

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

A Guide to the Field

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3 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH SERIES

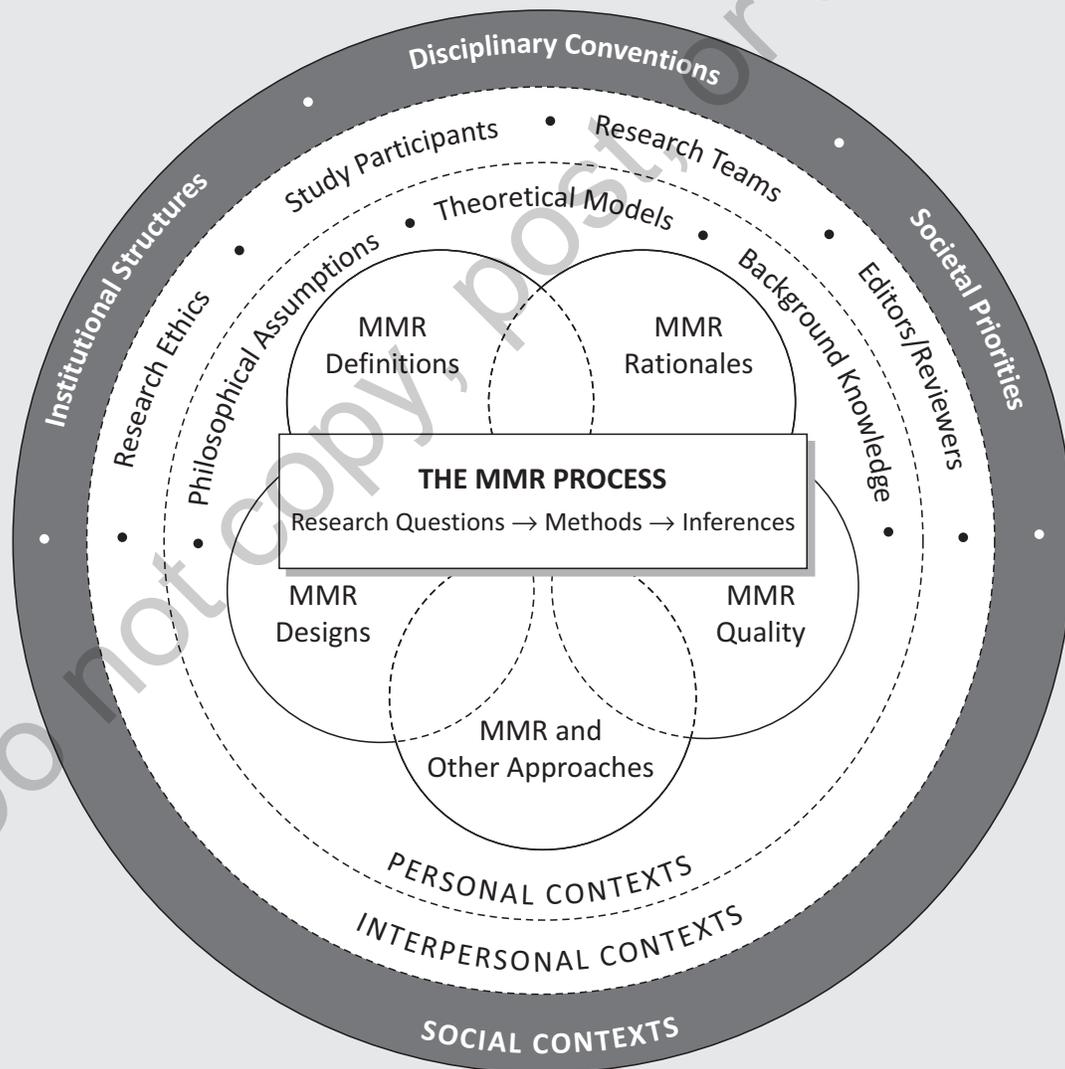
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HOW DO SOCIAL CONTEXTS SHAPE MIXED METHODS?

*CONSIDERING INSTITUTIONAL,
DISCIPLINARY, AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES
ON MIXED METHODS RESEARCH*



The final category of contexts for mixed methods research practice that we consider is social contexts. When you engage in mixed methods research practices as a scholar, researcher, reviewer, or instructor, you do so within a certain environment shaped by your many social contexts. These environments include your academic institutions; disciplinary research communities; and local, regional, and national settings. Social contexts provide significant influences on the use of mixed methods research; therefore, they merit important consideration within the field. In addition to shaping the mixed methods research content considerations and research process, social contexts play a notable role by influencing interpersonal and personal contexts for mixed methods research. In this chapter, we discuss several perspectives and debates about social contexts to help you understand their importance for mixed methods research. We also include examples and recommendations for addressing personal contexts in mixed methods research practice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter aims to provide you with an understanding of social contexts that shape mixed methods content considerations and the research process so you are able to do the following:

- Recognize different social contexts for mixed methods research.
- Understand how institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts shape mixed methods research practice.
- Describe how the status of mixed methods research is considered within different social contexts.

