

## William James and Methodological Pluralism: Bridging the Qualitative and Quantitative Divide

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In recent years pluralism has emerged as a popular approach for overcoming the method wars in psychological research, with advocates of mixed-methods approaches arguing for the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. They contend that a plurality of methods will allow researchers to draw upon the strengths of one method to overcome the weaknesses of another. In this article I argue that mixed-methods approaches fall short of a true methodological pluralism in the tradition of William James because they rely on a single worldview rather than a plurality of worldviews. I describe how James's pluralism, as outlined in his book *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909/1987), differs from mixed-methods approaches and I describe some basic features of a true Jamesian methodological pluralism.

A great divide has developed in the psychological sciences. Scientific psychology for years has been dominated by a quantitative methodology, but a growing movement of qualitative researchers has resulted in so-called "method wars." The method wars have revolved around the conflict between these two methodological camps regarding which methodology is best suited to psychological research. Some researchers have argued that qualitative and quantitative methods are grounded in seemingly incongruent worldviews and that this incongruence creates in turn incompatibility between methodologies, forcing a choice between one methodology and the other (Bednarz, 1985; Forshaw, 2007; Ogborne, 1995; Simpson and Eaves, 1985). A pivotal difference that such researchers point to as irreconcilable is the clash between these methodologies regarding the role of contextual influences in experimentation. Within an interpretivist worldview many qualitative methods are used to understand phenomena as contextually situated, based on the assumption that extracting phenomena from their contexts leads to distorted and misleading findings

(Polkinghorne, 1983).<sup>1</sup> Conversely, within a positivist worldview many quantitative methods make experimental control the highest priority, based on the assumption that variables are seen most clearly when they are separated from the extraneous “noise” of context (Bishop, 2007). One methodology assumes that the essence of a phenomenon only emerges within context whereas the other assumes that the phenomenon only becomes clear as it is experimentally extracted from context.

In recent years pluralism has emerged as a popular approach for overcoming the method wars in psychological research. Perhaps one reason that pluralism is growing in popularity is because, despite the seeming incompatibility of the worldviews that ground these methods, most researchers find some value in both qualitative and quantitative methods, even if they have a greater affinity for one methodology over the other (Aluko, 2006; American Psychological Association Task Force, 2006; Barrett, 2003; Brannen, 2005; Carey, 1993; Dzurec and Abraham, 1993; Hoshmand, 1989; Lambert, Garfield, and Bergin, 2004; Looker, Denton, and Davis, 1989; McKeganey, 1995; Michell, 2003; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005a, 2005b; Plewis and Mason, 2005; Richards and Bergin, 2005; Shadish, 1995; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Likewise, a number of researchers have argued that a methodological pluralism can appreciate the unique and necessary differences of these diverse worldviews while providing them sufficient unity to mutually contribute to psychological science (Howe, 1988, 1992; Lund, 2005; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005a, 2005b). The problem with these methodological pluralisms, as I will discuss, is that they have not solved the dilemmas inherent in putting two, to some degree incompatible, philosophies of science together.

An overlooked resource in this regard is William James’s book *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909/1987). A true pluralism, according to James, preserves the particularity of each worldview (one is not reduced to a watered-down version of the other) and at the same time meaningfully unites them such that dialogue, mutual understanding, and some degree of compatibility are possible. In this paper I will argue that the majority of contemporary methodological pluralisms fall short of the Jamesian ideal and end up favoring a single worldview instead of a plurality of worldviews. I will explore and illustrate how James’s pluralism avoids the problems that beset current mixed-methods approaches and I will describe some of the key features of a Jamesian methodological pluralism.

### Methodological Pluralism and Mixed Methods

Despite some scholars’ claims (Bednarz, 1985; Forshaw, 2007; Ogborne, 1995; Simpson and Eaves, 1985) that the worldviews grounding qualitative and

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<sup>1</sup>In keeping with the way they are traditionally characterized in the “methods wars” literature, I refer to the worldviews grounding qualitative and quantitative methodologies as interpretivist and positivist respectively. Although these labels are broad and do not reflect the nuanced variety of worldviews that can find application in these methodologies, they serve my purposes here in identifying generally the philosophical divide that is traditionally identified between qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

quantitative methodologies are theoretically incompatible (e.g., experimental context vs. experimental control), many researchers have found that research grounded in both the positivist and interpretivist worldviews can be practically useful and illuminating (Blake, 1989; Healy, Stewart, and Ozer, 1991; Howe, 1992; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005b). This view is consistent with William James's contention that it is possible for seemingly incompatible things such as worldviews to nevertheless find meaningful relationship and mutual utility in the practical world. As I will discuss further below, for James the question is not whether worldviews ultimately can link to one another with rational consistency, but rather it is whether adopting a particular worldview makes any practical difference. For psychological researchers this suggests that the logical incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative methodologies may be less of an obstacle than critics have suggested, presuming that researchers can show that each methodology brings practical utility to our understanding and practice surrounding a given phenomenon.

