Graduate education in qualitative methods in U.S. psychology: current trends and recommendations for the future

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ABSTRACT
The visibility of qualitative research methods (QRM) in U.S. psychology has increased with the dissemination of qualitative research in journals and books, formation of professional and scientific organizations, and recognition in educational institutions. While gains have been made, the current state of doctoral training in qualitative methods remains uncertain. It is unclear what training graduate students receive in U.S. psychology programs about qualitative methodologies and how further gains can be made in expanding visibility of QRM in graduate education. In this mixed-methods study, we surveyed a sample of faculty in U.S. psychology graduate programs about the frequency of QRM course offerings, graduate training, and students’ use of QRM in their dissertation research. We also explored qualitative responses from faculty regarding their attitudes about QRM and how these attitudes might help increase or diminish the frequency of methods training available to students. We found that even within graduate programs where there was support for QRM, enduring perceptions about the value of qualitative research limit faculty and graduate students’ use of qualitative methodologies in their research. With these findings in mind, we offer several recommendations for increasing the visibility of QRM in U.S. graduate education and the discipline of psychology as a whole.

KEYWORDS
Faculty; graduate students; qualitative; research methods; training

Introduction

While there have been advances in the uptake of qualitative research methods (QRM) within psychology, including the development of journals such as Qualitative Research in Psychology and Qualitative Psychology, the current state of doctoral training in qualitative methods remains uncertain. This leads to important and pressing questions for U.S. psychologists to consider as the field moves forward. For example, how many graduate students are being trained in QRM? What are collegial and departmental attitudes
regarding qualitative inquiry in graduate training? What is needed in terms of departmental resources to support graduate training in QRM?

In order to address these questions, we surveyed a sample of faculty in U.S. psychology graduate programs. We asked about the frequency of QRM course offerings, future intentions for graduate courses, and students’ use of QRM in their dissertation research. In addition, we examined qualitative survey responses concerning faculty attitudes about qualitative research as a means to better understand attitudes about QRM. We hope that the findings and suggestions addressed here will serve as a catalyst for debate regarding the importance of U.S. doctoral training in QRM.

**Review of literature**

**QRM in psychology**

Several stakeholders have developed recommendations to expand research and teaching opportunities in qualitative inquiry, including federal granting bodies and professional associations (Yakushko & Hook 2017). For example, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) called for increased financial support for qualitative dissertations and additional student training opportunities in QRM in order to increase publication rates of qualitative research (Lamont & White 2010). Echoing NSF’s recommendations, professional associations and task forces have advocated for additional instruction in the review and reporting of qualitative research in psychology (Gergen, Josselson & Freeman 2015). To aid the review of manuscripts that use qualitative methods, the Society for the Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (SQIP) recently established comprehensive guidelines for reviewing qualitative research for publication (Levitt et al. 2017). Related, the Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research was tasked with developing recommendations for the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication and Communications Board. The group recently proposed comprehensive guidelines for reporting qualitative research in the newest edition of the *Publication Manual the American Psychological Association* (Levitt et al. in press). The development of this formalized guidance for qualitative researchers signals growing integration of QRM in contemporary U.S. psychology.

Recommendations have also been developed to support QRM training in graduate education, including advocacy efforts to broaden the range of methodological expertise available to emerging scholars (e.g., SQIP Executive Committee Comment n.d.). More recently, APA’s Commission on Accreditation endorsed instruction in qualitative methods as a requirement for accredited psychology programs (APA 2015). The breadth of instruction in QRM, however, remains unclear in the proposed revisions to
curriculum. Given that the publication and use of these methods have risen steadily in psychology (Hays et al. 2016), these recommendations indicate that training in the design, review, and reporting of qualitative methods are important in preparing future researchers in the practices of the field (Levitt et al. 2017).

In terms of methodological training and available coursework, psychology has a longstanding interest in gathering data about what students are taught in their graduate programs. Most notably, Aiken, West and Millsap (2008) assessed the frequency and scope of graduate training in statistics, measurement techniques, and research design in their survey of psychology Ph.D. programs in the United States and Canada. Their findings highlighted departmental requirements in quantitative methodology, faculty support for quantitative training, and barriers to advanced statistical training for graduate students. Aiken et al. (2008) offered several recommendations to improve the quality of quantitative training and enhance the future of psychological science, including departmental support for quantitative faculty, additional graduate courses in advanced statistical techniques, and enhancements to research design curricula. Following this model, we aimed to evaluate the scope of qualitative methods training in U.S. psychology doctoral programs in order to assess contemporary practices in the field and offer recommendations to enhance training in QRM.

**Graduate training in QRM**

When QRM is incorporated into graduate curriculum, it is often brief and part of a larger methods course that prioritizes quantitative methods (Clarke & Braun 2013). Popular psychology textbooks in the United States provide limited coverage of QRM, and most advice on data presentation in these textbooks applies to quantitative research exclusively (Eagly & Riger 2014). Limited instruction in qualitative methodologies often results in few graduate students engaging in QRM or using these tools in their research (Harper 2012; Povee & Roberts 2014).

