Allwood on IP

From: Carl Martin Allwood

Dear Louise,

Here is a personal copy of my paper on the IPs! All comments are of course welcome!

I also enclose a link to the paper at Cambridge University Press, the paper is freely available on this link at least for a couple of weeks according to information I got from CUP today. Please could you send out the link to the members of the IP workforce?

https://wwwcambridge.org/core/elements/nature-and-challenges-of-indigenous-psychologies/70DAF132EB1B3ADD3E30B2FAEC497F52

Best wishes,

Carl Martin

Allwood 2018 Nature_and_challenges_of_indigenous_psychologies CUP.pdf

---

From: Dr. Louise Sundararajan
Sent: Monday, September 03, 2018 12:32 AM

Dear Carl Martin,

I read your paper with interest. I think it is another landmark in the IP literature, just as the one before that you co-authored with Berry. I wonder what prompted you to make the second investigation at this time? My comments below are made primarily for clarifications.

>Sundararajan et al. (2017) upheld the N/H-distinction by means of a controversial understanding of psychology when they argued that "[g]eneral psychology represents the natural sciences approach, and indigenous psychology represents the cultural science tradition" (p. 1). Sundararajan et al. (2017) also provided other controversial and seemingly outdated renderings of research in psychology. For example, they claimed that,
in contrast to physics and the biological sciences, in the human sciences the researcher needs to know people's intentions, and their goals and motives.
Moreover, they argued that such information can be found by studying people's self-reports. **(**P. 49)<

Basically, I was asked by the editor to "update" an old paper by Kim and Park, which in my view was outdated. I tried my best, but retained some innocuous statements, one of which is the statement you cited. The natural versus human sciences schism in psychology is well known, going back all the way to Wundt's natural versus cultural sciences, and I agree with Kim and

Park that IP is more aligned with Wundt's cultural sciences. This debate is still current; for a recent discussion of this topic, see

Teo, T. (2017). From psychological science to the psychological humanities: Building a general theory of subjectivity, *Review of General Psychology, 21*, 281-291.

>However, researchers in psychology are likely to disagree, for various reasons. For example, it is not clear why this information would not be
relevant also in biology (P. 49).<

Humm, if Darwin collected first-person accounts of the finch, I must have missed it.

>On the basis of their description of IPs, Sundararajan et al. (2017) Noted that in the future, in addition to their practical applied ambitions, IPs will
be engaged by "broader social and political issues"(p. 6). This assertion does not seem to recognize that many IPs (though not all; cf. Yang, 2012)
have been inherently political from the beginning . . . . (p. 39)<

The key term in "broader social and political issues" is "broader." By that I meant reflection on the social and political implications of any political agenda. It is helpful to make a distinction between political agenda and political critique—the former has been there with many IPs since the beginning; the latter--a more recent development--is to consider the social and political implications of such agendas. One example of raising such "broader" issues is the question you asked as to the hegemonic implications of nationalism that represents the majority at the expense of the minority groups in the nation.

Theory versus applied

>Moreover, Sundararajan et al. (2017) envisioned a large research program for IPs in the future: "By exposing the hegemony of Western psychology (De Vos, 2012), and by offering alternatives (Sundararajan, 2013, 2014a, b; Sundararajan and Raina, 2015) in researching the ontological, epistemological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the mental life, indigenous psychology plays an important role in the development of a global psychology" (p. 6). It is not quite clear what this means, but this formulation could be an argument that IPs should unite with postmodern and postcolonial research traditions. If so, it may have the effect of leaving the practical applied aspects of IPs behind. (P. 39)<

I don't think this approach necessarily leaves the practical applied aspects behind. I believe that for IP, there is nothing more practical than theory. Many of the problems in IP that you identified, such as logical contradictions, simplistic assumptions about culture, etc., can be

avoided if the IP researcher is better informed by culture theories, and by the approach to history as theory/story rather than facts/reality.

Essentialism

>Sundararajan et al. (2017), on a general level–somewhat enigmatically, and possibly over-totalizing the effect of culture–stated that "[c]ulture constitutes the very fiber of our being–all that we sense, feel, believe, value, think and do" (p. 5). <

This definition of culture is compatible with many schools of thought: Bourdieu's notion of habitus, and the notion of embodied cognition, to name just a few. The issue for you, I think, is that this approach to culture raised the specter of essentialism.

You have identified abstraction as a slippery slope to essentialism. This is how you saw the specter of essentialism in my cultural descriptions:

>By using such descriptions, the authors showed remnants of an approach to culture as a collective, abstract phenomenon (P.43)<

You further inferred that abstractions imply purity:

> here the authors also give the impression of retaining essentialism with respect to culture–that is, they seem to assume that there is some definite pure form that cultures might exist in. (p. 43)<

Given the fact that not all abstractions go down the road to essentialism, we may consider the circumstances under which they do. My hunch is that essentialism is abstraction mistaken as reality, as it is in the case of "nation" or "identity," whereas scientific theorizing is abstraction treated as abstraction. For instance, scientific modeling is abstraction that will not be mistaken as reality—you can't fly in a model airplane. Furthermore, the pure form of the model does not feed into essentialism, because of the basic understanding that no reality exists in pure forms.

