postmodern philosophy as well as psychoanalysis, Marxism, or anarchism along with other theoretical frameworks.

References


Online Resources


Methodologism/Methodological Imperative

Zhipeng Gao
Department of Psychology, York University, Toronto, ON, Canada

Introduction

Methodologism overemphasizes methods and neglects ontological, epistemological, practical and political considerations. On the one hand, it prevails in mainstream psychology and has a significant impact on the production of psychological knowledge. On the other hand, it has been criticized by various research communities for decades.

Definition

Methodologism or methodological imperative (sometimes “methodolatry”; see Bakan, 1973) in psychology refers to the uncritical privileging of scientific methodology over other research concerns; it shapes the properties of psychological knowledge through ideological and institutional means. Mostly found in natural-scientific psychology, methodologism favors experimental and statistical methods over theoretical, social, and cultural approaches; ignores theoretical assumptions underlying research and deemphasizes the subject matter and practical relevance of psychological research.

Keywords

Experiment; method; objectivity; politics; practice; statistics; subject matter; value

Traditional Debates

Methodologism largely originated from psychologists’ pursuit of scientific status. In the
nineteenth century, natural science became the new cultural authority in Europe and North America. The study of psychological topics, however, was still philosophical and speculative, incapable of establishing itself as a natural-scientific discipline. The breakthrough was made by a number of physiologists, physicians, physicists, and astronomers who measured psychological phenomena with scientific methods. In 1879, Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology laboratory where he studied psychology with experimental method; this event is generally celebrated for promoting psychology to the rank of science. Against this historical background, methodology functions as the core feature that disentangles psychology from philosophy and that guarantees the scientific status of psychology.

After the Second World War, methodologism grew entrenched in many institutions: academic language, publication, funding agency, course, training program, graduate employment market, etc. For example, methodology is among the most emphasized courses for psychology students, the most heavily weighted factor determining grant and publication; there are more journals available for publishing experimental, quantitative research than those open to theoretical, historical, social, and cultural papers. Comparing to methodology, the subject matter, theory, and practical relevance of psychological studies are considered of secondary importance. For example, in the heyday of behaviorism, “consciousness” was ruled out of psychology due to methodological concerns.

**Critical Debates**

The criticism of methodologism persisted through the history of psychology discipline (Teo, 2005) and sometimes engaged prominent scholars such as Gadamer (2004) and Maslow (1970). The criticism often comes from historical, theoretical, and political perspectives. Critical historians argue that methodologies are constructed and institutionalized within particular historical and cultural contexts. For example, three research models can be identified in psychological experiments: the Leipzig model, the Paris model, and the American model (Danziger, 1985). Influenced by social-historical contexts, each model produces a particular type of psychological knowledge. Some historians argue that methodologism is itself an American economic, political, and cultural product. Wilhelm Wundt, often regarded as the founder of modern psychology, warned that experimental method should apply to basic psychological phenomena only while the higher, more complex psychological phenomena must be studied from cultural perspectives, on which he wrote the ten-volume *Folk Psychology*. However, craving scientific status, mainstream American psychology adopted exclusively the experimental method. After the Second World War, American psychology traveled back to Europe and spread to other continents; methodologism evolved into a global phenomenon. Due to ill-balanced international relations, American psychology, among other colonial artifacts, largely replaced phenomenological psychology in Europe and indigenous psychologies in many other countries.

