Methodology and Morality

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Are qualitative (feminine, collaborative) and quantitative (masculine, domineering) methodologies merely better or worse ways of addressing different problems (Short-DeGraff & A. Fisher, RMT 7:3, p.301) or do they connote different moralities?

Even in measurement, it is clear that competing methodologies reflect rival systems of ethics. Richard Jaeger, in his 1987 NCME Presidential Address, quoted Wright (1977, p.77) "To arrive at a workable position, we must invent a simple conception of what we are willing to suppose happens, do our best to write items and test persons so that their interaction is governed by this conception, and then impose its statistical consequences upon the data to see if the invention can be made useful." In contrast, Jaeger quotes Lindquist (1953, p.35) "The objective [of an educational test] is handed down by those agents of society who are responsible for decisions concerning educational objectives, and what the test constructor must do is to attempt to incorporate that definition as clearly and exactly as possible in the examination that he builds."

Notice that in Wright's approach, the community of objective-definers, test-constructors, and tested-persons is egalitarian. Every member of the community has a voice in deciding which items are useful and which are not. The basic ethic includes fair play, justice, and democracy — and even aesthetics, as represented by the mathematical elegance of the Rasch model.

Lindquist, however, is concerned with content validity rather than construct validity. There is elitist and centralized control of the objective. Test-constructors and tested-persons are at the mercy of the test-definers. "The definition of the objective is sacrosanct" (Lindquist ibid.).

Here the Rasch debate is but a microcosm of the qualitative/quantitative debate, since virtually all quantitative methods proceed in a manner more akin to Lindquist than to Wright. "The question is not about how to define words like *truth* or *rationality* or *knowledge* or *philosophy*, but about what self-image our society should have of itself" (Rorty, 1985, p.11). Now, as much as in Galileo's time, our scientific methodology reflects our innermost selves.

The appeal of Rasch methodology is not in its some-what abstract scientific qualities, but in its capacity to build solidarity and community by ensuring that everyone can contribute in a constructive way, building consensus while simultaneously acknowledging and learning from dissent. High quality measuring instruments extend our conversation into new domains, justifying our theoretical constructs and their measurement, not through appeal to an arbitrary, unfeeling higher authority, but through the way they emerge from within the community affected by them. The mutual interaction of subject and object is unavoidable. Rasch helps us to capitalize on this mutual interaction and so increase its flow.

E.F. Lindquist (1953) Selecting appropriate score scales for tests (Discussion), Proc. 1952 Invit. Conf. on Testing Problems. Princeton, NJ: ETS

R. Rorty (1985) Solidarity or objectivity. In J. Rajchman & C. West (Eds.) Post-Analytic Philosophy. New York: Columbia

B.D. Wright (1977) Solving measurement problems with the Rasch model. Jou Ed Meas 14,2 p.97-116.

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Theory vs. Practice

"People sometimes say, *This is right in theory but it doesn't work in practice*. They ought to say, *This is wrong in theory and consequently it is wrong in practice*. There is no true theory which could be wrong in practice. This contrast between theory and practice is contrived by people who want to escape hard and thorough thinking. They like to abide in the shallowness of accustomed practices, on the surface of a so-called *experience*. They will accept nothing but a repeated confirmation of something they already know or believe. Only those questions for truth which have challenged and disturbed centuries of practice have brought about a fundamental transformation of practice. This is true of the history of science, morals and religion."

Paul Tillich, "Doing the Truth", in "The Shaking of the Foundations", 1949.

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