

Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences

Charlotte Højholt
Ernst Schraube *Editors*

Subjectivity and Knowledge

Generalization in the Psychological
Study of Everyday Life



Springer

Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences

Series Editor

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Editors

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Series Editor's Preface

Living Through Generalizing: Psychology of Desire for Becoming

This book—*Subjectivity and Knowledge: Generalization in the Psychological Study of Everyday Life*—is an important milestone in the theoretical advancement of the social sciences in our twenty-first century. Its editors—Charlotte Højholt and Ernst Schraube—have brought together a critical mass of scholars who collectively bring the need to consider the focus on generalization remain central for science and social practices. The volume leads to cardinal rethinking generalization in psychological theory, methodology, and research practice. The very core of the psychological science is open to new questions.

The questions are many. How to get in touch and explore general connections between various areas of knowledge on the basis of the situated, partial, and contextual character of psychological phenomena? What is the role of critique in the processes of generalization? How to develop analytical concepts and strategies which help us to conceive psychological phenomena as processes and movements, and how does the development of psychological knowledge involve transformations of everyday practice? We create new solutions—in technology, in our ways of living in the environment, and in our thinking of it all—all the time. Technological innovations become not only helpful *for* living but turn into essentials *of* our human living. Anybody who has forgotten to take one's cellular phone along leaving home and feels that one's self is denied access to the latest Facebook news can testify about the paradoxical takeover of the human *psyche* by a small technological device—albeit through the meaning construction processes of the proud owner of that trivial communication aid.

At the same time as generalization possibilities are being sought after in the book, the authors operate with the credo that science needs to explain the complex phenomena of our everyday lives and contribute to its betterment. Everyday living is unique—deeply subjective in its multitude of variations. Human beings *live* through their encounters with their *Umwelts*—and living through equals *feeling*

through. We feel into our environments and by doing that develop ourselves for further encounters with the world. Social practices carried out by human beings are affective practices—a simple truth that can be understood when one observes football fans performing their support acts on a stadium, or a gambler in a casino, or a mother trying to cope with her toddler's temper tantrum in front of the supermarket audience. All of the participants in these dramatic events view these as meaningful—"our team *must* win," "I *want* to win," and "my child *should* obey" are the parallel reflections of subjective kinds to support the publicly visible actions. All these (and other) reflections are local particulars—yet the subjective *affectivated* (Cornejo et al. 2018) meanings are a form of single-instance generalizations of desires and normativity. Human beings are intentional actors who strive towards goals beyond each and every local everyday life situation—yet the pathways towards these goals are worked out in each here-and-now situation.

The present volume continues the path of inquiry into new directions in psychology that was outlined in the "Yokohama Manifesto" of 2016. In that collective work (Valsiner et al. 2016) the interdisciplinary foundations for the science of a specifically human kind of psychology which starts from the axiomatic bases of an open-systemic look at the psychological functioning of a species where higher psychological functions play a primary role in our relating with our environments. Psychological phenomena are unique among those of other sciences by being organized through normative constraints (Christensen 2019) and are inherently social in their origins (Joerchel and Benetka 2018). Psychological science is therefore necessarily in need to develop new conceptualizations of its approaches as normativity is not part of the phenomena of any other natural science. For that reason, borrowing theoretical systems from psychology's usual "reference points" in the natural sciences—physics, chemistry, or even biology—would not lead to adequate epistemological solutions. Our contemporary fascination with the neurosciences is an intellectual *impasse* that replaces finding new solutions for understanding by the seductive beauty of multicolored brain images. Psychology as science needs to find its own solutions—rather than import these, wholesale, from neighboring disciplines.

Nevertheless, there are some "near neighbors" from whom we can benefit. Closest to psychology's needs would be developmental biology—yet even there the development of biological systems does not include radical reorganization of the whole biological system by an "inherent intention" of that system to innovate itself towards some goal state of an imaginary new "final form." Psychological science of everyday life phenomena needs to be built on the assumptions of the active creation of novel forms of subjective personal worlds under the influence of *invented possible and desirable* states of the system in the future. Innovations in technologies and fashion designs demonstrate the open-endedness of human imagination.

This specificity of psychology—a science of how desires for the future become turned into realities of human *being* in its present (and rapidly emerging past)—necessarily is based on the acts of generalization. These acts, however, acquire a special focus—that of *generalizing for the future*. The future of a developing human being is unknown—our personal life histories cannot be predetermined by the past. The

specific features of the here-and-now states of being cannot be directly transferred to possible future encounters with similar settings. The experience from the present needs to be encoded into a generalized abstracted form to be recontextualized in the future. Such generalization operates on the basis of single instances—particular encounters with the world—so as to be *pre*-adapting for future similar (but never precisely the same) conditions.

