

Just One More 'Other' in Psychology?

Jill G. Morawski

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT. Projects to comprehend the conceptions of subjectivity present either implicitly or explicitly in psychological theories should incorporate scrutiny of the subject status of the observer/analyst. Examination of this 'other' subjectivity is challenged by the discipline's longstanding practices of purportedly removing, regulating or even disregarding the observer/analyst's subjectivity. Some promising theory templates for interrogating the observer/analyst have been proposed in recent years; that work indicates intriguing epistemological and practical problems for future theory development.

KEY WORDS: experimenter, objectivity, science studies, subjectivity

Among the recent advances of critical theoretical studies is knowledge that psychological science itself is part of the historical process of subjectivity formation. Critical and historical studies have established that subjectivity changes over time: political events, technological innovations, economic trends and geo-ecological shifts have been identified as causal forces behind social-psychic transformations. Recent work articulates direct linkages between psychological science and subject formation: psychology has been productive of aspects of modern subjectivity, including the sense of an empty self (Cushman, 1990) or biologically based understandings of homosexuality (Terry, 1996) and so-called 'pathologies' such as eating disorders (Brumberg, 1992), pre-menstrual syndrome (Parlee, 1994) and multiple personality (Hacking, 1995). Such critical and historical investigations, along with new psychoanalytical studies (Malone, 2000), offer promising ventures in revisioning subjectivity.

In the inaugural issue of *Theory & Psychology*, Robert Steele and I (Morawski & Steele, 1991) explored a related question of another subjectivity—that of the psychological scientist, the presumed agent of scientific investigations. The exploration uncovered dynamics, particularly gender relations, structuring psychologists' writings and their social positioning of self and other. Other contributors to the journal have discussed the (psychologically) distant gaze of the psychologist and its effects on the science's

THEORY & PSYCHOLOGY Copyright © 2000 SAGE Publications. VOL. 10(1): 63–70
[0959-3543(200002)10:1;63–70;011600]

rendition of other bodies and beings (Sampson, 1996; Wertz, 1994). Notable among these contributions is Budge and Katz's (1995) detailed exposition of the shaping of psychologists' selves through the didactic demands contained in the *APA Publication Manual*. In our study (and the others), the theory excursion was left incomplete, acknowledging the future challenge of creating a place for the observer/analyst in a reflexive science—'a science that acknowledges and incorporates the relations between representation and object, and observer and the observed' (Morawski & Steele, 1991, p. 128). The project to articulate the constitution of that 'other' of psychological science remains before us, surrounded by a series of questions. It begins with critical assessment of conventional assumptions that scientists are passive actors, not quite rational calculators, or agents whose psychological profiles and actions require rigorous monitoring and regulation. This tradition of backgrounding the psychological scientist has been sustained through exoneration written into empirical methodologies (Suls & Rosnow, 1988) and theories themselves (Stam, Lubek, & Radtke, 1998). This backgrounding has persisted despite the fact that in psychology these particular agents have a special task; that is, according to the rules of the scientific game, psychologists are expected to set aside, to bracket, the very stuff of their psychological selves which they are probing, measuring, naming and explaining in others. Psychologists' efforts to study psychological acts, therefore, constitute a psychology layered and folded with a rarefied retinue of psychological acts of self-regulation (Morawski, 1992).

How are we to understand these special actors, these self-consciously invisible others and their (psychological) investigative practices? Are they, too, the effects of larger historical conditions? It is clear that scientific technologies affect psychologists' representations of their subjects; are psychologists affected by such acts of representation? Are they affected by the lived experiences of engaging in scientific practices, in the very routines, standards, regulations and repetitions of research? Should our theoretical analysis of these 'special' agents, these self-effacing others, be social, psychological, biographical or something else? In engaging these matters, how should we situate ourselves as second-order observers/analysts who study psychologist observers/analysts?

