

JEFFERSON M. FISH  
Department of Psychology  
St. John's University  
Jamaica, NY 11439

## What Anthropology Can Do for Psychology: Facing Physics Envy, Ethnocentrism, and a Belief in "Race"

I am a clinical psychologist, married to the anthropologist Dolores Newton. Over the three decades we have been together, I have lived in Brazil (during which time I accompanied her on field work with the Krikati Indians); learned to speak Portuguese, French, and Spanish; gotten involved with cross-cultural psychology; and become increasingly influenced by anthropology.

Early in our relationship, Dolores described psychologists as "a bunch of ethnocentric Americans," to which I responded, "You don't understand." Three decades later, sadder but I hope wiser and less ethnocentric, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that she was right.

This article attempts to describe how American psychologists—who dominate world psychology in both number, 60% (Rosenzweig 1992), and influence—see their field and themselves, and to point out three areas in which anthropology could provide a helpful corrective.

Psychologists with their emphasis on quantitative methods would doubtless dismiss this article, in which I serve as an informant on psychology, as unscientific. I can only say that, after three decades in university psychology departments (including stints as director of a Ph.D. program in clinical psychology and as departmental chair in the United States, as well as two years in Brazil) and three years as a psychologist in mental hospitals, I believe I know my subculture—especially clinical psychology—well. As to whether I am bicultural enough in anthropology to gain the distance from psychology necessary to report accurately on it, others will have to judge.

I should also mention at the outset that some psychologists, who have a sophisticated understanding of culture<sup>1</sup> and who have done significant research and made other important culturally informed contributions to psychology, were upset by a number of things that I wrote in an earlier version of this paper (a few of which appear here as well, more or less unchanged). Their reactions seemed to be, "That isn't true of me, or of colleagues I can name, or of psychology as I define it for myself." And they are right (e.g., see Segall et al. 1998 and the accompanying article in this issue by Greenfield [2000]). But it is an accurate

description of psychology as a whole, so I want to begin by explaining what I view as our contrasting perspectives.

When I was a graduate student 35 years ago, clinical psychology professors complained—as they had long been doing—that practitioners did not take research into account in their practices. That complaint is still being made, and is likely to be made into the indefinite future. It seems as if enthusiastic professors will always say, "We'll just have to try harder to communicate our findings to practitioners."

As an observer of the social scene, my reaction is that the function of research for clinicians is not to influence practice, but to legitimize it to others (and to themselves). That is, clinical psychologists—unlike social workers or psychiatrists—can say, "We are trained in research. Look at the mountains of therapy research done by clinical psychologists. We are the scientific therapists, so we deserve to be paid." And then their clinical behavior is determined by market pressures, past training, therapy fads, managed care, fear of lawsuits, and other social forces—with little room left over to be influenced by research.

In a similar way, psychology as a whole has always paid lip service to the need for the discipline to take culture into account. But, as I see it, the function of culturally informed research for psychologists is not to influence them, but to legitimize psychology to others (and to themselves). I am reminded of "cultural awareness" activities (endorsed by benevolent administrations) on predominantly white campuses that are attended almost exclusively by minority students, along with a scattering of white students. Such activities function in a parallel manner not to change the institutional reality but to use the acknowledgment of cultural differences to legitimize the status quo.

In other words, I have come to the reluctant conclusion that the field of psychology is inherently ethnocentric—though for social rather than theoretical reasons. While culturally informed contributions to psychology may continue to grow in both quantity and quality, I would expect them to remain quite small in relation to the rest of psychology, to remain marginalized, and to continue to have minimal

impact. My guess is that the colleagues who wanted this article to give more emphasis to what I view as minor exceptions to a general rule do not share my pessimism and they see the positive developments in their immediate vicinity as a harbinger of a better future for the field as a whole. (Another possibility is that, because there are so many psychologists, there may be specialties where things do not look so bleak—developmental psychology is perhaps the best candidate—as they do in clinical psychology, the field's largest specialty.)

### Physics Envy

With variations on a theme, psychologists generally define the discipline of "psychology" as "the science of behavior" and describe its goal as "to predict and control behavior." They would describe the field as beginning with Wilhelm Wundt's first psychology laboratory in Leipzig in 1879.

