

## MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID KRANTZ\*

John Shotter

Department of Psychology, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA 19081, U.S.A.

David L. Krantz is Professor of Psychology at Lake Forest College. A former Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences, he has published articles and books in the social psychology of science and topics related to power, knowing, and life's meaning. He recently completed a book tentatively titled *Journeys and Destinations: Searching for Life's Meanings* while a Visiting Professor at the University of Ghent, Belgium.

John Shotter (JS); David Krantz (DK)

JS: Let's start with your 1978 presidential address to the History of Psychology division of the APA, on what makes a question interesting. So what is it?

DK: We have habitual ways of raising questions, standard ways of thinking about problems. An interesting question is one that disrupts that sort of glazed over thought and leads me to say, "That's interesting". On a more practical level, I was trying in that 1978 address to get people to think about why the issues raised by historians and theoreticians of psychology are interesting, and to whom.

JS: Your earlier historical work was on the social psychology of science. In one study you looked at operant conditioning as a scientific movement. This kind of work seems very different from your recent projects on life's meanings and career changes. Would you talk about the relations of your two almost different careers?

DK: My earlier work, from about 1961 to the mid-1970s involved studying the phenomenon of schools of psychology, particularly from a social psychological perspective. By working through that work, however, I began questioning how plausible was this detached position that I was using, either in methodological or theoretical terms.\* My current research on how people find meaning in their lives includes me both as an observer and as part of the world I am looking at. One of the questions I am now involved with is how the objective and subjective observer relate to each other.

JS: Your early work was influenced by Kuhn's ideas-indeed, you worked with him. Was there someone who influenced the direction of your later work?

---

\*Departement of Psychology, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, IL 60045, U.S.A.

+ Visiting Professor, on leave from the University of Utrecht. The Netherlands. Present address: Department of Communication, University of New Hampshire, Durham. NH 03824-3586. U.S.A.

Krantz, D.L. (1971). The separate worlds of operant and non-operant psychology. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis*. 4. 61-70; Krantz, D.L. (1972). Schools and systems: The mutual isolation of operant and non-operant psychology as a case study. *Journal for the History of the Behavioral Sciences*. 8. 86-102.

||Krantz, D.L. & Allen, D. (1967). The rise and fall of McDougall's instinct doctrine. *Journal for the History of the Behavioral Sciences*. 3. 326-338; Krantz, D.L. (1969). The Baldwin-Titchener controversy. In D. Krantz (Ed.). *Schools of psychology*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Freeman, J. & Krantz, D.L. (1980) The unfulfilled promise of life histories *Biography*. 3. 1-13 Krantz D.L. (1978) *Radical career change* New York: Free Press.

JK: Seymour Sarason was very important. He was a different kind of psychologist than what I had grown up with. My graduate education had underlined, explicitly, and on a tacit level, more profoundly and subtly, the importance of the detached observer. Doing science was standing outside and looking in. That kind of training made it very difficult to accept that I was not only an observer but also a person that was part of what was being observed and that my own, more informal observation, had a validity. They could be a source of interesting ideas. That notion, that I could start from my own observations rather than beginning solely from the literature's definition of a problem, was something I had entertained but never explored. It's almost as if one were transgressing against the father, in the psychoanalytic sense, to even think of those things. So in meeting Sarason, whose work involved observations of the world around him and a relatively free form way of studying them, I learned that there was nothing wrong with using one's own observations.

JS: Did you seek him out?

JK: No, it was almost a chance encounter. At that time, I had just returned from a cabbatical in Kenya where, on a personal level, I had begun to question the idea of work as a mission. But as a professional psychologist, I continued my work on the social psychology of science. Seymour suggested that, since I was so involved with the question of the meaning of work, "why not study it?" And I said, almost naively, "You mean start from my own experience?" He answered, "Why not?" And when I came up with the idea that it would be interesting to get the observations of people who had been in the work force and now were marginal of people who had been in the work force and now were marginal to it - what I called radical career changers - like a museum director turned construction worker, he said, "That's a great idea. Now figure out some way to find them and then to get them to open up".

So I went off to Sante Fe, New Mexico and studied these people using whatever methodology was appropriate and would work. This project+ turned out to be the first in a series on various issues where I began from my own observations and questions.

JS: You have then, in a sense, discovered a way of turning around your personal concerns into something to be researched, of exploring yourself by studying others?

DK: In a way. What has come out of my recent work is the understanding that often psychological research has underlying, personal themes. It's not an accident that I became a psychologist, and I became a psychologist studying a certain set of problems and not a psychologist looking at different kinds of problems. Recently, I began exploring the question of how people sort themselves out in terms of research concerns and how those choices relate to the form and content of their work.

Also my work on radical career change set for me the more general question of how people find meaning in their lives. While the radical career change research involved the particular arena of work, the problem has now a larger focus in the book I'm just completing\* where I look at the general phenomenon of how people find life's meaning and the role of wisdom in that search.

