

Swarthmore College

Works

Psychology Faculty Works

Psychology

5-1-1996

Psychological Science In Cultural Context

Kenneth J. Gergen

Swarthmore College, kgergen1@swarthmore.edu

A. Gulerce

A. Lock

G. Misra

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Kenneth J. Gergen, A. Gulerce, A. Lock, and G. Misra. (1996). "Psychological Science In Cultural Context". *American Psychologist*. Volume 51, Issue 5. 496-503. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.51.5.496
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology/422>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232417847>

Psychological Science in Cultural Context

ARTICLE *in* AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST · APRIL 1996

Impact Factor: 6.87 · DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.51.5.496

CITATIONS

201

READS

207

5 AUTHORS, INCLUDING:



[Kenneth J. Gergen](#)

Swarthmore College

278 PUBLICATIONS 11,202 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



[Aydan Gülerce](#)

Bogazici University

105 PUBLICATIONS 240 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Psychological Science in Cultural Context*

- Kenneth J. Gergen, Swarthmore College
 - Andrew Lock Massey, University
 - Aydan Gulerce, Bogazici University
 - Gerishwar Misra, University of Delhi

For the psychological sciences cultural processes have traditionally served as but a single entry into a considerable list of "phenomena under study." Until recent years, such study has not been richly realized. There are many reasons for the secondary role of a culturally focused psychology. Most prominently, there are two chief ways in which culture figures in the logic of psychological science, and neither of these favors a major professional investment. If one views cultures in terms of a field of differences, then culture largely serves the same scientific role as the study of personality, that is, as a moderator or qualifier for theoretical propositions of a more general scope. Thus, the vigorous scientist will propose a general theory (potentially true for all human organisms) of learning, motivation, memory, perception or the like, in which case cultural variations serve only to qualify the character of the process in varying contexts. Typically, because of the greater scientific stakes in documenting the general as opposed to the particular, cultural variations are either de-emphasized or simply bracketed for "later study." In the second mode of study, culture furnishes the proving ground for the universality of the general theory. Thus, for example, a host of investigators has sought to demonstrate the universality of emotional categories. On this model, culture itself is of secondary interest; cultural distinctiveness is but an impediment to achieving the broader goal of research.

Although a sturdy and expanding band of psychologists have nevertheless generated volumes of research on cultural universals and variations (see for example, Berry et. al, 1992; Triandis and Berry, 1980), others have begun to explore the limits to the traditional view of psychology and culture. For example, some are drawn to a vision of a culturally sensitive psychology as a site for the study of the relationship between universal process and cultural rule systems (see for example, Eckensberger, 1994). Others see the primary task of the culturally concerned psychologist as elucidating processes of intercultural interaction - how cultures conflict and reconfigure through interaction (see, for example, Denoux, 1992). Still others see the primary challenge as more practical in character. Rather than working toward abstract theoretical formulations, the culturally engaged psychologist might help to appraise various problems of health, environment, industrial development and the like in terms of the values, beliefs and motives particular to the culture at hand (see, for example, Moghaddam, 1987; Pandey, 1988). Such efforts are useful in exploring the possibilities for a unique role for cross-cultural psychology, and draw special attention to the needs for more

interpretive and more practical orientations to the research process.

Interestingly, these deliberations on alternatives have not grown primarily out of North American soil. As many see it, they reflect the misgivings of myriad scholars in non-American, non-Western, and/or Third World locales, and particularly their doubts about the implicit presumption that 1) there is a universally acceptable conception of psychological science, and/or 2) all cultures should emulate psychology as practiced in North America. Such discontent has become increasingly vocal in recent years. For example, Sinha (1990) has questioned the predominance of "vertical collaboration," that is, of psychologists from developing countries working on research initiated by investigators in developed nations; he proposes "horizontal collaboration" among researchers working on practical problems across various regions of a country or with those in other developing nations. Moghaddam (1987) has outlined the attempt of many European psychologists to develop a psychology that is distinctively rooted in European culture. Kagitcibasi (1986) has pointed to the way in which Western individualism has important biasing effects on social psychological theory. Misra and Gergen (1993) have explored important limitations of North American theories and research practices when imported into the Indian cultural context.

In the expression of such doubts, the profession of psychology is relatively conservative. As a contrast, in cultural anthropology there is enormous concern over the tendency of western anthropology to construct other cultures in terms saturated with western ideals and preconceptions, to exploit other cultures by using them for ends that are solely tied to local western interests, and colonizing other cultures through the exportation of western ideas, values and practices (see for example, Clifford, 1988; Fabian, 1983; Marcus, 1986). Similar discontents are manifest in various geographical area studies. For example, in his now classic work, *Orientalism*, Said (1978) proposes that research in "Oriental Studies" reflects the presumption of western superiority, and operates as a self-serving projection of the investigators' conceptions.

