The Location of our Debates: Finding, Fixing, and Enacting Reality

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Our debates: Finding, fixing, and enacting reality

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Abstract
Working in the long historical shadow of what has been taken to be debates between quantitative and qualitative methods, Osatuke and Stiles (2011), Westerman (2011), and Yanchar (2011) seek to move beyond those debates and even the various détentes posed in mixed-methods research. Their projects can be assessed in terms of this seemingly permanent shadow and also within a broader framing of the political, ethical, epistemic, and ontological stakes that abide in methodological decisions. Taking a broad historical and meta-theoretical perspective illuminates both the boldness and the limitations of the three papers. Especially notable are their procedures for abandoning the Archimedean distanced observational stance, replacing it with intersubjective, relational processes of knowledge seeking.

Keywords
epistemology, history, ontology, qualitative methods, quantification

Quantitative analysis versus qualitative analysis. Trading in numbers versus trading in words. As the authors in this special issue suggest, researchers generally believe that they have a choice between two ways of observing psychological phenomena. They observe, too, that these two ways have been (mis)taken as competing for exclusive use, because either one method is deemed inappropriate for the tasks at hand or the two are seen as fundamentally incompatible, or both (Osatuke & Stiles, 2011; Westerman, 2011; Yanchar, 2011). Within psychology, quantitative and qualitative analyses often are represented as antagonists at war, one orthodoxy pitted against the other. Noting the presumed dichotomy of these two approaches to the psychological world, and conveying the longstanding metaphor of techniques at war, the authors seek détente. They offer empirical cases where quantitative and qualitative analyses are not inimical, not at loggerheads but, rather, become allies in the search for scientifically better understandings of

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psychological phenomena. Although the specific techniques for what might seem to be unholy alliances differ (and sometimes differ in important respects), the authors together seek to demonstrate the benefits of what has been called “triangulation of methods,” “mixed methods,” or “methodological pluralism.” They forward the claim that “the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is far less fundamental than most researchers think” (Westerman, 2011, p. 158). And they hold that psychological knowledge would substantially gain from joint or conjoined methodologies. The net result would be two aligned nations: open commerce, diplomacy, pluralism, or at least tolerance and bilingualism. In this regard, other researchers share this collaborative stance, albeit it is a stance advocated by a minority in the discipline (Madill & Gough, 2008).

If the two investigative approaches are treated as comparably powerful and if they are considered outside the long history of their development, then advocating détente and mutual survival seems reasonable, even feasible. However, the quantitative/qualitative “debates” can be understood otherwise. Although often portrayed as charged struggles over the particular methods, seen historically they are persistent efforts of a research minority to change intellectual practices. In recent history, these efforts most often aim toward pluralism. The “debates” are not directed toward simple victory, for few, if any, proponents of qualitative approaches aspire to a new methodological orthodoxy. Most simply want to broaden empirical work in psychology. However, the “debates” are not always only about methods, especially when they are part of worldview contestations over majority politics, theory, and even aesthetics. Qualitative approaches occasionally are connected to more extensive projects to realize (or at least move toward) fundamentally different visions of the psychological world; worlds that demand other epistemologies, new theories of knowledge, and radical rethinking of ontology. These latter aspirations invite seeing objects, persons, entities, and the like, as dynamic, active participants in the larger scientific project to make and remake as well as know the world.

The so-called “qualitative/quantitative debates,” then, need to be understood in broader, more heterogeneous terms in at least two respects. First, qualitative approaches have been and remain a minor contestant in psychology’s research practices. Second, proponents of qualitative approaches differ significantly among themselves in their reasoning, theory, values, and politics. Fuller appreciation of the multiple dimensions of these debates requires attention to the practical, worldly accomplishments of specific methods in specific contexts. This commentary, then, moves from a brief historical review of psychology’s quantification mandate. The historical framework brings into relief perspectives that are not generally represented in accounts of the debate; such perspectives offer markedly different commitments in psychological research. To illustrate these differences, ranging from utility and values to epistemology and ontology, I draw from recent meta-theoretical calls for radically rethinking actors, explanations, and values. This historical and conceptual framing helps to better situate the three papers in this special issue and, I hope, invites conversations about how the papers, which argue for new kinds of quantitative analyses, align with or depart from the tacit commitments of conventional uses of quantification.
Quantification and psychology

