



Fostering Innovation in Integrated Mixed Methods Autoethnography: The Role of Critical Dialectical Pluralism and the Radical Middle

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Abstract

In this reflective article, we—Tony and Sandra—delve into our personal and collaborative journey exploring the integration of critical dialectical pluralism (CDP) with Tony's call for of mixed methods researchers to move towards *the radical middle*, a journey that has led us to develop what we now refer to as *integrated mixed methods autoethnography*. From its inception as CDP 1.0 through to its evolved, more enriched form as CDP 2.0, we have witnessed and nurtured the growth of a methodology that not only champions rigorous research practices, but also deeply embeds the values of social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility—elements that we collectively identify as the SIDES of CDP 2.0. This evolution reflects a personal and professional alignment with the radical middle—a term I (Tony) have coined to describe a philosophy that embraces a dynamic and fluid integration of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This philosophy enriches research outcomes and amplifies their impact on society. The radical middle's ethos encourages a seamless interplay of methodologies, which is crucial for capturing the intricate textures of personal and cultural narratives within the framework of integrated mixed methods autoethnography. Our narrative here underscores how CDP fosters a participatory research environment wherein diverse methodological and philosophical approaches are interwoven (i.e., 1 + 1 = 1 integration) rather than merely placed side by side (i.e., 1 + 1 = 3 integration). This integration allows for a profound engagement with complex social phenomena, especially through the autoethnographic lens that prioritizes personal narratives entangled with broader cultural and societal frameworks. By advocating for what we term as *third space of methodological integration*, the amalgamation of CDP and the radical middle cultivates a unique and transformative research milieu. This environment not only is methodologically sound, but also is ethically committed to social transformation. Such a framework deepens and broadens the scope of our research findings and also ensures that the research process, itself, actively contributes to positive societal change. Therefore, this philosophy stands as a pivotal meta-framework for future studies that employ integrated mixed methods autoethnography, pushing the boundaries of traditional research to include comprehensive, transformative approaches that resonate deeply with both researchers and participants alike.

Keywords: Critical dialectical pluralism, radical middle, autoethnography, mixed methods autoethnography, integrated mixed methods autoethnography, 1 + 1 = 1 integration, partial integration, full(er) integration

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Fostering Innovation in Integrated Mixed Methods Autoethnography: The Role of Critical Dialectical Pluralism and the Radical Middle

In 2013, I (Tony), alongside Dr. Rebecca K. Frels—now Dr. Rebecca K. Weinbaum, Associate Dean at Lamar University—introduced the mixed methods research-based philosophy referred to as *critical dialectical pluralism 1.0* (i.e., Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). Critical dialectical pluralism is one of 14 mixed methods research-based philosophies that were identified by Onwuegbuzie and Corrigan (2021). These philosophies are presented in Table 1. Critical dialectical pluralism extends the meta-philosophy known as *dialectic pluralism*, which advocates for incorporating multiple epistemological perspectives within the same mixed methods research study. This approach was first formally introduced by Johnson (2012) and further developed in subsequent works by Johnson and his colleagues (Johnson, 2017, 2023; Johnson et al., 2014; Johnson & Stefurak, 2013; Stefurak et al., 2016, 2018, 2023; Tucker et al., 2020).

Table 1

Mixed Methods-Based Research Philosophies and Worldviews

Philosophy/ Worldview	Stance
Pragmatism-of-the-middle philosophy	A practical and outcome-oriented method of inquiry that is based on action and leads, iteratively, to further action and the elimination of doubt; traditions routinely are mixed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007)
Pragmatism-of-the-right	A moderately strong form of realism, and a weak form of pluralism (Putnam, 2002; Rescher, 2000)
Pragmatism-of-the-left	Antirealism and strong pluralism (Maxcy, 2003; Rorty, 1991)
Anti-conflationist	Methodology should not be conflated with technical aspects of method because the same method can be used by researchers with different ontological/epistemological stances; adoption of a more principled approach when combining methods—only appropriate to combine methods if a common ontological/epistemological stance can be maintained (Bryman, 1992; Hammersley, 1992; Layder, 1993; Roberts, 2002)
Critical realist	A mix of critical theory and a multilevel, discursive social scientific realism (Houston, 2001; Maxwell, 2004; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; McEvoy & Richards, 2003, 2006)
Dialectical stance	A dialogical engagement with philosophical differences that generatively produce new knowledge and insights (Greene, 2007, 2008; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Greene & Hall, 2010; Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). Use of “dialectical pragmatism” (i.e., examine qualitative and quantitative stances fully and dialectically, and produce a combination solution that works best for the research question) (Teddlie & Johnson, 2009)
Complementary strengths	Quantitative and qualitative research traditions are not necessarily incompatible but are substantively different; thus, methods used for different traditions should be kept separate to preserve paradigmatic and methodological integrity (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Morse, 2003)



