The Holy Grail of Universality (2007)

Kurt Danziger

Abstract: Although the sites of psychological research and practice have always been internationally diverse, the knowledge claims of the discipline have always been universalistic. In an earlier period this divergence was often rationalized in terms of differences among "schools" and more recently in terms of "indigenization". In the long run, the imposition of methodological uniformity led to a questionable kind of universality. Rather than treating psychological universality as an unquestioned default assumption, attention should be paid to historically emergent universality. Two examples of the latter are presented: changes in cognitive technologies over long periods, and "looping effects" in the more recent spread of psychological concepts and techniques.

Universality as a Default Assumption

In most areas of psychology an empirical study will not be rejected for publication on the grounds that all the experimental subjects were North American college students. It is perfectly acceptable to generalize in print about human memory or human decision making or human motivation on the basis of phenomena observed among an atypical fraction of the world's population in one corner of the world.

In other words, there seems to be a default assumption that empirical findings obtained in one location provide an acceptable basis for theoretical generalization unless and until other studies show this assumption to be unjustified. In most cases, we might note, those other studies are never done (see Sue, 1999), and local findings find their way into textbooks in a universalized form, as though they applied to human functions in general. Although in rare comparative studies, e.g. in category-based reasoning, researchers have noted that "undergraduates are [actually] 'the odd group out'" (Medin & Atran, 2004), these practices continue unabated. From time to time, they are subject to critical comment, yet they still constitute "the default condition of much of experimental psychology, which focuses solely on American undergraduates at major universities" (Atran, Medin and Ross, 2005).

One of the reasons why this state of affairs persists can be found in a pervasive belief among psychologists that what they investigate are human universals. This belief seems so deeply ingrained that it has recently been referred to as "a foundational postulate of psychology" (Norenzayan, A. & Heine, S.J., 2005). As such, it usually remains implicit, at least in North America and Western Europe. But when psychologists start wrestling with cross-cultural and cross-national differences, the issue of psychological universals is much harder to evade. So standard texts in cross-cultural psychology always address the topic of universality (e.g. Adamopoulos & Lonner, 2001; Miller, 1996). In spite of its concern with local differences, the field as a whole exhibits an explicit bias towards universalism (Jahoda, 1999; Smolka, 2000).

The topic becomes even more acute in the context of what are nowadays called "indigenized psychologies", versions of psychology that have been explicitly adapted to local conditions by

local practitioners. Mention of such psychologies first appeared in the international literature about twenty years ago (Blowers & Turtle, 1987; Paranjpe, Ho & Rieber, 1988; Sinha, 1989) and since then, the idea of psychologies with local roots has come in for a fair amount of attention internationally (e.g. Adair & Diaz-Loving, 1999; Allwood, 2002; Kim & Berry, 1993; Staeuble, 2006).

Recently, I was asked to comment on a dozen or more accounts of "indigenized psychologies" that had been supplied by psychologists from all parts of the world: India, China, New Guinea, Poland, Cameroon, and many others (Allwood & Berry, 2006). As you might expect, variety was a striking feature of the accounts of indigenization I looked at. Each of them referred to aspects of psychology that were considered to be particularly appropriate to one or other local context. Some of them even hinted at versions of "psychology" that would certainly be considered beyond the pale by conservative members of our discipline. Nevertheless, more than half the accounts of indigenization that I looked at included explicit expressions of faith in what was generally referred to as "universal psychology" and no one explicitly rejected this ideal. Indigenization was seen, not as a rejection, but as a way of approaching a "universal psychology", though the manner in which this would be accomplished tended to remain a little hazy. So indeed, some respect for the ideal of universality seems to be part of maintaining one's professional identity as a psychologist. This, in spite of the fact that one's version of psychology may well be profoundly incompatible with other versions.

When Asian or African psychologists simultaneously avow a local version of psychology *and* psychological universalism they are only being explicit about something that has been implicit in the practice of modern psychology since its beginning. Psychological knowledge is not produced in some extra-terrestrial sphere, it necessarily has to be produced at some location (or set of locations) on this planet, and that means, not just a geographical, but a social location. Inevitably, it has borne the marks of its origin. Yet, psychology as a science has always clung to its foundational postulate of universality.

In this talk I would like to pursue this paradox a little further. I will do so in two parts. In the first part I will present a brief historical overview, beginning with the observation that the tension between universalism and localism is as old as the discipline itself, going on to later attempts at homogenizing psychology, and then mentioning some recent manifestations of this tension. In the second part of my talk I will go beyond this intra-disciplinary account and raise the question of whether there is perhaps a kind of psychological universality that is historically emergent rather than purely biologically based.

