

# **SOME CHANGES, TRENDS, AND CHALLENGES IN NORTH AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY**

Anthony J. Marsella, Ph.D.  
Professor *Emeritus*  
University of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822  
[marsella@hawaii.edu](mailto:marsella@hawaii.edu)  
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## **Introduction**

Within the past few decades, North American Psychology has witnessed and experienced a number of profound changes that have altered its identity and directions as a scholarly and applied discipline. I have categorized these changes into seven areas for purposes of discussion: demographic, conceptual, technical, socio-political, training, content, and topics. The categories selected are arbitrary, and could well yield to condensation or elaboration. Figure 1 offers a graphic display of these categories and sample exemplars.

What is important about this brief effort addressing changes is the recognition psychology as a North American professional and scientific specialization is facing multiple, simultaneous, and interactive changes challenging traditional (conventional) scientific and professional identity, influence, and position. These changes have critical implications for training, research, and practice in psychology. They are the new foundation for rethinking psychology, especially as defined historically, politically, and economically by North American views.

While many of the changes are obvious (e.g., increase ethnic and racial minority student and faculty presence; altered gender profiles), it is the combination of the changes and their interaction that requires attention and consideration. At issue is whether the dominant professional and scientific organization governing psychology at this time -- The American Psychological Association -- is in need of rethinking its roles, functions, and regulatory responsibilities. There can be no doubt massive changes have called into question the very definition of psychology, and its authorization as a legal, scientific, professional, and moral area of study and practice.

For purposes of discussion, I have grouped the changes into SEVEN categories. The boundaries of these categories are fluid and interactive rather than fixed and separate. They are offered for purposes of reflection and discussion on the potential events, forces and people shaping North American psychology's current -- perhaps self-appointed -- identity as a profession and science in a global era. At issue is its hegemony and dominance in a GLOBAL era.

To its credit, North American psychology has witnessed and experienced numerous reflexive efforts responding to the changes of our times. However, there remains an inherent inclination within North American and Western European psychology to impose a universal imprimatur of its assumptions and validity. While there may be claims to the contrary, the efforts to establish dominance remain, denying in the process, the nature of psychology as both the content and process of constructing reality within the unique historical, geographical, cultural, and socio-political contexts of different people, regardless of national position. T

The push to establish an accepted definition and training standards definition and model of psychology by Western dominated national and international efforts under the guise of facilitating communication and coordination represents another well-intentioned, but ultimately colonization, of mind and behavior. It is not needed, and it is potentially destructive of national and cultural variations. While regulations, laws, codes, and standards in North American and European psychology may be seen as essential, there are pernicious consequences in homogenizing psychology's definition and functions. The very insistence on claiming a specific uniform definition eliminates and invalidates the unique philosophical, religious, cultural and historical forces that shape "psychology" within each nation and culture. It is one more efforts after regulation!

While it is clear that Western culture, replete with its popular culture of individualism, materialism, consumerism, commodification, competition, celebrityization, and technophilia, and ordered regulations, is being imposed upon the world via economic, political, and military dominance, the world faces the risks of global homogenization, and with this, the loss of cultural variation and diversity essential to the very nature of life itself. I acknowledge the efforts to establish a uniform definition and standards, but question whether this may ultimately lead to a loss of local controls and alternatives. Laws, rules, regulations, decrees, guidelines, obligations, responsibilities may bring uniformity and order, but is this not a potential problem for diversity.

The following chart is offers a brief summary of the some changes and trends occurring in North American psychology. The chart is offered to facilitate our apprehension and understanding of the complex events, forces, and trends in need of discussion, debate, and reconciliation. In my opinion, at this time, the events, forces, and people encouraging uniformity across the world are numerous and powerful. They are authorized and supported by political, economic, cultural, and military foundations that resist criticism and question. In many ways, corporate models of psychology, embraced in the existing American Psychological Association, state associations, and related subgroups, are defining directions, by appealing to impulses for commercial and scientific status and position. Dialog, participation, transparency, and accountability are always good guides. In my opinion, we need to be careful about the consequences since they include the very concerns we presently have regarding control, domination, surveillance, monitoring, and archiving of our private, professional, and civil lives.

**Figure 1:  
Graphic Display of Changes, Trends, and  
Challenges in North American Psychology**

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