Philosophy/ Worldview	Stance
Transformative- emancipatory	Emancipatory, participatory, and anti-discriminatory research that focuses directly on the lives, experiences, and perceptions of marginalized persons or groups (Mertens, 2003, 2007, 2010; Mertens et al., 2010)
A-paradigmatic	Quantitative and qualitative research traditions are logically independent and, thus, can be mixed; although these research traditions are useful for reflection, they do not shape practical research decisions; rather, practical characteristics and issues related to the underlying context and problem drive these decisions (Patton, 2002; Reichardt & Cook, 1979)
Substantive theory	Quantitative and qualitative research traditions may be embedded or intertwined with substantive theories; yet, substantive issues and conceptual theories drive the mixed research, not traditions (Chen, 2006)
Communities of practice	Consistent with pragmatist philosophy but accommodates variations and inconsistencies that prevail within mixed research by promoting a diversity of researchers, allowing the traditions to operate at different levels, incorporating group influences on methodological decisions, shifting debates about the traditions to level of practice and research culture, and allowing methods to be chosen based on their practical value for addressing a research problem (Denscombe, 2008)
Phenomenography	Its primary construct is the personal conception, which represents a vital relationship between experienced events and the personal meaning that emanates from these events—which prevail as a unitary conception, yielding the primary unit of analysis (Feldon & Tofel-Grehl, 2022)
Dialectical pluralism	Metaparadigm or metaphilosophy that involves a belief in incorporating multiple epistemological perspectives within the same inquiry (Johnson, 2012, 2017; Johnson et al., 2014; Tucker et al., 2020), wherein researchers “dialectically listen, carefully and thoughtfully, to different disciplines, paradigms, theories, and stakeholder/citizen perspectives” (Johnson, 2017, p. 160). Specifically, it “means listening, understanding, learning, and acting” (Johnson, 2017, p. 160). Involves taking a pluralist stance ontologically (i.e., multiple kinds of reality [e.g., subjective, objective, intersubjective]) and relies on a dialectical, dialogical, and hermeneutical approach to studying phenomena (Johnson, 2012).
Critical dialectical pluralism	Metaparadigm or metaphilosophy that builds on Johnson’s (2017) dialectical pluralism and that operates under assumption that social injustices are ingrained in every society (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2013). It is a process philosophy and a communication theory wherein procedural justice, process justice, and philosophical justice are emphasized, wherein the role of (mixed methods) researcher is changed to (mixed methods) research-facilitator, and, wherein, at the same time, the role of a participant is changed to a participant-researcher. Critical dialectical pluralism 2.0 promotes culturally progressive, culturally responsive, and culturally engaged research—promoting social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility, which represent five SIDES that facilitate global justice (Onwuegbuzie et al., in press).

Adapted from “A call for mixed analysis: A philosophical framework for combining qualitative and quantitative,” by A. J. Onwuegbuzie, R. B. Johnson, and K. M. T. Collins, 2009, *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* (p. 134). Copyright 2009 by Dialectical Publishing, LLC.



We (Rebecca and I) defined critical dialectical pluralism 1.0 (CDP 1.0) as a research philosophy that extends the dialectical approach to mixed methods research. It advocates for adopting a pluralist stance ontologically, recognizing multiple kinds of reality (e.g., subjective, objective, intersubjective, disciplinary, paradigmatic) that are significant. Our approach is dialectical, dialogical, and hermeneutical, aiming to understand phenomena through a careful, thoughtful attention to and integration of different traditions, disciplines, theories, stakeholder perspectives, and citizen perspectives. The goal is to combine important ideas from different research philosophies to create a new workable philosophical lens that is tailored for each research study or program evaluation. At the same time, the goal of CDP 1.0 not only is to ensure the ethical conduct of research—thereby facilitating the dissemination and use of research findings—but also is to evaluate the impact of research and its intended societal outcomes.

We posited that CDP 1.0 is inclusive and flexible, allowing the integration of different mixed methods research-based philosophical stances within a single study. This inclusivity extends beyond mixed methods research studies to monomethod research studies (i.e., quantitative research *or* qualitative research), promoting a broad and adaptable framework that is particularly suited to addressing social justice issues by engaging diverse perspectives and promoting egalitarian societal principles. Moreover, CDP 1.0 functions as a metaparadigm that fosters more integrative and ethically sound research practices—for example, by changing the role of (mixed methods) researcher to (mixed methods) research-facilitator and also changing the role of participant to participant-researcher—that are geared towards producing actionable insights and solutions for real-world problems, particularly those related to social justice.