Dispersal

Modern psychology had universalistic aspirations from the beginning. In the division of labour among the human sciences that crystalized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries each discipline appropriated a particular domain of human activity as its special object of study (Ross, 2003). Linguistics made language its own, economics took over human behavior in markets, sociology laid claim to humans in groups, and so on. The domain of psychology was defined, not in terms of human activity in specific social contexts, but in terms of the features of individual activity

that were universal across all contexts. Psychology's core domain was the mental life of the universalized asocial individual.

The categories that defined the domain of modern psychology, perception, memory, learning, cognition, and so on, were all predicated on a prior split between the realm of the individual and the realm of the social. Ideally, the psychological brand of universality depended on the externalization of everything that endowed individual action with social or cultural meaning. Psychologists would build a science of the universal natural characteristics of human individuals. The notion of a science of individuals demarcated the boundaries of the discipline. Culture and society were optional extras, left to the tender mercies of colleagues in fields widely regarded as somewhat less scientific than psychology.

Unfortunately, the universality implied by psychology's trans-cultural aims soon came into conflict with facts on the ground. Scientific psychology was international from its earliest years. Different versions of this new science appeared at more or less the same time in a number of countries, not only in Wundt's Institute in Leipzig, but also in Galton's anthropometric laboratory in London and in Charcot's clinic in Paris (Danziger, 1990). Yet, the psychological knowledge being produced at these sites was assumed to pertain, not only to individuals in Paris, London or Leipzig, but to individuals in general.

There was always a certain tension between modern psychology's unifying disciplinary ideal and the reality of its internationally varied practice. Ideally, everyone was working towards a universal psychology of individuals-in-general that was to be discovered by investigators whose social background was irrelevant and whose methods were nothing if not objective. But this ideal was in stark contrast to the reality of internationally dispersed sites at which representatives of different scientific traditions and individuals with different cultural backgrounds were participating in widely varying projects. The commitment to a common universalist ideal was not sufficient to overcome the centrifugal pull of local contexts.

In fact, the local diversity of psychology and its subject matter assumed dimensions that led to talk of psychology in the plural, several psychologies rather than one psychology. References to "Schools" of psychology became common, Behaviorism, Gestalt psychology, and Psychoanalysis being only the most prominent ones.. The differences between these Schools involved much more than discrepant explanations of the same phenomena. They did not agree on the meaning of many of the phenomena that each School had reported. What was an interesting observation for members of one School was a misleading artefact for those with a different allegiance. Members of different Schools had different conceptions of how to produce scientifically significant psychological information. There were deep divisions about the very goals of psychological investigation.

It is not necessary to elaborate on these differences because we already know about these matters from our history texts. What psychological texts on the history of the discipline do not emphasize sufficiently, however, is the local grounding of the psychological Schools. Although these were all "Western" products, cultural differences between western countries were more marked then than they are now. Professional historians have been more explicit about the fact that behaviorism was essentially an American phenomenon (Ash, 2003), that Gestalt Psychology

could never outlive its German roots (Ash, 1985), that psychoanalysis took profoundly different directions in different parts of the world (Hale, 1995; Rayner, 1990; Roudinesco, 1990).

During modern psychology's first half century there was little indication that the disciplinary reality was getting any closer to the disciplinary ideal. By the 1930's the gap between national psychologies had not narrowed but widened.

Hegemony

In the period that followed World War II psychology's international situation changed drastically. To all intents and purposes only one major national center of scientific psychology survived that war, the USA. Not only did it survive, it gained enormously in prestige and resources (Capshew, 1999; Herman, 1996). Internationally, the development of scientific psychology was now spectacularly uneven, an outcome that was powerfully reinforced by the fact that the country in which psychology had flourished so magnificently was also by far the most powerful country in that part of the world in which psychology really mattered. Whereas previously there had been several centers able to participate in an international dialogue on more or less equal terms, there was now one center that indisputably overshadowed all the others. Compared to this center, all the others found themselves in peripheral locations. Scientific psychology now had a world center that provided *models* of theorizing and of investigative practice for those at the periphery.

The result was a growing level of international uniformity in the content and practice of the discipline. With the exception of the Soviet sphere of influence, American textbooks were used all over the globe, or else their style was copied by only marginally different local products. Rules of scientific publication culled from APA manuals came to displace traditional local patterns. For armies of graduate students from every part of the world, American norms for deciding what counted as scientific psychological knowledge became universally valid norms. The overwhelming preponderance of American research made it easy to ascribe universal significance to topics and problems that had been formulated to fit a specifically American context (Teo & Febraro, 2003; Strien, 1997).

