
The Promises of Qualitative Inquiry

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We address the significance and implications of the formal entry of qualitative inquiry into the American Psychological Association. In our view, the discipline is enriched in new and important ways. Most prominently, the qualitative movement brings with it a pluralist orientation to knowledge and to practices of inquiry. Adding to the traditional view of knowledge as empirically supported theory are research practices congenial with varying accounts of knowledge, including, for example, knowledge as hermeneutic understanding, social construction, and practice-based experience. Added to the goal of prediction are investments in increasing cultural understanding, challenging cultural conventions, and directly fostering social change. The qualitative movement also enriches the discipline as a whole through the special ways in which it inspires new ranges of theory, fosters minority inclusion, and invites interdisciplinary collaboration. Finally, the movement holds promise in terms of the discipline's contribution to society at large. Here we focus on the advantages of knowing with others in addition to about them, and on ways in which qualitative work enhances communication with the society and the world. Realizing these potentials will depend on developments in responsible research and reporting, academic and journal policies, along with the discipline's capacities for appreciating a more comprehensive orientation to inquiry.

Keywords: qualitative research, pluralism, research methods, psychology and society

In recent years, an active coalition of psychologists exploring vistas in qualitative inquiry has spearheaded the development of the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology. Importantly, the society has now become a full-fledged participant in the American Psychological Association (APA), prominently situated within Division 5. The previous name of the division—Evaluation, Measurement, & Statistics—will be replaced with the Division of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods. Adding further weight to these ventures, a new APA journal—*Qualitative Psychology*—is in its first year of publication. In the present article, we address the implications of these events for the future of the discipline. In our view, this movement brings with it an invigorating and enriching expansion in the vision of psychological inquiry and its potentials. How are we to understand this expansion and its offerings? What may we anticipate in the future?

Such questions are all the more important because these events might otherwise appear as a minor perturba-

tion, possibly even retrograde. After all, qualitative research has been a fixture in psychological research virtually since its origins. The seminal work of such figures as Freud, Piaget, Bartlett, Lorenz, and Vygotsky was primarily based on qualitative research. And more recent luminaries such as Leon Festinger, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo, and Carol Gilligan have also relied on qualitative endeavors. So what's new? At the same time, as we commonly understand the purpose of research methods, qualitative approaches are considered rudimentary, even "prescientific." They are frequently faulted for the lack of interobserver reliability, the absence of standardized measurement, and their inability to accommodate inferential statistics. In effect, they cannot provide a proper grounding for general laws and the promise of prediction. From this perspective, we might scarcely be sanguine about the emerging enthusiasm for qualitative research.

Yet to view the contemporary qualitative movement through the lens of traditional hypothesis-testing research is to misunderstand the logics, values, and goals that are represented in the current movement. The movement draws from different reservoirs of thought, new sensitivities, and expanded conceptions of what psychology might offer the world. In important respects, the movement also points toward a new and more comprehensive vision of the discipline itself. As we will propose in what follows, the contemporary movement in qualitative inquiry holds promise for substantial enrichment of the discipline and its potential contribution to society. To appreciate what is at stake, we first sketch out some of the major influences informing the present movement, and several prominent orientations to inquiry. We then consider three resulting forms of enrichment—the potentials of psychological research, professional life in the discipline, and the contribution of psychology to society.

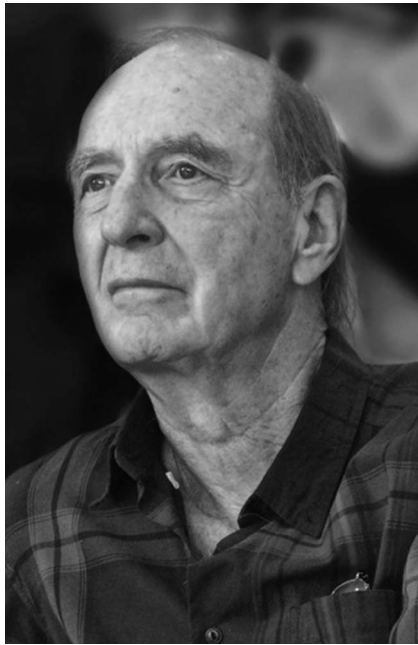
The Pluralist Turn and the Flowering of Inquiry

