Researching Complex and Fraught Contexts in *Social Science Methods for Psychodynamic Inquiry: The Unconscious on the World Scene.*

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The field of psychology has become increasingly specialized over the past half century. Because the inclusion of perspectives from various fields and attention to multiple levels of analyses can speak to important human and social issues, there is an increasing appreciation of psychology's integrative potential.   In *Social science methods for psychodynamic inquiry: The unconscious on the world scene,* the book's author, William Meyers models attention to multiple perspectives that speak to psychodynamic factors within social issues. Focusing on unconscious and irrational components of actors in world affairs, his book argues that empirical methods can systemically analyze psychological, social, and political dynamics that interact. An articulate and knowledgeable scholar, Meyers seamlessly reaches across subdisciplinary boundaries in psychology, speaking to readers with interests in personality, clinical, social, critical, political, cultural, and community psychology.

The book's overall goal is to convey the project of conducting valid and credible empirical research on psychodynamic matters on the world scene. To this end, it offers examples of traditional and inventive methods that can combine psychodynamic inquiry and social scientific procedure. The book is therefore quite timely as there is no shortage of irrational and menacing dynamics in the world today. Its author, William R. Meyers, is a Professor Emeritus in Psychology at the University of Cincinnati, who received his PhD from Harvard University and served on the faculty of M.I.T. and Harvard, and as Director of Research for the Peace Corps.   The book itself reveals that William Meyers is a well-read scholar of psychology, sociology, history, literature, philosophy, and kindred disciplines. His research has examined dictators, the press, social class, and public space. His dissertation, an experimental study of creativity (Meyers, 1963), was conducted in the storied Department of Social Relations at Harvard (1946-1972), an innovative program in which psychology, sociology, and anthropology were in conversation. He studied with such giants in the field as Timothy Leary, who supervised his dissertation, and Gordon Allport, Robert Bales, Henry A. Murray, Walter Mischel, among others. As this book reveals, Meyers is a scholar who thinks deeply, practically, and creatively.

Although each of the book's chapters discusses psychological constructs, methods, and case examples, each chapter is configured differently and in thought-provoking ways. The

book's structure is less like an empirical paper (i.e., intro, methods, findings, discussion) and more like a course. The chapters speak to various topics with increasing depth. There is intentional overlap between chapters as the book's flow circles back to revisit constructs, methods, and examples with more nuance. This structure offers readers a rich kaleidoscope. Because each of the chapters could stand alone they could enliven courses concerned with politics, psychology, irrationality, and research methods. Although methods are consistently foregrounded, this is not a traditional methods book. It is instead a book designed to provoke discussion and stimulate creative ideas. It is a guide for innovative research about complex and troubling contemporary and historic issues and events from a psychodynamic perspective. Going beyond the pieties of method, Meyer encourages the reader to think broadly, cross disciplines, and generae new ideas. This, in turn, contributes breadth to the increasingly narrow subfields of psychology (e.g., see Schwartz, Lilienfeld, Meca,& Sauvigné, 2016).

As the various methods, constructs, and contexts shift across chapters, readers will find questions and approaches that resonate for them. My interests in contemporary and historic social issues were well rewarded with interesting and informative material that integrated social, political, and critical psychological perspectives. Another reader would find other aspects of the book fascinating. In line with this, Meyers speaks of subjectivity as a resource for understanding complex and emotion-laden material, and he models this by conveying his own responses to the material he describes.

This book offers the reader methods that can examine the entwinement of micro and macro levels of analysis. That is, Meyers does not treat the micro and macro levels as the expansion or contraction of scale. In his descriptions and analyses that examine psychodynamics within world events he treats the micro and macro as deeply interconnected. For me, this recalls the work of Kurt Lewin, C. Wright Mills, and Thomas Pettigrew who each ask us to refocus our attention between the micro and macro to understand social behavior and societal dynamics. Lewin (1935) describes social behavior as a function of the interaction between persons and their social environment. Mills (1959) describes the sociological imagination that connects "personal troubles to public issues" (pp. 2-3). Pettigrew (1997) charts bidirectional pathways among micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis.

In *Social Science Methods for Psychodynamic Inquiry: The Unconscious on the World Scene,* the micro and macro are not positioned as different levels of analysis. Instead, they are embedded within each other and are mutually constitutive. Describing the person without the context (or vice versa) would be untenable from Meyers's perspective, as it would artificially separate persons from the society in which they think, act, and are afforded opportunities or are constrained. Meyers does not leave the world scene when considering individuals, nor does he examine socio-political dynamics in the world scene without considering the people who shape them. Approaching social issues via this holistic interweaving of persons and societies models a complex reality.

Meyers, a scholar with far-ranging interests, is an astute observer of social, political, and cultural life and is drawn toward complex sociopolitical contexts, but evaluation and analysis are central to his thinking (e.g., see Meyers, 1981). He describes three key methodological considerations that ground psychodynamic inquiry on the world scene: sampling, context analysis, and thick description with extensive verbatim quotes. Throughout the book he combines traditional and emergent methods as well as quantitative and qualitative approaches with rigor and creativity to study what isn't said and what lies behind contradictions. The methods he describes are not constrained by disciplinary pieties, and many may be new to students or researchers whose qualitative training focused on interviews and focus groups.

