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Refections on the Cross–Cultural Challenge to Western Psychology: Implications for Theory and Practice

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Psychology emerged from philosophy and the life and physical sciences as a separate discipline in the latter half of the 19th century. Europe and America were the primary geographic settings for the elaboration of the content and methodologies which, today, underlie much of psychology as an academic enterprise and a professional practice. In the process, a western (Euro–American) bias became an inevitable dimension of the psychology exported by Europeans and Americans to other parts of the world. Given the increasing contact between psychologists of different nationalities in recent years and the ongoing ethnic/cultural diversification of those very western societies in which psychology originally developed as an academic discipline and a professional practice, psychology has begun to respond to a cross–cultural challenge which asserts that psychological constructs, models, theories and practices are very much rooted in the historical and cultural contexts in which they arise.

Many definitions have been offered of "culture". Jenkins and Karno (1992) suggest that "Culture can be defined as a generalized, coherent context of shared symbols and meanings that persons dynamically create and recreate for themselves in the process of social interaction. In everyday life, culture is something people come to take for granted – their way of feeling, thinking and being in the world – the unselfconscious medium of experience, interpretation, and action." (p. 10).

Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, and Misra (1996) have suggested that the emerging understanding that psychological science has been rooted in particular Western cultural and historical biases opens the door for a multi–cultural science of psychology in which dialogue between psychologists in different cultural contexts is a key component. There is an increasing realization that North American psychology or European psychology cannot in and of themselves form the basis of a universal psychology. Moreover, the professional practice of psychology in North America or Europe cannot be exported to other cultural contexts with no regard to the consequences of such contexts for the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

The cross–cultural challenge for western psychology expresses itself in terms of questions related to the conceptualization of knowledge, the accommodation of culturally–embedded accounts of psychological functioning, and the appropriate content and form of psychological (mental health) services delivered to culturally diverse populations between and within formal national boundaries. Trimble (1988) echoes this concern as he points to the need for culturally equivalent research tools if psychology is to contribute to the solution of practical problems in a variety of domains, including mental health services.

Western/American Psychology as Ethnocentric

While western psychology has begun to address the implications of cultural diversity in recent years, it remains true, as Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) argue, that much of psychology, by which they mean "American psychology", continues to be ethnocentric in the sense of developing theories, models, instruments and services primarily intended for the local context. Jahoda (1988) has criticized American experimental social psychologists who show little or no

concern for the insights of cross–cultural psychology. He insists that theorists must ask whether their theories generalize to other cultures. Psychologists must ask whether the problems of significance in one culture are meaningful in another and whether experiments can be conducted in conceptually equivalent ways across cultures? He argues that social psychologists must acknowledge that the American tendency to regard internal psychological processes as central and primary is far from universal.

Tedeschi (1988) encourages a challenge of what he calls the ideologically–based theories of North American psychologists. The antidote he offers is more extensive study of the self across time and cultures. Mays, Jeffrey, Sabourin, and Walker (1996) point to the widespread influence which American psychology continues to exert in both developed and developing countries. This tendency ought to be tempered, in their opinion, by more bilateral and multilateral exchanges in the interest of moving American psychology to an explicit acknowledgment that the values and principles of individuality, abstract ideals and rationalism are, in a very real sense, uniquely American. While American approaches remain dominant in many parts of the world, there is an increasing need, as Lunt and Poortinga (1996) argue, to develop psychology as a science and as a profession to meet local needs. They focus in particular on how this is happening in Europe.