We are never the same but always similar. This simple general feature of psychological phenomena—never being “the same,” as the irreversibility of human life courses rules that out, but experiencing conditions that the meaning-making mind detects as being “similar” (to some past encounter)—makes the focus of this volume on generalization the arena for crucial innovation in psychological science of the twenty-first century.

Aalborg, Denmark
June, 2019

Jaana Valsiner

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Subjectivity and Knowledge – The Formation of Situated Generalization in Psychological Research



Ernst Schraube and Charlotte Højholt

Psychological phenomena are furnished with an astonishing doubleness: they are unique and general at the same time. Not only because of language, and because the words we use to articulate and give meaning to our experiences and activities unite the particular and the general, but also because we as human beings are social beings, developing our individual, unique, and particular mental life together with others in a common world. That is why the relationship between the particular and the general and processes of generalization are continuously at stake in people's everyday lives. However, generalization is also a key activity of science. While outside science it is usually a more implicit process, it forms the heart of scientific research. The central aim of generalization within science is to engage in overcoming superficial, one-sided, and distorted ways of thinking and to develop systematic, reliable, and socially relevant knowledge. Society's trust in science is based on a cogent practice of generalization and the idea that scientific research does not pursue one-sided and selective interests, but engages in developing multisided and general knowledge for the common good.

Over the past few decades, there have been major critiques, from various perspectives, of the common practice of generalization in psychological research. Some even argue that the concept should be abandoned entirely. One problem articulated in the debates, for example, refers to the disposition to identify general knowledge with static, universal, and final knowledge created through methods isolating the objects of research from their connections in the social world. Such a perspective can invite an understanding of knowledge in *knowledge hierarchies* in which contextual, involved, and everyday knowledge is seen not as knowledge but as subjective views in need of objective correction. An example could be the

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collaboration of different professions on a particular case. When psychological experts present numbers or results from a test, it is considered as indisputable knowledge, while professionals working with the case in everyday practice present their experiences and understandings of connections it is often turned down as “anecdotes of everyday life” (Røn Larsen 2016), subjective, involved, and emotional.

Within a hierarchical and disembodied vision of the production of knowledge, psychological research can turn into a control science involved in “governing the soul” (Rose 1999) and regulating, normalizing, and differentiating persons and their mental lives, and essential issues of human life slide out of the epistemic horizon. Attention to differences, for example, can turn into differentiating between persons and objectifying and othering particular people instead of studying common problems of the human world. In this way subjectivity is eliminated, together with the social context of everyday life to which subjectivity is connected. However, how can we understand psychological phenomena if we disarticulate human subjectivity and the uniqueness of each individual human being? As Jaan Valsiner emphasizes, “We need to come to terms with the uneasy recognition that it is the *personally unique subjectivity* that is objective in psychology” (2014: 6).

We understand human subjectivity not as something inside persons but connected to persons’ experience, action, and collective participation in the everyday world and their ways of perceiving, forming, and changing social and material conditions. The everyday world is composed of and developed through differences, conflicts, and changes in relation to shared matters. From different positions and with different kinds of responsibility and access to knowledge about a problem, persons strive with and coordinate their efforts in relation to many-sided common causes and concerns (Axel and Højholt 2019, Chap. 2 in this volume). The practice of generalization in psychological research has to relate to such common processes in continuous change, building on particular subjective experiences and action, and analyzing the relevant internal relations, connections, and constructions of meaning. Psychology, which roots psychological processes in human life, has to transcend the disposition to understand generalization as a practice of disarticulating social connections and human subjectivity and embrace a scientific research practice which facilitates an understanding of how persons experience, act, and create meaning in a common world. The vision of a disembodied, static, and universal knowledge represents a major challenge in the production of psychological knowledge and insight.

Based on a critique of disembodied and universalist conceptions of developing psychological knowledge, this book is engaged in rethinking the practice of generalization in psychological theory, methodology, and research. How do we get in touch and explore general connections on the basis of the situated, subjective, and contextual character of psychological phenomena? What is the role of critique in the processes of generalization? How do we systematically include the subjectivity of the researcher as well as the research participants in the practice of generalization? How do we develop analytical concepts and strategies which help us to conceive of psychological phenomena as processes and movements, and how does the development of psychological knowledge involve transformations of everyday practice?