The history of quantification in the human sciences dates back at least several centuries, its modern uses initially appearing in bookkeeping (accounting) and government projects of census taking (Poovey, 1998; Porter, 1992a, 1992b, 1994). Early measurement, whether for public or commercial purposes, provided standardization of expert practices. Measurement also offered proper surveillance over otherwise relatively unconstrained judgment and personal inclinations. Statistical forms of measurement, likewise serving standardization of practices and an impersonality of judgment, and “bearing the authority of mathematics” (Porter, 2003, p. 239), signaled objectivity and rigor even as such techniques were applied to value-charged social conditions.

Psychologists participated in and benefited from 19th-century developments in measurement and statistics. Quantification was crucial, for instance, in German psychophysics as well as evolutionary-based studies of variance forged by Francis Galton and his cohort. These implementations, along with developments in measurement in the sciences, imparted a sense that scientific method necessarily entailed quantification. Work on psychometrics (the testing and calibration of mental abilities) cemented psychology’s identification of its scientific methods with quantification. Two proclamations made by early 20th-century American psychologists still echo in psychology’s academic halls. E.L. Thorndike is claimed to have said that “everything that exists must exist in some quantity and can therefore be measured.” Supporting operationism in mental testing E.G. Boring (1923) asserted, “Intelligence is what the intelligence tests measure” (p. 36). Quantification, then, afforded psychology a professionally accepted means to assess phenomena that were not readily visible as well as those considered subjective, mainly by providing material yardsticks. Quantification simultaneously sated psychology’s hunger for scientific legitimacy—its reputed “method fetishism” and “physics envy.” With quantifiability established, psychology could proceed as a relatively mature natural science committed to modern scientific conventions of reductionism, positivism, value-freedom, and an objective (disinterested and distant) stance of the observer. And quantitative examination of mental abilities appeared to make good on psychologists’ repeated promises to advance social reform and human betterment.

Perhaps as important as these gains, quantitative techniques honed and delivered a common language spoken by trained experts. This language became indispensable for reaching consensus, getting work done, and producing public and publicly shared knowledge. Modern quantification practices offer “a distinctive style of communication” that “promotes the formation of a certain type of scientific community” (Porter, 1992b, p. 643). The expansive mandates of quantification accordingly necessitate extensive and nuanced appraisals of their usage. Beyond ideology, those techniques need to be assessed in terms of what they do for the science more broadly as well as for its objects of analyses, practitioners, policy formulations, and audiences.

Historical studies of intelligence testing research illuminate the extensive and complex lives of quantitative practices. Traditionally, historians focused on the ideological biases and socio-political implications of testing research. More recently they have attended to how testing research materialized: their work traces the negotiations and ultimate consensus forged among researchers and between researchers and consumers of that knowledge (Sokal, 1987). Given the disagreements over what intelligence actually
was and whether or not it even could be measured, psychologists collaborated in the task of answering these questions. Gail Hornstein (1988) outlined several major debates in psychophysics and mental testing that transpired as part of the negotiation processes to reach consensus. Adoption of quantitative methods entailed not only fundamental redefining of phenomena but also the jettisoning of phenomena “that resisted quantitative treatment” (Hornstein, 1988, p. 2). Quantification also enhanced psychology’s play in the marketplace. Adopting quantitative techniques thus was productive of certain psychological entities (and not others) just as it became a common language with which researchers could proceed to generate and share knowledge. Franz Samelson’s (1987) analysis of the invention of multiple-choice questions shows how quantitative measures produced the idea that intelligence is the ability to emit small bits of knowledge (rather than as some global or higher level of cognitive functioning). Quantitative test designs came to be valued for efficiency: they reduced labor and enabled ready assessment and communication of results.

