

We Must Build Spaces That Love Us: Fostering Healing Through a Critical Quantitative Collective

Quant for What? Collective with contributions from Shanyce L. Campbell, Alexis E. Hunter, Claire L. Mackevicius, Sarah Peko-Spicer, Paris Wicker

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Abstract

The quantitative research methods dominating educational policy were developed to serve whiteness and continue to reinforce racism and exclusion against marginalized communities. However, through collective (re)membering, these methods can be used for liberatory ends but must be engaged through a healing praxis rooted in (un)learning, refusing, and dreaming. We draw on African diasporic traditions of call and response through a collective autoethnographic epistolary to explore Quant for What?, a critical quantitative convening series, as an exemplar of community healing. We conclude with a community invitation, highlighting how convenings can provide deep healing, foster community, and manifest transformation.

Keywords: *critical quantitative methods, community healing, call and response*

Introduction

For many people, when asked a mathematical question or to engage in a reading that leans on quantitative methods, their body, mind, and spirit simultaneously respond negatively. The body may tense up. The mind may go blank. And the spirit begins to doubt its innermost knowings. These reactions are not happenstance or individual but were purposefully created to challenge non-Eurocentric knowledge traditions to maintain a white culture around math knowledge and use. We can trace the development of a white culture in

mathematics to as early as the 17th century, where influential leaders of statistical methods such as Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, and Ronald A. Fisher, developed and used quantitative methods to promote eugenics, a belief and practice that sought to racially improve people through *planned breeding* (Kevles, 1995). The (mis)use of statistics in their work created scientific legitimacy to racist ideologies, leading to harmful policies such as forced sterilizations, involuntary institutionalization, and stigmatization (NHGRI, 2022; Zuberi, 2001; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Today, statistical methods continue to be weaponized against marginalized communities and are taught and used in ways that reinforce racism and exclusion. Walk into almost any statistics course across disciplines, and you will find teaching void of any discussions of its racist history. The absence of historicizing quantitative methods solidifies lies under the guise of telling an ‘objective truth’ and it upholds the history of violence that further stigmatizes groups of people. Consider, for example, the policies, news articles, and social conversations about the perceived difference between what Black, Latinx, and Native American children know compared to white children using white-normed standardized tests. Terms like “Black-white achievement gap” or “Latino-white achievement gap” are used to suggest that Black and Latinx children are incapable of the intelligence deemed possible for white children. This racialized stigmatization has led to overidentification of Black and Latinx children into special education (Blanchett & Sealey, 2016; Bell et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2016; Ford & Russo, 2016), the under-enrollment in advanced courses despite similar achievement metrics as white students (Francis et al., 2019; Oakes, 2005; Tyson, 2011), and ultimately the fortification of the school-prison nexus (Sojoyner, 2013).

Despite the oppressive use of quantitative methods by some, there have always been those of us who recognize a liberatory potential of these methods (Du Bois, 1899; Garcia et al., 2018; Stage, 2007). Perhaps that is because in the spirit of (re)membering¹, our spirits connect to the mathematicians in our lineages who cultivated

¹ Following Dillard (2021), “(re)membering” is a process of reconnecting us back to our ancestral knowledges, cultures, and identities as a way of resisting the logics that have been imposed on us. Dillard marshals the prefix (re) to (re)mind us that in our going back to reclaim histories, knowledges or ways of being that have been forgotten, we are affirming that we “have inherently and always existed as brilliant holders of knowledge, culture, and humanity” (p. xv).

lands, built homes, created recipes with great precision, and who braided hair using other-worldly fractals. As critical scholars continue to use quantitative methods for liberatory ends, we believe they should do so in a community that engages deeply in (un)learning, refusing, and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Gonzales & Shotton, 2022).

In this paper, we offer reflections on how to plant the seeds for the collective work necessary to build towards liberatory possibilities by centering the role community healing can play in supporting our (un)learning², refusing, and freedom dreaming. We use *Quant for What?*, a critical quantitative convening series and collective as an exemplar to illustrate what was made possible through allowing a collective to “shift bodies, minds, and spirits from a status of suffering to repair and create opportunities to evolve” as scholars who use quantitative methods (Chioneso et al., 2020, p. 98). Because of the contextual, cultural, and collective nature of healing (Henderson et al., 2021), we define community healing in quantitative spaces as a process of collectively restoring wholeness from mathematical stigmas associated with the white supremacist ways that numbers have been wielded to oppress and subjugate people.