Although there is limited information on the number of U.S. doctoral programs offering QRM training, previous research has explored the frequency of QRM training provided in counseling psychology programs. Ponterotto (2005) surveyed training directors in counseling programs in the United States and Canada about the frequency of qualitative courses. Results indicated that only 10% of counseling programs required graduate coursework, and most courses in QRM were electives rather than required as part of the degree. When asked about introductory research courses, about one-third (27%) of respondents indicated that students received approximately one to three lectures of qualitative training. Ponterotto (2005) argued
that these findings indicated that most counseling psychology programs do not provide balanced instruction in quantitative and qualitative methods.

Training in qualitative inquiry impacts how many and how often graduate students use qualitative methods in their dissertation research. Looking historically, Keeley and colleagues (1988) reviewed abstracts for U.S. clinical psychology dissertations in 1965 and 1985 and found that of the 249 dissertations completed in 1965, only two students (<1%) used qualitative methods; in 1985, this number increased to 23 of the 641 (3.6%) but remained a tiny proportion of dissertation research. Twenty years later, Ponterotto (2005) found that this percentage had increased to 15.6% in a sample of counseling psychology programs. Ponterotto (2005) found that students who were required to take a QRM course used qualitative methods twice as often in their dissertation research as compared to those who were in programs that did not require a QRM course (29.7% compared to 13.9%). Given that the rate of qualitative dissertations increased with required coursework, integration of QRM on an institutional level may be key in students’ use of QRM in their own research. In the current study, rather than focus on one area of psychology such as clinical or counseling, we aimed to understand the status of qualitative research training across a range of areas (e.g., social, developmental, education) in U.S. psychology doctoral programs.

**Attitudes toward QRM**

Attitudes toward qualitative research, perceptions about subjectivity, and investments in the scientific method are an important part of this picture. Research has found that negative perceptions of qualitative inquiry can discourage students’ use of QRM in research (Povee & Roberts 2014; Roberts & Castell 2016). For example, interviews with Australian psychology faculty and students documented concerns about the subjective nature of QRM, its limited generalizability, and the perceived lack of scientific rigor (Povee & Roberts 2014). Povee and Roberts (2014) concluded that faculty’s and students’ limited exposure to QRM and perceptions of QRM as not “real science” created barriers that lead to decreased use of QRM. Psychology faculty have also described an absence of departmental support for teaching QRM in universities. Mitchell and colleagues (2007) detailed a lack of appropriately trained faculty for teaching qualitative methodologies and little or no institutional support for mentoring qualitative researchers in Canadian psychology departments. They concluded that negative attitudes about qualitative research within the discipline of psychology inform decision making about the frequency of QRM courses within departments. This evidence cumulatively points to how perceptions of disciplinary success continue to shape curriculum and training opportunities in graduate psychology programs.
The sidelining of qualitative research within psychology departments ultimately speaks to questions of value and, in particular, what types of methodologies and methods are considered legitimate. Within the 21st century university context, psychology has increasingly turned toward psychological science, with an emphasis on observable measurement, and has valued research designs that aim to discover causal mechanisms (Bhati, Hoyt & Huffman 2014; Brinkmann 2015). Reflecting trends within university settings, the most influential journals in psychology overwhelmingly publish experiments, quasi-experiments, and meta-analyses (Eagly & Riger 2014). Departments evaluate productivity through publication rates in top-tier psychology journals, making qualitative research a potentially risky investment given tenure and promotion pressures (Morawski 2011). The tremendous differences in institutional prestige between quantitative and qualitative methodologies speaks to how the discipline of psychology assigns value and worth to research, and in particular, its suitability for funding or publication. What remains unclear is how perceptions of value foster or diminish the types of methods training available to graduate students.

Although reports have documented the state of quantitative curriculum (Aiken et al. 1990, 2008), there is less information about instructional practices in QRM training across subdisciplines in psychology. The current study sought to assess the amount, frequency, and duration of QRM training in U.S. psychology graduate programs, as well as faculty attitudes about QRM. We focused on three research questions: (1) How many psychology programs offer qualitative research training and what are the characteristics of these courses? (2) What are faculty attitudes regarding QRM training in their respective departments or areas? (3) Are there associations between personal, disciplinary and/or departmental values and how often QRM courses are offered or used in dissertation research?

**Current study**

**Study design**

To assess graduate training in qualitative methods, the study team designed a survey with close- and open-ended items. In the close-ended items, we assessed the frequency of QRM training, characteristics about QRM course offerings (e.g., length of course, rate of enrollment), graduate student use of QRM in their dissertation research, and future intentions for offering QRM courses. In the open-ended items, we assessed faculty attitudes about qualitative methodologies (e.g., perceptions of QRM as important or unimportant
in a respondent’s department). The following section provides an overview of
the sample and multiphase analysis techniques used in this study.

