
Qualitative Evidence in Trauma Research: The Case of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* Preuve qualitative en recherche sur les traumatismes : le cas du *Journal of Traumatic Stress*

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ABSTRACT

The debate over the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative methods is particularly salient in the helping professions, where day-to-day clinical practice is potentially informed by research. Despite the growth in the use of qualitative methods and increasing recognition of their usefulness and relevance, particularly since the development of standards for evaluating their quality, the ratio of qualitative to quantitative articles published in journals within the helping professions tends to be small. In the context of previous studies that have shown that editorial interest in qualitative research considerably outweighs qualitative submissions and publications, we examine articles in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (JTS) to determine whether this pattern extends to the field of traumatic stress studies. Findings indicate that despite consistent interest in multidisciplinary approaches—including qualitative designs—expressed by the journal's editors, the publication of qualitative articles in the JTS has declined since 1988. Potential explanations and effects of this discrepancy are offered.

RÉSUMÉ

Le débat entourant les mérites comparatifs des méthodes qualitative et quantitative est particulièrement vif au sein des professions d'aide, dans lesquelles la pratique clinique peut se fonder sur la recherche. En dépit du recours croissant aux méthodes qualitatives et de la reconnaissance de plus en plus répandue concernant leur utilité et leur pertinence, surtout depuis l'élaboration de normes permettant d'évaluer leur qualité, on note, dans les revues scientifiques s'adressant aux professions d'aidants, que la proportion d'articles d'approche qualitative reste faible par rapport aux articles ayant recours aux méthodes quantitatives. Dans le contexte d'études antérieures montrant que l'intérêt démontré par les directions éditoriales pour la recherche qualitative l'emporte sur la fréquence des soumissions et des publications qualitatives, nous examinons les articles de la revue *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (JTS), afin de déterminer si cette tendance touche aussi le domaine des études sur le stress traumatique. Même si l'équipe éditoriale de la revue a exprimé un intérêt constant pour les approches multidisciplinaires, y compris le modèle de recherche qualitative, les résultats obtenus indiquent que le nombre d'articles d'approche qualitative publiés dans JTS a reculé depuis 1988. L'article propose des explications de cet écart observable et ses effets.

Despite a recent growth in the popularity of qualitative methods across a wide variety of social sciences (e.g., in psychology see Berríos & Lucca, 2006; Duffy &

Chenail, 2008; in sociology see Swygart-Hobaugh, 2004; in health and nursing see Whittemore, Chase, & Mandel, 2001), a debate over the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative methods persists. Although the debate tends to address valid questions about the usefulness and scientific rigour of qualitative research, the wildly divergent rhetoric within this debate is often overwhelming and confusing, making it difficult to separate the real value of qualitative research from the political attempts to promote it, and, conversely, to separate legitimate criticisms of qualitative research from political attempts to discredit it. In the context of this debate, a number of studies have demonstrated a distinct imbalance in the relative proportions of qualitative and quantitative research published in social science journals. As well, in many fields the level of interest in qualitative research expressed by researchers and journal editors has not been reflected in the proportionate publication of qualitative research.

Various explanations for this discrepancy have been offered, including confusion over what constitutes qualitative research, widespread ignorance of criteria that can be used to evaluate qualitative research, a lack of graduate-level training in qualitative methods, and perceived biases against qualitative research. Following the lead of Kidd (2002) and Marchel and Owens (2007), our purpose with this article is to illustrate how editorial interest in qualitative research in the field of traumatic stress studies has not translated into proportionate levels of publications of qualitative work. We show this by presenting an in-depth case example of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (JTS) because of its prominence as a key publication reflecting current knowledge and practice in the field of trauma psychology research.

ELEMENTS OF THE QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE DEBATE

The perceived distance between qualitative and quantitative research varies; some commentators have suggested that the differences are so great as to constitute two different cultures (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006), while others have argued that the distinction between the two approaches is difficult to sustain on close inspection (Allwood, 2012; Duffy & Chenail, 2008). Nonetheless, researchers coming from a postpositivist paradigm often see qualitative research as unreliable, invalid, anecdotal, and political, and in some cases not rigorously scientific (Gagliardi & Dobrow, 2011; Johansson, Risberg, & Hamberg, 2003; Morse, 2006a, 2006b). Qualitative researchers often defend their methods by emphasizing the value-ladenness of all paradigms, suggesting, like Denzin and Lincoln (2005), that “the positive science attack on qualitative research is regarded as an attempt to legislate one version of truth over another” (p. 8).