The testing research undertaken during World War I aimed at aiding the military in the evaluation and placement of recruits. That massive project illustrates how measures of intelligence, and even intelligence itself, were negotiated in terms of efficiency and suitability to the military’s interests, sometimes with the cost of compromising venerated scientific practices. John Carson’s (1993) study of the Army intelligence tests shows the repeated accommodations and multi-directional transfers of knowledge “in which both the psychologists and the military oscillated between accommodating and resisting change in the process of negotiating a modus vivendi acceptable to both and a domain of knowledge that both could deem valid and useful” (p. 280). Negotiations involved ongoing interactions and sharing of knowledge (such as notions that intelligence is related to performance or that humans can be taxonomized according to certain capabilities). Further, through test and numeric technologies, testing research and the intelligence tests themselves translated concepts into entities, enticing people to think with and through these concepts. Knowledge technologies such as intelligence testing thereby transform all involved: subject, scientist, tests, intelligence, and consumer. The “rhetorical force” of numbers grew, enabling psychologists to greatly augment their authority by expressing their objective neutrality in quantitative language (Brown, 1991).

Wholesale adoption of quantitative techniques over the last century did more than bestow scientific status upon psychology. Quantification delivered a language for trade and negotiation, a technology for standardizing observations and objects, and an elaborate process whereby concepts were negotiated and new entities observed. Standardization through quantification assured the ideal of precision and promised the desired impersonal authority and judgment. Quantification thus is more than a method of inquiry or a de facto enlistment in scientism. It affords a set of values in networks of practice, values that include impersonality, restraint, absence of subjectivity, and a particular kind of community of knowers.

**Historical patterns**

Quantitative and qualitative approaches in psychology typically are portrayed as being fundamentally at odds, starkly opposed to one another in some essential ways. Yet with the exception of the quality/quantity debates of the late 19th and early 20th centuries
(see Hornstein, 1988), there has hardly been any discipline-wide, robust debate. Quantification reigns in psychology. Most journals do not accept qualitative research; undergraduate majors are schooled in measurement, psychometrics, and especially statistics; few granting agencies consider research proposals utilizing only qualitative approaches; and print media rarely report on qualitative psychology studies. Whether or not the qualitative versus quantitative contest continues in some fashion of active debate, it remains a minor concern in contemporary psychology. Whatever contestation continues is fragmented and limited in scope, “skirting around the margins of psychology with minimal constraints” (Stam, 2006, p. 250). The tremendous differences in institutional power, prestige, symbolic meaning, and frequency of use belie any substantive oppositional tension.

There have always been advocates for qualitative study, from William James’ plea for radical empiricism over a century ago to contemporary calls for hermeneutics or phenomenology. James’ alternative to the emerging scientific psychology was epistemological, not methodological. He professed the dynamic indeterminism of the world; the plurality of ways to know that world; the transformation of that work through knowledge seeking with its attendant values; and the “knowing self” as inescapably present in making knowledge. Radical empiricism brings these precepts together:

The knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foothold anywhere, and passively reflecting an order that he comes upon and finds simply existing. The knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth, which he helps to create. Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action—action which to a great extent transforms the world—help to make the truth which they declare. (James as cited in Leary, 1995, p. 93)

Radical empiricism later was adopted by a small group of social psychologists (Pandora, 1997), although that venture was short-lived. Its adoption in ecological psychology (Heft, 2001), while influential, does not rely upon advancing qualitative investigations. Sparks of new epistemic footings that encouraged qualitative practices again surfaced in the late 1950s and 1960s. Its advocates lamented the reductionism, standardization, and routinization that had become central to experimental practices. Although often conflated as the “humanist” voice, these psychologists were a diverse lot, differing in theoretical and methodological inclinations. Sigmund Koch (1970) vividly exemplifies the spirit of dissatisfaction in worrying that,

The reduction of man to his present dimension need not be temporary. When the ability to differentiate among experiences is lost, experience is lost. When the perception of differential values as they inhere in the quiddities experience and action is lost, then value is lost. Nothing says that these things need return. (p. 130)

These psychologist/critics shared disdain for the current representations of the primary objects of psychology: humans and their experiences. Koch (1999), for instance, chided psychology’s mimetic enactment of natural science and its obsession with prediction and control, noting “we control the subject’s control of the subject” (p. 299). He satirically imagined future humans equipped with assorted gauges that interpose between events
and the person’s apprehension of them: “The rational biped who used to stride through
the world in quest of experience has become the sedentary reader of gauges and oscil-
loscope displays which monitor his condition” (p. 310). In a fictional dialogue between
a subject and an experimenter, another disquieted psychologist portrayed a subject who
resisted subjection by demanding open conversation, transparency, fairness, and, simply,
the right to get to know the experimenter and his project before committing himself to a
research relationship (Jourard, 1968).

