The obesity epidemic may mean that dieting is needed more than ever. From our perspective, however, the obesity epidemic provides testimony to the ineffectuality of (unrealistic) dieting, which has accompanied, and possibly contributed to, this epidemic. As for the other domains of self-change, the message is the same: Unrealistic hopes fuel failure, and given the constant reeducation to self-change that characterizes our society, we can safely assume that much of the hope that motivates self-change is indeed false.

REFERENCE


Rethinking Fragmentation and Diversity in Psychology

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Katzko (April 2002) wrote an important and suggestive article on a root issue, theoretical and disciplinary fragmentation or disorganization of topics, methods, and/or theories in psychology. (Katzko seemed to take the terms fragmentation and disorganization as being synonymous, but they are not. I prefer fragmentation and use it throughout this comment.) For Katzko, this is a common academic phenomenon that signals the richness of scientific fields. Diverse argument-modes breed fragmentation; he analyzed one mode, how rhetorical fragments people—reifying rhetorical modes into objects that divide people into groups. He proposed theory-unencumbered description as cure.

I have three cautionary comments. First, in general, Katzko (2002) concentrated on one cause of fragmentation, rhetorical, neglecting problematic fragmentation. Second, contrary to Katzko, rhetoric is not the universal cause of fragmentation. Third, contrary to Katzko, description is not the universal cure of fragmentation.

Confusion of Rhetoric With Fragmentation

Generally speaking, I applaud Katzko’s (2002) insights into one source of fragmentation, the social/rhetorical mode of argument as “conflict of values” (p. 267), and his brave solution of toning down rhetoric and using theory as “framework for description generalization” (p. 266). Yet I think Katzko missed how closely related fragmentation is to value-diversity; good value-diversity so charmed Katzko that he took fragmentation as a “surface” (Katzko, 2002, p. 262), “minor” (Katzko, 2002, p. 263) issue. He mistook problematic fragmentation for value-diversity related thereto. Moreover, his rhetorical solution just scratches the surface of fragmentation as problem.

Rhetoric Is Not the Universal Cause of Fragmentation

Examining Katzko’s (2002) rhetoric clarifies/explicates the above point. His rhetoric means psychological weight, in argument, of flashy names, popular assumptions/paradigms, and so on used to sway communal approval, attention, and/or research (see Katzko, 2002, pp. 263–264). As flashy names and assumptions (e.g., null hypothesis, causal explanation, modern physics, uniqueness assumption, levels of analytic discourse, etc.) differ, so do directions of research, and fragmentation in psychology ensues.

Now, rhetoric means persuasion by manipulating diction or style, a sophisticated oratory in politics and/or forensics. Concentrating on rhetorical conflict in tones, fashions, and directions of research misses the hardcore theoretical fragmentation. What is theoretical conflict in all this rhetorical push and pull? What are its theoretical roots? How should one deal with them? Katzko (2002) was silent on these core/central issues. Moreover, could Katzko’s view of fragmentation stemming from rhetoric be itself rhetorical? Could he heal his own rhetoric?

Crucially, Katzko (2002) passed over how psychological weight differs from shifts in theoretical paradigm, assumption, category, prototype, and/or a priori, for he lumped them all under rhetoric. Citing flashy names to sway research direction exercises rhetoric; paradigm shift is a theoretical matter, not rhetoric. Why does the rhetoric/value aspect of argumentation, not the epistemological/theoretical (see Katzko, 2002, p. 262), get involved in the rhetorical, to contribute to theoretical fragmentation?

His “paradigm-bound” argumentation (Katzko, 2002, p. 263) follows Thomas S. Kuhn’s (1970) theoretical scientific revolution without quoting Kuhn; Katzko’s classification of Kuhn’s view as rhetorical would surprise Kuhn. Katzko said, “It may be an oversight to evaluate the theories and movements only in terms of their epistemic content” (Katzko, 2002, p. 268), yet it is hardly less of an oversight to evaluate theories only in terms of social/rhetorical dynamics. Katzko himself would hesitate to take all fragmentations as just “surface disorganization” (Katzko, 2002, p. 268), rhetorical as the sole root of fragmentation in psychology, and fragmentation as nothing but rhetorical divisiveness. If Katzko said he denies rhetoric as the sole breeding ground of fragmentation, then the problem of fragmentation remains unexplored. Now, consider Katzko’s proposal of solution to fragmentation.

Description Not the Universal Cure of Fragmentation

As a solution to fragmentation, Katzko (2002) proposed theory-unencumbered description, simply seeking similarities in situations while taking theory as a mere “framework for descriptive generalization” (p. 266) on which to let blossom hundreds of theory-flowers. Here is the free, diverse, descriptive openness to multifarious data and varied speculative alternatives (Katzko, 2002, p. 268!)

“Theory as a framework for description” (Katzko, 2002, p. 265) makes me pause, however. If data that do not fit with an adopted paradigm are dismissed, how could theory be used as a frame for fair, comprehensive description? More basically, to describe is already to shape the bare welter of fact/data by a frame/paradigm/value aspect of argumentation, not theoretical matter, not rhetoric. Why does the rhetoric/value aspect of argumentation, not the epistemological/theoretical (see Katzko, 2002, p. 262), get involved in the rhetorical, to contribute to theoretical fragmentation?

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bered description. Instead, one should re-describe fragmentation as negatively manifesting positive value-diversity and seek a way out of fragmentation into diversity—elsewhere than in theory-unencumbered description; unity is now less important than the integrity of psychology that converts/heals fragmentation into diversity. To tinker with rhetoric is to bark up the wrong tree; one now must explore what is academically healing/healthy redescription.

For instance, mere description is a bottom-up process that produces an endless ocean of rudderless/unintelligible data. Diverse description remains just a preliminary task for psychologists, whose other important task lies in how to intercommunicate with intelligible data-descriptions. For example, psychologists in one specialty may have difficulties understanding psychologists in others (Benjamin, 2001; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001). How would psychologists in neuroscience understand descriptions of cross-cultural psychologists? Psychologists need description with a meta-framework, meta-theory, to confer description with mutually relatable meaning for the various “trees” of disciplines to thrive in their common milieu, a “forest.” Interactive relations between the forest and trees keep tree-interactions going and render both forest and trees alive and thriving. Here, the forest frame should be identical with neither pure description (whatever that means) nor usual theories of respective disciplines. What this forest frame is, how even to envisage it, are the key problems, exploring which is a task for Katzko and for all psychologists.

Someone might object that my comments above continue fragmentation on a meta-level. In answer, I plead that Katzko and I are undivided; we both stand opposed to fragmentation to promote value-diversity. I merely applaud and caution him, saying, apt are his opinions on social rhetoric as one cause of fragmentation, which bodes well as a pointer to free, diverse explorations in redescriptions of vast “tremendous realms of the uncertain and the unknown” (Tolman, 1959, as cited in Katzko, 2002, p. 268).

REFERENCES


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