To appreciate the significance of the current qualitative movement, it is important to glimpse the cultural and intellectual context from which it has emerged. In our view, its most recent beginnings can be traced to the 1960s and

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the rising waves of social protest. The antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement—among others—rekindled the long-standing belief in American society in the right to challenge existing traditions and authorities on the grounds of one's own beliefs and values. In psychology, this also meant the development of value-oriented enclaves devoted, for example, to feminist, gay and lesbian, and ethnic minority goals. Such groups have also been supported by humanistic psychologists, who had long resisted a singular vision of the field, and by culturally and internationally oriented psychologists, who have come to appreciate the many forms of indigenous psychology throughout the world. Simultaneously, as traditional psychologists have been increasingly drawn into applied research—in such areas as psychotherapy, health, education, organizational development, and program evaluation—qualitative inquiry has become a major source of useful information and insight. A need thus developed for “mixing methods,” adding qualitative understanding to standardized measurement (see, e.g., Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In effect, the emergence of numerous groups, each attempting to move forward in its own terms—without rejecting others—has given rise to a new and more pluralistic atmosphere.

These developments were also invited by a general weakening of foundationalist philosophy of science. The logical positivist philosophy of the 1930s had offered psychologists a rational foundation for a vision of science in which the experimental tracing of cause–effect relations was central. To be virtuously scientific was to test general hypotheses through experimentation. Yet with the internalist critiques of philosophers such as W. V. O. Quine, Hilary Putnam, and Nelson Goodman, and the broad flourishing of a social vision of science in the works of Thomas Kuhn,

Paul Feyerabend, and many others, few contemporary philosophers are now willing to make foundationalist claims. With no strong defense against plural visions of knowledge, its acquisition, and uses, there has emerged within the qualitative movement a philosophical perspective that may best be described as a *reflective pragmatism* (K. J. Gergen, 2014). From this perspective, no practice of inquiry is ruled out a priori; multiple goals of inquiry are rendered plausible and multiple methodological pathways may claim a situated legitimacy. At the same time, questions may properly be addressed as to whether a given research practice fulfills its envisioned goals and whether it does so in a sufficiently rigorous way. Of equal significance are questions regarding whose interests or values are served (or not) by these goals and practices. As proposed by Foucault (1980), among others, all claims to knowledge carry implicit values, and thus favor certain ways of life over others.

Additional forces have contributed to the reflowering of qualitative inquiry in psychology. Among the most important has been the mushrooming of qualitative research practices in the social sciences more generally. Only one indicator of the magnitude of this shift is the success of Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) pivotal volume, *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. The work was first published in 1994, but the field proved so active and innovative that, by 2011, the work had gone through four new editions. Additional handbooks and texts have emerged treating practices of discourse analysis (Gee, 2013), action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2006), narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007), social constructionist research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007), ethnocultural research in psychology (Nogata, Kohn-Wood, & Suzuki, 2012), arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012), participatory community research (Jason, Keys, Taylor, & Davis, 2004), and autoethnography (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), among others. Accompanying them is a spate of new journals, including—alongside *Qualitative Psychology—Qualitative Inquiry*, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *The Qualitative Report*, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, and the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. These new journals join such long-standing resources as *Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*, *Humanistic Psychology*, *Journal of Community Psychology*, and *Action Research*.

This ambience of supportive activity is also nestled within a broader context of massive expansions in global communication. With the support of the Internet and multiple social networking technologies, virtually any form of intelligibility has the potential to prosper. In the social sciences, this has meant that multiple enclaves of researchers have become organized, each oriented toward specific goals, with specifically tailored practices, and supportive rationale and values. There is diminishing concern with establishing a common goal or universal methodology, and increased acceptance of multiple goals of inquiry. In effect, the various movements of the recent decades have fostered what may be viewed as a robust pluralism in the understanding of how we may view the practices and potentials of psychology.