The rest of this piece proceeds as follows: we begin by describing how situating the convenings in collective memory allowed for individual and collective healing praxes to emerge organically. Next, we describe our approach to collective autoethnography through a call-and-response epistolary, which we follow with the letters we exchanged. Finally, we conclude with a call to you,

² Unlearning refers to the “reflexive process of identifying ways our conceptualizations of the world are unselfconsciously bounded and invisibly contingent” (Lawhon et al., 2016). We use the prefix “(un)” to emphasize that unlearning requires a “radical break” with prior ways of knowing (Rushmer & Davies, 2004) in order to 1) learn and adopt new knowledge and practices and 2) to “learn to (re)member the things we have learned to forget” (Dillard, 2021, p. 5).

the community, to join us in healing, (re)membering, dreaming, resting, seeding, watering, and caretaking.

Quant for What? Background

Quant for What? convenings were a response to the methodological, pedagogical, and spiritual harms inflicted by white quantitative logics. These harms include the marginalization of communities of colors' ways of knowing through white methodologies; the ahistorical and decontextualized ways of teaching quantitative methods; and the fractured connection of the mind from the body and spirit of those engaging in quantitative work. The gatherings were created as spaces of resistance and repair, intentionally designed to heal the wounds left by extractive, objectifying, and disembodied logics. Simply put, we were trying to facilitate the suturing of the mind back to its body and spirit (bodymindspirit), which quantitative fields tend to dismember in the name of objectivity (see hooks, 1994; Lara, 2002; Dillard, 2021; Cariaga, 2019).

To engage in a healing praxis, a group of six early-career scholars (three of whom are co-authors for this article) came together to design and develop the four-part convening series "Quant for What: Dreaming Toward Quantitative Paradigms for Anti-Racist Transformation," thematically anchored on (un)learning, healing, and dreaming. Over the summer and fall of 2022, 30 early-career scholars (including graduate students) were invited to participate in the series with the aim of creating space to wrestle with quantitative philosophies, applications, and pedagogy as we engage with communities of color in building a new liberatory paradigm for quantitative education research and teaching.

Across (un)learning, healing, and dreaming themes, the convening sessions were oriented around considering:

1. What are our freedom dreams for liberatory quantitative methodologies?
2. What do quantitative methods have to offer, as a theory of action, toward racial justice and transformation in education?
3. How do we (re)imagine the ways we fund, teach, partner, and use quantitative research to achieve these ends?

The first three sessions, held virtually over several months, brought participants and invited speakers together to deepen (un)learning of histories and dominant paradigms in quantitative methods, engage in reflexive practices to situate ourselves, and take time and space to enter into individual and collective healing processes. In the fourth session, we gathered in person and began orienting towards building, dreaming, and growing. To paraphrase Robin Kelley, "unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the [convening] in the world won't bring about our liberation" (Kelley, 2002, p. 198). During the in-person working sessions, seeds were planted and blossomed into the Quant for What? community that continues to deepen and grow.

Our Approach: A Collective Autoethnographic Epistolary

To understand the ways the convenings were designed, knowingly and unknowingly, to center healing and foster long-lasting community, we use collective autoethnography through an epistolary (letter-writing). Unlike traditional autoethnography, which centers a single author's voice, collective autoethnography foregrounds dialogue, relational meaning-making, and the co-construction of knowledge throughout the research process (Noel et al., 2023; Wężniejewska et al., 2019). As a collective autoethnographic approach, which allows for iterative shared meaning-making (Noel et al., 2023), we

organically engaged in a collaborative spirit-writing process that pushed each other’s thinking towards a better understanding of healing, resistance, and possibilities for critical quantitative methods (Alexander & Weems, 2025). We engaged in collective autoethnography through an epistolary between the co-authors and the larger quantitative community to explore our shared experiences as organizers and participants of the convening series.