#### *Mixed-Methods*

Based on this pragmatic reasoning, a growing number of researchers are now arguing that it does make practical sense not only to embrace both qualitative and quantitative methods in general, but also to mix these methods within individual studies (Blake, 1989; Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2006; Carey, 1993; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Curlette, 2006; Giddings and Grant, 2006; Greene, Benjamin, and Goodyear, 2001; Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, and Creswell, 2005; Howe, 1988, 1992; Kelle, 2006; Looker et al., 1989; Morgan, 1998; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005a, 2005b; Plewis and Mason, 2005; Shah and Corley, 2006; Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, and Bird, 1992; Sullivan, 1998; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). This movement for "mixed-methods," as it has come to be called, currently leads the charge for methodological pluralism and most of the current literature regarding methodological pluralism centers around mixed-methods approaches. According to mixed-methods advocates, a plurality of methods would expand the researcher's toolbox and allow researchers to rely on the strengths of one method to make up for the weaknesses of another (Kelle, 2006; McGrath, Johnson, Camic, Rhodes, and Yardley, 2003; Plewis and Mason, 2005; Stainback and Stainback, 1985; Steckler et al., 1992). Likewise, they argue, drawing upon methods from a diversity of worldviews should allow researchers to view their object of study from quite different perspectives, potentially bringing greater depth of understanding and critical examination as they compare these varying perspectives (Johnson and Turner, 2003; Kelle, 2006; Slife and Gantt, 1999).

However, despite researchers' pluralistic intentions of embracing both the positivist and interpretivist worldviews, most contemporary mixed-methods

approaches do not, in fact, represent both of these worldviews. Rather, they remain entrenched in one worldview or the other. Take, for example, the 2006 document from the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice. One of the key aims of the task force's policy on evidence-based practice was a move toward endorsing a diversity of research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. This move was in contrast to previous proposals which had more narrowly focused on randomized controlled trials and meta-analysis. However, as Wendt and Slife (2007) observed, the task force's proposal places qualitative methods on the bottom of a hierarchy of research methods, ranked according to their rigor and value within a positivistic worldview. Wendt and Slife further argued that by adopting a positivistic worldview, the task force unintentionally made a philosophical (worldview) decision without acknowledging it as such and without offering the philosophical justification necessary to support such a decision. The result of this decision was that the task force endorsed a diversity of *methods* while remaining entrenched within a single *methodology*.

#### *Methods versus Methodologies*

This distinction between methods and methodologies is perhaps worth noting here (cf. Giddings, 2006). For my purposes in this article the term "method" refers to the procedures, techniques, and approaches used to gather, store, analyze, and present research information, whereas "methodology" refers to the study or critique of methods and makes reference to the worldviews which ground such a study or critique. In other words, methods are guided by methodologies, which in turn are guided by the basic fundamental assumptions of a worldview.

For example, a positivist worldview assumes that reality is ultimately material (an ontological assumption) and thus only can be known through sensory observation (an epistemological assumption; Slife and Williams, 1995). This worldview shapes a positivist methodology which values material observability, selecting and developing methods that attend to observables and rejecting methods that do not. This is one reason that most positivistic research methods in psychology rely on operationalism — their worldview and methodology demand that unobservables like thoughts, emotions, personalities, and relationships be translated into observables like questionnaire responses or behaviors if they are to truly be known (Slife, Wiggins, and Graham, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Conversely, an interpretivist worldview assumes that reality is necessarily constituted, at least in part, by interpretation and that it can only be known by attending to

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<sup>2</sup>These phenomena are only "unobservables" in the sense of the material observability valued by positivists. In fact, many interpretivists regard scientific observation as encompassing all human experience, including, but not limited to, sensory impressions. Interpretivists argue that even sensory impressions are experienced interpretively and are thus rooted in interpretive meaning.

interpretive meanings. Thus, an interpretivist methodology selects and develops methods that attend to unobservable meanings, relying on linguistic methods and data (broadly conceived) as the purest representations of meaning. What this means is that methods are *always* shaped and biased by their methodology and worldview (Guba, Lincoln, and Fettermann, 1988).

