

## Comment

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For some contributors, “indigenous psychology” seems to involve no more than the introduction of essentially technical modifications that serve to enhance the export value of psychological products imported from the West. For the majority, however, indigenous psychology seems to imply some kind of reaction against the way in which the ideal of universal psychological knowledge is commonly pursued in the major centres. Insofar as this reaction is concerned with fundamental issues, it can be seen as questioning the social and normative framework within which psychological knowledge is produced and evaluated. Certain culture-bound interpretations of science and scientific method form an important part of this framework. Although complaints about the individualistic bias of Western psychology are common, there is a need for further exploration of the link between this brand of individualism, “Cartesian psychology,” and a certain understanding of the goals of scientific investigation in psychology. These goals, as well as the norms governing their practical pursuit, are embedded in and enforced by disciplinary structures that are now international in scope but were originally the product of quite specific historical circumstances. This imported disciplinary organization of psychological knowledge may not be appropriate at all times and everywhere. It may be particularly inappropriate where the primary task of indigenous psychology is considered to be the generation of locally appropriate knowledge. Another obstacle to the achievement of this task is constituted by the uncritical use of “culture” as an entity. A more promising approach is provided by those contributors for whom indigenous psychology means doing research *with* rather than *on* indigenous people. This seems to be an important step towards escaping a tradition in which the human sources and the human beneficiaries of professional psychological knowledge have seldom been the same people.

Pour certains collaborateurs, la «psychologie indigène» semble impliquer pas plus que l'introduction de modifications techniques essentielles servant à améliorer la valeur d'exportation des produits psychologiques importés de l'Ouest. Pour la majorité, cependant, la psychologie indigène semble impliquer une sorte de réaction envers la façon dont la connaissance psychologique idéale et universelle est communément poursuivie dans les principaux centres. Considérant le fait que cette réaction concerne des enjeux fondamentaux, elle peut être perçue comme une remise en question du cadre de travail social et normatif dans lequel la connaissance psychologique est produite et évaluée. Certaines interprétations présentant des limites culturelles relativement à la science et à la méthode scientifique constituent une partie importante de ce cadre de travail. Quoique des récriminations vis-à-vis les biais individualistes de la psychologie occidentale soient communes, il y a un besoin d'explorer plus loin le lien entre cette marque d'individualisme, la «psychologie cartésienne» et une certaine compréhension des buts de la recherche en psychologie. Ces buts, tout comme les normes gouvernant leur poursuite pratique, sont enchâssés dans, et forcés par, des structures disciplinaires qui sont maintenant d'envergure internationale, mais qui étaient originairement le produit de circonstances historiques plus spécifiques. Cette organisation disciplinaire importée de la connaissance psychologique peut ne pas être appropriée n'importe où et n'importe quand. Cela peut être particulièrement inapproprié où le devoir principal de la psychologie indigène est considéré comme étant la production d'une connaissance localement appropriée. Un autre obstacle à l'atteinte de ce devoir consiste en l'utilisation non critique de la «culture» en tant qu'entité. Une approche plus prometteuse est fournie par les collaborateurs pour lesquels la psychologie indigène signifie faire de la recherche *avec* plutôt que *sur* le peuple indigène. Ceci semble être une étape importante pour échapper à une tradition dans laquelle les sources humaines et les bénéficiaires humains de la connaissance psychologique professionnelle ont rarement été le même peuple.