Simply put, CDP 1.0 extends the ideas of dialectical pluralism by incorporating a critical stance on societal issues that includes promoting reflexivity, challenging existing power structures, and engaging with diverse perspectives. It is characterized by its commitment to addressing social justice by integrating philosophical ideas from diverse and sometimes competing traditions—in particular, quantitative research-based philosophies (e.g., postpositivism, which represents a modified view of objectivity that acknowledges the limitations and fallibility of human knowledge; see, for e.g., Phillips Burbules, 2000) and qualitative research-based philosophies (e.g., interpretivism, which focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their social realities; see, for e.g., Scauso, 2020)—into a cohesive and actionable framework. CDP 1.0 proponents not only aim to understand or to describe social phenomena, but also seek to change conditions by emphasizing egalitarian social principles and empowering underrepresented groups.

In summary, key features of CDP 1.0 include the following:

- **Ontological Pluralism:** CDP 1.0 involves adopting a pluralist stance towards reality, recognizing multiple forms of reality (e.g., subjective, objective, and intersubjective) that are important for comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. This approach involves acknowledging that understanding can come from various sources and perspectives and that different kinds of knowledge and perspectives can coexist and provide a richer understanding of complex phenomena.
- **Meta-paradigmatic Approach:** As a metaparadigm, CDP 1.0 allows for the inclusion of various other philosophical assumptions and stances, making it highly adaptable and capable of addressing complex and complicated research questions that span multiple disciplines and perspectives.



- **Epistemological and Methodological Flexibility:** CDP 1.0 encourages the use of mixed methods research that involves combining qualitative research and quantitative research approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of issues. In essence, CDP 1.0 represents a comprehensive approach to mixed methods research that seeks to transcend traditional boundaries by fostering inclusivity, integration, and a focus on achieving practical and theoretical outcomes.
- **Dialectical Methodology:** CDP 1.0 engages multiple realities through a process of dialogue and synthesis, aiming to integrate insights from competing mental models and values into a unified approach tailored to specific research needs. The goal of CDP 1.0 is to understand phenomena through dialogue and the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives and stakeholder views.
- **Integration of Perspectives:** CDP 1.0 emphasizes the importance of integrating ideas from competing mental models and values into a cohesive whole for each research study or (program) evaluation study. It aims to ensure that different perspectives are not just acknowledged, but also actively utilized in the research process. This integration of perspectives is aimed at creating new knowledge that is more comprehensive and applicable to a variety of contexts.
- **Ethical Conduct and Social Responsibility:** CDP 1.0 mandates conducting research in an ethical manner, with a strong emphasis on including stakeholders' and researchers' epistemological and sociopolitical values to guide the research. It stresses ethical dissemination and use of research findings, aiming for a broad and locally relevant impact, with an ultimate goal of ensuring that the research process and outcomes are just and beneficial, having a positive impact on society.
- **Promotion of Social Justice:** A central goal of CDP 1.0 is to promote and to sustain an egalitarian society. It focuses on producing research that not only adds to universal theoretical knowledge, but also addresses local practical needs, particularly in culturally progressive ways that engage with and support marginalized, oppressed, underserved, and/or silenced communities to bring about social change and to foster social justice. It aims to give voice to these communities and to integrate their perspectives into the research process, leading to findings that are directly applicable and beneficial to these groups.
- **Active Dissemination and Evaluation:** CDP 1.0 involves active dissemination and practical application of research findings, as well as ongoing evaluation to assess the impact of the research in promoting social change. Overall, it is designed to be an inclusive and flexible framework that not only integrates various research methodologies, but also prioritizes ethical considerations and social justice outcomes in the research process.
- **Empowering Research Participants:** Most notably, CDP 1.0 involves research participants in the research process, often as co-researchers, valuing their insights and experiences, which helps to promote research outputs that are relevant to and empowering for the communities involved.

In essence, CDP 1.0 is a transformative approach that extends beyond traditional research methodologies by representing a research practice that is deeply embedded in ethical, inclusive, and justice-oriented processes. This advocacy-based philosophy particularly is suited for



researchers who seek not only to understand complex social phenomena, but also to effect change and to promote justice by integrating diverse perspectives and addressing power dynamics within the research process itself.

A decade after the introduction of CDP 1.0, the authors of this current article (i.e., Tony and Sandra)—alongside our colleague, Dr. Elena Forzani, Boston University—have expanded this research philosophy into what we call CDP 2.0 (Onwuegbuzie et al., in press). As authors deeply engaged in mixed methods research, we reflect on our journey and the evolution of our thinking that led us to develop CDP 2.0. The transition from CDP 1.0 to CDP 2.0 represents a significant evolution in our philosophy, deepening the conceptual framework and enhancing operational focus. This update responds to the need to address increasingly complex societal challenges, particularly global crises (e.g., pandemics, wars, climate change), and adopts a redefined ethical stance towards research that is adaptive and responsive to worldwide dilemmas. Most importantly, compared to CDP 1.0, CDP 2.0