Sample
We designed a sample to include universities in the United States that
housed graduate psychology programs. Programs that offered only a
PsyD or a Master’s degree, as well as those with only online courses,
were excluded. Using several comprehensive websites listing graduate
programs, we compiled a list of 871 graduate programs (as of 2015).
Since our intent was to understand the role of QRM in graduate training,
we focused on those graduate programs where it was more likely to be
taught (rather than simply documenting the presence or absence of QRM
training across all psychology programs). With this in mind, we nar-
rowed the list to those programs with some history of using qualitative
methods in research (e.g., developmental psychology, organizational psy-
chology); this reduced the list to 340 relevant programs. From this list,
we identified three departmental contacts (chair of department or area,
director of graduate program, and departmental administrator) using
university websites and emailed a link to an online survey. Participants
were asked to either fill out the survey or to forward the e-mail to any
psychology faculty who are knowledgeable in graduate methods courses
in their department. A total of 487 emails were sent (180 to department
chairs; 117 to graduate program directors; 190 to departmental
administrators).

We received 125 surveys (26% overall response rate). However, given
that one-third of the sample were not intended as survey responders but as
administrative links to departmental faculty (190 individuals), 42% reflects
a more accurate response rate. Of these surveys, 111 were sufficiently
complete to be included in the analysis (14 removed due to missing
data). There was a wide variety of areas represented within the sample,
including, for example, participants from social psychology (26%) and
community psychology (9%); see Table 1 for more details. This diversity
of psychology area representation meant that our sample included those
working in a variety of sub-fields and holding a wide variety of attitudes
about QRM. For example, those programs with a long history of invest-
ment in qualitative methodologies (e.g., counseling psychology, education/
school psychology) accounted for two-thirds (68%) of the sample. A total
of 76 universities were represented in the sample, from 26 states and the
District of Columbia, and included public (e.g., University of California,
Berkeley) and private universities (e.g., Princeton). Institutions ranged
from small liberal arts colleges (e.g., 1 600 graduate and undergraduate
students) to large universities (e.g., 44 000 graduate and undergraduate
students).
Survey

The survey consisted of 20 items and took approximately 7–12 minutes to complete. All respondents were asked, “In the last five years, has your psychology department offered a graduate course (or part of a course) in qualitative research methods?” Three response options were included: Yes, No, or I don’t know. If respondents selected “yes” or “I don’t know,” participants were directed to answer six additional questions about the characteristics of QRM courses in their department. Questions about QRM course characteristics included: (a) length of course; (b) number of weeks dedicated to QRM; (c) number of times a QRM course had been offered in the last five years; (d) frequency of course offerings; (e) elective or required status of course; (f) level of enrollment. If respondents selected “no,” they were directed to the latter half of the survey, which asked about overall perceptions of QRM in their departments.

All respondents were asked to report on how they perceived the value of QRM in their department, with a focus on colleagues’ level of support for QRM in training and graduate student experiences. These questions included: (a) percentage of graduate students who use QRM in their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/Organizational</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical/Counseling</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/School</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender/Feminist</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biopsychology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlisted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Respondents were asked, “In your university, which area of psychology are you most closely associated with? [select as many as apply].” The number of areas exceeds the number of participants as multiple areas could be selected. Average number of program areas was 1.5 (range: 0-9 areas). While the sample was designed to include programs that would most likely include QRM in their graduate curriculum, departmental chairs were also included in the sample and were sometimes associated with excluded programs.
dissertations; (b) perceived value of QRM within the department; (c) percentage of colleagues and graduate students within the department who value QRM; and (d) desire for more or less attention dedicated to QRM in the department. Additionally, respondents were asked three open-ended items regarding the role of QRM in their department and the field of psychology more broadly. Two items concerned respondents’ perceived value of QRM and a third concerned overall feedback about QRM. See supplemental materials for survey questions.

Data analysis

In the first phase of analysis, we analyzed the quantitative data for associations between QRM course offerings, value ascribed to QRM in departments/colleagues, and student experiences using QRM in their dissertation research. Analysis of survey data was conducted using SPSS v. 23. In the second phase, we examined the open-ended responses concerning respondent attitudes about QRM. These two types of data offered ways to observe how faculty and students were encouraged and discouraged from pursuing studies using QRM at both interpersonal and institutional levels.

The research team comprised one faculty member and three graduate students in a U.S. psychology graduate program. The graduate students on the team were being trained at a university with limited and infrequent QRM courses. Of the three students, two were pursuing dissertations using qualitative methods, and the third did not use QRM in their dissertation. All four team members had been involved in qualitative research and were invested in perceptions about and representations of qualitative methods in the field. In the quantitative analysis phase, one of the graduate student team members (the first author) selected the research questions to pursue and conducted the analysis. In the qualitative analysis phase, all four team members worked collaboratively and in person with one another.

