Conventional and Postqualitative Research: An Invitation to Dialogue

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Abstract

This article explores a question that was left mostly unanswered in a recent special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* surveying the field of postqualitative research: *How can conventional and post qualitative research coexist within the qualitative community?* The importance of addressing this key question is first highlighted. Then, a possible answer is offered, which is: *By promoting a new paradigm dialogue grounded in the principles of agonistic pluralism*. Challenging the idea of consensus and harmonious coexistence, agonistic pluralism allows casting researchers with competing paradigmatic positions as adversaries or "friendly enemies," which exist together in the same space without each sacrificing its beliefs about knowledge production. We invite members of the global qualitative community to explore this possibility.

Keywords

qualitative inquiry, postqualitative inquiry, politics of research, paradigm dialogue, agonistic pluralism

Introduction

At the QRSE2018 conference (see qrsesoc.com), Professor Smith alerted about the McDonaldization of qualitative research, a phenomenon that occurs when research is adapted to have the same characteristics that are found in fast-food chains. Alongside and inspired by Brinkmann (2015), Smith provided a number of reasons as to why qualitative researchers need to move in the opposite direction of McDonalization. Then, he mentioned some promising developments that might be useful to achieve this goal. Last of all, Smith referred to the postqualitative turn, which ostensibly poses new and generative questions asking for attention. Yet, he cautioned about some overinflated claims in this domain, various caricatures of qualitative research, and showed concerns about the possible futures following our methodologically contested present (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). In a sigh, he said that we need to find a solution to a problem that is difficult to pinpoint. Then, he moved on to another issue. But not me. I stayed there.

I got caught up in this space of ambiguity or blind spot in Smith's keynote because of one key reason. That is, I find hard to say whether I am a conventional qualitative researcher, a postqualitative researcher, neither, or both. Competing versions of qualitative research coexist in my person. This identity dilemma can partly be attributed to being an early career researcher whose academic self is still at an embryonic stage. Importantly, here is that my academic self has emerged in the era of epistemological proliferation "with new epistemologies acting in combination with each other and previously existing epistemologies to produce

complex hybrids" (Wright, 2006, p. 799). I discovered postqualitative research (PQR) at an early stage of my career. In my work, I have oscillated between conventional qualitative research (CQR) and PQR. In doing so, the problem of incommensurability and onto-epistemological incoherence has always been there, pinching me. Every time I think about and do research, I feel the tensions between conventional and post versions of qualitative research in the flesh.

Readers can or not resonate with my experience. In either case, the feelings and doubts I have described above are not just personal, but also political. Concretely, they are embodied manifestations of a particular politics of research within my field. That is the field of qualitative research in sport and exercise. Here, PQR has just landed, and debates are yet scarce (Giardina, 2017). However, I also feel part of a wider field: the global qualitative community, which includes and combines different disciplines that have lately payed much attention to the postqualitative turn. I felt that my thoughts around the relationship between CQR and PQR could be of interest to this wider qualitative community, and not just mine. Over the last decades, some of my academic referents within sport and exercise, such as Brett Smith Andrew Sparkes and Michael Giardina, have transcended their field to made wider contributions on

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qualitative research, which have been beneficial to a wide audience. I could do something alike. This possibility was not an intellectual pose—it was something I felt at a gut level.

Back home from the QRSE2018, I made a decision: "After finishing my PhD, I will write about the coexistence between CQR and PQR within the qualitative community." But when I finished my PhD, I hesitated. Unavoidably, writing an article about the conventional and the post entails reflecting about the past, present, and future of qualitative research, while considering the wider context that shapes the conversation. I could not write about that straightforwardly. First, I needed to read more, read harder, read beyond my discipline, and read about philosophical shifts and concepts that I did not understand (St. Pierre et al., 2016). At the same time, I needed to find a slower way of scholarly being in order to avoid hurried and mechanical ways of thinking and writing (Ulmer, 2017).

I started reading texts on CQR, PQR, and philosophy of science alongside one another. At once, I engaged with playful and liberating lazy practices apparently unrelated to my research endeavor (Gildersleeve, 2018), such as reading everything that Paul Auster published, and walking. With Auster (2012), I discovered that "walking is what brings the words to you, what allows you to hear the rhythms of the words as you write them in your head" (p. 224). For months, I took long walks to "get lost" (Lather, 2007) and "move my thoughts" (Rabinow & Rose, 2003). After each walk, I would sit on the desk and write. However, I was not able to connect the ideas effectively. Every time I thought I had something, I begun to question the very soul of it, and start again, every time less convinced about the possible outcomes. I have a folder named "CQR-PQR" with dozens of different drafts to which I gave them all my passion just for loathing them soon after, tired of how they made me feel.

