Reviewer’s report

Title: Disciplinary boundaries and integrating care: using Q-methodology to understand trainee views on being a good doctor

Version: 1 Date: 18 Dec 2017

Reviewer: Edward Krupat

Reviewer's report:

I have ambivalent feelings about Manuscript D-1700737R1. First, since this is a revision, I am frustrated that the journal has not sent me the reviewers' comments. Second, most often one can infer the comments from the authors' response letter, but all I could see from the authors was: "I hope that the revisions made are suitable, please do let me know if there is anything else I can do," which, unfortunately, does not provide anything concrete about what the authors have revised. As for the paper itself, I agreed to review it because based on the title it would have been a paper I would be interested in reading had I seen it in a journal. Reading this draft, I see noteworthy flaws in the writing/exposition that made the paper hard to follow, and I also have some difficulties on knowing exactly what the most appropriate conclusions are to be drawn from this study.

To be more specific:

* The task requested of the subjects has to be 100% clear in order for a reader to be able to understand and interpret the findings, but it was never quite evident to me. It’s not clear whether the trainees were asked to rate, rank, agree with, and group statements within a grid—some of the above? all of the above?? It is very easy for authors who are familiar with their methods not to be able to place themselves in the position of a new/naïve reader, and I think that is the case here.

* The authors tell us that they chose a three factor solution as the "most appropriate," but they tell us nothing of the criteria used for selection. We need to know this so we can determine the soundness of their choice.
* In Tables 4, have I missed something? The columns A, B, and C are not clear to me what they represent and what the signed numbers 1-3 stand for. The title does little to inform, and there is nothing more to help.

* Telling us the first two items that each of the three groups most agreed with is a welcomed strategy; however, it wasn't clear to me that these two items justified the name of the designation in all three cases.

* For a paper that utilizes some complex statistical methods, we are rarely if ever told whether certain group differences were statistically significant. Perhaps this sort of reporting isn't justified by the small n's, but why are some group differences, but not all, worth establishing based on statistical criteria?

* In trying to generate some meaningful and broad conclusions, the authors face so many confounds—gender, program, specialty choice, and year in training. Are there some ways that we can be told about some "main effects"--group differences for that variable alone--as well as interactions of certain two-variable combinations?

* The authors conclude that maybe we should be thinking "continuum" rather than "dichotomy," and I am very sympathetic to this. However, they have just spent an entire paper explaining and justifying a trichotomy. So, how do they justify their conclusion from an analyses and discussion that present us with three discrete groupings. Is it that once we get beyond two categories we should think continuum. Had they found a "quadotomoy," four discrete groups, I ask whether this would this argue even more strongly for a continuum.

In short, this is an interesting paper. However, I have no idea what the original critiques were, and whether the authors have been responsive to them. Reading this revision, I see value here, but I still see the need for significant re-writing. By the way, although the basis for categorization was different, the authors might want to read and/or cite O'Brien et al in Medical Teacher (2016) to see another grouping study, in this case about the "ideal student."
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.

Yes

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

No

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.

I recommend additional statistical review

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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