- Advances the foundational ideas by emphasizing social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility, collectively referred to as SIDES.
- Explicitly addresses global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting a proactive role in achieving social justice both throughout the research process and in its outcomes.
- Introduces a more defined framework and systematic approach for conducting ethical research that goes beyond integrating perspectives actively to dismantle hierarchical structures and systemic inequalities in research and society.
- Critiques existing research methods for often neglecting justice for research participants.
- Focuses on practical applications and real-world impacts, aligning closely with current educational, social, and ethical challenges. CDP 2.0 enhances the role of researchers-as-facilitators and participants-as-co-researchers, democratizing the research process from conceptualization to utilization.
- Advocates for collaborative and cooperative research, incorporating diverse voices and perspectives to tackle complex societal issues.
- Establishes minimum criteria for achieving the goals of SIDES, including dialogue, empathy, accountability, transparency, and adherence to international laws (e.g., Helsinki Declaration; Peters, 2020).
- Enhances ethical considerations in mixed methods research, emphasizing the integration and elevation of various methodological approaches (e.g., integrated mixed methods autoethnography, Onwuegbuzie et al., 2024a, 2024b) to address social injustices more effectively.
- Seeks to impact both the theoretical and the practical aspects of mixed methods research.
- Discusses how CDP 2.0 can be implemented in various research settings, examining potential impacts on policy, education, and practice.

Through autoethnographic reflection on our journey, CDP 2.0 is grounded in our personal stories, our struggles, and our triumphs as researchers committed to a cause greater than ourselves. Whereas CDP 1.0 established a foundation for integrating diverse research



methodologies and philosophical perspectives, CDP 2.0 expands this by explicitly incorporating ethical considerations and social responsibilities, directly addressing current global challenges and promoting a broader societal impact through research. We emphasize the importance of this integration in addressing the broader societal issues that our research seeks to impact.

In essence, CDP 2.0 is a continually evolving and guiding philosophy—a manifesto—for mixed methods research that aims to transform educational research and to address the broader societal challenges through a rigorous, inclusive, and participatory research approach that demands a more proactive, justice-oriented approach in research methodologies. This new version is not just an academic upgrade; it is a personal commitment to re-envisioning how research interacts with the very fabric of society. The rich tapestry of our experiences and the diverse voices that have shaped our perspectives have shown us that existing methodologies often silo, silence, and even marginalize participant voices and overlook the importance of philosophical justice and procedural justice. In particular, we critique these methodologies for their frequent oversight of justice for research participants. We criticize these methods for their often top-down approach, wherein researchers hold significant power over the research agenda and participant involvement. Indeed, the stories shared by participants, fellow scholars, and community members in some of our previous studies have become woven into our academic fabric, urging us to transform the traditional researcher-participant dynamic into a partnership of co-researchers. Therefore, CDP 2.0 represents a call to action for all researchers to embrace a more critical, humane, inclusive, just, and socially responsible approach to research. Our shift is not merely methodological but radical (i.e., representing a deep and transformative shift), personal, and philosophical—deeply altering how we view the power dynamics within research processes. Specifically, as authors, educators, researchers, scholars, methodologists, instructors, mentors, parent, relatives, and, above all, humanists, our CDP 2.0 philosophy is rooted in a commitment to research that is inherently participatory, wherein power dynamics are recalibrated to elevate the voices of those who are often underserved, marginalized, and/or oppressed, working to flatten hierarchies and reflecting a methodological shift—from viewing participants as mere *subjects* to recognizing and embracing them as *co-researchers*. Most significantly, with this new iteration, CDP 2.0, we propose a transformative approach to research that reimagines research as a life philosophy with substantial influence on both academic fields and broader societal practices alike—one that is intrinsically ethical, methodologically inclusive, and transformative beyond the academic realm. Through CDP 2.0, we aim to contribute to a global movement towards an even more just and equitable society, and we are hopeful that CDP 2.0 will inspire and facilitate a more ethically robust and socially responsive approach to mixed methods research.

In order to understand how CDP offers the field of mixed methods research an innovative philosophical lens for equitable research approaches, we call attention to the features of the other 13 mixed methods research-based philosophies, which each have positive aspects, including the following:

- Pragmatism-of-the-middle: Focuses on practical and outcome-oriented methods that lead iteratively to further action and problem resolution.
- Pragmatism-of-the-right: Holds a moderately strong form of realism and a weak form of pluralism, supporting structured research approaches.



- Pragmatism-of-the-left: Emphasizes antirealism and strong pluralism, accommodating diverse views and methodologies.
- Anti-conflationist: Ensures that methodology is not conflated with technical aspects of method, promoting a principled approach to combining methods.
- Critical realist: Combines critical theory with a discursive social scientific realism, providing depth to understanding societal structures.
- Dialectical stance: Facilitates dialogical engagement with philosophical differences, generatively producing new knowledge and insights.
- Complementary strengths: Recognizes the substantive differences between quantitative research traditions and qualitative research traditions, maintaining methodological integrity.
- Transformative-emancipatory: Focuses on participatory research and anti-discriminatory research, directly addressing the needs of marginalized groups.
- A-paradigmatic: Mixes quantitative research traditions and qualitative research traditions without a fixed philosophical stance, driven by practical research needs.
- Substantive theory: Integrates quantitative research traditions and qualitative research traditions with substantive theories driving the research.
- Communities of practice: Supports diverse research practices and methodological decisions influenced by group dynamics.
- Phenomenography: Focuses on understanding personal conceptions and meanings derived from experienced events.
- Dialectical pluralism: Incorporates multiple epistemological perspectives within a single inquiry, promoting comprehensive understanding.

