

EVALUATION, YES; RESEARCH MAYBE

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Graduate students in social psychology learn a great deal about research and nothing about evaluation. In dealing with environmental issues and other social problems, this lack sets up the student to be either irrelevant or ineffective. Research cannot provide answers to questions of value. An evaluation model seems more appropriate to most social problems than a pure research model. Since there are few if any S-R relationships in nature, psychologists must develop criteria for evaluating program success based on the experiences of the people in the setting rather than looking at such experiences as instrumental to some remote productivity criterion such as mental health, school progress, or income.

The brief history of environmental psychology has been one of interdisciplinary cooperation. There were renegade psychologists interested in the effects of buildings on people, maverick geographers concerned with environmental perception, zoologists who wanted to develop a human ethology, sociologists who believed that props were important to the play—in short, the typical bunch of misfits attracted to the frontier. The mixture of expertise was inevitable since nobody was trained as an environmental psychologist and there weren't enough people from any single discipline to reinforce a stereotyped view of the environment. This situation has changed and all the signs of institutionalization are appearing—Ph.D. programs, several journals and an abstract service, special meetings, conferences, and interest groups, and nods of recognition when the phrase “environmental psychology” is uttered in public. I hope that the lessons of its interdisciplinary origins are not lost upon this next generation of students who will be the first people trained as environmental psychologists. There have been many things I have learned about psychology from my contact with other professions. The lack of solid data on human response to the environment has been a continuing source of frustration and humility. However this has been overshadowed by the inadequacy of the approach taken by most psychologists to important social problems. Many difficulties can be traced to the student's socializa-

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tion to the profession in graduate school and probably further back than that.

Graduate students in social psychology learn a great deal about research and nothing about evaluation. The word evaluation if it ever appears in graduate training, refers to statistical evaluation or methods for determining if one's results are reliable. Little or nothing is said about methods for evaluating the social utility of research data. This is a sure prescription (and explanation) for trivial research on irrelevant issues, with questions about data recording and statistical analysis substituting for questions about the importance of the problem and the applicability of the results to social issues. Psychologists also spend very little time discussing the nature of value and how it is created or the nature of proof apart from statistical reliability. This produces some awkward blind spots when the psychologist attempts to deal with practical problems. Present graduate training in social psychology sets up the student to be either irrelevant or ineffective.

In the psychologist's epistemology there is a difference between research and evaluation. Research seems to deal with immutable laws and relationships about abstract categories of individuals—schizophrenics, alcoholics, old people, young people, and so on. Evaluation deals with a specific concrete situation and the people actually in it—the tenants in the Bedford-Stuyvesant housing project, campers in Yosemite, or people living on the Ohio River floodplain. In evaluation one generalizes back to the people in a particular setting, while the researcher generalizes his finding to groups of individuals seemingly removed from time and place, including such broad categories as men and women, the old and the young, or blacks and whites. I would not deny the utility of the research model for dealing with a small number of problems. I think it has great utility for studies of after images, frontal lobe injury, and drug dosage studies. Yet for dealing with social problems such as gang rivalries, the use of hard drugs in a neighborhood, or low morale in the school system, an evaluation model seems more appropriate. Certainly the action-oriented psychologist dealing with drug problems in a community can draw upon the findings from the research laboratory about the effects, the risks of overdose or infection, and withdrawal symptoms. Such knowledge will be helpful if it is introduced into the setting in the right way at the right time. Most surveys, particularly the large scale ones involving hundreds of questions scored and cross-correlated by computers, are available only after interest in the problem has waned. This has given rise to the belief that surveys are done mainly to delay action and drain away interest in social change. This is not inevitable but it happens more often than it should mainly because psychologists do not distinguish between information and advice. It is obvious that advice is needed when a person has a problem. Information that is categorized as research requires several years lead time and addresses itself to a phenomenon rather than to a practical problem facing specific individuals.

The imbalance between training in research and evaluation needs to be redressed in the graduate training of psychologists. In addition to learning about methods for conducting research a psychologist should also learn something about evaluation. More specifically she should be given an evaluation problem as part of her graduate training. Not only would this provide valuable experience, it would also provide useful data on areas of direct interest to psychologists. The neglect of the evaluational approach has produced some serious blind spots in the psychologist's own professional life. Virtually no psychologists have ever evaluated the adequacy of the classrooms in which they teach. Are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough legroom between rows? How about the ventilation in the back of the room? I should add that a professor standing in the front of the room cannot know about these matters from his or her own direct experience. Only a tiny fraction of psychologists has made any effort to evaluate the textbooks they use. It seems an incredible travesty for *Contemporary Psychology* to publish reviews of textbooks that contain no hint of student response. I am not talking here about research monographs but rather about books specifically written as texts. It would be logical for the editor of CP to require every reviewer to include some student evaluations in his or her review. They would not tell the full story, since evaluational data supplies information rather than advice. The critical judgment of the reviewer would still play an important role in the review, but it would be supplemented by the opinions of students and faculty who have used the book themselves.