These false starts frustrated me and made me want to abandon and dedicate the time I was spending in this to something else, more practical for my career and closer to my expertise. Still, the problem of CQR and PQR (including the problem of how to define this problem) got under my skin and I could not let go of it. I needed a boost, or something that could encourage me to keep on trying. Almost providentially, I found solace in Auster's reflections on his beginnings as a writer. Auster lived for years with the ideas of books before he could manage to write them. Reflecting on his "long preparation" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 7), he said,

> Into my twenties, I had ambitious projects and ideas. Things that I was unqualified to even attempt at that early stage of my development. During those years of writing, I must have written piles and piles of many scripts. I was never happy with the results. I never published any of that stuff. However, these unfinished, aborted works had the seeds of several of my early

books in them. Even though most of it was absolutely no good, there were bits here and there that were worth using, so I look back at those years of frustration and I think: well, maybe the time wasn't wasted. It was my apprenticeship; it was my hard slog through the rigors of trying to turn myself into a prose writer with a way of articulating things for himself.[1]

Like good, caring friends, these words inspired me to carry on. The following time I spent writing generated a manuscript introducing postqualitative research to exercise psychology (Monforte & Smith, Forthcoming). However, the one I was expecting to write kept resisting me. At a certain point, I decided to take a break from writing, putting the manuscript away. Yet, like the athlete that retires but keeps watching the matches on TV wishing to come back, I kept reading new publications on the contested present of qualitative research.

Most recently, I read the special issue on PQR in *Qualitative Inquiry*, which includes brief invited commentaries outlining innovations, tensions, and generative questions (Lee Carlson et al., 2020). This special issue reinvigorated my curiosity. Engaging with the articles provoked numerous thoughts, conferred words to some of my intuitions, and illustrated certain tensions and seemingly contradictory ideas that used to disturb my sleep. By way of an example, Lester (2020) highlighted the importance of defining postqualitative inquiry in relational rather than oppositional ways, whereas St. Pierre regarded once again PQR and CQR as paired opposites, whereby CQR is a negative definition of PQR. The articles also posed questions that I had asked myself. Are PQR and CQR so different? Does PQR try to define their borders too hard? In certain spots, the special issue directly tackled the problem that I had in mind from the QRSE2018. For instance, Rautio (2020) wrote that, to her, PQR "is largely about developing an attitude and the ability to co-exist with—ideally also to collaborate with—as well as to question the diversity of existing understandings: of research, of knowledge, of the world."

I specially appreciated that, in the overall, the invited papers acknowledged the unfinalizable nature of the PQR project, treating it as an open-ended process that refuses permanence and being organized into the definite. Assuming and departing from such condition is both enabling and limiting. It is enabling, because it allows to generate more questions and direct them to the ongoing development of PQR. However, it also generates vague answers, especially to "how" questions. These include the questions I was concerned with since I attended to the QRSE2018: Can CQR and PQR coexist in our scholarly communities, and if so, how? What are the reasons to support coexistence? And, if we find good reasons to do it, what can we do and how can we do it? While I agree in that such problems cannot be resolved once and for all, I believe that they need more direct, focussed and perhaps pragmatic responses. Other

qualitative scholars may have the same perception. So, retaking the paper I had been trying to write was both appropriate and timely. I now had the energy to try again plus, for some reason, a sort of serenity. I was not going to rush it. This time, I sensed that I had everything I needed to complete *something*. Perhaps not everything. Before this new and decisive attempt, I felt I would benefit from doing two more things.

The first one was reviewing my own historical process, that is, how certain episodes and readings led me to *this* article in *this* particular way. Doing so would be useful *for me* to re-organize my thoughts and re-discover my intentions. I wrote about how, why, and when I arrived at the research topic, how I struggled to answer it from my position, and how reading the articles of a special issue inspired me to try again and, at the very least, fail better. As I wrote, I realized such confessional tale had some aesthetic merit and could meaningfully affect an audience, even readers who have no direct experience with the topic considered. For instance, the story could show rather than tell how approaching PQR takes time and thorough readings of post-structuralist philosophy, which is open to multiple interpretations and hard to read (Kuecker, 2020). Likewise, it could show how sometimes research emerges from situations of astonishment, mystery, and breakdowns in one's understanding that inevitably arise in life's situations (Brinkmann, 2014). Other benefits could be highlighted, such as the potential of the story to be generalizable in certain ways (e.g., naturalistic generalization, if my precarious positionality and concerns reverberate with other qualitative researchers from my generation). In the light of such potential contributions, I excitedly decided that I would refine the confessional tale after writing the rest of the article, and (as is evident) use it as the "Introduction."

The second one was asking for help to a leading qualitative researcher. To close the circle, I approached Professor Smith, whom I trusted to act as a supportive but critical friend. I told him about my project, showed him an outline of my confessional tale, and sent him some unfinished drafts. Following further discussion, he accepted to get fully involved in the project.

