

Why history of psychology is going global

Adrian C. Brock on why studying our past is a dynamic and relevant endeavour

Recently I was moaning to a colleague about the fact that a new edition of the textbook that I use in my history of psychology course (Richards, 2010) had appeared and that the university library had ordered only one copy of it for the entire class. When the previous edition appeared in 2002, it had ordered 10. My colleague looked at me with surprise and said: 'Surely the history of psychology hasn't changed all that much since 2002!'

Perhaps the view that history of psychology does not change comes from thinking of it in terms of a story, like the story of Noah's Ark or the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Historians might engage in debates over whether Noah was a real person and, if so, where he lived. They might also engage in debates over the origins or the authorship of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. But the story stays pretty much the same.

Generations of textbooks on the history of psychology have encouraged the view that they are concerned with a story and the very word, 'history' encompasses this word. Unfortunately it is a false and misleading view of the field.

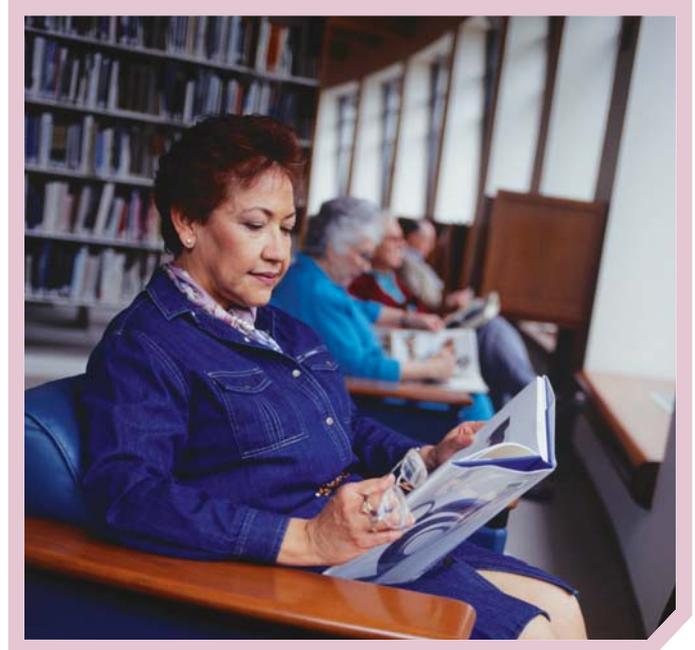
History of psychology is a small but dynamic area of research. Contributions are made to it not just by psychologists but also by professional historians, including historians of science and historians of medicine. Isolated contributions have also been made by scholars from disciplines as diverse as

philosophy, sociology, anthropology and biology. Thus, as in most areas of psychology, new editions of textbooks on the history of psychology are needed to incorporate new research in the field.

Why is there so much research if the broad outlines of the story are already known? In order to answer this question, we need to make a distinction between psychology's history and its past. One human life would not be enough to become acquainted with everything that has happened in psychology's past. We might also ask why anyone would want to do this: not everything that has occurred in psychology's past is worth remembering. The content of the history books is only a small sample of that past, and its inclusion is not random or arbitrary. History has much in common with what sociologists and psychologists have termed, 'collective memory' (Danziger, 2008). It consists of the things that a

particular community at a particular point in history considers worth remembering. This is why it is said that each generation must write history for itself.

Some of the more interesting changes in the history of psychology that have occurred in recent years have been the result of demographic changes in the discipline. The most obvious example is the worldwide trend towards the 'feminisation' of psychology. Psychologists were predominantly male until the 1960s and then predominantly female in the 1970s and beyond. This led to changes in the discipline, such as the establishment of a division for 'Psychology of Women' in the American Psychological Association in 1973. As far as the history of psychology is concerned, the new female psychologists began to ask why it consisted almost entirely of men. They consequently began to produce new narratives of women in the early history



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of psychology and the discrimination they faced. The book by Elizabeth Scarborough and Laurel Furumoto, *Untold Lives: The First Generation of American Women Psychologists* (1989) is a well-known example of the genre.

Another demographic change that can be traced back to the 1960s is the entry of more people from ethnic minorities into psychology. For example, an Association of Black Psychologists was founded in the United States in 1968. They too began to ask why all the psychologists in the history textbooks were white. The end result was the rediscovery of African-American psychologists like Kenneth and Mamie Clark (e.g. Guthrie, 1976).