Psychology as an International Force - the Prerequisites

Pawlik and d'Ydewalle (1996) are interested in how psychology can contribute to the fostering of international cooperation in such fields as the planning of educational curricula, health promotion and disease prevention. They go so far as to predict that "the next century, the second one in the history of our science,

may well become the century of psychology at large: a century in which psychologists will be requested to play key roles in bringing behavioral science–based expertise to bear under these profoundly new conditions of human life." (p. 494). However, none of this is possible without the understanding that psychological conceptualizations, principles and methods do not exist apart from a historical tradition and a set of cultural presuppositions which people are strongly inclined to accept as self–evident. Theories must be generalized in the interests of a greater universality. As Triandis (1988) points out, sensitivity to such culturally modulated dimensions as simple–complex, tight–loose, and collectivism–individualism will help to increase the generality of theories. This view is shared by Sharon and Amir (1988) who argue for the vital necessity of conducting replications of studies in various cultures if there is to be any hope of coming to general and universal conclusions regarding social psychological phenomena.

Writing from an American context, Moghaddam (1987) suggests that the internationalization of psychology must incorporate three worlds of psychological research and practice including: (1) the world of psychological knowledge and application drawn solely from within the United States; (2) those bodies of knowledge and practice developed by other developed countries; and (3) the indigenous psychologies of developing countries. All three worlds are important to the developing psychology of the future.

Selected Studies of Culturally-Related Differences in Human Psychological Functioning

Studies seeking to compare psychological phenomena of one sort or another have long been a feature of the psychological literature. Reasons for this interest vary. Some investigators have a desire simply to document such differences as may exist between peoples of different cultural traditions regarding par-

ticular psychological phenomena. Others seek to develop theoretical accounts of human psychological functioning in one or more aspects which incorporate demonstrable differences between peoples of differing cultural traditions. These interests often overlap and both may, on occasion, be fueled by a need to account for perceived educational, economic or political differences between ethnic groups within or beyond formal national boundaries.

Many examples of cross–cultural studies could be cited. To indicate the flavour of this type of research, a few studies are described which attempt to delineate differences in regard to a variety of psychological phenomena and variables. The focus is primarily, but not exclusively, on Japanese and Americans. Saito (1994) has explored cross–cultural differences in colour preference in three Asian cities. Azuma (1986), Stevenson et al (1986), and Peak (1991) have all pointed to the important link between psychological development and educational practice in Japan. Miyamoto (1989) has examined the concept of achievement motive among Japanese college students while Hamilton et al (1991) have explored the roles of group and gender in Japanese and American elementary classrooms. Shigemasu, Yokoyama, Stern, and Komazaki (1993) studied American and Japanese students in regard to creative attitudes and suggested that American students score significantly higher on flexibility, analytical problem solving, entrepreneurship and cooperation while their Japanese counterparts scored higher on cooperation and perseverance. Toshima, Demick, Miyatani, Ishii and Wapner (1996) have reported a study suggestive of cultural differences between Americans and Japanese in the expression of non–verbal behaviours when subjects are asked to perform cognitive tasks.

Cultural contributions to informing the roles of teachers and parents have been the focus of a number of studies. Kurachi (1987) conducted a cross–cultural analysis of teachers' and parents' perception of and attitudes toward conflict situations in Japanese and American school settings. He found significant differ-

ences between Japanese and American mothers and Japanese and American teachers in regard to the assumptions surrounding the misdeeds of children in school settings. Kurachi interpreted his findings as indicative of a possible discrepancy between inner feelings and actions between Japanese and American participants and cautioned against unwarranted transplanting of the educational ideas and methods of one country to another. Mizuno et al (1990) found discrepancies between Japanese, Australian and Korean teachers in regard to the consistency between their teaching beliefs and teaching behaviours. In this regard, Australian teachers were found to be most congruent, Korean teachers least congruent and Japanese teachers the most ambiguous.

Within a multi–cultural country like the United States, concern has been expressed for differences in educational and economic achievement between different ethnic sub–groups. Asian–American students have tended to be very successful in a number of spheres prompting investigators such as Hartman and Askounis (1989) to inquire whether Asian–American students are really the "model minority" they appear to be. Mizuno (1992) compared the causal beliefs of Japanese and Japanese–American senior high school students as they related to mathematical achievement and found that Japanese students were very pessimistic in the sense of expecting failure, more inclined to accept blame for failure, and more sensitive to evaluation by others compared to their Japanese–American counterparts, an outcome Mizuno sought to explain in terms of "learned helplessness". Sternberg, Dornbusch, and Brown (1992) challenged three widely held explanations for the superior school performance of Asian–American compared to African– and Hispanic–American adolescents. They attributed differences between these groups to different combinations of authoritative parenting and peer support experienced by the students.

