

Research in the Psychology of Religion

Chapter 3

Philosophy of Science for Psychology of Religion

- Tensions between Psychology and Religion
- The Nature of Psychological Science
- Multiple Accounts of Religious Behavior
- The Role Psychology Can Fulfill

Tensions between Psychology and Religion

- What is the relationship between the natural and the supernatural
- determinism-freedom issue
- Are psychological accounts of religious experience a threat to religious or supernatural accounts?
- We know much of behavior can be explained by natural laws, is this a problem?

The Nature of Psychological Science

- Scientific Inquiry through Different Worlds
 - theories and laws are in the world of ideas
 - behavior and action are in the world of events and observations

Induction, Deduction, Verification/Falsification: The Research Cycle

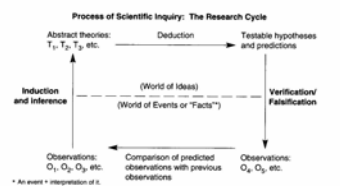


FIGURE 3.1 Process of scientific inquiry: The research cycle

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Examples

- Physics -- study fire
- Psychology of religion
 - observe that being raised in a loving home is associated with adopting the creed of ones parents
- Language rules
 - the rules of a language are a description of how a language is used
 - this changes as the language changes
 - the laws are not immutable and unchangeable
- Laws of religious behavior are not imposed on people by nature. Rather "laws" are descriptions of how people behave.

Determinism, Causality, Probability

- Determinism: the assumption that there is an underlying order in nature. Behavior follows a pattern of regularity that is part of the natural order.
- Causality: an inferred link that we place between observed events. We see many instances of two events associated with each other in some regular way and we infer one causes the other.
- Probability: Scientific statements (conclusions) must be qualified with some probability.

Naturalism and Religion

- We use the scientific method to try to understand events in nature, including the religious aspects of life, from a naturalistic perspective rather than from a religious or supernatural one. Nature is the focal realm of observation.
- This says nothing about who or what creates and sustains nature, just as the rules of a football game say nothing about who created the game or the rules.

Multiple Accounts of Religious Behavior

- Can make more than one type of map of an area (road map, topo map, etc.) Theories are like maps.
- Triangle Analogy: Artist describes triangle one way, physicist describes it another, mathematician another. Which is right?
- Explaining vs. Explaining Away: not explaining away, just describing from different viewpoint.

Post-Modernism and the Psychology of Religion

- Science is based on the assumption that there is truth or reality (of some kind) and our methods will help us figure it out
- Post-Modernism says “reality is pure illusion”
- all theories are mental constructions and all data equally valid because there are no valid rules for evaluating data
- Truth is personal and relative to personal and cultural context.

Post-Modernism and the Psychology of Religion

- Problem is this would mean “gravity” is an arbitrary cultural concept, along with all other so called laws of nature.
- This might work in literary analysis but it doesn't work in the real world.

Post-Modernism and the Psychology of Religion

- The Post-Modernists have made an important contribution
 - points out our biases in interpreting data
 - points out the relativity of knowledge
 - points out the contextual and tentative nature of truths that we propose

Methods of Researching Religion: Strategies and Methods

- Ideographic Approach
- Nomothetic Approach
- Phenomenology
- Content Analysis
- Questionnaires and Surveys
- Naturalistic Studies
- Studying Deviant Groups
- Experiments

Methods of Researching Religion: Measuring Religion

- Simple Identification
- Factors and Scales