Our dialogue across the letters began with a Zoom meeting as a group of co-authors to reflect on how healing showed up in the ways we engaged with Quant for What? We then met in pairs (two co-organizers and two participants) and recorded our conversations as data that guided the form of the letter exchange we share here. The letters we exchanged draw on call and response, a practice rooted in African diasporic ways of being and knowing, expressed through spirituals, play, and work songs (Sale, 1992). The practice “establish[es] co-constructed rapport between speakers” (Lee & Majors, 2003, p. 53), essential for communal healing. As Black women and women of color have done in the academy (see Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Porter et al., 2020), this back-and-forth dialogue form is a way to more authentically share and reflect on our experiences and engage in relational liberatory discourses (Bhattacharya, 2016).

As part of this process, we reflected individually and collectively on moments of clarity and insight as we read our conversation transcripts—some of which we include verbatim in our letters. We met again on Zoom to discuss the first “We Call” and “We Respond” exchange and then wrote an additional “We Respond” letter. The first letter was written by a pair of organizing authors, the second letter was a response written by a pair of Collective participants, and the third letter came again from two organizers as a response to the participants. Finally, we met on Zoom again to reflect on the

process and generate the broader invitations that we share with you, our audience, in our concluding community call to encourage centering healing in critical quantitative communities to foster freedom dreams. We visualize this exchange in Figure 1. Our letters are oriented around three prompts:

1. What do you create when you need to heal from quantitative traumas?
2. How can convenings center the bodymindspirit and allow for healing?
3. Might healing come from an invitation into the unknown?

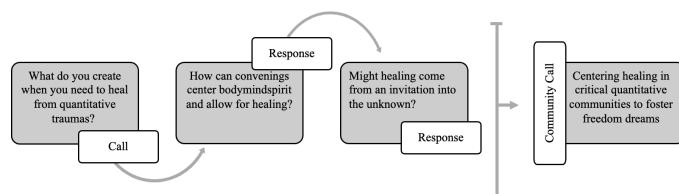


Figure 1
Structure of Call & Response Epistolary

We Call:

What do you create when you need to heal from quantitative traumas?

Dear Paris and Alexis,

We are writing to provide some texture around our intentions as co-organizers of Quant for What?, which you both experienced. Our hope is that you will come to see and understand ways that care, intentionality, and love anchored our design. When Quant for What? was just a seed in our minds, we were living in an unreality. It was the summer of 2020 and as the world was crumbling around us, we were grasping for glimpses of community. We found it in unexpected places—locked arm-in-arm with strangers at protests, through mutual aid

networks that cropped up in the places we lived, in COVID pods. And yet, we didn't find it in our academic homes—the places we spent most of our time—in ways we might have hoped.

So, we tried to create it. Five of us organizers were navigating through or just past our PhD programs, muddling on our orientations and approaches to applying methods to ask the kinds of questions we thought were worth asking. We started with reading groups among friends, which ever so slowly expanded to friends of friends. We hadn't met Shanyce yet, but in sharing stories, we soon learned that she was also questioning quantitative methods in her fourth year as an assistant professor. As our roots grew wide, Quant for What? took hold. Along with our co-organizers, we began working to plan three virtual and one in-person collective-building convenings meant to plant the seeds for a humanizing, liberatory research paradigm in quantitative education research. We centered these convenings on three actions necessary for building on the *ashes of a quantitative-led nightmare* (Kelley, 2002): (un)learning, healing, and dreaming.

We invited you both along with more than thirty other people—many of them graduate students or early career professionals, like us—to join us in these convenings. I'm not sure if you all remember, but rather than dive into technical conversations about this method or that, we studied and struggled together over excerpts from Undrowned, Emergent Strategy, Mutual Aid, and the like. We heard about the real harms of quantitative research from community members. We talked about our math trauma. We had Beyoncé dance breaks. We power-mapped. We had one *beautiful* meal that still brings us to tears when we think about it for too long, where Shanyce told us all: “When you build with love, only love returns.”