It is clear, therefore, that there is a great deal of evidence in the literature to suggest differences in psychological variables and phenomena across cultural

boundaries. The significance of these differences for psychological theory and practice represents the cross-cultural challenge to contemporary Western/ American psychology. Implications of such findings for a future "psychology of the self" are considered below.

Psychologies of the Self - Universals and Particularities

The study of the universality and/or specificity of particular psychological phenomena has been the focus of considerable effort of late. The cross-cultural study of emotional experience and expression with its search for what is universal and what is specific to a particular cultural context is one such example (e.g., see Matsumoto et al, 1988; Izard, 1994; Matsumoto,1992; Mauro et al, 1992; Russell, 1991; Tanaka-Matsumi et al, 1988). Another is the ongoing attempt to delineate a psychology of the self which can accommodate the possibility, and many say the reality, of culturally-linked differences in the ways people construe the self. (e.g., White and Kirkpatrick, 1985; Marsella, DeVos, and Hsu, 1985; Triandis, 1989).

In an article entitled "Why the self Is empty: toward a historically situated psychology," Cushman (1990) noted that many psychologists, especially American psychologists, have treated the bounded, masterful, individualistic self as inviolate and removed from the constraints of time and culture. He argues that American psychology must recognize the ethnocentric nature of its discourse on the self. For Cushman, the self amounts to a shared understanding in a particular cultural context. This understanding relates to beliefs about humanity's origins, place, and fate in the universe, what are socially acceptable/ unacceptable beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, and so on. From Cushman's perspective, the self is embedded in a social matrix and is, itself, a social construct. Cultures infuses and

completes individuals and thus amounts to far more than a surface phenomenon or veneer. Cushman's concern is with what he sees as the current, decontextualized, increasingly empty American self which is contributing to a variety of problems of both an individual and a social/community nature.

Cushman's assertions have not gone unchallenged. Col (1991) counters that the self appears empty only if viewed from the perspective of a literate, individualistic self, an American conceptualization of the self now somewhat at odds with reality. He argues that Americans are now developing a less individualistic conceptualization of the self which has yet to be supported by the local social matrix. This leads to an illusion of an "empty self" because the perspective is no longer appropriate. Rostafinski (1991) suggests that Cushman hasn't definitively disproved the idea that developmental and historical change may in fact represent the actualization of stable characteristics of the self. He points to neuropsychology, psychopharmacology and even Jungian psychology, with its notions of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, as examples of specialty areas in contemporary American psychology where the actualization of inborn potentials and limitations is seen as the fundamental determinant of the self which ultimately emerges.

Smith (1994) wonders if postmodernism has put the self at risk. Like many others, he freely acknowledges that unique historical, cultural, political and economic circumstances have given rise to a western conceptualization of self which is much more individualistic, hence much less collectivistic, than that found in many other societies. Smith is appreciative of the dividends accruing from an individualistic orientation: "The cultural focus during the present century on the autonomous, self-contained individual with a rich conscious and even unconscious inner life may be partly responsible for the popularity and proliferation of psychology as a science and a profession and of personality and clinical psychology among its sub-fields." (p. 406). However, something has gone

wrong when more and more people have a sense of an empty or incomplete self in a society where self–actualization may often seem like the one and only goal. This American dilemma is leading to a change in psychology's value assumptions in Smith's estimation.

