

Methodological pluralism:

A framework for psychotherapy research

Brent D. Slife

Edwin E. Gantt

Brigham Young University

Abstract

A new level of sophistication is advocated for psychotherapy research -- methodological pluralism. This pluralism recognizes the number of unexamined and untested assumptions that are embedded within any method, including traditional scientific methods. These assumptions restrict the questions that can be asked and the variables that can be tested, before any investigation of psychotherapy has occurred. Such premature closure is ultimately unscientific and hinders truly creative investigations of psychotherapy. Consequently, a framework is described that allows multiple methods -- with multiple underlying philosophies -- to complement one another in psychotherapy research. Five essential benefits of this pluralistic framework are shown: advancement of science, increased objectivity, a level playing field, greater scientific freedom, and an end to the burgeoning "method wars" of psychotherapy research.

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Brent D. Slife and Edwin E. Gantt

Brigham Young University

We cannot begin without first acknowledging the careful work that has already taken place in psychotherapy research. There can be little doubt that thoughtful people have employed sophisticated models for making sense of a complex enterprise -- psychotherapy. Still, as sophisticated as these researchers have been, we believe it is time to press for a new level (or type) of sophistication. Indeed, there is an important sense in which therapy researchers have not been scientific enough, so we advocate what some have called methodological pluralism (Roth, 1987; Slife, 1998) to help the field develop this new level of sophistication.

Methodological pluralism is in the spirit of the multi-trait, multi-method approaches of old (e.g., Strupp & Luborsky, 1962), except that its "multi" runs far deeper. Instead of the usual focus on the diversity of method designs and measures, methodological pluralism encompasses the diversity of method philosophies as well. Although the scientific method has sometimes been viewed as a transparent and value-free approach to inquiry, contemporary philosophy of science has shown this view to be false (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Bohman, 1991; Heelan, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1983; Roth, 1987; Taylor, 1985). The scientific method, like all methods, rests on a set of assumptions about the world, a philosophy, that restricts its mode and domain of inquiry. As such, the traditional logic that has united all methods has closed some modes and domains of psychotherapy inquiry before any investigation has occurred. We submit that such premature closure is unscientific and ultimately hinders truly creative investigations of psychotherapy.

To combat these limitations, we attempt to flesh out a methodological pluralism that allows method philosophies, and methods themselves, to serve complementary roles. Such a

complementarity would cut short the method wars that seem to be developing in psychotherapy research (e.g., qualitative versus quantitative methods), and permit a freedom of investigation that would foster more psychotherapy innovation. However, to begin this pluralism in the social sciences, we must first effect a type of consciousness raising regarding method assumptions. We describe here the primary tenets of the major method philosophies at play in the psychotherapy research literature -- traditional quantitative tenets followed by nontraditional qualitative tenets. With this description, we hope that a sophisticated matching between investigative questions and method philosophies can begin to be accomplished. We then describe some advantages of this approach for psychotherapy research.

Traditional Understanding of Research

The hegemony of the traditional philosophy of science is indicated by the fact that the scientific method is not referred to as a scientific method, but rather as the scientific method, implying that there is one scientific method, one basic logic of investigation. Although we would readily acknowledge that there are countless variations on this logic -- from experimental to quasi-experimental to correlational designs -- all these designs essentially stem from the same underlying assumptions as to how knowledge is gathered and tested. We describe four of those assumptions here, explicating both their virtues and their vices. That is, we attempt to show why these assumptions have been popular and need to be maintained in our arsenal of psychotherapy methods. However, we also try to demonstrate why these assumptions are limited, as all method assumptions are, and thus can never be sufficient in themselves to provide a complete understanding of the psychotherapy enterprise. We, then, attempt to show how qualitative assumptions can complement and thus shore up these limitations, just as traditional quantitative approaches shore up the limitations of qualitative approaches.