This political perspective has taken on particular salience in the context of practical matters such as funding, publication, and promotion. For example, in health research, Cochrane (1972) introduced a rating scale for determining the value of health research, in which qualitative research was “immediately classified as ‘mere opinion,’ as Grade C, the lowest level of evidence, not recommended for implementation” (Morse, 2006a, p. 396). For many researchers working in

the helping professions, including health research, education, social work, and psychology, qualitative research is considered imperative for informing practice, as it attends to relationships, interactions, and the context of care, rather than simply the efficacy of proposed cures (e.g., Kidd, 2002). This historical adoption of the Cochrane ratings by influential granting agencies in the UK introduced a threat not only to the professional development of health researchers, but also to the advancement of care-oriented treatment with theories and methods derived from qualitative research (Morse, 2006a).

In response to the perceived political threat, qualitative researchers defined standards for evaluating qualitative research derived from the epistemic basis of qualitative inquiry to improve the quality of such research, to demonstrate that qualitative research can be evaluated rigorously, and to give granting agencies and publishers criteria for judging qualitative research on its own merits, rather than applying “quantitative criteria to qualitative studies” (Kidd, 2002, p. 128; see also Coleman, Guo, & Dabbs, 2007; Kiseley & Kendall, 2011). Marchel and Owens (2007), for instance, have indicated that “perhaps the most substantial misconception about qualitative research is that it lacks rigor.... This misconception may stem from limited understanding of the standards of judgment applied to the research conducted” (p. 304).

Whittemore et al. (2001) have suggested that there is an increasing variety of techniques available to qualitative researchers for buttressing the soundness of their research. For example, as Marchel and Owens (2007) and Kiseley and Kendall (2011) have observed, the ideas of validity and reliability in quantitative research have equivalents in qualitative research, such as credibility and trustworthiness, although terminology varies. Specifically, credibility is improved by methods such as triangulation (i.e., seeking data from multiple sources and through multiple methods) during the data collection process; peer debriefing (e.g., to determine interrater reliability) and member checking (i.e., presenting some of the results to the participants) during the analysis process; and thick description (i.e., thorough explanation of context) during the presentation process. As well, thorough descriptions of the theoretical basis of analysis, lucid explanations of assumptions and standpoints, and clear descriptions of data analysis techniques can provide a measure of “replicability” for qualitative projects (Marchel & Owens, 2007).

Increasingly since the development of qualitative methods and standards for evaluating them, most commentators have appeared to recognize that qualitative and quantitative approaches both seek to answer scientific questions using empirical data (Duffy & Chenail, 2008), and that the dichotomy between the two, although somewhat pronounced in light of the epistemic differences, is false from the perspective of knowledge-generating usefulness. The value of qualitative research has been well documented; for example, in research that informs helping professions such as counselling, nursing, social work, and education, it provides real-world context that clinicians can draw on in their own practice for “assessing practitioners’ and patients’ attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and behaviors, and how these change over time” (Shuval et al., 2011, p. 1).

Qualitative Research in Trauma Studies

A lack of published qualitative research may inhibit the ability of the helping professions to address many important questions. As examples, Shuval et al. (2011) have suggested such topics as patient-doctor communication, improving care delivery, or understanding how health care providers and patients experience interventions. A lack of qualitative research may have similar effects within the field of traumatic stress studies. As noted by van der Kolk and Courtois (2005), “many clinicians do not find the existing PTSD research literature or treatment guidelines helpful in their day-to-day treatment of traumatized individuals” (p. 387); they suggested that clinicians faced with treating complex cases often rely on their clinical experience rather than on treatment models that are supported by empirical research because of a disparity between research samples and actual clinical populations. Thus, practitioners may be disinclined to draw knowledge from traumatic stress publications if that knowledge is predominantly quantitative and perceived as being a negligible source of practical information about how to conduct real-life clinical practice. Moreover, practical issues aside, omitting or marginalizing qualitative research may impede scientific progress in the field; as Kilpatrick (2005a) noted, “progress in the traumatic stress field will accelerate if we can integrate knowledge about traumatic stress obtained from different disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and types of traumatic victims” (p. 543).

Although the publication of papers based on qualitative research projects has increased over the past 30 years (e.g., Berríos & Lucca, 2006; Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Ponterotto, 2005), it still constitutes a small proportion of the total number of research articles published, both in the field of traumatic stress studies and in a variety of other fields (e.g., Hiebert, Domene, & Buchanan, 2011). Gagliardi and Dobrow (2011) conducted a review of 10 general medical journals and 10 health services and policy research journals between 1999 and 2008, finding that the percentage of qualitative research articles ranged from 0 to 0.6% for the medical journals and 0 to 6.4% for the health services and policy research journals.