As part of this collaboration, the content that follows has been written from two perspectives. Rather than anecdotic, this epistemological circumstance is noteworthy for it has a direct effect on the knowledge produced. We represent two generations of researchers, two moments in an academic career, and two positions of power-knowledge. This double standpoint gives the essay a particular angle and significance that should be taken in account. Besides this, our concerted account is inevitably partial and selective, and might be at odds with other viewpoints. Even our future selves can differ from the arguments presented here. This would be a positive sign that the text moves and evolves over time. Indeed, our hope is that the paper incites counterarguments, stimulates dialogue, and inspires further imaginations and developments.

Theoretical Prologue

This article addresses the relationship between CQR and PQR. But what are we talking about when we talk about these domains? As Aghasaleh and St. Pierre (2014) argued, scholars are typically quite familiar with CQR. They have studied and conducted research using it and have advised their students about conducting this kind of research. Thus, they know the concepts and categories that are usually used in a qualitative study. However, PQR is conceptualized outside the habits of seeing and modes of thinking we use to see and think, and thus, this term cannot be easily grasped. Previous articles have introduced PQR (e.g., Aghasaleh and St. Pierre, 2014; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2014, 2019a, 2019b). If the reader is not familiarized with the postqualitative turn, such readings are recommended, although one should bear in mind that reading an article or two or a book or two is not sufficient to understand the conditions that enable postqualitative work (Kuecker, 2020; St. Pierre et al., 2016). We do not attempt, however, to delve into the particularities of PQR and CQR. Instead, we want to back up and think about CQR and PQR more broadly, in terms of paradigms.

Following the thoughts of Kuhn (1970), paradigms can be thought as assemblages of shared assumptions, beliefs, and values which bring together a research community. When researchers share a paradigm they do not just share certain propositions, they agree also on how future research in their communities should proceed, on which problems are the pertinent ones to tackle, on what the appropriate ways for solving those problems are, and so on. Thinking with paradigms, we can think about the postqualitative turn as the shift from an old paradigm (CQR) to a new one (PQR). Although introducing this paradigm shift (accepted by some researchers, negated by others, oblivious for many) is beyond the scope of this article, let us explain briefly what it entails.

In many ways, PQR is an attempt to leave conventional research methods behind. Postqualitative researchers argue that CQR has become normalized, reductionist, and institutionalized and, consequently, that has lost its ability to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. For postqualitative scholars, experimentation cannot take place through the "dogmatic image of thought" on which CQR relies, which is said to be restricted to common sense (Hein, 2017). This is the reason why they argue for a deconstructive reading of CQR, rejecting traditional terms and practices that close possibilities for thinking otherwise.

Rautio (2020) indicated that it can be seen to challenge at least four elements of CQR: the nature of data, the

privileged role of methods, the quest for increasing clarity, and the idea of an individual voice. Although some qualitative researchers have challenged such aspects, the postqualitative critique is said to be much more drastic since it comes from a completely different philosophical grounding (Brinkmann, 2017). As St. Pierre (2019) insists, PQR is not qualitative methodology with a twist.

So, what does it mean to engage with PQR? Essentially, it means stepping outside of humanist research methodologies into the terrain of post philosophies (Berbary, 2017), especially posthumanism (Aghasaleh and St. Pierre, 2014). On this basis, Giardina (2017) suggested that researchers engaging with PQR should recognize themselves as philosophers of inquiry which do not apply methods but think with philosophical concepts to explore our posthuman societal condition. Crucially, this paradigm shift entails a move from epistemological concerns to a focus on ontology. Such ontological turn, however,

> is not a return to the "old" ontological preoccupations with "essence" and "objectivity." It is rather a more nuanced turn which seeks to retain the critical insights of the linguistic turn and of social constructionism but declares, at the same time, that we can no longer ignore (or downplay) matter and its contributing role in the production of our worlds. (Spyrou, 2019, p. 316)

Perhaps the most relevant differences between CQR and PQR can be found in their different engagement with ontology. In PQR, ontology is immanent as opposed to transcendent, processual as opposed to essentialist, posthumanist as opposed to humanist, monist as opposed to dualist, and entangled with, rather than separated from epistemology, ethics and politics. To read about what this mean, see, for example, Barad (2007), St. Pierre (2019) and Zembylas (2017).

Over the last years, PQR has generated enthusiasm, but also suspicion. Some scholars have offered careful critiques of PQR. In this regard, the reader can resort to the works of Bhattacharya (2020), Brinkmann (2019), Gerrard et al. (2017), Greene (2013), and Mayes (2019), for example. To simplify, critiques to PQR can be divided into two parallel trajectories. First, PQR has been critiqued as impenetrable, Eurocentric, dehumanizing, and complicit in the neoliberal work of destabilization. Second, postqualitative scholars have been critiqued for being forgetful and perpetuating hierarchies. It is said that PQR and related projects (e.g., new materialism) are not as new as postqualitative scholars claim it to be, being newness a rhetorical devise to gain intellectual capital. Postqualitative scholars are responding to critiques, and conventional qualitative researchers are answering back. There is, in short, an ongoing interchange. Importantly, we must not assume that this interchange is based on reason only. As Khun (1970)

argued, two components of paradigm allegiance are faith and peer pressure of researchers on one another.