Quantitative analysis

We examined comparisons between faculty attitudes and the frequency of QRM courses within departments. We also formed comparison groups for cross-tabulation analyses using four survey items: (1) the perceived value of QRM, (2) frequency of QRM course offerings, (3) desire for more attention to QRM in departments, and (4) students use of QRM in their dissertation research. We examined differences within these groups to provide insight into how endorsement of QRM may be associated with QRM courses in the graduate curriculum. These group comparisons, for example, helped to highlight associations between colleagues’ level of support of QRM and intentions for future QRM course offerings in the department.
Qualitative analysis
An inductive thematic analysis was used to explore participants’ descriptions of perceived barriers to QRM courses (Braun & Clarke 2006). The three open-ended questions were combined for analysis: (1) perceptions of QRM as important, (2) perceptions of QRM as unimportant, and (3) general feedback about QRM, which combined respondents’ perceptions about QRM with perceptions they saw and heard from others about QRM. Our intention was to study overall perceptions of QRM and this decision to combine responses meant that we did not artificially separate or distinguish between one’s own perceptions and those of others. Coding and analysis followed a three-step process. First, each coder independently grouped participants’ responses and identified potential emergent themes. After collective discussion, data were sorted into three emergent categories: associations with QRM, perceived value of QRM in their department, and barriers to QRM courses. Second, data within these three categories were collectively organized into subcategories. Themes were created from subcategory codes, such as “unscientific,” “risky investment,” and “best with marginalized populations,” and focused on the manifest level of the qualitative data (i.e., what participants said in their responses). The third stage involved refining themes to ensure that each theme had sufficient supporting data and any disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. In the third stage, we focused on interpreting the meanings associated with QRM as a way to understand the state of teaching and learning of QRM in U.S. graduate training.

Results

Quantitative results
Results are presented using four categories: QRM training, departmental support of QRM, collegial support of QRM, and dissertation research. Throughout results, we use the terms department and program interchangeably; we use area to indicate a particular specialty (e.g., social psychology).

QRM training
Thirty-nine percent of respondents (n=36) reported that their department offered a QRM course in the last five years. Only 13% (n=15 out of 111) required a qualitative course, and 17% (n=19 out of 111) had offered a QRM course as an elective. In departments that offered a QRM course in the last five years, most had offered a course every year (41%, n=15 out of 36) or every semester (12%, n=5 out of 36) that lasted on average 9.5 weeks. When considering whether QRM courses would be offered in the next three years, most reported it was “unlikely” (67% n=74 out of 111); see Table 2 for more details.
Almost one-third of respondents (26%, n=26) reported their departments saw QRM as “important,” one-third (29%, n=30) reported their departments viewed QRM as “unimportant,” and almost one-half (45%, n=46) reported their department regarded QRM as “neutral.”1 Departments that were reported as valuing QRM had also offered more frequent QRM courses in the last five years (M=5.2 times) than those that were described as not valuing QRM (M=1.7 times). Not surprisingly, QRM courses were offered at a greater rate in departments where a majority of colleagues valued QRM.

### Table 2. Characteristics of qualitative research methods courses (N = 111).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer QRM Graduate Course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of QRM Course*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each Year</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Semester</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Few Years</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in the Last Five Years</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Course*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Offerings, Next Three Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students using QRM, Dissertation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QRM Value in Department†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Important/Unimportant</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to Qualitative Methods†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Attention</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Attention</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Weeks, QRM Course*</td>
<td>9.66 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Times Offered, QRM Course*</td>
<td>2.92 Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Students, QRM Dissertation</td>
<td>M=14.71 (SD=15.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Colleagues Value QRM</td>
<td>M=30.53 (SD= 27.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Students Value QRM</td>
<td>M= 31.65 (SD=29.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Respondents were asked, “In the last 5 years, has your psychology department offered a graduate course (or part of a course) in qualitative research methods?”

* Indicates only respondents who reported that a QRM course had been offered in last 5 years (n=36)

† 9 respondents did not indicate if QRM were important in their departments (n=102)

‡ 13 respondents did not indicate level of attention to QRM in their departments (n=98)
Of the 36 departments that offered a QRM course in the last five years, more than half (58%, n=21) of respondents reported that QRM were seen as valued by colleagues. Of the 67 departments that had not offered a QRM course in the last five years, almost half (46%, n=39) of respondents reported that QRM were seen as not valued by colleagues.

