



Subjectivity NOT Statement and NOT APA!

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I inspect in a brief theoretical-philosophical essay the roots of subjectivity and suggest many possible directions for examining the phenomenon of subjectivity so that multiple different meanings can be revealed. For instance, a researcher can explore her or his own subjectivity or he/she can attempt to define subjectivity per se or the researcher can uncover subjectivity or merely learn about subjectivity. I propose that subjectivity is an inner essence of flux and ask if it is even possible to fully capture a researcher's subjectivity. Another proposition is to view subjectivity as an inner essence of each and every individual. Finally, I conclude that to demarcate subjectivity as opposite to objectivity is the least fruitful way to uncover the ultimate core of subjectivity – the multiple connections toward a vital balance of any type of research endeavor. Keywords: Subjectivity, Flux, Individual Essence

“... To strive for power via knowledge is to strive for ignorance via illusion...”

-DC-

I study at West Virginia University in the Interdisciplinary Education doctoral program. My expected graduation is May 2014. While my degree will be in Education, I am preparing to be a research methodologist. In my program, I am getting a variety of support that allows me not only to learn the rigor of research but also to explore my own views on a variety of topics regarding research methods. The course that initiated this exploration is Advanced Qualitative Research, where we discuss an array of issues, sensitivity, and theoretical foundations of qualitative research.

The purpose of the following text was to satisfy one of my course assignments. This assignment required writing a “*subjectivity statement*” as is done by many published qualitative research studies. I personally vehemently disagree with the word STATEMENT.

Statement in my understanding is some kind of declaration that represents an account of the totality of the facts. I perceive that the title of the assignment “*subjectivity statement*” (already) controls the direction of any exploration of my subjectivity. My subjectivity therefore cannot be fully recognized because the title and the purpose of the writing predefine the flow of such an exploration. In addition this type of subjectivity exploration would be led by the nature of the title and particularly by the word “*statement*.” Rather some kind of hybrid between my writing about “my” subjectivity, coming from variety of experiences, values and beliefs and the leading (hidden) positivist title (statement) with only a quasi constructivist flavor (subjectivity,) will be the product of this essay.

Another issue that I have with the word ...*statement*... is that it implies something written in stone; hence something that will be defined for an endless period of time –

or the period of time when I will engage in research. I refuse such a stagnation of my perspectives, feelings, moods, spirit, viewpoints, worldviews, thoughts, desires and so on.

Rather, I much prefer NOT to declare or state my “*subjectivity*” and remain open to many possible influences from many possible sources, people, readings, institutions, periods of time and so on. I desire that the phenomenon, which is called by contemporary social science subjectivity, will change me and will change my perspectives often because the inner essence of myself is my love and respect toward continuous learning. Indeed, I am aware that in the sentences above I have already described some of my *subjectivity*, but I did not (and will not) declare it or else state it. Besides, what is the purpose of such a statement!? To discover – to explore – to define – to uncover – to learn about – to discern – to realize – to notice – to see – to determinate – to study – to search for – to explain – to term – to demarcate – to expose – to disclose, bare, find, observe, communicate, absorb, understand, perceive, fulfill, appreciate, exanimate, or to **connect with my subjectivity**, I would have to know what *subjectivity* is, or rather how I (at the very moment) understand it.

In my understanding, *subjectivity* is essentially a quintessence that is constantly changing. I dare enough to say that **subjectivity is the inner essence of flux**. To capture personal, societal, or research *subjectivity* is difficult! I have to ask if it is even possible and actually desirable. I dare to say that it is impossible because the inner essence of flux (subjectivity) is indeed flux; hence an infinite number of possible transmutations of an infinite number of possible forms of *subjectivity* are out (and in) there for us to study. I do, however, strongly believe that it is not only desirable to explore subjectivity but also

absolutely necessary, particularly in social science research.

Yet it is contemporary social science research that panics in front of this challenge and capitulates by falling back into strict use of Francis Bacon's scientific method. A method that I personally believe has lots of merit, potential and practical use! However, NOT in the study of complex and/or silent and constantly changing phenomena, which is the subject matter of social science research.

Nevertheless, social science research principally searches for stability, permanency, reputation, longevity, status and ultimately space of control. Yet the fluidity of social or educational phenomena is the innermost matter of social science research; hence the *subjectivity* is an inseparable and **intimate part** of the social science research. To study uncertainty (flux) with, however, certain (defined) research methods can only lead to restricted (controlled) understanding - certainly not to knowledge (even though that would depend on how we would define or what we would count as knowledge).

Hmm... maybe I can totally switch the direction of my exploration of the *subjectivity phenomenon* and discern subjectivity as an **individual essence** and exanimate it on the level of humans' experiences, emotionality, intellectuality, spirituality, perceptions, misperceptions, biases, preferences, prejudices, cognitive abilities, preconceptions, intolerances of all kinds, bigotries, partialities, predispositions, sensations, and many others, in all reality, descriptions of human nature. Is then *subjectivity* the essence of human nature? Is it possible that we can study the idiosyncrasy of human nature simply by studying *subjectivity*? If so – then what kind of possible affluent reservoir is hidden in so much dreaded *subjectivity* in social science research?

