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Wanted: A Political Psychology

Editor

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Abstract. This article describes guidelines for a political psychology curriculum that could be pursued by the academic, the academic student, and the autodidact.

A point of departure for a political psychology curriculum is a quest to merge the political and the psychological to understand, explain, predict, and/or influence aspects of the phenomenal world. One obvious operationalization of this quest is to study the essentials of academic political science and academic psychology. These essentials often comprise hypothetical constructs, hypotheses, theories, methodologies, and statistics currently in favor by academic guild organizations, their representatives, and those who aspire to be their representatives. Some sort of integration of the political and the psychological would then occur as knowledge about something political—or less often, something psychological—is created.

However, this operationalization may be obvious but it is not commonly effected. Most often, something from academic psychology is applied to somehow elucidate something that is political—either some political event or some essential of academic political science. Much less often, something from academic political science may be applied to some psychological event or some essential of academic psychology. In either case, an integration of academic disciplines as peers does not occur.

Someone interested in the political and the psychological might be struck with the observation that there seem to be brilliant practitioners of what might be termed political psychology who have never studied the subject in a formal academic environment and who may even have very different ideas about what the subject is. Examples of these brilliant practitioners may include successful governmental leaders, governmental advisers, leaders of organizations, and individuals who seem to never be truly attached to an entity larger than themselves or a few loved ones but who navigate and traverse larger entities to achieve their own definitions of success. For such brilliant practitioners, the credential of political psychological expertise is not a diploma or a corpus of refereed knowledge but intentionally obtained life success on its own terms.

Perhaps the appropriate political psychology could involve emulating the brilliant practitioners. Yet which of an infinite number of behaviors and of only inferred intrapsychic phenomena could be emulated? Even if a brilliant practitioner could be induced to share the secrets of success, one would be at the mercy of access to and accuracy of self-knowledge and one's own intelligence and interpretative strategies. So is there a route to merging the best of the academic and the non-academic?

One possible curriculum would include a two-fold immersion in the stuff of life. This would involve living and through a large degree of self-selected situations wherein politics is highly salient. (Here politics would be defined as denoting infinite needs and finite resources—the stuff of life itself.) The immersion also would involve intense readings from novels, poetry, autobiographies and biographies, historical textbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, films, and variants of the police blotter.

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Also recommended would be an immersion in interpretive strategies. This would involve induction, deduction, and other forms of crafting associations among discrete elements and continuous phenomena that are the focus of philosophy, logic, objective and projective assessment, inferential statistics, and the study of religious texts.

Finally, the usual suspects of psychological and political academic materials would be studied.

The stuff of life, interpretive strategies, and academic materials would need to be frequently subjected to introspection in solitude with the ghosts of one's social life as well as in active engagement with the associates of one's social world.

While academic political psychology is itself interdisciplinary, the curriculum just described is also transdisciplinary. And in breaking the bonds of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary, one would truly be confronted with the politics and psychology of political psychology. (See Bilgrave, D. P., & Deluty, R. H. (2002). Religious beliefs and political ideologies as predictors of psychotherapeutic orientations of clinical and counseling psychologists. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 39, 245-260; Duckitt, J., & Fisher, K. (2003). The impact of social threat on world view and ideological attitudes. *Political Psychology*, 24, 199-222; Papadopoulos, D. (2003). The ordinary superstition of subjectivity: Liberalism and technostructural violence. *Theory & Psychology*, 13, 73-93; Prilleltensky, I. (2003). Understanding, resisting, and overcoming oppression: Toward psychopolitical validity. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31, 195-201.)