CHAPTER 10 KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts will help you navigate through the main considerations related to social contexts for mixed methods research as they are introduced in this chapter:

- **Social contexts:** The institutional structures, disciplinary conventions, and societal priorities that shape mixed methods research practice.

- **Institutional contexts:** Structures within professional settings, including how mixed methods is taught and promoted within academic programs, that shape mixed methods research practice.
- **Disciplinary contexts:** Conventions held by communities of research practice, including preferences for certain research questions and approaches, that shape mixed methods research practice.
- **Societal contexts:** Priorities within society-defined groupings, including national values and funding policies, that shape mixed methods research practice.
- **Status of mixed methods research:** The extent to which mixed methods research is used and perceived to be accepted as an approach to research within a specific community of researchers.

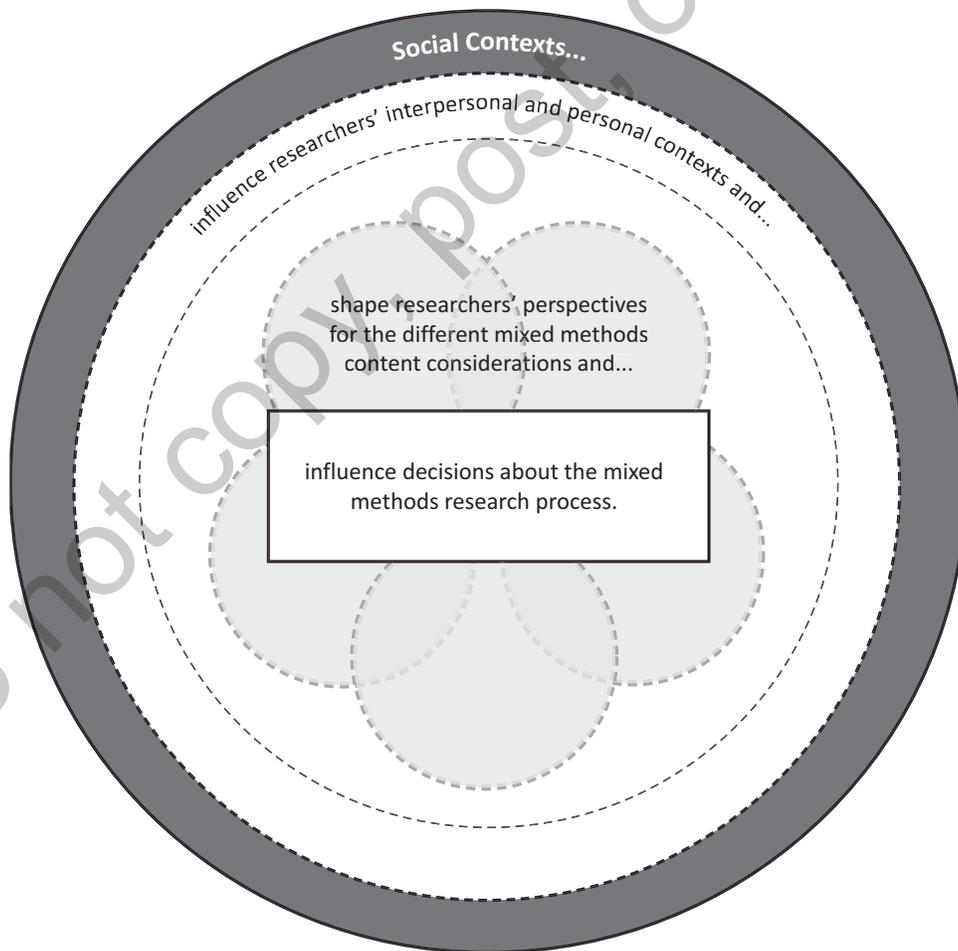
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONTEXTS IN THE FIELD OF MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Throughout this book, we have considered mixed methods research practice and how the field of mixed methods research has advanced different perspectives for the mixed methods research process, content considerations, and personal and interpersonal contexts that shape this practice. We have now reached the outermost level of our socio-ecological framework for mixed methods research, which we identify as social contexts. **Social contexts** are the institutional structures, disciplinary conventions, and societal priorities that shape mixed methods research practice. For example, as a student in an academic program, you experience the influence of institutional structures that determine whether and what kind of coursework on mixed methods research is offered. As a member of a certain discipline, you learn about disciplinary conventions for the acceptability of the mixed methods approach to research. As a member of a specific society, you are also subject to the influence of priorities and policies set by entities at the local and national levels, such as whether funding agencies support mixed methods research. Collectively, these social contexts interact with each other to provide the environment in which you engage in mixed methods research, and ultimately this environment influences how you approach mixed methods research practice.