Now, we are muddling together to reflect on the role healing played in our initial convenings. We

find ourselves sitting outside by a birch tree, watching it shed its bark, on its own continuous regrowth and healing journey. In reminding ourselves of how the Quant for What? convenings felt, we happened upon the memos the co-organizers wrote to each other following a healing session after our first convening. We were struck by an observation one of our co-organizers made:

*Even in the divergent lived experiences in our groups, people were finding ways to relate around the discontent with the status quo of their institutions. I don't totally love the mutual enemy as a **lone point of departure**, but it is what I think brings a lot of us together into this space. I'm hoping the tone shifts from there to then focus less on what we are **fleeing from** and more of what we are **fleeing toward**.*

For the two of us, Quant for What?, at its origin, was most concretely fleeing *from*. Our first planning sessions involved thinking of experiences in academic and conference settings that did not keep us or our friends whole. We committed to doing the opposite, and made some specific intentional moves in the spirit of resistance as a form of collective healing:

Resisting the grind

We had grown weary of the conference grind: long days packed with sessions, one right after the other, a 72-hour whirlwind. Full of talks, with little time to rest, reflect, or discuss. A growling stomach as you rush to your next session. So many social gatherings are scattered across hotels that you never spend quite enough time with the people you came to see. So instead, we paced ourselves. We encouraged you to listen to your bodymindspirit and give it what it needed: connection, rest, time to reflect, movement, food, laughter. We designed our convenings to allow everyone to attend to these needs. Our four convenings spanned across

months, with space to reflect and connect in between. For each of our three virtual convenings, we sent everyone GrubHub gift cards to ensure that people had lunch taken care of. At the in-person convening, we provided meals and made sure our meeting space was stocked with fruit, crackers, and little sweet treats. With food in our bellies and room to breathe, we hoped that everyone could dive deeply and fully into the purpose of our collective gathering. We built time into the virtual and in-person days for folks to connect with each other and to rest. We started our days with breathing exercises and seated yoga. We ended our in-person convening with joyful music and dancing all the way to the bus and then on it.

Resisting performativity

Who among us hasn't griped about the performance of conferences? At one point or another, we had all tried to put on the show-worn the outfit, said the buzzwords, thanked a peer for the question that was really more of a barb, and nodded along to talks that we didn't understand. And we knew it was exhausting. So, at Quant for What?, we encouraged everyone to show up as they are. To not worry about presenting or saying the right thing. To just be. And we did our best to model that. It's hard to remember all the ways we tried to do this, but we do remember as the in-person convening approached, we told all Quant for What? members to attend wearing whatever made them feel most like themselves. We shared examples of what we would be wearing: colorful jumpsuits, comfy leggings, jeans and a tee. We also modeled this through our communication: we joked around, laughed a lot, paused to make sure folks were still with us. We hoped, in doing so, we could ease conference anxiety and welcome comfort in self-expression.

Resisting COVID defeatism

At the time, we began to see academic spaces around us drop any form of COVID safety measures. We knew this inherently excluded some people from being in community and riddled others with so much anxiety about getting sick that they might struggle to be present. So instead, we took the known necessary precautions to safely gather 35 people from across the U.S. People were asked to test before traveling and when they arrived in their hotel room, they received additional tests to take before joining the convening, as well as masks to wear while we were together inside. Had anyone been or got sick, we were ready to take care: we had plans for making sure meals and medication would get to their hotel room, and that they would have someone nearby helping them navigate illness. We had tears in our eyes when, at the final dinner, a participant shared how these precautions allowed them to be at ease that weekend.

Resisting transactional support

We knew that we would need sponsorship to conduct an in-person convening that was financially accessible for all participants. Although we had many conversations about *who* to ask for sponsorship, our conversation about *who not* to ask was brief. You see, five of us had some affiliation with Northwestern University—a place that had been welcoming and generative for some and hostile and demoralizing to others. We were confident that we could secure money from Northwestern, but once Shanyce asked us, “Do you really want to accept money from places that traumatized you? Places that will expect something in return?” We knew that this path was also something to flee from. In that meeting, we decided not to ask the university for funds. This freed us from navigating continued engagement with an institution that had done us harm. It provided us with something of our own, to

cultivate, that we didn't have to worry would be claimed by an institution. And we didn't suffer financially by resisting transactional support. Instead, we worked with organizations that honored our humanity and understood our vision.

