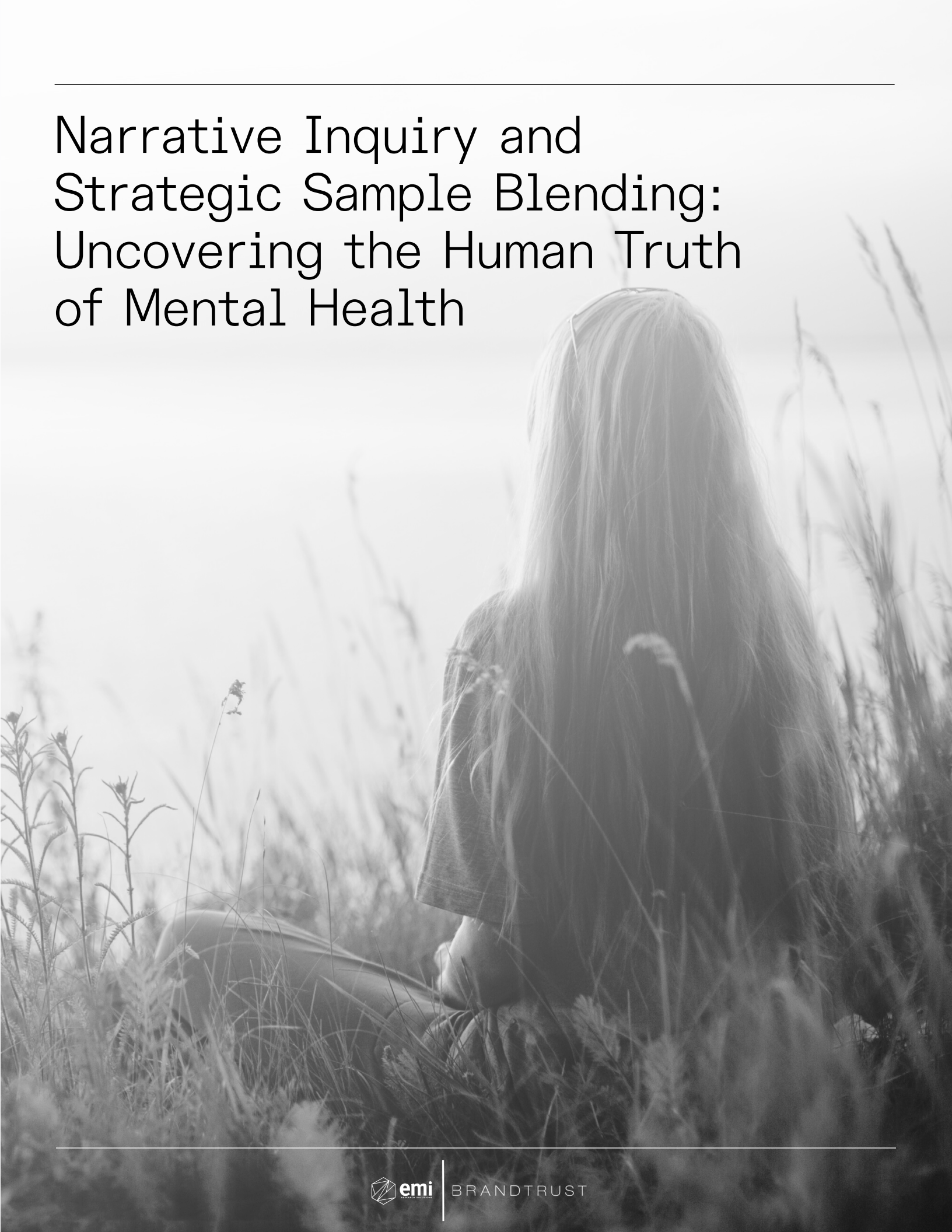

Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending: Uncovering the Human Truth of Mental Health



Introduction

In recent years, mental health has undeniably taken center stage as a prominent and critical topic of discussion. The events of 2020 and beyond have compelled each of us to confront our own experiences with mental health in ways we may never have anticipated. The global pandemic, with its profound impact on daily life, brought mental health concerns to the forefront, transcending age, gender, and background. It became an issue that touched us all, uniting us in our shared vulnerability and need for support.

In light of these transformative events, Brandtrust and EMI Research Solutions embarked on a partnership with specific objectives in mind:

- *Delve into the bedrock of people's experiences and beliefs surrounding mental health, understanding the narratives shaping our collective consciousness.*
- *Explore diverse and deeply personal perspectives on mental health, aiming to uncover the motivations driving individuals to enhance their well-being.*
- *Identify the internal and external factors at play in this transformative journey and examine what fuels the profound desire for change.*
- *Shed light on the challenges mental health presents and highlight the remarkable resilience and determination that defines the human spirit in the face of adversity.*

Furthermore, our collaborative effort aimed to provide a comprehensive assessment of

Brandtrust's Narrative Inquiry methodology and EMI's strategic sample blending. We sought to compare their effectiveness against more traditional survey and sample aggregation techniques, particularly in terms of the richness of insights and respondent quality, to support our goal of providing deeper insight wrapped in the agility and efficiency of an online methodology. This broader analysis was integral to advancing our understanding of the mental health landscape and the methodologies employed in our study.

