

Running head: VALUES IN RESEARCH

ACCEPTED FOR SPECIAL ISSUE OF CVJ

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITOR LEN SPERRY

JULY 2007

A Primer on the Values Implicit in Counseling Research

Brent D. Slife

Brigham Young University

Dr. Slife is currently Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University, where he chairs the doctoral program in Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology and is a member of the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology. He is the author of numerous articles and seven books, including *Critical Thinking about Psychology* (2005, APA Books), *Critical Issues in Psychotherapy* (2001, Sage Publications), and *What's Behind the Research?* (1995, Sage Publications). He also continues his psychotherapy practice of over 25 years, where he specializes in marital and family therapies.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brent D Slife, Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 84602 (email: slife@byu.edu).

Abstract

This article attempts to answer five related questions: What are implicit research values? Why are these values often considered problematic to traditional science? Why are such values necessary to research? What are the main values of traditional methods in psychology? What are the implications of a value-laden science?

A Primer of the Values Implicit in Counseling Research

As someone who has lectured in the early phases of courses in research methods, I have often been confronted with what many instructors might think are naïve student questions: “Why do we study only observables?” “Why do we operationalize our constructs?” “Why do we need to replicate our findings?” These questions may seem naïve because they are not really issues to most of us as instructors. We almost want to respond by saying, “We observe, operationalize, and replicate because that is what scientists do.” Of course, a moment’s reflection tells us that this is not really a good answer. In fact, some scholars might accuse us of committing a logical fallacy with this answer – the appeal to tradition: We observe, operationalize, and replicate because that is the tradition of science in psychology; it is how our instructors taught us and their instructors taught them, and so on.

Obviously, this instructional regress must stop somewhere. Why did the “first” instructors ask their students to observe, operationalize, and replicate? In other words, why did science originate in this manner? Surely, Moses did not descend Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments in one hand and the principles of science in the other. Some may assume that these principles were hard-wired into our brains, but there is no evidence for this assumption. Moreover, the principles of science could not have been scientifically derived, because one would need the principles (before their derivation) to conduct the scientific investigations to derive them.

Unfortunately, there is simply no way round the fact that the principles of science are human-made inventions. Scientists were not even the inventors, partly because they needed the invention to become scientists. Philosophers and other humanists invented

the current principles of science (Bohman, 1993; Curd & Cover, 1998; Slife & Williams, 1995). Still, these principles were not invented from nothing; they were invented from assumptions about how these philosophers thought the world worked. They *had* to be assumptions because they were conceived, guessed at, and speculated about *before* scientific investigations in their modern form. As we will see, these assumptions are very similar to what we would call *values* today. They are “subjective” opinions about what matters and is thought to merit investigation.

This invention from assumptions means that the correct, but somewhat unsatisfying, answer to those naïve student questions is that observing, operationalizing, and replicating are part of the values of science. We observe because we (implicitly) value observables and so on. Unfortunately, this answer can itself beg a lot of other questions from thoughtful students: “Isn’t science value-free?” “If it isn’t, then is it biased?” “If it is biased, then why should we trust its findings?” At this point in our hypothetical Q & A, it may be obvious why so many instructors and psychological researchers would prefer to avoid these questions all together – they open a “can of worms.”

For this reason, it is a credit to the editors of this *Journal* and the special issue editor, Len Sperry, that they wish to open this can of worms. This first main article in the special issue is intended as a primer, an *accessible introduction*, to the conceptual issues involved. I want to emphasize “accessible introduction” because my intention is to simplify many of the conceptual issues entailed in understanding implicit values in research. I fear, as any academic does, that simplifications will appear to the specialist as oversimplifications. Nevertheless, I want to resist many of the complications,

qualifications, and jargon that would satisfy specialists, referring them to more sophisticated resources (e.g., Curd & Cover, 1998; Gadamer, 1975; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005). I want to aim, instead, at the counseling student who is new to these issues.

