

Introduction

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1. Introduction

In a series published by Werner REIMER's foundation, dedicated to the "search for innovative inquiries in the sciences," there is a detailed review of the "cultural turn" in the human sciences. The review presents an overview of this momentous turn. One discipline is completely absent there: psychology. Psychology is only included among those modern, Western, systematic, empirical human sciences that are accused of having generally ignored other cultures' realities, failed to reflect on the cultural determinations of their own thought and practice, and so on, until now. The overview, whose bibliography comprises 334 entries, covers the path-breaking work in ethnology and anthropology, notes relevant innovations in history, philology, and geography, takes up the cultural turn in sociology, economics, and political science, in order finally to consider some commonalities between these developments in different fields and to inquire into the (political and economic) background to this renaissance in the concept of culture. Psychology here does not belong to those "broad disciplines" in which the cultural turn persisted and where it more or less began to change established routines and standards, or indeed changed them completely. Assuming this diagnosis is correct, it would mean that social changes of great significance had left no trace in psychology. Psychology would be cut off from so much that had long preoccupied the other human sciences:

"Proceeding from analogous trends in ethnology, reinforced by post-colonial self-determination outside of Europe and the increasing sensitivity to cultural difference in the face of new migrations and so-called 'ethnic' differences since the Cold War, the cultural turn has now affected a number of the broader disciplines" (LACKNER & WERNER, 1999, p.23). [1]

To exclude psychology from this number is a mistake—even if we admit that the international psychological community has largely encouraged this exclusion over several decades, nolens volens, and failed to maintain contacts with its former neighbor disciplines. Nowadays, cultural psychology and, even more, cross-cultural psychology are established very well. The special issue of *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* presents, as we hope, some progress in the field of cultural psychology. [2]

The articles in this issue indicate the value of qualitative methods for elucidating cultural themes. Some of the articles are theoretical. They describe why qualitative methods are useful for this purpose, and how they can be employed. Some of the articles are empirical and utilize qualitative methods to investigate cultural issues. [3]

Contributions here come from variable perspectives—yet all of them are oriented towards addressing interesting and humanly relevant issues in new ways. Instead of discussing each of the articles in the Introduction, the editors would like to comment on the usefulness of qualitative methods for cultural studies. [4]

Search for new methodological solutions encourages individuals to freely and completely express themselves—create new ideas where traditional orthodoxies of any kind have disallowed it. The data that are produced take the form of extended expressions such as interviews, diaries, essays, and letters. This rich, extended evidence needs to be analyzed through a sophisticated process of interpretation and theoretical base. Contrary to the claims of the crusaders of the "quantitative methods camp" that "those qualitative researchers are X" (where X= "soft", "non-scientific" etc.), the challenges of qualitative research methodologies are actually by far more stringent theoretically and conceptually than the easy and lazy acceptance of some ANOVA, MANOVA, or multiple regression result as if it amounts to "scientific evidence." The biggest misconception of science is the belief that quantification guarantees the data (and the scientist) a scientific status. Nothing can be further from the truth in contemporary sciences at large—if one looks carefully into areas of qualitative mathematics, or modern protein genetics. Yet that misconception lives in the social sciences—practically limiting their further development by directing researchers into ways of doing their work that provide illusory (yet socially acceptable!) explanations of complex social and cultural issues. [5]

In case of the contemporary movement towards the invention of qualitative methods, we see a kind of silent revolution taking place. Most social scientists employ qualitative methods in order to elicit personal psychological information—from their research participants, as well as from themselves (as parts of the research process). This constitutes recognition of the inevitable role of the researcher as an active agent who arrives at new knowledge through his or her own activity in science. [6]

One of the major theoretical challenges to contemporary social sciences is how to conceptualize the inherent unity of the active person and the person's dependence upon the social world. Individual psychological phenomena are not purely individual at all—they may be ontologically personal, yet ontogenetically social. They draw upon and embody broad cultural factors—and the activities of persons reconstruct the social worlds, art times in dramatic ways. Furthermore, every new action by a person is necessarily singular—it has not happened before, and will not recur, in precisely its current form. Each action is context-bound—hence accumulation of similar-looking actions over time and across contexts is not an alley for research methodology that attempts to remain true to

the nature of underlying phenomena. This consideration already by itself guarantees the primacy of the qualitative approach to methodology, and renders quantification a secondary tool that may be useful under narrowly specified circumstances. If those circumstances are proven to be in place, the use of quantitative methods may be warranted. Yet the proof of their adequacy must come first. Furthermore, the interpretations of the results of the use of quantitative methods are qualitative in their nature. So we have a basic knowledge construction cycle where social sciences begin with qualitative phenomena, decide whether the methods to be used to study these allow one or another strategy (quantitative or qualitative) to be applied, and end up with qualitative new knowledge. [7]

To carry out this stringent methodological credo is not easy. The analyst must be knowledgeable about cultural factors in order to detect their role in the derived psychological data. One must be knowledgeable about gender roles, alienation, trends and strategies in the media industry, the manner in which work and education are organized, religious trends, and broad concepts such as individualism in order to detect elements of these in psychological expressions about emotions, personality, motivation, imagination, intelligence, reasoning, memory, and perception. Cultural themes cannot be explored in the absence of rich, complex psychological information. Simple, fragmentary responses have ambiguous psychological significance hitting can express any number of motives or emotions. It is only when their dynamic unity—a cultural Gestalt—becomes reconstructed by social sciences that the empirical data begin to represent selected aspects of the phenomena—and thus become scientific in the stringent (Wissenschaft) notion of that term. [8]

The Editors of this Special Issue hope that the encounters with the different innovative research efforts presented here will trigger even further impulses to create new methodologies and insights in several domains of (qualitative) cultural psychology. The future of the social sciences depends on the breakthroughs in the domain of methodology—and the current quest for qualitative methodologies is a forceful step in that direction. [9]

Reference

Lackner, Michael & Werner, Michael (1999). *Der cultural turn in den Humanwissenschaften. Area Studies im Auf- oder Abwind des Kulturalismus?* (Schriftenreihe Suchprozesse für innovative Fragestellungen in der Wissenschaft, Nr. 2, edited by the Programmbeirat der Werner Reimers Konferenzen). Bad Homburg: Werner Reimers Stiftung.

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