




Qualitative Ethnographic Research and Biosocial Science.

Thinking through 'mixed methods' and the
lifecourse

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Mixed Methods and the Life Course

- ▶ Differences Epidemiology and Anthropology
- ▶ Convergences as Opportunities
- ▶ Mixed Methods Research : Interdisciplinarity
- ▶ Life Course Approaches: opportunities for mixed methods
- ▶ Bren Neale Qualitative Longitudinal Research
- ▶ ‘Bioethnography’: Mexican Exposures project

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- ▶ Epidemiology – focus on statistical power, universal categories, generalisability ('size matters')
 - ▶ Anthropology - focus on the particular, acknowledgement of heterogeneity ('small is beautiful')

'Cultural Factorization' (DiGiacomo 2008)

- ▶ Possible to isolate cultural concepts from context without changing meaning
- ▶ Possible to reify culture as values, attitudes that attach to particular group
- ▶ Culture understood as protective or risk factor
- ▶ Only 'others' have culture
- ▶ Attitudes and values attributable to particular ethnic group become 'unreasonable' or evidence for misinformation

Methodology as culture

'Methodology is merely a human designed tool to interpret reality'

(Behague, Concalves, Victoria 2008)

Convergences as opportunities?

- ▶ Conceptual and Analytical similarities = both interested in explanation
- ▶ Need to develop dialogue as 'iterative process' – challenge each others assumptions and limitations
- ▶ What an anthropology informed by epidemiology might look like?
- ▶ What global health (more) informed by anthropology might be (Pigg 2013)

(Inhorn 2011, Behague, Goncalves and Vitoria 2009)

Multidisciplinary → Interdisciplinary

‘Truly **multidisciplinary** research needs to **incorporate** the conceptual frameworks and knowledge bases of participating disciplines’

(Lambert and McKeivitt 2002)

‘theoretical **interdisciplinarity** was more likely to unfold if we actively **challenged** each discipline’s epistemological assumptions and limitations’

(Behague, Concalves, Victoria 2008)



What is mixed methods research?

‘Mixed methods research combines elements from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms to produce converging findings in the context of complex research questions’

(Lingard, Albert, Levinson 2008)

Why mixed methods?

- ▶ To explore health behaviours
- ▶ To explore complexity – biological, environmental and social factors
- ▶ To triangulate results
- ▶ To produce results which can inform health policy and practice

Interdisciplinarity



Anthropology → epidemiology

- ▶ Informing the research question(s)
- ▶ Questionnaire design
- ▶ Informing analysis
- ▶ Exploring associations

Epidemiology → anthropology

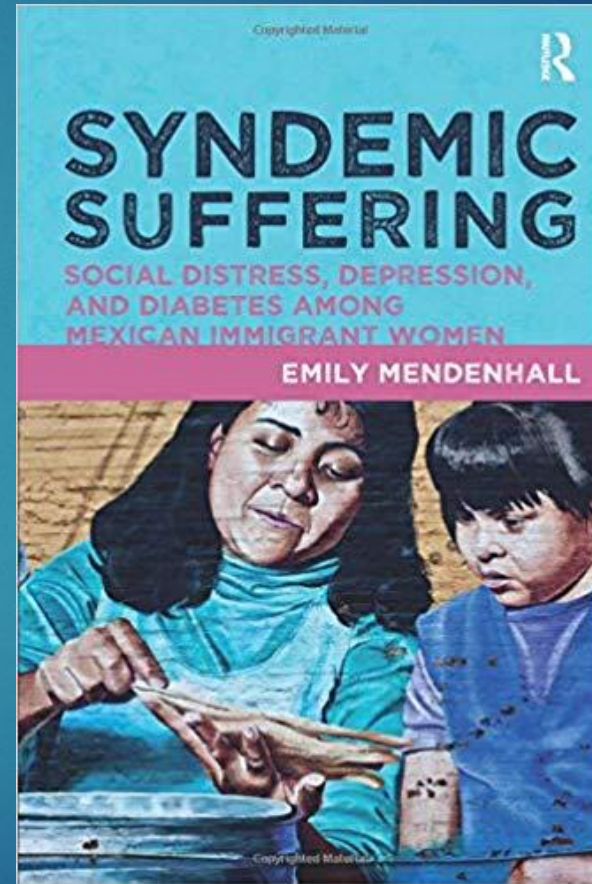
- ▶ Informing the sampling frame
- ▶ Informing the research questions
- ▶ Informing the research design
- ▶ Testing generalisability of results

How to do Mixed Methods?

- ▶ 'chicken or egg' : which first qualitative and quantitative (emic/etic meanings)?
- ▶ e.g. ageing
- ▶ What is lost and gained?
- ▶ Experiences of Mixed Methods Research: readings in Somatosphere on 'bioculturalism'

Emily Mendenhall (2008)
*Syndemic Suffering. Social
Distress, Depression and Diabetes
Among Mexican Immigrant
Women.* London Routledge

'matching biomarkers with
critical assessment of health
inequalities only strengthens
arguments and anthropologists
abilities to make their work
relevant outside of
anthropology, weaving robust
theoretical arguments with the
biological or psychological data
which maybe communicated as
biomedical' evidence.
(Bioculturalism, in Somatosphere
2015)




Lifecourse Approaches: opportunities for mixed methods

- ▶ Life course and Longitudinal Studies
 - ▶ Prospective studies (sometimes combined with retrospective gathering of past data)
 - ▶ The 'lifecourse' as organizing framework
- ▶ Qualitative Longitudinal Research
 - ▶ To follow individuals, households, collectives in real time
 - ▶ To engage with temporal dimensions of experience (change and continuity)
 - ▶ How to better integrate QLR in lifecourse research ?

Life course research

Three film genres:


- ▶ Epic Movie
- ▶ Intimate Movie
- ▶ Intimate Epic Movie?

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- ▶ **'EPIC MOVIE' : Quantitative Longitudinal Survey**
 - ▶ Gold standard of life course approach
 - ▶ Method regular questionnaires (every 1-5 years)
 - ▶ Large scale patterns of change from large data sets
 - ▶ What changes, for whom, direction and extent of change (e.g. observing social effects of poverty, migration, ill health)
 - ▶ Panoramic 'bird eye view' : big 'thin' data?
 - ▶ What is left out?



▶ **'INTIMATE MOVIE': Qualitative Longitudinal Research**

- ▶ Long history in social science – change and continuity in way lives unfold
- ▶ Small scale in-depth studies of individuals/communities tracked over time
- ▶ Focus not on events but agency of individuals in producing narrative coherence in lives
- ▶ Method of 'walking alongside'
- ▶ Show how and why social world unfolds/changes in different ways and how experienced/managed: more explanatory power than quantitative longitudinal study?
- ▶ Elliott (2005) accessing the 'reflexive individual'

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- ▶ **'INTIMATE EPIC MOVIE'** : a way of bridging the gap in life course studies?
 - ▶ Qualitative research nested within quantitative surveys
 - ▶ Scaling up of qualitative research combine breadth with depth
 - ▶ Revisiting existing data sets both qualitative and quantitative
 - ▶ Qualitative panel research as 'intimate epics': grounded big rich data but retain depth/explanatory power
 - ▶ Longitudinal biography E.g. Timescapes Study (<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk>) and [oldest generation project](#) (see Bornat and Bytheway 2008, 2010)