Key Takeaways from Our Exploration

In this report you will:

- *Gain deep insights into the multifaceted nature of mental health, exploring emotional, physical, relational, and contextual dimensions.*
- *Understand the diverse and deeply personal perspectives that shape our understanding of mental well-being.*
- *Discover the motivations that drive individuals on their journey to improve their mental health.*
- *Explore the factors, both internal and external, that facilitate the transformation towards better mental well-being.*
- *Learn about the resilience and determination that characterize the human spirit in the face of adversity.*
- *Find out how Brandtrust's Narrative Inquiry and EMI's strategic sample blending provide deeper insights and higher respondent quality compared to traditional methods.*

Methodology

We had three arms to the research for this study:

Arm 1: Narrative Inquiry with EMI's Strategic Sample Blend

Sample Size: 300

LOI: 25 Minutes

Arm 2: Narrative Inquiry with Sample from Online Marketplaces

Sample Size: 300

LOI: 25 Minutes

Arm 3: Traditional Quantitative Study with EMI's Strategic Sample Blend

The quantitative survey utilized primarily traditional quantitative and short answer questions to determine similarities and differences among a demographically representative sample as well as sub-groups.

Sample Size: 1,000

LOI: 8 minutes

Strategic Sample Blend was balanced to Census.

Narrative Inquiry

A social sciences-based qualitative online survey that extracts detailed, high-quality responses, utilizing the power of story with applied social and behavioral sciences to uncover the psychological underpinnings and deeply embedded narratives people hold that drive their behavior and help illuminate the path to Human Truth.

Strategic Sample Blending

A sample blending methodology that strategically blends three or more sample providers in an intentional and controlled manner. Providers are selected to complement one another based on attitudes and behavior of their panelists, which is based on EMI's 10+ years of research-on-research. Blending is done to reduce the overall sample bias and any potential behavioral or attitudinal impacts a panel can have on the results.



The Human Truths of Mental Health

Mental health is a complex and multifaceted aspect of our overall well-being, far from a singular entity existing in isolation. It encompasses emotional, physical, relational, and contextual dimensions, and is influenced by both internal and external factors. These factors interweave and interact with one another, shaping a person's mental health, which ultimately acts as a barometer of their overall health.

One of the challenges in understanding mental health lies in its intangibility. It's often more visible when someone is grappling with mental health issues than when they're in a state of well-being. This skewed perspective has contributed to the prevalent stigma surrounding mental health, reinforcing the idea that it's primarily a state of unhealth.

Defining mental health can be elusive due to several reasons. First, it's inherently challenging to define the absence of pain or distress, making it easier to articulate when one is experiencing emotional turbulence rather than when they're in a state of equilibrium. Second, the intricate interplay of multiple factors makes it difficult to pinpoint precisely what contributes to a healthy mental state, contrasting with the relative ease of identifying causes of mental unhealth.

While society has made strides in reducing the stigma around discussing mental health, misconceptions still linger. This lingering stigma can discourage individuals from openly sharing their struggles, fearing that they'll be misunderstood, judged, or rejected by others.

"To me, mental health is about being in a headspace that makes you feel safe, and if you're feeling vulnerable, you feel comfortable to be able to share those emotions with people that are close to you. Mental health is ever-changing and always affecting my everyday life. I have a lot of trauma from my childhood, and I was struggling with deep feelings of depression and anxiety and feeling very alone, like I was unwelcomed anywhere. I was falling apart and felt hopeless. I had started to self-harm and things eventually got even worse.

Recently, my father and I were in a situation where he did not understand my mental health and the needs that I have to protect it. It's incredibly hard for me to not be understood. I felt very shut down. I felt very misunderstood and like there is something wrong with me. It's important for me that other people that struggle with their mental health understand that it's okay not to be okay. Mental health is so important to take care of because it has an effect on your entire life."

Verbatim Research Respondent

Mental unhealth, though often invisible to others, exerts a palpable influence on individuals and their relationships. The ripple effects extend beyond the affected person, impacting those in their immediate circle. This shared experience of emotional turmoil can create a profound sense of helplessness, leaving both the person experiencing the difficulties and those trying to support them grappling with uncertainty.

The factors contributing to mental unhealth are usually complex and gradual, accumulating over an extended period of time. These compounding elements can make it seem insurmountable for individuals caught in the throes of mental health struggles to envision a way out.

Among the myriad factors, two prominent conditions stand out as recurrent themes in creating mental unhealth: isolation and stasis. Isolation is characterized by a profound sense of disconnection, where individuals feel alone, misunderstood, and emotionally detached. These feelings of worthlessness and shame intensify, rendering them isolated in their pain. Stasis, on the other hand, conveys a feeling of being trapped without hope or a clear path forward. It manifests as a sense of powerlessness, leading to an uncontrollable sense of foreboding.