Empiricism. The first of the traditional assumptions concerns the principle epistemology of psychotherapy methods: empiricism. Empiricism holds that the only reliable form of knowledge is that which comes through sensory experience. Such an assertion leads inexorably to the notion that only that which is directly observable or measurable in some way can be known with any degree of certainty (e.g., Bordens & Abbott, 1999). We should note that there is nothing in the empiricist epistemology that requires us to believe that nonobservables do not exist. However, such phenomena would have to be viewed as having little consequence for our quest for knowledge, because empiricism, by definition, assumes that only the observable -- or more broadly, the sensory -- can be real knowledge. In this sense, the empiricist must necessarily contend that a complete understanding of psychotherapy can be formulated on the basis of observables.

Part of our discipline's accommodation to this contention stems from operationalism. Operationalism allows for the postulation and testing of nonobservables, such as attitudes, heuristics, schemata, and memory. The only conceptual catch is that we must test the observable manifestations of these nonobservables -- the operationalizations of these invisible phenomena. That is to say, our epistemology disallows any direct study of these nonobservable variables. However, it would be well to remember that this limitation is a requirement of an epistemology which underlies -- but which does not have to underlie -- mainstream psychotherapy research. Indeed, this assumption, as with all ultimate assumptions, is unproven and untested. That is, there is no empirical evidence for empiricism (Slife & Williams, 1997). One can, of course, assert that empiricism has been successful, but without empirical evidence this is merely opinion. Moreover, this assertion typically involves the successes of the natural sciences which may or may not reflect upon the distinctive context of psychotherapy research.

Empiricism is also an inherently limited epistemology (as all epistemologies are), because studying the manifestation of something -- its operationalization -- is not the same as studying the thing itself. For example, a psychologist interested in the nature and meaning of love -- certainly not an inconsequential variable in psychotherapy -- is only able to study properly operationalized manifestations of love. The question is: Is kissing or intercourse or any number of similar measurable manifestations possible without love? Is it possible that love might well exist in the absence of such operationalizable behaviors? The point is that the manifested is not necessarily the same as the thing doing the manifesting. Thus, we are at least handicapped by such an epistemology from the outset.

Quantification. Of course, traditional research methods in psychotherapy research do not ask us to simply observe and report our observations. As a second assumption of traditional method, we are asked to measure, to translate whatever is experienced via the senses into the language of numbers. For example, it is a common practice among psychotherapy researchers to provide both clients and therapists with intricately crafted verbal questionnaires concerning their experiences in therapy. Respondents are asked not only to formulate accurate answers to these difficult questions but also to translate these answers into the language of numbers, a language that few of us have familiarity or comfort in using.

The potential problems with this quantitative approach are at least threefold. First, it is quite probable that there are any number of interesting variables here that cannot be adequately translated into the language of numbers. Second, how skillful are our subjects in doing this sort of numerical translation? Could they know how they feel about their therapy experience, and yet not necessarily know how best to translate that experience into a number? Third, as any linguist can attest, all languages have their advantages and disadvantages in opening up the world to

understanding. Our scientific language of numbers is no exception to this rule. There are some things in human experience that cannot be adequately expressed in a quantitative language. How aware are psychotherapy researchers of the advantages and disadvantages of numerical language? Is it well known in the literature what aspects of a patient's experience are opened up and closed down by this language? We submit that this obvious lack of knowledge seriously impedes our ability to gain accurate and meaningful access to a great many phenomena of psychological and clinical interest.

Universalism. A third requirement of the traditional or "received view" of science concerns what is known as universalism. Universalism is the assumption that knowledge -- as opposed to mere opinion -- is invariant, fixed, and unchangeable across time and space. Note that this assumption does not require knowledge to be applicable to all situations and conditions; universalism only requires that a piece of knowledge be applicable to the conditions under which it specifically applies, regardless of the time and place of these conditions. Likewise, a central goal of psychotherapy research is to "establish general laws of behavior that help explain and predict behavioral events that occur in a variety of situations" (Bordens & Abbott, 1999, p. 15). In other words, researchers typically seek to generate a knowledge of psychotherapy that holds across variations in time and place. Of course, few psychotherapy researchers conceive of their knowledge as (yet) being on a par with that of natural science. Still, knowledge in the behavioral sciences is considered primarily in terms of this natural science perspective. That is to say, a given bit of information is not knowledge until it is shown to be applicable to more than one place and time, i.e., it must be generalizable.