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Enriching the Potentials of Psychological Inquiry

Over the past century, views about what psychological research is and ought to be have undergone continuous change (Danziger, 1990). In the early 20th century, there was a relatively rich palette of research practices available. In addition to experimentation, researchers might freely engage in case studies, introspection, ethnography, field observation, and phenomenology. However, with the advent of behaviorism and its linkage to logical positivism, the aims of psychological inquiry began to narrow. As well, this narrowing continued apace after the heyday of behaviorism, with the result that a range of methodological strictures became virtually axiomatic across much of the discipline. With the “official” advent of qualitative inquiry into the divisional structure of the APA, a new spirit of pluralism is given a significant place in the discipline of psychology. And with this sanctioning of pluralism, multiple visions and practices of inquiry have begun to blossom. The attempt is not at all to exclude preceding traditions, and indeed, many qualitative researchers integrate into their work the kinds of measures and statistics common within these traditions. However, also invited by the qualitative movement are alternative conceptions of knowledge, along with their contrasting forms of research. We select three of these—the hermeneutic, the constructionist, and the praxis orientation—each of which offers alternatives to the traditional emphasis on the empirical grounding of generalized theory. These choices are also illuminating in terms of associated value investments. Although the aims of traditional research are to establish value-neutral knowledge, these particular conceptions of inquiry open more direct paths to value expression.

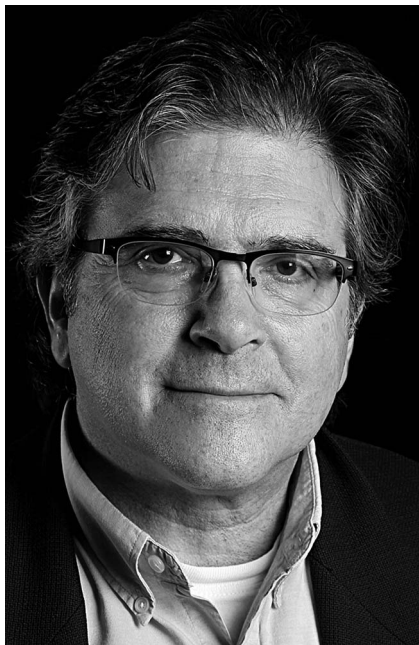
Hermeneutics and Social Understanding

The central goal of most traditional research is to establish general knowledge of human functioning. Psychologists therefore ask such questions as “What are the mental processes or mechanisms responsible for various forms of action?” or “What are the environmental or genetic determinants of behavior?” In effect, the researcher is concerned with the outcomes of research as they bear on general theory. Furthermore, to understand the object of research is to be capable of successful predictions, which, in turn, are offered to society for their potential use in controlling the course of future events. However, with roots in Diltthey’s (1894/1977) distinction between understanding (*Verstehen*) and explanation (*Erklaren*), many qualitative researchers believe that knowledge of human action is incomplete without understanding the lived experience of others. The precise measurement of an individual’s behavior through time and space would never allow one to understand, for example, the way in which an individual’s life is built around a search for spiritual salvation. In effect, the subjective lives of others are the very phenomena most central to the human condition. Such an orientation is embraced by scholars in a number of areas—phenomenological, constructivist, narrative, and more—and there is wide variation in research practices—from the highly rigorous to the imaginatively interpretive. More broadly, however, this orientation is often equated with hermeneutics—or the science of interpretation.

With the new wave of qualitative inquiry, however, two significant features have become paramount. The first is a subtle shift beyond the attempt to illuminate the subjectivity of the other as a scientific end in itself. In this case, a significant moral/political dimension has become prominent. Many believe that empathy with others is pivotal in developing a caring and just society (Hoffman, 2000; Rifkin, 2009). Many qualitative researchers thus begin to ask, how can we use our research to increase empathy or appreciative understanding among the various groups making up the society? How might such empathy and understanding contribute to the compassionate care for others? The challenge for these researchers, therefore, is not simply to illuminate the subjective worlds of others, but to do so in ways that the boundaries separating peoples—ethnic, religious, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and the like—are diminished or even removed. The hope is to replace alienation with appreciation, and rejection with respect.

