

## Considerations on the Fundamental Relationship between Clinical Psychology and Epistemology

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Clinical psychology is a scientific discipline whose origins are complex and multidisciplinary (Benjamin, 2005; Brems et al., 1991; Merlo, 2023; Watson, 1953). As this field continues to evolve, multidisciplinary work is becoming of increasing importance. Multidisciplinary work is a difficult task, requiring a range of knowledge of different areas that then converge in clinical practice. The combination of sectors entails sometimes reconciling distant concepts in a unifying framework. Given this evolving integration with other fields, it is important to consider the manner in which epistemological diversity will affect clinical psychology (Dwyer et al., 2015; Hoffman & Deffenbacher, 2014).

As fields with very different epistemological foundations collaborate in a multidisciplinary fashion with clinical psychology, researchers will have to be vigilant of the implications of changing epistemologies on their research and the manner in which their work is interpreted. Indeed, it will be necessary to consider the implications of changing epistemologies on conceptualisations of science, models of mental health difficulties and research methodology (Barker et al., 2015; Chinn et al., 2011; Hofer & Pintrich, 2012; Kazdin, 2021; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020; Parnas et al., 2013; Shean, 2013; Warner et al., 2016).

The word “clinical” pertains to the interventive nature of the discipline of clinical psychology (Wright et al., 2017). This term covers all areas that relate to concepts such as adaptation and maladjustment, individual psychopathology, relational, family, social, work and so on (Cîrstoveanu et al., 2020; Gangemi et al., 2021; Häfner, 2015; Masci et al., 2022; Nava et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2015; Parnas & Gallagher, 2015; Rogers, 2015; Schultze-Lutter, 2018; Settineri & Merlo, 2023; Tolsa & Malas, 2022; Wright et al., 2017). Clinical studies, the study of the single cases and theories concerning psychic functioning have been fundamental to the development of this science, including different epistemological approaches (Bishop & Trout, 2005; Hofer & Bendixen, 2012; Hofer & Pintrich, 2021; Hopner & Liu, 2021; King et al., 2021; Lonka & Lindblom-Ylänne, 1996).

Diagnosis, clinical practice, reasoning and interventions are therefore particularly relevant for clinical psychology and modern epistemology is a fundamental guide for theoretical concepts and practical implications. In fact, theoretical propositions guide the clinical choices, diagnostic and therapeutic operations (Magerauer, 2021; Thomas et al., 2020; Tonelli & Bluhm, 2020; Willemsen, 2022). For example, whilst often taken as very literal reflections of reality, the proposition that there are distinct diagnostic categories of mental health difficulties is, in fact, a theoretical, rather than factual, statement (Scull, 2021).

The field of medicine, for example, involves studies that concern the role of psychological factors that produce physical outcomes, as in the case of psychosomatics. In the same way, it is increasingly clear that different forms of pathology affect mental functioning both in terms of transversal and non-pathological phenomena, and pathological when the subject’s adaptation fails (Backer et al., 2008; Dindo et al., 2017; Fisher & Dickinson, 2014; Kazdin, 2021; Lilienfeld & Basterfield, 2020; Lund-Jacobsen et al., 2024; Martino et al., 2023; Merlo et al., 2024; Militi et al., 2021; Onken et al., 2014; Pintaudi et al., 2021; Ricciardi et al., 2023; Sicari et al., 2023; Silvestro et al., 2023; Tacket et al., 2017). This particular domain is absolutely central to the field of clinical psychology, to the point of gaining more and more interest.

Psychosomatic medicine, the various processes of somatization, the main psychopathologies caused by physical diseases, the forms of complex aetiology underlying mental disorders, maladjustment, suffering and their diagnosis represent the hard core of the discipline (Allegra et al., 2023; Baldino et al., 2023; de Aisemberg, 2022; Fischbein, 2011; Gubb, 2013; Lee, 2022; Mezzalana, 2018; Schulz et al., 2023; Spatari et al., 2015; Taylor, 2022).

Research in this sense must always take into account the different domains that are intertwined on the etiological level, be prudent of the different existing epistemologies and the role of the

latter in the verification of plausibility, the possibility and scientific basis of theory and methods of intervention (Beth & Piaget, 2013; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Lilienfeld, 2013; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020; Tavris, 2024).

In this sense, it is particularly interesting to see how different sciences can contribute to scientific progress in a unified sense. In addition to the clear and obvious fields that concern, for example, biology, the mathematical sciences dedicated to the methodologies of research and sciences in the classical sense, new forms of scientific progress induce particularly relevant reflections. Modern physics, for example, produces forms of consideration of phenomena including particularly relevant epistemological reflections (Aflisia et al., 2021; Bitbol, 2020; Casula et al., 2023; Fuller, 2021; Mezzalira et al., 2023a; Picione & Louzzi, 2021; Sergi, 2021; Sergi et al., 2023; Stanley, 2018).

The fundamental point on the epistemological level concerns the need to always consider the plausibility of the contents, as well as the ambiguous and ambiguous nature of the language (Hook, 2013; Kook, 2023; Lacan et al., 2020; Ragland, 2015; Ragland-Sullivan & Brancher, 2014). In this sense, other sciences such as psychoanalysis, merged with clinical psychology during the definition of the new Disciplinary Scientific Groups, plays a fundamental role.

The proposed existence of the unconscious and of defence mechanisms that so strongly affect clinical and social relationships, as the subjective attempts to stem trauma and its anguish, turn out to be only some forms of application of psychoanalysis in the field of clinical psychology (Bèkès et al., 2021; Di Giuseppe & Conversano, 2022; Di Giuseppe & Lingiardi, 2022; Mezzalira et al., 2023b).

In particular, it is possible to witness many contributions that testify to the scientific nature of these points, the epistemological reflection that accompanies theory and practice, the results of oriented psychotherapies and other forms of scientific outcome depended on the clinical activity (Aisenstein & Aisemberg, 2022; Barria-Asenjo & Žižek, 2023; Bateman et al., 2021; Di Giuseppe et al., 2021; Miniati et al., 2020; Stefana et al., 2021).

In this way, disciplines that are often considered by many as incompatible, start suspending arbitrary limits to contribute together to progress and modern clinical research. It is particularly interesting and important to note how integration processes, assisted by epistemology, produce forms of application synthesis valid for mental health and for the structuring of psychotherapies (Albajes & Moix, 2021; Crits-Christoph & Gibbons, 2021; Di Nuovo & Narzisi, 2021; Eilertsen & Eilertsen, 2023; Jurinec & Schienle, 2021; Merlo et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2014; Sani & Bacqué, 2023; Sønderland et al., 2023; Taubner et al., 2023; Texeira et al., 2023).

The latter term, used in the plural, summarizes the differences and the different levels of application of clinical psychology and psychotherapy, in which the different forms of application of reference theorizations converge. Integrative clinical and psychotherapy processes have often been born, so the continuous experimentation and theoretical verification are fundamental in the scientific field of clinical psychology.

Progress appears to be guided by integrative possibilities, but of particular interest are the limits. The concept of epistemological limit must be central in order to produce the right distinctions and the necessary boundaries. This arises from the irreplaceable theoretical and clinical reflection and from the analysis of plausibility and possibilities offered by the reference sciences (Myles & Johnson, 2023). Beyond the fundamental forms of assistance produced by the mathematical field, reflection is irreplaceable. From this point of view clinical psychology, although young, turns out to be a science in progress and well founded. These considerations are therefore intended to suggest the need for a continuous review useful for the progress and structuring of innovative clinical and research methodologies.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflict of interest.

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