Tensions Between CQR and PQR in Action

In what follows below, we present a creative non-fiction vignette that shows some contrasting points of CQR and PQR, but also how their differences (both misinterpreted and legitimate differences) might create dangerous consequences in the way scholars relate with each other. Creative non-fiction uses techniques from fiction but is grounded on data. Our vignette is grounded on transgressive forms of data, including the theoretical work quoted in this article, the political passions that emerged during our discussions, and multiple conversations with qualitative colleagues from different disciplines. It is noteworthy that most of these colleagues live a different theoretical life from St. Pierre, Mazzei, and other contributors of the special issue edited by Lee Carlson et al. (2020). By this, we mean that they are unfamiliar to the ontological turn, the philosophical language of PQR, and high theory. To craft the vignette, we extensively used "Captured Conversation" (Caulley, 2008), as this technique fosters a sense of interactive engagement and can show people counterarguing.

The two main characters in the vignette are Scholar 1 and Scholar 2. Years ago, they used to work together. Scholar 2 turned to PQR. Scholar 1 keeps adopting a conventional qualitative stance, although they pay attention to innovations in qualitative research. Scholar 1 and Scholar 2 ceased to collaborate because neither of them believes in what the other one is doing. Fair enough, both think. Earlier today, they have run into each other in a meeting, the first one after the COVID-19 crisis and within the so-called "new normality." Right after the meeting, Scholar 1 has approached Scholar 2. They have told Scholar 2 that, during the pandemic, they have been reading about PQR. After a few minutes of polite conversation, their paradigmatic passions emerge.

> Scholar 1: All right. I'm gonna be honest with you. This new post-thing irritates me. We've enough with dealing with neopositivism. Now, we have to deal with qualitative researchers saying that qualitative research as we know it is no longer possible, that it is a faulty enterprise that we have to give up, to try to unlearn it, to get it out of our minds. Now, we have to turn to PQR and reject conventional practices. Whatever. What if I don't want new beginnings in my research?
> Scholar 2: Postqualitative researchers don't reject qualitative research. PQR calls for a constant critique or deconstruction of what has been established in qualitative research. It's key to have in mind that deconstruction

does not reject what it deconstructs. So PQR is not rejecting, correcting or fixing qualitative research, but rather displacing a structure to make room for something new.

Scholar 1: What is the new, exactly?

Scholar 2: Well, don't take it literally. The new does not necessarily announce something new. It just signals that postqualitative researchers are determined to try to think differently.

Scholar 1: And what is different?

Scholar 2: The very notion of difference, for example, and the very mode of thinking. The way of approaching data, and so on.

Scholar 1: Really? Some pre-PQR work have already included some of the points and ideas claimed to be new by PQR.

Scholar 2: Well, CQR and PQR might use some of the same vocabulary, but with different meanings, and to refer to different sets of things. You cannot just assimilate what others are saying into your own categories and language without doing justice to what is substantially different . . .

Scholar 1: But what is substantially different? What is PQR that QR is not?

Scholar 2: In fact, asking what is PQR is not an appropriate question.

Scholar 1: Why?

Scholar 2: Because the "what is" question assumes something already exists, that something is . . . that is stable, and so can be identified and represented. But PQR is immanent. This means that it never exists, that it never is. It must be invented, created in a different way each time.

Scholar 1 takes a deep breath and says:

You advocate for turning to PQR, but if people want to understand why, or at least take it seriously, you should render its principles meaningful. That is frustrating.

Scholar 2: The point (and this is part of what is different in PQR) is that not understanding it is fine. You don't have to get the ideas completely. PQR problematizes this desire to comprehend and seeks to remain inexplicable. Deleuze [probably the most important author within PQR] himself recommended his readers to let go of interpreting or understanding his work. This, of course, makes explaining PQR in general and Deleuze in particular a troublesome task. But it's from darkness from what exciting knowledge emerges, not from clarity.

Scholar 1: But darkness limits the options of transparently and fully communicate the meaning of PQR. You keep me in the dark with all this language you cannot, or are unwilling, to put some flesh on.

Scholar 2: But critiques with regard to inaccessibility are sometimes simplistic and made from a comfortable position. Qualitative scholars too casually hesitate to read outside their comfort areas.

Scholar 1: That is simply not true.

Scholar 2: It is. They think they should quickly understand concepts, and they reject PQR texts because they seem too hard to read.

