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Indigenous Cognition? Review of J.W. Berry, S.H. Irvine, E.B. Hunt (Eds.), *Indigenous Cognition: Functioning in Cultural Context*

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Abstract

"What is known about the cognitive functions of other peoples that could enable extant psychology to become more comprehensive, to attain a 'universal' cognitive psychology?" This question was the focus of a 1986 NATO workshop held at Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) whose working theme was "indigenous cognition and models of information processing." The primary goal of the present volume, which contains 13 papers, is to bring together evidence from "studies of cognition in those populations that have remained well outside industrialised society: the hunting people, the nomads, and the peasants of the contemporary world" (p. 2). The volume begins wtih a general section that includes papers dealing primarily with theoretical concerns in cross-cultural cognitive psychology and continues with four studies among African populations and with three among Native American populations.

Disciplines

Cognition and Perception | Cognitive Psychology | Comparative Psychology | Education | Educational Psychology | Multicultural Psychology | Psychiatry and Psychology

question of what is an adequate model. Noam's chapter cautions that the metaphor of stage may not apply in the same way to personality as it does to more basic cognition and then goes on to offer a combined Piagetian–psychodynamic stage model of perspective taking. I was especially intrigued by Noam's argument that development has costs: Increased complexity of self without concommitant increases in ego strength can produce pathology. Cowan's chapter organizes developmental psychopathology's huge array of forces for stability and change into a rather large, but tidy and empirically grounded, matrix. I liked Cowan's recognition of a rich panoply of clinical goals and methods, including family systems (in contrast to the narrower, psychoanalytic paradigms of most of the other chapters). The chapter by Cicchetti, Toth, Bush, and Gillespie provides a fine overview of research on a disparate set of problems—Down syndrome, non-organic failure to thrive, children of depressed parents, and child abuse—organized according to the succession of children's developmental tasks. Breslow's chapter advances the theoretical work even further through a critical discussion of the other chapters. Much of the book seems to be attempting to assimilate psychopathology to Piagetian theory; fittingly, however, Breslow suggests that Piagetian theory itself may have to accomodate to the phenomena of child psychopathology.

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Indigenous Cognition?

J. W. Berry, S. H. Irvine, and
E. B. Hunt (Eds.)
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The Netherlands)

Review by
Daniel A. Wagner *and* Iddo Gal

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"What is known about the cognitive functions of other peoples that could enable extant psychology to become more comprehensive, to attain a 'universal' cognitive psychology?" This question was the focus of a 1986 NATO workshop held at Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) whose working theme was "indigenous cognition and models of information processing." The primary goal of the present volume, which contains 13 papers, is to bring together evidence from "studies of cognition in those populations that have remained well outside industrialised society: the hunting people, the nomads, and the peasants of the contemporary world" (p. 2). The volume begins with a general section that includes papers dealing primarily with theoretical concerns in cross-cultural cognitive psychology and continues with four studies among African populations and with three among native North American populations.

As the editors suggest, unlike research using ready-made, standardized Western tests presented in "Euroamerican laboratories, in which prime subjects are Anglophone adolescents whose responses are collected Monday to Friday during business hours, with two coffee breaks and a lunch hour during the day," the notion of *indigenous cognition* suggests that psychological research attempting to understand people's cognitive life should be informed by "*their* views and *their* understanding of what *their* cognitive life is about" (p. 2). However, as the editors

also admit, indigenous cognition is not an easily defined term, because it may also refer to any instance of daily thinking, overlapping to some extent with the more popular notion of "everyday cognition" (Rogoff & Lave, 1984).

In the opening chapter, Berry elaborates his well-known framework for ecological analysis, highlighting the need to study "the set of cognitive goals which are collectively shared and towards which children are socialized in a particular society . . . since one cannot assess how far a person has gotten unless one understands where he is going" (p. 12). Several chapters present evidence dealing with indigenous conceptualizations of cognitive functioning and show how these may match or deviate from Western views. As is often the case with cross-cultural work, there are wide variations in the scope and methods of analysis. For example, Georgas provides a global ecosocial description of a single society: Greece. A linguistic analysis of proverbs is used by Irvine in his study of thinking among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Das and Verster use test scores to point to information-processing or reasoning strategies that are more prevalent among members of certain societies. Although each of these chapters offers an interesting *tour de l'horizon* of the variety of analytic tools and conceptual models available to cross-cultural psychologists, they also highlight the complexity of making sense of any one finding without the application of a multilevel framework of analysis. Some chapters, such as Deregowski and

Bentley's study of size constancy with Bushmen subjects, provide the kind of narrowly focused technical study beyond which the workshop itself attempted to go. Others, such as those of Berry, van de Koppel, and Annis, use more comprehensive and elaborated research designs. Yet, even though testing instruments were adapted to the local language and made use of local materials from central Africa, little evidence is provided that cognitive style (field dependence or independence) had any indigenous meaning to the cultural groups studied. In this kind of book, it would seem that the question would not be how much field dependence or independence was displayed but, rather, what *indigenous* cognitive styles are typical in that culture.

