

What kind of psychology for all?

In their February special issue 'Bringing psychology to all societies', the three contributors (Ingrid Lunt, Kwang-Kuo Hwang and Carl Martin Allwood) dealt with some important though controversial topics. Since the editors of the special issue expressed the hope that it would generate a debate, I venture to offer some comments.

The general theme concerns the question of how to arrive at a psychology appropriate for the rich variety of human cultures. While the proposals put forward differ in detail, the key question addressed concerns the relationship between Western and 'indigenous' psychologies and the prospect of arriving ultimately at a universal psychology. One of the contributors, Hwang, devotes much of his piece to the history of what he calls 'cultural psychology'. Since this history is considerably distorted, I shall discuss it before going on to the main theme.

The history of psychology and culture

According to Hwang, there have been three main 'waves' in cultural psychology: 'modernisation theory', 'individualism/collectivism', and the 'indigenisation movement'. At this point I shall comment only on the first two, since the third is covered by all contributors. Hwang is right when he states that modernisation theory, which began in the 1960s, assumed that *Homo americanus* is the ideal for the world population. But while it clearly had psychological implications, it was essentially a sociological theory; and when it flourished, 'cultural psychology' was not yet on the map. On the other hand, during the 1950s 'cross-cultural psychology', which had originated with the Torres Straits Expedition at the end of the 19th century, re-emerged after a largely fallow period and rapidly expanded.

It was not until some two decades later that individualism/collectivism was initiated by Hofstede and further developed by Triandis and others. It gained considerable prominence for some time, but, as Hwang himself makes clear, there is a consensus that its original, relatively simple, formulation is not sustainable. Although no doubt significant, it constitutes only part, and by no means the major part, of cross-cultural psychology as a whole.

Without wishing to minimise the credit

In response to our special issue GUSTAV JAHODA sets out a different historical analysis of cross-cultural psychology and finds the concepts of 'indigenous psychology' and 'universal psychology' hard to pin down.

due to Hofstede, whom like many others working in the field I know and respect, it should be noted that his research using scales was undertaken with IBM employees. Although it covered many nations across the globe, such a sample can hardly be said to be representative of the world population; it omits the poor and underprivileged, who, as all the contributors

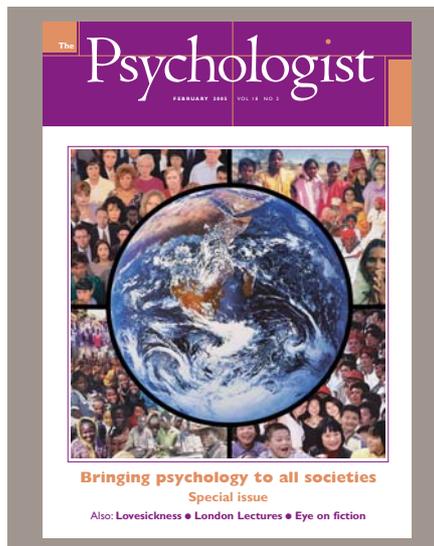
particular cultures, and as such can be very useful in elucidating psychological aspects of social problems. More recently the two streams, 'cultural' and 'cross-cultural', have tended to converge.

In sum, as Hwang himself rightly put it 'Modernisation theory is basically an American-centred academic construction' and is not 'a wave in cultural psychology'. Individualism/collectivism does belong to the history of (cross-)cultural psychology, but is only one strand in it (cf. Jahoda & Krewer, 1997).

On 'indigenous psychologies'

At the outset we need to clarify what is meant by 'indigenous psychologies'. There are at least two very different kinds, the first of which is known as 'ethnopsychology'. All non-Western cultures have some kind of traditional psychology dealing with such features as personality, self, emotion, and so on. Such a psychology may be highly elaborate, and is always part of a wider belief system. This form of psychology is documented by anthropologists, either for a whole culture area (e.g. Parrinder, 1976, on West African psychology), or in monographs devoted to a particular people (e.g. Levy, 1973, on Tahitians). Ethnopsychologies almost invariably differ radically from the scientific ones, and are usually incommensurable with them.

Some pronouncements by non-Western critics might lead one to believe that they were advocating such a traditional psychology. For instance, in the special issue Allwood cites an Indian one as follows: 'What was found problematic [with Western psychology] was the insertion within an internationalist context of a canonized European definition of rationality and universality.' One might imagine that a substitution of a purely Indian psychology is suggested, but this is hardly ever the case. Today most 'indigenous psychology' is, by and large, Western psychology extended and adapted more or less extensively so as to be more suitable for use



agree, need most help. Such people are often at best semi-literate, so it isn't feasible to test them with paper-and-pencil measures. Unfortunately, these have increasingly become the method of choice, being easy to administer and analyse. An earlier generation of cross-cultural psychologists more often also worked with people in face-to-face situations. Although labour-intensive, such an approach can be used with illiterate people and yields insights unattainable by surveys alone.

Cross-cultural psychologists typically make comparisons between cultures, frequently with the goal of pinning down universals; I return to this issue below. It was only some two decades ago that 'cultural psychology' in the narrow sense came on the scene. At first it split off from cross-cultural psychology, since it focuses primarily on the intensive study of

in local contexts; this may include the introduction of culture-specific contexts.

Until now indigenisation (barbarous term!) has not proceeded very far, as the review by Sinha (1997) indicates, although he tried very hard. Most seems to have been done in the Philippines, but I am not aware of any indigenous psychology which constitutes a coherent system of the kind seemingly envisaged by the contributors to the special issue.