We could go on and on, but perhaps it's best to stop here and leave you with (drumroll) a quote. We don't know if you remember, but we opened the in-person convening with this quote that one of our co-organizers selected from *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (Angelou, 1994): "If I am careful about the kinds of seeds I plant, about their potency and nature, I can, within reason, trust my expectations [that what I plant will take root and grow.]"

We *think* we were pretty careful. So, what took root for y'all?

With curiosity,

Claire & Sarah

We Respond:

How can convenings center the bodymindspirit and allow for healing?

Dear Claire and Sarah,

On a cloudy and unseasonably cool day in Buffalo, we (Alexis and Paris) met at a cafe, nearly one and a half years after meeting for the first time at the 2022 Collective convening, where we both gravitated towards the healing subcommittee efforts. In Figure 2, we share an image from our first meeting during the Quant for What? convening (left), and an image from our meeting to reflect on our healing (right). Once strangers, turned collaborators, and now friends. After hugs and small talk, we sat at a wooden high-top table for two, ordered warm drinks and lunch, and

caught up on life. We then talked about our experience with Quant for What? The conversation that flowed was an opportunity to (re)member, both in the traditional sense of recalling into awareness our experiences at the convening, but also in alignment with Black and Indigenous notions of re-membering as a decolonizing project of putting back together the ancestral memories, knowledges, and ways of being that were broken (Dillard, 2015; Yu et al., 2022). Unlike many places within the academy that only leave ashes in its wake, the seeds of healing that were planted at the convening were so instrumental for our own holistic socialization through the academy.



Figure 2

Top: First meeting of Quant for What? healing committee (2022). Bottom: Partial healing committee reunion (2024)

We heard your call and felt compelled to respond by using our own personal dialogue to share how the invitation and non-performative experience of healing within Quant for What? convenings allowed us to keep showing up for the work and for ourselves. As two Black women at different points within the academy (graduate student and

early career faculty), we prioritize healing in our research and scholarship. We share excerpts from our recent conversation with you as a way to capture the essence of healing at the convening and how it has changed the ways we think about the people we want to be, and the ways that we can more holistically show up for ourselves and others in a critical quantitative space. Let us just say this upfront; we were both positively impacted by the convening in 2022 so much so that we decided to remain involved as co-facilitators of the healing subcommittee. After reflecting on our conversations, we noticed healing appeared in three salient ways: 1. An invitation; 2. Engaging ambivalence; and 3. Care-led refusal.

Healing is... a seed of an invitation

Paris: I'm trying to remember, has it been almost two years? I'm trying to remember how [the healing subcommittee] came about. I knew that there were different breakout groups. I feel like it came from the organizers, and that those of us that were interested could come and be a part of it. I just remember being drawn to the idea of healing, especially as it relates to my work... I still remember the walk we went on walking around downtown Pittsburgh, as a healing breakout group. There was an open space so that whatever wanted to emerge could emerge. There was no preconceived outcome or expectation for what it was going to be.

Alexis: There were both subtle and explicit designs that were important. Obviously, the healing team we were a part of was a more explicit design. But even the organizers offering the walk or just having food present invited us to embrace healing and be present.

Paris: Yeah. Yeah. I think there might be something about the pace. The pace of healing. There wasn't an expectation, but again, we could take a walk and just talk about [healing].

Alexis: Everything was being positioned like an invitation.

Paris: Oh, I love that! What was the invitation?

Alexis: It was an invitation to be present. The organizers really encouraged us to take up that invitation. However, they felt best to, as I remember them saying throughout our time, if we wanted to do something that they had not offered to feel free to do that too.

