Reviewer’s report

Title: A methodological systematic review of meta-ethnography conduct to articulate the complex analytical phases

Version: 0 Date: 29 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Peggy Shannon-Baker

Reviewer’s report:

Overall this is an interesting article that provides some important findings on the application of meta-ethnography. Most of the feedback I have relates to how the authors present their study and findings which at times made it difficult to follow and assess the goal of the article.

The flow of topics in the background do not follow a sequence that I am familiar with reading. Here is a reverse outline of the topics by paragraph I see when reading the background: increase in use of meta-ethnography (ME) in health sciences research, original purpose for ME, phases of ME, importance of translation to ME, how ME generates theory, historical development to contemporary use of ME, problems with the increased/recent use of ME, stages of the study, and aim of the article. Since the focus of the article is on phases 4-6, these phases deserve more introduction. To make space for this addition, I recommend limiting the discussion on the increase in use of ME in health sciences to a single paragraph, and minimize historical discussions (except for points that relate directly to issues you now see).

I recommend including information on the total number of publications found before identifying if they meet inclusion/exclusion criteria. This will help to interpret how the authors then analyzed 57. (This information is mentioned in the Findings section, but I would argue that the findings should focus on the 57 reviewed, not the total population of publications retrieved. There is also a figure that seems to correspond to this but this is not mentioned until the findings section.)

More information and consistent information on the coding procedures would be helpful. Why were only 13 publications checked by the second reviewer (cf. data coding section)? How were these selected? What were the procedures for addressing inter-coder reliability? The study characteristics section states that some articles were only screened by one person but a second person was added during the analysis phase (for some or all)? How much detail is "a detailed account with in-depth explanation and rationale”? Some examples of such detail presented in a table would be helpful.

How is the data coding section different from the data analysis? These seem like they should be the same section to me.

The data analysis section provides further information on the inclusion criteria that seems like it would be relevant earlier when inclusion criteria for the study were initially introduced.
There were a lot of external inputs/feedback collected on the study. This is a great component. I am very curious to know what if any changes, questions, and/or unique findings came from this input. This could either be summarized when the external reviews are introduced or mentioned with the relevant finding later.

Since the goal of the article is to discuss phases 4-6 of meta-ethnographies, it seems that the findings presented should only focus on these phases. Instead the authors present findings relevant/related to all phases. Focus only on the findings relevant to the goal of this article.

What does a "worked example" mean?

It would be helpful to see some examples of descriptive writing versus "rich descriptions," especially if the authors can share examples of these from the 57 they reviewed. Since this was part of the analysis process, providing such examples would help add to the credibility of their claims that they did not find many rich description examples.

I recommend adding a summative discussion of the case examples presented. What similarities, differences, and inferences do the authors draw from presenting these specific case studies?

The discussion section reads more like a conclusion section in that it summarizes the analytical findings presented in the previous major section. A discussion section is where authors should draw implications for their findings, not restate the inferences identified. This could also be where authors provide guidance for practice in future studies. Revising the framing of the paragraphs and points in the discussion section could help make this distinction.

A smaller issue: the methods identify that articles were selected with publications dates up to March 2016 but the abstract identifies the cutoff as both 2015 and 2016.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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