

Forward

The publication of Advances in Culture and Psychology is of historic importance. The buzz surrounding research on culture and psychology reemerged in the 1980s and has been reverberating through several disciplines ever since, including social, developmental and cognitive psychology, anthropology and linguistics. There are now first-rate textbooks, handbooks and journals on the topic. A growing literature on psychic pluralism versus psychic unity across cultural groups is rich with inspiring philosophical and theoretical manifestos, eye-opening empirical studies and informative review essays. Now happily there is Advances in Culture and Psychology. The editors of the series invite leading scholars to give an overview of their mature research programs. Advances is sure to become an ongoing canonical vehicle for the revival of psychological research which is both comparative and sensitive to cultural realities.

Research programs in comparative psychology can, of course, be traced back to the late 19th century and early decades of the 20th century. In the late 1890s a young psychologist, William McDougall, participated in the famous pioneering interdisciplinary Cambridge University Torres Straits expedition and established an experimental laboratory in New Guinea to assess similarities and differences in sensory perception across cultural groups. In the early 1930s a young anthropologist, Margaret Mead, returned from a field trip to the Admiralty Islands and told a young Jean Piaget that Swiss children in Geneva were distinctively Western and that he had wildly over-generalized about the universal development of animistic thinking in children. Concerns and debates of that sort - attentive to the population-based boundary conditions for generalizations about human mental functioning and the global representativeness of the samples and evidence supporting “fundamental psychological processes” – have never been entirely absent from the psychological, semiotic and behavior sciences. Nevertheless they were largely set to the side in “mainstream psychology” in the decades immediately following WWII. Fortunately researchers in Europe and North America are beginning, once again, to become self-conscious about the possibility that the findings they publish might be significantly (and interestingly) culture-bound. And today research on culture and

psychology is one of the growth sectors in the psychological, semiotic and behavioral sciences.

One looks forward to the day when the recurrence of interest in culture and psychology has been systematically documented. Any such history, one imagines, will point to events and processes both inside and outside the academy that have created a favorable environment for a field that is concerned with questions of cultural influence.

Concerning outside events, I have in mind, for example, changes in the US immigration laws in the 1960s that prepared the way for increased levels of Asian, African and South and Middle American migration; the international pendulum swing in the direction of economic globalization, which eroded national barriers to the flow of goods, information, capital and labor (including students and scholars) all over the world; the emergence of identity politics, social justice concerns and affirmative action policies and their beneficial consequences for funding research or researcher training with regard to ethnic and racial minority groups; and the various and numerous conflicts and competitions between nations and groups over the past decades (from the Japanese success in the world economy to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the tensions between Islam and Christianity in Europe) which have made it increasingly apparent that cultural influences and group differences in human goals, values and pictures of reality are not only here to stay but need to be understood for the sake of domestic and international tranquility, and for everyone's general well-being. Concerning events inside the academy I have in mind scholarly institutions, including for example, this publication series, which will regularly publish and make visible the advances that mark progress in the disciplined investigation of the ways culture and psyche make each other up.

Breadth of coverage is a good thing for a publication series on culture and psychology, if for no other reason than the diversity of existing research program on mental states among human beings on a global scale. Most researchers who work this field have more than just a general interest in cultural influences on behavior. For some the aim of research on culture and psychology is to guard against the hazards of parochialism and to ensure the general truth or universal validity of any proposed psychological theory

(including theories of psychological development) by grounding any claims about psychic unity in evidence that is representative of the diverse populations of the world. For others the (closely related) aim of culture and psychology is to establish comparability or equivalence for measuring instruments across different populations (and to be especially alert to the hazards of misunderstanding or miscommunication or mistranslation across cultural and linguistic worlds). For still others the aim is to construct a credible theory of psychological pluralism and to give priority to the study of the distinctive mental characteristics of various peoples. Here the aim of research in culture and psychology is to document and explain differences in what people want, think, know, feel, value (and hence do) by virtue of growing up in a particular cultural group. It is the study of human diversity in emotional functioning, self organization, moral evaluation, social cognition and pathways of development. Advances in Culture and Psychology will be a lively and welcoming home to a multiplicity of such aims.

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