Of the 26 departments that rated QRM as “important,” most (69%, n=18) offered a QRM course in the last five years. Of these courses, three quarters (77%, n=20) were a semester-long. In these departments, the average number of weeks for a QRM course was 10.8 weeks. Additionally, the majority (66%, n=17) of departments who rated QRM as important also reported that a QRM course would likely be offered in their department within the next three years. In contrast, those departments that rated QRM as “unimportant” (n=30) or “neutral” (n=46) offered fewer QRM course in the last five years (18%, n=14). These departments reported that qualitative methodologies were usually covered in a few weeks during a semester as part of a larger methods course. Not surprisingly, these departments reported that a QRM course would be unlikely offered in their department over the next three years (76%, n=58). In sum, these findings reflect what one might expect: departmental culture is an important indicator of interest in qualitative methodologies as reflected in frequency and time allocated to QRM graduate training.

**Collegial support of QRM**

We examined reported collegial support of QRM in order to better understand colleagues’ role in sustaining interest in QRM. Respondents who reported that they would like to see more attention to QRM were more likely to report that their colleagues also considered QRM as highly valued (54%, n=21) or moderately important (31%, n=12). Conversely, respondents who reported that they would like to see less attention to QRM (n=2) or had no opinion (n=56) reported their colleagues as considering QRM to be not valued (45%, n=26). As would be expected, certain program areas were more likely to want greater attention to QRM, such as community psychology and family psychology. Interestingly, respondents who wanted to see more attention paid to QRM were also unlikely to offer a QRM course in the next three years (60%, n=24). This finding may indicate a lack of trained faculty to teach a graduate QRM course or a lack of departmental funding to offer one. We explored this finding in more detail in the qualitative phases of analysis.

**Dissertation research**

Faculty and departmental support were important indicators of graduate student use of QRM in their dissertation research. We found that respondents reported that in their departments 14.7% (SD=15.27; range 0–71%) of students used QRM in their dissertations, indicating that QRM (alone or
mixed methods) is used with some regularity, although it remained less than 20% in this sample.\textsuperscript{2} Students who used QRM in their dissertations were more likely to be in departments where faculty valued QRM (73% of students in these departments were reported as using QRM in their dissertations). Conversely, lower reported rates of QRM dissertations were in departments that did not value QRM (only 30% of students in these departments were reported as using QRM in their dissertations). These patterns were also evident in the association between departmental support and graduate students’ use of QRM. These findings highlight the somewhat intuitive relationship between graduate student use of QRM based on its perceived worth—faculty support leads to more student use of QRM in dissertation research.

In summary, although descriptive results indicated a moderate level of support for QRM, most respondents rated QRM as neutrally or as unimportant, and perhaps even more telling, only 13% of departments in the sample required a QRM course within the last five years. More positive evaluations of QRM within the department and among colleagues translated to a higher frequency of course offerings in the last five years, a higher frequency of graduate student use of QRM in dissertation research, and wanting more attention to QRM in departments. These findings are not surprising and have often been described from the perspective of individuals working within departments (Marecek 2003; Morawski 2011). Importantly, however, the current study contributes needed information about exactly how departmental values impact graduate curriculum and student use of QRM in their dissertations.

Our results indicated that only 13% of programs required a qualitative course in the last five years ($n=15$), and 14.7% of students were reported as using QRM in their dissertations. These findings are comparable to Ponterotto’s (2005) earlier assessment of graduate curriculum in counseling programs, where 10% of programs in that study required a graduate qualitative course and 15.6% of dissertations produced each year used QRM. Although we found marginal growth in the number of programs that required a qualitative course, it appears that changes have been slow in integrating graduate training in QRM across subdisciplines.

**Qualitative results**

We developed four themes focused on participants’ perceptions of and concerns about QRM: QRM as illegitimate, financial and faculty barriers, QRM and social justice research, and research question development in psychology. University names have been redacted in order to maintain anonymity of participants.
**QRM as illegitimate**

Respondents reported that QRM were not well respected in psychology, stating that qualitative research was either imagined to be or believed to be “inaccurate,” “subjective,” and “lacking rigor.” QRM training was described as irrelevant; respondents reported this work was difficult to fund and publish, unconvincing for policy makers, and not marketable outside academia. One respondent stated this as follows:

> [Qualitative] research skills [are] not readily marketable outside of academia. We aim to train our students to work not only in academia but also in research firms that contract work for the government and other organizations. Second, grant funding for qualitative research is very hard to come by. I don’t relish the task of training students in an approach that will not enable them to lead productive labs. And, lab work requires funding in the current academic climate.

Concerns such as these highlight how values are transmitted about worth and, importantly, that these values were consistently imagined as immutable or “just the way things are.” Respondents consistently noted that the disciplinary conventions within psychology were not compatible with using QRM, and as a result, teaching QRM was seen by some faculty as a “risky” investment from a graduate student’s perspective, as well as a sunk cost from the faculty’s perspective. Moreover, these findings echo what our quantitative results revealed: perceived value of QRM is directly related to support of QRM. If faculty perceive QRM to offer little value to a student’s training, they are not likely to encourage student training in QRM, nor advocate for new courses or additional faculty to be hired to meet this need.