These voices of dissent from mainstream psychology, although often figured as a
single movement, sometimes called “humanism” and at other times “new paradigm”
research, actually differ in significant respects. These psychologists were informed by a
variety of perspectives, including the social scientific “interpretive turn,” hermeneutics,
critical theory, civil rights activism, response to a Cold War cultural atmosphere of con-
formity and control, ecological psychology, existentialism, and ethical concerns about
What most of these dissidents shared was moral and political: interests in freedom, indi-
vidual agency, democracy, and egalitarianism underscored their works. Many, although
not all, endorsed qualitative methods to better represent the contextual dynamics and
protean possibilities of personhood. These were taken to be possibilities that could not be
observed or calibrated through quantitative procedures.

Emerging alongside were other advocates of qualitative approaches: feminist psy-
chologists. They, too, brought moral and political interests to their work, including equal-
ity, agency, and elimination of sexism, and, for some, also emancipation. (Feminist
psychologists did not dismiss the use of numbers: Phyllis Chesler’s monumental study of
women and the mental health industry in 1972, for instance, included quantitative analy-
sis.) Even in early critiques, numerous feminist psychologists perceived sexism to live
beyond investigative methods. They traced the multiple axes of influence between social
structures, institutions, research designs, theories, and individuals’ self-understandings.
In what has become a classic statement, Naomi Weisstein (1971) observed, “what is
surprising is not that women end up where society expects they will be; what is surpris-
ing is that little girls don’t get the message … that some women resist this message”
(p. 220). Despite biased fundamentals of experiments and quantification which manufac-
tured entities like “masculinity” and “femininity” (Constantinople, 1973), the gendered
system of knowledge production and consumption does not fully quell other realities or
other entities. Here lay incentive for feminist researchers to deploy qualitative investiga-
tions into the possibilities of personhood, into the psychological realms uncharted by
quantitative examinations and unimaginable through the reigning epistemology.

Many feminist psychologists did not subscribe to these broader, cultural understand-
ings of science; instead, they held to a feminist empiricism, a view that psychology’s
epistemological bedrock simply needed to be cleansed of gender bias. These researchers
have been committed to democratic values in research relationships, even as these aspi-
rations continue to bump against epistemological matters, namely “positivism’s assump-
tion of an unmediated relation between the world and acts of investigating it” (Burman,
2001, p. 265). Those who apprehended such matters have worked alongside feminist
philosophers of science in seeking fundamental changes in notions of objectivity, observ-
ation, knowers, objects, and the place of science in the world (Morawski, 1994). Their
explorations query assumed boundaries between epistemology and ontology. If, as historians have found, psychologists’ adoption of quantification involved privileging impersonal authority, denial of subjectivity, detachment, standardization, and circumscribed networks for negotiating meaning (including reductionism and causal determinism), this minority has proposed other ethical and political values. For them, qualitative approaches offered tools for studying neglected, denied, or emerging phenomena (entities) and values.

This snapshot of calls for qualitative studies in psychology suggests that far from chronicling significant debates between quantitative and qualitative minded researchers, the history is one of periodic challenges to a hegemonic ethos of quantification, challenges posed in the service of other moral and scientific visions. The alternative visions vary in the particulars, yet most gesture toward realities (kinds of persons, interactions, potentialities) not recognized or accessible through current quantitative techniques. What a historical glimpse also shows is that conversations between qualitative and quantitative researchers sometimes are oppositional, but such an adversarial atmosphere is less significant scientifically than the “debate” narratives (or even the term “debate” itself) imply.

Although most contemporary qualitative proposals aim toward pluralism, some beckon us to rethink our understandings of ontology as well as epistemology. A modest but distinctive number invite us to entertain worlds we desire as well as worlds wildly different from the one we now understand. The conceptual contours of an allied group of these alternatives can be traced, drawing upon projects across disciplines ranging from science studies, feminist studies, psychology and sociology, to philosophy. This conceptual prototype is neither compatible nor commensurable with the quantitative mandate or pluralist compromises; there is a “gap” between them (Burman, 2001). It differs on ethical-political grounds and advances distinct assumptions about the relation of epistemology and ontology.