American/Western vs. Japanese Conceptualizations of the Self

The Western/American understandings of "self" are increasingly recognized as a subset among many options one can find in the world. Geertz (1979) suggests that the western self is construed as a "distinctive whole" contrasting with other such wholes or selves. Shweder and Bourne (1982) characterize the western self as egocentric. Weisz et al (1984) claim that the western self stands out from the group while Spence (1985) describes the western self as self–reliant and independent. Johnson (1985) sees the western self as rationalistic. Sampson (1985, 1988) refers to the western self as a highly centralized, bounded and self–contained equilibrium structure. For Schwartz (1986), the western self is selfish. Furth (1995) refers to the Western, especially American, tendency to focus on the self–contained individual.

Hermans, Kempen and van Loon (1992) have considered the limits of individualistic and rationalistic conceptualizations of the self and seek to bypass the ethnocentric Western view by proposing that the self is better viewed as dialogical. In practice, this means that the self can imaginatively occupy a range of positions in space and time. This dialogical self is constrained by particular historical and cultural factors but it is a flexible, social self which has the capacity to be both "here" and "there" and to imaginatively assume the perspective of the other. This view finds some resonance in the argument of Guisinger and Blatt (1994) that western, primarily American, theories of psychological development

cannot claim to be universal when they are based almost entirely on an egocentric view of the person. They insist on a sociocentric view of psychological development which stresses the self's relatedness to others

In cross–cultural psychological, anthropological and sociological studies, Japan has often served as a contrast culture for purposes of analyzing cultural differences in a wide range of phenomena. Deserved or not, Japan has long had a reputation of being unique and apart from the rest of the world. The Japanese, themselves, have been inclined to foster this view. Ruth Benedict's (1946, 1985) classic post–World War II study, "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword," was one of the first of many attempts to reveal the subtleties of Japanese society and culture to a wider world. Roland (1988) has compared India and Japan in terms of how the self is construed in these societies. Lebra (1983) offered a psychocultural view of the Japanese self based on the distinction between shame and guilt. Takeo Doi's (1986) "The Anatomy of Self: the Individual Versus Society," introduced the concept of "amae" as explanatory of many aspects of Japanese social convention. Rosenberger's (1992) "Japanese Sense of Self" represents still another attempt to come to grips with the Japanese conceptualization of the self while Takata (1995) has recently looked at age differences in the rendering of the self in Japanese culture. Takata argued that his findings could be accounted for reasonably well by Markus and Kitayama's (1991) recent distinction between "independent" and "interdependent" construals of the self.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) have argued that people in different cultures have strikingly different construals of the self, of others, and of the relationship between self and others. Whether these differences are surface phenomena or represent core differences in orientation remain unclear. Nevertheless, Markus and Kitayama believe that differing construals of the self can profoundly determine the nature of cognition, emotion and motivation. Interdependent cultures, many of which are found in Asia, emphasize attending to others, fitting in and

harmonious interdependence with them. Others are included within the boundary of the self. The Japanese are used as a particular example of a society fostering an interdependent construal of the self. The United States is taken as a primary example of a society which fosters an independent construal of the self where attending to one's self and maximizing one's distinctiveness and unique attributes is given greater priority than cultivating a sense of connectedness with others. Others exist outside the boundary of the independent construal of the self. To understand individual human behaviour, one must have an understanding of the view of the self held by the individual.

Kitayama and Markus (1994) extend these arguments as editors of and contributors to a recent volume entitled "Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence." Collectively, the argument is made that emotions are culturally, socially and linguistically shaped even while embedded at a basic level in the structure and function of the nervous system. Emotions are, ultimately, a social phenomenon. The hard–wired aspects of emotional arousal and experience must be appropriately tuned to make it possible for people to adapt effectively to their environments.

Kiuchi (1995) has recently constructed a scale to measure independent and interdependent construals of the self in Japan. His results tend to support the distinction between these differing orientations toward the self as proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991).

