

Bringing psychology to all societies

SINCE the first laboratory experiments by Wilhelm Wundt in 1898, psychology has developed rapidly. No longer reliant on the white-coated Prof studying rats or, at best, students in a lab, psychology now theorises human behaviour across cultures. The world is seen as a global village, and we expect research in one country to teach us about human behaviour in general. And, increasingly, the infrastructure is there to put the knowledge to work: national professional bodies, such as the British Psychological Society through its International Committee, have worked hard to make psychology a truly international discipline. Working across national boundaries, the International Association for Applied Psychology has divisions in almost all corners of the world.

So psychology at the start of the 21st century is beginning to address global issues, and psychologists are making significant inroads into social problems through institutions such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations and UNESCO. But collaboration within

Guest Editors MANFUSA SHAMS and PAUL JACKSON introduce the special issue.

multidisciplinary teams to address international social issues requires a common platform on which we can talk effectively about psychology, irrespective of cultural differences in human behaviour. Is our contribution compromised because it can be difficult to generalise psychological knowledge developed in a Western context to other cultural groups? For example, conceptualisations of individual and collective identity in East Asia are strikingly different from those in the West. And if the science in one society is far less developed than in another, how can it keep up with advances in theorising and research practice? Even if it does keep pace in terms of knowledge and understanding, perhaps the challenges that developing countries face are so different from those in 'advanced' societies that the relevance of research cannot be taken for granted. How can Western approaches to the study of humans and their behaviour deal authentically with conceptualisations from fundamentally different traditions?

The following articles by leading scholars in their respective fields will debate these questions. Firstly, Ingrid Lunt looks at how psychology has attempted to reach out globally at an organisational

level, while at the same time recognising the importance of local concerns. She highlights the pressures this creates for psychology and psychologists. Next, Kwang-Kuo Hwang shows how the world's sociocultural history has shaped our approach and concerns as psychologists, and questions whether indigenous psychologies are really the step forward they might at first appear to be. Finally, Carl Martin Allwood sets out some practical concerns with the indigenous approach.

Each article sets out a distinctive perspective in order to provoke interest in the problem of bringing psychology to culturally diverse contexts, and readers will find many fascinating challenges to their thinking and practice. We hope to generate a debate about whether bringing psychology to all societies requires the development of numerous indigenous psychologies, or whether a 'common psychology' is either possible or desirable.

■ *Dr Manfusa Shams is at Regent's College, London. E-mail: shamsm@regents.ac.uk.*

■ *Professor Paul Jackson is at UMIST. E-mail: paul.r.jackson@umist.ac.uk.*

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