There is much to be said for healthy dissent, and reflexive deliberation on the taken-for-granted assumptions of the profession. However, perhaps the most important test of the critical impulse is in terms of its capacity to generate alternative courses of action, to enrich the discipline and the world it serves in important ways. It is to this end that we direct the remainder of this offering. For many of us there is no more dramatic form of critical reflection than that stemming from an inversion of psychology's traditional subject-object dichotomy. That is, rather than privileging the psychologist as the scrutinizing subject for whom culture serves as the object of study, we find it most fully liberating to place culture in the vanguard. Let us begin with culture, as variously lived by each of us, and place psychology under scrutiny. In this case we may ask, in what degree and with what effects is psychological science itself a cultural manifestation? Beginning in this way, it is immediately apparent that the science is largely a byproduct of the western cultural tradition at a particular time in its

historical development. Suppositions about the nature of knowledge, the character of objectivity, the place of value in the knowledge generating process, and the nature of linguistic representation, for example, all carry the stamp of a unique cultural tradition. Most interestingly, the character of psychological science is informed by a priori suppositions concerning the nature of human psychology itself (Gergen, 1994). That is, the science is based on certain assumptions concerning the psychological functioning of the individual scientist; without these assumptions the science as we know it would fail to be intelligible. It is presumed, for example, that the scientist possesses a conscious or observing mind, capable of reflecting and recording the nature of a world external to it; that the scientist possesses powers of inductive and deductive logic; and that the scientist also harbors motives and values that, without safeguards, can obscure observation and interfere with logical processes. All of these grounding assumptions are constituents of a western ethnopsychology (see Heelas and Lock, 1981).

In what follows we wish to give fuller voice to specific cultural standpoints. Speaking from disparate cultural backgrounds and disparate histories of culturally sensitive study, we explore a range of problems provoked by the presumption of a universal science of psychology. However, rather than resting secure in critique, we also begin to explore the benefits for psychology when culture is given primacy.

Toward Indigenous Indian Psychology (Girishwar Misra)

The discipline of psychology as practiced in India is primarily based on the knowledge and know-how imported from the Euro-American tradition within the context of the more general exportation of Western knowledge and education (D. Sinha, 1986). As such Indian psychology began its journey by imitating the research problems, concepts, theories and methods borrowed from the research done in western countries. Being the recipient, it was subordinated to the donor country. The colonial condition of India led to gross neglect and avoidance of the Indian intellectual and cultural tradition central to the practices of the Indian people. The academic world maintained a distance from its cultural heritage and looked down at it with suspicion. The colonial incursion was so powerful that while western concepts were accepted and welcomed without scrutiny, indigenous concepts were denied entry to the academic discourse. Since the discipline was imitative, its growth remained always one step behind the developments in the donor country.

Unlike the West, psychology in India did not grow as an integral part of the evolutionary process. Training by British or American psychologists coupled with the colonial influence produced a strong tendency in the academy to engage in a practice of culture blind psychology. Surprisingly enough this did not create discontent, as researchers were generally confident that they were contributing to the cumulatively growing pool of universal knowledge. Thus, deviations were treated as errors and the problems and issues were filtered through the scientific

framework (Nandy, 1974)

For a long period, psychology taught in the Indian universities was pure western psychology and attempts were made to safeguard it from the contaminating effects of Indian culture and thought. Its teaching maintained a strong universalistic stance. The research studied largely focused on testing the adequacy of western theories and concepts, wherein subjects provided objective behavioral data. In this scheme of scientific activity, culture was an irrelevant and extraneous intrusion. The current western thinking of the science of psychology in its prototypical form, despite being local and indigenous, assumed a global relevance, and was treated as a universal or pan-human mode of generating knowledge. Its dominant voice subscribes to a decontextualized vision with an extraordinary emphasis on individualism, mechanism, and objectivity.

This peculiarly western mode of thinking is fabricated, projected and institutionalized through representational technologies and scientific rituals, and transported on a large scale to the non-Western societies under politico-economic domination. As a result, western psychology tends to maintain an independent stance at the cost of ignoring other substantive possibilities from disparate cultural traditions. Mapping reality through Western constructs has offered a pseudo understanding of the peoples of alien cultures and has had debilitating effects in terms of misconstruing the special realities of other peoples, and exoticizing or disregarding psychologies that are non-Western. Consequently, when people from other cultures are exposed to western psychology they find their identities placed in question, and their conceptual repertoires rendered obsolete.

For many of us, the universally projected modernist view of the individual as a self-determining and self-contained being is rapidly losing its functional value. In particular, post-modern conditions of massive cultural interchange invite us to think in terms of global coordination and cooperation. Sampson (1989) proposes that the western theory of the person has to be revised. To this end he proposes that the community not only describes a person's identity but constitutes it. In this framework persons are viewed as guardians of culturally based assets, and not their owners. Concomitantly, there is a resurgence of interest in approaching human action through more local modes of understanding, and issues of subjectivity, interpretation, and everyday understanding become increasingly salient. This shift signals the possibility of developing more culturally grounded and locally useful forms of knowledge. It goes beyond the positivist position and proposes that the knowledge claims in the human domain are relative to the setting in which they are developed.

From this standpoint, we may see the person and the cultural context as mutually defining. Instead of searching for simple cause-effect relationships, a context-dependent strategy is more desirable. The role of the academic psychologist might be better envisioned in terms of understanding, reading and interpreting cultural actions; sensitizing people to the potentialities of action within the existing range

of intelligibilities; and inviting exploration into alternative forms of understanding. Innovative reconstructions of the academic toolbox are required; forms of language require attention, not as representations of underlying mental mechanisms but as culturally constituting actions. We must expand not only the repertoire of our analytical tools, but also add new dimensions to the theoretical and conceptual arena of the discipline. This also means active interchange with allied disciplines. This kind of participatory practice would be creative and emancipatory, acting so as to enrich and extend the cultural traditions.