The goal of a universal psychology

All three contributors accept the goal of a universal psychology, though not without reservations. None of them explains how it could be achieved, which is perhaps not surprising.

The most enthusiastic and articulate advocate of a universal psychology is Berry, who presents a figure resembling an analysis of variance model in which topics are listed on the left, universals for each topic on the right, underneath the topics indigenous psychology 'yielded by integration', and at the bottom right a two-way integration 'yields a universal psychology' (Kim & Berry, 1993). It is a neat and imaginative scheme, but remote from reality, since the key notion of 'integration' is not explained.

In my opinion the whole notion of a universal psychology as an integration of different elements is empty. For one thing it assumes the existence of a *single* monolithic Western psychology. Furthermore, as hinted at by Allwood, there is a gradient of increasing susceptibility to cultural effects from neuropsychology to such areas as child development, mental illness and social psychology. Competent psychologists working in the latter areas have long been sensitive to such influences, and it is at those levels that indigenous inputs would probably be most fruitful.

Finally, Berry's suggestion cited by Lunt that Western psychology (or, I would add, at least some of it) could well be regarded as just another indigenous psychology. Current experimental social psychology might then be a suitable candidate. It could be classed as an indigenous psychology of American college students, since many of its findings are not replicable in other cultures (Amir & Sharon, 1987; Jahoda, 1979). This is because while some aspects of social behaviour are no doubt evolutionary products, others are a function of cultural norms, beliefs, values, and so

on, shared by the experimenters and assumed to be universals. As Gerard and Conolley (1972, p.242) disarmingly wrote: 'Given the abiding faith in basic universals of humankind, the social psychologist might just as well work with...the students in his classes.'

Fortunately such naivety has become rare, but one finds hardly any texts in which the limitations of Euramerican social psychology are admitted. There would be a case for, say, an Indian indigenous social psychology of equally restricted validity, but that would not mean that the methods as such needed to differ. Incidentally, it

'no coherent, let alone convincing, case was made for indigenous psychologies'

could be argued that a 'discursive' social psychology would *ipso facto* have to be indigenous. However, the contributors to the special issue were not concerned with any particular field, but with some reservations sought to make a case for the desirability of indigenous psychologies in general. Hence their propositions need further scrutiny.

Is there a case for 'numerous indigenous psychologies'?

In their introduction the editors of the special issue ask 'How can Western approaches to the study of humans and their behaviour deal authentically with conceptualisations from fundamentally different traditions?', implying that scientific psychology is unequal to that task. Yet when one looks at the (often inconsistent) ways the contributors formulated their views, there is little indication that indigenous psychologies would do any better.

Hwang writes that 'The emergence of

indigenous psychologies can be understood as a search by non-Western psychologists for cultural identity in the power structure of the new world order'. This is of course a purely ideological justification that says nothing about effectiveness. Later he states: 'The process of modernisation enables non-Western researchers to depict the psychology of their people in a scientific way.' It is hard to know what exactly this means, but it seems to suggest that indigenous psychologies should be studied scientifically. If so, these psychologies would become the objects rather than the methods of study.

Allwood formulates his position with greater care, but even he succumbs to vague generalities: 'A universal psychology informed by various indigenous psychologies would clarify the degree to which conclusions generalise to many societies...' It would take too long to deconstruct this sentence, so only two brief points will be made. First, the weasel-word here is 'informed', open to much the same objections as 'integrate' above; secondly, one might ask how comparisons could be made with a mixture of universal and individual psychologies? In sum, no coherent, let alone convincing, case was made for indigenous psychologies, and not a single concrete instance of their supposed advantages has been provided. The two examples described as such by Allwood are nothing of the kind. Studies inspired by, or adapted to, specific cultural contexts are commonplace in mainstream scientific (not just Western scientific) practice.

In conclusion, it is regrettable that the special issue has missed an opportunity for throwing light on significant issues by using much of its space for airy, if well-meaning, speculations.

■ Professor Gustav Jahoda is at the University of Strathclyde. E-mail: g.jahoda@strath.ac.uk.

References

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| Amir, Y. & Sharon, I. (1987). Are social psychological laws cross-culturally valid? <i>Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology</i> , 18, 383-470. | Psychology Bulletin, 5, 142-148. | Chicago: University of Chicago Press. |
| Gerard, H.B. & Conolley, E.S. (1972). Conformity. In C.G. McClintock (Ed.) <i>Experimental social psychology</i> (pp.237-269). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. | Jahoda, G. & Krewer, B. (1997). History of cross-cultural and cultural psychology. In J.W. Berry, Y.H. Poortinga & J. Pandey (Eds.) <i>Handbook of cross-cultural psychology: Vol. 1</i> . Boston: Allyn & Bacon. | Parrinder, E.G. (1976). <i>West African psychology: A comparative study of psychological and religious thought</i> . New York: AMS Press. |
| Jahoda, G. (1979). A cross-cultural perspective on experimental social psychology. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 5, 142-148. | Kim, U. & Berry, J.W. (Eds.) (1993). <i>Indigenous psychologies</i> . Newbury Park, CA: Sage. | Sinha, D. (1997). Indigenizing psychology. In J.W. Berry, Y.H. Poortinga & J. Pandey (Eds.) <i>Handbook of cross-cultural psychology: Vol. 1</i> . Boston: Allyn & Bacon. |
| | Levy, R. (1973). <i>Tahitians. mind and experience in the Society Islands</i> . | |