With the exception of the transformative-emancipatory philosophy, most of the mixed methods research-based philosophies do not specifically focus on social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, none of these philosophies actively involves participants in the research process as co-researchers, and only a few emphasize culturally responsive and culturally engaged research. CDP 2.0—hereafter referred to as CDP—addresses many of these limitations found in the other 13 philosophies by emphasizing social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility.

CDP promotes the integration of quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods with broader interdisciplinary and global perspectives, which often are isolated in other approaches. It involves that active engagement of participants throughout the research process, wherein they engage as co-researchers, co-ideators, and co-decision-makers, ensuring that all participant voices are heard and valued—a focus that is largely absent in most other mixed methods research-based philosophies.

Moreover, CDP promotes deeper engagement and responsiveness to cultural and social contexts by integrating the roles of researchers and participants. This approach aims to ensure that research is culturally sensitive (cf. Tillman, 2002), culturally competent (cf. Lee & Zaharlick, 2013), culturally progressive (cf. Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016), culturally responsive (cf. Trainor & Bal, 2014), and culturally engaged (cf. Hayward, 2005), directly



addressing issues of procedural, process, and philosophical justice. It seeks to rectify ethical oversights or biases that might be present in other philosophical frameworks. By promoting culturally progressive and culturally responsive research, CDP addresses the often Eurocentric (i.e., referring to perspectives or approaches that predominantly reflect European or Western viewpoints, norms, and values, often at the expense of excluding or marginalizing other cultural contexts) or culturally neutral approaches of other philosophies. Additionally, CDP uniquely addresses the weaknesses of the other philosophies by promoting a holistic and inclusive approach that integrates the strengths of various philosophical stances while intensively focusing on social justice and ethical considerations in research.

Despite CDP being a relatively new research philosophy—established just 11 years ago—methodologists who embrace this approach have developed and applied methods specifically designed to mitigate procedural and process injustices. These include the following:

- ***T**ransparent, **R**igorous, **E**quitable, and **E**thical Sampling Designs*: Corrigan and Onwuegbuzie (2023) emphasize the importance of TREEful sampling, particularly when sampling among/between phases/components.
- *Meta-Framework for Optimal Matching*: Onwuegbuzie and Corrigan (2021) developed this framework to ensure (comparison) groups are as similar as possible, accounting for factors like demographics, personality, and affective variables.
- *Participant-Driven Focus Group Discussions*: Termed critical dialectical pluralist focus group discussions by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2015), these are designed and conducted by the research participants themselves.
- *Integrated Mixed Methods (IMM) for Design-Based Research (DBR)*: Referred to as critical dialectical pluralist integrated mixed methods design-based research (CDP-driven IMM-DBR; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2023).
- *Meta-Framework for Impact Evaluations*: This framework, as outlined by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2022), facilitates an integrative approach to addressing complicated and complex evaluation problems.
- *Paired Depth Interviewing*: Defined by Wilson et al. (2016) as interviewing two people together to understand their perceptions of the same event, experience, or phenomenon.
- *Transformation of Bibliometric Studies to Mixed Methods*: This approach integrates bibliometric analysis with qualitative research in a transformative manner, further detailed by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2018).
- *Qualitative Research Processes Involving Participant Co-Presentation*: Outlined by S. S. Abrams et al. (2017), Gerber et al. (2014), Onwuegbuzie et al. (2014), and Schaefer et al. (2018), where one or more participants co-present findings at professional meetings.

Radical Middle

Simultaneously with the conceptualization of CDP 1.0—prior to its inaugural publication—emerged the concept I (Tony) have termed *the radical middle*. This idea was inspired by a CPD-influenced way of thinking, representing a call for a significant paradigm shift in the conceptualization and application of mixed methods research. The *radical middle* in mixed methods research (Onwuegbuzie, 2012) represents a transformative and innovative theoretical



and methodological space. This approach critiques the artificial dichotomies historically separating quantitative research and qualitative research, aiming to integrate and to enhance collaboration between these traditions. Unlike the conventional middle ground that merely passively balances different epistemologies, the radical middle is an active, strategic, generative, and socially just space. It promotes a productive coexistence among all research traditions and seeks to harness the strengths of both quantitative research and qualitative research methodologies to address more effectively complex and complicated research questions.