My own view of "science" is that it involves the systematic study of observable phenomena, uses evidence and logic to further that understanding, and chooses its methods based on the problem investigated. This is not the dominant view of "science" in psychology. Rather, scientific psychology is seen as the experimental study of behavior under controlled laboratory conditions, including the random assignment of subjects to different groups and the analysis of data by up-to-date statistical means. The further a study departs from this ideal, the less "scientific" it is. Thus, it is the methods that determine what is scientific and, hence, what questions can be asked. Also, the (statistical) certainty with which one can be assured of findings is more important than the light they shed on the phenomenon under investigation.

This unfortunate situation has long been recognized by the minority of psychologists interested in cultural issues. For example, the social psychologist Otto Klineberg (1899–1992), who was strongly influenced by anthropology, was fond of quoting Aldous Huxley's warning, "Woe to the science that lets its methods dictate its problems" (Klineberg 1999). (To the extent to which other social sciences share psychology's methodological commitments, they suffer from the same or similar failings—but this paper is limited to psychology.)

Psychology's view of science is reflected by a leading text on research methods in social psychology (Aronson et al. 1990), more than 90% of which is devoted to experimental methods. Not only is minimal attention paid to other methods—including questionnaires<sup>2</sup> (which might surprise anthropologists)—but the kinds of field methods that form the core of scientific anthropology are all but absent.

Psychologists in their training have been made aware—at least in passing—of the extremely narrow cultural base on which most broad behavioral generalizations are constructed. In case they should forget, they are periodically

reminded by their colleagues (e.g., Higbee et al. 1976; Sears 1986) who point out that 80% of the articles in social psychology journals are experimental studies of undergraduate psychology students. Nevertheless, in a kind of grand cultural conspiracy—or, to be more charitable, a willing suspension of disbelief—psychologists pretend that this is not a problem. Their commitment to the experimental method and the practical need for subjects trump other considerations.

This odd state of affairs is the result of a veneration of physics, with its admirable precision and quantification, as the ideal model for all science—including the study of human social behavior. Psychologists believe that disciplines can be ranked in a prestige hierarchy of "scientificness" according to how close they are to physics, as follows: physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education.

(A psychologist reader of an earlier draft of this paper suggested placing education between psychology and sociology on this hierarchy because much education research is experimental in exactly the way psychologists value. My own sense is that the placement of education accurately reflects psychologists' views of relative scientific prestige—perhaps because the objects of study [children] are of low status, perhaps because schools of education have lower status than schools of arts and sciences, or perhaps even because of anthropology's upper-class cachet [referred to in note 5 below]. I have to acknowledge, however, the possibility that my dual allegiances to psychology and anthropology may have distorted my perceptions because of my not wanting to believe that psychologists view anthropology as the least scientific discipline.)

One can make several observations about psychology's view of "science." First, the description of behavior—one is tempted to say, "the mere description of behavior"—does not qualify as science. At best, it might be seen as a pilot study, generating hypotheses for further investigation. For example, having a Brazilian informant tell you that *maça* is Portuguese for "apple" is not scientific, but asking a random sample of Brazilians is.

Second, the study of animal behavior (by physiological and comparative psychologists) is more scientific than the study of human behavior. This is because an experimenter can do things to animals in a search for causal relationships that would be ethically prohibited with humans. (Legislation stemming from the animal rights movement is chipping away at this rationale.) The experimental study of the behavior of animals raised under standardized conditions in laboratory cages, or in somewhat larger controlled environments, is more scientific than the study of the behavior of animals in their natural habitats—since one cannot control important variables in the wild and therefore cannot establish causal relationships. By downplaying the importance of animals' habitats, or even ignoring them—and

treating culture and society similarly for humans—psychology avoids dealing with much of the relevant context of behavior. This leaves a greater role for biological factors in explaining behavior, in influencing the questions that can be asked, and ultimately in perpetuating psychology's "scientific" self-definition.