It is in this sense that a lack of replication is typically taken to indicate a lack of generality, and thus often puts into question the very existence of a phenomenon. Indeed, even the most

rigorous experimental conditions will not convince traditional scientists of the reality of a given phenomenon, if the findings cannot be shown to have some universality (Slife, 1998). The problem is that this replication notion of knowledge makes it impossible to adequately consider unique events. A commitment to replication forces us to study only events which consistently recur or fit general classes of events. Woolfolk (1998) and others discuss the many problems with this commitment. However, the main point is that the universalist philosophy that leads to this commitment is a point of view, an opinion formulated before investigation begins, and as such is vulnerable to any other view or opinion.

Consider for example, as William James (1902/1982) did, the counter opinion that unique spiritual experiences are significant to humans. Many of our students report having undergone deeply significant and life transforming spiritual experiences that have happened to them only once. It is true that Bergin and others (e.g., Bergin, 1991; Shafranske, 1996) have attempted to investigate spirituality. However, as Bergin notes (Richards & Bergin, 1997), traditional methods have only been able to investigate the postulated manifestations of spirituality that are operationalizable and potentially replicable. In other words, the phenomena reported by our students (and discussed as important by Williams James) have not been directly studied via these methods, and there is no way of knowing what relationship, if any, these postulated manifestations (i.e., operationalizations) have to the real thing. The issue of unique spiritual experiences, then, is a case of a potentially important topic not being directly considered, let alone empirically supported, because of the biases of method (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, in press).

Naturalism. A final assumption of traditional method concerns its naturalism. Naturalism assumes that the goal of science is to discover the natural laws or principles that govern all of nature, including human nature. Humans are thus assumed to be ultimately determined by these

laws, just as all other sorts of natural phenomena are. After all, what justification is there for our exemption from the determinism of the natural world? Although we have not already discovered these laws, this lack of knowledge does not prevent psychotherapy researchers from assuming that the world is of this lawful and deterministic nature, ultimately, and that our methods must be designed to detect these laws. For example, "Viewing behavior as lawful leads to a second, related assumption: Psychologists assume that the behavior of organisms is determined. According to the doctrine of determinism, behavior is solely influenced by natural causes; it does not result from free will or choice. . . ." (Heiman, 1995)

It is this notion of determinism that makes the cause and effect pronouncements of scientists possible in the first place. Only when we assume the world to operate in a determined and causally necessary manner does a science of prediction and control become conceptually viable. Granted, our knowledge may be inexact and probabilistic at the moment, but our methods presume that there exists a necessarily determined, cause-effect world out there waiting to be discovered, manipulated, controlled, and predicted. The problem here is that we have yet to decide on the crucial free will/determinism issue as a discipline. Do we know enough about human beings to presume they have no agency? While many in the discipline might well say "yes" to this query, we hope the emphasis in our question is noted. We are not advocating here that human beings possess a free will. Rather, we are contending that the issue is too controversial for our discipline to presume (via its methodological commitments) that human beings possess no freedom of choice.

All the supposed evidence for determinism is underlaid with the naturalistic assumption of determinism, as inherent in the methods employed. The methodological restriction of naturalism precludes ever finding anything remotely resembling a free will, yet there is surely no doubt about

the significance of such a finding for the therapy enterprise. Indeed, many techniques already assume some level of self-control and ability to choose (cf. Rychlak, 1981). Would not it make more sense to investigate the possibility of human agency, instead of letting philosophers -- the original formulators of traditional method -- decide our position on this crucial issue for us?

Qualitative Understanding of Research

If all methods make assumptions, and all methods have their advantages and disadvantages, then how is it possible to fully investigate psychotherapy phenomena? What method options are available to the concerned researcher? How can the limitations of the traditional methods be addressed? We would argue that these limitations can be overcome through the pluralization of acceptable methods and philosophies in psychotherapy research. As psychotherapy researchers, we need to reject the notion that the traditional empirical approach is the scientific method and adopt, in its stead, the more modest position that the traditional approach constitutes one scientific method among many. This more modest position assumes that alternative methods are available that might: (a) provide a fruitful complement to traditional methods of research, (b) be amenable to a pluralistic approach to methodology, and (c) help us do a more complete job of conducting psychotherapy investigation.