The chapters of the book contribute to a theoretical and methodological vocabulary which systematically includes the subjective dimension of human life in psy-

chological inquiry and situates the processes of generalization in persons' common, social, cultural, and material practices of everyday living. The authors engage in developing an understanding of generalization as a basis for forming a viable future society. Before we present the chapters of the book, we will begin by delineating major approaches to generalization in psychological research, and then we will reconsider the challenge for psychology to include human subjectivity and everyday life in the production of knowledge and describe significant perspectives from the history of psychology contributing to the formation of situated, subjectivity-and-context-based generalization in psychological research.

Major Understandings of Generalization in Psychological Research

Within contemporary psychological research, we can distinguish three major approaches to generalization as the basis for the production of theory and knowledge: first, *numerical* traditions, generalizing through representative samples primarily based on quantitative methodology; second, *post-generalizing* traditions, which conceive of generalization not as a decisive goal in scientific research; and third, *situated* traditions, emphasizing the significance of scientific generalization and generalizing not through representative samples but through subjectivity-in-context primarily based on a qualitative methodology.

Each of these approaches provides an important epistemic quality and has its place in scientific work. However, “the difficulties arise,” as Charles Tolman underlines, when one of them “is taken as the principal or only form of generalization” (1989: 203). Even though situated and subjectivity-based traditions of generalization can be found throughout the history of psychology, numerical approaches have almost exclusively dominated the production of knowledge in psychology since the early part of the twentieth century. In this book we argue for an epistemological shift and for expanding and redirecting the practice of generalization in psychological research toward a situated, subjectivity-and-context-based conception of generalization. This shift refers to the specific content and characteristics of the psychological subject matter. An embodied, qualitative perspective is the fundament of any numerical account.

Numerical Generalization

Numerical generalization (other common terms are *generalization in frequencies* [e.g. Holzkamp 1983], *nomological generalization* [e.g., Kaplan 1964], or the quite misleading term *empirical generalization* [e.g. Flick 2014]) focuses on classification and identification of traits or principles that are common to the largest number of instances. The methodological strategies build on measuring the phenomena in their relations, identifying the general with the abstract, detached from concrete social

contexts. Within this perspective, generalization is seen as *not* possible from a single case. This principle refers to the problem of induction and the notion that it is logically untenable to conclude from a single case to many or all cases (or from unknown to known, or from particular to general propositions). Therefore, the research design is usually based on representative samples which aim to adequately reflect the population as a whole so that the findings of the sample can be “generalized” to the population. To generalize, here, therefore means to generalize through representative samples. It is a form of concluding on the basis of statistical inference from a representative sample to a more general population, category, or class and in this way a move toward the abstract aiming at universality. Major traditions of psychological research build on numerical generalization of frequencies as the basis of evidence and the central practice of developing knowledge, and apply it in various forms especially in classical experimental settings as well as surveys with questionnaires.

The exploration of frequencies can definitely help to develop relevant and socially important knowledge, especially about the distribution of a phenomenon (for instance, about the frequency of stress in a certain population). However, as the principal or only form of epistemic approach in psychological research, it would be too narrow and one-sided. Usually, the results require further, more in-depth psychological investigation to shed light on the phenomenon in its relevant contexts (e.g., *why* and *how* do persons of a certain population develop stress, how is it experienced in everyday practice, what is stress about, and what kind of conditions is it connected with?). One issue, which refers to a fundamental dilemma of generalization in frequencies is, that the methodological strategies make it difficult to access the richness of psychological phenomena. Depending on how numbers are used, interpreted, and communicated, they may lead to a kind of overgeneralization. In fact, epistemic strategies of measuring can reduce and even distort psychological phenomena and undermine the possibility of investigating human subjectivity, experience, and action.

Accordingly, a major concern with numerical generalization as the only form of developing psychological knowledge refers to the lack of systematically including human subjectivity in the epistemic account. How can we approach and constructively work with the problems, concerns, and dilemmas of people in the contexts in which they actually unfold if we do not include the subjective experience, perception, emotion, thought, and reasons for action of persons? How can we contribute with substantial knowledge to understanding and bringing movement into the problems of human life if we do not systematically include human agency and the creation of and dealing with the problems we are confronted with in our contemporary world? When the world is dangling on a string and natural scientists are warning that the whole is at risk (Ripple et al. 2017: 1028, in the declaration *Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice*, signed by over 15,000 scientists), the question of rethinking scientific generalization and the relationship between the particular and the general is at stake. To be able to understand and work with these issues and participate in forming a possible future society, we have to systematically include the question of human subjectivity, experience, and agency.

