

# Mixing Methods

February 29, 2012

*At the 24<sup>th</sup> APS Annual Convention, **Rebecca Campbell** will host a workshop called Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Mixed-Methods Designs for Psychological Research. Campbell is a professor of community psychology and program evaluation at Michigan State University. Her own mixed-methods research focuses on violence against women and how the legal, medical, and mental health systems respond to rape survivors. She took a few minutes to give the Observer a sneak peek of her upcoming workshop.*



Rebecca Campbell

## **What are some examples of the quantitative and qualitative methods you'll be highlighting in your workshop?**

My primary goal in this workshop is to show how qualitative and quantitative methods can be “mixed and matched” to form a variety of interesting research designs that can answer both exploratory and explanatory research questions. For example, qualitative focus groups can be used in an exploratory Phase I to understand a phenomenon of interest and to guide formalized quantitative hypothesis testing in Phase II. Alternatively, traditional experimental designs can be used to establish key significant findings in Phase I of a project that are then “unpacked” using qualitative methods to elucidate underlying mechanisms. Qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviewing, and ethnographic observations combine nicely with traditional quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, experimental designs, and quasi-experimental designs).

I will also touch on some methods that can be “all inclusive,” meaning they provide both quantitative and qualitative data within one study/one phase of research. For example, calendar and timeline/diary methods can provide detailed quantitative data regarding frequency and pattern of behavior (which can be analyzed using advanced longitudinal techniques, such as HLM or growth curve modeling). If timeline/diary data are collected as part of an interview, the participants’ open-ended narratives about these behaviors can be recorded simultaneously for a more in-depth perspective.

**What challenges do researchers encounter when they conduct mixed-method studies? Can you provide an example from your own research?**

There are two main challenges researchers often face in mixed-methods studies. The first is epistemological: How do we reconcile traditional, positivist approaches to social science (typically associated with quantitative methods) with alternative, constructivist approaches that are nearly 180-degrees different in ideology? Finding a unifying conceptual framework for mixed-methods studies is essential.

The second challenge is analytical, and there are established methods for the analysis of quantitative data; There are established methods for the analysis of qualitative data. Then what? Are the results supposed to be combined? Compared? Contrasted? What if the findings are contradictory across methods? The mixed-methods literature is growing rapidly to address these kinds of challenges.

In a recent project, I used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of a community-based service program for victims of sexual assault. The quantitative results demonstrated significant change over time that could be reasonably attributed to the implementation of the program. Great — that’s good news, but how did it do that? We used qualitative methods to interview key stakeholders to understand the mechanisms by which the intervention was effective. We struggled with how to integrate the results across studies to come up with one single “answer” regarding the effectiveness of this program.

**What are the benefits of mixed-method studies?**

Quite simply, another set of “eyes” on the phenomenon of interest. Each methodological paradigm can only “see” so much; the other can help shed light on what the first paradigm often misses. In instances where the findings converge across methods, there can be greater confidence in the accuracy of the results. In situations where the findings are contradictory, there are new opportunities and new research questions to pursue.

**Why should convention attendees come to your workshop? What can they expect to take away from your presentation?**

Because the *Handbook of Mixed Methods Research* is over 800 pages long! This workshop is a more concise, interactive introduction to the key epistemological, design, and analytic issues in the field. It’s a great opportunity for researchers curious about mixed methods to learn more about how this approach could benefit their work. We will focus on mix-and-match design options that are applicable across a wide-range of areas within psychological science. Participants will have an opportunity to think though a design option within their own area of interest and receive feedback and suggestions from the workshop facilitator. All participants will also leave with a list of resources and “next steps” for planning and executing a mixed-methods project.