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EDITORIAL

To count or not to count?

We recently confronted an interesting dilemma here at the editorial desk of *Social Identities*.

What is the role of a journal with a tendency such as this one, which largely runs free of the disciplinarity of journals run by professional associations (and their guaranteed subscriptions)? We rely on peer review in the same way they do, but the rewards for reviewers are less apparent, because they do not gain points for university service as they would if such work were associated with a formal body that represents their departments nationally or internationally.

We also differ because we stand for things beyond academia. While rigor is required, we also anticipate that authors will read our subtitle and appreciate the tendency represented by postcolonial critique.

All that said, what happens when we encounter a divide perhaps as fundamental as that between journals of partial, political tendency and journals of professional parthenogenesis and policing? It's the age-old quantoid-qualtoid distinction, so beloved of *bourgeois* social science and the US academy in particular: the distinction between numbers and *noumena*, experiments and ethnography, chi squares and counter-public spheres, math and meaning. What is the place in our journal of expressions such as 'N='? or 'coder reliability'? Or instruments like regression analysis? Do ideology critique, discourse analysis, and other qualitative methods have not only pride of place, but unique standing *contra* such terms and methods – and if so, why?

In part, these questions arise because so much critical scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has been introduced from within literary studies, for example postcolonial work associated with Edward Said's lead. More conventional empiricist social science is likelier to claim objectivity and support of the status quo and define itself in relation to the natural sciences than it is to work committed to social change as well as observation.

The warfare-welfare service mentality and rewards of US social science and the business-is-god mentality and rewards of UK and Australian social science amplify this distinction.

Here at *Social Identities*, we mostly publish articles that are on the overtly tendentious, qualitative half of the divide. We stand unambiguously for social and cultural justice and rigor – simultaneously.

But we sometimes receive submissions that are animated by content analysis, questionnaires, or other means that strive for statistical proof and significance rather than hermeneutic rectitude or imagination – that look to be surprised by data rather than driven by commitment, and claim objectivity, not interpretation, as their lodestar.

Obviously we are setting up binaries here that are inherently unstable. One might consider the work of Justin Lewis, a noted figure in media and cultural studies yet trained in criminology, as exemplifying disobedience of these distinctions, both in his empirical and theoretical work and his Olympian summations on the subject (Lewis, 1996, 2001, 2008).

Lewis works with the fundamental understanding that the most quantoid of quantoids works with words, which have meaning at both denotative and connotative levels, and must translate them into numbers and then back into words in order to be effective. At the same time, the most qualtooid of qualtooids selects phenomena to discuss because they matter in some way – and numbers will always be part of what matters.

So after some deliberation, we have come to recognize that we want the future of ‘our’ journal (custodians, not really owners!) to be one that disobeys those rules that seek to distinguish qualitative and quantitative approaches in any absolute way.

We want critical and empirical scholars to work together; we want participant observation and social experimentation to agree and disagree; but above all, we want studies of postcolonial and national identities that acknowledge the complex and conflicted nature of these terms and take nothing for granted – including their own theories and methods.

References

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