There are many political and social implications to the evaluational model. For one thing it tends to *demystify* the activities of the psychologist and the workings of social institutions. Done properly it can provide a feedback loop from the clients or users back to the practitioners. It creates a *questioning community* where people take a serious look at what they are doing and whether it is being done right or needs to be done at all. Surveys can be made into educational tools, and user self-surveys where the people themselves have supplied the questions and carry out the interviewing and data analysis, are the most educational of all. Most subjects in psychological experiments derive very little from the experience although a subsequent debriefing after the experiment can be educational. But even the debriefing tends to be didactic with the experimenter informing the subject about the "real purposes" of the investigation which makes him feel more like a manipulated object than anything else.

Most psychologists conceive of research as a value-free and ethically neutral activity. I must admit some ignorance about the status of basic research outside of the western world. A recent article about China (Galston, 1972) indicates that there is no basic research being done and all scholarly efforts are being devoted to solving practical problems. Personally, I have always been skeptical about the value of distinction between basic and applied research. The ecological view stresses the

interconnectedness of phenomena and this includes areas of knowledge. Every piece of research has implications for both theory and for action. What distinguishes so-called basic from so-called applied research is the view the experimenter takes towards the data. Research on the sales of Pepsi-Cola can be related to the selling of environmental quality and to a theory of attitude change. What is usually detached and seemingly free from social concerns is the investigator rather than the data! The research model carries with it certain role behaviors. These would include sucking around foundations and government agencies, selecting problems likely to be funded, and learning how to draw up a grant proposal and organize a research program within institutions set up for other purposes (e.g. teaching) but most insidious of all is the role requirement that the investigator refrain from immersing himself in social action for fear that he might become compromised, tainted, and controversial. To make research grants dependent upon such role prescriptions makes them seem like bribes to induce scientists and scholars to refrain from social action.

The objective and value-free posture of the investigator contributes to the exploitative quality of social research. It simply isn't of much value to the people being studied. This situation is partly traceable to the investigator's explicit approach to the problem. When he gives Rorschach tests to 20 convicts and 20 guards, he doesn't believe in the slightest that this information will be of use to any of the 40 individuals. The only person who will gain anything directly is the investigator in terms of a dissertation or a publication. The moral basis of such research is highly questionable. I can accept this as a short-run tactic as part of a larger research program but not as a life style. The danger in using people without giving them anything directly in return and profiting personally from their labors is the development of an exploitative mandarin attitude towards other people and one's job. This mandarin approach has produced an *inverse* relationship between rewards and social importance. Within academe so-called applied research is looked down upon and counts very little towards promotion. I can testify from personal experience on numerous hiring and promotion committees and review panels that abstract and esoteric articles and proposals are weighted more heavily than studies concerned with practical issues.

An important distinction that is neglected in graduate training is that between questions of fact and questions of value. Social issues generally concern the latter while science is concerned with the former. Research comes up with information rather than advice. A recent article on a proposed redwood national park illustrates this.

The discussion over a redwood national park was dominated by objective analyses. Obviously, these studies did not produce "objective truths," nor did they result in agreement among the factions involved. They provided little help, therefore, in resolving the question of whether or not a park should be created. While future events are, at best, difficult to predict, the failure of these reports was not caused

simply by poor or inadequate techniques . . . Even the ideal state of absolute objectivity would not have furnished an answer. This is necessarily so because the problem, being dealt with could not be resolved by factual analysis. As in most other cases of resource allocations, the controversy over a redwood national park was one of differing values. (Vale, 1970)

The young Ph.D. who believes that research tools will provide answers to questions of value will inevitably be frustrated. He can survey the problem to death (and many social agencies are content to let him do this) but at some point a decision has to be made about whether the recreational experience in a redwood park is worth a forty million dollar federal appropriation and the loss of a certain number of jobs in the lumber industry balanced somewhat by a gain in employment in the tourist industry. Research can tell us something about the number of forest-related jobs that are likely to be lost and the number of tourist jobs to be created and the kinds of experiences that people will have in a redwoods park but none of this will answer the (value) question about whether or not the park should be created.

Looking at programs and experience solely as instrumental to other things (e.g. Headstart as instrumental in improving school performance later) has two drawbacks. First of all it diverts attention away from the experience itself since the investigator always has at least one eye looking beyond the immediate experience. What *really matters* to him is how the Headstart student performs in first and second grade. According to Hill (1971) the bulk of the evidence on Headstart suggests that there are some social and intellectual gains to be had from participation providing the measures are taken just before and after the child's exposure to the program. However, by the end of the first grade, there are no differences between those who have and those who have not had prior experience in Headstart. Before concluding that the Headstart program is "no good" we must answer the question "Good for what?" If the environment the first grade teacher provides does not build upon the child's Headstart experience, there are not going to be any gains. Headstart and similar programs do not seem to be inoculations of social and cognitive vaccines that give everlasting benefits regardless of the environment in which they occur. It therefore seems necessary to seriously deal with experience itself, to devise ways of conceptualizing it and evaluating its quality rather than simply using it as instrumental for something else. One can ask college students about their dormitory rooms and patients about their hospital wards with the goal of assessing the quality of the individual's experience. Are students satisfied with the size of their rooms, the amount of privacy, the lighting and ventilation, the possibilities for coed contact? Is the hospital patient satisfied with the location of his bed, his acoustical protection from hallway noise, the possibilities for reading, the privacy afforded his visitors? One can ask all these questions without assuming a provable correlation between the person's satisfactions with his sur-