**Financial and faculty barriers**

Perceptions of value accorded to qualitative research were also reflected within departmental funding for QRM courses. Many reported there were no faculty available who had the skills to develop a QRM course, lack of funding to hire new skilled faculty, and lack of departmental enthusiasm to support students’ use of QRM. As one respondent reported, “Like many public universities, we are woefully understaffed. No one has taught a qualitative methods course in my seven years here. If we were to add such a course—and I believe we should—then we’d first need to hire additional faculty.” Messages concerning a lack of university support for QRM, while not immediately rejecting the value of QRM, suggest that QRM remains largely on the margins of curriculum because they lack institutionalization within the field, both in terms of funding opportunities and faculty recruitment. Our quantitative results indicated that most psychology departments were unlikely to offer a QRM course within the next three years. These qualitative findings indicate that departmental resources may be spent on
opportunities other than creating QRM courses or hiring faculty trained in QRM.

Respondents reported that psychology faculty had advised students to take qualitative courses in related fields such as sociology, nursing, or education because their home department lacked resources or courses. One participant explained, “We had one retirement and one faculty move with a spouse leaving us with no instructors. Fortunately, we still have wonderful courses in other departments.” Although graduate students may take QRM courses outside psychology, institutional constraints also limited those opportunities: “We don’t have enough/correct faculty to teach them...funding and concerns with tuition support going to courses outside of psychology make it harder for students to take qualitative methods in education or sociology.” Encouraging students to take a QRM course in other departments may expand their methodological expertise, yet it also indicates that psychology departments do not prioritize QRM training.

**QRM and social justice research**

Participants consistently described that they saw growing recognition of qualitative research and imagined that this greater appreciation would result in increased faculty and student endorsement of QRM. This enthusiasm was seen as in the near, but unspecified future. One respondent argued: “Students and faculty are grasping increasingly that [QRM] are invaluable to gaining an in-depth understanding of phenomena in ways that quantitative methods simply cannot provide.” In our analysis, we found that QRM’s upward trajectory was often linked with research on issues related to “diversity” and social justice research. As one participant explained, “Many of our students and faculty do applied research with marginalized populations. Depending on our research questions, qualitative methods make the most sense.” Another noted, “Our department offered a course on qualitative methods and focused on women’s issues and LGBT issues, among others” and another reported that qualitative research was valued for its ability to highlight “voices of those who are most disenfranchised in our society.” While all of these points may be true, it is important to notice how QRM is consistently imagined as suited for research focused on some populations (but not all populations), useful for some concerns (such as diversity), and useful for some areas within psychology, but not all. Certainly not all methods fit all research questions; however, this consistent linking between QRM and issues of social justice keeps this methodological perspective limited to only specific types of situations and populations rather than broadly applicable to the study of psychology. Similarly, if qualitative methods are seen as the “best” tool to study diversity, it is also clear how issues of diversity may not be taken seriously and may also be regarded as illegitimate within psychology.
Research question development in psychology

Across their responses, participants reflected on the ways that research questions demand certain methodologies. When considering graduate student use of QRM, faculty respondents emphasized that students are encouraged to select the “best method” for their research question(s), with qualitative methods seen, at times, as an “appropriate” tool to study a phenomenon. For example, one respondent noted, “We are open to whatever methods best suit the needs of the research. If a particular research topic is best served by qualitative methods, we could use them” (emphasis added). Another respondent agreed: “[Qualitative methods] are not typically suited for the kinds of research questions our faculty examine...the majority of research questions that faculty and students are interested in exploring are better addressed with quantitative methods.” It is important to notice that this attitude about QRM obscures the stage of how research questions are formed and what role methodological training plays in generating research questions. Given that only 39% of psychology departments in our sample offered a QRM course within the last five years, an additional component to consider is how students are trained to ask research questions in such a way that invites or discourages the use of qualitative perspectives.

In summary, respondents reported that they valued QRM for providing in-depth data that would be unattainable through quantitative and computational methods. In addition, QRM were often described as the best methods for feminist, community-based, and social justice research because QRM “let[s] all the voices be heard.” These perceptions could be interpreted as a “hopeful sign” for faculty’s openness to use QRM, but should be seen as indicating that even amongst those that value QRM, it was often described as relevant only in limited areas within psychology. Reasons for not valuing QRM were its perceived lack of objectivity, concerns about reliability, and limited generalizability. Some respondents noted that the disciplinary conventions within the field of psychology were not compatible with using QRM and teaching QRM was seen by some as a “risky” investment. Perhaps most importantly, respondents pointed to the lack of knowledge in their existing faculty to develop QRM courses and lack of enthusiasm to support students to learn QRM. These reflect financial priorities within U.S. psychology doctoral programs and the limited resources typically assigned to training students in QRM.