With this audience in mind, my essay is grounded in a set of common questions I hope to answer. Two related questions seem an appropriate starting point: “What are implicit values?” and “Why are they often considered problematic to traditional science?” As we will see, this special issue on research values is little short of a miracle, given the historical and disciplinary pressures to understand research methods as value-free. However, we will then ask: “Why are values necessary to research?” In other words, values will be described as not only inescapable but also required of good research. Even the notion of “good” in this last phrase should help us to understand the value-ladenness of research. We will next ask the biggest question of all, certainly the one that will occupy most of this article in answering it: “What are some of the implicit values in traditional scientific methods?” The article then concludes with a final question regarding implications: “What does a value-laden science mean?”

What are Implicit Values?

Defining terms is always a bit hazardous because propositional definitions are typically both overly inclusive and overly exclusive (Slife, 2005). Consequently, we will attempt to explore here a few important “family resemblances” of values (Wittgenstein, 1958). Let us begin simply by noting that values tend to concern what matters or has merit. To value something is to judge that it has merit for some enterprise. To value observables, for example, is to judge that they have merit for the enterprise of science.

The *implicitness* of many scientific values, as we will see, is that they are not usually understood as values. In fact, they are frequently presented and understood as though they were necessary truths (Heiman, 1995; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003). Most counseling students, for example, would probably not think that studying observables is an implicit value at all, because this form of study has often been taught as if there were no scientific alternatives.

This teaching helps us to highlight another characteristic of implicit values – they are typically viewed as needing alternatives. In other words, a value is usually not perceived as a value if it is the only thing we can do; a value is usually understood as one of several possible values that we could embrace. For example, if desiring observables is a value in traditional research, then this value is best identified and understood in contrast to some other value. As it happens, alternative forms of scientific research, such as qualitative methods in psychology, do not value observables in this same way. Most qualitative methods, for example, value experiences and meanings as much as they value observables (Patton, 1990).

This alternative value may sound odd, because many Western thinkers tend to equate observing with experiencing. Yet, there are many experiences that are not observable, such as many emotional and “spiritual” experiences. Perhaps most importantly for qualitative methods, the experience of meaning is not considered an observational experience solely (Gadamer, 1975; Slife, Wiggins, & Graham, 2005). The meaning of a *Harry Potter* story line, for instance, is not just the book’s printed words, which fall on our retinas (are observable); it is the *relations* among the printed words that *never* fall on our retinas, though these relations (the plot) are certainly experienced.

Qualitative methods, in this sense, have different values from traditional quantitative methods, and this contrasting relation between methods will help us in this article to experience (but not literally observe) the values of both methods (Slife & Gantt, 1999).

An important final feature of research values is that they frequently have a close relationship with research assumptions. Research assumptions involve pre-investigation and often taken-for-granted beliefs about how the world operates. For example, the traditional research assumption that only sensory experiences can be truly known – the assumption of empiricism – is a large part of the reason that observables are so highly valued in science. Obviously, many qualitative researchers would disagree with this assumption, because they hold that *nonsensory* experiences, such as experiencing the relation among printed words, can also be known. Nevertheless, both methods have research values that are closely related to their research assumptions.

At this point, we have described three characteristics of values that help us to answer the question raised by this section's title: What are implicit values? First, values are not always labeled or explicit, especially in science. They are often viewed as the axioms of how science is conducted. Second, implicit values (presented as axioms) are often best revealed through contrasting values. We will use the contrast between quantitative and qualitative methods in this article to help us identify the values of both approaches. Third, research assumptions are frequently central to research values. Not only are the two closely associated; they also have similar characteristics. Both are unproven, pre-investigation beliefs about the nature of the world (assumptions) and what matters in the world (values).

Why are Values Considered Problematic to Traditional Science?

The question of this section directs us to the reasons that so many scientists view values as problematic to the scientific method. Indeed, the users of traditional scientific methods (quantitative methods) often consider it important to minimize values as much as possible. This consideration accounts, in part, for the popularity of traditional method; it is frequently understood to have no particular values at all – as if it works in a relatively value-free manner (Heiman, 1995; Slife & Williams, 1995).