Keep in mind that social contexts play an influential role in *all* research. For example, research is often impacted by policies established by the larger

society. If you conduct a study in the field of education, your research will likely be influenced by policies that mandate curricular priorities and testing procedures. Although influences such as these are found in all forms of research, our intention here is to focus on the influential social contexts for mixed methods research. By placing social contexts in the outermost level of our model as depicted in Figure 10.1, we highlight the importance of social contexts specifically for mixed methods research practice. As Figure 10.1 suggests, social contexts influence researchers' interpersonal and personal contexts for mixing methods. For example, national policies regarding research ethics shape researchers' interactions with human subject review boards

Figure 10.1 The Role of Social Contexts in the Practice of Mixed Methods Research



regarding their use of mixed methods research. Disciplinary norms regarding acceptable research methods influence the background knowledge that researchers bring to the use of mixed methods. Social contexts also shape the mixed methods research content considerations, such as when disciplinary conventions suggest which mixed methods definition to follow or what quality standards are considered appropriate. In addition, we find that social contexts can directly influence researchers' decisions about the mixed methods research process. For example, funding parameters might dictate which research questions are worth seeking answers to or academic program expectations might require that one method (quantitative or qualitative) be prioritized over the other. Because of the pervasive nature of social contexts, their implications are an essential element to fully understand mixed methods research practice.

MAJOR PERSPECTIVES ABOUT SOCIAL CONTEXTS FOR MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

The development of the field of mixed methods research has been profoundly shaped by, and therefore concerned with, the social contexts in which scholars consider and apply mixed methods research. Many of the earliest writings in the field examined the application and implications of mixing methods within specific research communities and social contexts (e.g., Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), often with an aim to advance understanding and support of this research approach within the community. Although all research is shaped by social contexts, their influence is particularly salient for new, emergent research methodologies such as mixed methods because new methodologies need to be understood within, adapted to, and accepted by existing social contexts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Morgan, 2007; Plowright, 2011). In some situations, social contexts serve to constrain the use of mixed methods, such as by discounting it as a legitimate form of research or limiting the types of mixed methods approaches that are viewed as acceptable within a discipline. In other situations, social contexts support and encourage the use of mixed methods, such as by promoting it as a preferred research approach. In either case, when scholars review, write about, propose, discuss, or report the use of mixed methods research, they craft their work based on socially constructed conventions and to satisfy the expectations of specific audience groups. To help you understand the major perspectives about these complex influences,

we highlight three broad (and interrelated) types of social contexts discussed in the mixed methods literature: institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts.

Institutional Contexts

As you consider the social contexts that influence your approach to mixed methods research, you likely first think of influences from your graduate program such as the methodological expertise of the members of the faculty, the research methods courses available and/or required, and the types of faculty recruited to teach in your program. These are examples of institutional contexts. **Institutional contexts** are the structures within professional settings, including how mixed methods is taught and promoted within academic programs, that shape mixed methods research practice. Relevant parameters related to academic programs include whether the program favors either a quantitative or a qualitative research approach; whether or not mixed methods is taught; and if it is taught, whether it is introduced throughout the program or as a specialized advanced topic. Although not limited to academic programs, it is the structure of academic programs and the teaching of mixed methods specifically that has received the most attention in the literature thus far. This is likely because of their influence on researchers' use of mixed methods and because the incorporation of formal coursework can serve as an indicator for the larger acceptance of mixed methods research (Plano Clark, 2005).

The teaching of formal mixed methods courses has been identified as particularly challenging due to the emergent nature of the field (Creswell, Tashakkori, Jensen, & Shapley, 2003; Greene, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003b; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). This emergent nature means that the mixed methods research content considerations are still unsettled and debated (as we emphasized in Chapters 3 through 7) and that currently few instructors received formal coursework in mixed methods during their own graduate training so they have few models for structuring their own courses. There is, however, a growing literature on instructors' experiences to guide thinking about teaching mixed methods research within academic programs (e.g., Baran, 2010; Christ, 2009, 2010; Ivankova, 2010; Ivankova & Plano Clark, 2014, 2015; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2010; Onwuegbuzie, Frels, Collins, & Leech, 2013; Poth, 2014). Examining these writings identifies several facets that vary across mixed methods courses, including the instructional format

(e.g., face-to-face or distance learning), the required prerequisite courses (e.g., quantitative and qualitative research), the course pedagogical features (e.g., objectives, textbooks, additional readings, schedules of topics, and assignments), the course emphasis (e.g., supplementing quantitative or qualitative methods, designing a mixed methods study, or introducing mixed methods perspectives and debates), and the number and sequence of mixed methods courses required (e.g., one semester, two semesters, or throughout the program). These facets serve to distinguish the different experiences that students have when completing mixed methods coursework and the different decisions that instructors make when teaching mixed methods courses.