We proffer the many types of qualitative methods in this regard (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Although qualitative methods have a history as long or longer than quantitative methods, these methods have only recently been critically examined in psychology. Indeed, many researchers have dismissed qualitative research methods out of hand, confusing them inappropriately with the nineteenth century, introspectionist methods or "subjective" measures. That is, any measure that is loose, ambiguous, or attempts to move beyond numbers and measurables is often labeled (or, more correctly, mislabeled) "qualitative." In both cases, this

confusion is the result of an inadequate understanding of the approach and its assumptions.

Qualitative methods are a highly rigorous, defensible means of gaining insight into psychology generally and psychotherapy specifically.

As we have noted above, however, no method is a panacea. All methods contain particular advantages and disadvantages, and so qualitative methods have their own limitations and biases. Indeed, it was these limits that originally kept natural scientists from using these methods more frequently. And, it was psychology's adoption of natural science methods that also entailed our discipline's uncritical adoption of natural science philosophy that led to our discipline's initial negative evaluation of qualitative methods (cf. Koch, 1959; Polkinghorne, 1983). We contend, however, that there is no substitute for a careful examination of this method philosophy for ourselves -- if for no other reason than our subject matter may be different from that of the natural sciences in important respects (e.g., humans may have choices). At this point, then, let us turn our attention to some of the philosophical biases underlying most qualitative methods.

Lived Experience. The first assumption of qualitative methods involves a different epistemological stance on the nature of knowledge. Unlike empiricism, which only validates a very narrow range of our experiences (i.e., sensory experiences), qualitative methods open up all experiences for validation status (e.g., mental, emotional, spiritual, agentic). Sensory experiences are just as subjective (or as experiential) as any other experiences, and we never get outside our experience. It is only the result of certain philosophies that empiricistic epistemology is allowed to grant "objective" status to some subjective experiences (the sensory) over others. Some researchers may contend that sensory experiences have an advantage, because they can be validated by others who can sense the same things. But how can we know that these others sense

the same things, and should mere consensus or intersubjective agreement among observers be the main factor in deciding what is right or correct?

Qualitative researchers do not believe that anyone is capable of objectivity in this sense, nor do they accept the notion that only the observable and operationalizable can be real and known. We know about historical occurrences (e.g., the destruction of Pompeii) and about our love for others in the same way we know anything -- through our experiences, broadly conceived. Hence, all such experiences are candidates for knowledge. All such experiences can hold important meanings for the experiencer, so to understand an experiencer better, such as a client, we must seek to understand the meanings of their experiences, whether sensory, emotional, contemplative, or spiritual. This does not mean that qualitative methods are subjective, because there are no objective methods with which to contrast them. Traditional methods deal with the experiences of scientists, and qualitative methods also deal with the experiences of their investigators. The issue, then, is not the experiential nature of these endeavors; the issue is the way in which each defends and justifies the meaning of their experiences -- their findings.

Ordinary Language. Perhaps surprisingly, each methodological approach accomplishes this defense in a similar manner, though the language of each is quite different. The language of quantitative methods is, of course, the language of numbers, so quantitative methodologists seek to justify and defend their conclusions by pointing to patterns in their numbers (often via statistics). Qualitative researchers, by contrast, do not present their questions to subjects in a common language and then ask them to reply in the foreign language of numbers. These researchers contend that such a translation omits and distorts important information. Consequently, qualitative researchers are committed to dealing with the data in the "ordinary

language” of the subjects themselves, including both nonverbal and verbal forms of this language.