In a certain paradoxical sense, we could say that the logic of traditional methods *values* being value-free. This may sound like we are anthropomorphizing methods – for them to “value” something. Still, it is not quite appropriate to say that the traditional researcher, who uses the methods, is always intentionally or consciously valuing value-freeness (or any other method value, for that matter). It is, rather, that all methods are formulated in ways that lend themselves to value certain things, such as a screwdriver “valuing” screws over nails and empirical methods “valuing” observables over unobservables.

The point here is that the logic of traditional methods favors (or values) the elimination of all values, because the original formulators of this logic assumed that values prevented them from understanding the world as it is. If values were allowed in knowledge-gathering activities, as this assumption goes, researchers might selectively attend only to what they valued and not to what is truly “out there” in the real, objective world. With this logic, we need to minimize values because they result in biases.

This line of reasoning (minimizing bias) is so prevalent in counseling research that many students may view it as the only line of reasoning, especially in regard to

research. Yet, it is underlain with unproven and quite debatable assumptions, as *any* method is (Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005). For example, the paradox of valuing value-freeness usually stems from the debatable assumption that the world is “dual” or divided into two parts – the subjective realm and the objective realm (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Science is typically considered to attend only to the objective realm, the realm of nature and its laws, in part because it is thought to have no values. All our values are in the subjective realm. Hence, as this dualistic assumption implies, one must understand this value-free objective realm with a method that minimizes values.

Why are Values Necessary to Research Methods?

The difficulty is, as mentioned earlier, the scientific method was invented by humans who were clearly influenced by their “subjectivity.” Those who invented and continuously evaluate the scientific method – philosophers of science – are quite clear that this method is filled with values about what knowledge is and how it should be gathered, which we will discuss later (Bohman, 1993; Curd & Cover, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990; Slife & Gantt, 1999). Even the wish to minimize values and biases is a value in this sense.

This is not to say that only traditional methods have values. *All methods have implicit values.* Although quantitative methods are often taught as though they have no implicit values, qualitative methods can be taught similarly, with both methods considered mechanical (non-value-laden) procedures for “acquiring data.” It is true that some qualitative methods *require* some awareness of their implicit values, but this is not always taught or emphasized, making the problem of values very real for either set of

methods. As we will also see, the different general values of quantitative and qualitative methods also imply different advantages and disadvantages for each method, depending on the investigative questions being asked.

Research methods are actually quite parallel to counseling methods in this regard. Over a half century of scholarship has revealed that all our counseling techniques and strategies are shot-through with values that cannot be avoided without abandoning the techniques and strategies themselves (Rosenthal, 1955; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2005). Also, each technique has its pros and cons, depending on the client and problem. Without an awareness of these values, counselors are likely not only to overlook these pros and cons but also to unwittingly promote these values. The latter prompted Paul Meehl (1959) many years ago to wonder if counselors were “crypto-missionaries” (p. 257) – attempting to “convert” their clients to these values.

At this juncture, the value-ladenness of both scientist and practitioner may sound problematic to many students. They might reasonably ask: “If all methods are so biased, how can we ever deal with or know the world as it *really* is?” To answer, we first need to remember that this question presumes an unproven and debatable subject-object dualism that has led us to assume that the real (objective) world is value-free and that values – and the (subjective) biases they produce – are detrimental to gathering knowledge about this world. With this dualism, the only way we could experience the value-free, objective realm is to somehow move outside our experience – outside our subjectivity. Because everyone knows that we cannot get outside our experience, we have counted on our methods to be the value-free bridge between the subjective and the objective realms. Unfortunately, we now recognize that subjective humans invented all these methods –

qualitative, quantitative, and therapeutic (Curd & Cover, 1998). There is, unfortunately, no value-free “lunch.”