In practice, the radical middle encourages a dynamic and strategic engagement with both quantitative research methodologies and qualitative research methodologies. It advocates for research approaches that are local, vibrant, interactive, situated, contingent, fluid, strategic, and generative, focusing on the responsiveness to local conditions and adaptability to new insights. This stance is particularly suited to addressing complex and complicated research questions that require nuanced and multifaceted insights. I (Tony) contend that moving towards a radical middle in research methodologies not only is a necessity for advancing knowledge, but also is crucial for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and just research practice. Furthermore, this stance involves a commitment to developing new theoretical and methodological frameworks that embrace complexity and fluidity in research.

The radical middle approach in mixed methods research is distinguished by several distinct characteristics that advocate for a more integrated and responsive research methodology. This approach is local and dynamic, emphasizing research that is grounded in and responsive to local conditions and needs, while remaining adaptable to changes and new insights. It is inherently interactive and situated, fostering engagement among different methodologies and situating the research within specific cultural and ethical contexts to acknowledge the influence these factors have on the research process. The approach also is situated and fluid, recognizing the need for research strategies to evolve over time and to adapt to the specific situation at hand.

Strategically and generatively, operating in the radical middle means aiming to address specific social issues through deliberate and thoughtful integration of diverse methodological approaches, thereby generating new knowledge and insights. This approach not only critiques the ongoing paradigm wars within and outside mixed methods research by challenging the extreme positions held by purists on both the quantitative and qualitative sides of the spectrum, but also promotes a socially just coexistence of different research traditions, advocating for mutual respect, cooperation, and collaboration. Furthermore, the radical middle encourages a constructivist view among researchers, recognizing multiple realities and validating different methodologies for studying the same phenomena, thereby fostering a dialectical approach wherein differences are seen as opportunities for deeper understanding and innovation in research practices. This inclusive approach also emphasizes the importance of a *bilingual nomenclature* to prevent communication breakdowns and to promote better integration and understanding between different research traditions.

Overall, the radical middle is not just a theoretical construct but a practical approach that fundamentally transforms how researchers approach, conceptualize, and conduct mixed methods research. It calls for a synthesis that respects and utilizes the strengths of both quantitative research approaches and qualitative research approaches to address societal issues more effectively. It seeks to bridge divides and foster an integrative, inclusive, and justice-oriented research philosophy. By advocating for a proactive stance that integrates the strengths



of diverse research traditions, the radical middle aims to transform the landscape of mixed methods research, leading to richer, more comprehensive, and socially responsive research outcomes.

The Intersection of Critical Dialectical Pluralism and the Radical Middle

Both versions of CDP—CDP 1.0 and CDP 2.0—embody and extend the principles of the radical middle in mixed methods research because they promote a transformative approach that transcends traditional methodological dichotomies and emphasizes ethical and inclusive practices. This alignment is evident in our advocacy for integrating qualitative research methodologies and quantitative research methodologies in a seamless and interactive manner, thereby fitting neatly into the radical middle’s ethos of neither fully embracing nor fully rejecting any single methodological tradition but, instead, going beyond simple methodological mixing or combining. Furthermore, both versions of CDP emphasize not only the accumulation of knowledge, but also its practical application and ethical implications, resonating with the radical middle’s goal of producing research that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant.

CDP 1.0 laid the groundwork by focusing on procedural, process, and philosophical justice, integrating universalistic theoretical knowledge with local practical knowledge, and aiming to balance diverse methodological and philosophical traditions. This foundation reflects the radical middle’s ethos of methodological integration and social justice by promoting an egalitarian research environment wherein different methodologies are not simply combined, but, rather, interact to create new insights and to promote equity. Building on this, CDP 2.0 expands these concepts by explicitly incorporating elements of social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility (SIDES)—further developing the role of participants in the research process—and emphasizing their empowerment and active involvement in all stages of research, a key aspect of democratizing the research process and a core principle of the radical middle. This approach aligns with the radical middle’s commitment to a dynamic, integrative, ethical, and socially responsive research approach wherein methodological boundaries are transcended to address complex and multifaceted social issues effectively.

Critical dialectical pluralists advocate for a *third space of methodological integration*, a hallmark of the radical middle, wherein diverse methodological and philosophical approaches are not just acknowledged but actively merged to enrich the research outcomes and to ensure that they are ethically sound and socially transformative. This makes CDP, particularly in its evolved form, a robust embodiment of the radical middle’s principles, pushing the boundaries of mixed methods research towards more transformative, inclusive, and justice-oriented practices.