However, similar to the quantitative researcher, the qualitative researcher seeks patterns in the linguistic data. Just as the quantitative researcher seeks patterns in their numbers, so, too, the qualitative researcher seeks patterns in their linguistic data. Moreover, qualitative researchers should be able to demonstrate to someone else=s satisfaction that their conclusions are justifiable. In other words, conclusions should be demonstrable from the data themselves (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Contextualism. Another central assumption of many qualitative methods contrasts with the universalism of more traditional methods -- contextualism. Contextualism is the assumption that some knowledge, at least, is relative to the context in which it occurs. In other words, we can have knowledge of something that is relatively unique and singular, without automatically assuming that it is not knowledge. Indeed, from within the qualitative framework, it is expected that some knowledge is thoroughly cultural, historical, and thus unique and singular. As parts of the whole, these singularities are somewhat reflective of the whole and thus generalizable, after a fashion, without needing to assume universalism (cf. Slife, 1995). That is, some of the meanings of our clients and some of the practices of our therapists are the products of particular cultural and historical meanings and practices. For example, past emphasis on individual therapy may have something to do with the individualism of our western culture (cf. Cushman, 1995). If this is true, then as the culture changes so does the emphasis on individual therapy. In this sense, some important knowledge is not universal and thus is not replicable outside its specific context.

Meaning. A final assumption contrasts directly with the naturalism of traditional research: Qualitative researchers assume that humans possess some meaning in their lives. In other words,

they do not assume that humans are at the mercy of natural laws that dictate their every thought and behavior. A rock rolling down a hillside cannot reasonably be said to have any meaning or purpose in its "behavior," because its behavior is dictated by the forces of gravity and terrain. We can give meaning to its behavior, but the rock does not have its own meaning, any more than any other entity that is supposedly governed by natural laws, such as humans.

Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, assume that humans have possibilities and meanings in their lives (unlike the rock), and thus these meanings are paramount in understanding them. To be sure, humans are constrained by their nature and their nurture, but this does not mean that we must see them as being dictated by natural and nurtural factors. In this sense, the goal of psychological science is not so much the search for the laws and principles that explain behavior and cognition, but rather the understanding of a person=s experiential meanings. It is these meanings that foster linguistic and behavioral patterns, and thus predictability. However, as Kruger (1988) notes, "meaning does not lend itself to reductive analysis" (p. 148). For example, it is possible to reduce a kiss to a series of voluntary muscular movements stimulated by particular hormonal secretions, but such a reduction is considered, at best, incomplete, and at worst, misleading. To be fully understood, a kiss must be seen in context: Is it a sexual advance, a greeting, a good-bye, or a sentence of death? If the method of investigation ignores or distorts the context in which the act gets its meaning, then there is little hope that clarity can be reached concerning the act=s inherent psychological and social meaning (see Kruger, 1988).

A Pluralism of Philosophies and Methods

At this point, we have described two sets of contrasting assumptions, two philosophical foundations for method. However, it is one thing to list the various assumptions, and quite another thing to put them into a coherent framework. Given the obvious differences of these two philosophies, are they so divergent that they cannot be brought together under one theoretical or philosophical framework? This is the question of incommensurability, the question of whether their differences are so deep that there is no common commensurate, or measuring stick, for relating the two method philosophies. A pluralistic framework cannot work unless method philosophies have some meaningful relation, i.e., have some coherence -- for a pluralistic framework to work. Otherwise, there is no basis for comparison and no way to know when one method philosophy is to be used over another.

Kuhn (1970) is quite famous for having shown that philosophies such as these are incommensurable. That is, he contended that the differences between "paradigms" -- his term for incommensurable philosophies -- ran deeper than was typically thought (Slife, in press). However, as deeply as Kuhn taught us to consider such incommensurable philosophies, he did not hold that differing paradigms were incomparable (Bernstein, 1983; Kuhn, 1997; Slife, in press). Indeed, his purpose in calling attention to the incommensurability of paradigms was that such paradigms could be compared and related in the most profound (and incommensurable) ways.

We would advocate a similar comparison and relationship for methodological pluralism. We would never minimize the differences between these two method paradigms (or other methods and philosophies that might be developed). However, the depth of their differences does not necessarily lead to incomparability and incoherence. As Kuhn (1970) and other philosophers of science, such as Bernstein (1983), have demonstrated, the incommensurability of two

paradigms is their relationship. The recognition that each employs differing "measuring sticks" is itself a type of comparability.