The value-ladenness of methods is perhaps most easily seen in their selectivity. That is to say, no method takes in *all* the world “objectively;” it attends to (and thus values) selective aspects of the world, such as observables over unobservables for quantitative methods, and meanings over nonsense for qualitative methods. In a certain sense, these values make all methods biased. However, there is also a certain sense in which these values make all methods *valuable*. As Gadamer (1975), for example, argues, many methods may have a prejudice against prejudice, but some prejudice is necessary to guide the method to the things that matter (and are valued). The inherent selectivity of methods helps us separate the “wheat” from the “chaff” – what is valuable from what is not. In fact, without some value-laden selectivity we would be overwhelmed by the “noise” of so much information. Far from being detrimental to scientific explanation, some values are required of it.

An example from a different genre of methods may help to make the point. The venerable organization, Consumers Union – publishers of *Consumer Reports* – often claims that its critical evaluations of cars, appliances, etc., are “unbiased” because the organization takes no money from the companies who make the cars and appliances. Still, Consumers Union would never argue that their methods for evaluating cars and appliances are value-free, or even strive to be value-free. Indeed, they specifically champion certain values, such as safety, and explicitly incorporate them into their methods and criteria of evaluation. Consumers Union is quite aware that a different set of method values would mean a different set of results, but this difference does not mean

that they can or should eliminate their values. It just means they need to be sure they have appropriate values.

Obviously, this raises a pivotal question: How do we know we have *appropriate* method values? A method's values could direct us to "see" irrelevancies or guide us away from the core of an important issue. A behavioral counseling technique, for example, could lead us to value behaviors when they are not really related to a particular client's problems. Similarly, an interest in the quantity of something may not be best studied through qualitative methods.

For these reasons, it is vital that we identify the values inherent in our research methods so that we know where they lead and mislead us – hence, the importance of this special journal issue. Knowing the values of a particular research study will also aid us in interpreting more critically the study's findings and significance. Unfortunately, researchers rarely report their research values (and assumptions) in journal articles. In fact, given the discipline's general bias against biases, it is likely that many researchers either do not know their assumptions and values or do not want to report them for fear their findings will be viewed as biased, and thus bad findings. Therefore, it is pivotal that all counseling professionals arm themselves with a thorough knowledge of the most likely assumptions and values, so that they can critically assess research studies for themselves.

What are the Values of Traditional Science?

In the service of that critical assessment, we now explore some of the main values of psychological science. It may help to know at the outset that the primary historical source for these values is the natural sciences. There seems to be little dispute among

historians that the “physics envy” of early psychologists led them to adopt natural science methods (Leahey, 1991, p. 33; Nelson, 2006), including what is now considered experimental, quasi-experimental, and even many correlational methods. Indeed, the suitability of these natural science methods was almost unquestioned at the time of psychology’s inception, because they were considered to be universal to whatever was studied, the natural or the social world (Bohman, 1993; Viney & King, 1998).

Still, the original methods of the natural sciences were based upon a pre-investigatory understanding of the natural world that is now commonly called *naturalism* (Davis & Collins, 2002; Leahey, 1991; Plantinga, 1997; Porpora, 2006; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife, 2004; Viney & King, 1998). This worldview or philosophy is thus the general source for many of the main values of psychological research. As historian of psychology Thomas Leahey (1991) put it, naturalism is “science’s central dogma” (p. 379), and psychology has long striven to attain scientific status. Although formal definitions vary, a naturalistic worldview typically has two common features that can serve as our core understanding in this article – its godlessness and its lawfulness (Davis & Collins, 2002; Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 1997; Porpora, 2006; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife, 2004; Slife & Whoolery, 2006).

First, naturalists explain and interpret the objective world as if reference to God is irrelevant or superfluous (Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 1997; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Naturalism is about nature alone – without subjective or divine influences – fitting nicely the secularism of psychology. The world is thought to occur as if its operation happens autonomously, as a result of its own independent and objective processes. The “lawfulness” feature of this worldview involves the most popular understanding of this

godless operation: natural laws and principles autonomously govern the many processes and events of the objective world (Griffin, 2000; Plantinga, 1997; Ruse, 1982).

These two general features of naturalism imply a set of “isms” that form many of the assumptions and values of traditional psychological research. We have space here only to introduce and contrast five of them briefly: objectivism, materialism, reductionism, determinism, and secularism. For a richer description and illustration, please consult references elsewhere (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife, 2004; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005) or the articles of this special issue.