Similarly, Shuval et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study of 67 general medical journals between 1998 and 2007, and found that the proportion of qualitative research had increased by 2.9%: from 1.2% in 1998 to 4.1% in 2007. Schoenberg, Shenk, and Kart (2007) studied three major gerontology journals between 2004 and 2007, and found approximately 1 out of 10 articles reflected qualitative research designs. Buckler (2008) reviewed 18 criminology and criminal justice journals between 2003 and 2007 and found between 4.9% and 14.3% of the published research studies were qualitative.

Similarly low proportions have been recorded in more recent psychological journals. Munley et al. (2002) conducted a study of 454 articles in 10 psychological journals in 1999, finding that 97.6% of them were quantitative, with only 3 of the reviewed journals publishing any qualitative studies at all. Kidd (2002) reviewed 15 APA journals in the years 1989, 1994, and 1999, finding that approximately 1% of them were qualitative, with only 5 of the 15 journals publishing

any qualitative research. Marchel and Owens (2007) reviewed 57 APA journals from 1950 (or the journal start date) until 2002, and out of their 96,379 articles, only 1,248 (1.3%) were qualitative. Bangert and Baumberger (2005) reviewed the *Journal of Counseling and Development* between January 1990 and December 2001, and found that 8% of the published studies used qualitative designs. Finally, Berrios and Lucca (2006) reviewed *Counseling and Values*, the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *Professional School Counseling*, and *The Counseling Psychologist* between 1997 and 2002, and found that 17% of their articles were qualitative. Although some of these reviews are somewhat outdated, the relatively small proportion of qualitative research is still well supported.

As part of their reviews of the psychological literature, Kidd (2002) and Marchel and Owens (2007) contacted journal editors to determine levels of editorial interest in qualitative research. Kidd conducted interviews with the editors of 10 of the 15 APA journals they reviewed, and found that although all the editors generally accepted the usefulness of qualitative research, several of them had reservations that influenced their opinions on whether such research should be published in their journals. Five were unequivocal about the value and relevance of qualitative research, indicating that such research should be published in their journals; 1 expressed concern about perceived weaknesses in qualitative research, but indicated willingness to consider publishing such work; and 4 indicated that the weaknesses limited the applicability of qualitative methods to psychology and would not consider publishing such work. Notably, “no participant stated that they believed that qualitative methods were fatally flawed. All agreed that this approach could be conceived of as a useful source of information” (Kidd, 2002, p. 134).

Marchel and Owens (2007) similarly received 40 responses to e-mails and letters they sent to the editors of the 57 APA-affiliated journals they reviewed, finding that 26 viewed qualitative research as “scientific and empirical,” while 24 indicated that they published qualitative manuscripts. Ten indicated they would like to publish more qualitative work but did not receive any qualitative submissions.

REVIEW OF THE *JOURNAL OF TRAUMATIC STRESS*

In the traumatic stress field, how common is qualitative research, what qualitative methods are used, and how is qualitative research perceived? To help us answer these questions, we explore the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (JTS) because of its high 2010 impact factor (2.374) in trauma psychology, and its prominence for researchers and practitioners as a source of current knowledge about traumatic stress and its treatment. Our choice is reflected by the JTS editors' descriptions of the mission of the journal, such as those by Figley (1988b) in his introductory statement: “We hope to serve our community as an international interdisciplinary forum for the publication of peer-reviewed original papers (both theoretical and applied), brief reports, and comments” (p. 2). Its editors have repeatedly described the JTS's role in guiding and informing the entire field of traumatic stress studies. Figley (1988c), for instance, noted the journal's

mandate, in accordance with the Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, as helping to “guide and document the important developments in the emerging field of study” (p. 6), and to provide direction to the agencies and organizations responsible for research and treatment decisions. In a later editorial, Figley (1988a) noted that the JTS “embraces the entire field of traumatic stress, and stimulates and disseminates significant advances for the future” (p. 143). Similarly, Weiss (2011) anticipated how over the course of his 5-year tenure the JTS would “take the lead in directing and shaping the field ... and providing a greater impact on the scientific community overall” (p. 2).

As a component of this guiding role, there has also been an emphasis on the work published in the JTS developing and informing clinical practice. In one of his early editorials, Figley (1988c) noted that articles published in the journal would have a “special emphasis on practical implications for intervention” (p. 7). Similar comments about the desired relevance of the JTS to clinical practice have been made by more recent editors as well; Kilpatrick (2005a), for example, indicated that the impact factor ranking of the JTS reflects well on “the relevance of traumatic stress to mainstream mental health science and practice” (p. 590), and Schnurr (2008), in correcting a misperception that the JTS does not publish clinical material or review articles, indicated that the editors “strive to include diverse topics that are relevant for a general audience” (p. 2).