The second major shift in orientation is toward multiple methodologies. Rather than embracing only a single perspective on personal meaning, or a single form of measurement, it is the ends of research that are important. Thus, in the attempt to bring society’s peoples closer together, any and all research practices are invited. Different research practices, even if opposed in their assumptions, are used in the service of enhancing both interpersonal and societal understanding. To illustrate, by far the most widely practiced form of qualitative inquiry is narrative research. Here it is assumed that one of the major ways in which we

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understand our lives and center our actions is through stories. We live out our lives in terms of dramas of achievement, love, conflict, and so on. To understand others, then, is to comprehend (or “feel with”) the stories by which they live. Thus, for example, narrative researchers have provided entries into the worlds of the aging (Randall & McKim, 2008), single mothers (May, 2004), lives in transition (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001), anxious adolescents (Bell, 2011), and women prisoners (Waldaman & Levi, 2011). McAdams (2005) reveals narratives that are deeply embedded in American culture more generally. Such work also expands the potentials for generating appreciative understanding across cultures. For example, we learn from such work about the experiences of Slavic refugees (Gemignani, 2011), Israeli and Palestinian youth (Hammack, 2011), and immigrant students struggling with American culture (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010). The interested reader will find rich offerings on these and related topics in such journals as *Narrative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, and *Narrative Works*.

Yet narrative research is not the only hermeneutic practice of inquiry devoted to social understanding; for example, psychologists have become increasingly interested in autoethnography, a form of inquiry in which the individual researcher describes his or her personal experience in a way that it connects to larger social or political issues. This orientation results from a critique of traditional ethnography in which researchers use their own professional terms to describe the activities of others. Importantly, these terms are seldom those that the others would choose for themselves. Thus, autoethnographic work provides firsthand accounts of what it’s like, for example, to live with a dying spouse, survive a debilitating illness, perform as a pole dancer, or struggle as a parent of an ailing

child (for a review, see Jones et al., 2013). Performance-oriented researchers add further to the practices employed. In particular, they add both novel and potent ways to cultivate a sympathetic understanding of otherwise distant others. Public performances of various kinds are used to illuminate, for example, what it is like to “come out” as a homosexual (Saldaña, 2011), experience the aging process as a woman (M. M. Gergen, 2012), or to be treated for metastasized cancer (Gray & Sinding, 2002). Common across all such inquiry is a concern not only with illuminating the lived experience of human beings but also, and again, with sensitizing ourselves to their worlds and imagining ways in which they might be encountered with appreciation. In this respect, qualitative inquiry may be seen as a vitally important vehicle for deepening our relations around the world.

Social Construction and Liberation

Social constructionist views of knowledge now move across the social sciences, opening up a rich range of theory and research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). From a constructionist standpoint, all knowledge claims issue from socially negotiated assumptions and values within a community. Thus, what we take to be knowledge is not so much a reflection of the world as it is as a historical and culturally situated account of the world in terms of the values and needs of a particular community. Constructionist research takes many forms, including, for example, the analysis of discourse, conversation, patterns of relationship, forms of rhetoric, organizational development, and the development of scientific beliefs. However, there are two important ways in which constructionist assumptions differ from the positivist tradition of hypothesis testing. First, from the traditional standpoint, one presumes a certain stability in the research phenomena. Thus, the phenomena can be observed by others across time, and with continued research, one may accumulate knowledge about the subject of study. Most constructionists, however, begin with the assumption that human behavior is highly malleable. Given the enormous variations in the way people construct their realities and values, one may anticipate cultural and temporal variations in human conduct. Second, from the traditional research standpoint, a strong ethic of value-neutral observation prevails. Research results may be used for various social or political ends, but the research findings themselves are neutral. In contrast, constructionists hold that values enter into the scientific process at every turn, including the selection of topic, theoretical terminology, methods of research, and the social implications of the interpretations. Given these two assumptions—malleability and the value saturation of research—many constructionists see research as a means of giving expression to their social, moral, and political values. In effect, if all research is value invested, why not cast away the mask of impartiality and engage in research that can move the culture in what one believes are more promising directions?