To address these questions, undertake descriptions of the subject status of the investigator, and ultimately create a more adequate understanding of the observer/analyst, we can start by reviewing some of the alternative portrayals that have been proposed. Such alternatives typically are incorporated within larger theory ventures which address the cultural and technological dynamics of psychology. Given the foregrounding of culture and technology, these theory ventures can be accessed with Cowan's (1992) template for analyzing the effects of technology, a template that presupposes the embeddedness of technologies in culture and the diverse intentions of the producers of those technologies. Cowan argues that we must distinguish

the objectives and effects of technology as well as consider the indirect and sometimes inadvertent connections between producers and their productions. Motives are built into technologies (which are not benign tools), although these objectives are not entirely determinate. In addition to overt objectives, technologies have embedded ones (such as aspirations for market dominance, occupational security); they also have unintended consequences (such as pollution or unanticipated uses).

One of the first theories that described the impact of (scientific) psychology on the psychological and included the observer/analyst was Gergen's (1973) essay positing social psychology as history. Considered in terms of Cowan's model, he claims that the forces of technological practices of experimentation are of two sorts: embedded objectives and unintended consequences. The embedded objectives consist largely of 'prescriptive biases' which are engineered into experimental technologies and language. The unintended consequences of these techniques include such diverse psychological activities as experimental expectancies, enlightenment, self-fulfilling prophecy and reactivity, to name a few. Gergen's model is illuminating, if schematic; recent theorists such as Cushman (1990), Rose (1992) and Richards (1987) isolate more precisely some of the embedded objectives of psychological technologies, and, hence, provide more detailed accounts of the observer/analyst. Cushman (1990) attributes the psychotherapeutic emphasis on the self as empty and in need of filling or fulfillment to the excess production in capitalism: just as advertising strove to create need for new products, psychotherapists, too, created their own markets by confecting needs of the self. Rose's (1992) Foucauldian analysis corroborates this finding of economic motives of psychological scientists but highlights the 'generosity' of psychology: psychology's very form possesses a capacity to be borrowed liberally by other 'agents of social authority', including doctors, managers and social workers. Psychology's alliances, not its exclusive skills, are the source of its power. With this capacity of generosity, the motives as well as the effects of psychological technology are dispersed across professions, and psychologists must remain attentive to their generous scientific projects—a special condition of their subject status.

Unlike the perspectives of Cushman and Rose, Richards' (1987) theory is not wholly interpretable through Cowan's system. He proposes that the relation between scientific-technological productions and cultural formations is not one where external cultural pressures are exerted on or through scientists' practices, but one where science *is* culture. From this purchase, scientific activities like

... Asch's experiments [on conformity] were not *separate from* the phenomenon they were studying—they were themselves part of it, one further level of expression of the general cultural pre-occupation with conformity, just as later U.S. psychological work on prejudice and the roots of racism was part and parcel of the wider civil rights movement. (p. 207)

Richards' scientists are identified not as members of a special class but as members of culture whose work, like that of other members of culture, is shaped by and saturated with dominant beliefs about the world. His cultural theory describes only diffused psychological motivations of the observer/analyst, like Gergen's, and thus is less revealing than those of Rose or Cushman. However, Richards' model is advantageous in its refusal to deploy causal models of influence, and in this regard resembles the work of another affinity group of science studies scholars. Donna Haraway's (1989) *Primate Visions* exemplifies this new scholarship. Her study proceeds with the premise that

The sciences that tie monkeys, apes, and people together in a Primate Order are built through disciplined practices deeply enmeshed in narratives, politics, myth, economics, and technical possibilities. The women and men who have contributed to primate studies have carried with them the marks of their own histories and cultures. . . . [P]eople have engaged in dynamic, disciplined, and intimate relations of love and knowledge with the animals they were privileged to watch. (pp. 1–2)