The multidisciplinary nature of the JTS has been emphasized a number of times as well. Speaking of the field as a whole, Figley (1988c) noted, “It will certainly become interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary” (p. 4). By 2005, Kilpatrick (2005a) noted the degree to which Figley’s predictions had come true, describing the international scope of the field, the range of topics investigated, and the role of the JTS’s multidisciplinary nature in providing a “range of conceptual frameworks, assessment procedures, and research methods” for use in understanding traumatic stress (p. 543). As is characteristic of most editorials in the JTS, Kilpatrick saw this multidisciplinary nature as a defining advantage for the JTS and the field as a whole: “progress in the traumatic stress field will accelerate,” he wrote, “if we can integrate knowledge about traumatic stress obtained from different disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and types of traumatic victims” (p. 543).

However, out of the JTS’s multidisciplinary nature arise tensions between different beliefs, treatment approaches, and research methods. Particularly prominent among these is the tension between clinicians and empirical researchers. For example, Kilpatrick (2005b) described this tension in his introduction to the special section on complex trauma by pointing out how, being wary of non-evidence-based interventions, “[o]ne camp thinks that research as opposed to clinical intuition should drive our treatment choices,” and that “such treatments should be used as front-line clinical interventions”; the other camp, in contrast, “tends to take a dim view of treatment guidelines and manualized treatments,” valuing clinical intuition and experience over treatment research that is sometimes perceived as being “so flawed that it provides little guidance about how to do treatment in ‘real world’ clinical practice” (p. 381). Hartsough (1988) has suggested that an ideal

synthesis of the two aspects of traumatic stress research would involve attention to both rigorous measurement and the “richness of the clinical perspective” (p. 148). But this ideal is not always realized in practice, and views on the importance of the clinical perspective tend to highlight a perception that laboratory studies of research samples are highly disconnected from the realities of treatment.

Statements published in the *JTS* in favour of qualitative research generally observe that qualitative research offers a more holistic view of certain complex experiences and situations that could not necessarily be captured through quantitative measures. As Kastenbaum (1988) pointedly noted with regard to the field of thanatology, “Death, where is thy sting?” is a question not likely to be discovered via a 15-item fixed-choice instrument” (p. 397). The same could be said about something as grave and life-altering as traumatic stress. Compare that to Goodwin and Segura (1995), for example, who noted, “we often overlook the value of qualitative research in providing models for understanding the human experience in depth and for generating hypotheses for future research” (p. 359). Similarly, the exploratory and hypothesis-generating capability of qualitative research has been underscored by other writers; Goodman, Dutton, and Harris (1997), for example, in observing that the complex mental health histories of homeless, mentally ill women makes it very difficult to identify causal links between explanatory variables and outcome variables, suggested that “[t]hese problems indicate a need for qualitative research to deepen our understanding of the ways in which these women experience violent victimization. What meaning do they make of it in their lives?” (p. 68). Guay, Billette, and Marchand (2006) observed similarly how “the sole reliance on quantitative methods for measuring social support may constrain the field’s ability to understand other important dimensions” (p. 333).

Qualitative Research in the JTS

To characterize the nature of qualitative research in the *JTS*, and the changes that have taken place over the history of the journal, we conducted a review of the articles published since the first issue in 1988. We consider this review exploratory because it is comparatively self-evident that qualitative research, particularly purely qualitative research, is relatively rare in the *JTS*, and rather than trying to quantify that rarity per se, we are interested in exploring how qualitative methods are used in traumatic stress research, and how the research published in the *JTS* might reflect beliefs about qualitative research within the *JTS* or the field at large.

To find articles that included qualitative methods, we relied primarily on searches conducted on the publisher’s website (Wiley Online Library: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>), which has indexed every article published in the *JTS* since January 1988. Keyword searches included variations on “qualitative,” “code,” “open-ended,” “interview,” and “case reports/examples/studies/histories.” Articles were reviewed by hand to determine their qualitative content. We have organized the following discussion by editorial period, both as a way of highlighting changes in the *JTS*’s attitudes and as a convenient, shorthand way of splitting up a considerable amount of material.

In calculating the total number of articles published in each editorial period that actually hinged on conducting or discussing research, we included commentaries and brief reports, and excluded editorials, introductions to special sections, letters to the editor, announcements, book reviews, and errata. We recognize that these distinctions in article type are somewhat arbitrary, as the distinction between a commentary and a letter to the editor, for instance, can often be one of degree; our touchstone was merely the distinctions made by the Wiley Online Library. We attempted to ascertain whenever an article was published under one editor but had been accepted by their predecessor. We do not wish to contend that out of the total number of articles published, minus those that include qualitative methods, the remainder are quantitative; this is clearly not the case, as the JTS publishes a great variety of additional article types, including meta-analyses, literature reviews, conceptual papers, and commentaries on previously published articles.