Disciplinary Contexts

Along with considering the level of institutionalization of mixed methods research within your academic program, another key social context that you likely readily identify is your research discipline. Your research discipline is the substantive content area in which you work and it represents the community of scholars who serve as the primary audience for your scholarship. Disciplines can be viewed as very broad (e.g., education, health sciences, or psychology) or more narrow and specialized (e.g., adolescent development, public health, or career development). **Disciplinary contexts** are the conventions held by communities of research practice, including preferences for certain research questions and approaches, that shape mixed methods research practice. As such, your disciplinary contexts shape the training you receive, the research problems that you address, the terminology you use, the conferences you attend, and the journals in which you disseminate your scholarship.

With the great differences that exist among our substantive disciplines, it is no wonder that there are great variations in the disciplinary contexts that exist for mixed methods and the ways in which mixed methods is discussed and applied (Denscombe, 2008; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2008). In some disciplines, the use of mixed methods is ubiquitous and unremarkable compared to other research approaches, but in other disciplines, it is exotic, unusual, or even discouraged (Alise & Teddlie, 2010; Ivankova & Kawamura, 2010; Plano Clark, 2005). Disciplinary contexts for mixed methods have been examined in many ways in the literature, such as in terms of the types of research questions and theories that are used (e.g., Rudd & Johnson, 2010; Stentz, Plano Clark, & Matkin, 2012), the dominant method priority and paradigms

(e.g., Alise & Teddlie, 2010; Ross & Onwuegbuzie, 2012), the historical developments and trends (e.g., Small, 2011), and the prevailing attitudes about mixed methods (e.g., Roberts & Povee, 2014). A discipline's conventions for mixed methods can often be described in terms of the acceptability, prevalence, and typical use of mixed methods by researchers who are trained and publishing within the discipline.

Societal Contexts

The third type of social context that we highlight is societal contexts. **Societal contexts** are priorities within society-defined groupings, including national values and funding policies, that shape mixed methods research practice. Consider the society-defined groupings that might influence your mixed methods research practice. These often include organizations and agencies at the local, regional, or national levels that support the production of research. These groups, including governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations, are involved with research through policy initiatives that shape priorities for research and/or by directly funding research endeavors. As with the institutional and disciplinary contexts, societal contexts represent different levels of support for and acceptance of the use of mixed methods research.

Within the mixed methods literature, societal contexts have often been considered in terms of national settings for the use of mixed methods, particularly as they relate to national funding for research. Scholars have examined and described the level of support for mixed methods within national contexts such as the United States (Plano Clark, 2010), Canada (Islam & Oremus, 2014), and the United Kingdom (O'Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2007). While Western countries such as these are described as becoming generally supportive of mixed methods research, scholars are also beginning to examine the emergent presence of mixed methods within other national contexts such as France (Dupin, Debout, & Rothan-Tondeur, 2014), East China (Zhou & Creswell, 2012), and Nigeria (Dumbili, 2014). These writings note varying levels of support for mixed methods and identify important contexts for ensuring this support, such as how academic training is provided within the national context. Even within a specific context, scholars find that societal contexts are complex and nuanced. For example, within the United States, Saint Arnault and Fetters (2011) described how their planned use of mixed methods received enthusiastic support from the federal funding source, but Christ (2014)

described how current national funding priorities in the United States limit researchers' use of mixed methods. Likewise, when mixed methods studies are successfully funded by national entities, that funding can still constrain researchers' use of mixed methods. For instance, Canadian researchers Miall and March (2005) noted that the choice of their mixed methods design was impacted by their national funding agency. They explained, "We had intended to draw an interview sample from the larger telephone survey. In reviewing our research proposal, the funding agency mandated a qualitative study followed by a survey" (p. 407).

CONSIDERING THE STATUS OF MIXED METHODS RESEARCH WITHIN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Because of their powerful influences, social contexts have been of great interest to researchers using mixed methods research throughout the development of the field. Much of this work has focused on the **status of mixed methods research**, which is the extent to which mixed methods research is used and perceived as an accepted and supported form of research within specific research communities. The status of mixed methods is important because it indicates whether specific research communities are knowledgeable about mixed methods, are using mixed methods to address important research problems, and are willing to support and fund mixed methods applications. As you engage in mixed methods research practice as a researcher, scholar, and reviewer, it can be very useful to consider the literature about the status of mixed methods research within your research community. There are three broad types of publications that you may encounter about the status of mixed methods. We refer to these publications as advocacy writings, systematic methodological reviews, and disciplinary-based discussions of mixed methods research, and we introduce their primary features in the paragraphs that follow.