**Epistemology and ontology**

Many if not most champions of qualitative methods urge researchers to use both qualitative and quantitative methods skillfully. They claim, accurately so, that qualitative methods are unfairly devalued in mainstream psychology. They consequently advocate greater appreciation of qualitative inquiry, even when they acknowledge notable epistemological differences between the approaches (Rabinowitz & Weseen, 2001). Qualitative methods, according to such an optimistic, “assimilationist” stance, add much to the toolkit of research technologies. They can be used in conjunction with quantitative ones as techniques for working with data which stymie ready numeric analysis, in pilot studies, or with unavoidably small samples. Such utilization of qualitative techniques typically makes no critical claims about measurement (Stam, 2006). Whether epistemologically tolerant or scientifically opportunistic, this stance assumes at least a modicum of compatibility (not incommensurability) between the two methods.

An assimilationist stance presupposes that variety in methods captures more of the psychological world, providing better and/or more complete representations of that world. Its practitioners believe that qualitative approaches enable one to see more than
one otherwise would see, or hear more than one otherwise would hear. They ultimately assume that one can know the world and know it relatively accurately; at the least, one can practically or provisionally represent it. Likewise, they hold that the world being observed (those psychological entities both evident and invisible, simple and complex) pre-exists investigations and is not substantively changed by knowledge seeking and consequent knowledge claims. The translations made by research, therefore, are ones of correspondences, not transformations. Whether intentionally or by acquiescence, this view largely upholds aforementioned central values of orthodox science: impersonal authority, denial of subjectivity, detachment of observers, and standardization. By contrast, perceiving a “gap” between (or incommensurability of) the two implicates another or other versions of the world. Offered here is a prototypic model that takes all entities (observers, subjects, entities, institutions, knowledge claims, and audiences) as actively existing in relation to one another. Entities emerge, connect, and cohere within systems or networks of world making. Just as proponents of such views generally respect the moral and political ideals of their dissident predecessors (freedom, agency, and emancipation), so they complicate ideal visions by attending to practices, to networks of actors. Psychology’s foundational goals of improving the human condition are reassessed, and such reappraisals illuminate how such goals actually constitute the human sciences. For instance, North American psychologists’ early goals to fit the individual to his or her environment grounded socialization research and aptitude testing. Both scientific ventures figured human limits in ways that served an increasingly heterogeneous and class-structured society. Roger Smith (1997) described this constituting circuit, “The history of the sciences that characterize the self is therefore also a history of the social worlds in which the self has existed” (p. 14). Through dynamic, complex circuitries, psychological entities are made just as they are found (Hacking, 1995a, 1995b; Mol, 2002; Richards, 2002). An example can be found in the ways that the development and growth of mass surveys altered Americans’ self-understanding just as survey designs were shaped in no small measure by their “subjects” (Igo, 2007).

Conceptualized somewhat differently, this (abstracted) view takes actors to exist in relational systems or, some propose, as revisable effects of systems or networks. Actors in such systems are not only persons and not entirely discrete entities. According to John Law (2004),

> People, technologies, “natural” phenomena, documents, non-human life forms, knowledges, social facts, collectivities and phenomena—all of these are relational effects, materials, being done in interaction. Actors, then, also constitute networks that hold together for long enough to act in relation to something else. (p. 632; see also Law, 2008)

Entities are enacted; they are performative. Knowledge about them also is performative and, therefore, is indexical and non-conclusive (Woolgar, 1988). By contrast, the objectivity and subjectivity attending quantitative methods entail positive moves to fix the world by enabling certain kinds of claims about an underlying reality (Daston & Galison, 2007). Once reality or realities are understood to be enacted rather than (or just as they are) found, this dichotomy dissolves (Bayer, 2008). Observers’ gazes are locatable, partial; objectivity is “situated” in the process of looking (Haraway, 1988). By enacting and
not representing, transforming and not translating, observers become responsible actors but without “impartial authority” or detachment. And observers’ actions are reflexive in that they change entities just as they investigate them, implicating and connecting the subjectivities of observers and objects alike (Morawski, 2005; Woolgar, 1988). Thus, subjectivity involves ontology as well as epistemology. Performing or enacting in networks severs the dividing line between ontology and epistemology since our doing (knowledge production) is our making (ontology). And the making is political (Law, 2004, 2008; Mol, 2002). As Law (2004) put it, “technoscience does its realities as well as the representations of those realities: that technoscience, in all its complex multiplicity, *enacts worlds that are fit for its methods*” (p. 639).