Meyers describes his methods as grounded in the work of several notable scholars. He describes Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno of the Frankfort School as drawing his attention to critical theory in which, he says:

> *assumptions and ideology underlying social conditions, and involved in social investigation itself, are examined and questioned, particularly in relation to their function in supporting the existing social structure.* (p. 19)

For example, Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford analyzed Hitler's speeches to construct the F-Scale (Fascism) as described in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). He also draws on Theodor Reik's emphasis on "the need to free associate to what is being said in order to understand the underlying meaning" as described in *Listening with the Third Ear* (1948) and on Peter Gay's (1985) approach that "read[s] 'entries in private journals as though they were chains of associations' and seeing what they call forth in our minds (p. 36). Meyers explains that Reik and Gay emphasize that

> *empathy can gain strength through free association: what comes to mind as we listen to a speech or read a document or consider a set of external events can help us get a sense of the underlying feelings of a person or a group* (pp. 36-37).

Meyers also draws from William McGuire's (1983) work on contextualism, which seeks to prevent researchers from making "overly sweeping formulations" (p. 46). Instead, investigators "discover through their research the boundaries within which a proposition holds true rather than attempting to prove it clearly true or false" (p. 46).

I briefly describe two chapters that illustrate the approach of this book. Chapter 7, "An Adventure in Narrative Analysis: A Regular Terrible Story" focuses on narratives and the importance of a good story. Meyers, himself a skillful storyteller, describes narratives throughout the book with nuance and analytic flair. In the fraught socio-political contexts he studies, narratives can include surreal stories about stories. Narrative analyses, Meyers argues, can expose hidden dynamics. Important details can be uncovered by studying "the protagonists, the dramatis personae, the implicit conflict the story is an effort to resolve,

the crucial role of audience, and the psychodynamic, cultural and social structural factors implicit in the story" (Meyers, 2015, p. 125).

Chapter 8, "A Systematic Study of Irreality," strikes me as a key chapter because it probes two central theoretical constructs in Meyers analyses: *irreality* and *knowing and not knowing. Irreality* is ordinarily defined as unreal, imaginary, not existing objectively. Meyers defines it simply and psychodynamically, as a process rather than a state: "induced confusion about what is real" (p. 129). Meyers uses the phrase *knowing and not knowing* to describe "a 'captive mind' syndrome that actively denies the reality of irrational unconscious processes while secretly knowing that they are real," (p. 8). He draws on Polish poet and philosopher Czeslaw Milosz's book, *The Captive Mind* (1953), which describes European intellectuals' desire to believe that the communist state was ethically pure despite their knowledge of Stalin's widespread, bloody murders and persecutions.

In situations that are bizarre, inexplicable, or abhorrent*, knowing and not knowing* pairs with *irreality. Irreality* refers to the socio-political context and *knowing and not knowing* refers to the psychological state of individuals. Together, they have a Lewinian (Lewin, 1935) resonance as an interaction between a person and the environment. They also have a Millsian (Mills, 1959) resonance that emphasizes the connection between personal and public problems. To this, Meyers contributes methodological approaches for investigating contexts that are contradictory, confusing, fraught, violent, and where fantasies are "embedded in seemingly rational and logical arguments" (p. 38).

The book opens with the epigraph "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't" from Hamlet, an apt start for Meyers's focus on disturbing motives, fantasies, and chains of causation in contexts in which confusion and irrationality are rife and purposeful. To illustrate methods for studying such dynamics, Meyers describes historical and contemporary cases as well as brief shorter examples to illustrate the application of research methods in psychodynamic inquiry. Some cases are brief (e.g., the Stasi files; the bombing of Dresden) while others are more detailed about individuals (e.g., Vladimir Zhirinovsky) and events (e.g., the 1938 Munich Agreement to appease Hitler). Most cases are dramatic and include power struggles and threatened or actual political violence. Some are historic and demonstrate the productive use of archived and scholarly materials, including obituaries, speeches, and analyses by political scientists historians. Some are recent, such as his study of Zhirinovsky, the flamboyant ultra-right-wing Russian Federation politician. As he notes, these cases and others have resonance with such contemporary issues as the murder of Charlie Hebdo journalists in 2015, climate change, and the insurgent Salafi jihadist militant group ISIS or ISIL.

Throughout, this book is a lively read. It includes fascinating narratives on methods, constructs, and cases, and it references to a vast literature. Its descriptions of methods are clear and helpful. I would have liked a brief review of related literature that takes a psychodynamic approach (e.g., Hollway & Jefferson, 2012; Robinson & Ryder, 2013) to

provide additional perspectives and examples for readers who wish to pursue Meyers's invitation to investigate questions about psychosocial dynamics.

The fit between this book and this journal is striking. *Psychology & Society* bridges both methodological perspectives and psychological and societal processes to examine how the social world shapes psychological processes and vice-versa. William Meyer's book, *Social science methods for psychodynamic inquiry: The unconscious on the world scene* will undoubtedly interest readers of *Psychology & Society*. By pairing world events and psychological dynamics and describing how they can be studied together, Meyers offers us a gift. Such contexts are complicated and often abhorrent, but they can and must be studied to understand the complex world we live in today.

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