Hmm... maybe I can switch one more time and demarcate *subjectivity* as opposite to objectivity. This tactic is rather common when researchers encounter with *the phenomenon of subjectivity*. I suggest, however, that it would be the least fruitful way to uncover the ultimate core of *subjectivity* – the multiple connections toward vital balance of any type of research endeavor. If we get stuck in the dualistic and profoundly limited thinking such as **objective versus subjective**, however, we cannot ever overcome the ultimate illusion that subjectivity is the opposite partner of objectivity. I am afraid that many social science textbooks offer evidence of just this profoundly limited thinking, which, however, is the foundation of contemporary social science research. (Epistemological Civil War)

Ex Post Facto Notes:

I was thinking that I could approach this assignment in a more “regular” way and simply expose the type of glasses (subjectivity) I have developed over my life span. I acquired many types of glasses with various possible visual perceptions. I was in many roles, from child to parent to student to teacher to victim to leader to UN peacekeeper to journalist to spokesperson to researcher. I have encountered many cultures, subculture, doctrines, religions, and institutions. Yet, I do not necessarily think that when I encounter the world as an individual person or in the role of a researcher, the type of glasses changes according to my role. Rather, the type of situation modifies the way I encounter the world or the phenomenon under the study calls for a different type of approach – the use of different types of lenses.

Hence, while the vast majority of qualitative research calls for a critical assessment of personal subjectivity– I do believe that it is not enough! Rather, I propose, that the examination of *personal subjectivity jointly with examination of*

(what I term) *situational subjectivity* may contribute to a more complete picture of the way the *researcher is positioned in the research*.

Such and such type of situation is principally the result of such and such type of power! Perhaps we can discern the *situational subjectivity* according to perceived or actual power: the type of power, the purpose of power, the strength of power, context, duration, gender, and whether it is political or workplace-driven. Nevertheless, the idea that the researcher will on the one hand review and acknowledge her or his subjectivity while staying blind toward the situational context (power dynamics), then call this a complete account of subjectivity's influence on the research process, is naïve!

And Why not APA?

Because my exploration of a sensitive and fluid phenomenon like subjectivity would be directed by APA structure, hence would lead to a very skewed understanding. **APA is in essence a structure!** To understand how this structure may influence our explorations, we need to step back and examine what is structure per se. Structure is something that helps humans to orient in their human affairs – from a form of diplomacy to an eating order to complex school curricula to a train time-table to army regulations to driving on right or left side – you name it. Structures organize any type of human activity. We can also see structure as an ultimate tool to ensure repetition of the specific activity or of such and such a type of research. Or we may see structure as a necessary tool for human survival to orient in chaos or to prevent anarchy or turmoil or to control something or someone.

The world population is significantly increasing along with the complexity of human activities. Hence the need to use structures is acute. I argue that structures

are absolutely necessary for human survival but at the same time and with the same intensity, structures may cause the collapse of human existence. Yes, this paradoxical nature of structure is its intrinsic strength but also its weakness. Our survival depends on our willingness to open up and initiate discussion about our use of structures (such as APA) and their purpose. We need to identify the fine balance between structures that lead us (flexible) and structures that obstruct us (rigid). Now, what does this imply about APA structure? APA structure is not subtle and I dare say not terribly complex. Rather, APA structure is one-dimensional with sharp boundaries that on the one hand prevent chaotic research reports but on the other significantly limit the writings of free explorations. Hence, APA predefines the type of understanding and thus controls research results.....

Author Note

I am an international student from Prague, Czech Republic. I am a former journalist who encountered “face-to face” the phenomenon of power at the times when Czechoslovakia was transforming from a communist state to a democracy. As a young journalist (20-24), I idealized this transformation and did not realize that while we changed the system, we did not change people's thinking, feelings, stereotyping, and overall spirit. The other thing that I did not recognize was that democracy is an extraordinarily compounded and fragile system that requires decades (maybe even a century) to build and constant maintenance to preserve.

Currently, one of my research interests is the epistemological and ontological foundations of educational research. I am preparing a book, *Dilemma of Researchers: Crisis of Methodologies, Methods and Results*, which compounds a series of philosophical-theoretical essays

such as: Paradoxical Condition, The Power of Undiscovered Intuition, Chimera of Destination, Ultimate Trap of Symbolic Representation, Quintessence of Educational Research, Value of Assumption and so on. The overall spirit of this (still incomplete) book is to critically evaluate the power of paradigms on current research methods and the way researchers are not always aware of this influence. I suggest to change or alternate the understanding of two key epistemological umbrellas (objectivism - constructivism) in educational research and argue that educational research needs to change its bipolar approaches to multi-polar so as to be able to productively react to the current rapid changes in our global society. I suggest replacing what I term as "Dualistic Research" with what I term "Dynamic Pluralistic Research."

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