**P**ara algunos de los autores de este número, la «psicología tradicional» parece implicar algo más que la introducción de modificaciones técnicas esenciales que sirvan para mejorar el valor de exportación de los productos psicológicos importados de Occidente. Para la mayoría, sin embargo, la psicología tradicional parece implicar una especie de reacción hacia el modo en que suele buscarse el conocimiento psicológico ideal y universal en los principales centros. Considerando el hecho de que esta reacción implica problemas fundamentales, puede ser vista como un cuestionamiento del esquema de trabajo social y normativo en el cual se produce y se evalúa el conocimiento psicológico. Algunas interpretaciones de la ciencia y el método científico limitadas por la cultura son parte importante de este esquema de trabajo. A pesar de que las quejas contra las tendencias individualistas de la psicología son comunes, es necesario sin embargo explorar aún más a fondo el vínculo entre esta marca de individualismo, la «psicología cartesiana» y una cierta comprensión de las metas de la investigación en psicología. Estas metas, al igual que las normas que regulan su trabajo de búsqueda en la práctica, están encasilladas y se ven reforzadas por estructuras disciplinarias que son, hoy en día, de alcance internacional, pero que eran originalmente producto de circunstancias históricas más específicas. Esta organización disciplinaria importada del conocimiento psicológico puede no ser apropiada en todo momento y en cualquier lugar. Esto puede ser particularmente inapropiado cuando se considera que el deber principal de la psicología tradicional es la generación de un conocimiento apropiado a nivel local. Otro obstáculo para el cumplimiento de este deber consiste en la utilización no crítica de la «cultura» como entidad. Una aproximación más prometedora proviene de aquellos colaboradores para quienes la psicología tradicional significa realizar la investigación *con* la población tradicional, y no tanto *acerca* de la población tradicional. Esto parece ser un paso importante para escapar a una tradición en la cual los recursos humanos y los beneficiarios humanos del conocimiento psicológico profesional son rara vez las mismas personas.

I was first brought up against the reality of indigenous psychology nearly half a century ago when I was working at an Indonesian University. I found to my great surprise that I had an Indonesian colleague who was already teaching courses on a kind of psychology based on a vernacular literature, the roots of which went back many centuries (Danziger, 1997). Since then, the challenge of indigenous psychologies (though they were not always called that) has been a significant presence for me while teaching and doing psychological research in five continents. Being confronted by the existence of psychologies that were often vastly different from the Anglo-American psychology in which I had been trained decisively influenced the direction of my own work and turned me towards a study of the historical emergence of “Western” psychological theory and practice. My comments on the present discussion are informed by this background; they are not those of an active participant in the field but of an outsider with some personal experience of the issues and a perspective that is historical and philosophical rather than culturological.

## VERSIONS OF INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY

Plurality and heterogeneity seem to be necessary and essential features of the field of indigenous psychology. Nevertheless, all indigenous psychologies seem to share a common metaphor, that of the local versus the distant. The nature of the

“local” is exceedingly diverse, covering many very different parts of the world, and ranging from ethnic minorities to large national entities. Indigenous psychologies profess a certain sensitivity to the local and therefore manifest great diversity. They also differ significantly in the way the relationship between the local and the distant is conceived.

In some cases the relationship is presented as though there were no fundamental incompatibility between work originating in different localities. In the extreme version of this interpretation, psychologies are regarded as “indigenous” merely in the sense that they all have some local origin, whether that origin is defined in terms of the borders of a country, some cultural entity, or a particular academic institution. Indigenous psychology then becomes little more than another, more fashionable, term for what E. G. Boring (1950) used to call *Ortsgeist*, the counterpart to his more famous *Zeitgeist*.

Although there are echoes of this use of “indigenous” in some of the contributions to this discussion, especially those from the so-called “West,” the majority present a different picture. Here, indigenous psychology is characterized by some form of opposition to, rejection of, or simply distancing from a way of doing psychology that is characterized as Western or American. Indigenous psychology in this sense is a *reaction* to a particular stimulus, where “stimulus” is to be taken in its ancient meaning of “irritant.” This reaction calls

for changes that take two forms, *technical* and *structural*. Technical changes become necessary because modern psychology is an article of export from one part of the world to another. Even material exports often require modification to make them useful under new local conditions. That cultural exports should experience the same fate is hardly a cause for surprise.

Indeed, the “indigenous” component in some versions of indigenous psychology appears to be quite analogous to the technical changes that are often necessary before Western-designed machinery can work effectively in less industrialized parts of the world. This is essentially what happens when standard psychological assessment techniques are modified for use in countries of “the East” or “the South” by adding or deleting certain items and scales, or introducing new quantified “dimensions” of personality or social interaction. It is also what happens when these modified techniques are applied to solve research questions that have not simply been imported unchanged from abroad but have been modified in the light of local issues and priorities. In that case the term “indigenous psychology” is merely used to refer to a psychology whose export value has been enhanced by locally appropriate modifications but that is indistinguishable on any fundamental criterion from its Western prototype.