This epistemological–ontological model, whether advanced through dynamic nominalist, performative, or network models, encompasses a qualitative perspective that appears incommensurable with much qualitative research as currently practiced. It departs from a quantitatively informed worldview in substantive ways: ethics, politics, epistemology, ontology, and claims to expert authority. Although emerging in various disciplines and certainly not taking form as a coherent movement, this alternative stance illuminates how different the stakes can be in qualitative work. It highlights too, by contrast with the more common understanding of qualitative methods in psychology, the vast range of relations between quantitative and qualitative practices.

**Re-pairing qualitative and quantitative approaches**

The papers in this special issue, although differing in important respects, all acknowledge the values of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. While Osatuke and Stiles (2011) are interested in what they refer to as the “assimilation of voices” in therapy, I want to point out that they have pursued study of that process using the kind of methodological approach I am referring to here as an “assimilationist” one. They forward “assimilation research” and hold that “Numbers generally offer clearer communication than most other words” (p. 200). Westerman (2011) takes quantitative analysis to be interpretive (identified as a virtue of qualitative methods). He advocates quantification because many activities of life “concern quantity” (p. 157) and because quantification directly concerns the concrete. Yanchar (2011), apprehending the possible formation of a “qualitative orthodoxy” (p. 180), shares Westerman’s belief that numbers can be part of a collaborative and negotiated process because the numbers involved are meaningful to both parties and reflect lived aspects of the situations and phenomena under investigation. Yanchar and Westerman understand quantification as a language of lived experience and, therefore, call for the use of this “indigenous” language. With sober appreciation of the virtues of qualitative inquiry, these authors yet hold that numbers (also) do work. Numbers do something that words (or voices or other actions) cannot.

These empirical projects are innovative in deploying interpretive tools that broaden understanding of the entities being investigated. They demonstrate the empirical workability, even profitability, of deploying key concepts in “new paradigm” research, including collaborative research, attention to lived experience, interpretation, self-interpretation, involved subjectivity, contextual work, and the investigator–participant relationship. There is much to commend about these inventive theories and their risk-taking experiments,
especially the careful refinement of concepts and extension of them in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Situating these inquiries within the historical saga of qualitative/quantitative research relations shows them to live among efforts to combine both approaches along with the attendant ethical and political interests in freedom, individual agency, and emancipation (specifically growth or healing). More or less in keeping with the “quantitative imperative,” the three projects for the most part assume entities and the goal of representation even when defined as provisional or ongoing interpretation. They conjoin or otherwise co-apply methods, sharing several overarching epistemological commitments. Osatuke and Stiles’ (2011) “assimilation theory” illustrates overarching ethical aims of agency and healing that ultimately are to be identified and adjudicated by expert authority (the authority of raters who are investigators themselves). The study is laudable for not presuming personality to be not a fixed and unified entity but, rather, “multiple and dialogical” and “made of traces of various life experiences” (p. 201). This potentially dynamic and relational understanding of personality is foreshortened by (or not representable through) the adopted quantitative techniques that aim to “quantify investigators’ understandings of clients’ felt experience of change process” (p. 203). This quantifying translation is warranted by the belief that, “more than most other words, numbers mean the same thing to everybody” (p. 200). These warrants, at once methodological and epistemological, retain established beliefs of quantitative psychology, beliefs that are not necessarily empirically supported (as evidenced in economics, numbers do not always mean the same thing to everyone). In actuality, numbers are clearer, not for all investigative enterprises but typically for those with certain objectives: singular or unambiguous representations, efficiency, and an accounting model of truth.