These conditions intertwine and penetrate deep into an individual's identity. What might start as physical solitude can escalate into social disconnection, fueling emotions of loneliness and abandonment. This emotional isolation further erodes

one's sense of self, resulting in feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and emotional numbness. The cycle can become self-perpetuating, making it challenging to break free from the clutches of mental unhealth.

Hope serves as the crucial compass guiding individuals along this path to recovery. The mere belief that change is possible, that they can reclaim their agency and sense of self from the constraints of mental unhealth, provides the necessary impetus people need to embark on this transformative journey. Building upon the understanding of the factors contributing to mental unhealth, particularly isolation and stasis, we were able to identify two core needs essential for progress: Connection and Agency.

TAKING CONTROL

When grappling with the complexities of mental health, individuals often find themselves at a pivotal crossroad, a crossroad defined by control. It is here that they confront a fundamental choice - to continue allowing their experiences to dictate their lives, perpetuating a seemingly endless cycle of hopelessness and negativity, or to recognize their own agency in regaining control over their mental health journey. This choice is not one that can be made overnight, just as mental health doesn't deteriorate or improve overnight. The transformation of one's mental health is an arduous journey, one that demands time and effort.

"I was in the emergency room, and I didn't have anyone with me. I hadn't let anyone in my family know what I was planning to do when I left my house to kill myself and I refused to give an emergency contact because I didn't want my children to know. I was ashamed of myself and my actions but still felt like it was the only way to stop the pain. I was just so burnt out emotionally and wanted it to end. I was scared of the future. I was terrified of living with these feelings of inadequacy. I felt like I was hurting my family and didn't want them to keep suffering with me in the state I was in. I think that after I spoke with the nurse, I started to think more about the fact that I had isolated myself from my family because of my illness and how much what I had done would hurt them, but I wasn't ready to move forward yet with my recovery. I was thinking about it for the first time and that I had to find a way to stop hurting everyone including myself and get help because that was the only way to stop the pain."

Verbatim Research Respondent

Connection

Connection is a profound need, encompassing both external and internal dimensions. To begin their healing journey, individuals must feel connected to others, sensing care, understanding, and acceptance from their social circles. Equally vital is the need for self-connection, fostering self-acceptance and self-worth. Only when they feel wanted and known can they truly experience a sense of worthiness and acceptance.

Agency

Agency, on the other hand, empowers individuals to break free from the stagnancy and immobility that characterized their mental un-health. Regaining control over their lives and charting a new, hopeful trajectory forward becomes their mission. This often involves cultivating optimism and inspiration about the future, redirecting focus from the past, and, in some cases, finding the strength to forgive others and accept their own imperfections, ultimately returning the power to themselves.

Within this we start to see a cycle of worth developing. The cycle of worth that individuals project and receive from the world is a profound and intricate interplay within the realm of mental health and well-being. At its core, this cycle is driven by meaningful connections - connections to oneself, to others, and to the broader external world. When individuals possess a profound connection to these elements, they inherently recognize their own worth, and