Theoretical psychologists criticize mainstream psychology for being unreflexive of its research assumptions. Against the view that methods are free from theory and value, critical theorists argue that any method necessarily makes a particular assumption about the subject matter (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and practical orientation. In terms of ontology, mainstream researchers understand psychological phenomena as atomistic, reducible, mechanical, individualistic, decontextualized, and ahistorical. In order to apply experimental and statistical methods, mainstream psychologists break holistic psychological event into atomistic parts, which are then converted into variables and numbers. While exploring causal relations and normalities, mainstream psychologists either exclude agency, experience, and meaning or reduce them to biological, chemical, and physical processes so that technical manipulation can be carried out and objective evidence can be found.
Within an individualistic framework, mainstream researchers understand human psychology as possessing certain essence that can be pinned down in the laboratory, isolated from historical and cultural contexts. When cross-cultural psychologists take sociocultural factors into consideration, they tend to treat them as additional variables rather than substantive conditions that shape human psychology (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). The assumption of human essence legitimates social status quo and denies the need for social change. The universalistic, transhistorical assumption denies the diversity of psychological phenomena across cultures, genders, classes, etc., and fosters colonization by facilitating psychological knowledge to travel from its producer to people in other social contexts. Mainstream researchers make assumptions about the nature of psychological phenomena according to methodological demands: any observable, isolatable, quantifiable, operationalizable, manipulable, formalizable, and retestable ontologies are included, while other unamenable types of ontologies are reduced, distorted, and excluded.

In mainstream psychology, dialogue is replaced with monologue: the subject-subject relation between the psychologist and the subject is often mistakenly replaced with a subject-object relation, borrowed from natural sciences. The human subject becomes objectified for measurement and experimentation; his or her self-understanding is often considered as useless data if not extraneous variable. Powerless and voiceless, the human subject has no choice but to conform to methodological demands.

Methodologism contains the belief that the application of scientific methodology guarantees objective knowledge. Ironically, the very concept “objectivity” has experienced historical vicissitudes (Daston & Galison, 2007). Social epistemology suggests that fact can hardly be separated from value. Despite its claim of objectivity, psychological knowledge often embodies particular values, interests, and ethical-political commitments of the researchers, of academic institutions, and of the wider social contexts. In a research project, many processes escape from methodological prescription: selecting a topic, establishing a hypothesis, observing phenomena, choosing a method, conducting research, collecting data, interpreting data, and writing report. It is up to the psychologists, often from a western, white and masculine background, to observe the similarity between the skulls of African people and those of apes, to hypothesize that female emotionality results from hormone activity rather than socialization, and to prefer the concept “sex” over “gender”. These methodological choices promote dominating ways of perceiving reality while excluding alternative ways, rendering psychological knowledge a bearer and perpetrator of the dominating social power and ideology.

Methodologism is maintained through institutional and social means. The selection of methods is often influenced by institutional regulations such as tenure-track promotion, publication, graduate training, and funding allocation. Wider social, economic, and political contexts also have impacts on the development and popularity of methods. Psychometrics grew out of the process of bureaucratization that emphasizes surveying and managing populations behaviorism in America embraced its golden age when industrialization and urbanization demanded more skilled workers and new social order (Bakan, 1966). The claim of achieving objectivity through methodology not only remains unfulfilled but also obscures psychology’s normative nature, legitimizes its hidden political agendas, and denies its social responsibility.

With its professionalization strategy to serve the government, military, industry, commerce, and health care, among other lucrative institutions, methodologism produces knowledge that has little relevance with everyday life and experience. According to the Aristotelian distinction between techne/poiesis and phronesis/praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2001), methodologism produces the techne type of psychological knowledge that embodies instrumental rationality and that is reductionist, mechanical, quantifiable, and decontextualized. Techne facilitates the poiesis activity, which is intended to bring about something other than itself; the corresponding
psychological practices, such as technical control and administration, utilize individual psychology as a means for achieving something else, e.g., advertisement, human resource management, and artificial intelligence development. Missing from mainstream psychology is *phronesis* or practical wisdom. According to Aristotle, *phronesis* is the most important intellectual virtue as its value rationality can balance instrumental rationality. Its corresponding activity, praxis, allows a person to understand, experience, and develop him or herself and to discover a good that he or she must become. The need for *phronesis* is reflected by lay people’s expectation that psychological knowledge can shed light on their everyday concerns, such as self-exploration, interpersonal relations, and the meaning of life. Unfortunately, methodologism prevents this type of psychological knowledge from being produced. With its formalistic pursuit, methodologism circumvents the content of psychology (e.g., the content of memory) and is exclusively concerned with the functionalistic and mechanical aspects of psychology (e.g., the forgetting curve) for technical control (Teo, 2005).