There are numerous signs of movement toward indigenous forms of psychology. At a metatheoretical level, Pranjpe (1984) has explored the possibility of relating and contrasting eastern and western concepts of self, identity and consciousness. Varma (in press) has approached the possibility of developing a social constructionist framework for psychology in India. Misra and Gergen (1993) have explored the possibility of articulating Indian (Hindu) construals of psychological functioning, with special emphasis on the spiritual and natural roots of the ontology of personhood. An indigenous psychology, from this standpoint, would emphasize: a holistic-organic worldview, coherence and order across all life forms, the socially constituted/embedded nature of the person, non-linear growth and continuity in life, behavior as transaction, the temporal and atemporal existence of human beings, spatio-temporally contextualized action, the search for eternity in life, the desirability of self-discipline, the transitory nature of human experience, distributed rather than personalized control, and a belief in multiple worlds (material and spiritual).

In more pointed analyses, there has been increased questioning of western psychological constructs and methods for explicating and understanding Indian reality. These efforts to offer alternative construals have taken various forms, including theoretical and methodological innovations in social psychological, clinical and organizational contexts. A fruitful interface between indigenous Indian thought and psychological discourse is found in the Guru Chela paradigm of therapy (Neki, 1973), the nurturant task style of leadership (J.B.P. Sinha, 1980), analyses of self and personality (Naidu, 1994; Tipathi, 1988), the reconceptualization of achievement (Misra and Agarwal, 1985; Dalai, Singh, and Misra, 1988), analyses of the Indian psyche (Kakar, 1978), emotion (Jain, 1994), justice (Krishnan, 1992), morality (Misra, 1991), the concept of well-being (D.Sinha, 1990), development (Kaur and Sarawsathi, 1992), values (Prakash, 1994), detachment (N. Pande and Naidu, 1992), and methods of organizational intervention (Chakraporty, 1985). As Marriott (1992) has envisioned, these developments suggest, "that alternative social sciences are potentially available in the materials of many non-western cultures, and their development is essential to serve in the many places now either left to ad hoc descriptions or badly monopolized by social sciences borrowed from the West." (p.269)

This move toward an indigenous Indian psychology does not imply an abandonment of the western tradition. The aim is not to generate a set of mutually

exclusive, culturally based orientations that fail to regard or appreciate the alternatives; rather, there is an additional need to generate orientations that intersect and interpenetrate. Even three decades ago, Sinha (1962) indicated a need for an integration of modern psychology with Indian thought. Indian scholars have been drawn to this possibility by attempting to mix western and Indian concepts and to adapt western concepts to suit Indian culture. Whether western scholars can join in such a multi-world endeavor, so that a true dialogue ensues, remains to be seen.

Psychology in the Maori Context (Andrew Lock)

The practice of psychology in New Zealand, and particularly within the Maori context, cannot be understood without some grasp of history. The Maori are an indigenous people whose origins in the country can perhaps be traced back some 3,000 years. A second group of people began to arrive some 300 years ago, and have sustained a post-Renaissance Indo-European culture that is generically termed "British." Largely because of their superior force of arms, and through a series of dubious political "agreements," the British gradually asserted their rule of the territories. Simultaneously, the Maori people have found themselves the victims of wide-ranging abuses, in which they have lost land, the rights to many of their traditional practices, and governance rights which they felt had been guaranteed by earlier agreements. They have increasingly been subjected to laws and regulations that either disregarded or actively interfered with traditions of longstanding.

It has only been within the past few decades that a significant political force has been mounted in opposition to these incursions. Historically, there is no single Maori culture, as a recognizable, coherent unit; rather, there are many distinctive tribes each with its own local customs. However, largely for political purposes a vociferous "Maori" voice was developed to challenge the ever-encroaching British reign. Only in 1987 did the Maori language become an official language of State. State agencies have since developed mission statements in which they have committed themselves to observing certain Maori rights and customs. Yet, the nature of their policies is still very much an unknown; all cultural institutions are going through a process of re-inventing themselves.

What are the implications of the above sketch for the contemporary practice of psychological science? Consider the reaction of Lawson-Te Aho (1993): psychology, and clinical psychology in particular, has created the mass abnormalization of Maori people by virtue of the fact that Maori people have been on the receiving end of psychological practice as the helpless recipients of (English) defined labels and treatments... Clinical psychology is a form of social control derived from human intent and human action and offers no more "truth" about the realities of Maori people's lives than a regular reading of the horoscope page in the local newspaper.(p.26)

In effect, because psychology is seen by the Maori as an instrument devised by the

dominant power, the profession is practiced in a highly politicized environment. There are three important consequences. First, because western psychology provides the instruments of assessment on which judgements are made, it is distrusted implicitly as a force in the continuation of suppression. Durie (1994) notes that Maori psychiatric admission rates are two or three times those of non-Maori, and that there are no simple explanations for this. None-the-less the western diagnostic scales can be socially represented, grasped, and characterized by the Maori as part of the policing mechanisms of a post-colonial state.