However, for many contributors the issues that arise in the process of indigenization cannot be reduced to technical problems but involve decisions grounded in questions of cultural identity and historically evolved power relationships. In the case of material goods, the export of specific items of technology always takes place within a socioeconomic framework that constitutes the world trade system. That system operates according to rules that are the product of historically inherited structures of inequality. Remarks by some of the contributors suggest that the export of cultural goods, such as the techniques and concepts of “Western” or “American” psychology, also takes place within a framework of historically derived asymmetric relationships. For instance, Western texts and journals are far more widely disseminated and are consulted far more frequently and seriously than their non-Western counterparts, and students commonly travel to the West, not the East or South, for their professional socialization as psychologists.

Much of this asymmetry can be accounted for in economic terms: World resources for the production of psychological knowledge and the training of professional psychologists are very unequally distributed. The flow of information is skewed in

that much more is exported from the most developed centres than is imported by them. But these centres not only produce a lot of potentially exportable psychological knowledge, they also invented and exported the *criteria* by which the value of the products of psychological research are judged within the profession. These criteria are as closely tied to the cultural context of their origin, as is the specific content of exported psychological knowledge. Yet, after they have been exported, these criteria provide the standard for judging the value of psychological knowledge produced anywhere. The result is that the products of the major exporting centres commonly achieve an exemplary or paradigmatic value that other producers will hope to approximate unless they reject the criteria on which the system of evaluation is based. This rejection is central to the project of indigenous psychology in its more radical forms.

In the present set of contributions, the more radical aspirations of indigenous psychology are addressed primarily in three contexts, which may be conveniently identified by means of the keywords *science*, *disciplinarity*, and *voice*. I will address these in turn.

## Science

Apart from some marginalized exceptions modern (Western) psychology understands itself as an essentially *scientific* project and is so perceived by others. Its cognitive authority and the plausibility of its knowledge claims derive from this essential scientificity. No doubt, the historical link to science has been advantageous to the development of psychology as an academic discipline in the West. But in opting for this path psychologists have also had to accept certain restrictions. One major restriction pertains to the kind of knowledge that their discipline is designed to foster. Scientific knowledge is regarded as the only legitimate kind of knowledge in a disciplinary context, though in other life contexts individual psychologists may well appreciate the value of other kinds of knowledge.

On the orthodox view, “science” functions as a source of regulative norms for the conduct of psychological inquiry. These norms prescribe the kind of knowledge that is sought after and the means for attaining it. When modern psychology was transplanted from its countries of origin to other regions of the world, not only specific items of knowledge and specific instruments travelled; certain norms for the conduct of psychological inquiry, and certain criteria for assessing the

legitimacy of forms of psychological knowledge, travelled too. The application of these norms and criteria imparted a particular character to the export as a whole. Only insofar as indigenous psychology proceeds to a questioning of these norms and criteria does it represent a real challenge to the status quo in the asymmetric global circulation of psychological knowledge and practice.

There are indications that some representatives of indigenous psychology are not unaware of the problematic aspects of Western psychology's scientific pretensions. K.-K. Hwang, for instance, distinguishes scientific knowledge as a specific type of knowledge and recognizes that indigenous psychology has epistemological goals. U. Kim refers to "the Euro-American values that champion individualistic, de-contextualized, and analytical knowledge."

However, for many representatives of indigenous psychology, as indeed for most of their Western colleagues, "science" continues to be an uncontroversial, unexamined, source of cognitive authority. As Allwood (2002) has pointed out, this is likely to create problems for the field. Insofar as indigenous psychologists emphasize the cultural embeddedness of psychology while proceeding as though "science" was entirely separate from culture, they are likely to become deeply embroiled in paradox (see Harding, 1998). One has to distinguish between *science* in some ideal Platonic sense and the numerous historical versions of "science" that have often differed from each other to the point of incompatibility (Fuller, 2002). One of these versions acquired canonical status in American psychology around the middle of the 20th century and was then exported together with the psychology for which it supplied the regulative norms of legitimate practice. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this version of scientific practice, whose peculiarities have been widely noted (see, e.g., Michell, 2000; Tolman, 1991), was no less a product of specific social circumstances and cultural traditions than the psychological content to which it was applied.