Homogenization was particularly noticeable on the level of technology. By the middle of the 20th century, American psychologists were increasingly emphasizing the methodological basis for the universality of their generalizations (Danziger, 1997). Following this lead, psychologists in many countries became convinced that the potential reach of their generalizations depended on the use of the right scientific procedures, what have been called the standardized tools of psychological investigation (Yanchar, 2000). These tools were eminently portable. Quantitative procedures can be learned and adopted by anyone with some basic arithmetic resources. In this respect, psycho-technology works just like other forms of technology; you do not need to become a different person to borrow someone else's technology, a little specific training will do.

For those at the geographical and disciplinary periphery the adoption of a technical discourse and practice that was largely American in origin had obvious advantages. It provided them with a passport that gave them entry to a world-wide community of behavioral scientists whose language they could now speak and whose view of psychological reality they could now share.

Outside this disciplinary community it enabled them to benefit from the general prestige of techno-science, a benefit that sometimes translated into greater access to the scarce resources they needed for their work.

The portability of psycho-technology made a particular kind of psychological knowledge transculturally reproducible and therefore, in a sense, universal.   A set of methodological prescriptions held out the promise of generating truly objective knowledge that would be independent of the local biases of investigators. It was hoped that these biases would be eliminated by recasting all empirical questions in the format of linear causality and adopting more or less mechanical decision rules, such as statistical significance levels, to adjudicate among theoretical alternatives. A common technology would provide psychologists with a lingua franca that bridged theoretical and international differences.

This development created an appearance of universality that essentially depended on a methodological consensus among investigators. If everyone employs basically similar techniques, believed to be objective, it may well seem that the resulting knowledge has universal validity though there is no necessary connection between the replicability of methods and the universal features of the object of investigation. Universality can be a feature of the discipline and also a feature of what the discipline is interested in. For the discipline, universality means that, provided proper procedures were followed, any findings will be replicable by other investigators. Achieving a universal psychology in this sense depends entirely on employing methodologies that yield replicable data. However, we can also speak of a universal human psychology as something that exists, has in fact existed throughout human history, even when there were no psychologists. "Universal psychology" in this sense has nothing to do with methodology.

Resistance

However, adoption of imported technical discourse and practice was sometimes accomplished in the face of significant local resistance. I know what I am talking about because at an early stage of my career I was among the missionaries for these practices in remote parts of the world. I well remember a five-hour debate in the Senate of my Indonesian university about whether quantitative investigations in the human sciences might provide acceptable grounds for the award of graduate degrees. "Our" side won, as it always did in the end. My own doubts about the value of such victories came later.

In this respect I was not alone. Late in the 20th century there were signs that the shape of psychology as an international discipline was beginning to change once more. Non-American centers of psychological theory and research were multiplying and becoming more responsive to local problems and ultimately to local traditions. Sometimes this growing autonomy became quite self-conscious and led to the proposals for "indigenizing" psychology I referred to earlier. A key principle of indigenization was that "behavior is to be understood..... in terms of indigenous and local frames of reference and culturally derived categories" (Sinha, 1997, p. 132).

The call for indigenizing psychology in Asian and African countries had an interesting corollary. It entailed a questioning of the universalistic claims of the psychology that had been imported

from America and Europe. This imported psychology was no longer accepted as a science that floated above society; if psychology has an "indigenous" aspect, it follows that so-called "western" psychology must be as much a product of local conditions as Indian, or any other version of psychology (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 2000). Or perhaps we should use "western psychology" in the plural, because the early 20th century Americanization of European psychology provides as good an example of what is now called indigenization as one could hope to find (Danziger, 2006).

By the closing years of the 20th century the social localization of psychology had become a topic to be addressed in the context of psychology's internationalization and there was evidence of greater openness to culturally diverse voices among American psychologists (Mays, Rubin, Sabourin & Walker, 1996; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock & Misra, 1996). There was also a new sub-discipline, "Cultural Psychology" (Cole, 1996; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993), based on the principle that psychological processes were "always grounded in particular sociocultural historical contexts" (Miller, 2002, p.99). This understanding, and the growing practice of international research collaboration on a basis of equality, led some cognitive psychologists to recognize that if they restricted their investigations to one cultural context they were, in effect, doing a kind of ethnography of that culture (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan, 2001).

This more recent sensitivity to the social embeddedness of both psychology and its subject matter certainly represents a long overdue corrective to the rather mindless universalism that is still quite common. However, a new kind of problem arises when sensitivity to social context is automatically translated into sensitivity to the local and the particular. This link is problematical because social contexts do not necessarily privilege divergence, sometimes their convergent effects are far more powerful.