Because they only attended to methods rather than methodologies, the American Psychological Association task force's (2006) recommendations were mono-methodological in spite of their claim to methodological pluralism. In fact, the mono-methodology of the task force is not unique among mixed-methods approaches. For example, Morgan (1998) demonstrated that mixed-methods studies are guided by a primary or dominant methodology, with the other methodology or methodologies serving a supplementary or subordinate role. Morgan asserted that this methodological dominance is a necessary state of affairs. Likewise, Yanchar and Williams (2006) illustrated how a study's dominant worldview tends to pervade the use and interpretation not only of the dominant method in a mixed-methods study, but also that of the supplementary method. They gave an example of a mixed-methods study by Onwuegbuzie and DaRos-Voseles (2001) in which qualitative data were translated to quantitative data (frequency counts) and were marshaled as support for causal inference. As Yanchar and Williams (2006) observed, this practice not only overlooks some of the greatest potential strengths of qualitative methods (e.g., contextual detail and phenomenological insight), but it also employs them to ends for which they are ill suited (e.g., causal inference).

### *Methodological Monism*

Adhering to only one worldview (and by extension only one methodology) in mixed-methods is not without its consequences. Critics have observed that such an approach at best allows only a limited application of the methods not traditionally associated with the adopted worldview (Slife et al., 2005; Wendt and Slife, 2007; Yanchar, Gantt, and Clay, 2005; Yanchar and Williams, 2006). This is because methods are designed to suit the purposes, values, and assumptions of their original worldview and thus carry into their practical applications these qualities of their native worldview (Guba et al., 1988; Polkinghorne, 1983; Slife and Williams, 1995). For example, the positivist worldview assumes atomism (Slife, 2004): the notion that the basic and essential qualities of a thing are self-contained, meaning that something requires no reference outside of itself for its identity. Based on this assumption, positivist methods are designed to get at these basic and essential self-contained qualities by seeking to isolate the phenomenon of interest from any outside influence. This is because, according to atomism, outside influences are irrelevant and extraneous to a self-contained phenomenon. Conversely, the interpretivist worldview assumes ontological

relationality (Slife, 2004) — the notion that a thing is defined at least in part by its relationships with its context. A child is hyperactive in relation to his calmer peers; a woman is a mother in relation to her child; a table becomes a stepstool in relation to the person standing upon it to reach a light socket. Thus, interpretivist methods are designed to approach a phenomenon within the context of its mutually constitutive relationships by attending to the meanings that arise in these relationships. As these examples illustrate, the respective purposes, values, and assumptions of positivist and interpretivist worldviews often contradict one another. In this manner, many methods from separate worldviews resist assimilation within the umbrella of a single worldview.

Nevertheless, advocates of mixed-methods are silent as to how one would navigate the dilemma between being true to the new method and being true to the dominant worldview. As Yanchar and Williams (2006) observed, when methods *are* included in a foreign worldview they tend to be devalued, distorted, and ill-used because they simply do not make sense in the new worldview. In fact, if methods *are* assimilated into a new worldview they arguably cease to be the same methods because the new worldview demands that they be made to fit a different set of purposes, values, and assumptions (Buchanan, 1992; Morse, 2005). The likely result of these problems is that some methods are left out completely because they are too foreign to the new worldview while others are changed to fit the new worldview.

This outcome is particularly problematic because the goal of mixed-methods is to broaden the useful methods available to researchers rather than to restrict them (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). In other words, rather than expanding our knowledge by approaching a phenomenon from the various angles of multiple methodologies as they intend, mixed-methods researchers are quite likely to do the opposite — they remain mired within a single methodology that makes poor use of alternative methods.

It seems that mixed-methods researchers face a dilemma between uniting multiple methods and maintaining a true methodological pluralism. Mixed-methods advocates want the diversity that is afforded by a plurality of worldviews and they also want to bring the perspectives of these worldviews into some kind of meaningful relationship. How then can we preserve the plurality of worldviews in mixed-methods while retaining sufficient unity to preserve dialogue and relationship? It is this question of the One (unity) and the Many (plurality) that William James addresses in *A Pluralistic Universe*.

### The One, the Many, and William James

In order to understand what William James has to offer in confronting the dilemmas facing mixed-methods we must first step back and examine James's philosophy of pluralism. For James, the question of the One and the Many, or

the question between ontological monism and pluralism, is the central question of philosophy:

If you know whether a man is a decided monist or a decided pluralist, you perhaps know more about the rest of his opinions than if you give him any other name ending in *ist*. To believe in the one or in the many, that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences. (1909/1987, p. 542)

At its heart, this question asks whether reality is ultimately a perfectly united whole with each "part" dissolving into totality (monism), or whether reality is instead made up of distinct and particular parts that are more loosely connected in that each and every part need not cohere perfectly to the others (pluralism).