The Role of Critical Dialectical Pluralism and the Radical Middle in Fostering Innovation in Integrated Mixed Methods Autoethnography

Traditionally, autoethnography is defined as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 65). With the solid union of CDP and the radical middle, and drawing from our (Sandra’s and Tony’s) extensive individual and collective experiences in developing methodologies and methods to address procedural and process injustices, two natural questions arose. When I (Tony) asked, “Why does autoethnography have to be solely a qualitative research approach? Why can’t it also represent a mixed methods research approach



by incorporating quantitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation?” both of us responded affirmatively. Our ensuing conversation was the catalyst for the creation of what we, and our colleagues—Madeline Abrams (Green Meadow Waldorf School, USA), Professor Anna S. CohenMiller (Nord University, Norway), and Anthony Bambrola (St. John’s University, USA)—coined as *mixed methods autoethnography*, which we further developed into *integrated mixed methods autoethnography*.

Conducting autoethnography in the radical middle using a CDP lens, led us to the following definition of integrated mixed methods autoethnography. Specifically, as we have described elsewhere (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2024a, 2024b), an integrated mixed methods autoethnographic approach involves:

- adopting an emtic viewpoint (which represents the place “where emic and etic viewpoints are maximally interactive” [Onwuegbuzie, 2012, p. 205]);
- using CDP as the research philosophical lens;
- conducting an integrated mixed methods autoethnography study that reflects a $1 + 1 = 1$ integration approach (Natesan et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2015; Onwuegbuzie, 2017, 2023, 2024; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019a, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2021), which represents the full[er] integration of qualitative and quantitative research components at all stages of the inquiry—rather than a $1 + 1 = 3$ integration approach (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015), which represents a partial approach wherein the quantitative and qualitative research approaches occur separately (e.g., quantitative and qualitative data being collected and analyzed separately) until the meaning-making phase, whereby meta-inferences—involved combining inferences stemming from both the qualitative and quantitative findings into a coherent whole (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998)—are developed;
- using a meta-methods research approach that combines mixed methods and multiple methods within the same inquiry (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019b);
- using one or more research designs;
- involving multiple researchers in a collaborative manner;
- adopting a balanced approach that is both participant-driven and researcher-driven;
- involving an iterative approach to data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, reflection, and revision (cf. M. L. Abrams, 2024);
- producing narratives that are embedded with the other findings and interpretations; and
- producing narratives using a semi-personalized style that allows for both personal engagement and scholarly rigor.

Our writing team has concluded that CDP aligns with the radical middle to foster an integrated mixed methods autoethnography that merges rigorous methodological structures with a deep commitment to social justice and ethical practices. CDP, when intersected with the notion of the radical middle, creates a powerful foundation for integrated mixed methods autoethnography. This intersection is particularly significant given the unique demands and philosophical underpinnings of autoethnography within the spectrum of mixed methods research. CDP is characterized by its emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, ensuring that social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility (SIDES) are central to the research



narrative. This approach is critical in autoethnography, which seeks to narrate deeply personal and culturally embedded experiences. By reframing participants as co-researchers, CDP empowers them to contribute not just data, but actively to engage in narrative construction, analysis, and interpretation. This empowerment enriches the research with multifaceted insights into human experiences, aligning with the goals of integrated mixed methods autoethnography to produce enriched insights.

Additionally, CDP encourages a deeply reflective and participatory approach to research, wherein researchers and participants collaborate as co-researchers. This collaborative approach is one of our aforementioned 10 dimensions of autoethnography, which emphasizes personal narrative and social critique. By integrating mixed methods, CDP supports a richer, more nuanced exploration of personal and collective experiences, positioned within a rigorous methodological framework that embodies the radical middle. It leverages the empirical strength of quantitative research methods while deeply engaging with the contextual and nuanced insights of qualitative research methods.

The radical middle's methodological flexibility advocates for a dynamic, fluid, and interactive methodological space where quantitative and qualitative methods interact freely. This flexibility is crucial in integrated mixed methods autoethnography, wherein blending qualitative data and quantitative data captures the complexity of personal and cultural narratives. By moving towards the radical middle, researchers create a *third space of methodological integration* wherein integrated mixed methods quantitative and qualitative research traditions not only coexist, but also interact to create new meanings. This goal aligns precisely with integrated mixed methods autoethnography, which seeks to transcend traditional methodological boundaries to explore new theoretical and empirical terrains.

Whereas other mixed methods research philosophies offer various strengths, those perspectives typically do not provide the same level of philosophical integration and flexibility as CDP combined with the radical middle concept. For instance, although pragmatism supports methodological flexibility, it may not inherently push for the deep integration of diverse epistemological perspectives as does CDP. Similarly, transformative-emancipatory approaches effectively emphasize social change but might not embrace fully the social change within the *research process* that is required for integrated mixed methods autoethnography.

In summary, the combination of CDP and the radical middle uniquely supports integrated mixed methods autoethnography by fostering a research environment that is simultaneously inclusive, flexible, and dynamic, crucial for exploring complex personal and cultural narratives that demand both depth (from qualitative research approaches) and breadth (from quantitative research approaches), thereby fulfilling the potential of integrated mixed methods autoethnography as a transformative research methodology.