Each of these five assumptions and values of traditional quantitative methods will be contrasted with the assumptions and values of many qualitative methods. However, this contrast is not intended as a competition. Frequently, for example, readers perceive the exposure of the less known values of traditional (quantitative) science as a condemnation of these methods. This perception is partly because they are often presented as value-free and partly because it is often forgotten that qualitative methods – or any alternative method, for that matter – are just as value-laden. The purpose of these contrasting relations, then, is to explicate the values of each method, not to certify one as the “winner.” The only exception, as we shall see, is the first “ism,” objectivism, because the problems of this traditional assumption have led researchers to overlook the importance of values all together. Even so, my argument is that once the values of each method are taken into account, both methods can be useful, depending on the context of investigation.

Objectivism. The first “ism” related to naturalism has already been discussed to some degree. Natural scientists are typically not interested in the nonobservable, *subjective* world of feelings, values, and spiritual experiences; they study the *objective* natural world of observable laws and elements. Because no values presumably exist in this natural world, any values that might crop up in our methods or results are signs that something has gone awry. Similarly, many counseling researchers work within the logic of natural science methods to eliminate biases and values, either through experimental control or precise measurement, or some combination of the two. Objectivism, in this sense, is not the claim that all scientific research is absolutely free of values, but rather the notion that scientific research should *strive* to be as free of values and biases as possible (Slife, 2004).

Contrast this objectivist mindset to the worldview of many qualitative researchers. Instead of attempting to avoid values and biases, biases and values are considered not only *inescapable* but also *necessary* to true understanding (Browning & Cooper, 2004; Gadamer, 1975; Packer & Addison, 1989; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003). Many qualitative researchers do not assume dualism because they believe that even the so-called “objective” natural world can only be known through values and interpretations (Patton, 1990; Slife & Gantt, 1999). However, this recognition of values does not prevent qualitative researchers from making value-laden errors themselves, including using inappropriate or wrong values in illuminating the phenomenon of interest. Still, these researchers would argue that identifying and understanding these values makes it more probable that they will be open to replacing the values which do not illuminate the phenomenon with the values that do.

Materialism. In the worldview of naturalism, the objective world is filled with the tangible, visible, and substantial. What is valued, then, in order to understand these aspects of the world is the material. In other words, matter is what matters to the naturalist. For the counseling researcher, this materialism manifests itself through the traditional natural science notion that only the material and thus observable are knowable (empiricism), hence psychology's focus on behavior (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Slife, 2004). The problem is that much of what psychologists want or need to study, such as attitudes, memories, and emotions, cannot be directly observed. Consequently, materialism requires such *nonmaterial* constructs to be *operationalized* – made into material things such as behavior – so they *can* be observed (Slife, Wiggins, & Graham, 2005). If researchers are interested in the feeling of love, for example, most understandings of this feeling would imply that it cannot be studied directly. Researchers can study only the operationalizations or observable manifestations of this love, such as hugs, rather than the actual love doing the manifesting.

Contrast this value of our traditional methods with the values of many qualitative researchers. Because hugs can occur without love, and love can occur without *whatever* is the specified operationalization of this love, qualitative researchers believe that a study of observables may not study the unobservable we may want to know. Consequently, they consider their source of knowledge to be the *entire* spectrum of lived experience or meaning, which includes not only experiences of our senses, as in conventional empiricism, but also experiences of our thoughts, feelings, and even spiritual events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Packer & Addison, 1989; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). Although this domain is, in some sense, broader than materialism and empiricism, it is still a value

or bias. For example, some qualitative researchers may view love as an experience or a meaning when it could be viewed as something else (e.g., a relationship). Also, qualitative researchers do not “operationalize” in any conventional materialistic or observable sense, but many “translate” in other senses (e.g., linguistic reduction) as they attempt to clarify or make sense of their findings.

