

VALUES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

In this book, wide-ranging sources are utilized to seek alternatives to the science-value dichotomy and to move beyond unhelpful impasses between qualitative and quantitative methods. It urges new directions of impact for psychology through intra- and interdisciplinary collaboration in order to confront unprecedented global challenges, generate questions, and articulate new possibilities for a sustainable future for humanity. The analysis places the researcher as the principal instrument of any science – an affordance and an ongoing form of demand. Foregrounding “the personal” also emphasizes continuity across arts and sciences, the interfaces of which contain the full range of resources for innovative thinking. The enduring relevance of observation, imaginative sense-making, and perspective-taking to psychology is explored. In emphasizing that “the person” and “the personal” reflect interconnected systems of various levels, the book calls for an appreciation and cultivation of these activities in the psychological scientific community.

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Values in Psychological Science

REIMAGINING EPISTEMIC PRIORITIES AT A NEW
FRONTIER

Lisa Osbeck
University of West Georgia



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To Kenneth and Ceci, whom I remember singing

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PREFACE

What it comes back to, for the mature mind – granting of course, to begin with, a mind accessible to questions of such an order – is this attaching speculative interest of the matter . . .

The old matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and enjoyed – believed in, to be brief, with the same ‘old’ grateful faith . . .

yet for due testimony, for reassertion of value, perforating as by some strange and fine, some latent and gathered force, a myriad more adequate channels.

Henry James, 2009/1909, p. liii

This book proceeds from the assumption, at once commonplace and radical, that science consists in the creative and responsible acts of persons, and that psychology must do better to try to understand what this implies for its own endeavors. That we never escape ourselves is a pedestrian claim – a truism, even – that we can endorse with little bother. Yet it is precisely the implications of this insight that physicist Bridgman called “the most important problem before us,” linked to, but “infinitely more complicated than, the problem of the role of the observer to which quantum theory has devoted so much attention and regards as so fundamental” (1959, pp. 5–6). The present book is modest in its aim, which is to offer only a broad sketch of a framework to recast the “problem” of the “personal” as an affordance for psychology, even as it constitutes an ongoing form of demand. The argument draws from an array of disparate sources, reflecting the peculiar sensibilities, influences, and values of its author.

The “frontier” in question refers to a critical time in human development, a time of exceedingly rapid technological and social transformation

and unpredictable global challenges, requiring innovative modes of thinking and new solutions – “frontier science.” It is also a reference to a frontier of collaborative potential within psychology and between psychology and other disciplines. After decades of humanistic, constructionist, critical/historical, feminist, phenomenological, discursive, ecological, and other frameworks of critique, new constructive efforts are underway. Psychological humanities (Teo, 2017), indigenous psychology (Sundararajan, 2015), narrative psychology (Josselson & Hopkins, 2015; Kim, 2015; McAdams, 2014; Woolhouse, 2017), and a focus on the psychological “other” (Freeman, 2014) exemplify “movements” at least loosely defined, which begin to generate momentum. They are united in recognition that strictures on psychology and its methods arise from a narrow view of what it means to be scientific, that psychology as both an academic subject and professional pursuit labors under a weighty but sometimes unreflective “scientism” that threatens even to bleed into every domain, overstretching the reach and purpose of science (Williams & Robinson, 2014).

Constructive alternatives emerge from recognition that the impact of critical evaluation of psychology’s principal theoretical frameworks and methods remains uncertain. The discipline of psychology as practiced looks less like a robust and constructive pluralism than it does a patchwork of separate, sometimes hostile encampments, with psychologists from different backgrounds and with different convictions tending principally to their respective fires, citing epistemological incompatibility or incommensurability as a reason to avoid collaboration toward a common goal. There are risks in perpetuating too stark a contrast between science and the humanities – risks that include a diminished conception of the embodied, enculturated nature of scientific reasoning and neglect or denial of the sophisticated forms and expressions of “rationality” outside of natural science. In the face of contemporary human challenges and for trials yet to come, we must increasingly look to a new frontier – to the interfaces of sciences and the arts/humanities, in order to understand the deepest interconnections between domains at the level of generative human activity. To the extent that psychology is accessible to questions of such an order, it is in a position for reevaluation and reimagining, for “due testimony and reasserting of value, by myriad more adequate channels.”

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