Usually, the emphasis on divergence of social context is conveyed by the promiscuous use of the category of "culture", a term once used in reference to human commonalities but later monopolized by a discourse of human differences (Kuper, 1999). Anthropologists, from whom psychologists borrowed the concept, used it specifically to wage what one of them called "guerilla warfare against psychological universalism" (LeVine, 2001, p.xi).

But it is also possible to replace the abstracted features of individuals with the abstracted features of cultures, so that one ends up with a universal psychology of cultural differences. The trouble is that this relies on a somewhat metaphysical view of cultural essences that is itself culturally grounded. For example, R. E. Nesbitt (2003) finds that an impressive array of data on cultural differences reveals a profound divergence of so-called "Eastern" and "Western" cognitive styles. One of the observed features of the Western style is its tendency to operate with dichotomized and essentialized categories. In that case, how can we be sure that the dichotomization of "Eastern" and "Western" styles is anything else but yet another manifestation of the Western style?

It seems odd that culture is so often territorialized and essentialized in an era marked by vastly increased levels of homogenization, standardization, blurring of cultural boundaries, in short, globalization (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). Sometimes, a reduction of complex global interrelationships to cultural differences is a way of ignoring crucial institutional, economic and

political factors. At other times, the concept of culture is mobilized to emphasize the local and the traditional in an attempt to resist the juggernaut of globalization. However justified this resistance may be, it should not divert our attention from the common features of modern life, whether in Delhi, Berlin, or Soweto.

Historically Emergent Universality

From the first part of my talk you will have gathered, I hope, that there is a historical dimension to the universality of psychological science. I now want to turn to the related question of whether there is a historical dimension to human universals as potential *objects* of psychological science. A positive answer to that question is obviously implied when evolutionary psychology refers to our phylogenetic history. We can find common features of human life in our remote past. But what about common features that are emerging at the other end of the arrow of time? History did not stop with our hunter-gatherer ancestors, it is still going on. In looking for sources of universality, perhaps more recent history is worth a second look. This is not to deny the common human constitution as a source of psychological universality. My concern is rather to draw attention to the *inherently* historical nature of important aspects of that constitution. To the degree that there is historical convergence among different localities universality may be an emergent feature.

A little over a decade ago, an international group of distinguished natural and social scientists (the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences) came up with this suggestion, among others, for "the future of the social sciences":

> The question that is consequently before us is how to take seriously in our social science a plurality of worldviews without losing the sense that there exists the possibility of knowing and realizing sets of values that may in fact be common, or become common, to all humanity (Wallerstein, 1996, p.87).

I'd like to draw your attention particularly to the words "or become common". Usually, when we look for human universals, we look for things we have always had in common. This group, however, suggests we consider the possibility that some of the things we have in common may still be taking shape *now*. Their advice is, not to overlook the *historical* aspects of universality. Of course, the history we are part of is always the hardest to see.

How might this be relevant to psychology? It would indeed be relevant if we could identify conditions that are producing a general convergence of human experience and required behaviour in the modern world. There are many candidates for such an identification, but on this occasion I want to single out two cases with particularly strong psychological implications. The first of these concerns the technology of cognition, the second, what have been called the looping effects of psychological categories. I will address these in turn.

The Technology of Cognition

Most human cognitive activity takes place in an environment of human artifacts. And this environment has never stopped changing ever since there were humans to invent new artifacts

and to improve on what they had. Human technology has always been on the move, at first quite slowly, and now very rapidly - it is inherently historical. But it is not only mobile across time, it is also mobile across space. Humans have always engaged in technological borrowing and copying, though there were also barriers that limited the spread of technologies. More recently however, those barriers have been collapsing at an astounding rate so that a condition of technological universality is within sight. On this level surely, we can all see things we have in common that are in the process of becoming universal.

That has to have important psychological implications because human technology and human cognition are tightly interlocked; the one cannot change significantly without the other. Insofar as human cognitive performance is tied to human technology there is an inherently historical aspect of human nature. Humans are what Andy Clark (2003) calls "Natural-Born Cyborgs", that is, their cognitive functions have always depended on the use of artifacts of their own making. Human cognitive capacities are an unknown potential until they are made manifest through the use of some historically evolved technology.

Symbolic technologies, such as writing, provide some of the clearest illustrations of this process. The *potential* of doing all the things people were able to do with the help of writing was there long before it became manifest in the form of specific skills. But this did not happen overnight. The technology of literacy took many centuries to evolve, involving changes in hardware, stone, wax, parchment, paper, ink, print, and so forth, as well as changes in software, leaving spaces between words, page layout, indexing, use of images and diagrams, and much more.