Second, recent developments in social psychology in the area of discourse and "social construction" have been seized on as of central importance for a practical contribution from the discipline (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Discourse studies are seen as having strong potential for undermining the authority of the elites (Huylens, 1993); studies of the discourse of the oppressed hold promise for challenging existing social relations (Essed, 1988). Smith (1992), for example, outlines Maori discursive ideologies of education and language that have undergirded changes in the educational system; knowledge of the discourse of the disempowered brings it into contrasting relief with the discourse of the empowered and thereby both poses and enables a challenge to the status quo.

Third, the politicized context of psychology serves to highlight the constructed nature of social life and institutions, such that in the hands of skilled workers, new and effective forms of practice can be established. Examples include the "Just Therapy" of Charles Waldegrave's group in Wellington (E.G. Waldegrave and Tapping, 1990) and David Epston's contribution to the development of "narrative therapy" (e.g., White and Epston, 1990).

In my view, the political polarization of the discipline is not merely derived from local relations of dominance and submission, but involves a clash of cultures. There is, here, a clash of values, of logics, and of conceived worlds and personhood; it is a difference in linguistic and other practices with incommensurate historical roots. "Personhood" in the two cultures cannot properly be equated. Superficially we might locate similarities, for example, in the conception of the mind-body relation, between the tinana and wairua. But these latter words are embedded in a complex web of cultural practices, and the direct translation of tinana as body, and wairua as mind, cannot be substantiated. The "map of the self" is different in each culture, and each culture could be said to require its own separate "psychological science."

I have found coming to terms with this conclusion very difficult. In this case, the academic psychology of experimentation and measurement is not being challenged on epistemological grounds, nor on its constitution and interpretation of its data - its "truth status," if you like. These could be interesting discussions. Rather, academic and applied psychology are just deemed irrelevant. Why would a Maori want to measure intelligence, or sanity, for example? Western schools and western asylums are not the Maori way of education nor treatment for the

troubled. As I confront this fact, great doubt suddenly opens up. At one time - not so long ago - western cultural institutions did not require such measures. What, after all, is the status of the measurements created by such scales? Intelligence as a concept has no purchase on an objective reality; it does not map anything in the "real" natural world: rather the concept of intelligence seems historically constituted to meet the challenges faced by western institutions in gaining control of their constituents (see, for example, Rose, 1990). These thoughts have been raised before, but as philosophical and social critiques grounded in a shared tradition of thought, rather than directly by a cultural tradition that defines a lived-in human reality in which these "things" are irrelevant except as instruments of politically motivated suppression.

If it is to have a future here, psychology has to be practical within its cultural context. This is not to say that the western tradition has nothing to offer. There are, for one, some approaches within contemporary western psychology that have simple instrumental utility. To appeal to an impeccable study such as Dan Slobin's Cross Linguistic Developmental Project (1985-1992) increases the chances of gaining funding for setting up Maori Language and Cultural Schools; it is high-status research, and thus appeals to the governments of New Zealand. One could also teach developmental psychology, but because of its practical implications, more usefully from a Vygotskian perspective than a Piagetian one. In particular, the former admits the constitutive role of culture as an integral part of development rather than a background variable. One could teach social psychology as practical rhetoric, but as little else, for experimental social psychology is recognized by many scholars as a branch of an ideologically imbued system of thinking, value saturated, and imperialistic in ambitions. The "narrative" tradition is currently the most attractive candidate for the survival of (near) mainstream academic psychology (Sarbin, 1984). How to tell one's story effectively is a pressing problem in this country, not only in terms of sustaining prideful traditions but in the generation of a "level playing field." Further, such racial discourses also contribute importantly to a substantial data base in social psychology (as contained, for example, in the journal, *Discourse and Society*). Discourse studies are seen as committed to expressing the worlds of the unvoiced peoples.

In part, the challenge of becoming a psychologist in New Zealand came from previous work, in which Paul Heelas and I, as editors, outlined a universal model of beliefs about the mind (Heelas and Lock, 1981). In one chapter of this volume, Jean Smith (1981) wrote on an exotic culture, the Maori, in which being a self was differently conceived. We as editors, however, felt the Maori view was "encompassable" within our science. We conceived of a universal "moral science" in which agents were aware of the responsibilities which their cultural categories constructed for them. This model may still have some validity. However, the challenge has turned out to be the validity of that validity, the morality of my morality, and the human use of my science. One cannot simply do as George Miller once advocated - give psychology away - when the gift is an imposition,

seen as an element in a policing process that denies the validity of a culture to determine its own ends.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters: A Turkish Vision (Aydan Gulerce)

In parallel to the global transformations taking place, psychology in Turkey is rapidly "developing." In large measure the profession has been following (sometimes blindly) the footsteps of so-called western (mainly American) psychology - with considerable delay. Ironically, it is not the strategies for defining the place of psychology in society and improving its prestige, that have been transported, so much as psychological technology and theoretical concepts. In spite of this generally unfortunate condition, a substantial number of pioneer psychologists in Turkey are transforming the psychological know-how acquired in western educational institutions in order to meet the specific needs of the present sociocultural context. They have made substantial efforts to "think globally, act locally," recognizing the possibility of modernization without obliterating the local culture (see, for example, Kagitcibasi, 1986)