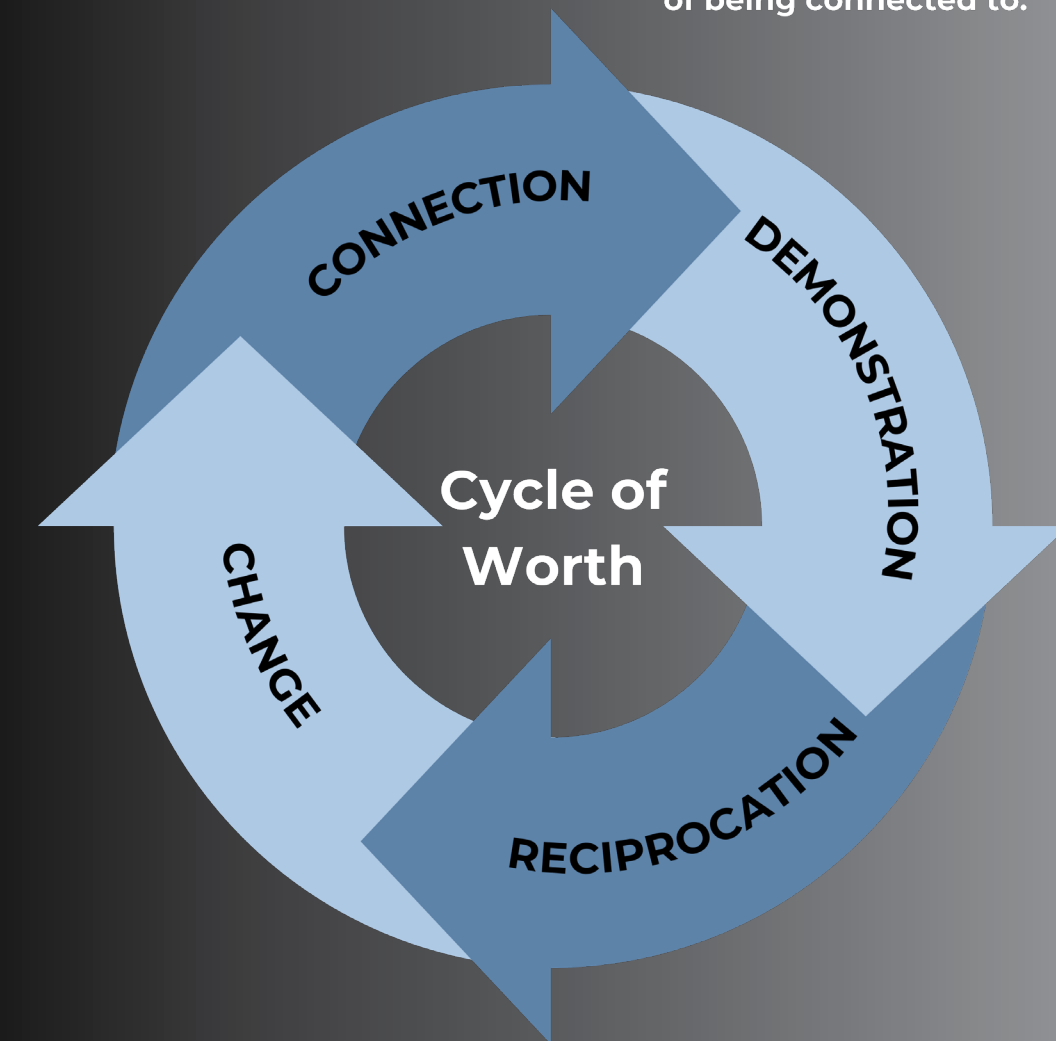
this self-awareness is outwardly evident to others. They convey that they are indeed worthy of these connections, fostering a reciprocal bond where their worth is affirmed by the connections they maintain.

In this symbiotic exchange, a transformative process unfolds. Feeling worthy and making others feel worthy catalyzes a positive change, a change that deepens the connections both within oneself and with others. This positive reinforcement allows individuals to explore greater depths of self-awareness and forge stronger bonds with those around them. It becomes a continuous, reinforcing loop where connection constantly shapes one's perception of self-worth.

However, this delicate cycle is not immune to disruption. When the connections, whether with oneself or others, are severed or strained, the cycle of worth can be fractured as well. The profound impact of these connections on an individual's sense of worth underscores the importance of nurturing and sustaining them, for they are not only the cornerstones of mental health but also the conduits through which individuals find purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in their lives.

Having a connection to oneself, others, and the outside world

Connection with another demonstrates one's own worth - you are worthy of being connected to.



Allowing both parties to be changed by the connection with each other

In turn, you make others feel worthy

Shifting from the suffocating feeling of stasis to the liberating sense of agency involves a transformative journey that often hinges on the profound acts of forgiveness and acceptance. Forgiveness serves as the key to unlocking the psychological prison constructed by past experiences, liberating individuals from the chains of resentment and regret. By forgiving, they not only release themselves from the weight of the past but also embark on a path of learning and growth, channeling their energy towards the present and the future. Concurrently, acceptance emerges as a potent force, empowering individuals to regain control over their lives, thereby reclaiming their agency. Through acceptance, they acknowledge their current circumstances may not align with their ideal vision, yet they recognize the power within themselves to effect change, to break free from the self-imposed constraints, and to carve a new path toward a future infused with hope, purpose, and renewed agency.

Forgiveness of...

the past

**others who may
have wronged you**

**yourself &
your flaws**

**losing
control**

**previous
stagnancy**

Acceptance of...

change

**yourself & where
you are in your
journey**

accountability

the future

**help &
support from
others**

“It was after I was released from the psychiatric hospital. I had continued to keep my family out of everything because I felt I couldn’t deal with everything else and their feelings until I dealt with my own. I was on medication but was still lost. I had been through a lot of trauma in my life, and I finally decided to be honest with myself and my doctors so that I could try to heal. I finally told someone everything, all my pain and fears. I accepted that I couldn’t do it alone and remembered what the nurse said about the programs. I found one with their help and took those steps to try to find peace while fighting myself every step of the way. I had to make a choice to not just survive, but I had to choose to live. I was still scared to deal that I was unfixable, and it was just a waste of time, but I did it regardless for myself first and for my children. They had suffered with my every day and it was time to try to heal for me and so I could heal my relationship with them in the future. But, even if they could never forgive me, I had to learn to forgive myself. It was the only chance I had to not feel like I had all my life. I was dead when they found me, and I had been given another chance to make better choices for myself. To learn from the past and live for the future, whatever it held. I think I will always be a little afraid, it’s part of my life, but I had to be brave enough to fight for my life and learn to manage my mental health instead of it managing me. It will always be a struggle because there is no cure, just a way to maintain my life and illness through honesty, medication, therapy, and support from medical professionals and eventually, my family. I had to learn how to live my life and then I was able to be honest with my family and move forward. I had to educate myself because I could educate them on what I needed.”