Since the 1960s, the issue of a too narrow, particular, and fixed conception of generalization and ways of developing scientific knowledge has been widely dis-

cussed in psychology, including the need for a fundamental epistemic renewal of psychological research practice (Chimirri and Schraube 2019; Gergen 2015; Holzkamp 1983, 2013a; Teo 2009; Valsiner et al. 2016). In response, an epistemological shift from a *god's eye view* toward *situated knowledge* has crystallized in psychological theory of science and the understanding of the practice of developing scientific knowledge. The *representational* vision of the production of knowledge is especially challenged today, as well as the notion of the researcher as an isolated knower who stands outside the world, aiming to produce knowledge which represents the world correctly (Brinkmann 2012; Bang 2019, Chap. 6 in this volume). Scholars realize that their research activities and practices in developing knowledge do not occur in a social vacuum, but are rooted *in the world*, a world involving other human beings as well as societal relations, culture, technology, politics, and nature. They realize that through their research and production of knowledge, they not only participate in the creation of the social world, but also view the social world in turn as affecting their research practices, including their theories, concepts, and methodologies as well as their own thoughts, ideas, and conduct of everyday life (Jensen 1999; O'Doherty et al. 2019). With the words of Svend Brinkmann:

Knowing is not something that simply happens – as if we were able to magically represent the world ‘as it is’ – but rather ... an activity. Knowing is something people *do*, as part of their lives We need to desacralize knowledge and admit that if knowing is a human activity, it is always already situated somewhere – in some cultural, historical and social situation. (2012: 32)

With an extensive body of theoretical as well as empirical work, *Science Studies* substantiate this epistemological shift and argue for an understanding of scientific research and the production of knowledge as an inherently worldly situated, embodied, and socially and culturally constructed process (Knorr Cetina 1999; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Hess 1997). As the historian of science Donna Haraway explains, the “view from above”, the isolated, disconnected, and infinitive scientific vision is no longer convincing, “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (1991: 190), and she argues for transcending the dichotomy between human subjectivity and scientific objectivity.

The topography of subjectivity is multi-dimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position not of identity, but of objectivity; that is, partial connection. (1991: 193)

Post-Generalizing Approaches

Drawing on the epistemological shift toward a situated, subjectivity-based conception of the production of knowledge, *post-generalizing traditions of thought* emerged, which fundamentally question scientific generalization and conceive of it as neither possible nor desirable. Within this perspective, the diversity and multi-

plicity of psychological phenomena and human life are seen in conflict with nomothetic accounts aiming to identify general principles and laws. Scientific practices of classification and categorization cannot acknowledge and facilitate the investigation of the heterogeneity and contextuality of human experience. However, psychological inquiry, which appreciates the unique and gives proper weight to the diversity of human life in local conditions (including those in which numerical generalizations are applied)—so the main argument—has to turn any generalization into a tentative working hypothesis, not a conclusion. As Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba explain, “Local conditions ... make it impossible to generalize. If there is a ‘true’ generalization, it is that there can be no generalization” (1985: 124).

The shift toward situated epistemologies and the inclusion of the subjectivity, diversity, and multiplicity of human life consequently involves a move toward understanding scientific inquiry as action. To a certain extent, the science-as-action perspective can also lead to a post-generalizing perspective. Within this view, the success of scientific research can be seen as based not on the universality and truth-claims of knowledge, but on its social relevance and how it actually can *do* something, contributing to improve the world and changing it for the better, including people’s everyday life. “The researcher,” Kenneth Gergen notes, is “an active agent in fashioning the future” (2015: 305). “The aim of research,” he explains, is not “to illuminate *what is*, but to create *what is to become*” (2015: 294), and he argues for “research as a future forming practice – a practice in which social change is indeed the primary goal” (2015: 292). The perfectly justified emphasis on science-as-action can turn the question of generalization into a more marginal issue, pivotal is only how scientific research and the production of knowledge matters as a part of forming a viable future society.

However, it could be stated that any activity to form a viable future society involves the question of the relationship between the particular and the general and specific practices of generalization. In fact, the specific practices of generalization are, in our perspective, a central question in the making of the world. In continuation of such thinking, we cannot just reject generalization, but have to expand and re-invent it. That is our vision with the concept of situated generalization.