Period 1: 1988–1992. By our estimate, 189 articles were published in this period. Of these, we identified eight that report on qualitative studies. Although some of these were relatively straightforward studies involving the thematic interpretation of interview data (e.g., Roth & Lebowitz, 1988), other researchers used methods relatively uncommon in traumatic stress research. Giel (1991), for example, used an ethnographic method: “The following paper is not based on systematic research,” he wrote, “but on observations and numerous interviews, both arranged and spontaneous, with villagers, townspeople, authorities, health workers, and the general public” (p. 383). Although standards for evaluating the validity of qualitative research have been offered (e.g., Whittemore et al., 2001), our characterization of these eight studies as qualitative does not take into account their potential quality or validity. In Bar-On (1990), for example, the “explicitness” criterion described by Whittemore et al. (2001) is unmet, as there is no formal explication of the methods used to analyze the interview data.

Manuscripts that combined qualitative methods with other methods were published approximately seven times during this period. In several of these articles, researchers gathered qualitative data through open-ended questionnaires or interview questions, but then coded those data into quantitative information for statistical analysis. Van der Kolk and Ducey (1989) were somewhat rare among the mixed-methods projects in that they presented an analysis of 13 Vietnam veterans’ Rorschach records using an approach that combined quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis, and then presented a longitudinal case example about one particular participant. Additionally, approximately 26 articles present case examples that include qualitative information of one sort or another, but not a large proportion of these solely present case examples. Many of them are conceptual papers that use case examples for illustration (e.g., Hiley-Young, 1992), and some, rather than presenting examples of qualitative data such as quotes, include only descriptions of backgrounds or events (e.g., Gersons, 1989). In one of these articles (Talbot, Manton, & Dunn, 1992), it is unclear whether the case example presented is real or fictitious. Many articles using case examples were excluded because they present only quantitative data about the case in question (e.g., Perconte, 1989).

A few of these articles are unusual and not easily classified. Shay (1991), for example, presented an interpretation of Homer's *Iliad* as a source of knowledge about trauma and combat stress, using case examples from his experience as a clinician in a partial hospitalization program for Vietnam veterans with chronic PTSD. Hyer, Woods, and Boudewyns (1991) described a three-tier, mixed-method procedure for evaluating PTSD "to understand better the operative components of chronic PTSD and to treat it better," under the assumption that "a holistic assessment and understanding of chronic PTSD are required" (p. 166). However, the article only presents qualitative data incidentally, as the case example included in the paper is a mixed-methods approach to understanding a given case of PTSD that incorporates qualitative data into a treatment strategy; in other words, no qualitative data were gathered specifically for the purposes of the study.

Period 2: 1993–1997. During this period, approximately 263 articles were published, and of these, only six present the results of qualitative studies. rather than being a straightforward study that set out to gather data of one kind or another, one of them (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994) presents largely anecdotal data gathered through the first author's experience as a trauma psychologist and the second author's experience in active employment as a navy clinician. Some studies that we excluded (e.g., Peterson & Biggs, 1997) involved the collection of qualitative data but the analysis was exclusively quantitative.

We identified 12 articles that combined qualitative and quantitative methods. A few unusual articles in this cohort are worth mentioning. Instead of using interviews or questionnaires, some researchers gathered qualitative information in rather unorthodox ways. Flannery and Penk (1996), for example, reported on a variety of anecdotal and informal sources of information, including "use of sick leave, medical visits related to violent acts, Industrial Accident Claims, requests for transfers to other units, and staff turnover due to violence," as well as "ASAP [Assaulted Staff Action Program] team ratings of any symptoms of acute distress as well as disruptions in mastery, attachment, and meaning in employee victims" that were obtained during debriefing interviews (p. 322). Shalev, Schreiber, and Galai (1993) combined ethnographic methods with quantitative measures such as the Impact of Events Scale (IES). Although Van Driel and Op den Velde (1995) gathered both qualitative and quantitative data through straightforward interviews, they did not outline any methods for interpreting the qualitative data; instead, they presented it in the results section only as "facts" about the participants (e.g., "Eight of the 18 survivors reported distress during the first year after the MI [myocardial infarction]" [p. 154]).

As was the case in the first editorial period, several of the studies in this period involved the collection of qualitative data, but the analysis was predominantly quantitative. For example, Bremner and Brett (1997) included open-ended questions about the participants' most traumatic experiences as part of administering the Modified Dissociative Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ-M), and although the analyses for the purposes of the study were all quantitative, examples of the

participants' responses to the open-ended questions were presented with the results; this article was included in our count.