As the editors of this collection noted in their introductory comments, the broader issues entailed here have provided grist for an extensive field of science studies (see Golinski, 1998; Harding, 1998; and Pickering, 1992, for particularly relevant material). Deeper links with this field would help to face the challenges of what one of the contributors refers to as a "truly universal" psychological understanding. To ground such an understanding in a universalized understanding of science is to build on shifting sands, for codes of

scientific practice are not and never have been unified except as myth (Galison & Stump, 1996).

The notion of a universal psychology appears to hold an abiding attraction for most contributors. Possibly this attraction derives from a faith in the psychic unity of humankind, which is certainly preferable to the sorts of prejudice that flourished in the period of colonialism. What is questionable is any implication that a particular historically constituted version of the norms of scientific practice represents the royal road to the discovery of humankind's psychic unity.

Adherence to the ideal of "a universal psychology" seems almost as common as a rejection of the "individualism" of Western psychology. Yet, in the history of Western psychology, individualism and the search for universal laws have been closely linked: Psychological laws would be considered universal insofar as they applied to all individuals or to quantifiable differences among individuals along a common set of dimensions. Is it possible to break this link between individualism and universalism, as the remarks of several contributors seem to require?

I think this is certainly possible, once it is recognized that both individualism and universalism come in a number of versions. In traditional Western psychology, a particular version of universalism is linked to a particular form of individualism in a combination that is deeply engrained in the discipline's investigative practices. This combination takes the form of what has been called "Cartesian psychology" (Wilson, 1995), based on the belief that the scientific generalizations of psychology pertain to intra-individual processes and characteristics. Examples of these are variables of personality and intelligence as well as most of what has been investigated under "cognitive processes." The Western cultural roots of Cartesian psychology are glaringly obvious, yet its preconceptions are so deeply enmeshed with the procedural norms of traditional scientific psychology that alternative approaches have long been subject to disciplinary marginalization.

As several contributors note, the psychology that had its origins in and flourished in Western societies reflects the values of those societies to a degree that it too can be considered an indigenous psychology. Perhaps one could say that traditional or "mainstream" psychology has respected only one form of indigenous psychology, which it then attempted to universalize. Abandoning this path towards creating a universal psychology does not mean abandoning the possibility of any kind of general validity for psychological concepts. But it does mean abandoning terms that refer solely to

the insides of isolated heads or the qualities of autonomous individuals. Variations in the social and environmental conditions under which individuals act are not separate items to be added *after* “basic” psychological uniformities have been established, they are an intrinsic aspect of human activity. Taking such considerations seriously results in a redefinition of psychology’s subject matter and a change in the paradigm of psychological research. Topics such as “distributed cognition” (Hutchins, 1995), “situated cognition” (Clancy, 1997), “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), “distributed intelligence” (Pea, 1993), provide salient examples (see also Schliemann & Carraher, 2001). A dialogue between these approaches and various indigenous psychologies may be an important step towards a psychology that is not based on an individualistic metaphysic.

## Discipline

Discussions of indigenous psychology, including the present one, usually take place in a *disciplinary* context: The contributors have received their professional socialization as psychologists; the medium of publication is a psychological journal or book; and so the primary audience is also one of professional psychologists and candidate psychologists. Consequently, much of the discussion typically revolves around the relation of indigenous psychology to the *discipline* of psychology, whether in terms of its past, present, or future.

It is only in historically rather recent times that the academic or scientific discipline has become the dominant institutional form that provides the framework within which the generation of scientific knowledge takes place. For about a century in America, and less in Europe, disciplinary structures have presided over professional socialization, controlled prestigious publications, affected the career chances of individual members of the discipline, influenced the flow of research funds, and so on. These activities depend on the development of a *normative* framework that is characteristic of each discipline. Different disciplines still embody different conceptions of what it means to do good research, what procedures are regarded as being scientific or objective, what the knowledge products of the discipline should look like, and where the discipline’s boundaries are drawn, as well as other normative canons. Typically, this gives rise to a “regression into professional purity” (Abbott, 2000), a tendency to do

work that embodies this normative framework visibly and rigidly.