At the same time, the authors step toward other commitments, breaching the edicts of quantitative models. To varying degrees they situate the meaning making not merely in the “concretely meaningful phenomena” (Westerman, 2011, p. 158) but also in the investigative relations between researchers and participants. All the authors assert that quantification involves “interpretation”: quantification is an act of meaning making. The potential epistemic transgression of these claims, however, at some points remains undeveloped. Osatuke and Stiles (2011), for instance, urge a diversity of observation perspectives such that the research outcome “preserves and integrates this diversity of raters’ perspectives, rather than forcing a monolithic unity or settling for an impoverished common core” (p. 205). They do not persuasively show, however, how this method differs from the consensus methods and negotiation processes used in mainstream quantitative research: for example, those deployed in the development of intelligence tests (Carson, 1993; Hornstein, 1988). Without further clarification about how Osatuke and Stiles’ consensus-making procedures preserve the “dialogical” and “multiple traces of experience” that constitute personal selves, it is difficult to ascertain how they avoid producing static representations and entities. Such ambiguity is troubling and troublesome for its risk of slippage back into or re-appropriation by normative quantitative thinking about persons whenever quantitative techniques are introduced. We need to ascertain, then, how and when such slippage might occur. Perhaps we can identify strong versions of an “interpretation” claim that have the traction to challenge the quantitative regime and weak versions that are more readily assimilated. Thus, perhaps a test of innovation would be its assessment in terms of mainstream criteria, checking the fit of the findings with
dominant knowledge claims or the relative ease with which the desired innovations actually replicate or fold into those claims. We might more directly—and boldly—ask what specific scientific understandings are disturbed.

Bolder moves to re-imagine the relations between researchers and participants are found in the papers of Westerman (2011) and Yanchar (2011). In distinctive ways, these papers contest the conventions of segregating and differentially evaluating the knowledge of the two primary agents, researcher and subject. By discarding this observer–object dichotomy, the papers move toward seeing all entities as active participants. Yanchar rejects the “etic” or Archimedean perspective with its privileging of the observer’s “detached standpoint.” He admirably dismisses, too, the fantasy of the opposite perspective that holds the researcher to somehow empathetically capturing the subjectivity of the other. Instead, he advocates collaboration and negotiation between researchers and subjects in order to produce “shared understandings” that respect both lived experiences of subjects and also investigative experiences of researchers (Yanchar, 2011, p. 183). Westerman’s refiguring of the observer/subject dualism is more complex because he examines studies of therapist–client relations and the relations of the investigator to these relations. His appraisal of the conversational analysis studies persuasively shows the relational dynamics of expert and subject (therapist and client). It also steps toward critically (and constructively) assessing the investigators’ dynamic participation, mainly in his discussion of the conversational analysts’ utilization of their own “background of conversational competence” during their interpretive work (p. 172).

Other commitments in these papers are less transparent. For instance, the authors hold that counting phenomena is useful (useful, for instance, are frequency of topic changes, number and frequency of different “voices” in therapy, and numbers of discursive practices of teaching). Yet, they also aim to demonstrate how meanings are intersubjective, contextual, and contingent. As they gesture toward relational understandings of phenomena, a conventionally trained quantitative researcher might find these papers perplexing if not contaminated. Whenever they implicate the observer in the phenomena, they might well irritate quantitative clinical researchers. With such shifts and interventions, then, these papers can be seen as part of an evolution in methods, cautiously moving toward new visions of the psychological world. At present such moves might drift to a netherworld somewhere between the scientific demands of APA journals or NIH proposal criteria and the desiderata of dynamic, interpretive theories.

To aspirants of new theoretical or meta-theoretical views, the moves of these three papers seem partial: to varying degrees they appear to retain a sense that there is a singular, even if context-dependent, meaning (interpretation). As described in the papers, many of the meanings generated resonate fairly comfortably with common knowledge. Although the authors assert the necessity of reflexive or critical awareness, the fruits of that awareness are difficult to detect in the results. The causal reasoning and relations assumed between actors and phenomena appear, with few exceptions, to be normative. For example, the frequency of topic change is taken to signify a certain psychic interest; the number of voices points to a particular psychic experience. Similarly, at points the more critical and distinctly innovative features of the studies (for instance, Yanchar’s [2011] case of subjects’ active participation and Westerman’s [2011] relational theory of therapy) recede behind the power of numbers. That power should not be underappreciated. The deeper meanings ascribed to these measured actions are overshadowed or
engulfed by conventional (quantitative) assumptions about “what,” “how much,” “how often” stand for. Using quantification seems to overwhelm the possible discovery of surprises, elisions, contradictions, deceptions, or otherwise non-intuitive interpretations or values. Through numeric accountings the meaning making appears to contract and the investigator becomes less a participant, more a detached assessor. That apparent foreclosure, it needs be noted, might be determined less by the studies’ methodologies than by the narrative structure and rhetorical style required in psychology writing. The disciplines’ mandated and tightly regulated publication style demands not only narratives of discovery (of truths) but also narration by an authorial voice of detachment, authority, and certainty. With few exceptions (this journal being one), there is no professionally sanctioned space for reporting process not outcome, dynamics not fixity, comparative analysis of common data, or even the interpretive work of case study.