Situated Generalization

Traditions of situated generalization (also commonly described as *substantial* [e.g., Davydov 1984], *structural* [e.g., Holzkamp 1983], *analytical* [e.g., Kvale and Brinkmann 2009], or *theoretical* generalization [e.g., Demuth 2017]) build on a qualitative stance; however, this does not mean that they dismiss quantitative methodology but rather that they include it, if appropriate, in relation to the specific content and questions of the investigation. Situated generalization systematically includes human subjectivity, context, and change and focuses on the investigation of the genesis, internal relations, and interconnections of phenomena in the construction of psychological knowledge. It attempts to achieve scientific objectivity and

general knowledge not at the cost of the subjective and by disarticulating the subjective dimension of human life, but rather *through the generalization of the subjective*.

It is correct that we cannot *conclude* from a single case to many or all cases. However, because psychological phenomena are subjective givens, *psychological generalization is only possible from and through single cases*, and we have to expand the conception of generalization as quantitative *conclusions* toward a qualitative stance of *elucidating the subjective in its worldly connections*. As Valsiner explains:

Not only is generalization from the single case possible – but it is *the* only possible base for generalization. And even more – generalization necessarily happens on the basis of a single instance – each and every new experience – within the life space of the single case.... While being led by the uniqueness of each moment in life, we operate through general principles that transcend the uniqueness of any of these moments. Generalization is possible from any single instance of our encounters with the environment. Generality is in singularity. (2015: 233)

The key to situated generalization is the notion that *generality is in singularity*. It builds on the conception that individual human beings are *social* beings, living their everyday life together with others in a shared world. Even if psychological processes are subjective, particular and unique, they do not exhaust themselves in it, but relate in their general dimensions to others and the objective world with its possibilities and limits. That is why they integrate the fascinating doubleness of being unique and general at the same time (Brock 2016; Dreier 2007; Salvatore and Valsiner 2010). And that is why the practice of generalization matters, not only in the construction of theory and knowledge, but also more fundamentally in people's everyday life, the making of the social and material world and the formation of future society.

Because we cannot recognize *immediately* in the unique, subjective experiences how they relate to the common world in its relevant dimensions, the investigation of the internal relations and the processes of making meaning of ourselves in the world is precisely the task of psychology as a science. Starting from specific questions, problems, and concerns in everyday experience, situated generalization is in such an approach rooted in human subjectivity. However, it is a world-oriented practice and a continuous process of exploring human experience and action (and their implications) in their relevant worldly connections as a way to analyze, work with, and bring movement into the problems of human life.

The fundamental challenge of situated psychological generalization is how can we achieve generalization, objectivity, and sound knowledge without reducing the uniqueness, individuality, and subjective givenness of psychological phenomena? This challenge forms the central question of this volume, and all chapters engage with it. Looking back over the history of psychology, in the following paragraph, we present major lines of thought dealing with this challenge and contributing to a psychological conception of how to develop knowledge through the generalization of the subjective. But first, we will take a look at why it is so difficult for scientific psychology to include human subjectivity in its epistemological framework.

Subjectivity, Everyday Life, and Psychological Origins of Situated Generalization

Psychology's difficulty with systematically including the subjective dimension of human life in its theoretical and methodological framework can be traced back to some confusion in understanding the relationship between human subjectivity and scientific objectivity. Major psychological traditions assume that human subjectivity represents bias. Both the subjectivity of the researcher and the subjectivity of research participants seem to be incompatible with scientific objectivity—therefore, we cannot consider it. However, such a scientific vision seems illusory. It denies the reality that psychological phenomena are given subjectively. Instead of starting from the content of research, the human subject and her/his psychological processes, and asking about objectivity and generalization from that point to attain scientific knowledge, the starting point is the apparently objective methodology, and on this basis, the content of research is operationalized and “objectively” constructed (Teo 2015). Reversing the form of knowledge production in psychology in this way demonstrates confusion between epistemic and ontological objectivity, a kind of misunderstanding that the philosopher of mind, John Searle, has described in detail. He explains:

We resist accepting subjectivity as a ground floor, irreducible phenomenon of nature because, since the seventeenth century, we have come to believe that science must be objective. But this involves a pun on the notion of objectivity. We are confusing the *epistemic* objectivity of the scientific investigation with the *ontological* objectivity of the typical subject matter ... Since science aims at objectivity in the epistemic sense that we seek truths that are not dependent on the particular point of view of this or that investigator, it has been tempting to conclude that the reality investigated by science must be objective in the sense of existing independently of the experiences in the human individual. But this last feature, ontological objectivity, is not an essential trait of science. If science is supposed to give an account of how the world works and if subjective states of consciousness are part of the world, then we should seek an (epistemically) objective account of an (ontologically) subjective reality, the reality of subjective states of consciousness. What I am arguing here is that we can have an epistemically objective science of a domain that is ontologically subjective. (2002: 11)