In this vein, qualitative inquiry has given new life to investigators who believe that, as trained professionals, they have the responsibility not only to understand and

explain human behavior but also to appraise the world about them, to offer criticism when appropriate, and to share their ideals for the future. Social critique is not new to the field. Critiques of cultural selfishness (Wallach & Wallach, 1983), individualism (K. J. Gergen, 2009), and consumerist culture (Cushman, 1996) are illustrative. What the qualitative movement adds to such efforts are multiple research practices that can provide useful support for critique. Especially prominent in this case are the many new practices of discourse analysis in which researchers focus on forms of language use and the way they function within society. For those engaged in critical discourse analysis, in particular, the attempt is to illuminate forms of language use that variously serve to oppress, discriminate, dominate, or function in other socially corrosive ways. Inspired especially by liberation psychology ideas (Martin-Baro, 1994), the goal of such research is to free the reader from traditional or commonsense ways of constructing the world. For example, Coates (2013) illuminates the way group prejudices are normalized in everyday discourse on heterosexuality, Simpson and Mayr (2010) showcase the various ways in which language is used to generate power differences, and Breeze (2012) demonstrates the rhetorical strategies by which corporations legitimate their malfeasance. Willig's (1999) edited volume, *Applied Discourse Analysis*, features critical analyses of the taken-for-granted assumptions in self-help literature, reproductive technologies, psychiatric medication, and sex education.

Discourse analysis is not the only form of qualitative inquiry with liberatory ends in mind. Performance-based researchers often focus attention on prejudices and injustices, but use performance, as opposed to scientific text, to dramatize their positions (see, e.g., M. M. Gergen & Gergen, 2012). Autoethnography often carries similar goals (Jones et al., 2013), illuminating, in first-hand language, the life of authors who have been the targets of discrimination or oppression. Autoethnographic performance, a relatively new departure, achieves similar ends by setting into dramatic performance critical issues of race, gender, and sexual preferences (see, e.g., Spry, 2011). More subtly developed explorations in culture critique are also folded into oral history research (Shapes, 2001).

Praxis and Social Action

Drawing from Aristotle's early account of knowledge, a distinction can be drawn between knowledge as *theoria* and as *praxis*. By and large, psychological research has been devoted to establishing the empirical grounds for general theories, essentially reflecting Aristotle's vision of knowledge as *theoria*. However, bearing philosophic traces from both Karl Marx and John Dewey, there has been growing interest in the potentials of viewing knowledge as emerging from action in the service of reaching a goal. Thus, although much empiricist work is aimed at establishing evidential grounds for general theory, praxis-oriented research derives working knowledge from specific goal-directed action. Rather than embracing the traditional dictum that science is devoted to understanding "what *is* the case rather than what *ought* to be," they ask what might be accomplished if we

place *ought* in the forefront of our endeavors? How can we as psychological researchers actively build the kind of society in which we wish to live? And don't we gain valuable knowledge in our efforts to bring about change? Most prominent here are researchers engaged in what has come to be known as "action research," the origins of which are often traced to the work of Kurt Lewin (1946) on intergroup relations. It should be noted, however, that although action research is typically viewed as a qualitative research practice, action researchers do include measurement and statistics within their tool kit for effecting change.

With the emergence of the qualitative movement, action research has expanded in both the range of practices employed and the range of goals for positive social change. Illustrative here is Fine and Torre's (2006) research assisting women in prison, Lykes's (2001) consciousness raising work with rural Guatemalan women, and Russell and Bohan's (1999) efforts to resist antigay legislation. For many educational psychologists, research begins in the process of teaching, in which the classroom becomes a form of laboratory (Wamba, 2011). And for researchers in community psychology, action research has been a major means for moving beyond theory and research on building communities to actually bringing them into being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). An extended view of the range and potentials of such efforts can be found in journals such as *Action Research* and the *International Journal of Action Research*, along with the Reason and Bradbury's (2008) *Handbook of Action Research* (2nd ed.).