In the case of methodological pluralism, we would argue that this incommensurable difference is precisely what pluralism is all about: It is the use of different measuring sticks, different methods, to understand a particular subject under consideration. If such differing philosophies and methods converge on a particular understanding -- and some type of complementary results was found -- then our confidence in the justification and validity of our understanding would be increased many fold. This increase is because two dramatically different measuring sticks produced complementary results. Admittedly, this assertion of convergence glosses over many method details that have to be worked out (and for which we have no space in this article) to achieve this type of complementarity. Still, many researchers report that they have already conducted such complementary investigations and seen such complementary findings (e.g., Packer & Addison, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Is there a coherent framework available for guiding this type of complementary research? The answer is clearly positive, because in many ways the relation between these two philosophies has already been explicated here (see section above). A framework of this sort could never be an entirely straightforward procedure, or as Kuhn (1970) put it, "an algorithm able to dictate rational unanimous choice" (p. 331). The challenge of implementing pluralism would undoubtedly be greater than traditional methods. With traditional methods, the challenge of scientists is limited to fitting investigative questions into the method philosophy: How do we operationalize, numerize, replicate, and manipulate? A pluralistic framework, on the other hand, would require fitting the method to the investigative question. That is, the subject matter or investigative question would take precedence, because it is the thing being investigated. In the same sense that a literary work

is evaluated in terms of its own genre, an investigative question would be evaluated in terms of its own underlying philosophy.

Cognizance of method language is imperative in this regard, since it is key to the assumptions as well as central to knowing the advantages and disadvantages of particular methods. As we stated above, all languages open up and close down some ways of thinking and feeling. The problems and prospects of each method's language should be as well known to researchers as the problems and prospects of each method's design (in traditional research). When is a numerical or an ordinary language called for? What does each language open up and close down? Answers to these questions are crucial if we want to avoid using a screwdriver to pound a nail.

A methodological pluralism does not preclude the use of counter philosophies, or methods based on philosophies that are counter to the assumptions of the investigative question. A screwdriver can occasionally pound a nail, and it may be instructive to see what such pounding produces. However, such counter philosophies would always be used with extensive awareness of their pros and cons, i.e., what the language and assumptions that are inherent in the philosophy open up and close down. More often, different aspects of the same phenomenon -- each aspect fitting the differing assumptions of the respective methods -- would be investigated to see if these aspects complement or converge upon a united understanding of the phenomena in question. In the same sense in which an understanding of clothing requires both quantitative dimensions (e.g., the size of the collar, the length of the cut) and qualitative dimensions (e.g., the fit, the style, its propriety for particular occasions), we would argue that psychotherapy also has its quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Advantages of Methodological Pluralism

How would methodological pluralism specifically benefit psychotherapy researchers? We would contend that there are five essential benefits:

First, methodological pluralism advances science. As in any discipline with unacknowledged and yet pervasive assumptions, the exposure and examination of these assumptions brings about deeper understanding and sometimes profound innovation. The most noted example of this is perhaps Albert Einstein's work in physics. His advances of science did not stem from his empirical research, but from his theoretical examination of the core assumptions of his discipline (e.g., time). In fact, Einstein's type of scientific advancement is not an isolated case. The identification and investigation of core assumptions have regularly benefited disciplines (e.g., Heisenberg, 1958; Kitcher, 1993; Kuhn, 1970), and we believe that a similar benefit would accrue to psychotherapy research with a regular and constant examination of its assumptions.

Second, methodological pluralism is a more "objective" approach. The term objective is intended here to mean object oriented. That is, pluralism attempts to put the object of study first when deciding how it should be examined, tested, and investigated. This is not to say that an object can be studied without at least some type of informal method and language. However, it is to say that this method and language do not have to dictate what questions can be asked (e.g., operational ones), how the object is to be presented (e.g., numerically), and whether the object is deemed to exist (e.g., if replicated). Although data can by no means "speak for themselves," pluralism assumes that objects of study are "stubborn" in the sense that if we pay attention, they will help us to know whether our assumptions about them are pertinent.

Third, methodological pluralism levels the "playing field". The issue here is that traditional scientific research has not given all psychotherapy techniques, strategies, and ideas a fair chance.