---

Krantz, D.I. (1978). The relation of action and reflection American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. 48. H 227. Cherniss. C & Krantz, D.L. (1983). The ideological communities as an antidote to burnout the human series In B.A. Farber (Ed.) Stress and burnout in the human series profestory. New of Penganon.

\*Krantz, D.L. (in press). Journeys and destinations engering for life's meanings.

The best, or at least the most interesting, way for me to study this issue was obliquely. I didn't think questionnaires, or interviews, or maybe, participant observation with a guru, would yield much. My approach was to take a story about seekers and wise men that's been around for a long time. I read this as a document which projects many of the underlying feelings, desires, and hopes which guide our search for life's meaning, and which we often find difficult to talk about.

You probably know the story or some version of it. It's about a seeker who takes a long, shaggy-dog-story kind of trip to find a dying guru who supposedly knows what is the meaning of life. The guru tells him that the answer is "life is a butterfly". When the seeker responds, partially for fear of mishearing and partially out of disbelief: "Life is a butterfly?" the guru answers, "... isn't life a butterfly?" The story provides the framework for the book where each chapter deals with a question like: "why is the guru characterized as dying?" or "why is the guru a guru?" or "why did the seeker have to take a long, arduous journey?" etc. One of the central themes that emerges from my analysis is the importance of the "process" where the answer to questions about life's meaning may in here in the journey itself and can readily be overlooked in the search for a "right" answer, something which has a context like "life is a butterfly".

JS: Okay. Let's go into that in relation to yourself for just a moment. What you said earlier about the oedipal Freudian worry, about unconsciously transgressing against the father, this relates to another theme that is in your book - your ideas on apprenticeship. I know you worked with Donald Campbell, Kuhn, and Sarason. But it seems that an important part of their influence was allowing you to become free to transgress against them.

That's true. My current research on apprenticeship is a way of getting at the process of influence. One conclusion I've come to is that the most effective educational relationship is where the student becomes autonomous, can transcend his teachers. And that's not easy to accomplish.

An earlier study I did on theorists' leadership styles\* also addresses this point. From the perspective of their students, those theorists who provided the least autonomy, who expected students to become disciples, were the most successful in getting their theories explored. Yet science claims to value autonomy and independent thought. How the autonomy-discipleship tension gets resolved is a complex problem. I started my "apprenticeship" work with a fascinating interview with a wine testing instructor. I thought his input would provide a simpler example of what I call "interactive experiential learning". I went on to interview a guru who talked about how he "teaches" about life's meaning, a business mentor, who is a high-ranking corporate executive, a professor and some of his doctoral students, and a psychotherapist who talked about the therapeutic situation as a kind of "apprenticeship in living".

JS: Are there different procedures for each of these different examples - differing styles of mentoring?

DK: These examples are held together by the following common components: a personal interaction, where the relationship provides a significant basis for the learning; a focus on

---

\*Krantz, D.L. & Wiggins. L. (1973). Personal and impersonal channels of recruitment in the growth of psychological theory. *Human Development*. 16. 133-156.

experiencing rather than "talking about"; and a central emphasis on an ongoing interaction. In some situations, what is learned is both mirrored and taught within the relationship. You can see this most particularly with the guru. He is not simply teaching about how to live one's life but, rather, the student learns to live by being with the guru. A key factor is the ongoing interaction, where the learner is continually being shaped and is shaping his own experience.

Apprenticed, interactive learning seems the most effective in coming to know about things which are not readily talked about. How well can someone communicate about the difference in taste say, between a bordeaux and a burgundy? What is the relationship between the experience and the words that come to be associated with it and their ability to communicate to others? How does someone communicate when the other individual doesn't share common experiences? What are the meaning of "understanding?" How does an observer know when someone "understands?" These are some of the issues I deal with in the book on life's meaning, and in the paper I am beginning on apprenticeship.

It was my relationships with Kuhn, Sarason, and Campbell that were the starting points of wondering about apprentice relationships and the enormous power they often have in shaping and controlling later behaviors.