To use James's terms, monism represents the substance of reality as an "all-form" and pluralism represents it as an "each-form":

The pluralistic view which I prefer to adopt is willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made, and that a distributive form of reality, the *each-form*, is logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the all-form. (p. 645)

According to James, in our experience of the unity of many things in the world, we go too far in extrapolating "that the whole world forms one great fact" (p. 542), one great system. He argued that this leap to absolute monism always goes beyond our empirical experience of particularity in the world because no one has empirical experience of the totality of all that exists. He further asserted that our practical experience of the empirical world actually suggests pluralism as he has described it.

### *Monistic Vicious Intellectualism*

One of the major problems that James noted in the clash between monism and pluralism involves matters of semantics. Specifically, James accused monists of "vicious intellectualism," which he defined as "*the treating of a name as excluding from the fact named what the name's definition fails positively to include*" (p. 657). He noted that the monists of his day tended to apply the label "one" to things that might otherwise appear to be "many" (e.g., referring to a set of variables as "interdependent" rather than "independent"), and based on this relabeling then assume that they had established the validity of monistic unity. The fear for these monists was that the name "independent" would preclude any relationship among variables and their hope was that the name "interdependent" would preclude any fundamental distinction among them. This strict reliance on semantic meanings furthered the tendency of monists to insist on the transcendental unity of all that exists, to the exclusion of any ultimate par-

ticularity or individuality — if they could point to *any* relationship implied in the names labeling given phenomena, they could dismiss any particularity that we encounter empirically as epiphenomenal. Likewise, monists insisted that any pluralistic claim of multiplicity and particularity ultimately leads to the obliteration of any relationship among particulars because they took the semantic meanings of individuality and unity to be inherently contradictory. James criticized this claim, arguing that monists err in their assumption that relationships point toward absolute oneness and away from particularity.

It is this notion of absolutism that characterizes what James found problematic in vicious intellectualism. That is, monists treated the world as if it is either absolutely one or absolutely many without exception, creating a false either/or dichotomy. James is clear that claims of absolute unity are problematic because they always go beyond our limited empirical experience. However, for James, absolute particularity is equally problematic because it treats phenomena as hermetically sealed atoms (i.e., the atomism of positivism) that can only be related by some “external go-between” (p. 662). In other words, absolute particularity ignores our empirical experience of phenomena having meaningful relationships.

### *Monistic Universalism*

The absolutism that James observed in his day seems to reverberate in the modern dilemmas facing mixed-methods advocates. In current mixed-methods practices worldviews appear to function as monistic systems. That is, a worldview is taken to subsume anything with which it is in relation, including other worldviews. In this sense, worldviews are taken to have universal application. This universalism creates the monistic demand that a worldview *must* apply to everything, rather than the pluralistic contention that a worldview *may* apply in any given situation. For anything to remain outside of the worldview would violate universalism. This is what happened in the mixed-methods study by Onwuegbuzie and DaVos–Roseles (2001) mentioned above — they assumed that they *must* make their qualitative methods fit with their dominant positivist methodology. Thus they converted their qualitative data to numerical representations and used these data for causal inference, the positivist worldview subsuming or excluding what the interpretivist worldview might otherwise have offered.

However, James argued that we need not assume the monistic universalism of worldviews. Contrasting the intellectualist all-or-none of monism, James explained that “pluralism stand[s] out for the legitimacy of the notion of some: each part of the world is in some ways connected, in some ways not connected with its other parts” (1909/1987, p. 666). In other words, the world is neither absolutely connected nor is the world absolutely fragmented into particular parts. The implication of this “notion of some” is that we should attend to both the unity and the particularity in our experience — to dismiss one or the other



would be to fall prey to a hasty universalism. Thus, James suggested that if worldviews are taken as incomplete and provisional rather than as complete and universal they can then be related in a way that preserves their particularity or "otherness" while at the same time allowing for meaningful contact and dialogue between them; they can have points of unity and relationship, but also maintain points of uniqueness.