Scholar 1: But some of them *are* hard to read! If you want PQR to be translated into classrooms, research practice and policy, they must bring their philosophical discussions down to earth. Plus you say we need to try harder. Too read harder. You are aren't apologetic about the difficult language—it's us that need to up our game. Isn't that . . .

Scholar 2: But philosophy is hard! You do not expect to understand a physics text, do you? But you expect to understand a PQR study at first sight. Isn't that arrogant?

Scholar 1: But what about democratizing knowledge. How can society benefit from research-based knowledge if it is not understood, and its value not perceived? People see PQR to abstract, too far from Realpolitik. And for researchers, it is not evident how PQR would concur with the aspirations of initiatives like Citizen Science or public sociology.

Scholar 2: The point is, I think, that more accessible language is not necessarily more socially just. Sometimes, not being easily understood might be an ethical imperative because any call for transparency, clarity, or accessibility is always already a call to reinforce the taken-for granted or common sense. You cannot understand PQR in terms of something familiar. That's the mistake. You cannot see and recognize "the new" because it lies outside the dominant discourses you use to see and think.

Scholar 1: Ok, let's say we accept the inexplicable nature of PQR. But for this approach to have conceptual force, and lest it be misunderstood as to mean anything and everything (which is partly what it means, isn't it?), you should be able to explain it to different audiences, including to students and those who *want* to understand. Currently, just a few insiders are allowed to access it. There is a VIP area: Very important postqualitative scholars. Don't tell me about anti-intellectualism, you know me. What happens is that postqualitative scholars are creating a hierarchy that privileges theory used by themselves and dismiss all other approaches as crude, as if those who did not engage in high theory were simpletons. And theory becomes a mechanism of distinction. And novelty becomes a marketing ploy. Deleuze. Barad. Deleuze, Deleuze. He is on now. Today everything is an assemblage. It's cool to say that now. But what would be the next fashion or fad tomorrow?

Scholar 2: Assemblage is a misunderstood and banalized concept. Very complex. Recently I read a paper [Nail, 2017] that explains it in detail. I will send it to you. Have a look.

Scholar 1: I won't understand it! *That's what I'm saying*!

After a pause, Scholar 2 says:

Well, it's funny that you get pissed at this, because CQR has also been deemed inaccessible in a particular historical context. If we rewind 20 years ago, we would appreciate how the critique of being obscure have been also done to CQR, which started using "big words" such as "epistemology."

Scholar 1: Are you talking about sociological amnesia[2]? Come on. Look . . . What I really believe is that PQR is a rebranding exercise. And I mean, this suspicion is not so much toward the paradigm itself as toward the people who use it or speak in its name. Much well-established knowledge is now part of PQR without proper attribution or recognition. For example, post researchers ignore and fail to engage with the Indigenous scholars already working with parallel ideas about materiality and agency. In doing this, they are reinforcing practices of erasure of Indigenous cultures and thought. So, new materialism . . .

Scholar 2: But new materialism departs from continental philosophy, that's not completely fair.

Scholar 1: These are alibis in my view. This selective erasure is suggestive of a neoliberal politics of knowledge production. You criticize how QR has surrendered to neoliberalism. You say that the qualitative community is at risk of assimilation and the reduction of qualitative to an instrumentalism that meets the demands of audit culture. But you use theories and research approaches as commodities that secure a way into a seemingly special intellectual-cultural class, which is even worse. The problem is that these theories are sealed off from any real potential as political tools. You claim to be open and so on with the no-methods, anti-methodology or how you call it, but PQR is at risk of being deemed another fashionable post-something and creating its own set of methodological and conceptual closures. I don't doubt that you have good intentions, but PQR is often co-opted and is actually transporting ideas that may be contrary to the original intentions

Scholar 1 stays in silence, pondering what they just have said. They add:

I sometimes wonder: What if in the postqualitative, posthuman world, in which humanist, conventional research is perceived as out of time and problematic, those who stay human and keep doing traditional QR are the true subversives?

Scholar 2: So, basically, all postqualitative scholars are wrong and speak nonsense. St. Pierre, Lather, Mazzei . . .

Scholar 1: It's curious. You criticize the humanist voice and truth and so, but you trust so much the voice of these people.

Abruptly, an awkward silence is created between Scholar 1 and Scholar 2. After a few seconds, Scholar 1 makes as if to say something.

Scholar 2: Go on. Tell me.

Scholar 1: I guess what bothers me most is that, in the search for a break from the "old," PQR mobilizes a colonial temporal logic of progress on a linear trajectory and states itself as more progressed and progressive than earlier or other ways of knowing.

Scholar 2: Ah. Nevermind.

Another silence separates them. Scholar 1 shrugs. Scholar 3 enters the meeting room. They are co-author of most of the latest work of Scholar 2. They put the mask on and say:

Hi. Everything all right? I forgot my diary, here it is. What are you discussing about? I can't see your mouth below the mask, but you both seem altered!