Advocacy writings are publications in which authors provide an introduction to mixed methods research to a particular research community and argue for the merit and value of its use specifically for members of that community. Advocacy writings typically define mixed methods research, review its historical development, summarize different possible approaches and designs, and provide a few notable exemplars of the use of mixed methods from within the community. In general, authors develop advocacy writings with the

explicit intent of enhancing the status of mixed methods within their research communities by increasing awareness of mixed methods and helping to legitimize this approach through a prestigious publication. Therefore, advocacy writings are particularly influential when they are published in important journals within the field. For example, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) published their advocacy piece within the *Educational Researcher*, a premier journal in the field of education. Its influence within the field of education has been remarkable, as best indicated by the high number of citations the article has received in the 10 years since its publication (more than 5,000 citations according to Google Scholar). Advocacy writings have appeared in a wide variety of fields to date, and the number continues to increase as more scholars choose to advocate for the legitimacy and acceptance of mixed methods research within specific communities. We provide a few select examples of advocacy writings in Table 10.1, although many more such publications exist. Writings such as these are particularly useful for you to cite when proposing or reporting a mixed methods study in a field where the use of mixed methods is currently relatively uncommon.

Another way that scholars consider the status of mixed methods research is to conduct *systematic methodological reviews*. In disciplinary-based systematic methodological reviews, scholars systematically examine researchers' use of mixed methods within one (or more) social context to identify trends and patterns about that use. When you read a systematic methodological review, you notice that the authors report having used methodical procedures for identifying a sample of published mixed methods studies and reviewing specific dimensions and features reported within those publications. Examples of mixed methods dimensions that are reviewed within such publications include the rationale for mixing methods; the timing, integration, and priority of the methods in the mixed methods research process; and the type of mixed methods design used. In addition, some systematic methodological reviews specifically consider additional dimensions such as the prevalence rate and citation impact of the use of mixed methods as compared to the use of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. There is a long history of scholars conducting disciplinary-based methodological reviews in the field of mixed methods research to learn about researchers' use of mixed methods. Early reviews included fields such as evaluation (Greene et al., 1989), nursing (Swanson, 1992), higher education (Creswell, Goodchild, & Turner, 1996), primary medical care (Creswell, Fetters, & Ivankova, 2004), and counseling

Table 10.1 A Few Select Examples of Advocacy Writings for Mixed Methods Research

Publication	Discipline	Mixed Methods Topics Discussed	Comments
Grafton, Lillis, and Mahama (2011)	Accounting research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining and describing mixed methods research Rationales for mixing methods The risks of mixing methods Examples of mixed methods studies from the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advocacy writing for a field that already makes extensive use of both quantitative and qualitative research
Curry, Nembhard, and Bradley (2009)	Cardiovascular disease research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining qualitative and mixed methods research, including when and how to use them Examples of qualitative and mixed methods research from the field Quality considerations for qualitative and mixed methods research Future directions for using qualitative and mixed methods research to study cardiovascular diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advocacy writing in a field that makes extensive use of quantitative research
Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004)	Education research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical development of mixed methods research Pragmatism Comparison of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research Mixed methods design typologies and elements Mixed methods research process Expected future developments for mixed methods in the field of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advocacy writing in a field concerned about philosophical assumptions for research

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Table 10.1 (Continued)

Publication	Discipline	Mixed Methods Topics Discussed	Comments
Bradt, Burns, and Creswell (2013)	Music therapy research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for mixed methods to answer complex questions relevant to the field • Core characteristics of mixed methods • Examples of the use of the basic mixed methods designs • Quality criteria for mixed methods research • Recommendations for applying mixed methods in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advocacy writing in a field that traditionally values quantitative research
Kroll and Neri (2005)	Rehabilitation nursing research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for mixed methods within the field • Introduction to the basic mixed methods designs • How to plan and conduct mixed methods research • Value of mixed methods for rehabilitation-nursing research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advocacy writing that emphasizes the utility of mixed methods to address the content of interest to the field
Rudd and Johnson (2010)	Sport management research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for mixed methods to address causal research questions of interest to the field • Historical development of mixed methods • Mixed methods designs and procedures • Examples of the use of mixed methods to understand causation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advocacy writing tailored to a specific type of research question of primary interest to the field

psychology (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Table 10.2 summarizes several recent (2007–2014) examples of systematic methodological reviews that scholars have conducted to learn about the status of mixed methods within a variety of disciplines. Reviews such as these provide a current picture of the status of mixed methods within a particular context as well as information about how mixed methods is used in that context. Furthermore, some scholars are beginning to conduct cross-disciplinary reviews of the use of mixed methods (Alise & Teddlie, 2010; Ivankova & Kawamura, 2010), which facilitate comparisons between different disciplines. By reading systematic methodological reviews, you can learn about the current conventions for using mixed methods within specific fields, identify good models from within the field, and cite the review to support your use of mixed methods within your disciplinary context.