### *Monistic Abstractionism*

One of the reasons, however, that it is so easy for monists to miss this "notion of some" and to fall into the universalism of worldviews, James argued, is because monists treat worldviews as abstractions. He explained, "Neither abstract oneness nor abstract independence exists; only concrete real things exist" (p. 656). What James meant by this is that oneness and independence are only *conceptually* distinct — their categorization and theoretical definitions cast them as separate in abstraction, but in the flux and flow of our actual lived experience oneness and independence overlap and emerge within the same reality. That is, we experience the world in terms of particularity *and* unity, parts *and* whole, One *and* Many. For example, when we hear the melody of a song we experience the flowing relationship of one note to the next, unified as a single melody, but we can also distinguish each particular note from the next. We do not experience either one melody or many notes; rather, we experience both. Each particular note is not, however, a self-contained absolute or abstracted note. All notes are experiences as "in relation to" other notes (as are words in language), and as such are mutually constitutive of one another — separate but related.

However, because abstraction artificially separates and extracts these overlapping layers of our experience (e.g., one *and* many) from their lived context, relying on abstractions can create the illusion that worldviews, taken as abstractions, are actually independent of any relationship to one another. When we treat worldviews as if they are independent of one another they can appear to be ontologically self-sufficient, requiring no reference to other worldviews and applying universally to all situations. Thus, in the abstract, positivism and interpretivism can each appear to be entirely self-sufficient in universally accounting for all phenomena. Likewise, abstractionism opens the door to the logic of vicious intellectualism because it treats worldviews as nothing more or less than their abstract theoretical definitions.

If abstractionism has such problematic consequences, it creates a troubling situation for both interpretivist and positivist methodologies because the practice of research within either worldview requires a certain degree of abstraction. In fact, both worldviews ultimately produce abstractions from our experiences of the world, be they the linguistic themes of qualitative research or the mathe-

matical patterns of quantitative research. Rather than accounting for all things at all time in all places, research methods focus in on and illuminate particular phenomena within a given scope. Furthermore, research methods are not intended to produce the concrete lived realities that they are investigating; they are intended to produce descriptions or reductions of the phenomenon of interest. The methods of the depression researcher do not ultimately produce actual depression (at least one would hope), but instead they produce accounts of depression either in ordinary language or the language of numbers. Such accounts are abstractions that describe key features of depression, but they are not depression itself.

Fortunately, abstractions have an important role to play in Jamesian pluralism, despite their limitations. In a flourish of metaphor, James explains:

Abstract concepts are but as flowers gathered, they are only moments dipped out from the stream of time, snap-shots taken . . . at a life that in its original coming is continuous. Useful as they are as samples of the garden, or to re-enter the stream with, or to insert in our revolving lantern, they have no value but these practical values. You cannot explain by them what makes any single phenomenon be or go — you merely dot out the path of appearances which it traverses. (pp. 735–736)

Hence, abstractions are useful inasmuch as they point us back to the practical world of lived experience. Where abstractions can get us into trouble is when we reify them, or take them to be reality itself rather than the thin “snap-shots” of reality that James described. Thus, as abstractions, qualitative and quantitative methodologies, along with their worldviews and the research findings that emerge from these approaches, can serve as tools for getting at phenomena of the real world, but they can never fully capture these phenomena. In other words, these worldviews and methodologies can represent the truth of the real world just as a photograph or painting might, but they are always limited to a degree of “thinness” as they necessarily fall short of representing the entire scope of “thick” dynamic richness and complexity that makes up our world of experience.

### Jamesian Methodological Pluralism

How then would a true methodological pluralism in the tradition of William James avoid the monistic pitfalls of vicious intellectualism, universalism, and abstractionism? Allow me to address this issue by outlining several key features of a true Jamesian methodological pluralism, highlighting the ways this pluralism differs from traditional mixed-methods approaches.

*Feature 1: A worldview requires a worldviewer.* At its most basic level, this feature points to James’s insistence that we cannot ultimately separate our explanations of the world from our actual experience of it. This means that worldviews are always views of the world for a particular person situated in a lived experiential

world of time, space, and culture. Our explanations and understandings of the world arise from and are reflections of that experience. However, if we try to abstract worldviews from situated worldviewers, this can create the monistic illusion that worldviews do not belong to any particular context or person and can thus be universally applied, regardless of context. Thus, it is crucial to James that we recognize that worldviews, even in the abstract, ultimately have roots in the lived experience of particular worldviewers.

For James, worldviews emerge and take hold because they fit our lived world in some way — they make sense of something or do something useful. The positivist and interpretivist worldviews each have certainly offered illumination and utility to psychologists and other social scientists in their efforts to understand and intervene in the social world. Because worldviews such as these are tied so closely to our experience of the world, they can, for many people, easily become synonymous with the world itself — as if there were no other valid worldview — another version of monistic universalism.