Paris: They gave us the seed, and I think when you mention the space, they planted the seed of healing. And of course, the seed is necessary, but you need all these other things. You need attention. You need sunlight, moisture, you need a caretaker. And so, I think what they [the organizers] did was plant the seed of healing to see who would show up to water it, and see what happens. I think the theme of seeds and growing was embedded throughout all the processes. But there were clearly those of us who were drawn to it [healing] and was like, yes, this matters. We didn't have all the answers. I think we left with more questions [laughs], but that's okay. That was okay.

Healing is...engaging ambivalence about quantitative methods

Alexis: I was very pessimistic about quantitative methods, to be honest, but also curious. I think just the way that I had experienced it [quantitative methods], I was like, this isn't it. But I knew folks of color have always been mathematicians. There was a conversation I had in class one day where I was trying to explain to my class everyday mathematics I have seen Black people engage in such as cooking or braiding hair.

Paris: If you've seen them part a hair section or braid a hairstyle!

Alexis: Yeah! So, this space felt like it could be an opportunity for me to unlearn the way I had been socialized to think about math and also be in a validating space. Quant for What? Convening was historically oriented, and that was crucial to me because we weren't dismissive of people's real realities with math and science, which is how I sometimes have felt in other spaces.

And then as someone doing healing work, I am really interested in concepts of (re)memory to remember communities of color have origins before colonization, and I think remembering that we have all these traditions of how people have built things, all these things that are math intuitive that I just was like, 'oh, this conference could be a place for me to reground myself and just also changed my language about how I talk about quant, but also my ideologies about how I think about it too.'

Paris: Yeah, I love that. Even the fact that there was a healing section already in place, acknowledged that we (as attendees) may be coming to a space having been traumatized by our very existence. So, the fact that the organizers were like, this could be something that folks want to engage with, I thought that was really great. And I am a mixed methods person, so I've always had some tensions of whether or not I'm quantitative enough or the right type of quantitative or mixed methods person. So, I went in even thinking, 'well, I'm not really a quant person, even though I am, but maybe I'm not enough.' Even with that ambivalence, I applied to the convening because I was seeking community for other quant folks interested in equity and justice related issues, but also grappling with their "quant-ness." So, I just feel like the healing space just felt like a place that I could acknowledge that, but then I also realized I'm more than enough. So, I think that was just really helpful to see.

Healing is... care-led refusal, not business as usual

Paris: I think the care that the organizers took with one another, often publicly conferring with and deferring to one another about the flow and activities for the convening. This allowed everyone to take up space with ideas and questions. I felt like however I came was enough. I didn't need to be more than I was. I didn't need to be anybody else. My interests and expertise were enough for the space, which was really nice.

Alexis: I remember feeling a bit nervous because I was just starting to explore quantitative methods. There was a lot of quant and academic jargon that I didn't get, and I worried that would hinder me from maximizing my experience. This convening felt like a space where I could share what I did not know and not be judged. In traditional conferences, people are encouraged and praised for acting like they know everything. We have been socialized in academic spaces to put on this show and so it was cool to just see people disrupt that. When I told mentors I was going to a convening around quantitative scholarship, they told me to be cautious and not expect too much. I realized that people were giving me advice based off the way they have experienced academic gatherings and the anxiety I had going into the convening quickly went away when I realized the departure from conventional conferencing Quant for What? was inviting us to.

Paris: They cared about us as people, not necessarily what we did or what we were doing, but who we are. Alexis, I feel like you are dropping some wisdom here, especially about the lack of performativity in Quant for What?, which is unlike what we have experienced at other convenings and conferences. Of course, there may be some people who felt like you got to come in and show that you're knowledgeable. Overall, I felt less of a need to have to prove myself by coming into the space. By simply being invited to

the space, we were already seen as someone who carried some type of knowledge, wisdom, expertise. It set the standard.

Alexis: We don't have to keep doing things the same way in the academy. It was a reminder that there are people making tangible efforts with different approaches aligned with our cultural values. And I think it really set the tone for our energy during the convening. It was a great atmosphere and our care for each other and what the space was inviting us into was genuine. This convening was early in my second year of grad school, and it was great to experience this so early on in my career.

Alexis: Even the application process. I remember feeling like this is very different. I can't remember the questions exactly, but it was like, what is your orientation to this work? What are you hoping to learn and grow from here? I think they asked a question about healing as well, how we are understanding healing. It didn't feel like it was a test where I had to prove why I should be here, why this work matters, why I'm thinking about whatever topic.