With the new wave of qualitative inquiry, we thus find the potentials of psychological research vastly increased. Although the preceding forms of inquiry are illustrative, they scarcely exhaust the range of assumptions and aims of qualitative researchers. Focus-group methods have been with us for decades as means of exploring attitudes and generating ideas in the public and private sectors (Kreuger & Casey, 2008). There are also narrative researchers, for example, who gather individual life accounts of people who have overcome difficulties (e.g., physical impairment, imprisonment). Such narratives are used to provide models for those who also confront such difficulties, in effect furnishing inspiration and directions toward more promising ways of life. In the medical arena, first-person accounts of being a patient are used in medical education. Medical students essentially learn about best practices from the patient's point of view, and, as well, narrative practices are encouraged as a major means of communicating between doctor and patient (Charon, 2008). In general, the qualitative movement invites psychologists to think creatively and expansively, both about what we can achieve as psychologists and the practices we may employ in these efforts.

The Flourishing of Psychology as a Discipline

The new wave of qualitative inquiry substantially expands the range of potential achievements in psychological inquiry. In addition, however, there are significant reverberations for the field of psychology itself. There is already a charged atmosphere within the community of qualitative researchers—a shared enthusiasm in the freedom to move

beyond the confines of any one school or tradition of inquiry. Researchers are invited to tailor-make their practices of inquiry to the specific goals they seek. Such enthusiasm is further intensified by the freedom to engage in research giving expression to deeply held values. It is perhaps for such reasons that in less than a decade, the section for qualitative researchers in the British Psychological Society has expanded to become its largest section. In what follows, we focus on three positive outcomes significant for the discipline as a whole.

Theoretical Inspiration

Practices of research walk hand in hand with theoretical assumptions and values. Thus, for example, if one chooses to work with an experimental method, one may be invited to theorize in terms of cause–effect relationships, and the work likely places an implicit value on prediction. Observational methods—centering, for example, on children’s activities—may favor theories of intrinsic process, with a concern for what is normal in human functioning. Phenomenological methods may inspire theorists to articulate the structure of experience, with the hope that the research will increase human understanding. Thus, as we enrich the range of research practices, we simultaneously expand the arena of theoretical ideas and their associated values. A prominent example from the contemporary qualitative arena is furnished by discourse-focused researchers. The concern with the pragmatic use of language, both in writing and conversation, has led to broad theorizing about the challenge of communicating across cultures (Wierzbicka, 2003). It has inspired widely cited developments in positioning theory (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003), given birth to new theories of mental functioning (Hermans & Gieser, 2012), and enabled the formation of an entire movement in “discursive psychology” (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

To expand on the point, narrative methods have stimulated theoretical explorations of personal memory (Freeman, 1993); interpretive methods have stimulated dialogue on the moral dimensions of psychological inquiry (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999); the recognition of indigenous methods has brought with it an appreciation of psychological theorizing from other cultures (Hwang, 2014); observational methods have given rise to new conceptions of infant relationships (Trvarthen & Aitken, 2001); case studies have given rise to more complex ideas about therapeutic change (Sherb, 2014); and ethnographic methods have been vital to the development of cultural psychology (Shweder, 2003). In effect, it is not simply that theoretical concerns dictate methodology, but methodological preferences influence theoretical developments. To presume a single, best method is to reduce theoretical horizons. The pluralism of the qualitative movement brings with it rich and ever-expanding resources for theoretical innovation (see also Kirschner, 2006).

Building Community

In her book on the rise of world hyperpowers, Chua (2007) argues that the creative power of a culture is closely associated with its tolerance for its subcultures and its assimilation

of multiple perspectives. In an important sense, it is the possibility of hyperpower that the qualitative movement invites into psychology. In its pragmatic orientation to inquiry, foundationalist battles over “the right way to do research” drop away. Indeed, it is this spirit of inclusion that has enabled quite disparate groups to form a “qualitative movement” at all. As Wertz (2011) summarizes it, in the qualitative movement, “there is no single theory or paradigm. A panoply of social theories includes constructivism, critical theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, cultural studies, semiotics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, narrative theory and psychoanalysis” (p. 84). Importantly, the two new journals of the field, *Qualitative Psychology* and *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, are not tied to any particular field of study in psychology. All may participate.