Jamesian methodological pluralism, on the other hand, requires that researchers be aware that they are necessarily situated in a particular worldview that is shaped and colored by their particular contexts, and that there are worthwhile worldviews other than their own. As I will discuss further below, this does not mean that we cannot try on other perspectives and view the world differently. It does mean, however, that we are always necessarily situated within some worldview and that we are likely to prefer certain views of the world with their particular values. In this way worldviews prove to be “sticky.” That is to say, even when we consider other perspectives we are likely to play favorites to certain ways of seeing the world, to certain values, and to certain methodologies.

Perhaps a helpful illustration of the “stickiness” of worldviews comes as we consider how worldviews are similar to cultures. Each of us is native to a particular culture that is shaped by nationality, region, community, and family, with their unique traditions, customs, practices, values, and beliefs. When we encounter cultures that are different in some way from our native cultures we usually view these differences from our native perspective — *they* are different, perhaps even strange or bad. Nevertheless, a person may choose to participate in a different culture or to adopt new cultural practices, but such changes often require concerted effort as our native practices “stick” to us and come more naturally than do the new practices. Likewise, scientific worldviews can be seen as a part of researchers’ cultures with scientists being “native” to a particular worldview. The positivist may be intrigued by her interpretivist colleague’s worldview and even try to adopt some interpretivist practices, but she is likely, at least initially, to approach these practices with a positivist slant.

*Feature 2: Worldviews have a particularity.* James was insistent that monism threatens individuality and particularity and that pluralism better accounts for

the variety and uniqueness we encounter in the world. This variety extends to variety in worldviews and their associated methodologies, which are particular and necessarily different from one another. To be sure, for James worldviews are always in relation to one another, but this does not mean that they are the same. Researchers can guard the particularity of worldviews by recognizing and acknowledging the limits of worldviews, including their values, assumptions, purposes, and methods. This does not mean that researchers need to be methodologically rigid, but rather it means that they should recognize when they are stepping outside of the bounds of a given worldview and how that step places them in different territory.

One way that the differences from one worldview to the next become clear is in the either/or opposition that frequently arises between worldviews. For example, if a mixed-methods study includes the quantitative comparison of two groups, the researcher may have certain decisions to make regarding the value of a double-blind for the study. The positivist worldview would direct the researcher to minimize the influence of interpretation by researchers and subjects by imposing the double blind, whereas the interpretivist worldview would value these interpretations and want to understand them, thus opting out of the double-blind. The researcher here needs to recognize that the decision whether or not to employ a double-blind is also the decision to favor one worldview over the other. Each worldview is shaped and limited by its particular values. Thus, the decision of objectivity vs. interpretation cannot satisfy both worldviews simultaneously because each is opposed in its values on this issue.

*Feature 3: Because worldviews are provisional rather than universal in methodological pluralism, researchers are able and even expected to try out alternative worldviews, methodologies, and methods when the limits of their current approach do not accommodate promising lines of investigation.* James realized that the world of our experience always overflows the frameworks through which we try to capture that experience. He contended that we should never treat these frameworks as sufficient in and of themselves to explain the world. The implication of this claim is not only that our worldviews are limited and provisional, but also that we can approach our experience and explanations of that experience from many different worldviews.

Thus, according to James's pluralism, the researcher in the above example should be able to approach the decision whether or not to use a double-blind by "trying on" the perspectives of both positivist and interpretivist worldviews and considering which choice is most likely to illuminate the object of study. Although researchers cannot choose both worldviews simultaneously, they *can* have access to each worldview in turn, taking into account their "stickiness" and weighing the pragmatic value of what each has to offer. The pluralism in this instance comes in researchers' ability to consider multiple worldviews as they approach their object of study, rather than in trying to simultaneously

apply both worldviews. Mixed-methods researchers could reflect this pluralism by making more explicit these sorts of worldview confrontations that arise in their research processes, acknowledging the limits and possible contributions of each worldview to the problem in question, and outlining their rationale as they make methodological decisions that ultimately show an awareness of “stickiness” and favor one particular perspective.