Verbatim Research Respondent



The Best Methods for Uncovering Deeper, Richer Insights

In our pursuit of gaining a deeper understanding of mental health, we recognized the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of our research methodology. Specifically, we aimed to compare Brandtrust’s Narrative Inquiry approach, coupled with EMI’s strategic sample blending, against more conventional survey techniques and sample aggregation methods. Our objective was twofold: first, to gauge the richness of insights obtained through these different research arms, and second, to evaluate the overall quality of the data gathered.

To accomplish this, we established clear criteria for measurement, focusing on two primary aspects: the depth of insights garnered from respondents’ engagement with open-ended questions and the overall data quality, as reflected in the extent of data removals necessary within each research arm.

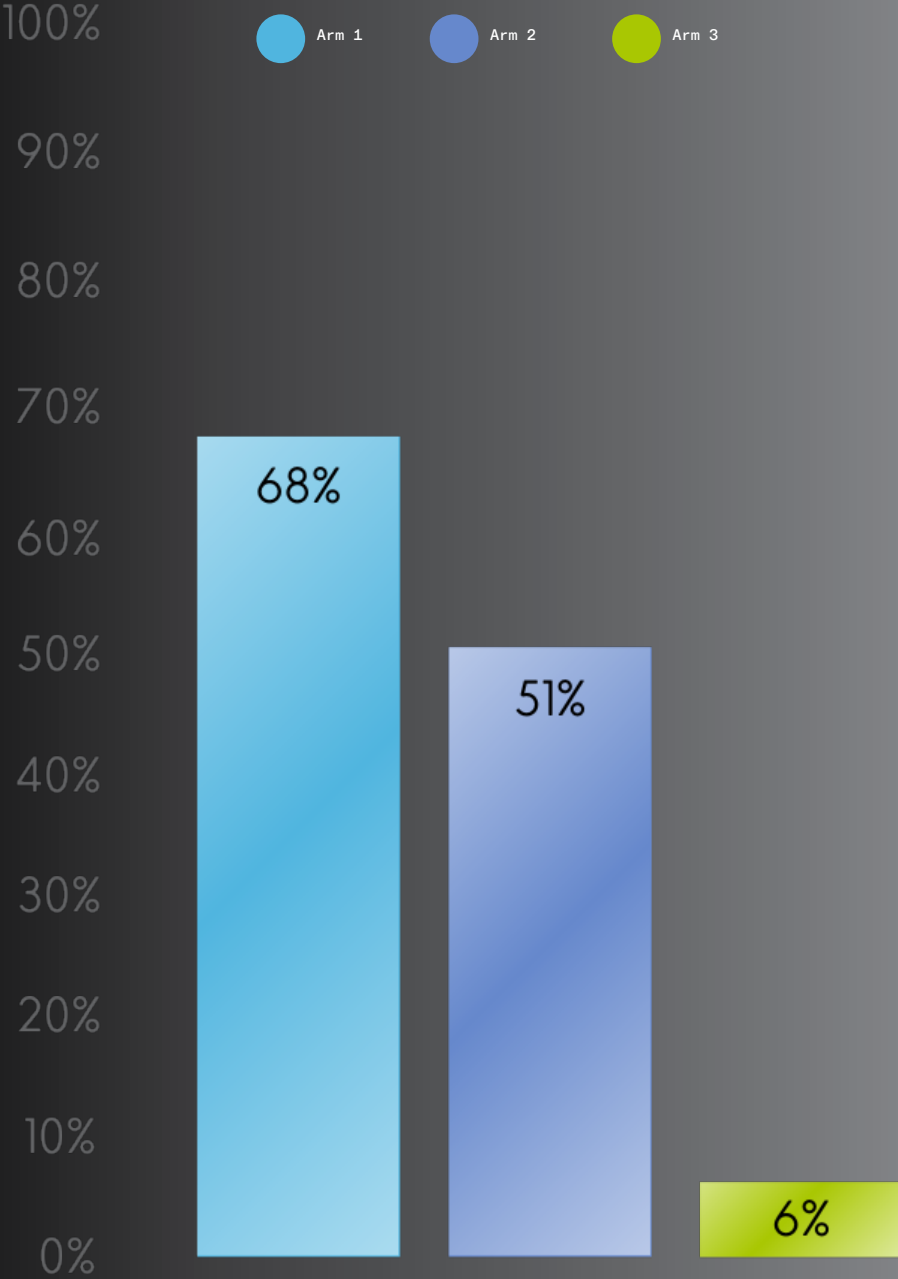
Depth of Insight Richness

With the depth of insight richness, we decided to use respondent open-end engagement as our measurement. In this measure we looked at the word count of open-ended questions across all three study arms to compare them to one another. We also looked at the actual content of the open ends as well.

