Reviewer's report

Title: Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: a critical review

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Reviewer: Mark Rodgers

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This article presents an interesting and worthwhile overview of the various methods used to synthesise qualitative research, then compares and contrasts these methods in terms of their epistemological positions.

The authors go on to articulate important points about the supposed independence yet clear conceptual overlap between some of the described methods. In fact, it is the second half of the article – the presentation and discussion of different methods within the authors' framework that is of most value and is the key contribution of the paper.

However, the article as a whole would benefit if the preceding section (“Overview of synthesis methods”) was to some extent simplified. Though the article is clearly intended for an audience with some qualitative research/synthesis knowledge, introducing terminology such as “middle-range theories” (p.3), “hypothetico-deductive” approaches (p.3), plus some of the more abstract descriptive sections occasionally made this introductory material a little hard to follow. This is not the always the case though - paragraph 3 under “meta-narrative” provides a fairly concise and readable summary of a complex approach. The section might benefit from simply summarising the authors’ rationale for developing each method (as done for CIS, p.6), followed by a straightforward description of the procedures and processes involved. The more difficult conceptual and epistemological ideas are already largely covered in the analysis section of the article, but this could be expanded if necessary.

Minor issues:

p.3: The heading “Discussion” is used twice, both here and on p.8
p.3, bottom line: “hypothetico” typo
p8, para 2, 1st line: delete “of”
p.9, para 3, 1st line: insert “formal” before “grounded theory”? 
p.10, para 2: “different ways of knowing of different researchers” is ambiguous, perhaps rephrase

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being
published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.