The successful institutionalization of psychology in America can be attributed to psychologists’ alliance with the government, military, and other organizations (Herman, 1995). In terms of its contribution to psychology discipline, methodologism can be better understood as a professional and political strategy than a purely intellectual decision. In fact, methodologism overrides ontological inquiry, precludes certain research topics, prevents theoretical development, limits possible knowledge and practice, causes the fragmentation of psychology discipline, conceals the politics within and without psychology discipline, and constrains the liberating potential of psychological research. It has been argued that psychology has gone astray for the last 60 years (Toomela & Valsiner, 2010) and methodologism is responsible for the persistent crisis (Bakan, 1996).

On the one hand, methodologism has been criticized by a variety of research communities including humanistic psychology, feminist psychology, postmodern psychology, postcolonial psychology, qualitative psychology, community psychology, and cultural-historical psychology from social, cultural, historical, political, hermeneutic, and phenomenological perspectives. It is often proposed to replace methodologism with methodological pluralism and to achieve a balance among methodological, ontological, epistemological, and practical considerations. On the other hand, driven by scientism, mainstream psychology remains unreflexive while many other natural and social sciences acknowledge the limits of method. Operationism, one important tenet of methodologism, is questioned by most philosophers of science, including its inventor, Bridgman. The application of operationism in psychology is based on a misunderstanding of Bridgman’s work (Green, 1992). The persistent prevalence of operationism in mainstream psychology finds more ideological and institutional support than intellectual justification. This situation also applies to methodologism. It requires time and collaborative efforts at theoretical, methodological, and institutional levels to overcome methodologism in psychology.

**References**


Migration, Overview

Paul Mecheril and Astride Velho
Center for Migration, Education and Cultural Studies, Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, Germany

Introduction

Throughout history and throughout the world, people have always moved across significant borders. Migration is a universal part of the human condition. Although human history as a whole can be seen as a history of migration, current migration flows are particularly significant, for both societies and individuals worldwide: we are living in an “age of migration” (Castles & Miller, 2003). Today, nearly every state and political context is affected by international migration. This is due to at least three factors:

(a) The “modern” idea that people can, and have the capacity to, legitimately take their fate into their own hands and change their geographical, ecological, political, and cultural situations. Indeed, current migration phenomena are encouraging this very idea and enforcing migration.

(b) The intensity of global inequality (e.g., due to wars, poverty, ecology), which is probably worse today than it ever has been before.

There are several reasons for this: increasing differences between rich and poor regions and countries, resulting in very different opportunities in life depending on a person’s geopolitical location; an ever-increasing number of people living on the planet; and increasing awareness and representation of the world and its inequalities.

(c) The world is “shrinking,” both in terms of time and space, because of recent developments improving means of both transport and communication.

Migration is and has always been an important driver of social change and modernization. From this perspective, migrants can be seen as social actors who bring new knowledge, experiences, languages, and different perspectives to a variety of social contexts and thereby contribute to social development.

In political and everyday discussions about migration, one of the key questions is always how any given imaginary (such as the West), national (such as Indonesia), or supranational social unit (such as the EU) defines its borders and how it deals with difference and inequality within those borders. Migration calls borders into question. Not only territorial borders are meant but also, and more importantly, symbolic borders which define belonging. Migration also questions individual, social, and societal belonging. This is not only true for the “migrants” sense of belonging but must be understood in a wider sense. The question of belonging also relates to how “we” want to live and thereby affects a fundamental aspect of social cohesion. Discourse concerning “migration,” “immigrants,” “multiculturalism,” etc. is therefore always a highly ideologized, politicized, and emotional matter.

Definition

General definitions of migration can be extremely problematic, because they are often so abstract that they lose any useful meaning, for example, when migration is defined in a very general way as “mobility” or “movement” without mentioning orders of belonging or border control systems.