Among the more interesting papers are descriptions of two studies that analyzed questions of language, culture, and thought. De Kerckhove examines the interrelation between the direction of writing of contextual and sequential orthographies and hemispheric specialization of brain functioning. This treatment of writing systems leaves out many of the cultural groups discussed elsewhere in the book—that is, those without established orthographies but with highly developed oral traditions. Hunt and Banaji offer an elaborate cognitive science view of the Whorfian hypothesis, arguing that the "variations and invariances in information processing across languages should be predictable from a model of the mechanics of thought" (p. 81). They explore the constraints on thinking (which they take to be "symbolic computation") imposed by language and speculate about the feasibility of understanding "other people's" language (and hence thinking) when observers are not sufficiently immersed in the culture of interest. Although these two papers contribute to cross-cultural theory, they, too, fail to address the topic of the volume's title.

Even a cursory reading of the various chapters is sufficient to reveal the widely different agendas guiding researchers who engage in cross-cultural research. One such difference is between those interested in theory construction, or the establishment of psychological universals, and those interested in making cross-cultural psychology more relevant and attuned to the needs of local cultures. Chrisjohn, Towson, and Peters's chapter "Indian Achievement in School: Adaptation to Hostile Environments" will make fascinating reading for those interested in the link between psychological

research and social policy, at the same time highlighting the tension between indigenous (read *minority*) as opposed to institutional (read *majority*) conceptions of educational goals. Murdoch's chapter "Cree Cognition in Natural and Educational Contexts" and Verster's analysis of the applicability of Western constructs to African populations address similar issues.

One may ask: Have the authors truly addressed the challenge inherent in the title? Is *this* "indigenous cognition?" To what degree have the authors advanced our thinking about cognition in local or emic terms? That a number of well-known specialists met to address this topic is, of course, no small achievement.

However, after reading these chapters, one is left feeling that only a very small, hesitant step has been made toward the conceptualization of cognition through "local" eyes. Relatively little attempt is made to link these papers with the work of anthropologists, and no papers were prepared by specialists from the particular culture areas that were the focus of the volume. Future research on indigenous cognition will have to provide such links in order to delete the "?".

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Self-Esteem Enhancement: The Hard Work of Helping Children Feel Better

Alice W. Pope, Susan M. McHale, and W. Edward Craighead
Self-Esteem Enhancement With Children and Adolescents
England: Pergamon Press, 1988.
166 pp. ISBN 0-08-032765-6 (hardcover); 0-08-032764-8 (paperback). $22.50 (£16.50) hardcover; $12.95 (£9.95) paperback

Review by
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Alice W. Pope is assistant professor of psychology at Texas Tech University (Lubbock). ■ Susan M. McHale is associate professor of human development at Pennsylvania State University (University Park). ■ W. Edward Craighead, professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Division of Medical Psychology at Duke University Medical Center (Durham, North Carolina), is the editor of Behavior Therapy. ■ Maurice J. Elias, associate professor of psychology at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, New Jersey), is recipient of the National Mental Health Association's Lela Rowland Prevention Award.

The fields of psychology and education appear united in the view that enhancement of children's and adolescents' self-esteem should be a national priority. Deficiencies in self-esteem have been implicated in *DSM-III-R* disorders and in a host of other problem areas, such as substance abuse, delinquency, school failure and dropout, and teenage pregnancy. The psychological benefits of feeling good about oneself may seem obvious, but the task of self-esteem enhancement is quite challenging.

The authors have entered into the fray with a book for practitioners that is based on a theoretical framework about self-esteem and a program that the authors say they have used with success. They view high self-esteem as a " 'healthy' view of the self—one that realistically encompasses shortcomings but is not harshly critical of them" (p. 2). Low self-esteem is a more slippery construct. It is evidenced by "an artificially positive self attitude to the world" or a "retreat" into oneself (p. 2). Self-esteem is believed to encompass five areas: social, academic, family, body image, and global. The essence of this book is to present a series of activities that practitioners can use to