Reductionism. The lawfulness feature of naturalism assumes that all apparent change in the world is ultimately *reducible* to the unchanging laws of nature (e.g., Heiman, 1995). This feature means that natural science methods have been formulated to get “behind” the changeable appearance of things in order to detect these unchangeable and universal realities. The valuing of replication and reliability in counseling research and assessment is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this reductionist assumption because unchangeable natural laws (the real) should be detectable and repeatable under the same conditions (e.g., Heiman, 1995). Reductionism has also led counseling researchers to formulate their theories as if they were universal and unchangeable (e.g., theories of personality or cognition), with the hope that these universal theories would one day be tested and found to be valid.

On the other hand, consider that many qualitative researchers do not require characteristics in their methods for detecting unchangeables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Slife & Gantt, 1999). Rather than assuming that fundamental knowledge is universal and unchangeable (or generalizable) across individual contexts and situations, many qualitative investigators assume that at least some fundamental knowledge is inherent in the particular, and thus not in all or even most contexts. Spiritual experiences, for example, are rarely considered meaningful without particular and even unique contexts

(James, 1902/1935). Indeed, many qualitative investigators contend that pivotal aspects of many individual meanings have contextually particular characteristics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). If this qualitative value is correct, then looking for the replicated and reliable may prevent psychological researchers from understanding important aspects of many experiences and practices.

Determinism. The research assumption of determinism is highly related to the reductionism of naturalism (above). If unchangeable causal laws govern all the apparent changes of the natural and social worlds, then all aspects of the counseling enterprise are determined by the cause and effect of those laws. Counseling events, from this perspective, are not random or capricious, or even the result of some free will (Rychlak, 1994). They are predictable and lawful, even if we do not happen to know the laws governing them at the time. In fact, this becomes the task (and value) of the counseling researcher – to use the scientific method to discern these deterministic causes. This task is the reason that *experimental* design is so highly valued in traditional science – it provides the best understanding of how these causes (independent variables) and effects (dependent variables) occur (Heiman, 1995). Experimental designs have controls that allow the researcher to rule out factors other than the truly causal ones, whereas correlational designs permit extraneous factors to muddy our understanding of these cause-and-effect relationships.

Many qualitative researchers, by contrast, hold a different set of values, focusing on possibilities as much as limits. They assume that both the investigators and the human participants of a research study have real possibilities, such as choices, options, and opportunities, that are not determined or dictated solely by sources outside the person's

control (Clegg & Slife, in press). Indeed, this kind of personal agency is typically viewed as necessary to the meaning-filled worldview of the qualitative researcher. While a computer, for example, can be programmed to “say” something audible, it cannot *mean* what it says because it has no *possibility* to say otherwise (agency). Some determinists understand such possibilities as caprice or chaos because they are not governed by natural laws (e.g., Heiman, 1995). However, human choices, for example, are often quite consistent with past choices (e.g., choosing to leave class when the lecture is finished) without the past choices “causing” the present. This consistency allows not only for some predictability but also for the qualitative researcher to discern patterns of choices and possibilities (Rychlak, 1994).

Secularism. Naturalism’s first feature – its lawfulness – has implied most of the research values described so far for many quantitative researchers. How does the absence of God, the other main feature of naturalism, come into play? Perhaps the main influence is that most counseling investigators assume they must become modern secularists in their research, avoiding religious language and divine influences in conducting the scientific method (Reber, 2006; Richards & Bergin, 2005). They can perhaps study spiritual variables, but they cannot study them in a spiritual way. In the same dualistic sense that the objective natural world is thought to be free of values, it is also thought to be free of divine influences (Nelson, 2006; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). This means that the scientific method is, or should be, as free of divine influences as it is free of values (cf. Slife & Melling, 2006). Otherwise, scientific findings are not revealing the objective facts of the world. In this sense, the secularist believes that no reference to spirituality or divinity is *ever* appropriate when designing studies or interpreting data.