Most qualitative inquiry is not locked in intellectual combat with quantitative practices, despite lore of impassioned debate. The two typically are commensurate, sharing an ethics, politics, and modern epistemology, and even creative projects to bring the two approaches together carry the high risk of succumbing to the power of quantification.

Debate might well ensue, however, should our conversations broach an alternative model that does not assume that methods are to be fitted to reality but, instead, assumes science “enacts worlds that are fit for its methods” (Law, 2008, p. 639). Finding and making entities transpire together in such versions of the world. This model of the human sciences as dynamic enactments and as world making differs in notable ways from these papers’ notions of the fluidity of interpretation and meaning making. An example from Westerman’s (2011) and Yanchar’s (2011) studies illustrates how two approaches would materially part, and be debatable. Both argue for the suitability of quantification, at least in part, through an idea of “practical numeracy.” Yanchar proposes the “use of numerical data from the common resources of human expression, meaning, and communication” (p. 182). Such numerical data are “indigenous to the actual situation being studied,” presumably because the “everyday numeracy” and “lived numbers” are not imposed on experience but inhere in that experience (p. 182). Westerman accurately sees quantification as part of our everyday lives: given that “methods concerning quantity are a useful part of our practical engagement with things” (p. 157), it is natural or not reality distorting to employ quantitative analysis. We think numbers, live by numbers. Yanchar identifies “common measures” or “commonly understood aspects of the experiences and activities being studied” (p. 182), including the SAT, ACT, GPA, and time. Numbers are our common experiences. A network or systems model, described above, proposes that such practical numeracy is not found in the world; it is produced through ongoing practices, including scientific ones. Counting has long been a human activity, but thinking about common experiences, our life spaces, and ourselves in numeric terms has not. SAT, ACT, and GPA are part of our self experiences precisely because of technoscience, particularly psychology; the same could be said of caloric intake, average family income, frequency of sexual activity, blood pressure, stress levels, and so on. Fitting the method to the phenomenon, as these authors suggest of numeracy experiences, is fitting the method to a phenomenon that already has been fitted to the method. The logic entails a doubling of the double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1979), a doubling not unique to quantitative techniques. Researchers draw from common or folk knowledge to craft
psychological concepts; once empirically tested and refined, the once vernacular now
scientific concepts are returned to the folk, who, in turn assimilate or integrate them in
everyday life experiences. They take these everyday interpretations, quantitatively trans-
formed through science, to be natural phenomena ready for empirical study. Alternatively,
we can understand the looping interpretations in terms of dynamic systems: practical
numery is performative, enacting methodological realities in a circuitry of making and
finding. All actors (research participants, researchers, SAT test forms, stress inventories,
articles, and clinicians) perform in the doing of the real.

The predominant use of qualitative techniques abides by the underlying logics of a
quantitative regime in modern psychology. Transpiring at the discipline’s margins, they
rarely trigger heated dispute with more pristinely quantitative techniques. Nor have such
qualitative ventures been cause for dispute for most of the last century. They live rather
peacefully together within (or despite) tremendous differentials in power. Given the
power differences, partnering quantitative and qualitative techniques, even through
astute methodological innovations, invariably runs the risk that such “mergers” end more
like “hostile takeovers.” Other models of science might well initiate debate if they sub-
stantively and critically challenge the ethical, ontological, political, and epistemological
ethos of psychology’s technoscience. The perspectives delivered in these three papers at
moments traverse a space beyond the pluralist compromise. And although their interven-
tions into conventional scientific understandings of phenomena are circumspect, they
step toward making innovative pathways and encourage further trespassing.

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