A study by Newman, Riggs, and Roth (1997), in contrast, was excluded from our count of qualitative articles for incorporating an unusual method of data collection: instead of using interview data to generate codes, the authors conducted interviews with 15 predetermined themes and structured the interviews as necessary to cover all of the themes. They then rated the resolution of these themes on a 6-point scale, which was later condensed into the variables "resolved," "unresolved," and "nonrelevant." Thus, unlike a qualitative study that uses interviews to gather unanticipated data, the authors used a method that is only a degree removed from a close-ended questionnaire. As well, a number of studies (e.g., Goodman, Corcoran, Turner, Yuan, & Green, 1998) were excluded for coding responses to open-ended questions into quantitative variables for statistical analysis. Foa, Molnar, and Cashman (1995), for instance, gathered and analyzed participants' narratives, but only for types of utterance, such as "desperate thoughts," "negative feelings," or "speech filler" (p. 682), and the relative proportions of each type and the change in these proportions over time were then analyzed statistically.

The paper by Liem, O'Toole, and James (1996) is unusual and was excluded for subjecting qualitative data to a quantitative analysis. The authors used a quantitative coding method called *n Power coding* to quantify the levels of powerlessness expressed in the participants' narratives. They also developed thematic codes related to powerlessness and betrayal that they marked as either present or absent in a given narrative. Because the purpose of the study was to quantitatively compare the powerlessness ratings of abused and nonabused participants, we believe that the study does not qualify as including qualitative methods; the quotes in the discussion are merely used to illustrate the quantitative findings.

Twelve articles were identified that presented case examples. Zaidi (1994) described a pilot treatment program for abused children. Aside from some anecdotal statements about the efficacy of the program, the article reads predominantly like a description of a generic treatment program rather than a specific one, as specific information about the actual participants in the pilot program was omitted altogether.

Period 3: 1998–2005. Approximately 513 articles were published during this editorial period, out of which one (North et al., 2005) reports on a qualitative study and another nine present a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Again, some of these mixed-methods studies were predominantly quantitative. Falsetti, Resick, and Davis (2003), for example, reported on only a paucity of the qualitative data they gathered; examples from responses to their open-ended interview questions were used primarily in the conclusion to support some of their theoretical assertions. Norris et al. (2001) only used open-ended solicitation methods to determine the existence or prevalence of PTSD symptoms. Two studies—Zoellner, Alvarez-Conrad, and Foa (2002), and van Minnen, Wessel, Dijkstra, and Roelofs (2002)—were excluded for subjecting qualitative data to quantitative analysis, using the same method as Foa et al. (1995) described above.

Finally, about four of the articles incorporate case examples involving qualitative information. Others (such as Taylor & Cahill, 2002) were excluded for presenting case examples only with quantitative measures.

Period 4: 2006–2010. Out of approximately 474 articles published during this editorial period, none report solely on qualitative research. Only three incorporate qualitative methods into a mixed-method approach. Among these, Poulin, Silver, Gil-Rivas, Holman, and McIntosh (2009) coded their participants' open-ended responses into themes, and then used the themes they derived from the coding to recode the data for a quantitative analysis. It appears likely that they could have conducted the same research using a survey if they had known ahead of time which items to use. Again, some articles were excluded for gathering qualitative information but then coding it into quantitative data for statistical analysis (e.g., Yeomans, Herbert, & Forman, 2008). Similarly, a study conducted by Sobel, Resick, and Rabalais (2009) involved coding narratives, but only for utterance types, the quantities of which were presented with the results. A comparable approach was used by Bender, Ferguson, Thompson, Komlo, and Pollio (2010): "Qualitative descriptions were employed to create quantitative variables by assigning numerical codes to the youths' most common responses" (p. 163).

Only two articles involving case studies with qualitative information were published in this time period. As with the articles published in prior periods, some case studies (e.g., Gerardi, Rothbaum, Ressler, Heekin, & Rizzo, 2008) were published that included only quantitative information. As well, Bisson (2008) was excluded for presenting only fictional case examples.

Period 5: 2011–current. Articles published in this most recent editorial period were examined through to the sixth and last issue of volume 24 (December 2011). Out of approximately 110 articles published in 2011, two reported on qualitative studies (Kaltman, Hurtado de Mendoza, Gonzales, Serrano, & Guarnaccia, 2011; Sayer et al., 2011). There were no articles that included case examples with qualitative information; one case study (McCarthy & Petrakis, 2011) was excluded for reporting only on quantitative measures.