In this case, the values of many qualitative investigators agree with those of many traditional researchers. Despite their generally alternative system of values, most qualitative researchers embrace the modern secular legacy of naturalism (Bohman, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Richardson, 2006). Still, a few historical researchers, such as William James (1902/1935), and modern researchers, such as Richards and Bergin (2005), exemplify those investigators who assert that researchers, whether qualitative or quantitative, should follow the evidence where it leads, including to divine influences. Again, divine influences may mean caprice and chaos to those who assume the complete determinism of natural laws. However, similar to the issue of agency (section above), choices – either divine or human – do not have to imply the complete unpredictability or irregularity of human events (Plantiga, 1997; Popora, 2006). And what if divine influences *are* involved in world events – an assumption held by a number of religious researchers? Any method or explanation that refuses to consider at least the possibility of these influences would be inadequate from the outset (Popora, 2006; Slife & Whoolery, 2006). While it is surely true that such a theistic assumption of the world is unproven and perhaps unprovable, the same could be said about the philosophy of naturalism that underlies traditional science (Griffin, 2000; Slife, 2004).

What Does a Value-Laden Science Mean?

To answer our final question, we first need to clarify that the value-ladenness of methods does not have to imply the distortion of findings. Value-ladenness may imply selectivity and perhaps even some incompleteness of our findings, yet it does not have to mean that our results are mistaken or merely opinion. It just means that we should take the method's values into account when interpreting the results. The point is not only that

all methods *have* values but also that the *utility* of any method involves its values. In this sense, the obvious utility of traditional methods involves the naturalistic values we just reviewed. The fact that they are values does not make these methods inherently bad, nor does a method's value-ladenness discredit it as a knowledge-gathering tool.

By the same token, the obvious utility of naturalistic methods does not mean that we should avoid identifying the values involved and attempting to understand their implications. In fact, it probably fair to assume that many values – filters, philosophies, assumptions, and interpretations – have their advantages and disadvantages, given a particular investigative question and object of study. Here, we could take a lesson from the pragmatism of good carpenters, where the job dictates the tools used (James, 1907). In other words, the investigative questions or objects of study should dictate what methods or tools we choose, rather than our methods (and their values) dictating what questions we ask or how we operationalize our ideas (Slife, Wiggins, & Graham, 2005).

Some have called this conception of research “methodological pluralism” because counseling researchers would not have to depend on one “tool,” logic, or system of values for all their investigations (Plantinga, 1997; Roth, 1987; Slife & Gantt, 1999). A plurality of tools – analogous to hammers, screwdrivers, and saws – would be available and evaluated for the “job” at hand. The hammer, like any particular method, is good for certain practices and bad for others. And surely not everything is a “nail,” or can be operationalized as a nail.

Similarly, many counseling topics and investigative questions should not be forced to fit the value system of a naturalistic method. Many topics and questions work well with a naturalistic method, but this value system is not universal to all the topics and

questions that are of interest to the counseling researcher. When the investigative question requires counting, we should not hesitate to use the methods that were specifically formulated for this task – quantitative methods. However, when research questions turn to meanings, representing such meanings with numbers is surely an impoverished approach. We should use the methods that were specifically formulated to understand and discern meanings – qualitative and interpretive methods.

Unfortunately, when researchers have sometimes used qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups), they have emphasized the differing *procedures* of these methods and ignored the differing *value systems* or philosophies that guide these procedures (e.g., APA, 2006; Wendt & Slife, in press). A true pluralism of methods is also a pluralism of value systems. Admittedly, this kind of pluralism is a challenging prospect for counseling researchers at a number of levels, from practical to philosophical. Still, if carpenters can do it in a less complex enterprise, surely we can. In any case, it is high time we face up to the challenge, because ignoring it will not make it go away.