Because this research has a certain set of relatively unacknowledged assumptions, it favors certain techniques, strategies, and ideas that share, to some degree or other, its assumptions. Many existentialists, for instance, find it theoretically reprehensible to make their "ways of being" into techniques, and thus operationalizations (e.g., van Deurzen-Smith, 1997; Yalom, 1980). Without operationalizations of the unobservable constructs of existential therapy, how would a traditional researcher proceed? Although it is true that there are inevitably things to observe in any therapy, what if the existentialist insists that these observables are not the subjects of interest?

Traditionalists might insist, in response, that observables are the subjects of interest, but how level is this playing field from the perspective of someone who does not share these assumptions of what is important?

Fourth, methodological pluralism promotes greater scientific freedom. The uncovering of assumptive restrictions and the greater knowledge of alternative assumptions would permit greater freedom and creativity of inquiry. In some sense, the more method philosophies there are to choose from, the better is the potential method-phenomenon fit. We are aware that this type of method proliferation and scientific freedom scares some researchers, because it smacks of unchecked relativism. However, it is important to remember that the object of study is the ground of this approach. The stubbornness of the data, in this sense, is the check on this freedom.

Fifth, methodological pluralism ends the "method wars." As discounted as nontraditional methods might be in some psychological circles, they are taking other disciplines -- sociology, anthropology, and nursing, to name just a few -- by storm. Given their differences, and their differences from traditional methods, it is perhaps natural for each method to trumpet its own virtues and expose the vices of other approaches. This is what we mean by the coming of method wars. We believe that such wars, and all of their concomitant communication breakdowns,

fragmentation, and disunity, can be avoided through a framework that unites them but also gives them their just due -- methodological pluralism.

Conclusion

As the description of a framework, this article is not intended as a "how to" of methodological pluralism. Still, when coming from a tradition in which more method details are spelled out, some researchers may view pluralism as vague and perhaps even ephemeral. Although, as we have stated, space constraints limit the description of our proposal, there is an important sense in which pluralism is less structured and less specific. Indeed, this is the price of a continuing knowledge of our assumptions as well as an increase in our objectivity, fairness, freedom, and disciplinary unity. Further details will be required, to be sure, but there is also an important sense in which methodological pluralism is more of an attitude than a procedure. This attitude is, we believe, the core of the scientific spirit -- that as much as possible things should be examined, including the examination process itself.

We have also mentioned, in passing, the specter of relativism. Relativism (or subjectivism) is often the fear of traditionalists who first consider pluralistic proposals (e.g., Popper, 1959). Relativism in its most stark form is an "anything goes" attitude in which nothing can ever be ruled out and no knowledge is ever really discerned. Methodological pluralism may seem relativistic in that different phenomena and questions are viewed as relative to different philosophies. However, as we noted, this view does not mean that these philosophies, and the findings they might produce, are necessarily incomparable. In other words, this type of relativity does not mean that anything goes, because these findings can be compared and evaluated. Perhaps most important in this regard is our assertion that the data or object are the ground of all evaluation. Again, this is not a naive empiricism in which data are presumed to "speak" for themselves or be independent of

method, but this is, instead, the notion that all theories and understandings gained from pluralistic research must be justified in terms of the data. That is, whether the data are numbers or words, the "findings" must be demonstrable from the data themselves. This type of groundedness can prevent relativism and unite method philosophies.

This type of groundedness is, of course, itself a philosophy. No avoidance of relativism or promotion of unity is possible without a philosophy. As Karl Jaspers (1954) once put it, "There is no escape from philosophy. The question is only whether [a philosophy] is good or bad, muddled or clear. Anyone who rejects philosophy is himself unconsciously practicing a philosophy" (p. 12). Jaspers sums up the situation in psychotherapy research quite nicely. The originators of traditional methods assumed they could escape philosophy, when, in fact, they were practicing a particular philosophy in attempting this escape. If we cannot ultimately escape philosophy, as Jaspers says, then our only truly scientific recourse is to make the philosophies underlying our methods the subject of continuous examination and innovation themselves. In this way, methodological pluralism allows us to avoid practicing a "muddled" philosophy, and thus a muddled science of psychotherapy.

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