The disciplinary organization of knowledge was exported to much of the world in the course of imperial rule. In the case of psychology, the major push towards the internationalization of disciplinary authority did not take place until the second half of the 20th century, by which time American psychology had come to be the dominant factor in the discipline on a global scale. As many of the contributions to the present discussion indicate, indigenous psychology represents some kind of reaction to this development.

There is, however, a tendency to formulate the reaction in purely cognitive terms and to pay less attention to the institutional aspects of the disciplinization of knowledge. It cannot be taken for granted that the disciplinary division of scientific authority, which evolved under specific historical circumstances, has a timeless value for all times and places (Staeuble, 2004). On the contrary, the experience of several contributors suggests rather that disciplinary norms and disciplinary authority have often become a means for extending the global reach of certain ideals for organizing social and economic life. It is surprising, therefore, that so few contributors address the question of changing psychology’s disciplinary boundaries and primary disciplinary affiliations in the course of indigenization, J. B. P. Sinha being a notable exception. It seems that alternatives to imported patterns of disciplinary organization at least deserve serious examination if indigenous psychology is to flourish.

## Voice

The term “indigenous psychology” is not always used in a disciplinary context, but can also be used to refer to psychological usage or understanding among scientifically untrained lay people in their daily lives. This ambiguity points to the existence of two sources from which work in this area derives its legitimation. When “indigenous psychology” is used primarily in the sense of a body of explicitly formulated objective knowledge, it is a matter of establishing its scientific credentials before the court of disciplinary authority. When the same term is used primarily to refer to the everyday psychology of people of a certain background, the crucial issue is one of asserting the value of *their* understanding of human life and rescuing it from oblivion; of giving voice to those who are not professionally certified. This emerges

most clearly in the contributions from Africa (Nsamenang) and New Zealand, for which indigenous psychology becomes a way of generating locally relevant knowledge and practice by privileging the input of local people; doing research *with* rather than *on* indigenous people, as the Maori research group put it.

This touches on quite a profound, though largely unacknowledged, division between two understandings of indigenous psychology. For many, the field is defined in terms of the concept of "culture" and its problems arise out of the existence of "cultural differences." I would not be the first to remark upon the irony of this emerging emphasis on culture in a world in which traditional cultural differences are being eroded at an unprecedented rate and in which cultural hybridization and interpenetration is so common (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). For this reason it is not obvious that the reification of culture, in terms of geographically based and essentialist entities, offers the most promising basis for the development of indigenous psychologies. The discipline of anthropology, which virtually invented "culture" in its modern sense, has certainly become much more cautious about the "territorialized" and reified use of that concept (e.g. Kuper, 1999), still very common among psychologists.

Ultimately, it is people, and not cultures understood as entities, which constitute the units of analysis. Of course, it is taken for granted that people are cultural beings, but not in the sense that they are the "dopes" of homogeneous cultural traditions. Their "indigenous" psychologies usually represent an often inharmonious and unstable mixture of cultural elements. As an area of investigative practice, indigenous psychology would have the task of doing justice to this complex mixture and thus to give voice to people too often silenced by a homogenizing world system.

In the end, indigenous psychology seems to be faced by the question: Psychology for whom? The vague hope that psychological knowledge will be good for humankind should not prevent recognition of the fact that, in principle, this knowledge can be used in two ways. It can be used to exert control over others (for their own good, it is claimed), or it can be used as a resource for self-growth. That distinction applies to communities as well as to individuals. In the past, a great deal of psychological research has been geared to producing the kind of knowledge that would be useful primarily to experts working in institutional contexts dedicated to the administration of human resources and human inadequacies (Danziger,

1990). The knowledge that was initially exported to colonies and quasi-colonies was almost all of this kind (Smith, 1999). Indigenization, however, carries the promise of knowledge that is more adequate to goals of individual and community emancipation.

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