Why did it take so long? Well, there were many reasons of more interest to historians than to psychologists. But one reason is that human cognitive functions had to adapt to each new development. During the last few years I have been amusing myself by studying the history of memory, an old man's pastime (Danziger, 2008). It is possible to do this because writings on memory go back as far as Ancient Greece and because memory aids in the form of written manuscripts have been preserved. Over time, there are correlated changes in the uses of memory and the technology of memory.

One quick example must suffice: Classical Roman texts were written without spaces between words (*scriptura continua*), they also lacked paragraphs, chapter headings, indices, diagrams and other technical aids that we take for granted (Saenger, 1997). Imagine using this kind of text as an aid to memory in your academic tasks! It would not work, because the technology is not designed for such tasks and we lack the cognitive skills for using it. Yet we know that documents of this type were once valued as a form of external memory. How did that work? First of all, the Romans particularly prized a form of memory performance that is not so important today: public declamations, speeches and recitations relying on written material learned by heart. Texts were meant to be remembered auditorily, as speech. Accordingly, reading was taught on the basis of phonic recognition, so that a piece of writing represented a pattern of sound that the reader could chunk according to the demands of oral delivery. The topic of memory was nearly always discussed in the context of rhetoric, a highly esteemed discipline in those days.

In the Middle Ages quite different memory functions became more important, functions that involved relating texts to each other, biblical concordances for a start, then theological and legal

disputes carried on between a network of dispersed localities by means of travelling texts. The technology of external memory changed, making ever more use of visual aids, spaces between words, paragraphs, headings, and so on. When you follow the further development of external memory: the adoption of alphabetical indexing, library catalogues, increasingly abstract diagrams, and much much more, it is clear that the *organization* of memory is changing. This took many centuries, but eventually, cognitive skills associated with advanced forms of literacy became part of what it meant to be a normal human adult in many parts of the world.

When 20th century psychologists used visually presented lists of separated words to their experimental subjects in order to study what was called "verbal memory" they were relying on a historically evolved form of cognition. A better name for what they were studying might have been "modern western literate reference memory". If and when familiarity with particular technologies of literacy becomes universal there will be a basis for a universal science of literate reference memory, a science that will also be concerned with persisting local variability.

The technology of literacy has a deep historical background. But a relatively short history does not preclude a technology from having significant psychological effects. The tightly organized human-machine systems of the modern world are one example. To study human cognitive functioning in the context of such systems we turn to experimentation. Hooking individuals up to laboratory apparatus often involves simulating specific aspects of human-machine systems that exist outside the laboratory. In these studies we do not measure timeless human attributes. What we can observe are, historically evolved, specific expressions of a potential that we can only know about insofar as it has become manifest in a particular technological context; "working memory" is a good example. It may be that this context becomes more and more familiar in more and more localities. In that case, knowledge pertaining to cognitive functioning within that context may approach, though probably never quite reach, a kind of universality.

Scientific generalizations, whether in the natural or the social sciences, typically apply only under certain conditions. In the physical sciences this is often expressed in the form of constants: a relationship holds provided other relevant conditions do not vary. In the social sciences, in a somewhat analogous way, we may recognize the existence of large scale historical formations and trends that form a necessary setting for observable empirical relationships. So there may well be aspects of modern life which form a context that must be presupposed for the generalizations of modern psychology to be validly applied. Without the appropriate socio-historical context those generalizations would lose their validity.

In my earlier historical sketch of modern psychology I suggested that the discipline's later claims to universality were closely linked to the hegemony established by the American model for the discipline. The technological slant of this model enhanced its portability, as did American power and influence. No doubt, the American role was particularly prominent, yet it is also true that there was nothing irredeemably American about many of the exported techniques; they were a product of social institutions that were being duplicated all over the planet and models of living that were spreading fast. The world-wide dissemination of psychological techniques was not an isolated event but only a relatively minor example of the massive transfer of scientific and technical artifacts in the course of the 20th century. And this transfer was very much part of broad economic, administrative, political, and social changes that affected almost everyone to

some degree. With the global spread of an artifactual world exhibiting certain common features the generalized human individual who provides psychology's subject matter may actually be emerging as a product of historical circumstances.

Looping Effects of Psychology

The spread of certain cognitive technologies provides one reason for the existence of historically emerging universals. The spread of modern psychology provides another. For humans are organisms with a special feature, self-understanding or self-interpretation. These organisms not only act and react, they also have particular ways of describing and explaining what they are doing, both to others and to themselves. But they are only able to do this as members of some language community. Because historical change is an inescapable feature of language communities the categories of human self-understanding tend to change, especially over longer periods of time. In the course of the past century the vocabulary of modern psychology became an increasingly tapped source of reconstructed models of self-interpretation. Detailed studies have shown that in Western Europe and North America modern psychology had a significant share in spreading modern forms of human subjectivity (e.g. Pfister, 1997; Rose, 1996; Thomson, 2006).