roundings and his grade point average, physical health, or relations with his family. In an environmental bill of rights, a dormitory room that affords some privacy and a hospital room that is comfortable and functional are ends in themselves. It is a dangerous trap to see them as short-run objectives which are casually related to productivity measures such as grade point average or physical health. This is simply another pathway of instrumental thinking which (a) tends to downgrade the importance of the experience itself and (b) requires the investigator to establish the connection between satisfied students and grade point average that will be very difficult if not impossible to do so. The only way out of this dilemma is to accept the student's comfort and the hospital patient's comfort as ends in themselves, not simply as instrumental to something else.

It should be enough to demonstrate that people enjoy themselves in a park, feel some communion with growing things in the outdoors, and have the opportunity to relax and socialize away from smog and crowds. It is not incumbent to demonstrate that this is related to anything else. This is not a plea for subjectivity or anti-empiricism; the proximate criteria of a park's enjoyment by visitors can be clearly and objectively stated. In fact they are more capable of clear and objective statement than the remote criteria of mental health and social adjustment in which innumerable other factors cloud the picture. An environmental bill of rights would consist of *a priori* value statements such as provision for adequate shelter, food, medical services, and recreational spaces among other things. It is not necessary to establish the need for good housing on the basis of health criteria or vice versa. In the same way we do not insist that freedom of speech is justified only when it produces freedom of the press or assembly and vice versa. Rather we look upon freedom of speech and assembly as necessary ingredients of a good and full life. We can do the same thing with housing and education and recreational programs and facilities. The fact that people can adapt to poor water or poor air or poor schools is no argument for them. The important questions concern the quality of life. For social planners and administrators this means deciding not so much what kinds of facilities and programs are necessary as what sorts of experiences we want people to have (Sommer, 1972).

My concern with this issue arose during repeated and mutually frustrating encounters with government administrators and environmental activists who wanted to prove things that I felt could not be proven, at least by the evidentiary criteria presently used by psychologists. Essentially they wanted to justify something which should be part of an environmental bill of rights. Let me begin with a nameless individual from the Bureau of Land Management who wanted to sell Congress on the idea of setting aside money for desert recreation areas. He earnestly believed that he had to show Congress that desert recreation had some affect on family life. To use his example, it would be necessary to demonstrate that if a man and his boys went out and rode around the desert on a dune buggy, when they came back to Los Angeles the kids would

spend their time fixing up the dune buggy rather than loitering on the street, smoking pot, and becoming delinquents. For my part, it seems reasonable that families who go to the desert together (or to the mountains or the lake) have a lower divorce rate, less juvenile delinquency, and higher school achievement than a random sample of families in Los Angeles—but this overlooks the selection factor of families going to the desert. If these same families were prevented from going to the desert they would go to the seashore together or to the mountains or have a barbecue in their backyard. It doesn't seem that one can demonstrate the importance of preserving the desert in this way. The only correlations between specific recreational opportunities and remote life adjustment variables such as family togetherness, academic success, and vocational adjustment are spurious. If the study actually controlled for the selection variables I doubt if there would be any connection with remote productivity or health criteria. The only honest approach for the researcher in this situation, *and I strongly believe that there is an important role for the researcher in dealing with problems like this*, is to deal with the behavior and attitudes of the people in a particular situation. It is sufficient to demonstrate that the desert provides camping and picnic and scenic opportunities which give considerable satisfaction to the people who go there. Using an evaluational model one can also specify the most satisfying aspects of the situation and those in need of some improvement.

There is no way to prove that the preservation of a row of brownstone houses or the Imperial Hotel will lower the incidence of mental illness, reduce divorce rates, or increase national income. There is no point in trying to prove any of these things because they obviously do not occur. It seems more reasonable and more honest to say that we appreciate their historical, cultural, and educational value and back this up with research into the roles that historical buildings play in the life of a community—how many people visit these buildings and the sorts of experiences they have, including feelings of continuity and a sense of the past. When someone visits a restored building, listens to a concert, attends a good play, or views a great work of art, is it legitimate to measure this in terms of its affect upon his marriage or his job or his IQ? It seems enough that he has had a good experience and that he feels that he derived something from it even though we cannot measure this by remote productivity criteria. Psychologists must self-consciously examine alternatives to the research model as a means of generating socially useful information. As one such alternative, the evaluation model should be upgraded and given a place of prominence in the training of social psychologists.

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