Consider a scientific approach to "dirt":

> If you think dirt is really dirt, not a construct we invented for our convenience, then all you'll ever have is dirt. If you see that it's a construct, not the Truth, you open up the possibility of other constructs to talk about the same thing: elements, crystals, subatomic particles. (Brodie, 2009)

This can be illustrated by two approaches to reality (X):

A: X=dirt, elements, crystals, subatomic particles.
B: X=dirt (elements, crystals, subatomic particles).

In scientific investigations, as represented by A, abstraction is context dependent, each level of analysis generates its own abstraction such that there are multiple abstractions (dirt, elements,

crystals, subatomic particles), none of which has a higher status of "essence" than the other. By contrast, in essentialism, as represented by B, the term closest to the phenomenal world (dirt) is elevated to the status of reality, the essence of which is supposed to be captured by the more abstract terms.

Cast in the context of culture, nation and population may be considered the counterpart of "dirt"—whether these labels of culture tread the path of essentialism or not depends on whether one takes the approach of A or B. In B, nation or population names reality, the essence of which is captured by abstractions. But in A, abstractions are not inextricably yoked to serve the master scrip of nation or population which are treated as labels of convenience like any other.

With this understanding, let us exorcise the specter of essentialism you saw in the following:
>However, the same paper (Sundararajan et al. 2013) also described abstract entities such as the indigenous Indian view.

Let us look at the context. The discussion was about a comparison of self models between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. The authors discussed Chinese and Hawaiian notions of the self, and proceeded to use one school of thought from India--the medical system of *Ayurveda*—to flesh out the collectivistic model of the self. In this context, Indian view or *Ayurveda* is one of the terms that circulate like glass beads to generate meaning pertaining to a cross cultural comparison of models of the self, with implications for mental health and treatment. Questions concerning whether other texts should also be included in reference to indigenous Indian view do not arise unless one is on the track of B—being concerned about the "essence" of things Indian, which is not what the discussion in Sundararajan et al. (2013) is about.

Future Forecast

>given the increasing diversification of IP, including a tendency to be increasingly linked to other ongoing intellectual waves such as critical theory and postcolonialism, and given the tendency for other forms of globalized and internationalized psychology to develop, the IP movement might in the future dissolve into different versions, more or more or less aligned and associated with other developments in psychology. At the same time, some of the more applied components in IP research programs may be at least partially covered by other approaches to psychology. (P.58)<

I have mixed feelings about your future forecast. On the one hand, I am happy about the emerging alignment of the IP movement with other progressive intellectual waves in psychology, an alliance which will enhance the far reaching impact of IP. I would also be happy that IP might thereby "dissolve" like the bean-paste in a good bowl of miso-soup, or in a loftier vein, to be like the Taoist sages who never take credit for what they do:

> With all things accomplished and the work complete
> The common people say, "We are spontaneously like this." (Dao De Jing, Ch. 17)

On the other hand, I am concerned about the political implications of this scenario of dissolution. First of all, this seems to perpetuate a pattern in the Western history of science, namely that sources of external influence are rarely acknowledged, resulting in an imbalance in current historiographies of science that Goonatilake (1992, 2000) has documented. For instance, not too many people in the West are aware of the fact that, as Needham (1986) pointed out, modern science arose only in Europe in the seventeenth century, when "the discoveries and inventions made then and thereafter depended in so many cases on centuries of previous Chinese progress in science, technology and medicine" (p. 7).

How to make sure that we give credit where it is due in the ongoing borrowing, fusion, and cross-fertilization of ideas throughout history? One way, I think, is to have both sides of the story. For instance, the Chinese account of the encounter with Buddhism would suggest that Indian Buddhism "dissolved" into Chinese culture. On the other hand, the account of Buddhism, as a world religion, would suggest that Chinese or Confucian culture has "dissolved" into the Buddhist religion to give it a distinct flavor called Chinese Buddhism, just as so many other flavors came from a diversity of cultures—Japanese, Thai, Sri Lankan . . . with the latest flavor being mindfulness claiming multitudes of devotees in the secular West. Both accounts are valid; neither tells the complete story. In other words, there are no canonical accounts--pluralism is the key to better understanding of history. And IP makes pluralism more likely by offering the neglected side of the story.

Lastly, will IP ever "dissolve" into a larger reality like a river joining the ocean? I suppose it is possible-- when a more equitable global psychology becomes reality. But till then, IP will be in business.

Thanks for the stimulating read,
Louise