Haraway holds that science is a 'story-telling practice' (p. 4) dependent upon historically specific rules, crafts and language. The agents of this story-telling are many, from primatologists and all other primates to scientific instruments, Cold War politicians, and corporations. Everything and everyone, as it happens, participate in establishing objects, objectives and effects; they all produce and are produced through storied technologies. Haraway describes all involved entities with the terms *actors*, *agencies* and *actants*, insisting that they 'be seen to be lively, consequential, where the action is' (1994, p. 65). The entities are not Aristotelian: they are not preformed but rather 'take shape in encounters' (p. 65). Nor are all the human actors the same. This last caveat, in particular, departs from psychology's conventions of comprehending knowledge producers wherein 'the subjects/actors who do the discovering are, at least ideally, interchangeable, all the Same, self-invisible, reliable, modest witnesses—self-invisible, transcendent Subjects, in short, out on a noble journey to report on embodied Nature' (p. 66).

Emphasis on the multiple actors and transformative features of psychological inquiry—a network analysis—also marks Hacking's (1986, 1995) looping model of psychological science. The observer/analyst is not prior to or privileged over the analyzed persons: both have bounded possibilities for personhood that are circumscribed by social and material conditions. And both sorts of persons can seize possibilities or undergo transformation such that sometimes 'our classifications and our classes conspire to emerge hand in hand, each egging the other on' (Hacking, 1986, p. 228). Distinctly elaborated in Hacking's theory is the play of agency and morality: choice and self-knowledge are taken as both characteristics and virtues of humans. His comprehension of the psychological observer/analyst is precisely in

these terms: 'In the modern image, it is we ourselves who must choose the ends' (Hacking, 1995, p. 264).

Haraway's analysis of the scientific observers' subject status also beckons a conception of situated knowers, one where partiality of vision, multiplicity of motives, intimate connections with the world of objects, and mobility or metamorphoses of identity constitute premises. Bayer's (1998) study of 'phantoms' in psychological research illuminates the psychological complexities of observers/analysts. The term 'phantoms' refers to various stand-ins for the observer/analyst: 'Taking their form as confederates, stooges, accomplices, paid participants, cyranoids, bogus pipelines, false feedback, cover stories, suggestions, illusions and the like, they are the laboratory phantasmagoria set in motion to manipulate, create, and stage cultural, social, and psychological life' (p. 188). These experimental doubles for the analyst 'denaturalize' the social relations of investigations, 'revealing all manner of scientific actors and actants to be hybrids formed out of new and unanticipated combinations of humans and non-humans, science and culture, politics and popular media . . .' (pp. 189–190). Phantoms show how classic notions of subjectivity or subject status— notions sustained by boundaries between natural and artificial, body and mind, objectivity and subjectivity and human and nonhuman—are inadequate for the task of deciphering the observer/analyst. They also display the gendered, authorial and industrial attributes of the scientific observer. Bayer argues that phantoms trouble not only orthodox constructs of the rational scientific actor but also contextual perspectives on the social relations of science, and notions of moral agency such as Hacking's. She urges attention to forces of desire and the imaginary, joining the recommendations of several other feminist theorists (Flax, 1990; Walkerdine, 1990).

In summary, the last decade or so has yielded considerable contributions to understanding the subjectivity of the observer/analyst. These advances most certainly disturb the dominant view of a passive, if not transcendent, agent of pure observation—a creature of prior inventions (Bordo, 1990; Daston & Galison, 1992) and 20th-century perfectibility. These ongoing projects unglue a second strategy for comprehending the observer/analyst: the portrayal of scientific observers as fallible actors sometimes blown about by ideological gusts or material winds of economics and social arrangements. This second strategy is compatible with and sustains the sacred tradition of objective stance: bad science occurs when scientists depart from the practices of objectivity.