Psychological phenomena are simply subjective givens. On the one hand, they are always socially mediated processes (through social, discursive, cultural and technological practice); on the other hand, they are always someone's processes. They exist from the point of view of a unique human being who experiences them, and in this sense in a subjective, first-person mode (Schraube 2013; Teo 2017). The emotion of love, for example, is ontologically subjective in the sense that it only exists because it is experienced by individual subjects. Without the concrete experience of love by an individual, there is no love. Love is an emotion, socially mediated in a specific historical practice, but still we explore it through different individual subjects' different experiences with it—connected to their specific participation in social practice. That is why the analysis of *connections* is so fundamental to generalization (Højholt and Kousholt 2019). Accordingly, because the typical subject

matter of psychology is *ontologically subjective reality* the *epistemic objectivity* of the scientific investigation has to be based on it. Therefore, the *personally unique subjectivity is objective* in psychology, and we have to come to terms with it as the foundation of our processes of generalization and of developing knowledge.

As already mentioned, the concept of subjectivity not only refers to human experience and the multiplicity of psychological processes but also to human action. This includes the notion that humans do not just live their life *in* a world, but are actively engaged in the *making* of the societal world on the basis of their experience and action, which in turn is *re-making* themselves. To be able to grasp this internal relation between subjectivity and the world in its concrete form, we work with the concept *everyday life*. Everyday life, in our perspective, does not refer just to a particular context, such as everyday life in public spaces, but to all the various everyday contexts and practices—family, educational institutions, organizations, workplaces, digital spaces, etc.—in and through which psychological processes actually unfold (Brinkmann 2012, 2015; Hodgetts et al. 2020; Højholt and Schraube 2016; Lave 2019; Lave and Wenger 1991; Lawrence et al. 2004). The concept does not exclude broader cultural, societal and technological relations: on the contrary, everyday contexts are embedded in broader societal structures which are accessible through the everyday, perhaps in their most concrete form. The concept *conduct of everyday life* tries to grasp such an integrated understanding of subjectivity in everyday contexts and practices (Dreier 2016; Holzkamp 2013b, 2016; Schraube and Højholt 2016).

Despite the difficulties of psychology to include the subjective dimension of human life in its epistemological frame, psychologies of human subjectivity permeate the history of psychology from the very beginning. Within these traditions, we can find the endeavor to develop subjectivity-in-context-based conceptions of scientific generalization, and from this body of work, we present in the following a few important contributions to the formation of situated generalization.

In an historical review of the development of psychology of the nineteenth century, William Stern, one of the most distinctive psychologists of the early twentieth century, differentiated between two major directions: “subject-less psychology” (*subjektlose Psychologie*) rooted in a natural science tradition and “subject-psychology” (*Subjektpsychologie*) rooted in a concept of an active human subject, integrating various dimensions of mental life in the individual person (1900: 431). Although major parts of his body of work engage in experimental psychology in a natural science tradition, he also knew about its limits. With the development of his *Critical Personalism*, he puts the person in everyday life at the center of his thinking. His theory of early childhood and language development, for example, was based on an investigation of his own everyday family life with three children and included detailed research diaries covering more than 18 years. Stern can be seen as the founding father of the psychological study of everyday life, influential already during his time (e.g., for the research by Martha Muchow and her classical study of children’s everyday life in the city [Muchow and Muchow 2015]). Generalization, Stern argues, requires rethinking psychological research as “*synthesis*” and “to trace the *connections* between the phenomena investigated” (1938: 15). As he explains:

Since man and the human mind are in the midst of a world, mental phenomena are connected with the most varied spheres, even with spheres outside mind; the body, fields of external stimulation (light, sound, etc.), climate and weather, other people and human society, civilization, historical circumstances, values. (Stern 1938: 15)

With his notion of persons as active subjects *in* the world, his concept of synthetic investigation as well as his concern with moving psychological research out of the laboratory into everyday life, in which psychological processes actually unfold, he contributes with important steps toward a situated approach to developing psychological knowledge. Furthermore, with the concept of *psychography* (Stern 1911: 327), he suggests not sample-based but individual-based research practices which actually take the uniqueness and diversity of human life seriously, and which can be seen, as Valsiner underlines, as “the starting point to understand how generalization occurs from single episodes of the lives of single persons” (2019: 14, Chap. 5 in this volume).