Perhaps even more interesting is that historians of psychology from these groups have gone beyond what might be called 'compensatory history'; that is, adding a few extra figures to the history of psychology and leaving it at that. One of the consequences of the entry of ethnic minorities into psychology was a condemnation of the racism that has existed in psychology's past, such as the view that people of African origin were less intelligent than people of European origin because they were less successful on culturally loaded tests.

With very few exceptions, such as Lewis Terman's masculinity-femininity scale, psychology took little interest in gender until women began to enter the discipline in large numbers. That did not prevent some feminists from arguing that mainstream psychology was based on male perspectives and that it would have to be radically revised if it was going to do justice to the female point of view. The book by Jill Morawski, *Practicing Feminisms, Reconstructing Psychology* (1994) contains this type of argument.

The changes with which this article is concerned have been slower to occur but they are potentially more wide-ranging. It is well known that scientific or modern psychology emerged in Western Europe

in the second half of the 19th century. A large number of Americans came to Europe to study this new discipline, or at least to keep themselves abreast of developments there. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, American psychology had begun to overshadow European psychology in size, and the United States has been the dominant power in the discipline ever since.

Although this situation has not changed in the last hundred years, the strength of its dominance has varied enormously during that period. It was at its height in the years immediately after the Second

World War. Much of Europe lay in ruins, especially Germany, which had had the strongest tradition of psychology in Europe before the war. Also of

relevance is the fact that psychology had yet to be exported to Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania on a large scale. The International Union of Psychological Science was founded in 1951 with 11 charter members, nine of them in Western Europe plus the United States and Japan.

American psychology has been declining in importance ever since. The underlying reason for this is the growth of psychology in countries where it hardly existed at the end of the Second World War. Psychology has continued to grow in the United States, but it did not have the same room for expansion that it had in countries where the discipline and the profession had yet to be established. The end result is that the percentage of the world's psychologists who live and work in the United States has been gradually declining.

A small but growing number of American psychologists are aware of this situation and have been trying to persuade their colleagues to take a more international outlook on the field. One of the results of their efforts has been the establishment of a new division for International Psychology within the APA (Division 52) in 1997, and publications such as the *Handbook of International Psychology* (Stevens & Wedding, 2004) and *Toward a Global Psychology* (Stevens & Gielen, 2007). As a historian of psychology, it occurred to me that I could make a contribution to this new movement by providing it with a more international history.

I accordingly organised an edited collection titled, *Internationalizing the History of Psychology* (Brock, 2006). It contains chapters on the history of psychology in countries such as

Argentina, China, India, South Africa and Turkey. Being aware of the limitations of what I have called 'compensatory history', I wanted to leave some space for broader issues that arose from this work. Just as feminists have argued that a psychology that was almost exclusively male led to a limited male perspective, and psychologists from ethnic minorities have argued that psychology that was almost exclusively white led to a limited white perspective, so psychologists from non-Western countries have argued that a psychology was almost exclusively Western has led to a limited Western perspective. One consequence of the situation is the indigenisation movement in psychology, whose advocates argue that Western psychology is inappropriate for their needs and that it must be adapted to suit the local context. A more radical wing of the movement rejects Western psychology entirely and tries to build an alternative out of indigenous resources (Allwood & Berry, 2006).

With the sole exception of a very hostile review by a conservative American (Whittaker, 2007), the book has sold well and met with positive reviews (e.g. Bem, 2009; Brennan, 2007; Buchanan, 2008; Hegarty, 2007; Pickren, 2007; Teo, 2007). Perhaps this type of history is the wave of the future. Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania are now important markets for psychology texts, and the people in these places are no more willing to accept a history of psychology that excludes these regions than women and members of ethnic minorities were prepared to accept a history of psychology that excluded people like themselves. It is also important to realise that substantial minorities from these places live and work in Europe and North America. Several contributors to *Internationalizing the History of Psychology* are psychologists from Asia, Africa and Latin America who are currently resident in Canada and the United States. As for the rest of us, the expansion of our horizons can only serve to enrich our understanding of psychology and its history.

As the editor of *Theory & Psychology*, Hank Stam, said about *Internationalizing the History of Psychology* in the jacket blurb: 'For those who wish to glimpse the future of psychology, there is no better place to begin than with this historical volume.' History of psychology is not just of relevance to the present, it is of relevance to the future. That, I suspect, is why many of us are involved in the field.

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