At the same time, it would not be so difficult to conclude that American psychology has largely been "thinking locally, acting globally." The reader interested in the potentially damaging impact of western psychology in developing countries can consult with numerous writings by cross-cultural psychologists, including one in the Turkish context (Kagitcibasi, 1984), and a special issue of the *International Journal of Psychology* devoted to this topic (Sinha and Holtzman, 1984). Much has already been written about the value-ladenness and other self-induced constraints of contemporary psychological science. Not surprisingly, there are also many examples in which American psychology seems all too parochial when contrasted to the enduring characteristics of Turkish tradition (cf. Kagitcibasi, 1982; Oner, 1982). In my own inquiry into ethnopsychological conceptualizations of mental health (Gulerce, 1990), child development (Gulerce, 1992), and the family (Gulerce, 1992), for example, evidence was provided for traditional moral, religious, and sociocultural values that differed or clashed with those implicit in American psychology (when checked against DSM-III, developmental psychology and contemporary family models). There was also evidence for the diffusion of a western ideology of individualism and related construals, indirectly (via cultural artifacts like media) or directly through psychological theories and practices (such as "assertiveness training"), in this socioculturally rich and dynamic society.

To me, any attempt to "repair" or "replace" the western tradition, prior to considering its philosophical and methodological assumptions, along with its place in a world of practical affairs, would largely be useless. To be sure, cross-cultural psychologists were quick to notice cultural "shortsightedness" of western psychology (see, for example, Berry, 1990; Seagal et al, 1990). In general, however, they have been unable to abandon mainstream scientism in general, remaining loyal to empiricism, and testing western theories with "culturally"

(geographically) diverse data. In a similar vein, Turkish psychologists have been concerned particularly with the cultural/ecological validity of various research and application tools (see, for example Oner, 1994; Savisir and Sahin, 1985). Enormous energy has been invested in the adaptation and normalizing of western instruments. Clearly, the importation of measures, concepts and hypotheses involves a mutually supportive relationship with the diffusion of positivist-empiricist conceptions of science. It is also unclear what injustice is done to local intelligibilities by the importation of western conceptions. When psychological terminology is translated into Turkish, the local language loses its richness of connotation along with its multiplicitous functioning in the society. It was not until recently that the conceptual validity of the western models or theories behind the technology were challenged and a "replacement" process begun (e.g., Gulerce, 1992).

It is in this respect that the indigenous psychology movement (e.g, Heelas and Lock, 1981; Kim and Berry, 1993), appears to offer good potential for making the discipline socioculturally relevant, and for constructing culturally valid and intelligible theories. Beyond being culturally appropriate, indigenous conceptions may in turn contribute to the revision of western theories. To illustrate the point with works from Turkey, Kagitcibasi (1985) demonstrated that "culture of separateness" and "culture of relatedness" appear compatible and interdependent in our society, and hence are not mutually the exclusive polarities assumed in western theorizing. Again, my own studies on the conceptualization of transitional phenomena (Gulerce, 1991) and the use of traditional objects (Gulerce, 1991), argue for the coexistent transformations towards both "individuation" and "connectedness," contradicting not only western theory, but classical assumptions about human development - such as unidirectionality, unilinearity, universalism, hierarchical and progressive order, etc. Additionally, many other theoretical assumptions relying on a view of rational, materialist, pragmatic, functionalist, self-centered, and self-contained human being fall short in application to understanding of much Turkish behavior. A guiding model is required which leaves room for the irrational, spiritual, altruistic, conservative, other-centered, community-oriented, and interdependent human being.

At the same time, I do not feel content with the incorporation of "culture" into psychology at the level of theory alone. The indigenization of psychology still faces important challenges. Conceptual and operational definitions of culture, for example, are major sources of difficulty. Converting culture from "independent variable" to "index variable," drawing regional/communal boundaries, relying on group statistics - all at the expense of "private cultures" and local psychology - not only has the potential danger of generating a "sense of understanding" the other (lodged in one's local assumptions), but of creating new polarities. Further efforts at opening psychology to diverse traditions at all levels of inquiry, particularly in the areas of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and praxis are much needed.

At this point it is important to recognize that, just as there are psychologists in Turkey who are unwittingly more "American" than the American, there are psychologists living in the States who are also contributing importantly to the present discussion. Various programs have developed concurrently under the general headings of "cultural" and "cultural/historical" psychology to study culturally constituted processes (e.g., Cole, 1990, 1992; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Shweder, 1990; Valsiner, 1989, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). Their studies of human processes in cultural contexts help in understanding and incorporating culture into psychology at a fundamental level. Similarly, we are provided with significant philosophical and historical critiques of psychology's strong commitments to foundationalism, empiricism, and the self-contained individual (see, for example, Danziger, 1990; Gergen, 1994; Jahoda, 1993; Sarbin, 1989; Shotter, 1993). Such reflections help the discipline to realize its particular historical and cultural location.