The third category of publications that speaks to the status of mixed methods research within a specific community is disciplinary-based discussions of mixed methods research. *Disciplinary-based discussions of mixed methods research* are how-to writings where authors offer specific guidelines and recommendations for mixed methods research tailored to a particular community of research practice. That is, instead of writing about mixed methods in general, these writings focus specifically on how mixed methods can and should be adapted and used within a specific discipline. To date, there are several examples of disciplinary-based discussions of mixed methods found in the health sciences. For example, Curry and Nunez-Smith (2015) authored a book that provides a full introduction to mixed methods research written in the context of the health sciences, using language, priorities, and examples drawn from the field. Other examples of disciplinary-based discussions of mixed methods research from the health sciences include a document offering “best practices for mixed methods research” commissioned by the National Institutes of Health (NIH; Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith for the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, 2011) and an edited volume on consideration and applications of mixed methods in the nursing and health sciences (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009). These types of publications are indicative of mixed methods research having obtained a generally high level of acceptance within the health sciences. Other examples of disciplinary-based discussions of the practice of mixed methods research include the application of mixed methods in teaching English as a second language (Brown, 2014), in criminal justice and criminology (Lanier & Briggs, 2013), and in policy research and evaluation (Burch & Heinrich, 2015). We expect that many more

Table 10.2 Examples of Recent Disciplinary-Based Systematic Methodological Reviews of the Use of Mixed Methods Research

Publication	Discipline	Mixed Methods Dimensions Considered	Other Dimensions Considered	Comments
Jang, Wagner, and Park (2014)	Applied linguistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale • Timing • Mixing • Synergistic effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants • Language content • Testing validity issues • Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 7 databases, 2007–2013 ◦ $N = 32$ mixed methods articles • Results indicated that the use of mixed methods is increasing, occurs for a variety of rationales, and is often related to issues of validity within the studies.
Molina-Azorín (2011)	Business management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority • Timing • Rationales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rates • Citation impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 4 journals, 1997–2007 ◦ $N = 152$ mixed methods articles • Results indicated that mixed methods articles had greater impact than other research articles.
Ross and Onwuegbuzie (2012)	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rates • Content topics and research contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 2 journals, 1999–2008 ◦ $N = 110$ mixed methods articles • Results indicated a high prevalence rate for mixed methods within education (24%) and within math education in particular (33%).

Plano Clark, Huddleston-Casas, Churchill, Green, and Garrett (2008)	Family sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Design types • Timing • Priority • Integration • Logistical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author national affiliations • Content topics • Prevalence rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 4 journals, 1996–2005 ◦ $N = 19$ mixed methods articles • Results indicated the use of a variety of designs and several issues related to procedures and context that influenced the use of mixed methods.
O’Cathain, Murphy, and Nicholl (2007)	Health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationales • Qualitative strand methods • Quantitative strand methods • Priority • Timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rates • Funding programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ HSR-funded projects in the United Kingdom, 1994–2004 ◦ $N = 75$ mixed methods studies • The authors also interviewed 20 researchers • Results indicated a strong prevalence (18%) for mixed methods projects and emphasized the influence funding priorities have in choosing to use mixed methods.
Stentz, Plano Clark, and Matkin (2012)	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of interaction • Priority • Timing • Mixing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of theory • Type of participants • Author national affiliations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 1 journal, 1990–2012 ◦ $N = 15$ mixed methods studies • Results indicated limited but growing use of mixed methods by international researchers in the field.
Harrison and Reilly (2011)	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority • Timing • Design type and variant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 9 journals, 2003–2009 ◦ $N = 43$ mixed methods studies • Results indicated limited but growing use of mixed methods and the need for more awareness of the field of mixed methods.

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Table 10.2 (Continued)

Publication	Discipline	Mixed Methods Dimensions Considered	Other Dimensions Considered	Comments
Hart, Smith, Swars, and Smith (2009)	Mathematics education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative strand methods • Quantitative strand methods • Priority • Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 6 journals, 1995–2005 ◦ $N = 207$ articles that combined qualitative methods and statistical results • Results noted a high prevalence for mixed methods approaches (29%) but the need for increased sophistication in the use and reporting of mixed methods.
Cameron (2010)	Vocational education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration • Rationale • Design type • Priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rates of type of paper • Data collection methods • Data analysis techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review scope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 2 conferences, 2007–2008, and 1 journal, 2003–2008 ◦ $N = 23$ papers that used mixed methods • Results noted an overall low prevalence (15%) and quality concerns for mixed methods approaches, with mixed methods more prevalent in conference papers than journal articles.

such publications will be forthcoming in a variety of disciplines as its status continues to grow and expand.

ISSUES AND DEBATES ABOUT SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Considering the many different disciplines using mixed methods research and its global presence, it is not surprising that we have considered so many different perspectives for and about mixed methods research throughout this book. Although there is general agreement about the importance of social contexts for mixed methods research, there are still ongoing issues and debates related to the issues raised in this chapter. Here, we identify three issues that are discussed and debated within the field.

1. How should mixed methods research be taught? There is general agreement of the value of formal training in mixed methods research, and more and more academic programs are offering coursework and experiences in mixed methods research. However, differing opinions can be found about how best to structure this formal training as part of academic programs. For example, some academic programs emphasize providing a strong foundation in both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., Baran, 2010), others provide explicit instruction on mixed methods research (e.g., Ivankova, 2010), and still others argue for teaching all data collection and analysis methods within a mixed research framework (e.g., Onwuegbuzie, Leech, Murtonen, & Tähtinen, 2010). Although there is likely no one best way to teach mixed methods research, as a student or instructor in an academic program, you should be aware of different approaches and strive to continually evaluate and improve the quality and availability of mixed methods training opportunities provided within your program.