Scholar 2: Hi, pal. We are talking about conventional and post qual.

Scholar 3: Oh, are you? What are the points?

Scholar 2: Well, we do not agree in anything. We are speaking different languages. And we end up going around and around the same ideas. Not very useful. We just don't . . .

Scholar 1: To be frank, it's not a dialogue. We are having two monologues!

After saying that, Scholar 1 looks through the window and think that the students that used to walk through the campus before Christmas are alien to their conversations. They think: Which kind of research will be done when they will be my age? The implications of the PQR turn for tenure, training, funding, publication, status and legitimation for her may not be important, but what about people they (will) teach and supervise? They can't be bothered. They believe that PQR is annoying but that, eventually, nothing is going to change. Things within the qualitative community will stay the same. PQR is likely to end up joining the multiple actors cast in the history of qualitative research, without breaking it. Or maybe it will become an echo chamber, a segregated zone for just a few postqualitative researchers that insist on deconstructing qualitative research while they still participate in qualitative research handbooks and conferences. While Scholar 1 has immersed in their soliloquy, Scholar 2 and Scholar 3 are talking between them, but Scholar 3 is looking at Scholar 1. Scholar 1 thinks: I am not going to convince them, and they are not going to convince me, so what's the point? They stand up and clear her throat.

Scholar 1: Yes, well, I'm leaving. I have much work to do. Have a good weekend!

Scholar 1 leaves. Scholar 2 and 3 stay.

Scholar 2: Qualitative researchers are becoming really territorial. Gosh. Anything that falls outside of that provokes a strong reaction.

Scholar 3: Indeed. Validity, doing content analysis, speaking about the self, all that was OK 10 years ago, but now is simply out of place. We need something different.

Scholar 2: Exactly.

Possible Futures and Ways Out

In addition to present some characteristics of and misunderstandings about conventional and post qualitative research, the above vignette highlighted how paradigmatic polarization leads to confrontation or a blame game between different paradigm proponents. Here, scholars adopt protectionist paradigmatic behaviors, speak only with like-minded, and remain locked within the boundaries of their own positions, unwilling to consider theories or research forms of a contrasting kind. Equally, it can lead to "other" those with whom we disagree and discredit the work carried on by the other paradigm, sometimes just to vindicate one's own. This, in turn, might perpetuate existing antagonisms, promote a survival of the fittest culture, and perpetrate epistemic violence, which involves convincing some groups that their understandings of the world are inferior, and therefore, they are also inferior. In this sense, researchers might internalize toxic, oppositional energies and become more motivated by their antipathy for the other paradigm than by affinity for their own (i.e., negative partisanship).

Considering these possible destructive consequences, we are concerned that QR and PQR researchers may turn against one another, criticize one another's "language," and debunk another's paradigm. As Nespor (2006) noted, if paradigms "can be used both to add complexity and diverse standpoints to inquiry" (p. 115), they can also contribute "to build reductive boundaries that bleed out difference and obscure alternatives." They can work as excuses for not thinking, which assemble groups of researchers into armed camps. Without wishing to overstate the point, we believe that the threat of entering into another paradigm war[3]—an internal or "civil" war in which associations of conventional qualitative researchers and postqualitative researchers battle against each other—has to be taken seriously. Such paradigm war could be very self-damaging; the danger is that it could diffuse our energies and yield almost nothing in return. For instance, it could make our community vulnerable to the attacks of postpositivism and endanger democratic politics of knowledge production and trustworthiness. To clarify, none of this is a prediction. We hope the possible futures presented above will not materialize. However, hoping is not enough. We need to be proactive. As Denzin (2017) stated, we cannot afford to fight with one another. As a community, we need to do something, and we need to do it now.

Against paradigm war, one of the most celebrated actions of qualitative researchers has been the so-called paradigm dialogue. This term has been suggested to promote coexistence between QR and (post)positivism, but also between different persuasions within the qualitative domain (Denzin, 2017). Typically, perfect consensus and a harmonious collective are presented as the ideal conditions for paradigm dialogue. The point is that there needs to be a decline in conflict and confrontationalism between alternative paradigms proponents. This means that everyone must give up part of their pretensions for the common good, control selfish impulses and cultivate habits of harmony and collaboration. Over time, such idea has been enacted in such a way that it has become hegemonical; most of us have come to identify consensus with democracy and consequently to consider disagreement as its main enemy.