DISCUSSION

Some general comments about the research we examined are worth noting. It is fairly apparent that straightforward qualitative research studies are very rarely published in the JTS. Many of the articles we included in our review either used mixed methods, which we often characterized as such for including only one or two open-ended questions in the data collection, or were case studies. Many of the articles that included qualitative data often incorporated the data for the purpose of addressing or clarifying only a minor aspect of what was predominantly a quantitative study. We doubtless missed some of the papers in the JTS that incorporate qualitative methods, because the exact method of a research project is rarely laid out in clearly indexable terms in the resulting article, and we make no claim to have examined all of the articles published in the JTS in detail. As well, others

may define qualitative methods more liberally (or conservatively) by including, for example, projects that examine narratives or responses to open-ended questions numerically (e.g., Zoellner et al., 2002).

However, it is highly unlikely that we missed so many or that an alternative definition could be so broad that the relative scarcity of qualitative studies that we observed, and the general downward trend in their frequency since the journal was inaugurated, would be disproved by a more rigorous study. A number of possible reasons for this discrepancy, and for the overall paucity of qualitative research in the literature despite its established strengths, are offered below.

First, there appears to be a large amount of confusion about the nature of qualitative research (Morse, 2006b). Whereas quantitative research is at least identifiable by its use of statistical analyses, “qualitative research,” as described by Wallace and van Fleet (1998), “is unlike pornography in that one does not necessarily know it when one sees it” (p. 757). For researchers, editors, and referees who are unfamiliar with standards of qualitative research or who are skeptical of qualitative methods in general, terms commonly used by qualitative researchers and distinctions between them can often appear confusing, vague, or deliberately obscure, as Wallace and van Fleet (1998) describe:

A consequence of the terminological quagmire in which qualitative research is currently trapped is that editors, editorial board members, and referees are presented with a wide variety of unfamiliar terms that are used inconsistently by different authors. It is not difficult to understand the resultant conceptual and terminological dissonance. (p. 757)

Terminology is also an issue among qualitative researchers themselves, in cases where researchers take it for granted that their papers will be read by an audience already schooled in qualitative methods and consequently neglect to define key terms and be explicit about analytic techniques. Similar issues arise when quantitative researchers attempt qualitative techniques without sufficient familiarity with validating strategies and epistemic perspectives, leading to what Coleman et al. (2007) described as “qualitative lite” (p. 56). Coupled with the terminological issues is a general skepticism about the scientific validity of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kidd, 2002; Naidoo & Orlme, 1998). Johansson et al. (2003), for example, conducted a study of physicians’ judgements of qualitative and quantitative abstracts, and found that physicians generally considered the qualitative study to be lacking scientific accuracy. Adding that to terminology that appears vague and confusing and papers that are not explicit about methods, it appears that some referees and editors would be likely to undermine the publication of qualitative studies.

Second, issues related to publication are also likely at play in maintaining the marginal status of qualitative research in the literature. Journals’ word limits, for example, are often seen as an impediment to the publication of qualitative research, which typically deals with complex cases that require a lot of space to explicate fully and clearly (e.g., Morse, 2006b; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Quantita-

tive papers can typically follow a standard format (objective, method, results, conclusion), but because the format of qualitative papers is much more variable, qualitative researchers find it difficult when they are mandated to structure their papers according to the standard template (Bradley, 1993; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Additionally, editors' research background and training may influence their overall view on the types of research that are likely to be considered high quality; editors with strong backgrounds in qualitative research, for example, may accept more qualitative studies simply because they would be more qualified to judge the quality and relevance of those kinds of articles.

Third, qualitative researchers are also at a relative disadvantage because of the resources required to conduct many qualitative studies (particularly the resource of time) and the relative difficulty of the data gathering and analysis (Carlson & Dutton, 2003; Schoenberg et al., 2007). Studies designed with attention to trustworthiness will typically involve long periods of time in the field, and writing up thick descriptions is a time-intensive process, particularly when compared to the relative ease of analyzing the results of self-report measures quantitatively. As well, there also appears to be a lack of qualitative researchers available to train graduate students, among whom interest in qualitative research outweighs faculty expertise (Buckler, 2008; Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). This lack of training resources also reflects a relatively small number of researchers actually conducting qualitative research in the field (Kidd, 2002; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999; Munley et al., 2002).

Whatever the cause for the low number of qualitative articles in the literature, the relative rarity of these articles may itself discourage the submission of qualitative articles by perpetuating a perceived bias, even in lieu of a real bias on the part of editors or reviewers, which may also be a contributing factor (Kidd, 2002). In interviewing editors of criminology journals, for example, Buckler (2008) found that some editors believed that this perceived bias, based on a general lack of qualitative publications or on comments received from reviewers and editors, likely discourages researchers from submitting qualitative papers, particularly to top-tier journals.