Discussion

The importance of this study goes beyond generating a summary of current QRM training practices in U.S. psychology doctoral programs. Our analysis extends to using these data as a catalyst for discussion regarding methodological pluralism in psychology and QRM training opportunities in graduate education. To this end, we use our findings as a basis for developing recommendations for QRM training.
In order to assess the future of QRM training in U.S. graduate education, institutional practices that value a narrow range of psychological methods must be addressed alongside limited departmental resources. Departmental constraints such as budget cuts and a lack of faculty hires with background in QRM certainly contribute to QRM’s underrepresentation in doctoral training (Gergen, Josselson & Freeman 2015). Faculty mentors are often asked to mirror departmental anxieties about QRM by advising graduate students against undertaking qualitative research in their dissertations because it would stifle their academic employment prospects. Even undergraduate students report avoiding qualitative methods in their undergraduate thesis research to gain admission into graduate school (Marecek, 2003). The centrality of QRM courses in U.S. psychology programs is shaped by longstanding perceptions of qualitative work within the discipline as a whole.

Departmental culture is integral in valuing the contributions of QRM in psychological research. Our results show that perceptions of value were associated with graduate student use of QRM in their dissertation and respondents’ desires for greater attention to QRM in departments. Accordingly, understanding departmental values is a necessary precursor for increasing visibility of QRM in academic environments. Morawski (2001) spoke to the importance of change within disciplinary culture, what she called the “near environment” within departments (p. 70). Although she focused her discussion on challenges facing feminist psychologists, her conclusions are also applicable to qualitative psychologists:

The challenge of feminist psychologists [and qualitative researchers], then, lies just as much in everyday actions as in meticulous and innovative research designs. Whenever these actions are within the scope of our influence or control, as is frequently the case, our greatest contribution to feminist [and qualitative] methods is changing the environment in which science is generated. (Morawski 2001, p. 70)

To fully integrate QRM training in doctoral education, more attention must be paid to everyday actions occurring within the “near environment” of psychology departments. This might include, for example, how research methods are described in mundane locations such as departmental websites or which faculty are invited (and which methods are highlighted) in departmental talks.

**Recommendations**

We offer five recommendations based on our findings to encourage integration of QRM in U.S. doctoral training: the length of QRM courses, frequency of QRM courses, departmental climate, research question development, and advocacy for inclusion of QRM in graduate education and beyond.
**Length of QRM courses**

Given that most experimental and quasi-experimental methods are privileged in undergraduate and graduate psychology degrees, training in QRM beyond a few weeks is integral to shifting perceptions of qualitative research. We view results from this study as making a strong case for expanding coverage of qualitative inquiry in introductory methods courses and offering a dedicated, elective course for graduate students seeking training in QRM. We recommend that qualitatively oriented faculty and professional organizations in the United States continue to advocate for required qualitative training in psychology graduate programs. We see institutionalizing curriculum in QRM as integral to increasing students’ use of qualitative methods in their dissertations and establishing QRM as one of many valued methodological perspectives available to psychological researchers.

**Frequency of QRM courses**

The frequency and regularity of QRM courses in a graduate student’s career are important factors when developing methodological expertise, developing research questions, and developing networks necessary to sustain an ongoing research career. Findings indicate that in departments where QRM courses were offered annually, 62% of students were reported as using QRM in their dissertation research. Conversely, in departments where QRM courses were offered less frequently, the number of students who use QRM in their dissertation research was lower. These findings should not be interpreted as causal; the association between graduate students and departmental culture might be reversed (i.e., students interested in QRM might seek out departments where it is valued). Nevertheless, these findings speak to an important connection between departmental values, the frequency of QRM courses, and dissertation research in that department. Given the relationship between regularity of course offerings and student enthusiasm for QRM, we recommend that departments support and expand teaching opportunities for QRM courses. This might include, for example, supporting and/or providing training opportunities for faculty wishing to learn more about teaching QRM through departmental workshops and professional organizations.

**QRM and departmental climate**

Several key findings highlighted the important role that departmental culture plays in the use and support of QRM. First, those departments that had offered a QRM course in the last five years were also likely to offer a course in the next three years. This type of stability in the perception of QRM seems important to understanding how (and if) departments might introduce courses in QRM. Second, respondents who indicated that they wanted more attention to QRM were also often in departments where students were using QRM in dissertation research at high or moderate rates. These
findings, as well as others across this study, point to the role that overall departmental culture plays in fostering frequent use of QRM by faculty and students. We recommend expanding conversations about the aims of psychological inquiry and the importance of methodological pluralism in achieving these goals within U.S. psychology.

**Research questions and QRM**

Respondents consistently reported that they simply picked the “best” or “most appropriate” method for their research question. This underscores how respondents did not imagine themselves as asking questions that would rely on QRM. For example, rather than teaching students to ask research questions that require hypothesis testing or testing causal mechanisms, students should be also taught, for example, to ask questions that take an exploratory approach to understanding the lives of others (Yakushko et al. 2016). In this regard, we recommend developing a more inclusive approach to psychology within the undergraduate and graduate classroom in order to encourage students to ask research questions that demand the use of qualitative methods in their own research.