Taking advantage of my present location, looking from the bridge between East and West, literally and metaphorically, I believe we must press further toward an appreciation of differing philosophic traditions and in the direction of psychology's inter-culturation. Continuous consideration of the varied epistemological and metapsychological assumptions underlying and fertilizing mainstream psychology is necessary to soften the discipline's rigid boundaries. Equally important to me is the acceptance of novelty that enables creative growth and increases conceptual/ecological adequacy of knowledge and its use around the globe (Gulerce, in press). Otherwise it is all too easy to see the situation in terms of western producers of psychological knowledge, as against non-western importers. Yet, in the long run this kind of dichotomous thinking is unproductive, and again, western (Cartesian) in origin. It seems further to sustain an "us vs. them" mentality, and thus inhibits the development of true dialogue among the cultures (to say nothing of dialogic methodology within the field itself). It may not only be arrogant (ironically, even in the search for solutions to "neo-colonization"), but also epistemologically erroneous, to view the West independent of the rest.

If the West has gained sufficient self-reflexivity to prevent further "patronizing," and the rest has gained sufficient self-assertion for "emancipation," we can hope for genuine intercultural interchange. In my view, a strong commitment to any particular epistemology and methodology is unproductive. It is my specific hope that we might move together toward a discipline that would enable us to "live together more comfortably (with)in the universe" as opposed to "gaining control over" it. Needless to say, the capacity for diversity and pluralism, a tolerance for ambiguity and the unknown, and an acceptance of - and peace with - limitations in the quest for knowledge are not well developed western qualities. Alternative philosophical positions, I believe, would help to prevent psychological science from anxious reductionisms (as in behaviorism and cognitivism) and from superficial and/or conceptually flawed constructions of human reality (as in pragmatism and rationalism). Perhaps they would encourage what for the world

might be a "better" or more humane psychological science.

I am sometimes optimistic about the possibilities of inter-cultural dialogue - particularly as western psychology becomes less isolated. However, it sometimes appears that American psychologists are too busy with their own quantitative reproductions that they cannot find time even for reading each other's work, much less conceptually unsettling contributions from abroad. And, I fear, the enormous production of data in the United States is seldom applicable even to local social problems, to say nothing of the problems confronting other cultures. We see an enormous "waste" of material and human resources, creating not knowledge but largely irrelevant information.

In Speaking Together

Although these commentaries were generated independently, and in highly diverse cultural contexts, we find the extent of our agreement striking. And, in spite of our shared misgivings regarding traditional practices, we find common grounds for what we believe could be a particularly fruitful range of inter-cultural dialogues. For entry into such dialogue, it is first essential that no single paradigm of psychological inquiry be granted preeminence. This is at once to honor the many traditions of western psychology - empiricist, phenomenological, critical school, feminist, hermeneutic, social constructionist, and more - as well as those extant in other cultural traditions. At the same time, it is to invite a certain humility. Should practitioners fail to appreciate the limitations necessarily inherent in their local paradigms, and treat the alternatives as flawed inferiors, currently existing conflicts will not give way to productive dialogue.

With dialogue configured in this way, we see the various cultures of the world offering to each other an enormously rich array of resources. These include multiple 1) conceptions of knowledge (metatheory), 2) discourses of human functioning (indigenous theory), 3) culturally located descriptions of action (research outcomes), and 4) professional practices (e.g. therapy, counseling, meditation, mediation). In effect, the richly variegated traditions must be explored, articulated and celebrated for the range of resources they can bring to the practice of psychology as a global cooperative. In our view, the most positive forms of professional interchange occur, not when one attempts to improve or enlighten the other, but when the fascinating, the novel and the practical from one context are made available for others to appropriate selectively as their local circumstances invite. It is to the practical means of achieving such dialogue that attention is now required.

By placing culture in the vanguard of our concerns, we are finally drawn to the enormous global need for a psychology of practical significance. Western psychology has had the luxury of devoting most of its research to questions of abstract theory, and viewing application as a second-rate derivative. However, not only do we find such theories largely parochial (even when purporting

universality), but very little of the research has practical payoff. Expenditures on behalf of abstract theory testing seem largely wasted. In contrast, culturally sensitive research into people's behavior in such domains as health (e.g. trust in medicine, safe sex), birth control, child abuse, drug addiction, ethnic and religious conflict, and the effects of technology on society are in desperate need. This is not to abandon abstract theory. However, in a world of extended hardship, the chief function of such theory may be that of constructing intelligible futures. Alternative conceptions of the person invite alternative modes of action, new institutions, and new policies. In effect, theory becomes a practical device for constructing the future.

