

7-28-2000

Wanted: New Methodologies for Peace

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2000) "Wanted: New Methodologies for Peace," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 4 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol9/iss4/5>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Wanted: New Methodologies for Peace

Author: Editor

Volume: 9

Issue: 4

Date: 2000-07-28

Keywords: Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Peace, Postmodernism

Abstract. This article describes problems with common methodological approaches to developing knowledge that will prevent war and attain peace.

Political psychologists and other social scientists desiring to prevent war and attain peace are, for the most part, characterized with the best of intentions. However, the common epistemological methodologies that are employed serve more as impediments to knowledge than the royal roads to peace.

First, operational definitions of peace usually comprise the absence of external, behavioral acts directly antecedent and judged causally related to external injury, death, damage, and destruction for publicly declaimed political reasons. An example of such acts would include killing people with guns to settle a dispute about the boundaries between two nation-states. Yet these operational definitions usually ignore or discount internal consequences involving feelings, thoughts, motives--viz., the mind and spirit--and acts antecedent and judged to be causally related to such consequences. Attending to the external as opposed to the internal--even if successful within a primary prevention context--might well result in a chilling world with a nonviolent veneer covering a profound violence.

Second, positivist approaches to establishing causal variables contributing to peace and war intrinsically possess intractable deficiencies. Such variables are usually identified based on a number of time-honored and partially overlapping criteria relating each variable to that which it may be related including priority, consistency, exclusivity, conjunction, contiguity, and antecedence. Statistical analyses (based on models assuming distributions of what is being analyzed) are only then applied to delineate some magnitude and quality of relationship between each variable and that to which it is being related--this application being carried out irrespective of other variables or in the context of them. Regardless of the complexity and sophistication of the statistical models, the whole analytic enterprise is ultimately dependent on human social perception and judgment within a socio-historical context--as to variable and model choices and to interpretive strategies towards data analysis and resulting analytic products. Only a face validity too easily developed through a sense of a pressing need for peace is the sine qua non of validity in such a situation.

Third, the other common methodological approach to establishing causal variables contributing to peace and war encompasses various constructivist perspectives--viz., the postmodern and hermeneutic. Although this approach may explicitly eschew the very notion of causality, it often implicitly supports attempts at delineating causality through vehicles such as ideal speech situations, various types of ongoing discourses or universal procedures, exchange values, and making sense in particular cultural contexts. When all is said and done, the constructivist approach is isomorphically parallel to the positivist one, even as it does a commendable job in highlighting inadequacies of the naturalism and empiricism bases of positivism.

Instead of remaining in the throes of a repetition compulsion to fit the procrustean beds of positivism and constructivism, political psychologists and other social scientists need to develop an epistemology

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of peace. Much as with the intellectual history of feminism, success will afford epistemological gains for many pursuits of knowledge as well as for the telos of peace that primarily motivates the whole enterprise. (See Bickhard, M. H. (1992). Myths of science: Misconceptions of science in contemporary psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 2, 321-337; Crawford, M., & Marecek, J. (1989). Feminist theory, feminist psychology: A bibliography of epistemology, critical analysis, and applications. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 477-491; Diorio, J.A. (1989). Consequentialism and peace education. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 24, 19-33; Kendall, G., & Michael, M. (1997). Politicizing the politics of postmodern social psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 7-29; Phillips, N., & Brown, J. L. (1993). Analyzing communication in and around organizations: A critical hermeneutic approach. *Academy of Management Journal*, 36, 1547-1576.) (Keywords: Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Peace, Postmodernism.)