- JS: One of the themes that continues throughout your work is the relation of power to differing views of reality. It is particularly strong in your earlier work on operant conditioning and your recent material on antipsychiatry.\*+ Would you talk a bit about this?
- DK: I'm convinced that there are many, versions of reality out there. The question is how a person negotiates his or her own version of the world in such a way as to avoid running into other people or the social order. That's an interesting problem. Most of us are successful at doing this in what are usually subtle social setting and reality definitions. My work on our images of madmen+ and of naive children fundamentally concerns how the social order views and responds to its marginal members. Power is always involved, particularly when alternate visions of reality pose a threat. Like most of my work, I deal more with our images than with the "actualities" of social relations, and how these images or projections shape and define our lives.
- JS: So, essentially, what you are doing now is raising problems about what might constitute a community, or what might constitute a group, in which these notions of belonging or not belonging are raised. The degree to which negotiations go on, and where they go on?
- DK: That's the other side of my emphasis on the individual adaptation. This is what you've been dealing with in your work on citizenship. Marriage is a very good example. Here's an intense, interpersonal relationship, built on unspoken, differing ways of seeing the world. Often one of the key issues that must be continually negotiated is who has the power to define what is "right", both in its empirical and moral senses. One of the odd pieces of my intellectual background is my training in divorce conciliation. A powerful image that emerged from that work with couples in conflict is that marriage partners are engaged in a dance step: some choose mambo, others want to do tango, and others make up a dance that no one has ever seen. All of these steps are perfectly okay, at least within their own limited social system, as

---

\*Krantz, D.L. (1978). The relation of action and reflection. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 48. 214-227.

+Krantz, D.L. (1988). Anti-psychiatric film in the new age. *Readings*. December.

Krantz, D.L. & Bacon, P. (1973). On being a naive questioner. *Human Development*. 16. 133-156.

long as they don't step on each other's toes. People usually end up in divorce court for reasons that are often difficult to articulate, and, in part, that articulation is what the therapist helps them to do. Then the question of power becomes more obvious in how the dance step gets redefined.

JS: This seems to me to suggest an image of people as really rather separate, individuals interlocking their behavior with one another, but not necessarily stopping to check that they share common meanings with one another.

DK: One of the issues that's come out of the book I am finishing is a question related to this: In what ways can we understand things we have yet to experience? In what ways can you understand the intense grief of another, for example, if you have never experienced it yourself? To what extent are we left with the impasse of not being able to communicate about what can effectively be known through experiencing? What I have begun to understand is that in such situations communication is usually very partial. We often assume that other people do actually understand what we're talking about. But there are no ready "objective", accurate criteria available to check on this. In many cases, it doesn't make any difference if we are wrong because what we are talking about is not that important. But when something goes beyond the trivial, then there must be constant checking and a willingness to stand in the shoes of the other, of taking on that other person's world view.

JS: But that is an extremely exhausting, time-consuming experience.

DK: That's true and is clearly in evidence in the work I have done on unity in psychology.\* In our field, communication is at best partial among researchers. How does power operate to define "what psychology is?" or how willing or capable are different aspects of the field to negotiate between different world views? These issues must be considered along with any conceptual attempt to integrate or unify psychology.

JS: So bit by bit you seem to be dismantling the objectivist world view.

DK: In a sense. The objectivist world view, in terms of its metaphysical and methodological commitments, is still very dominant in psychology, both in its training and research strategies. To entertain the possibility of objectivity being only one way of going about looking at the world can be, and is, very threatening. The recent social constructionist arguments, which you and others are working through, pose this kind of threat. But there have been similar attacks throughout our history. One interesting question is why, for the most part, have these critiques not changed things? I believe these critiques have set out reasonable, interesting, and productive ways of doing psychology that deserve more than the usual response of a passing lip service. Part of the answer to the resistance lies in the issue of power and also what the scientific and social consequences would be to modifying our traditional objectivist view.

JS: You don't think psychology could be a unified discipline even then?

DK: I don't think that question can be reasonably answered until we ask why we are raising the question in the first place, and on what assumptions our usual calls to unity are based. I think the focus has to be extended beyond psychology to consider to what extent psychology's search is resonant with and determinate of similar broad societal concerns, a social reality we often forget that we are deeply interconnected with. Many of the recent dramatic political changes, like Quebec's possible pulling out of Canada, or the unification of East and West

---

\*Krantz, D.L. (1987) Psychology's search for unity. *New Direction in Psychology*. December.

Germany can provide suggestive perspectives for our more internal discussions within psychology. Psychology has a conceptual organizational structure similar to political federations. I think by studying historical and contemporary accounts of such federations we can gain some important insights into the dynamics of unification. I think former discussions have emphasized the conceptual approach to unification without sufficient awareness of the social and political dimensions.

JS: Doesn't your way of thinking put you on the margins, or maybe it's the periphery, of psychology? How do you feel about your position?

DK: I see myself as a question raiser more than an answer finder. I enjoy getting people to say "Yes, that's an interesting problem" or "That is something I hadn't thought about that way" - the point at which we began, if you remember. Social scientists seem more involved in finding answers without asking whether the questions are themselves interesting and worthwhile, and by what criteria we can judge this.

Usually, I find it fun being on the edges. Sometimes it gets lonely and generally I find communication problematic. But then there is the solace a senior colleague once offered. He said something like: "Most creative work falls between the cracks - almost by definition. The question is whether the work is good enough to make the cracks the sidewalk". Now I find that an interesting observation, maybe even a wise one.