Paris: So yeah, I think the pace of it all, that it's not the grind. When you go to conferences, they take more than they give. You're exhausted, depleted. You don't have enough time. You're tired and thirsty and dehydrated (laughs), and so that's how many conferences leave you. I should do a history of conferences, but I feel like maybe it didn't used to be this way. And I felt like that wasn't the case for this convening. I think part of it was acknowledging pace. They provided long lunches and time to walk and time to be...and we had good food! Health care for people, providing them with food, makes a difference! I remember just sitting outside in the sun. It's not to say that you can't do those things at other conferences, but you have to go out of your way to do that, whereas

I feel like in the [Quant for What? convening] it was sort of built in.

Alexis: The bread breaking aspect was so important. They had food prepared for us and created conditions for us to take care of our body. It was so different from traditional conferences where you're running from place to place and if you don't intentionally decide to pause and eat, you might go the whole day without food.

Paris: You've got to take time to nourish yourself; to step away. Now I get the relationality piece, connecting with people, caring for self and others, learning about the land that you're on, all of those matters.

As you can hopefully glean from our engaging dialogue, we were fundamentally transformed by the in-person convening and the invitation to engage with healing as it relates to quantitative methods. We have experienced a glimpse of this reimaged academy, and there's no going back! As we come to a close on our letter offering to you, we would be remiss not to offer a bit of healing as gratitude for all your initial and ongoing, seen and unseen, paid, unpaid, and underpaid laboring, refusing, organizing, reading, intentionality, freedom dreaming, (re)-membering, seed planting, manifesting, harvesting, and so much more. Thank you, and we look forward to continuing on this journey with you.

In healing and solidarity,

Paris and Alexis

We Respond:

Might healing come from an invitation into the unknown?

Dear Paris and Alexis,

You have no idea how excited we were to read your letter! Although at this point, you know us well enough to guess that we both cried and that we immediately related your words back to things we had recently read. Claire brought up something Eve Tuck shared in a brief piece:

I don't have a predetermined theory of change that I want us all to have. I don't want the conversations about theories of change to be prescriptive, but pedagogical. In wanting for these conversations to flourish, I don't want our theories of change themselves to be more accurate in their estimation of causation. There can be many unknowns in our theories, many sites of wonder.

This is all to say, your letter helped us recognize healing as a joint action of fleeing *from* a known harm(ful status quo) and fleeing *toward* unknown, wondrous possibilities. Two such possibilities (now outcomes) we couldn't have predicted were: 1) that you would leave the Quant for What? convening, expecting more of academic spaces like conferences, *and* 2) that the two of you would have a blossoming friendship years later.

We've already told you about what we were fleeing from, but honestly, we weren't quite sure at the time who and what we were fleeing toward. We didn't have the answers, and we didn't expect anyone else to either. As a result, reviewing the applications for Quant for What? was probably the hardest part. We couldn't quite articulate the criteria to be met and instead found ourselves noticing those people who were similarly uncomfortable in their academic spaces, who balanced their pessimism with curiosity, who were also fleeing toward something different, and yearning for a collective to flee toward and with. And we were so thrilled as we read your applications, where you both modeled steps we could take toward something different that we didn't yet know. Yes, we organizers had planted

some seeds. And through your applications, we found the sun, the water, and the caretakers. Even before meeting, you showed us how offering an invitation into the unknown would bless us all with warmth, wisdom, and love.

You noticed our tendency to invite, rather than dictate, and wondered how intentional it was. The answer is: very. Coming into Quant for What?, we had learned from organizing other spaces that invitations are both alluring and necessary for sustained engagement in a community. Invitations reinforce our individual and collective agency. They ask us to pause and reflect on whether and how our values and visions align. They allow us to move like water, perhaps tributaries all moving toward the same destination but taking our own little paths to get there.