References

- Adair, J.G., Puhan, B. and Vohra, N. (1993) Indigenization of psychology: Empirical assessment of progress in Indian research. *International Journal of Psychology*, 28, 149-169.
- Berry, J., Poortinga Y., Segall, M., and Dasen, P., (1992) *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.
- Chakraborty, S. (1993) *Managerial transformation by values: Corporate pilgrimage*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Clifford, J. (1988) *The predicament of culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cole, M. (1990) Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline? In J. Berman (ed.) *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*. Vol. 37 (pp. 279-336) Lincoln: University of Nebraska.
- Cole, M. (1992) Context, modularity and the cultural constitution of development. In L.T. Winegar and J. Valsiner (eds.) *Children's development within social context*. Vol. 2. Research and methodology. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dalal, A.K., Singh, A.K. and Misra, G. (1988) Reconceptualization of achievement behavior: A cognitive approach. In A. Dalal (ed.) *Attribution theory and research*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern.
- Danziger, K. (1990) *Constructing the subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Denoux, P (1992) *Les modes d' apprehension de la difference*. Toulouse: University of Toulouse.
- Durie, M.H. Maori psychiatric admissions: Patterns, explanations and policy implications. Spicer, J., Trlin, A., and Walton, J.A. (eds.) *Social dimensions of health and disease: New Zealand perspectives*. Palmerston, North New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Eckensberger, L. (1994) On the social psychology of cross-cultural research. In A. Bouvy, et al. (Eds.) *Journeys into cross-cultural psychology*. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Essed, P. (1988) Understanding accounts of racism: politics and heuristics of reality constructions. *Text* 8: 5-40.

- Fabian, J., (1983) *Time and the other; how anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gergen, K.J. (1982) *Toward transformation in social knowledge*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Gergen, K.J. (1994) *Realities and relationships, soundings in social construction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gulerce, A. (1990) Public awareness, perceived seriousness and conceptual definition of psychological maladjustment in Turkey. In N. Bleichrondt and P.J. Drenth (eds.) *Contemporary issues in cross-cultural psychology*. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeithinger B.V.
- Gulerce, A. (1991) Transitional objects: A reconsideration of the phenomenon. In Rudmin, F.R. (ed.) *To have possessions: Handbook on ownership and property*. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6, 187-208.
- Gulerce, A. (1992) AYDA: Aile Yapisini Degerlendirme Araci: Elkitabi ve Turk normlari. (Family structure assessment device: The manual and Turkish norms). Istanbul: Alphgraphics.
- Gulerce, A. (in press a) A family assessment device for Turkey. In J. Pandey (ed.) *Asian contributions to cross-cultural psychology*. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeithinger B.V.
- Gulerce, A. (in press b) Change in the process of change: Coping with indeterminism. In A. Fogel, M.C.D.P Lyra and J. Valsiner (eds.) *Process of change: Determinism and indeterminism*.
- Heelas, P. & Lock, A. (1981) *Indigenous psychologies: The anthropology of the self*. London: Academic Press.
- Huygens, I. (1993) A letter, an idea. *New Zealand Psychological Society Bulletin*, 76, 22-25.
- Jahoda, G. (1993) *Crossroads between culture and mind: Continuities and change in theories of human nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Jain, U. (1994) The socio-cultural construction of emotions. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 6, 151-168.
- Kagitcibasi, C. (1983) Early childhood education and preschool intervention: Experiences in the world and Turkey. In K. King and R. Myers (eds.) *Preventing school failure; The relationship between preschool and primary education*. Ottawa: IDRC.
- Kagitcibasi, C. (1984) Socialization in a traditional society: a challenge to psychology. *International Journal of Psychology*, 19, 145-157.
- Kakar, S. (1978) *The inner experience*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kaur, B. and Saraswathi, T. (1992) New directions in human development and family studies: Research, policy, programme interfaces. *International Journal of Psychology*, 27, 333-349.
- Kim, U. and Berry, J. (1993) *Indigenous psychologies: Research and experience in cultural context*. London: Sage.
- Krishnan, L. (1987) Justice research: The Indian perspective. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 4, 39-71.

- Lawson-Te Aho, K. (1993) The socially constructed nature of psychology and the abnormalisation of Maori. *New Zealand Psychological Society Bulletin*, 76, 25-30.
- Markus, G. (1986) Contemporary problems of anthropology in the modern world system. In J. Clifford and G. Markus (Eds.) *Writing culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Markus, H. and Kitayama, S. (1991) Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224-253.
- Marriott, M. (1992) Alternative social sciences. In J. Macallson (ed.) *General education in the social sciences; Centennial reflections (262-278)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, J., Berroff, and Harwood, R. (1990) Perceptions of social responsibilities in India and the United States: Moral imperatives or personal decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 33-47.
- Misra, G. (1994) Psychology of control: Cross-cultural considerations. *Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12, 8-45.
- Misra, G. (1991) Socio-cultural influences on moral behavior. *Indian Journal of Social Work*, 42, 179-194.
- Misra, G. and Agarwal, R. (1985) The meaning of achievement: Implications for a cross-cultural theory of achievement motivation. In I.R. Lagunes and YPE Poortinga (eds.) *From a different perspective: Studies of behavior across cultures*. (250-266) Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Misra, G. and Gergen, K.J. (1993a) In the place of culture in psychological science. *International Journal of Psychology*, 38, 225-253.
- Moghaddam, F. (1987) Psychology in the three worlds: as reflected by the crisis in social psychology and the move towards indigenous Third World psychology. *American Psychologist*, 42, 912-920.
- Naidu, R. (1994) Traditional Indian personality concepts and the unrealized potential for paradigm shift. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 6, 70-85.
- Nandy, A. (1974) Non-paradigmatic psychology: Reflections on a recipient culture of science. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, 49, 1-20.
- Neki, J. (1973) Guru-Chela relationship: The possibility of a therapeutic paradigm. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 43, 755-766.
- Oner, N. (1994) *Türkiye'de kullanılan psikolojik testler. Bir basvuru kaynağı. (Psychological tests in use in Turkey. A desk reference.)*. Istanbul: Bogazici Universitesi Matbaasi.
- Oral, A. (1994) VIII. Ulusal psikoloji kongresi anketi. (The VIII National Congress of Psychology Survey). *Türk Psikoloji Dergisi (The Turkish Psychology Journal)*, 9, 31, 88-105.
- Pandey, J. (1988) Psychology in India: Emerging trends in the eighties. In J. Pandey (Ed.) *Psychology in India: The state of the art*. V. 3. New Delhi: Sage (339-359).
- Pandey, N. and Naidu, R. (1992) Anasakti and health: A study of non-attachment. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 4, 89-104.