*Feature 4: Shifting between worldviews requires that researchers have an awareness of the differences between worldviews in order to avoid simply imposing the old worldview on a different set of methods.* To have an awareness of differences between worldviews ultimately means that researchers need to understand, at least to some degree, the philosophies, values, and assumptions that drive their methods. That is to say, it is not enough for researchers to understand the methods that they are using, but they also need to understand the methodologies that inform those methods. To illustrate the problem of focusing on methods while ignoring methodologies, nursing researcher Lynne S. Giddings (2006) related the following scenario:

A Masters student from a science department who was using a mixed-methods design for her dissertation research (survey and semi-structured interviews) was overheard saying to a faculty member after a research forum in which a hermeneutic phenomenologist had presented her work: “You know, I don’t know what they are going on about. Why they go on into all that philosophical and methodological stuff. I’m doing qualitative research and it is pretty straightforward . . . doesn’t need all that.” . . . Both walked away looking somewhat satisfied and somewhat bemused. (p. 201)

In this scenario the student presumed that “all that philosophical and methodological stuff” was unnecessary because hermeneutic phenomenology in her mind was just another qualitative method along the same lines as the semi-structured interviews that she was conducting. In fact, although both methods are qualitative in name, methodologically they are quite diverse. By ignoring the methodological philosophies, values, and assumptions implied in these methods, the student ended up misunderstanding hermeneutic phenomenology as well as what it might add to her methodological arsenal.

Perhaps an important flaw in this student’s approach is that she not only failed to understand what the alternative methodology *is*, but also that she failed to understand what her own methodology *is not*. That is, she did not recognize how her own methodology differs from that of hermeneutic phenomenology, and thus unknowingly imposed upon it her current worldview rather than recognizing an alternative. In James’s pluralism the boundaries of worldviews become most clear as they are in dialectical tension with other worldviews — when we can begin to define a worldview in terms of what it is not (an alternative) as well as what it is. Thus, for James, the best way this student can understand the boundaries and limits of her own worldview would be to familiarize herself with an alternative worldview, seeking to understand how it

is “other” from her own worldview.<sup>3</sup> In the process of discovering the “otherness” of an alternative, she would be likely to also discover implicit assumptions and values in her current approach that only become apparent to her as they contrast with differing assumptions and values.

A methodological pluralist in the tradition of William James, then, would be well versed in multiple methodologies and not merely in multiple methods. This methodological awareness would allow pluralists to recognize the boundaries of methodologies as well as tensions between them that may arise as they are brought into relationship. Not only would this awareness help pluralists to preserve the “otherness” of multiple worldviews, but it would also help them to avoid imposing a single worldview on multiple methods. Indeed, reports of methodologically pluralistic experiments would likely include an explicit discussion of the methodologies involved in the study, including the methodologies’ assumptions and values as well as how each methodology approaches the object of study in a way that is truly “other” from its counterpart. Such a discussion would provide methodological transparency as well as justification for using multiple methodologies.

*Feature 5: The choice of methodology should be guided by the object of study and not by an abstract set of supposedly universal research principles or values.* According to this feature of pluralism, when researchers approach an object of study, they should do so with initial openness to a wide variety of methodologies and methods for dealing with the problem of interest. Although researchers are likely to approach a problem most naturally from their “native” worldview, pluralists should strive to consider the problem from a variety of worldviews, examining what each worldview might contribute in solving the problem and illuminating the object of study. In fact, pluralists would avoid aligning themselves with a particular methodology (e.g., quantitative researcher, qualitative researcher, or even mixed-methods researcher) because such an alignment would assume a “best” methodology at the outset of a study, regardless of its fit to the object of study.

There is a sense that pluralism is itself a worldview, contrasting with monistic worldviews. However, the point for James is not that pluralism is *de facto* the “best” worldview — even here James was insistent that his preference for pluralism is that he finds it to make the best sense of the world as we experience it. It is less important, according to James, that the world conform to our abstractions of it and more important that our abstractions give way to the world of our experience. Thus, worldviews, including pluralism, serve the pluralist as tools which can aid researchers, albeit imperfectly, to illuminate or “get at” an object of study.

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<sup>3</sup>These boundaries and limits are not ontological boundaries — they do not separate the “inside” of a self-contained worldview from its unrelated “outside.” Rather, they are relational boundaries that indicate the particularities of each worldview as they are in contrasting relationship to one another.

Furthermore, James anticipated that any attempt to capture a phenomenon would always be incomplete and open to further illumination from other worldviews:

Take any concrete finite thing and try to hold it fast. You cannot, for so held, it proves not to be concrete at all, but an arbitrary extract or abstract which you have made from the remainder of empirical reality. The rest of things invades and overflows both it and you together, and defeats your rash attempt. Any partial view whatever of the world tears the part out of its relations, leaves out some truth concerning it, is untrue of it, falsifies it. The full truth about anything involves more than that thing. (1909/1987, p. 670)

Because our view, according to James, is always partial, it is important for researchers to persistently consider multiple perspectives, as no one perspective provides “the full truth about anything.”