So, we committed to making everything an invitation. And your responses to our initial invitation to explore—Alexis, you have no idea how wide we were smiling when we saw your joint application with another graduate student come through—strengthened that commitment. From the convening schedule to the activities planned, to the points of connection in between and after convenings; nothing was mandatory, everything was a seed ready to be watered.

We are overcome with emotion, appreciation, and wonder as we see the ways that you and others took up these invitations (especially the invitation to learn from and with nature as we heal; something that has been at the core of our friendships and growth as a duo). And we're touched that Quant for What? convenings still sit in your bodymindspirit as they do ours. And beyond pleased that you remain in community with us. We find comfort, ease, and joy as we continue to heal together.

With big feelings that words can't capture,

Claire & Sarah

A Call to the Community:

Centering healing in critical quantitative communities to foster freedom dreams

Dear community seekers and builders,

We hope this letter finds your bodymindspirit well. Since our initial convenings, we have continued to “move at the speed of trust” as adrienne maree brown (2017, p. 42) suggests, focusing on deepening the roots of our collective relationships rather than rushing to grow in numbers. In some ways, this has involved a collective hibernating; as we emerge, we find ourselves considering how to re-engage with one another in Quant for What?, how to invite more people into our collective, and how to support a meshwork of similar collectives so we might, together, shift the field of quantitative education research away from paradigms that reproduce oppressive power structures toward paradigms that support more humanizing and just educational futures.

One of the concepts our healing praxis is rooted in is dreaming. Robin D.G. Kelley reminds us that “without new visions we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down” (Kelley, 2002, p. 9). This is where we are calling you to imagine with us. Doing this work will require at times resistance and at others’ refusals, but remember this is all about liberation for folks, adults and children, who as Bettina Love reminds us, have been *Punished for Dreaming*.

A community healing process involves (re)storing and (re)claiming our wholeness in intentional ways that simultaneously attend to the body, mind, and spirit. Communities bring together people, not just minds. And so, we must create opportunities for bodies to fully engage, whether that’s de-attiring the space in ways that push against white male

norms of professionalism, or ensuring sustenance is always present, or inviting physical movement through walks. We must attend to folks’ spirits in multiple ways, including providing opportunities for reflection, incorporating the arts and music, and inviting healers into the space to facilitate our collective work. We must pay deliberate attention to each of the parts of the self that allow for collective healing so we can muster the creativity, strength, and trust to resist the ways quantitative spaces suffocate our ways of knowing and being.

Most of these ideas are not new and dare we say basic, but each requires an intentional “slowing down, a refusal to conform to pressures to be fast and efficient, and to imagine other ways to work” (Gonzales & Shotton, 2022, p. 9). We must take comfort in pauses, move with ease, breathe steadily, and grow in sustainable ways.

We recognize that doing a new thing, in a new way, is hard. That freedom dreaming is hard. It is not a fantasy. As the great philosopher, Ms. Lauryn Hill (2002), reminds us “fantasy is what people want, but reality is what they need.” And the reality is that with anything new, comes many unknowns. As we explore these wondrous unknowns and participate in what Ruha Benjamin (2022) calls “growing the world we want”, we make invitations anew, each with a brief grounding reading:

- Let us grow our roots wide, interlocking together (brown, 2017, p. 85).
- Let us “grow towards [each other] like a rainbow, brighten[ing] what’s between us, filter[ing] nourishing possibilities (Gumbs, 2021, p. 82).
- Let us plant peace, loyalty, and honesty (Angelou, 1994, p. 91–92).
- Let us trust each other, in the face of the unknown (brown, 2017, p. 178).

- Let us never forget that our healing is next to the wound (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011, p. 71).

While we continue our work in Quant for What?, we look forward to healing, (re)membering, dreaming, resting, seeding, watering, caretaking. Won't you join us?

With ease, gratitude, love, and hope,

Shanyce, Alexis, Claire, Sarah, and Paris

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Author Bio

Quant for What? (quant4whatcollective.org) is a collective to manifest possibilities, dreams, and hopes for quantitative educational research that honors traditions and legacies. In this building, we dismantle and disrupt white norms and logics, which are historically and currently harmful. We unlearn, we question, we sit in discomfort. We heal, we rebuild, we inspire.

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