It is this same spirit of inclusion that softens the tension between quantitative and qualitative researchers. Although drawing from competing visions of knowledge, mixed methods are now a common feature of many research endeavors (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This welcoming spirit also ensures a place at the table for the various minority groups in psychology—ethnic, religious, gendered—and others over which a gray cloud of “going it alone” has sometimes hovered. And the way is open to appreciate multiple cultures and build global understanding (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014). A sense of welcoming also means an opening to curiosity about what are others accomplishing, and how are they reaching these ends. With curiosity comes respect and cross-fertilization.

Interdisciplinary Enrichment

As noted earlier, qualitative inquiry has burgeoned within the social sciences more generally. Consistent with its pluralist orientation, one of its most important characteristics is a common sharing. Journals such as *Narrative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Narrative Matters*, and the *Qualitative Report* feature contributions from across the social sciences, including practice-oriented disciplines such as education, medicine, social work, counseling, nursing, urban planning, and more. The various editions of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) pivotal *Handbook of Qualitative Research* have featured contributions by not only psychologists but also scholars in communication, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, philosophy, and more. Such interdisciplinary sharing is also evident at the meetings of the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, an annual event at the University of Illinois. This congress brings together researchers not only from across the social science spectrum but also from around the world. Importantly, the congress now features a full day of contributions by psychologists to the qualitative culture more generally. There are no disciplinary hierarchies, no distancing between the “pure” and “applied,” no strong separation between the sciences and the arts, and no sense that some disciplines or cultures are more advanced in their methodological sophistication than others.

Although university politics and disciplinary gate-keeping have tended to balkanize the social sciences, the qualitative movement creates fresh and significant openings for the flow of ideas and practices across the disciplinary and cultural spectrum. For psychologists, the door is open to unending cross-disciplinary enrichment.

Psychology and Its Public

As we have proposed, the qualitative movement both expands the potentials of the field and generates valuable harmonies and synergies both within psychology and companionate disciplines. In our view, the movement also carries significant implications for the relationship between psychology and the society more generally. Two of these bear special attention.

Understanding With

As inherited from the empiricist tradition, psychologists have drawn a sharp distinction between the observing scientist and the subjects of observation. The attempt is to observe with dispassion, and avoid personal relations with those we study, so as to prevent biasing the results of our research. Although important for purposes of prediction, this orientation also carries costs. On the one hand, a dispassionate orientation favors an analytic stance in which observing, categorizing, counting, and conjecturing are primary, but with little consulting, those we study as participants in the search for knowledge. Their opinions and insights are typically discounted as “folk knowledge,” in contrast to the superior fruits of professional analytics. Increasingly, however, groups organize themselves against such claims to authority of knowledge. This has been especially true in the arena of mental health, in which there is active rejection of psychiatric labeling (Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000). Those classified as “disabled” often reject this label and demand that researchers conclude “Nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 2000). On the global scale, Western psychology’s claims to knowledge are rejected as neocolonialist (Teo, 2006).

In contrast, many qualitative forms of research function to reduce or remove the gap between scientist and society. In applied settings such as health, family services, community building, and program evaluation, for example, researchers increasingly depend on the local knowledge of their participants. Community-based participatory action for health is but a single example (Winkler & Wallerstein, 2008). In much narrative research, as we have seen, the researcher not only provides the participant a means for self-expression, but acts as a vehicle for disseminating these expressions to a broader public. In performative work, community participants are often drawn into various dramatic productions. They may serve as “spectators” (Boal, 1979), rotating between positions as spectators and actors. Most prominently, action researchers break the boundary between scientist and society by actively joining with outside groups to achieve shared ends. In all of these cases, there is an abiding sense that our knowledge is not *about* you, but *with* you. Rather than playing cat and

mouse, science and society collaborate in the search for understanding.

