Problems with Hypothetical-Deductive Explanation
Methodological or Theoretical?

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Vollmer has written an interesting paper encompassing several issues that need more consideration by all of us in psychology. I especially like his suggestion that our psyche extends into what we say and do, reaching beyond our strictly individual realm of mentation and being reflected within a patterned context. I think that psychologists would profit from considering the logos or patterned context of behavior on the basis of which we human beings frame the rationales (reasons, grounds) for our behavior. Sometimes the context per se takes on a meaning that the person must accommodate even though he or she did not personally initiate such significations. This is especially true in the social realm. In this sense I think it is correct to say that at times we are "being thought" through the contextual influence of others' cogitations as well as doing our own thinking. There is a logic transcending the person that cannot be overlooked. At least some of what Jung (1953, pp. 149, 155) meant by the collective conscious (persona) and/or unconscious relates to some such contextual meaning formulation.

Of course, the reason why Vollmer comes to the view that psychic thoughts and feelings extend into what we say and do interpersonally is that he has a specific criticism to make of current personality theorizing. Vollmer is attacking the notion that human behavior is something other than what we perceive it to be overtly, in the ongoing actions of the present. He believes that too many psychologists have postulated superfluous "behind-the-scenes" conceptions to account for what is observed...
directly in overt behavior. He cites constructs such as wishes, needs, intentions, urges, motives, traits, and dispositions as examples of such unnecessary formulations. In attacking the influence of unobserved "somethings" causing the observed behavior of people, it seems to me that Vollmer deals with two issues: The first is a clear charge that the hypothetical-deductive (H-D) "model" or "approach" is fundamentally at fault in this erroneous practice. Second, he implies without delineating an alternative that there is some other way for a science of psychology to proceed than by way of the logic encompassed in the H-D approach. As I do not agree with either of these suggestions, I would like to focus my comments on this aspect of Vollmer's paper, although in the process I will have something to say concerning his views on intentionality as well.

1. Hypothetico-Deductivism in Bridging the Theory–Method Bifurcation

It was Clark Hull (1937) who first called psychologists' attention to what he referred to as the hypothetico-deductive method, framing it in terms of three steps. These steps were essentially as follows: (1) operational definition of critical theoretical terms, (2) deductions from these terms leading to a system of interlocking theorems covering the field in question, and (3) agreement between the system of theorems and the observationally known facts. Hull then suggested:

If the theorems agree with the observed facts, the system is probably true; if they disagree, the system is false. If it is impossible to tell whether the theorems of a system agree with the facts or not, the system is neither true nor false; scientifically considered, it is meaningless.

Now that we have seen the H-D sequence referred to as a model, approach, and method, how are we to think of what is taking place here? What was Hull after, and how does this aim of his relate to the problems to which Vollmer has drawn our attention? In order to clarify things, we must first backtrack to draw a clear distinction between theory and method. I have argued for several years now that psychologists routinely confuse their theories with the method they employ to put theoretical hypotheses to test (for a recent example, see Rychlak, 1981a). In its most general phrasing, a theory is simply a pattern of relationship between two or more concepts, constructs, images, schematic labels, or whatever we wish to name those items that we bring into meaningful association in order to enrich our understanding of some realm of interest (Rychlak, 1981b, p. 42). Meaning is a relational