Lately, however, the problems behind this idea are showing up. We have realized that what we aspire to achieve through consensus is, insofar as it is the fruit of the renouncement, a devalued good, an agreement of minimums that does not please anyone and excludes some. Consensus is not enough, and ultimately it fails to respect the plural nature of communities. At the same time, as the creative non-fiction illustrated, disagreements might finish dialogue, and agreements can do that as well. Against this, we need ways of promoting a plural and participative communities in which people do not stop dialoguing when they do not achieve a consensus, or if they achieve them. Dialogue is how our communities breathe, and we cannot stop breathing. Applied to the topic of this article, we need to imagine new strategies to work and live together in a paradigm dialogue between CQR and PQR. The possible strategy we present in this article is agonistic pluralism. As a caveat, we acknowledge that some of the principles of this approach can be operating among the qualitative community without necessarily naming it explicitly. However, it is important to label this approach, as labels are performative: they call for political awareness, guide practice, and generate conversations.

Agonistic Pluralism: Toward a Paradigm Dialogue Between CQR and PQR

The term agonism is derived from the Greek *agon*, taken from the root ἀγών, which in its broadest and most basic sense means "struggle." In the realm of political philosophy, agonism refers to an understanding of citizen participation that welcomes conflict and distrusts social consensus. The agonistic perspective is grounded in the assumption that agreement and conflict-free consensus are likely to neglect difference, generate a marginalization of minority positions, and feed the acritical assimilation of hegemonic values. On this basis, agonism poses the democratic relationship in terms of "conflictive consensus". This kind of consensus does not hide differences and particularities, but rather departs on their recognition to support democratic coexistence. In other words, it suggests that democracy is dependent on difference and dissent, being characterized by allowing opposing systems of thought to express. As Fisken (no page) put it, "a properly political pluralism must countenance different positions that are genuinely incompatible with one another." Here, agonism creates an imperative in

which the task is to not only tell one's stories, but also to assume the responsibility to listen carefully and attempt to grasp what is being expressed, said, and done by others who live by contrasting tales. Such responsibility, in the words of Bernstein (1991, p. 66), "should not be confused with an indifferent superficial tolerance where no effort is made to understand and engage with" people who disagree. William Connolly, a leading theorist of agonism, calls this responsibility "agonistic respect".

The work of another key theorist, Chantal Mouffe, is also relevant here. In short, this author sustains that agonism balances "(the need for) unity with (the need for) plurality; (the defence of) democracy with (the inescapability of) conflict; and (the mobilisation of) dissensus with (the construction of discourses and projects that encourage) democratic renewal" (Tambakaki, 2014, p. 1). For Mouffe, what makes agonism valuable is the possibility that it offers to do a non-hegemonic, but also a non-antagonistic type of politics. In contrast to antagonism, (i.e., a struggle between enemies who seek each other's destruction), agonism does not imply a relationship of enmity with people who believe differently. There are no enemies, but rather adversaries. The main difference between friends and adversaries is that adversaries are, so to speak, "friendly enemies" in the sense that they have something in common. Both share a symbolic space. Therefore, there can exist among them what Mouffe call a "conflictive consensus." Adversaries may disagree, but ultimately respect one another's right to exist. Mouffe (2000) wrote,

> envisaged from the point of view of "agonistic pluralism," the aim of democratic politics is to construct the "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an "adversary," i.e. somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question. (p. 15)

Thinking with Denzin (2010a), the symbolic space mentioned in the above quote should be a commitment to antifascism, equality, and social justice. Researchers should share this ideational (ideological) common ground. Yet, researchers have the right to propose their own ways of doing so. To repeat the central tenet of agonism, it is a matter of sustaining a "conflictive consensus" based on manifold interpretations and opinions that gravitate around the widely shared. This hint arises a key point: instead of "being in a different space altogether" (Denzin & Giardina, 2016, p. 14), agonism allows being *different in the same space*.

Being and becoming different in the same space is a configuration that ensures both unity and plurality. According to the agonistic ideal, there would be a single yet plural community where researchers coming from diverse contexts and paradigmatic affiliations are able to (be)come together. This global community would allow people with diverse paradigmatic vocations (even competing and

incommensurable ones) to engage in a whole without each sacrificing its distinctiveness. Indeed, differences and discrepancies between members of the community would be considered a sign of its vibrancy. Compromises are, of course, also possible, although they should be seen as temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation (Mouffe, 2000). Such an agonistic effervescence is much preferred to the acceptance of a single perspective as authoritative, or a homogenization of the community. To paraphrase Sparkes (2001), some

> might see this diversity as an acknowledgment of a pluralism that celebrates different ways of knowing about the social world. This pluralism, despite the communication problems (perhaps better redefined as possibilities) that come with it, might be preferable to the specter of everyone marching to the same drummer or being forced to speak a social science version of Esperanto.

Thinking lives by contrast and plurality. Thinking is impossible where everything is the same as well as where there is not any coincidence. If we do not surround ourselves by others holding different paradigmatic views, we cannot know which ones are ours, and in turn, that these are ours. Without pluralism and dissent, we lack the element that moves our thought and pushes us to improve our thinking. Translated to a simple message: we must talk to the other, although we do not need to agree.

