

How High Can You Go: An Academic's Role Beyond the Academia

***Nick Yeh**

National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan

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***Corresponding author:** Nick Yeh, National Dong Hwa University, Greater Los Angeles Area, Taiwan, Tel: 6172063437;
Email: psycheboy@gmail.com

Editorial

SO WHAT?" On his/her academic journey, an academic must be confronted with such an unfriendly, derogatory remark at least once in response to his/her research. The scholar may feel beaten, frustrated, or tremble with rage. It feels like a chef seeing his/her latest recipe being spit on or a proud mother hearing her new born baby being called an ill-favored ogre.

While humanities scholars are more often challenged with the "so-called" question than scientists, scientists (social scientists and otherwise) cannot completely escape from the diatribe. A researcher usually begins with some curiosity for a subject matter; passion for the problematic and zeal drive him/her to dig deeper and climb higher, where the orgasm is achieved the moment he/she sees the research write-up in print in one of the academic journals. Then the cycle starts all over again.

There is nothing wrong with a research project being personal. In fact, frequently, it is the personal nature of a research question that pushes a scholar to go an extra mile and eventually bring us that "Eureka" effect that is so meaningful and precious. One major problem with some of the contemporary academic articles is their proclivity of theorizing something simple, which almost sounds like an axiomatic common sense, with so-called well thought of scientific research methodologies as the flawless backbone. Such articles usually lure readers into the authors' realm with some catchy titles; the readers stay tuned because of the fancy graphs and charts, but they throw those articles against the wall the moment they finally hit the coda, wishing they could have better spent their time that they have just squandered.

Perhaps indeed each research project has its own merits. But an academic is suggested to monitor and filter his/her research project as early as the research question formulating stage with the "so-what" question, to be more exact, "Does this research project really matter?" A research project comes out valuable not solely because it "matters to" the researcher (and/or his/her cohorts) personally per se, but when it contributes the achievement of public good or when its test results may be translated into fixing everyday personal, interpersonal, structural problems.

When pioneers such as Freud, Skinner, Pavlov, Munsterberg, Rogers, Beck etc. set up the tent poles for the field called psychology, regardless of their different research methodologies, all help us better understand the human psyche and in turn human behaviors. Since many interpersonal or socio-cultural issues can be traced back to how human beings form, process thoughts and to the manifestation of those thoughts, psychologists may well take pride in their being the ultimate key holders to many organizational problems. They branch out from fixing a client's personal emotional issues to helping make a corporation function more efficiently, if not harmoniously. Indeed, psychologists rock and rule.

Recent years have seen psychologists venturing into Media & Film Studies. This new, emerging, somewhat trans-disciplinary field, which is named "Psycho-cinematics," has attracted some psychologists, including neuroscientists, when these innovators can no longer wait for something better to happen. These psychologists use a variety of research methodologies ranging from in-depth ethnographic field work (extensive in-person interviews) to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and eye-tracking devices to bring a better picture of how an audience reads a movie. Specifically, these scholars manage to make sense of how a character-audience identification is constructed, which parts of a single frame from a movie tend to catch an audience's attention considering that an audience is apt to be able to process only less than 1% of information thrown at him/her from one frame, what narrative approaches (i.e. camera angle, camera movement, lighting, soundtrack, dialog) may get an audience interested and keep the audience hooked, etc.

The rather destined if not convenient encounter between psychology and media/film studies not only drives psychologists away from dead alleys, offering psychologically-minded researchers new research topics to play with but also direct them onto the track of conducting "research that matters." Research results may bring filmmaker alike the insight of what works and what does not work—filmmakers' decisions over the decades have been primarily based on trials and errors if not hunches.

Now with psychologists' input, the expected monetary benefits aside, filmmakers might find the gap between their assigned signified and audiences' denotation of the signifier better bridged.

One aspect that psychologists may look into, aside from audiences' reactions to numerous film promoting strategies and tactics, is the dynamic in and management of film production teams. Industrial & organizational psychologists' and social psychologists' scrutiny of leadership-followership styles and organizational cultures indeed may help corporations turn over a new leaf, but one needs to be aware of the fact that production teams are almost always operated by people whose personality traits are drastically different from their corporal world counterparts'.

Management models developed out of studies on conventional business sectors might not be applicable upon film companies, which are run by creative professionals. Psychologists' in-depth examination on production teams, in particular the power struggle among team members and possible solutions to inner conflicts, could really benefit the film industry.

While a lot of humanities and social science scholars' critical analyses on some given subject matters are accused of being like countesses patronizing food courts, psychologists, with the 100-year-old tradition as the base and with fixing human problems as the common goal, usually can avoid that pathetic fate. However, in order to keep the flame burning, psychologists need to keep opening new doors for themselves. The fuel for the flame is psychologists' ventures into other fields, which may trigger digs into new topics, the oxygen for the flame being psychologists' appreciation for numerous different research methodologies, quantitative and otherwise. With interpersonal and structural issues all traceable back to human dynamic, psychologists, as the key holders to the black box called "human psyche," may be the preferred solvers to many socio-cultural problems.

The legendary French film director Jean Renoir's classic adage goes: **"Everyone has his reasons." Psychologists may keep this in mind: "Everyone has his/her mission."**