2. What is the status and acceptance of mixed methods research? As this chapter has highlighted, an ongoing issue for the use of mixed methods research is its status within specific research communities. Across the literature (and among colleagues), you can find a wide range of opinions and descriptions of the status of mixed methods research. These range from dire warnings (e.g., “mixed methods is not accepted and cannot get funded or published”) to extreme claims (e.g., “only proposals for mixed methods studies

can get funding”), and every perception between. The key is to recognize that the status of mixed methods research varies and continues to evolve and expand across institutions, disciplines, and nations. You should therefore carefully examine the status of mixed methods research within your own specific social context through the literature and your own experiences so that you can thoughtfully argue for and report about your use of mixed methods research in ways that address the expectations found within your context.

3. Do mixed methods scholars represent their own community of research practice? Through the early history of the field of mixed methods research, the primary concern about social contexts was how they impact mixed methods research practices. As the field has matured, however, a new question is emerging for debate regarding whether mixed methods has become its own distinct research community (Tashakkori, 2009). Although many writings, including this book, highlight the many debates and lack of consensus that exist in the field, there are also many indications of the existence of a productive and thriving community of scholars, which supports the existence of the Mixed Methods International Research Association and several interest groups within other organizations, several journals, and a regular major mixed methods international conference. As you consider this debate in relation to your own social contexts for using mixed methods, consider how connected you are to scholars who share the conventions, priorities, and beliefs that have been discussed throughout this book.

These questions highlight three ongoing conversations within the field about social contexts for mixed methods research. They also point to the important role that our institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts place on our research in general and use of mixed methods research in particular. The differing opinions that exist acknowledge that social contexts can be both facilitators and barriers to the use of mixed methods research, and successful scholars need to be able to recognize, adapt to, and possibly challenge and change social contexts to conduct the research that they feel is most needed to address important research problems.

APPLYING SOCIAL CONTEXTS IN MIXED METHODS RESEARCH PRACTICE

Whether you engage in advocating for, teaching, planning, conducting, disseminating, or evaluating mixed methods research, your research practice is

shaped by your larger environments in the form of social contexts. For better or worse, these contexts provide the settings in which mixed methods research occurs. Although the literature agrees on the importance and relevance of these contexts, there are great variations within the contexts depending on one's institution, discipline, society, and the interactions among these entities. Therefore, it is important for you to consider social contexts and recognize the ways in which they may influence your and others' use of mixed methods research. In Box 10.1, we offer some general advice for considering the concepts of this chapter as they relate to your mixed methods research practice.

One of the best ways to learn about social contexts is to attend to them as you read about and review examples of mixed methods research. When reading

Box 10.1

Advice for Applying Social Contexts in Mixed Methods Research Practice

Advice for Reading/Reviewing Mixed Methods Studies and Methodological Discussions

- Recognize that all scholars who engage in mixed methods research practices are situated within their own social contexts (i.e., institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts).
- When reading about and reviewing mixed methods research, identify the authors' social contexts including their academic institutions, disciplines, funding support, and national affiliations.
- Consider the extent to which the social contexts provided a supportive and/or constraining environment for the authors' use of mixed methods.
- Pay attention to the ways in which the authors' mixed methods research process, content considerations, and personal and interpersonal contexts were shaped by social contexts.
- Assess the extent to which the authors explained how social contexts influenced their mixed methods research practice.
- Assess the extent to which the authors' use of mixed methods was consistent with the structures, conventions, and priorities associated with their social contexts.

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Advice for Proposing/Reporting/Discussing Mixed Methods Research

- Reflect on your institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts as you first consider the use of mixed methods and consider how these social contexts may support or constrain your mixed methods research practice.
- Assess the status of mixed methods research within your social contexts as discussed in writings about mixed methods research, and cite this literature to support your use of mixed methods.
- If needed, take steps to improve the status of mixed methods within your research community, such as by developing advocacy writings or a systematic methodological review.
- When appropriate, shape your use of mixed methods to align with the conventions and priorities associated with your social contexts. When this alignment is not appropriate for your mixed methods research practice, fully justify and explain why your use of mixed methods differs from these conventions and priorities.
- When social contexts directly shape your mixed methods research process and content considerations, explain how and why these influences occurred.

and reviewing mixed methods literature, note the institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts identified by the authors and consider in what ways they influenced the authors' use of mixed methods and to what extent the authors discussed and explained these influences. Recognize that the way the authors thought about, used, and reported mixed methods likely depends at least to some extent on the prevalence of, conventions for, and opinions toward mixed methods within those social contexts.