A third strategy, evident in the last set of words considered here, is one where agency proliferates: observers/analysts might be animate or inanimate; they inhabit complex networks of actors and actants. In some senses the analyst and analyzed are the self-same entities: they occupy the same species-niche in the world order, and have some access to similar resources for self-examination, change and moral judgment. Although plotting somewhat

different organizational charts, they converge in pronouncing a certain democratization of agents (their new organizational genealogies nevertheless do delineate differences of position and opportunity). Yet glimpsed together, these theoretical ventures pose no showy consensus. Some locate important clues to understanding the observer/analyst in moral actions; others underscore social relations of power; and still others emphasize the imaginary and unconscious as they manifest the workings of (gender) identity. With these nuances and divergences emerges a provocative foundation for re-imaging the subject status of the observer/analyst, one awaiting elaboration and debate. Whereas these theories depict the observer/analyst as an actor within a larger public arena of culture, they leave space to consider how and where this public life connects with the private—the intrapsychic, autobiographical, idiosyncratic. Interrogating the private and personal might seem amiss, discordant with the attitude of postmodern and post-empiricist theorizing. However, in another era intellectually captivated with the cosmic and holism, the personal and private constituted living proofs of that system theory (Izenberg, 1992). Likewise, the new theories invite researchers to examine the relations of observer/analyst agents with subject agents—to ascertain whether and when these relations are dialectic, contractual, oppositional, mutually supporting, hierarchical, conflictual, co-dependent, relational and/or allied (Morawski, 1994; Stam et al., 1998).

For the explorations of the psychologist's subjectivity which lay ahead, two perplexing matters linger without any detectable resolution or reformulation. First, psychologists' self-regarding disregard for their subject status, their superbly crafted regulation of reflexive thought, continues (Flanagan, 1981; Morawski, 1992). It entails something of a paradox: what is persistent in observer/analyst's psychological actions is a creative fluidity in manufacturing disappearances of self. Consequently, with the exception of some feminist and race psychology, development of an epistemic purchase on the subject status of the observer/analyst has not affected psychology's investigative practices. The second matter, uncomfortably related to the first, is the absence of a proposed means to get beyond what Woolgar (1988) has called 'gerrymandering', the tendency in science studies research to maintain 'implicit claims at differentiation between deconstructor and deconstructed' (p. 99). Analysts of the psychological dynamics of the observer/analyst exempt themselves from psychological gaze, perpetuating what Nancy Miller (1991) described as a 'self-conscious depersonalization' of analysis (Haraway's and Hacking's work offer exceptions). This power of depersonalization is not without irony: in critical theoretical work on the observer/analyst, 'We have written of others and disclosed little of ourselves, and rarely been in doubt. Like the good experimenter, we have kept our distance and avoided personal involvement' (Morawski & Steele, 1991, p. 128). We have not yet acted upon Rouse's (1992) proposal that we acknowledge 'normative issues inevitably at stake in both science and cultural studies of

science, but see them as arising both locally and reflexively. One cannot but be politically and epistemologically engaged' (p. 20). Shared with scholars in science studies (Gooding, 1992; Haraway, 1994; Rouse, 1992), these two vexing matters promise engaging, energetic and crucial work for the forthcoming decade.

References

- Bayer, B.M. (1998). Between apparatuses and apparitions: Phantoms of the laboratory. In B. Bayer & J. Shotter (Eds.), *Reconstructing the psychological subject: Bodies, practices, and technologies* (pp. 187–213). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bordo, S. (1990). Feminism, postmodernism, and gender-skepticism. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 133–156). New York: Routledge.
- Brumberg, J.J. (1992). From psychiatric syndrome to 'communicable' disease: The case of anorexia nervosa. In C.E. Rosenberg & J. Golden (Eds.), *Framing disease: Studies in cultural history* (pp. 134–154). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Budge, G.S., & Katz, B. (1995). Constructing psychological knowledge: Reflections on science, scientists and epistemology in the *APA Publication Manual. Theory & Psychology*, 5, 217–231.
- Cowan, R.S. (1992). Genetic technology and reproductive choice: An ethics for autonomy. In D.J. Kelves & L. Hood (Eds.), *The code of codes: Scientific and social issues in the human genome project* (pp. 244–263). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cushman, P. (1990). Why the self is empty: Toward a historically situated psychology. *American Psychologist*, 45, 599–611.
- Datson, L., & Galison, P. (1992). The image of objectivity. *Representations*, 40, 81–128.
- Flanagan, O.J., Jr. (1981). Psychology, progress, and the problem of reflexivity: A study in the epistemological foundations of psychology. *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 17, 375–386.
- Flax, J. (1990). *Thinking fragments: Psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism in the contemporary West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gergen, K.J. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 309–320.
- Gooding, G. (1992). Putting agency back into experiment. In A. Pickering (Ed.), *Science as practice and culture* (pp. 65–112). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hacking, I. (1986). Making up people. In T.C. Heller, M. Sosna, & D.E. Wellberry (Eds.), *Reconstructing individualism: Autonomy, individuality, and the self in western thought* (pp. 222–236). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hacking, I. (1995). *Rewriting the soul: Multiple personality and the sciences of memory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Haraway, D.J. (1989). *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nature in the world of modern science*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D.J. (1994). A game of cats' cradle: Science studies, feminist theory, cultural studies. *Configurations*, 1, 59–71.