References

- APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice. (2006). Evidence-based practice in psychology. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 271-285.
- Bohman, J. (1993). *New philosophy of social science*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Browning, D.S., & Cooper, T.D. (2004). *Religious thought & the modern psychologies*. 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Clegg, J., & Slife, B.D. (in press). Research ethics in the postmodern context. In D. Mertens & P. Ginsberg (Eds.), *Handbook of social research ethics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Curd, M., & Cover, J. A. (1998). *Philosophy of science: The central issues*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Davis, E.B., & Collins, R. (2002). Scientific naturalism. In G.B. Ferngren (Ed.), *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fowers, B. J. & Richardson, F. C. (1996). Why is multiculturalism good? *American Psychologist*, *51*, 609-621.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and method*. (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.) (Rev. ed.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1960)
- Griffin, D.R. (2000). *Religion and scientific naturalism: Overcoming the conflicts*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Heiman, G. W. (1995). *Research methods in psychology*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

- James, W. (1902/1935) *Varieties of religious experience*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- James, W. (1907). *Pragmatism*. New York: Longman, Green, and Company.
- Leahey, T.H. (1991). *A history of modern psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Meehl, P. (1959). Some technical and axiological problems in the therapeutic handling of religious and valuational material. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 6, 255 – 259.
- Nelson, J. (2006). Missed opportunities in dialogue between psychology and religion. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 205 – 216.
- Packer, M. J., & Addison, R. B. (Eds.). (1989). *Entering the circle: Hermeneutic investigation in psychology*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Patton, M. Q., (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd Ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Plantinga, A. (1997). Methodological pluralism? Part 2. *Origins & Designs*, 18 (2). Retrieved January 17, 2005 from <http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm#anchor261256>.
- Porpora, D.V. (2006). Methodological atheism, methodological agnosticism and religious experience. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 36, 57 – 75.
- Reber, J. S. (2006). Secular psychology: What's the problem? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 193-204.

- Richards, P. S., & Bergin, A. E. (2005). *A spiritual strategy for counseling and psychotherapy (2nd ed.)*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Richardson, F. C., Fowers, B. J., & Guignon, C. B. (1999). *Re-envisioning psychology: Moral dimensions of theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosenthal, D. (1955). Changes in some moral values following psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 19*, 431-436.
- Roth, P. A. (1987). *Meaning and method in the social sciences: A case for methodological pluralism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ruse, M. (1982). *Darwinism defended*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Rychlak, J. F. (1994). *Logical learning theory: A human teleology and its empirical support*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.
- Slife, B.D. (2004). Theoretical challenges to therapy practice and research: The constraint of naturalism. In M. Lambert (Ed.) *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change*. New York: Wiley.
- Slife, B. D. (2005). Testing the limits of Henriques' proposal: Wittgensteinian lessons and hermeneutic dialogue. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 61*, 1 – 14.
- Slife, B. D., & Gantt, E. (1999). Methodological pluralism: A framework for psychotherapy research. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 55* (12), 1 – 13.
- Slife, B.D., & Melling, B.S. (2006). Psychological method and the activity of god: Clarifications and distinctions. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 34*, 280-284.

- Slife, B.D., & Nelson, J. (in press). Philosophical Issues in the psychology of religion. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 191-291.
- Slife, B.D., & Whoolery, M. (2006). Are psychology's main theories and methods biased against its main consumers? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34, 217-231.
- Slife, B.D., & Williams, R.N. (1995). *What's behind the research? Discovering hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Slife, B.D., Reber, J.S., & Richardson, F. (2005). *Critical thinking about psychology: Hidden assumptions and plausible alternatives*. Washington, D.C.: APA Books.
- Slife, B. D., Smith, A. F., & Burchfield, C. (2003). Psychotherapists as crypto-missionaries: An exemplar on the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy. In D. B. Hill & M. J. Kral (Eds.) *About psychology: Essays at the crossroads of history, theory, and philosophy*. (pp. 55 – 72). Albany: SUNY Press.
- Slife, B. D., Wiggins, B. J., & Graham, J. T. (2005). Avoiding an EST monopoly: Toward a pluralism of methods and philosophies. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 35, 83 – 97.
- Viney, W., & King, D.B. (1998). *A history of psychology: Ideas and content (2nd Ed.)*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wendt, D., & Slife, B.D. (in press). Is evidence-based practice diverse enough? Philosophy of science considerations. *American Psychologist*.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.