Understanding human actions in psychological terms was not simply the preserve of specialists but often an important characteristic of the human subjects of psychological research. Modern psychology is most at home with individuals that provided psychology with what Graham Richards (2002) has called a "constituency", which I would see as people who are receptive to a psychological understanding of their lives.

Let me return briefly to my experience, many years ago, of acting as a missionary for modern psychology in a country, Indonesia, far from the localities of the discipline's origin. Along with others who have been in that position, I can certainly confirm Fathali Moghaddam's observation (Moghaddam & Lee (2006) that the appeal of modern psychology is usually greatest among those sections of the population that have been drawn most closely into the orbit of modernity: young, well educated urbanites, students in particular. All too often, these are the very same people who supply the subject pool for cross-cultural psychological investigations. They are the ones who understand what a psychological investigation is and what is expected of them. When they begin to play their role in the investigation they already share with the investigator a certain pre-understanding of the meaning of what is about to happen. In the words of Michael Cole (2006, p.913): "the very form of social interaction that makes it possible to assemble and instantiate psychological tasks presupposes familiarity with the forms of discourse involved and their appropriateness". And because this familiarity can now be found everywhere, it is possible to claim a world-wide validity for some psychological generalizations.

Take for example the phenomenon of what the sociologist Steven Ward (2002) calls "the psychotherapeutic self": individuals framing their understanding of their own and other people's feelings and conduct in terms of categories derived from the discourse of the helping professions. Yes, these categories vary greatly among themselves, but when you trace their historical emergence it becomes pretty clear that they all share certain features that distinguish them as a group from anything that existed previously. It is a mode of self-understanding that did not exist

150 years ago but that became quite common in those parts of the world in which psychologically informed professions exerted a significant social influence. And now that influence is spreading virtually everywhere.

A rather telling instance of this is provided by a recent South African study that considered the influence of psychologically trained counsellors on victims of apartheid terror who gave evidence before the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. From the counsellors these witnesses learned, not only a completely new psychological vocabulary, but new ways of presenting their distress and suffering to others. Narrating one's story was taken out of the traditional context it once had and placed in a new, psychotherapeutic, context. "Suffering becomes psychologized", as the author of the study puts it, and this process has "the potential to create new forms of subjectivity" (Louw, 2006, pp. 24/5). Analogous effects are being produced in many parts of the world, and it is not too difficult to foresee a time when a psychological mode of self-understanding will have become natural for almost everyone, as it already has in some communities.

There are other forms of psychological self-understanding than the psychotherapeutic one, for example, the experience of oneself as *calculable* (Rose, 1996). Historical studies have shown how closely the very idea that human characteristics might be calculable was linked to the development of mental testing.

In a recently published study, the historian John Carson (2007) documents the transition from a time when humans had "talents", or perhaps "talent" in the singular, to a more recent time when they had skills, aptitudes, and above all, intelligence. A key difference was that talents were not measurable, and therefore not precisely calculable. Their transformation into measurable attributes of individuals largely depended on the theory and practice of mental testing. As psychological instruments became part of the standard equipment of modern institutions, from schools to armies, the previously strange notion of human calculability became quite natural and taken for granted. Increasingly, people were not only treated as the site of calculable attributes, but also thought of themselves that way. Psychology not only assumes individuals to be the site of calculable attributes, by its practices it brings such individuals into existence in ever more locations.

Humans are often changed when they eat from the apple of psychological knowledge; they are not quite the people they would have been had they never encountered this knowledge. The reason for this lies in the reflexivity of human action: its meaning depends on the way it is represented symbolically. These representations are usually part of public discourse and are therefore subject to historical change. Currently, human action and experience are increasingly defined in terms of psychological categories and this implicates psychology in what the philosopher Ian Hacking (1995) has described as a process of "looping". As psychological knowledge and psychological interpretation achieve more social prominence they affect their potential subject matter.

I am reminded of something Theodore Porter (1995) said when tracing the history of quantification in the social sciences: "numbers work most effectively in a world they have collaborated in creating" (p. 213). Perhaps one could also say that psychology works most

effectively in a world it has collaborated in creating. With the expansion of that world, psychology may be helping to bring about the universality it takes as its default assumption.