In terms of qualitative trauma research, Schnurr (2006), for example, responded in a *JTS* editorial to feedback she had received from readers about "a perceived lack of clinically relevant material specifically aimed at a practice-oriented audience" (p. 1) by noting that, in general, the editors "publish what [they] receive" (p. 2), and thus the paucity of clinically oriented materials in the journal reflects a low number of submissions. In that editorial and in a later one (Schnurr, 2008), she encouraged readers to submit qualitative reviews, case studies, and other clinically oriented papers, but the review of articles that we conducted indicates fairly clearly that these kinds of articles were not forthcoming. This is not particularly surprising considering the weight of the evidence about what is likely to actually appear in the pages of the *JTS*.

An editor's perspective on the types of articles submitted is necessarily going to be different from that of a reader who sees a predominance of quantitative meth-

ods appearing in the JTS, and this predominance is likely to be discouraging for a researcher who wishes to have their work published. In this sense, “we publish what we receive” leads to a sort of paradox, where the JTS editors’ stated interest in clinically relevant material is negated by a preponderance of quantitative submissions. Such preponderance may also have a ripple effect through the uptake of associated beliefs in other parts of the field. As noted by Rennie, Watson, and Monteiro (2000):

Once knowledge is defined by method, then institutions of power (university curricula and hiring practices, criteria used by granting agencies, editorial policies of journals, etc.) are organised to materialise the definition. From then on, claims to knowledge based on alternative methods are either ignored or dismissed. (§26)

Thus, as an additional potential reason for the decline in qualitative studies published in the JTS, we suggest that the prevalence of quantitative studies in the JTS may be self-perpetuating, in that it discourages qualitative researchers from submitting their research on the basis of a belief that their work has a low likelihood of being published.

As a final point, qualitative methods in the field of traumatic stress, at least as judged by the articles published in the JTS, do not seem to have been clearly defined, so it is not always clear what someone in the field means when they use the term “qualitative.” Creswell and Zhang (2009), in an attempt to clarify some of the ambiguity around mixed-methods approaches in the field, note that the mixed-methods studies they review “are not called mixed methods, do not use explicit systematic mixed methods procedures, and have not been analyzed to use as models for designing mixed methods research on trauma topics” (p. 612). This also appears to be the case in the JTS, based on our review of its articles; very infrequently are mixed-methods studies referred to explicitly as such, and there is very little consistency in how mixed methods are applied. This may reflect some confusion or ambiguity around how people conceive of or understand qualitative methods, particularly in a field that has traditionally emphasized quantitative approaches.

CONCLUSION

Many of the articles and editorials published in the JTS have acknowledged that both quantitative and qualitative methods are relevant and important for traumatic stress research. Despite a number of editorials by various editors suggesting that clinicians are not satisfied with the amount of clinically relevant material published in the journal, our review suggests that researchers doing qualitative traumatic stress research are still at a clear disadvantage in terms of both getting research reports published in the JTS and being able to refer to the JTS as a resource for developing their own research programs. Because of the esteemed position of the journal in the field and its purported desire to influence the entire field along with

its attendant funding and treatment organizations (e.g., Figley, 1988c), the JTS is particularly important as a forum for the promotion of qualitative research. Its tendency to subordinate this important aspect of traumatic stress studies threatens to negatively influence the field as a whole.

As a brief comparison, we corresponded with editors from other less prominent trauma-based journals about their practices in publishing qualitative research. We received e-mail responses from 14 editors and found that qualitative research reports were definitely published more rarely than quantitative papers; for example, editors commented that “for qualitative publications I would estimate somewhere on the order of <5%,” “qualitative work makes up a minority of our papers,” and “qualitative papers represent less than 10% of published papers.” Nonetheless, editors were open to receiving qualitative manuscripts. On the basis of these responses, the trend we observed in the JTS appears to also affect other trauma-focused journals in the field. In light of these findings, how might we open up the conversation to promote a more inclusive research atmosphere in the field?

In this article, we presented a few observations that reflect our views on the value of qualitative research, along with its role in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* and the traumatic stress field as a whole. The evidence we provide lays out a fairly simple circumstance: Although qualitative research is invaluable for answering certain questions, and prominent journals recognize the value of qualitative research, there is a paucity of qualitative research that appears in the pages of trauma-focused journals. The intent of this contribution is not to lay an argument to rest, but rather to begin it in earnest—to stimulate thought and encourage discussion, to cultivate ideas and inspire solutions for furthering qualitative research in traumatic stress studies.

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