Kurt Lewin with his *Topological Psychology* and the development of *Action Research* continues in a subject-psychological direction. His concept of generalization refers to human action and connects it systematically with the fabric of the everyday world aiming to increase human agency. Building on a critique of an Aristotelian mode of thought in which lawfulness remains limited to the recurrence of the same event—an idea which underlies the practice of generalization in frequencies—he argues in a Galilean mode of thought for rethinking the lawfulness and intelligibility of psychological events. “Lawfulness,” he noted, is “inherent in the nature of the psychic, and hence in all psychic processes, even those occurring only once” (1931: 152). Every activity and single case, he recognized in his attempt to rethink lawfulness, can be considered as lawful in the sense of meaningful, because it resonates with the general structure of the social space in which it occurs (Tateo 2013). Lewin worked with the question of the relationship between the particular and the general, the individual and lawful by taking the *single case as a starting point and exploring the dynamics of human life in the concrete situations and social life-spaces* in which psychological processes unfold and by examining the concrete possibilities and limits of human experience and action within these spaces. As Martin Dege explains, “Lewin lays the grounds to rethink generalization as a tool in the hands of the research subjects to understand and shape their individual life-space agentively” (2019, Chap. 3 in this volume).

One of the founders of *Cultural Historical Activity Theory*, Lew Vygotsky, expands the formation of situated generalization. The activity of generalization, we can learn here, is based on *language, general concepts, and theory*. Understanding the phenomena under investigation is not independent of the words we use, and all words and concepts already embody a process of generalization. Language is the medium of the human capacity to think, understand and act, and essential in any process of developing scientific knowledge. As Vygotsky explains:

Everything described as a fact is already a theory ... When we meet what is called a cow and say: “This is a cow,” we add the act of thinking to the act of perception, bringing the given perception under a general concept ... I do not see that this is a cow, for this cannot be seen. I see something big, black, moving, lowing, etc., and understand that this is a cow.

And this act is an act of classification, of assigning a singular phenomenon to the class of similar phenomena, of systematizing the experience etc. Thus, language itself contains the basis and possibilities for the scientific knowledge of a fact. The word is the germ of science and in this sense we can say that in the beginning of science was the word. (1927/1997: 250f).

No empirical reality is ever perceived just as such; instead, it is always perceived through the available language and theoretical concepts which, in turn, affect our views of the world and, thus, our relations to it. In this sense, psychological research does not just reflect (or represent) reality but virtually creates reality through the way it conceptualizes it. Every form of empirical research requires explicit theory and concepts, otherwise it would be lost in pure reproduction of norms, traditions, and immediate understandings. Scientific generalization therefore includes a continuous work with the concepts and theoretical vocabulary employed in the investigation (Dafermos 2019, Chap. 4 in this volume).

Furthermore, we can learn from Activity Theory that not only activity and language but also the *material objects* produced through human activity involve processes of generalization. As Aleksei N. Leontyev explains with the example of an axe:

The use of an axe not only corresponds to the objectives of a practical action but at the same time objectively reflects the properties of the object, i.e. the object of labour, onto which its action is directed. The blow of an axe subjects the material that constitutes this object to an unflinching test; it makes a practical analysis and generalisation of the objective properties of objects according to a certain attribute objectivised in the tool itself. It is thus the tool that is the carrier or vector of the first real conscious, rational abstraction, the first real conscious, rational generalisation. (2009: 191)

The produced material tools, objects, and technologies refer to human life. They embody human experience and action, and in their making, the relationship between the particular and the general and the processes of generalization are at stake. These generalization processes are never complete thought-out; they are in a certain extent always narrow, one-sided, ambivalent, and partial and therefore require continuous critical deliberation and re-formation of materialized generalizations (Chimirri and Schraube 2019).

Within the tradition of *Cultural Psychology*, Jaan Valsiner and colleagues contribute to the vision of *generalization as an ever-new process of signification* and meaning-making. The conception emphasizes the central role of generalization in any scientific endeavor and fundamentally challenges any form of scientific generalization which does not acknowledge that any event in the world exists in particulars. Accordingly, psychological generalization is addressed and elaborated *through the uniqueness and concrete situation* of human living and an exploration of the various ways we create meaning in an ever-changing world of becoming. An essential dimension of such “intersubjective generalization” (Tateo 2016: 59) is seen in the processes of *reflexivity*, *distancing*, and breaking away from the uniqueness, subjectivity, and concrete reality of human life through abstraction, signs, models, and analyses of the conditions under which the concrete reality of human life occurs. As Zach Beckstead, Kenneth Cabell and Jaan Valsiner underline:

If phenomena are qualitatively organized by the whole system they are embedded within (and interrelated with) then generalization should not be based on premises of separate variables, but rather *generalization should be based on the premises of generalizing under what systemic conditions something occurs*. (2009: 72)

However, the processes of reflexivity, distancing, and analyzing conditions do not mean constructing abstract knowledge disconnected from the concrete reality of human life; on the contrary, as Valsiner explains, “The key to generalization is the distancing from the single instance while retaining a connection with it, for the future” (2015: 241).