What we found was that Arm 1, the combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending, provided significantly verbose open-ended responses compared to the other two.

When respondents were asked “*What does mental health mean to you?*” the combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending yielded 68% of open ends with at least 30 words or more, 17 percentage points higher than Arm 2.

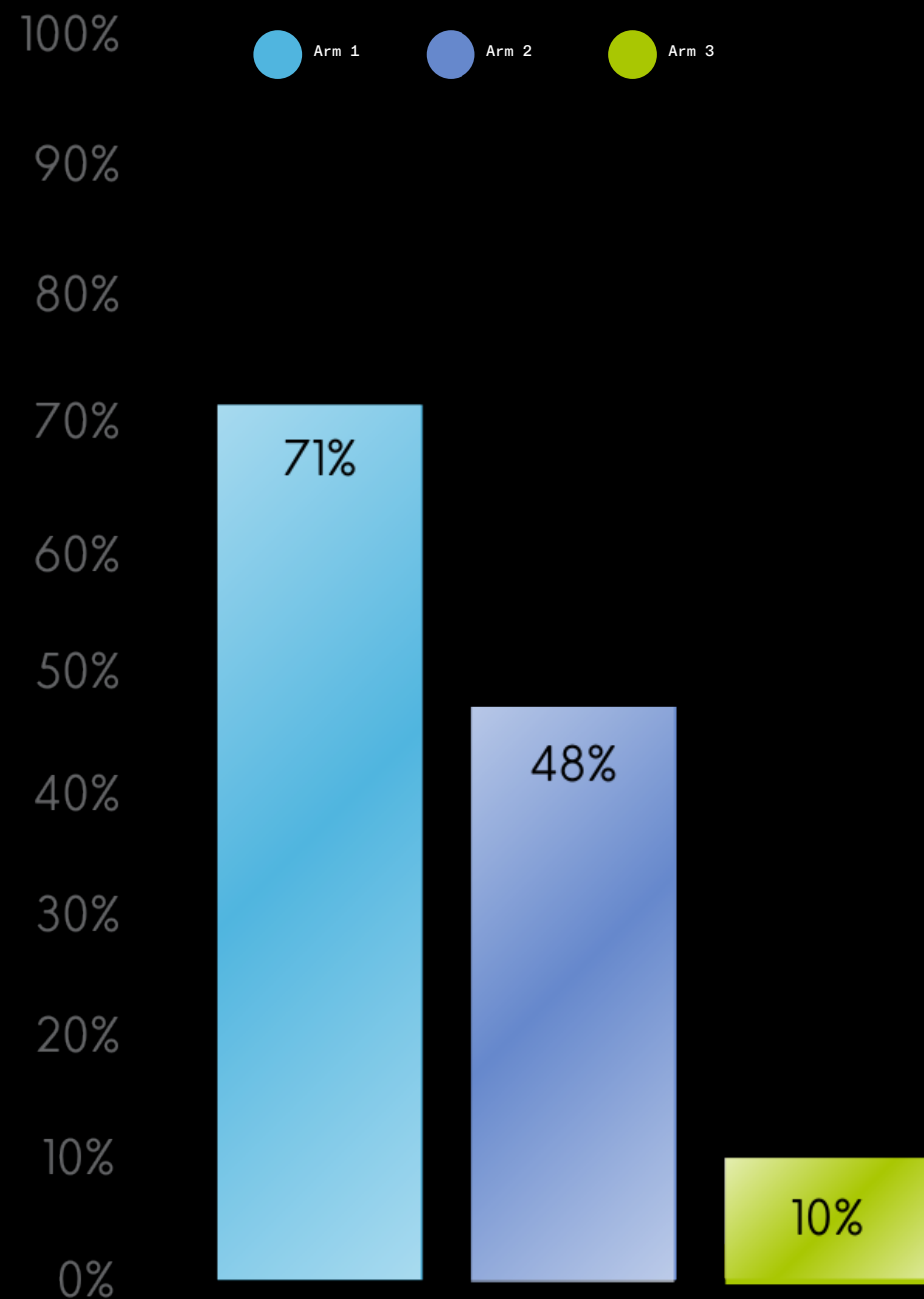
WHAT DOES MENTAL HEALTH MEAN TO YOU?
(Percentage of Open-Ends with 30+ Words)



When asked to describe a time that they were struggling with mental health, the combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending yielded opens-ends where 71% had at least 30 words or more. This was 23 percentage points higher than the next highest arm.