**Advocacy for inclusion of QRM in graduate education and beyond**

Recent developments in curriculum guidelines and formal reporting standards for qualitative research signal a shift in attitudes within the field. Indeed, the inclusion of qualitative research in the forthcoming APA Publication Manual and the inclusion of qualitative methods as a topic that requires coverage in accredited programs are promising developments (Levitt et al. 2017). These advancements echo respondents’ perceptions of qualitative research as gaining traction in the field, potentially signaling greater appreciation of QRM among faculty and students. We recommend continued feedback to APA regarding the areas or domains that need strengthening in order to increase the quality of QRM training for doctoral students. We see this type of assessment as an important next step in positioning QRM as an integral part of training in psychological research methods.

**Next steps**

There are several important next steps for to consider in the future of graduate training in psychological research. These steps include assessing what types of qualitative training are offered (e.g., thematic analysis, content analysis, grounded theory), how often certain types of training are offered (once a year, every five years), and whether these training opportunities exist as partial or full courses. For example, Aiken and colleagues’ (1990, 2008) landmark assessment of quantitative training in U.S. psychology programs provided information about the types of statistical training offered, which
allowed Aiken and colleagues to offer specific recommendations for well-rounded quantitative training (Aiken et al. 1990, 2008). Given the intricacies of QRM training, we suggest a similar study that would provide this kind of detail for developing resources within U.S. universities. This type of assessment would allow researchers to offer more targeted recommendations for programs and faculty that may be interested in increasing QRM course offerings.

Although we did not assess structural barriers (e.g., financial support, faculty hires) in the current study, these factors may impact the frequency and scope of QRM course offerings. Future researchers are encouraged to develop studies that explore differences in training opportunities between research-intensive universities and a general sample of programs to better assess variability in institutional resources. The current study does provide unique strengths as a result of using a comprehensive sampling frame and a multi-method design in addressing research questions. By exploring both quantitative and qualitative results, this study provided an innovative perspective that focused on attitudes and how they relate to course offerings, departmental support for QRM training, and student use of QRM in their dissertation research.

**Conclusion**

Gergen (2001) predicted that if psychology did not keep up with new methodologies and challenges that it risked becoming a “historically frozen and endangered field” (Mitchell et al. 2007). In this mixed-methods study, we explored the scope and frequency of QRM training in U.S. doctoral-level education as well as faculty attitudes about qualitative research. Departmental and collegial values, not surprisingly, impact the institutionalization of QRM in graduate curriculum, often resulting in graduate students not being trained in or using qualitative methods. Even within departments where there was support, there were often erroneous or anxious beliefs about the marketability of qualitative research skills.

Further gains must be made in expanding visibility of QRM in U.S. psychology programs in the service of advancing the discipline. This study contributes several important ways for faculty and students to increase visibility of QRM in their own departments: first, we encourage educators to develop a more inclusive discussion of psychological methods within the classroom that highlight how qualitative approaches contribute to the discipline and society at large. Second, we encourage students to engage in classroom discussions regarding how qualitative research may be used to better understand current real-world events as well as understand classical questions within psychology that have long been studied using other methods, such as group conformity and responses to authoritarianism.
We see this study, its findings, and our recommendations as part of a long history in psychology to broaden the scope and impact of the discipline beyond the experimental paradigms that are excellent at observing cause and effect, but less attuned to meanings, expectations, and contradictions in lives that are always messy and not easily observed or measured (Fine 1985; McClelland in press; Weisstein 1968). This study is also part of the emerging call in the United States for qualitative research methods to be valued within psychology (Levitt et al. 2017). All of these voices create an urgent call for greater attention to be paid to the many layers of human experience, moving beyond psychological mechanisms, physiological responses, and laboratory environments, to the historical, social, and political environments in which humans thrive, suffer, and exist (Fine 2016).

Notes

1. Nine respondents did not indicate if QRM were perceived as important in their departments. Similarly, eight respondents indicated that they “did not know” if a qualitative methods course has been offered or not offered in the last five years. As such, these respondents were excluded in cross-tab analyses that explored the associations between importance and course offerings.

2. Respondents were given a slider scale ranging from 0–100%. The average percentage of graduate students using QRM in their dissertations across survey responses was 18.8%. However, five respondents reported that 80–100% of their graduate students use QRM in their dissertations. We removed these five responses from analysis concerning student use of QRM in dissertations because they were not reflective of the majority of responses and skewed the interpretation of results to this question. To aid in the interpretation of the remaining responses, three groups were formed: departments that were low in students’ use of QRM in their dissertations (median=4), departments moderate in using QRM (median=10), and departments high in using QRM (median=30).

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