

## Creative Tensions? Reflections on mixing methods in a qualitatively-driven way

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### Outline

- Orientations
  - Some uneasiness about mixing
  - Moves, crossovers and hybrids
- Grounding ourselves in realities and pragmatics
  - Concluding ideas

# orientations

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## Qualitatively-driven mixed methods – some principles

- Reflexive and non-accepting approach to design and practice
- Recognizing validity of more than one approach
- Flexible, creative approach
- Celebrating richness, depth, complexity, nuance
- Reflexive approach to what data represent, and how they constitute knowledge

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## Qualitatively-driven mixed methods – some reasons why you would

- Encourages thinking outside the box
- Researching and theorising how different scales of social existence intersect or relate (beyond micro or macro)
- Enhancing and extending logic of qualitative explanation
  - Comparison
  - Context

(Mason, 2006)

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# some uneasiness about mixing

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- Semantics
- Orthodoxies
- Reifications and reductions
- The ideal of complete knowledge

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## Semantics

To mix:

Combine or put together to form one substance or mass (OED)

Combine so that the parts of one thing or things of one set are diffused among those of another (Chambers)

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## Semantics

Mixed:

- containing a mixture of both favourable and negative elements (mixed blessing, mixed bag); composed of different varieties of the same thing (mixed salad) OED
- mingled, miscellaneous, confused, not select (Chambers)

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## Semantics

- Fusion, loss of distinctiveness, compromise, ambivalence.
- Not a concept that inspires or excites?

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## Orthodoxies

- Risks of singular implied orthodoxy, epistemology (or paradigm)
- Typologies (of method and mixing) can be stultifying
- Rules and recipes can deskill (like satnav) and lead to 'methodological inhibition'

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'Those in the grip of the methodological inhibition often refuse to say anything about modern society unless it has been through the fine little mill of The Statistical Ritual...Some of the most energetic minds among us use themselves up in the study of details because The Method to which they are dogmatically committed does not allow them to study anything else'

(Wright-Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959)

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## Reductions and Reifications

A priori reification/reduction of:

- The things that are being mixed – to enable us to talk about how we can mix them
- What mixing involves – to enable us to call it a paradigm

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## Complete knowledge

- The deification of complete knowledge and maximum coverage
- More (methods, findings) isn't necessarily better
- Underestimating the value of particularity and partiality.

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“I think it is important above all to reflect not only on the limits of thought and the powers of thought, but also on the conditions in which it is exercised, which lead so many thinkers to overstep the limits of a *social experience that is necessarily partial and local*, both geographically and socially” (Bourdieu). To say that these portraits are partial is not quite the same as claiming they are limited or lack depth’

(Les Back, citing Bourdieu, *The Art of Listening*, 2007) (my emphasis)

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## Complete knowledge

‘the feeling remains that whenever we try to say something completely, the saying of it misses the point’

(Stephen Frosh, ‘Distintegrating Qualitative Research’ *Theory and Psychology*, 17, 2007)

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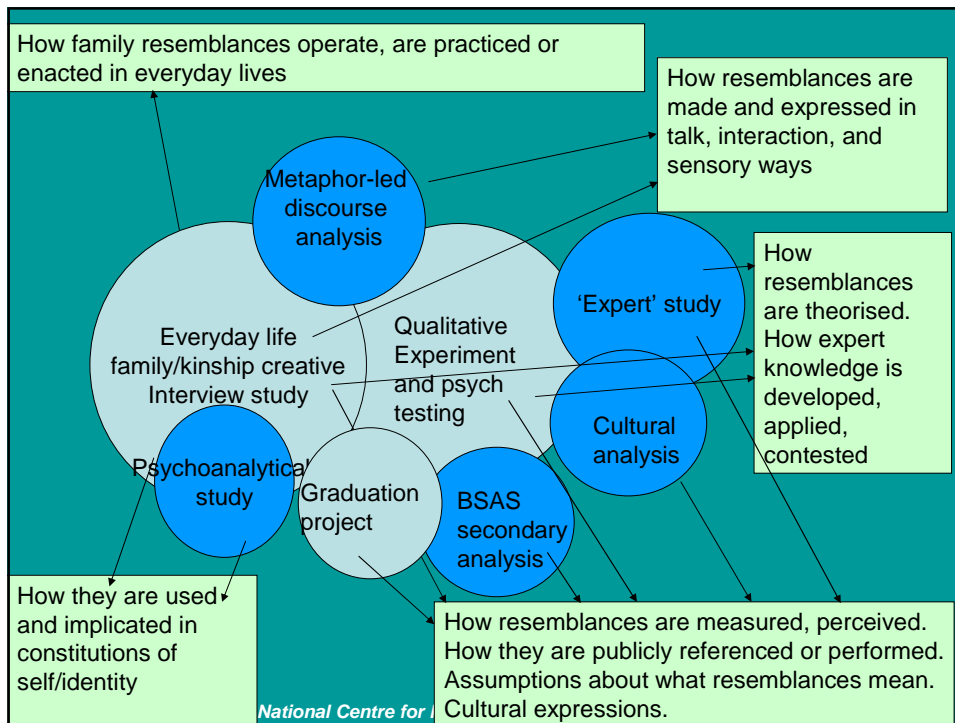