From Default to Possibility

The theme of this conference is "transdisciplinarity and internationalization", implying that there is a link between the two. I certainly believe there is, and I have implied as much throughout my talk. First, I described how internationalization was inseparable from a fundamental tension within the discipline between the universality of its knowledge claims and the local features of the sites at which this knowledge was produced. I then tried to indicate ways of escaping this polarity by exploring the idea of historically emergent human universals. I pointed to two examples of this, one based on the likelihood that the spread of psychological knowledge is having effects on its potential subject matter and the other based on the fact that human cognitive functioning often depends on technologies that change historically. In doing that I had to draw on the work of historians and sociologists as well as psychologists. But what I came up with remains a sketch, at best. To get further, it would help if people shut off by inter- and intra-disciplinary boundaries started talking to each other occasionally.

Even within psychology, there are two rather different discussions going on. On the one hand, there is the discourse of culturally sensitive cognitivists, cross-cultural psychologists, and increasingly, I should add, evolutionary psychologists who recognize the importance of cultural diversity but look for so-called "human universals" beyond that diversity. On the other hand, there is the discourse of psychologists, mainly in under-industrialized countries, whose attempts at "indigenizing" their discipline raise questions about the universality of psychology *as a discipline*. These concerns are shared by some historians of psychology, like myself, by some who are interested in the internationalization of psychology (Brock, 2006), and by some theorists of the human sciences, Nicholas Rose (1996) for example. These two discourses approach the problematic of universality in different ways. For those who look for "human universals" the *object* of scientific investigation is the site of universality, and any concern about the reach of their scientific tools is a by-product of that primary interest. For those who start with an interest in the universality of psychology as a scientific discipline, the question of human universals is secondary. Although it is entirely possible for an individual to participate in both of these discourses, there is very little cross-referencing between the two sets of literature. This is a pity, because they are surely relevant to each other. Questions about the universality of psychology as a science have implications for questions about human universals as objects of scientific investigation, and vice versa.

If universality is to be treated, not as an assumption to be quietly pushed under the table, but as a problem to be explored, we will have to overcome the perspectives of specialties. And that brings me back to my starting point. I began by suggesting that much of the discipline operates on the principle that the onus of proof is on researchers who wish to question the default assumption of universality. The suggestion with which I want to conclude is that we reverse the onus of proof. In the modern world, it would be far better for the relevance and general health of the discipline if any new findings, theories or procedures were regarded, firstly as local curiosities, and secondly as potential contributions to the psychology of modernity. In order to assess this potential, cross-national and cross-cultural studies would be expected as a matter of course, and not as a rare optional extra, as happens now. That seems to be a better way of helping

the actual growth of such a science than the easy option of treating universality as a default assumption.

NOTE

Keynote address, International Society for Theoretical Psychology meeting in Toronto, June 2007. Originally appeared in T. Teo et al (Eds.), *Varieties of Theoretical Psychology*. Toronto: Captus Press, 2009.

REFERENCES

Adair, J.G., & Diaz-Loving, R. (1999). Indigenous psychologies: The meaning of the concept and its assessment: Introduction. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. *48*, 397-402.

Adamopoulos, J. & Lonner, W.I. (2001). Culture and psychology at a crossroad. In D. Matsumoto (ed.), *The handbook of culture and psychology*, pp. 11-34. New York: Oxford University Press.

Allwood, C.M. (2002). Indigenized psychologies. *Social Epistemology*, *16*, 349-366.

Allwood, C.M. & Berry, J.W. (2006). Special issue on the indigenous psychologies. *International Journal of Psychology*, *41*, 241-303.

Ash, M. G. (1985). Gestalt Psychology: Origins in Germany and reception in the United States. In C. Buxton (ed.), *Points of view in the modern history of psychology*, pp.295 - 338. New York: Academic Press.

Ash, M. G. (2003). Psychology. In T.M. Porter & D. Ross (eds.), *The Cambridge history of science*, vol. 7: *The modern social sciences*, pp. 251 - 274. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Atran, S., Medin, D.L., and Ross, N.O. (2005). The cultural mind: Environmental decision making and cultural modeling within and across populations. *Psychological Review*, *112*, 744-776.

Blowers, G.H., & Turtle, A.M. (1987) (eds.), *Psychology moving East: The status of Western psychology in Asia and Oceania*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.

Brock, A. (2006). *Internationalizing the history of psychology*. New York: New York University Press.

Clark, A. (2003). *Natural-born cyborgs: Minds, technologies, and the future of human intelligence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cole, M. (2006). Internationalization in psychology: We need it now more than ever. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 904-917.

Danziger, K. (2008). *Marking the mind: A history of memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gergen, K.J., Gulerce, A., Lock, A., and Misra, G. (1996). Psychological science in cultural context. *American Psychologist*, *51*, 496-503.