In the light of the foregoing, conventional and post researchers can be thought as dialogical partners or *critical friendly enemies* that keep each other intellectually in check. From this position, the contrahegemonic demands of PQR are indeed positive and should have a space in the qualitative community. Crucially, though, we should not confuse disagreement with negation. Disagreement is not just about saying no. It is an affirmative and constructive practice. It is about saying *no, and . . .* The positions just aiming to negate, abolish, abuse, absorb other positions, or to impose a "proper" or "right" way of being, doing and becoming qualitative above other ways cannot have place and do not deserve respect in a democratic community. As the activist James Baldwin said, "we can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression [. . .] and right to exist." In this regard, we cannot share the arguments of scholars that want to finalize their "adversaries" (thus turning "adversaries" into "enemies"). As Frank (2010) explained, dialogue is never finalizing. Only by refusing the "tyranny of the last word" (Levinas, 1998, p. 141), we will be able to dialogue.

Concluding Thoughts

This article adds to the conversations about the politics, practices, and philosophies of conventional and postqualitative research that are taking place in the present time.

Certainly, each qualitative community lives a different situation. For example, members of the qualitative community in sport and exercise to which we belong are just beginning to hear about PQR (Monforte & Smith, Forthcoming). Meanwhile, other fields such as cultural studies are more familiar with this intellectual project. This diversity recognized, we have tried to address the global qualitative community, thinking of it as a large assemblage composed by smaller assemblages-communities (DeLanda, 2006).

Taking this wide target, we have introduced what are we talking about (the coexistence between CQR and PQR within our qualitative community), why are we talking about it (it is relevant to all of us, and overlooking it can bring us negative consequences), and most remarkably, how can we address the problem of coexistence. Regarding the "how question," we have stressed the value of a paradigm dialogue between conventional and postqualitative research, and then, we have suggested to address such dialogue through the lens of agonism or agonistic pluralism. Our proposition attempts to provide a guiding philosophy that scholars can use to engage in a more participative dialogue across paradigmatic disparities. As a caveat, however, we must acknowledge that the divergences between competing variants of agonism remain largely underdeveloped. As such, we will need to attend some questions that remain unattended in this article.

For example, an important remaining question concerns the problematics of adopting the standpoint of the adversary or "friendly enemy," while others maintain the standpoint of an "enemy" (who never accepts your legitimacy) or a "friend" (who avoids disagreements and therefore dialogue). Can agonism work if we are not all agonists? Another question mark is put over the legitimacy of the labels CQR and PQR as capturing the complex histories and the current state of qualitative research. On the one side, the polarization between CQR and PQR does some useful work in holding in tension the two approaches and letting conflicts arise to enable paradigmatic dialogue across legitimate differences. On the other side, we should acknowledge a third space encompassing the range of variations that can operate in between them, as well as the possibility of entangled paradigmatic positions that generate "fewer demarcations and boundaries" (Vagle, 2020). Brinkmann (2017), for example, suggested that one could be a "postqualitative qualitative researcher." There is no consensus about the legitimacy of this hybrid paradigm. Whereas some accept it, others (e.g., St. Pierre) negate that possibility, arguing that mixing elements of CQR and PQR would be a signal of ontological confusion. Who is right? This question is unanswerable. As Khun (1970) proposed, objective choice between paradigms is impossible, for what counts as right is relative to a paradigm—there is no neutral vantage-point from which to assess the claims of each paradigmatic position. Here, the interesting question for us is: can we promote a dual agenda to erase boundaries between CQR and PQR, and at the same time, emphasize their differences to stimulate conflict and, in turn, agonistic dialogue?

The above questions interpellate us. However, we alone are not capable of answering them. We need other voices with which to dialogue. We need experts such as the authors that wrote the special issue on postqualitative research published in this journal, but we also need to learn from the views of people that has not been invited to sit on the table (Nordstrom, 2018). Democratic dialogue needs to include the view of all members of the qualitative community, not just the authorities on the subject. To disrupt problematic hierarchies, it is likewise important to avoid 'shaming practices that turn academics away from theoretical debates (have you not read every word of Karen Barad's 525-page book Meeting the Universe Half Way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning?)' (Fullagar, 2017, p. 255). In parallel, we should think affirmative ways of facilitating dialogue within but also across qualitative communities. Doing so will enrich us and will help us fulfilling our common interests. As Guba (1990) commented 30 years ago (p. 374) referring to paradigm dialogue, 'it is to everyone's benefit to cooperate.'

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Notes

1. This paragraph has been crafted from two interviews. To hear the exact words of Auster, please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8cNYqgalyk and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLhVjsczcb8
2. The notion of sociological amnesia refers to the "selective inclusion and exclusion of predecessors to gain intellectual capital" (Maines, 2017, p. 241)
3. See Denzin (2010b) for a concise overview of paradigm wars.

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