# moves and crossovers

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- 'measuring' and perceiving family resemblance

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## The Living Resemblances project team

- Sociology (Katherine Davies, Carol Smart, Jennifer Mason)
- Socio-Legal Studies (Carol Smart)
- Psychology, health and social understandings of genetics (Josephine Green), facial recognition (Lee Wickham, Karen Lander)
- Psychoanalysis (Brendan Gough)
- Socio-Linguistics (Lynne Cameron)
- Visual Methodologies (Jon Prosser, Jennifer Mason, Katherine Davies, Carol Smart)

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## Everyday life creative interviews

- Interactive talk, narratives and stories.
- Asking grounded/experiential questions about appearances, ways of being, the sensory and ethereal and 'between-persons' elements of kinship and relationality.
- Visual methods including drawing family 'trees', photo elicitation, photography, how pictures are displayed, who keeps them

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## Psychological testing

- applying principles of psychological testing, face recognition expertise, using quantitative analysis
- 'Relatedness spotting' using photos selected from our creative interview and photo case study – where resemblance is said to be strong, or no resemblance
- And red herrings (not related) – similar, and those who the team didn't think were similar

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- Different 'measures' of resemblance/relatedness  
Similarity/difference between testing results and resemblance in 'real life'
- Patterns in degrees of accuracy and sureness of decision, clusters in responses. When people 'know' there is a resemblance in everyday life.
- Different 'recognition' processes going on in different contexts. Different things at stake
- Different implications – for us - of trying to trace 'relatedness' and 'similarity'
- Reflections on what constitutes knowledge in different approaches – what we can be sure of and why
- Fascination with each other's approaches

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- Focus on your moves and the paradigms will look after themselves
- Crossovers, hybrids

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# grounding ourselves in realities and pragmatics

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- Realities of practice – what we actually do and how

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## Bringing methods into relationship

‘As the warrant for methodological pluralism has become more widely accepted, the recognition of the value of using different or mixed methods needs to be accompanied by a recognition of the pragmatic and epistemological implications of how those methods are brought into relationship with each other in a particular study. These processes merit close attention since it is in the *practices* of social research that the potential for epistemological claims are created: in the practicalities and the pragmatics of generating, analysing and interpreting data’

(Moran-Ellis et al, 2006)

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- Realities of practice – what we actually do and how
- Single methods, approaches, or researchers, are rarely pure types
- Recognising that connection can mean a range of things, with no necessary requirement for integration into one paradigm or epistemology

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'If a realist and a constructivist share an intellectual exchange on a conference panel and the audience applauds in response, that is more than enough to convince a pragmatist that something other than complete incommensurability has happened'

(Morgan, 'Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained', JMMR 2007).

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- Single methods, approaches or researchers, are rarely pure types
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- Flourishes and sparks
- Realities of habit (habitus), unreflexive practice as well as value of half formed ideas in the everyday, experimenting

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# concluding ideas

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- Curiosity
- Ideas
- Insight
- Creative tensions

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