Hacking, I. (1995). *Rewriting the soul*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Hale, N.G. Jr (1995). *The rise and crisis of psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Herman, E. (1996). *The romance of American psychology: Political culture in the age of experts*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jahoda, G. (1999). Reflections of a "pre-nominal" cros-cultural psychologist. In W.J. Lonner, D.L. Dinnel, D.K. Forgays, and S.A. Hayes (eds.), *Merging past, present and future in cross-cultural psychology*, pp. 34-39. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Kim, U. & Berry, J.W. (1993). *Indigenous psychologies: Experience and research in cultural context*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kuper, A. (1999). *Culture: The anthropologists' account*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

LeVine, R.A. (2001). Japan as front line in cultural psychology wars. In H. Shimizu & A. LeVine (eds.), *Japanese frames of mind: Cultural perspectives on humandeveloment*, p. xi. New york: Cambridge University Press.

Louw, J. (2006). Constructing subjectivity in unexpected places. In A.C. Brock (ed.), *Internationalizing the history of psychology*, pp. 16-33. New York: New York University Press.

Mays, V.M., Rubin, J., Sabourin, M., and Walker, L. (1996). Moving toward a global psychology: Changing theories and practice to meet the needs of a changing world. American Psychologist, 51, 485-487.

Medin, D.L. & Atran, S. (2004). The native mind: Biological categorization and reasoning in development and across cultures. *Psychological Review*, *111*, 960-983.

Miller, J.G. (1996). Theoretical issues in cultural psychology. In J.W. Berry, Y.H.Poortinga, & J. Pandey (eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*, vol. I pp. 85-128. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Miller, J.G. (2002). Bringing culture to basic psychological theory - Beyond individualism and collectivism: Comment on Oyserman et al. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*, 97-109.

Nisbett, R.E., Peng, R.E., Choi, I., and Norenzayan, A. (2001). Culture and systems of thought: Holistic versus analytic cognition. *Psychological Review*, *108*, 291-310.

Nisbett, R.E. (2003). *The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think differently and why*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Norenzayan, A. & Heine, S.J. (2005). Psychological universals: What are they and how can we know? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*, 763-784.

Owusu-Bempah, K. & Howitt, D. (2000). *Psychology beyond western perspectives*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

Paranjpe, A.C., Ho, D.Y.F., and Rieber, R.W. (1988) (eds.), *Asian contributions to psychology*. New York: Praeger.

Pfister, J. 1997) On conceptualizing the cultural history of emotional and psychological life in America. In J. Pfister & N. Schnog (eds.), *Inventing the psychological: Toward a cultural history of emotional life in America*, pp. 17-59. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rayner, E. (1990). *The independent mind in British psychoanalysis*. London: Free Association Books.

Richards, G. (2002). The psychology of psychology: A historically grounded sketch. *Theory & Psychology*, *12*, 7-36.

Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge University Press.

Roudinesco, E. (1990). *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A history of psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Saenger, P. (1997). *Space between words: The origins of silent reading*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Shweder, R.A. & Sullivan, M. (1993). Cultural psychology: Who needs it? *Annual Review of Psychology*, *44*, 497-523.

Sinha, D. (1989). Cross-cultural psychology and the process of indigenization: A second view from the third world. In D.M. Keats, D. Munro, & L. Mann (eds.), *Heterogeneity in cross-cultural psychology*. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Sinha, D. (1997). Indigenizing psychology. In J.W. Berry, Poortinga, Y.H., and Pandey, J. (eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*, vol. I, pp. 130-169. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Smolka, A.L.B. (2000). Cross-cultural diversity and theoretical differences: Perspectives and difficulties in (cross-cultural) psychology. *Culture & Psychology*, *6*, 477- 494.

Staeuble, I. (2006). Psychology in the eurocentric order of the social sciences: Colonial constitution, cultural imperialist expansion, postcolonial critique. In A.C. Brock (ed.), *Internationalizing the history of psychology*, pp. 183 - 207. New York: New York University Press.

Strien, P.J. van (1997). The American "colonization" of Northwest European social psychology after World War II. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *33*, 349-363.

Teo, T. & Febbraro, A.R. (2003). Ethnocentrism as a form of intuition in psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, *13*, 673-694.

Thomson, M. (2006). *Psychological subjects: Identity, culture, and health in twentieth-century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallerstein, I. and others (1996). *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, p.87. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Ward, S. C. (2002). *Modernizing the mind: Psychological knowledge and the remaking of society*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Yanchar, S.C. (2000). Progress, unity, and three questions about incommensurability. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, *21*, 243-260.