- Paranjpe, A., Ho, D. and Ribberg, R. (1988) Asian contributions to psychology: New York: Piaget.
- Paranjpe, A. (1984) Theoretical psychology: Meeting of East and West. New York: Plenum Press.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) Discourse analysis and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behavior. London: Sage.
- Prakash, A. (1994) Organizational functioning and values in the Indian context. In H. Kao, D. Sinha & N. Sek Hong (eds.) Effective organizations and social values. New Delhi: Sage.
- Rogoff, B. (1990) Apprenticeship in thinking. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roland, A. (1988) In search of self in India and Japan: Toward a cross-cultural psychology. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univer
- Rose, N. (1990) Governing the soul. London: Routledge.
- Said, E. (1978) Orientalism. New York: Pantheon.
- Sampson, E. (1989) The challenge of social change for psychology: Globalization and psychology's theory of the person. *American Psychologist*, 44, 914-921.
- Seagall, M.H., Dasen, P.R., Berry, J.W., and Poortinga, Y.H. (1990) Human behavior in global perspective: An introduction to cross-cultural psychology. New York: Pergamon.
- Shotter, J. (1993) Conversational realities: Constructing life through language. London: Sage.
- Shweder, R. (1991) Thinking through cultures: Expeditions indigenous psychologies. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Shweder, R., Mohapatra, M. and Miller, J. (1987) Cultures and moral development. In J. Kogan & S. Lamb (eds.) The emergence of morality in young children. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sinha, D. (1965) Integration of modern psychology with Indian thought. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 5, 6-17.
- Sinha, D. (1986) Psychology in a third world country: The Indian experience. New Delhi, Sage.
- Sinha, D. (1990) Concept of psychological well-being: Western and Indian perspectives. *National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences Journal*, 8, 1-11.
- Sinha, D. (1994) Indigenous psychology: Need and potentiality. *Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12, 1-7.
- Sinha, D. and W. Holtzman (1984) The impact of psychology on Third World development. *International Journal of Psychology*, 19. (Special issue, Nos. 1 & 2).
- Sinha, J. (1980) The nurturant task master. New Delhi: Concept.
- Sinha, J. (1984) Toward partnership for relevant research to the Third world. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, 19, 169-178.
- Smith, G. (1992) The legacy of Tane Nui A Rangi: propping up the sky. Auckland Research Unit in Maori Education.
- Smith, J. (1981) Self and experience in Maori culture. In P. Heelaas and A.

- Lock (Eds.) Indigenous psychologies. London: Academic Press. (145-160)
- Triandis, H. and Berry, J. (Eds.) (1980) Handbook of cross-cultural psychology: Vol 1-6. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
 - Tripathi, R. (1988) Aligning development to values in India. In D. Sinha and H. Kao (eds.) Social values and development in Asian perspectives. New Delhi: Sage.
 - Valsiner, J. (1987) Culture and development of children's actions. Chichester: Wiley.
 - Varma, S. (In press) The social constructionist framework: An alternative paradigm for psychology in India. Indian Journal of Social Science.
 - Waldegrave, C. and Tapping, C. (1990) Social justice and family therapy: A discussion of the work of the Family Centre, Lower Hutt, New Zealand. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
 - Wertsch, J. (1991) Voices in the mind. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
 - Wetherell, M. and Potter, J. (1992) Mapping the language of racism: discourse and the legitimation of exploitation. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
 - White, M. and Epston, D. (1990) Narrative means to therapeutic ends. New York: Norton.

Footnote

* Requests for reprints should be sent to Dr. Kenneth Gergen, Department of Psychology, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA. 19081, USA.

It is slowly being realized that psychological processes are rooted in historically variable and culturally mediated practical activities. People construct multiple socio-historically grounded realities; apprehending reality from an observer-independent perspective is not possible. A cultural emphasis underscores the constitutive role of the social context of understanding. We as human beings operate within socially constituted worlds. From this orientation the assumptions of a lawful universe of human conduct and absolute objects with context-free properties are misleading. Investigations from a culturally rooted perspective tend to show that many western concepts lack experiential grounding in other cultures. They offer evidence that presumed universal and identical psychological phenomena or processes (e.g. self, emotion, morality, well-being, development) are not viable. Instead, the character of human action is constituted differently in varying socio-cultural contexts.