- Izenberg, G.N. (1992). *Impossible individuality: Romanticism, revolution, and the origins of selfhood*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Malone, K.R. (2000). Subjectivity and the address to the other: A Lacanian view of some impasses in theory and psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, 10, 79–86.
- Miller, N.K. (1991). *Getting personal: Feminist occasions and other autobiographical acts*. New York: Routledge.
- Morawski, J.G. (1992). Self regard and other regard: Reflexive practices in American psychology, 1890–1940. *Science in Context*, 5, 281–308.
- Morawski, J.G. (1994). *Practicing feminisms, reconstructing psychology: Notes on a liminal science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Morawski, J.G., & Steele, R.S. (1991). The one and the other: Textual analysis of masculine power and feminist empowerment. *Theory & Psychology*, 1, 107–31.
- Parlee, M.B. (1994). The social construction of premenstrual syndrome: A case study of scientific discourse. In M.G. Winkler & L.B. Cole (Eds.), *The good body: Asceticism in contemporary culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Richards, G. (1987). Of what is history of psychology a history? *British Journal of the History of Science*, 20, 201–211.
- Rose, N. (1992). Engineering the human soul: Analyzing psychological expertise. *Science in Context*, 5, 351–369.
- Rouse, J. (1992). What are cultural studies of scientific knowledge? *Configurations*, 1, 1–22.
- Sampson, E.E. (1996). Establishing embodiment in psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, 6, 601–624.
- Stam, H.J., Lubek, I., & Radtke, H.L. (1998). Repopulating social psychology texts: Disembodied ‘subjects’ and embodied subjectivity. In B. Bayer & J. Shotton (Eds.), *Reconstructing the psychological subject: Bodies, practices, and technologies* (pp. 153–186). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Suls, J.M., & Rosnow, R.L. (1988). Concerns about artifacts in psychological experiments. In J.G. Morawski (Ed.), *The rise of experimentation in American psychology* (pp. 163–187). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Terry, T. (1996). The seductive power of science in the making of deviant subjectivity. In V.A. Rosario (Ed.), *Science and homosexualities* (pp. 271–297). New York: Routledge.
- Walkerline, V. (1990). *Schoolgirl fictions*. New York: Verso.
- Wertz, F.J. (1994). Of rats and psychologists: A study of the history and meaning of science. *Theory & Psychology*, 4, 165–198.
- Woolgar, S. (1988). *Science: The very idea*. New York: Tavistock.

JILL G. MORAWSKI is Professor of Psychology at Wesleyan University, where she also teaches in the Science in Society Program and Women's Studies Program. She is author of *Practicing Feminisms, Reconstructing Psychology: Notes on a Liminal Science* (University of Michigan Press, 1994) along with articles on feminist psychology and the history of psychology. Her current research projects include exploration of reflexivity in psychological theories and a study of male reproductive sciences. ADDRESS: Department of Psychology, Wesleyan University, Judd Hall, Middletown, CT 06457, USA. [email: jmorawski@mail.wesleyan.edu]