Communicating With the Culture

Closely related to the preceding, traditional forms of representation in psychology are frequently opaque to the general public. The formalisms, density of exposition, rarefied vocabularies, and complex statistics that dominate professional writing place the outcomes of our work beyond common understanding. Qualitative research has not yet overcome the challenge of accessibility. Much of it remains laced with jargon, dense, overly detailed, and sometimes pointless. But a growing consciousness of the “elitism” inherent in traditional writing, along with less restrictive methodological demands in the qualitative arena, does invite transparency. Further, most qualitative research is not employed in testing general theories of concern primarily within the discipline. Rather, such research draws its energies from topics of general societal concern. Issues of justice, poverty, community building, and oppression are often central for the qualitative researcher, as are concerns with improving education, health care, child rearing, organizational development practices. Straight talk about the social importance of the work is favored. Researchers in the performative domain are actively developing more powerful ways to communicate with nonprofessional audiences. Experiments with such media as video, storytelling, theater, and photography have significantly broadened the means of reaching and inspiring general audiences (Madison & Hamera, 2005). The result is not only a heightened appreciation of what psychologists contribute to the culture, but the aforementioned collaboration between science and society is enhanced.

Realizing the Potentials

The fresh breezes of a new, more pluralistic and inclusive psychology are in motion, but we are only beginning to realize the potentials. The forces of tradition are strong; Organizational structures are firm. Can the positive possibilities of a qualitative movement flourish, or will its practitioners struggle relentlessly against tradition? There is, first, the general question of whether the kinds of projects we have outlined in this paper are properly *scientific*. There is no principled end to such a question, as the definition of science and objectivity shift across history and subject matter (see, e.g., Daston & Galison, 2010). To define “science” only in terms of measurement, experimentation, and prediction would be narrow indeed. To include within the definition the enhancement of understanding, systematic critique of assumptions, and practice-based knowledge—among the goals of the qualitative movement—is to move toward a far richer and more comprehensive field of inquiry (Freeman, 2013). Nor is it appropriate to evaluate all forms of qualitative inquiry with the yardsticks of traditional empirical research (e.g., validity, reliability, sample size). The conception and goals of inquiry within the qualitative movement are many and varied, and each form of practice must be evaluated in terms of the rigor and

responsibility with which it pursues its own its specific goals (K. J. Gergen, 2014).

Even with an acceptance of this more comprehensive view of science, several important challenges remain. First is the challenge of education. Courses on empirical research methods are ubiquitous, but existing courses offer little coverage of qualitative practices. Psychology courses devoted to qualitative practices are indeed rare, even while numerous volumes are available for the aspiring teacher. The recent publication of the three-volume *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology* (Cooper, 2012) is among the most relevant. Numerous chapters in these volumes treat issues and practices in qualitative work. Whether and how such materials can make their way into educational curricula remains to be determined.

The question of education is closely related to issues of dissertation demands, publication opportunities, and promotion and tenure evaluations. With respect to criteria for judging PhD dissertation research, there is a prevailing assumption that one's thesis should be based on traditional empiricist research. Yet although skills in such research methods are surely important, whether they should represent an essential requirement for dissertation research is debatable. If we expand the legitimate aims and practices of psychological inquiry, so should we expand the allowable forms of inquiry. As we have seen, testing general hypotheses is but one approach to knowledge generation; as we develop such goals as generating social understanding, engaging in liberationist critique, effecting social action, so should we welcome new ways of carrying out dissertation work. Of course, the demand for traditional methods is closely linked to what is judged as acceptable research within the journals of the field. Until recently, qualitative research was not generally accepted by many of the major research journals. Even now, many editors find it difficult to locate suitable reviewers for such research. By expanding the scope of such journals to include qualitative inquiry, professionals will be motivated to explore its potentials, and relevant educational offerings will expand. Then there is the question of promotion and tenure. In many universities, publications of traditional empirical research findings serve as a major yardstick for advancement. As a result, engagement in qualitative research is discouraged and demands for relevant education are minimal. It is essential, then, that the field comes to appreciate and to honor the multiple ways in which psychological inquiry can contribute to both the field and society at large. Giving voice to the marginalized, undermining the taken for granted, critically analyzing societal conditions, helping a community to rebuild, or generating new ways of seeing the world—for example—should take their place alongside hypothesis testing in the contribution of psychology to society. The qualitative movement brings with it fresh ways of thinking about such contributions, along with practices that are fashioned for just such purposes.

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