DESCRIBE A TIME YOU WERE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH

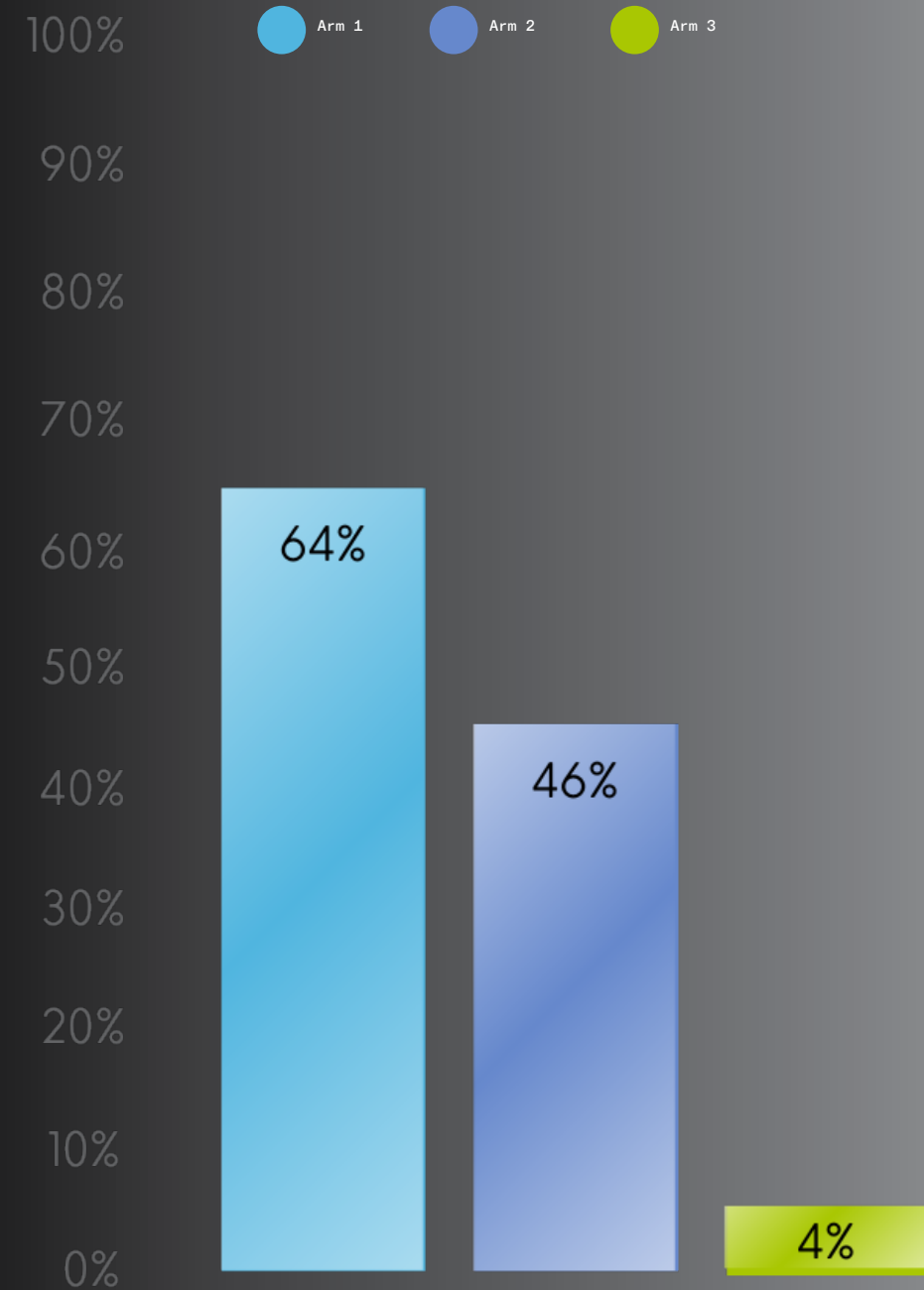
(Percentage of Open-Ends with 30+ Words)



Finally, when respondents across all 3 arms were asked to describe a time that they did something to better their mental health, the Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending combination had 64% of open ends with 30 or more words.

DESCRIBE A TIME THAT YOU DID SOMETHING TO BETTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

(Percentage of Open-Ends with 30+ Words)