In his endeavor of developing *Critical Psychology as a Science of Human Subjectivity*, Klaus Holzkamp contributes to the formation of situated generalization with the concept of *generalization of possibilities*. The concept is based on a systematically developed conception of human subjectivity and a theoretical and methodological framework articulating in detail the complex societal mediation of human life. Quite close to Lewin’s perspective, it connects societal structures and everyday practices with the possibilities and constraints of human experience and action.

Because human experience and agency refer to a shared social world, “my” experience actually refers to the experiences of others. Through my personal experience, I am connected with other people in real terms, because our experiences relate to the same world and its fabric of possibilities, constraints, problems, and necessities for action. In such an intersubjective context of experience, subjective experience becomes objectifiable and generalizable as the individual ways of participating, dealing with and realizing societal possibilities and limits of experience and action. As Klaus Holzkamp noted:

Generalization here means recognizing and accounting for those mediational levels and aspects by which each particular case of subjective-intersubjective experience or situations is understandable as a specific manifestation of a general case. (1991: 77–78)

Within this perspective, to generalize implies not to disarticulate or abstract away subjectivity. On the contrary, its aim is to understand difference and uniqueness as different forms of appearance of general connections and, based on an analysis of the social conditions, to clarify the possibilities, constraints, and necessities for action as a fundament for developing everyday practice.

Such historical origins and conceptual contributions move the production of psychological knowledge from dissecting, isolating, and individualizing toward synthetic, relational, and embodied research practices. They reveal that scientific generalization does not mean just to follow fixed procedures but is an ongoing, never-ending process determined by the subject matter and content of the investigation. With the presented psychological contributions, we want to indicate that situated generalization has a long history. However, its conception is still at its early days and cannot build on a fine-tuned theoretical and methodological framework. Nevertheless, over the past few decades, a substantial body of work emerged, and in this volume, we present some major contributions from distinctive scholars within the field. The aim of the book is (1) to introduce this emerging body of work and to

demonstrate how it could contribute to a substantial and necessary renewal of the psychological production of theory and knowledge (2) to present in detail the practice of situated generalization, its central principles, theoretical concepts, methodologies, analytical strategies, and empirical work as well as historical lines of thought it can build on.

The Practice of Situated Generalization: Outline and Summary of Chapters

The chapters in this collection are structured according to three sections. The first section, *Generalization and the Practice of Everyday Living*, features chapters that provide a vision for situated generalization that build on subjectivity and context in continuous movement, and an integrated understanding of human life in a social, cultural, and material world. In this context, Erik Axel and Charlotte Højholt (Chap. 2) identify generalization as a subjective process in praxis in which the way praxis is coordinated, the things persons deal with in it, and the generalizations unfold together. Generalizations are understood as subjective and social at the same time. They are about common causes in praxis, and both are concrete as well as contradictory. Moreover, participants have different perspectives on the common causes, which stem from the way they participate in them. Generalizations, they argue, relate to concrete conditions in praxis, and as a consequence, our generalizations appear varied in particular ways according to the actual conditions. This theoretical exposition is elucidated using examples from empirical research on school life.

In Chap. 3, Martin Dege presents Kurt Lewin and his concept of generalization. Lewin is one of the most well-known psychologists. He is the founder of topological psychology, closely related to the Gestalt psychologists, and the originator of action research. Less well-known is the extent to which he saw a political agenda connected to his work, and little light has been shed on his reflections in the philosophy of science. Dege attempts to bring both these valuable aspects of Lewin's body of work into the discussion. From there, he shows how Kurt Lewin's approach can contribute to an alternative concept of generalization in psychology and the social sciences.

In Chap. 4, Manolis Dafermakis presents a dialectical understanding of generalization based on a dialogue between Vygotsky and Davydov. Questioning formal accounts of generalization, a dialectical perspective highlights the concrete, dynamic, historical connection between the general and the particular. Dafermakis shows how a dialogue between Vygotsky and Davydov, who were both adherents of the dialectal tradition in psychology, can provide important insights for re-conceptualizing generalization. A dialogue on dialectical understanding of generalization and its relation to changing societal practices is offered as a way to promote active, transformative subjectivity.