involved and make clear to participants that consent is given to, and confidentiality assured, by all members of the research team.

Thinking about the consequences for participants of taking part in a study is a key ethical underpinning of all research; steps must always be taken to ensure as far as possible that participants are not harmed or distressed as a result of taking

part in a study. In pluralistic research there is a need to retain a heightened awareness of the different understandings of a topic or experience that may be held by different participants, or participants from different groups, or constructed using different methods of analysis. Without due care, researchers may become complacent that, because talking about a topic is not distressing to a participant from one group, it will also not be to another. This may be particularly pertinent when carrying out research with vulnerable adults, or children, and those who provide support and other services to them, for example. It is also important to retain an awareness of how the findings from different methods are published in order to minimise distress and confusion, so that particular attention is paid to contradictions, challenges and different interpretations of data.

Writing Up Pluralistic Qualitative Research

Writing up a pluralistic qualitative research study requires researchers to think about how best to present the distinct yet complementary layers of understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In some cases they may want to present them separately, and in others in combination. The decision will often rest on the context of the study and how it was carried out (sequentially or simultaneously, designed as pluralistic from the outset or evolved as a pluralistic study, and so on). We have previously discussed the value of pluralistic research in acknowledging the 'messiness' of human experience, and how this 'mess' may be reflected in contradictions and tensions that the use of multiple qualitative methods allows for. A challenge therefore is to find a way to present the findings without tidying them up and risking obscuring or misrepresenting meanings.

As with many forms of research writing, this process in pluralistic research can also act as part of the inquiry, with new insights being gained and relationships between methods and findings recognised as the write-up is crafted. Pluralistic research write-ups, like all qualitative research write-ups, can be challenged by the need to adhere to journal article formats and word counts, often predicated on traditional scientific styles. It can be hard to find space to include the researcher voice, and even harder if the research has involved a team of researchers, each making different contributions to the study. Pluralistic research enables enhanced reflexive awareness by researchers as they engage both with different methods and with other researchers in a study, and presenting this can be a key consideration of writing up pluralistic research.

There are many ways in which pluralistic research can be written up, and finding what will be most appropriate for your study will depend in part on the target audience, the focus of the study and the agreement between the team of researchers about the status of each method employed. A range of styles have been adopted in dissertations, theses and published articles and some are discussed below.

One way of writing up the pluralistic research is to present the findings for each analytical method separately, enabling comparisons to be drawn between the interpretations (Clarke et al. 2015). This enables each finding to be treated with equal significance, and to be considered to reflect a different dimension of the same phe-

nomenon. This allows for multiple possibilities to be constructed rather than limiting phenomena to an either/or ontological perspective, thus recognising the complexity of participants' lives (Frost et al. 2011). The different interpretations offered by each method of analysis stand alone, and taken together offer multi-layered insights into phenomena (Clarke et al. 2015). Following the different analyses and interpretation write-ups, the pluralistic researcher can then draw out and highlight the overlap and differences in meanings between these. This would make explicit any tensions, contradictions and consensus, without the tidying away of loose ends, in the building of a holistic, complex and multi-layered understanding of the phenomenon being researched pluralistically.

It is important to find ways of providing evidence of the analyses in pluralistic studies, and this is often in the form of quotes and/or visual images. The pluralistic researcher is aware that any decisions they make about which to include and how to display them has an impact on the research and can inform the interpretation of its meanings. Therefore they aim to present as much data as possible in appropriate and accessible ways. From a pragmatic perspective, pen-drives or online videos offer ways to include the bulk of the data and the data contained within the main text of the paper or thesis is then selected to best illustrate how meanings were reached.

Many researcher and participant groups may be involved in pluralistic research, and it can be useful to present data in collage form. Using computer technology, boxes can show voices with differing descriptions of the same phenomenon, and foregrounding some of this can be part of the findings. Researcher voices can be included as text or pictures from reflexive journals, and data from different researchers can be displayed together to show how each experienced a common challenge in the research process. Disagreement or contradiction between stakeholders can be illustrated by arranging them around a central box.

Whilst most write-ups of pluralistic research are text based, this does not preclude the inclusion of drawings and diagrams to enhance, support or add new findings. As previously discussed, these can provide understanding from a different dimension about what is significant to participants. Note that when including photographs in write-ups, it is important to think carefully about anonymity and confidentiality as well as inclusion of children or others who have not consented to appear in them.

Even with only textual data, innovative ways of writing up can be found. An example of one that incorporates many 'pluralisms' is by Chamberlain et al. (2011). In order to embrace pluralisms of method, of occasion, of researchers and of disciplines, the paper includes email correspondence, and written responses to interview questions posed by two of the researchers to the other two members of the team about their own multi-method research. Readers are told that discussions and debates about these responses informed the writing and rewriting of the paper, as did further discussions and responses to challenges posed by the editors of the journal in which it was to be published. The outcome is a detailed and informative paper that retains multi-dimensionality and plurality in a style that draws the reader in to understand the context, conduct, theory and outcomes of the study of pluralisms.

It is also possible to present theoretical pluralisms, as has been done by Honan et al. (2000), who use distinctive theoretical approaches to present and compare

three qualitative analyses and show how subjects and the character of the social world they inhabit can be constituted differently depending on the theoretical approach used. To show how theoretical approaches radically influence what can be found in data and how it can be found, their three readings of the same data are presented separately by different researchers, each writing in the first person. Different scenarios are presented by each researcher to illustrate and explain the 'subject' they construct. The paper raises questions within and across the readings so that when one has reached the Discussion, it is clear not only that there are a number of other possible readings but also how the title of the paper, *Producing Possible Hannahs*, can be understood. The write-up is subjective, theoretically informed and compelling in its level of detail and explanation.

The value of pluralistic research is in representing the non-linear, multi-dimensionality of human experience, whilst also acknowledging the role of the researcher, and to show this as far as is possible in writing up the research is challenging. However, with an increasing openness to the publication of qualitative research, and the growth in online journals, there is a growing acceptance of creative and non-conventional styles of research write-ups which enables pluralistic researchers to ensure that not only the innovation but also the rigour of their work is disseminated.

Summary

In this chapter we suggest that qualitatively driven mixed methods and qualitative pluralistic research offer opportunities to generate multi-dimensional material for holistic insight into experiences. We have explored different approaches regarding how to engage in qualitative pluralism. For instance, 'analytical pluralism' refers to the mixing of several methods of qualitative data analyses on a single dataset; 'within-method pluralism' involves using the same method to analyse data in different ways but with the same underpinning philosophical assumptions. In contrast to this, 'across-method' pluralistic research uses different methods to analyse data in different ways, and thus the approach may be underpinned by differing philosophical viewpoints. We have explored pluralism and pragmatism and considered them with the issue of 'paradigm peace' (Bryman 2006) and the issue of methodolatry: the privileging of certain research methods and underlying frameworks. We have referred to how to ensure quality, including ethics concerns, when conducting pluralistic research, and looked at ways in which you may practice as a pluralistic researcher alone or as part of a team.

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