The Impact of Cultural Differences on the Practice of Psychology: Mental health and Mental Illness

The foregoing suggests that the cross–cultural challenge to psychology, especially Western or American psychology, will have consequences for how psychologists offer their professional services in cross–cultural and multi–ethnic

settings. Brislin (1990) points out that sensitivity to cultural differences will affect how psychologists contribute to: (1) cross–cultural testing and assessment; (2) family and home–based interventions in different societies; (3) indigenous psychology as science and practice; (4) work attitudes, leadership styles and managerial behaviours in different cultures; (5) dispute processing in and between different cultures; (6) an understanding of the acculturation of individuals moving between cultures; (7) the relationship between environment, culture and behaviour; and (8) culture and health, especially mental health.

Among the most important and most enduring of these areas is mental health where psychologists have long been engaged in rendering diagnostic and therapeutic services to the public. Given the tendency to export Western/American based models of psychopathology together with associated therapeutic regimens, it is especially important to recognize the cultural contributions to the manifestation of symptoms and the course of therapeutic intervention.

Jenkins and Karno (1992) suggest that "Culture is ... the most generalized baseline from which individuals may deviate and hence invaluable for comparative studies of psychopathology." (p. 10). Draguns (1990) argues that the embedding of psychopathology in a cultural milieu has practical implications for understanding the origins of the disorder and the most effective course of treatment. Jenkins (1994) points out that the most important issues when exploring the relationship between culture, emotion and psychopathology include: (1) documenting what differences, if any, exist across cultures regarding the course and outcome of psychopathology; (2) recognizing any inclination to de–emphasize the cultural aspect of illness in favour of the biological dimension; and (3) ensuring that diagnostic labels developed in one cultural context are not applied in another without due regard for coherence and validity in the other culture.

The question arises of how to reliably distinguish between "normal" and "abnormal" in different cultural settings. Jenkins notes that even the most

"biogenic" of disorders – schizophrenia and depression – display a heterogeneous symptomology both within and between cultures implying an important role for family and community in modulating the link between culture and the course of these disorders. Those charged with the professional management of such disorders need to be aware that cultural variability in social response to the problem (tolerance, support, hostility) and culturally linked variations in emotional response to the problem may account in part for different disease outcomes (See also Tseng and McDermott, 1981; Kleinman and Good, 1985; Nakane, Ohta, Radford and Yan, 1991; Nakane, Ohta, Uchino, and Takada, 1988; Jablensky, Sartorius, Ernberg, and Anker, 1992; Niem, 1989).

Counseling Cross-Culturally - Japanese and Japanese-Americans

Much of the literature discussed above suggests that the Japanese are more inclusive of significant others in their decision making and very exclusive of those who are not interdependent with them. This suggests that counselors working with Japanese or Japanese–Americans in psychological distress may need to modify their techniques to accommodate different expectations on the part of the client regarding an appropriate therapeutic strategy. Reviews of the counseling literature with Japanese–Americans tend to support this observation (Henkin, 1985; Leong, 1986; Uba, 1994, pp. 10–20). Available evidence suggests that the decision whether to seek counseling and what type and to what extent are molded by Japanese cultural patterns (Tracey, Leong & Glidden, 1986; Gim, Atkinson & Whitely, 1990). Addressing counseling issues with Japanese–Americans necessitates to some degree a familiarity with the original social–cultural teachings of Japan as well as other cultural influences. As a result we can assume that there are similar counseling problems among Japanese families and Japa-

nese–American families.

It has been fairly well documented that Japanese and Japanese–Americans under–utilize counseling services for the sake of relieving emotional or relational problems (Atkinson, Lowe & Matthews, 1995; Bui & Takeuchi, 1992; Snowden & Cheung, 1990; Uomoto & Gorsuch, 1984). On the other hand, Japanese–Americans seem to have little problem seeking help for educational or vocational/career concerns (Leong, 1986; D. Sue & D.W. Sue, 1977; Tinloy, 1978). Explorations of this disparity have been undertaken and they suggest that Japanese–Americans tend to look to their family first for help to save "face" and to avoid being stigmatized by others when it comes to emotional or family counseling (S. Sue & Kitano, 1973; Webster & Fretz, 1978). As a result they are reticent to share family matters with non–family members, even counselors. Educational and vocational counseling, however, are actively encouraged in the Japanese–American community and are considered less personally revealing (D. Sue & D.W. Sue, 1993; D.W. Sue & Kirk, 1975; Tracey et al., 1986).