Summary and Conclusions

In the article, we, Tony and Sandra, embark on a reflective exploration of how critical dialectical pluralism (CDP) intertwined with the call for mixed methods researchers to move towards the radical middle facilitates the development and implementation of integrated mixed methods autoethnography. Our journey is not just a methodological exploration, but also a deeply personal narrative that weaves through our academic pursuits and personal insights, highlighting the profound impact of these philosophies on our approach to research.



Philosophical Underpinnings and Evolution

The genesis of our exploration begins with CDP, a framework that has evolved significantly from its initial formulation (CDP 1.0) to a more nuanced and inclusive iteration (CDP 2.0). This evolution mirrors our own intellectual journeys, influenced by our experiences and the changing dynamics of the research landscape. CDP 1.0 laid the groundwork by advocating for an integration of diverse research philosophies, challenging the traditional dichotomies between qualitative research and quantitative research. It promoted an egalitarian approach to knowledge production, one that valued and elevated different perspectives equally and sought to integrate them in meaningful ways.

As we delved deeper into the complexities of research, it became clear that the foundational principles of CDP needed to be expanded to address more directly the realities of social injustice, diversity, and ethical considerations in research practice. Thus, CDP 2.0 was born, emphasizing SIDES—social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social responsibility. These elements became central to our research narrative, pushing us to think beyond the academic implications of our work and to consider its societal impacts.

Intersecting with the Radical Middle

The radical middle, a concept that I (Tony) introduced, has been instrumental in furthering the evolution of CDP. Thus, it serves as a catalyst for innovation, facilitating a methodological space where the rigidity of traditional research dichotomies is replaced by a flexible, interactive continuum. This radical middle philosophy advocates for a dynamic and fluid integration of qualitative research approaches and quantitative research approaches, creating a *third space of methodological integration* that is neither purely qualitative nor purely quantitative. Instead, it is a space where methodological rigor meets the flexibility required to address complex and nuanced social phenomena.

Integrated mixed methods autoethnography, as explored in this article, is a direct outcome of the fertile interaction between CDP and the radical middle. This innovative approach extends beyond traditional autoethnography by incorporating quantitative data into the deeply personal and narrative-driven inquiry that characterizes autoethnographic research. This methodological expansion allows for a more comprehensive exploration of personal and cultural narratives, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual experiences and broader social phenomena.

This approach is autoethnographic in its method and in its execution, reflecting our own journeys through the landscapes of research and personal experience. Indeed, integrated mixed methods autoethnography has enabled us to address complex research questions that are deeply embedded in personal experiences yet resonate with wider societal implications. The intersection of CDP and the radical middle has enabled us to approach integrated mixed methods autoethnography not just as a methodological choice, but also as a transformative practice that challenges existing power structures and amplifies marginalized and/or undervalued voices.

CDP and the Radical Middle in Practice

In practice, the integration of CDP and the radical middle has revolutionized our approach to autoethnography. Integrated mixed methods autoethnography, as facilitated by these frameworks, allows for a deeper engagement with personal and cultural narratives. It provides



a methodological robustness that supports the empirical rigor of quantitative research approaches while embracing the depth and contextual sensitivity of qualitative research approaches. This methodological synthesis is crucial for capturing the complexities of personal experiences and the broader cultural and social dynamics that shape them.

Our work has shown that this approach does more than just enrich research outcomes; it transforms the research process itself, making it more inclusive and participatory. Because participants become co-researchers, they not only contribute to data collection, but also participate actively in the narrative construction, analysis, interpretation, and presentation. This shift fundamentally changes the researcher-participant dynamic, fostering a research environment that is collaborative and transformative.

Future Directions and Societal Impact

Looking forward, the intersection of CDP and the radical middle is poised to continue influencing the development of integrated mixed methods autoethnography. This influence is anticipated to grow as societal challenges become more complex and interconnected, necessitating research approaches that are not only methodologically robust, but also ethically sound and socially responsive. The continued evolution of CDP, especially in its alignment with the radical middle, likely will push the boundaries of what mixed methods research can achieve, particularly in terms of addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the journey through CDP and the radical middle has been transformative, not just for our research methodologies, but also for our personal philosophies and commitments to social change. This narrative, embedded within the broader discourse of mixed methods research, reflects a profound engagement with the challenges and opportunities of integrating diverse methodological perspectives in a way that honors both the complexity of human experiences and the ethical imperatives of research.

The implications of this work are significant, suggesting that the future of mixed methods research, particularly in autoethnographic contexts, will increasingly rely on frameworks like CDP and the radical middle to guide its development. Such frameworks enhance the methodological rigor of research practices and ensure that these practices are aligned with the goals of social justice and ethical responsibility.

In essence, our exploration within this article is a call to action for researchers and practitioners alike to embrace these integrative, transformative approaches to research. It is an invitation to consider how we conduct research *and* why we do so, urging a commitment to practices that are not only intellectually rigorous, but also socially meaningful and transformative.



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