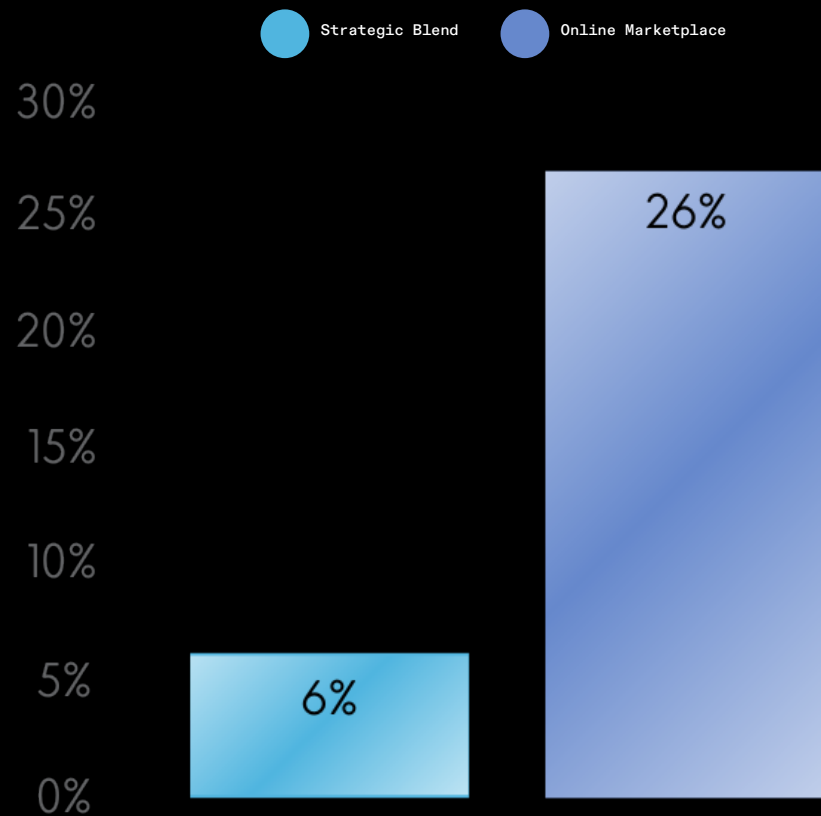


When looking at the actual content that was written for the open ends, the combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending provided more thorough and comprehensive answers than the other methodology combinations. This is highlighted by the quotes that are in the previous section – all responses were found in Arm 1.

QUALITY OF DATA

One metric that nearly everyone can agree on that indicates a study's quality of data is the number of removals the data set has. For this study, we looked at the number of quality removals each arm had. What we found was that when a Strategic Sample Blend was used, the cumulative quality removals were only 6% total for Arms 1 and 3. The online sample marketplace in Arm 2 had a 26% quality removal rate, nearly 4 times higher.

When the data richness was combined with the low amount of quality removals, it proved that the combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending gave the richest insights with the best level of data quality.



Conclusion

In the wake of transformative events that have brought mental health to the forefront of our collective consciousness, our partnership between Brandtrust and EMI Research Solutions has illuminated the profound complexities surrounding this crucial topic. Our commitment to delving into the very essence of people's experiences and beliefs concerning mental health has led to a deeper understanding of the narratives that shape our perceptions. We have uncovered the motivations driving individuals on their journeys towards improved mental well-being, shedding light on the profound desire for change and the myriad internal and external factors at play. Furthermore, we've celebrated the human spirit's remarkable resilience and determination, even in the face of adversity.

This study, not only a reflection of our dedication to comprehending mental health but also a testament to the power of our combined Narrative Inquiry methodology and Strategic Sample Blending, has unveiled significant insights. It revealed that mental health is far from a singular, isolated entity; instead, it is an intricate web of emotional, physical, relational, and contextual dimensions. The human experience of mental health is deeply intertwined with factors both internal and external, making it a holistic reflection of one's overall well-being.

Through the personal stories and experiences shared by research participants, we've recognized the importance of connection and agency in the context of mental health. Connection, both with others and with oneself, plays a pivotal role in fostering self-acceptance, self-worth, and feelings of belonging. Simultaneously, agency empowers individuals to take control of their mental health journey, breaking free from isolation and stasis, as they chart a hopeful and transformative path forward.

Our research has demonstrated that nurturing and sustaining these connections is essential not only for one's mental health but also for their overall well-being. By understanding the cyclical relationship between worth, connections, and self-perception, we've emphasized the significance of tending to these vital elements in our lives.

Forgiveness and acceptance emerged as powerful tools for regaining agency and control over one's mental health journey. These acts can free individuals from the weight of the past, empowering them to focus on the present and the future. In this journey, hope is the guiding force that allows individuals to believe in the possibility of change.

Our comprehensive analysis compared the effectiveness of our Narrative Inquiry approach and Strategic Sample Blending with traditional survey methods. It became evident that the former provided richer, more comprehensive insights, with significantly longer open-ended responses and fewer data removals, signifying superior data quality.

If you are inspired by the insights we've uncovered in this study and wish to collaborate with Brandtrust and EMI Research Solutions, we welcome the opportunity to explore the complexities of other vital topics. Our combination of Narrative Inquiry and Strategic Sample Blending is a powerful tool for uncovering deeper insights that can drive transformative change, wrapped in the agility and efficiency of an online methodology. Together, we can embark on a journey to illuminate the Human Truths behind the challenges and opportunities that shape our world.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the research participants who generously shared their personal experiences, as well as our dedicated teams at Brandtrust and EMI Research Solutions for their unwavering commitment to understanding and improving mental health.

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EMI Research Solutions is a leading quantitative research and online sample consultancy. With more than 20 years of experience operating in the market research industry, we provide you with unbiased solutions that ensure you get the highest-quality, most accurate data to base your decisions on.

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Our world-class project management team works with you as an extension of your team, providing you with a single point of contact, utilizing responsiveness, creativity, and flexibility to help you navigate any issues. Our proprietary sample management platform, SWIFT, seamlessly connects your survey with the appropriate sample audience while ensuring you get only high-quality data with our built-in data quality measures.

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