It is also important to consider the social contexts in which you work when you conceptualize, design, and report your own mixed methods study. By assessing and reflecting on the status of mixed methods research, you are better able to argue for and position your use of mixed methods in ways that will be understandable and acceptable for the social groups that are the

primary audiences for your work. On the one hand, if the status of mixed methods is at the ground level in your setting, then you can expect to need to define this approach in basic terms and explain why it is appropriate for your context. Citing literature such as advocacy writings from within the field can help to bolster your arguments. On the other hand, if mixed methods research has a well-established status in your setting, then you can expect your audience to be knowledgeable and prepared to apply high-quality standards to reviewing your approach. In this case, you should situate your use of mixed methods within ongoing discussions and examples of its use found within the field. The key is to both understand your social contexts and give them critical consideration when proposing, reporting, and discussing mixed methods research.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We conclude the chapter by offering some final summary comments organized by the learning objectives stated at the beginning of the chapter.

- **Recognize different social contexts for mixed methods research.** Social contexts represent the environment in which scholars conduct their mixed methods research practice. It is useful to think of these contexts in terms of structures found in academic institutions and programs, conventions and norms established by disciplines, and priorities and policies set by agencies and governments.
- **Understand how institutional, disciplinary, and societal contexts shape mixed methods research practice.** Social contexts influence mixed methods research practice by providing environments with differing levels of acceptance of and support for mixed methods research in terms of the available formal training, the relative preference for the use of mixed methods for addressing disciplinary research problems, and the availability of funding for mixed methods research. These environments influence how researchers learn about, use, assess, and discuss mixed methods research.
- **Describe how the status of mixed methods research is considered within different social contexts.** The status of mixed methods research within a particular social context is often described in terms of the prevalence of and perceived level of acceptance for the use of mixed

methods research by the corresponding community. The status within specific social contexts is often examined and promoted through advocacy writings, systematic methodological reviews, and disciplinary-based discussions published in the literature.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Locate a published mixed methods research study from your area of interest and, based on the information included in the article, identify the social contexts that might have shaped the researchers' use of mixed methods research. Discuss what the nature of those influences might have been.
2. Locate a discussion of mixed methods research published in your area of interest that is an example of an advocacy writing, systematic methodological review, or disciplinary-based discussion. What do you conclude about the status of mixed methods research in this area based on this discussion? Explain your conclusions.
3. Describe your perceptions of the status of mixed methods research within your institutional contexts, such as whether certain methods are favored, expertise in mixed methods is present, and formal coursework in mixed methods is available. Discuss how this environment might influence your use of mixed methods research.
4. Describe your perceptions of the status of mixed methods research within your disciplinary contexts, such as the extent to which members of your discipline are knowledgeable about mixed methods and the prevalence of the use of mixed methods research within the field. Discuss how this environment might influence your use of mixed methods research.
5. Describe your perceptions of the status of mixed methods research within your societal contexts, such as the extent to which mixed methods research aligns with current funding priorities. Discuss how this environment might influence your use of mixed methods research.
6. Pick one of the ongoing issues and debates about social contexts for mixed methods: when and how mixed methods research should be taught, whether the use of mixed methods research is accepted or not,

or if there is a community of mixed methods researchers. State why you selected that issue, and discuss your reactions to this issue in terms of the environment for the use of mixed methods research.

KEY RESOURCES

To learn more about social contexts for mixed methods research, we suggest you start with the following resources:

1. **Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Frels, R. K., Collins, K. M. T., & Leech, N. L. (2013). Conclusion: A four-phase model for teaching and learning mixed research. [Editorial]. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 7(1), 133–156.**

- In this article, Onwuegbuzie and colleagues reviewed many of the decisions and challenges associated with teaching mixed methods research at the graduate level. They also described their own approach to teaching mixed methods, which is organized by a model of the research process that includes four phases: conceptual/theoretical, technical, applied, and emergent scholar.

- *2. **Alise, M. A., & Teddlie, C. (2010). A continuation of the paradigm wars? Prevalence rates of methodological approaches across the social/behavioral sciences. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(2), 103–126.**

- In this article, Alise and Teddlie presented a systematic methodological review of the use of mixed methods across four prominent disciplines (education, nursing, psychology, and sociology) to highlight disciplinary differences in the status and use of mixed methods research.

- *3. **Plano Clark, V. L. (2010). The adoption and practice of mixed methods: U.S. trends in federally funded health-related research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 428–440.**

- In this article, Plano Clark summarized the importance of social contexts for mixed methods research and then presented a systematic methodological review of mixed methods proposals that received federal funding in the health sciences within the United States.

***4. Tashakkori, A. (2009). Are we there yet? The state of the mixed methods community [Editorial]. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(4), 287–291.**

- In this editorial, Tashakkori provided his reflections on the existence of a distinct community of mixed methods scholars that can provide a social context for conducting mixed methods research.

* The key resource is available at the following website:
<http://study.sagepub.com/planoclark>.

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