*Feature 6: A plurality of worldviews requires a community of worldviewers.* Although researchers can try out different assumptions and perspectives, they are themselves each contextually situated (as *Feature 1* suggests) and thus limited in the perspectives available to them. Researchers are prone to default to their “sticky” native worldview and even when they do consider other worldviews, they are nevertheless unable to access every worldview. The hermeneutic metaphor of the horizon is an apt illustration of the pluralist’s contextual limitations: as one moves toward the horizon, new vistas open to view as others recede out of view (Gadamer, 1960/2004). In a similar way, our worldviews are always incomplete and partial, never simultaneously comprehending the whole of the world.

However, James contended that our individual views of the world overlap and merge with others’ worldviews in many important ways, and yet remain unique and particular in other ways. A person standing ahead of me can see beyond my horizon and, looking behind us, I can see what has receded from his view. Because we both bring diverse views to the common ground that we share, we can attempt to communicate to one another what is beyond the others’ view as well as a different perspective on our common ground. Thus, it is in community with other worldviewers that we are able to encounter other worldviews and expand our own limited horizons.

In this sense, methodological pluralism is not unlike the classic Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant, each man touching a different part of the elephant and coming to a different conclusion about what an elephant is. The elephant’s tail is perceived as a rope, its side a wall, its trunk a snake, its leg a tree trunk, its ear a fan, and its tusk a spear. In the parable each man believes the others to be mistaken, presuming that he grasps the whole of what the elephant is when, in fact, his limited and partial investigation obscures the truth of the whole elephant. In fact, each man is in some ways right and in other ways wrong as each of their descriptions only applies to the elephant in limited ways.

The point here for a Jamesian pluralism is not that our limited worldviews doom us to misperceive the world, but rather the point is that we need to recognize our limitations and be willing to explore the worldviews that others can contribute to our own. Indeed, differences and disagreements between worldviews become crucial as we strive to make sense of the thick complexity of our world of experience. This is not to say that James would have us embrace any and all worldviews. Rather, James's pragmatism demands that we attend to those worldviews that show promising utility in truthfully illuminating the world of experience. Just as one man should hold fast that, according to his experience, the elephant's tail is like a rope and unlike a spear, he might remain open and curious to how an elephant may nevertheless have spear-like qualities. Likewise, researchers exploring a phenomenon from different worldviews may come to very different and even seemingly contradictory conclusions about the phenomenon. James would have us grapple with how each conclusion may shed light on the truth of the phenomenon and even how together they may give us a fuller sense of the truth of the whole, despite their apparent contradictions.

*Feature 7: Dialogue (as opposed to monologue) can bring a plurality of worldviews into rich relationship.* The undercurrent of monism in mixed-methods research has led mixed-methods theorists to take a monological approach to worldviews and methodologies, meaning that ultimately everything must be unified within a single grand worldview. This monological tendency has proven to be problematic for mixed-methods as much of what mixed-methods researchers hope to unite, multiple methodologies, contradict one another — they resist a single or mono-logic. However, in a Jamesian methodological pluralism dialogue is key to bringing opposed and even contradictory worldviews and methodologies into meaningful relationship. Dialogue is the notion of multiple voices, multiple accounts of the world. Because no one account or worldview bears the burden of encompassing all truth about the world within its single logic, it is possible for worldviews and methodologies to have meaningful relationships outside of logical consistency. That is, they can find relationship in contrast or opposition as well as in comparison as communities of researchers dialogue from their varied worldviews.

For methodologically pluralistic dialogue to occur within and across our research communities, we need to be constantly aware of our limited perspectives and seek out worldviews that are “other” than our own, inasmuch as they illuminate truth about the world. Such an attitude requires that we be humble, recognizing that our own worldviews are always provisional and incomplete and that we can always learn from the worldview of another. Dialogue of this sort would likely lead to collaboration by researchers who are “natives” to different methodological worldviews, each contributing and guarding the uniqueness of one worldview while discovering and appreciating the “otherness” of an



alternative. Likewise, dialogue may reveal points at which worldviews cohere — how the elephant is both rope-like and spear-like.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, methodological pluralism for William James must guard against the monistic absolutism that has plagued mixed-methods approaches that base themselves in a single worldview. A true pluralism can be achieved when researchers treat their worldviews and methodologies as limited and provisional. Likewise, researchers need to recognize that worldviews other than their own native worldview may be both helpful and necessary in making sense of their phenomenon of interest. By seeking out the perspective of multiple worldviews through dialogue and collaboration with researchers of diverse methodological backgrounds, researchers are more likely to preserve the “otherness” of alternative worldviews and reap the benefits of a plurality of methodologies.

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