Henkin (1985) offered a "primer" for counseling Japanese–Americans. A summary of suitable techniques may be found in Henkin (1985) and other counseling techniques may be found in Uba (1994). Although these techniques have not been thoroughly tested for effectiveness (S. Sue, 1977), those familiar with counseling Japanese have focused almost exclusively on cultural approaches to individual counseling (D.W. Sue, 1992; D.W. Sue, 1994; Uba, 1994).

Henkin (1985) reports the view of a psychologist in San Francisco to the effect that "...while much of what I do seems to be to work at resolution of conflicts within the family, the ultimate goal is to reintegrate the person into the family." Henkin believes that this cultural effect is true for possibly up to five generations removed from the original cultural setting.

While cultural and family influences are paramount in counseling Japanese and Japanese– Americans, there is a dearth of research on family dynamics and

family therapy with Japanese or Japanese–Americans. Many of the theorists and investigators cited above recommend cultural factors (e.g., family relationships) as a major point of concern when counseling Japanese. Despite this, only a few researchers have offered techniques for dealing with counseling a Japanese–American family (Ho, 1987; Kim, 1985; D.W. Sue, 1992).

Yamamoto and Acosta (1982) have demonstrated that family therapy is more appropriate for first (issei) and second (nisei) generation Japanese. They concluded that the closer a generation is to its actual Asian culture the greater the need for family therapy. Subsequent generations tend to prefer individual therapy though this does not preclude the need for family therapy among these successive generations.

A lack of substantial research is revealed in a search of the Psychological Abstracts from 1991 to 1996. There is only one mention of research with Japanese families using family therapy. Surprisingly family research has not taken a priority in Japan itself. A listing of psychology journals published in Japan shows no journal exclusively dedicated to researching family dynamics or family therapy. It is ironic, perhaps, that the scholars of an interdependent society are not actively involved in family therapy research.

The preceding observations strongly indicate that the next critical step in research for counseling with Japanese as well as Japanese–Americans is in the field of family dynamics, systems theory and family therapy. Answers are required to the following questions: (1) what are the effective techniques used by counselors in individual counseling and why are these techniques effective (S. Sue, 1977); (2) what strategies can be used that will include the family in the counseling process without a tremendous amount of resistance on the family's part; (3) is family therapy viable with Japanese families; (4) how effective are current Western family therapy theories when applied to a Japanese family in a counseling context; and (5) what are the similarities and differences among Jap-

anese families and Japanese–American families?

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has sought to document significant aspects of the cross–cultural challenge to psychology as an academic discipline and a profession. As an academic discipline, psychology is increasingly obliged to incorporate the notions of cultural and historical context in its formulations of the dynamics of a wide range of psychological phenomena. Ethnocentric biases in such efforts must now at least be recognized if not eliminated. Those who offer psychological services in culturally pluralistic communities must be aware of the complications which may arise if the perspectives and practices they bring to bear on a problem are inconsistent with its culturally–linked origins and symptomology and the expectations of the client. Fowers and Richardson (1996) have recently noted how powerful a force multiculturalism has become in contemporary American psychology. The growing appreciation that American norms, or the norms of any particular society, are not necessarily universal has encouraged the American Psychological Association (APA) to publish guidelines for the practice of psychology with culturally diverse populations such as are found in the United States. Psychology is facing an ongoing cross–cultural challenge which will ultimately transform the discipline and the practice in highly significant ways. As Fowers and Richardson attest, multiculturalism in psychology, while initially threatening to the status quo in many ways, is essentially good in the longer run in forcing researchers and practitioners to consider the wider validity of their assumptions, models, theories and professional practice.

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