Clearly, there are many important aspects of the behavior of humans and animals that one can study in the laboratory. But it is not difficult to see that the exclusion of or condescension toward questions that cannot be so studied impoverishes and distorts the field.

Third, the omission of the word *human* from the definition of psychology as "the science of behavior" is not accidental. Cross-species studies of behavior are viewed as particularly scientific but also implicitly exclude that which is characteristically human (such as complex cultural and linguistic behaviors)—and therefore much of what outsiders look to psychology to understand.

Here is an example. During the early 1970s, I was teaching at another university. The sexual revolution had long been under way, and Masters and Johnson's work (1966, 1970) was the subject of widespread public discussion. Undergraduate students petitioned the psychology department for a course about sex. After discussing the issue in detail, the department responded by offering a course entitled "Sexual Behavior." To the students' dismay, the course omitted discussion of the human species. Why? Because it is impossible to achieve adequate experimental control over human sexual behavior in order to reach scientific conclusions about it.

An inappropriate reliance on physics as the model for understanding social behavior excludes or disparages both (1) consideration of important questions and (2) the use of qualitative, field, and descriptive methodologies. In addition, it places a value on biologized explanations for behavior (closer to the physics end of the prestige hierarchy) over social ones (closer to the education end). This is because biologized explanations provide the kind of generalizations about "human behavior" or even "behavior" (with unspecified limits—presumably excluding at least micro-organisms) that are missing from more contextualized and descriptive studies. This is despite the latter providing more detail and understanding of phenomena that are not claimed to be universal. For these reasons, when psychologists do think about culture they are intellectually attracted to the search for human universals (Brown 1991) and to sociobiology. A recent example of this kind of thinking is the argument by evolutionary psychologist David Buss (2000) that jealousy is an important adaptive mechanism for males. Buss's view articulates well with a similar argument for the adaptive function of rape by evolutionary biologist Randy Thornhill and evolutionary anthropologist Craig T. Palmer (2000; Thornhill, Palmer, and Wilson 2000).

As is discussed below, psychologists are easily led into lines of investigation based on ethnocentric assumptions—

including, most distressingly, "racial" comparisons—because the dominant culture in the United States contains many biologized folk beliefs that articulate well with psychology's self-definition.

In my own field of clinical psychology, the discipline's commitment to biologized and universal methodologies and generalizations leads to an intellectual climate fostering, for example, epidemiological studies of "borderline personality disorder" (one recently invented diagnosis among many) or an inquiry into the neuropsychological substrates of spouse abuse (in contrast to investigating marital interactions or cultural norms). The availability of more grant money for biologically oriented studies than for socially oriented studies both contributes to and perpetuates this emphasis.

In contrast to biological universals, cross-cultural psychology does offer a number of universal conceptual frameworks for understanding cultural differences and similarities. Among these are individualism/collectivism (Triandis 1995; individualism/collectivism is also discussed in the accompanying article by Greenfield [2000]), cultural complexity (Murdock and Provost 1973), cross-cultural frameworks for understanding child rearing practices and aggression (Segall et al. 1999), and various dimensions of subjective culture (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Stewart and Bennett 1991). Unlike much of psychology that purports to explain human behavior, these conceptual frameworks do include significant contributions by psychologists to understanding culture.

Unfortunately, while such broadly applicable conceptual frameworks constitute an important contribution, their number is limited, and it is difficult to detect their impact on psychology as a whole. Nevertheless, the amount of energy that psychologists are willing to spend in making a broad generalization is worthy of note. Here is an illustrative example:

This article reviews research which examines Kohlberg's claim that moral reasoning develops according to a universal sequence of stages. . . . Although there are now more than 120 cross-cultural studies, it is suggested that Kohlberg's theory has undergone only preliminary testing, and that it needs to be tested in more comprehensive and imaginative ways. [Gielen 1996:313]

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Anthropology can play an important role by communicating its knowledge concerning taboo topics and methods (i.e., those that are considered "non-scientific" by psychologists but not by anthropologists). Psychologists would probably be surprised to find that some of their own methods that have fallen into disuse because they do not lend themselves to universal generalizations have found a home in anthropology. For example, George Kelly's interviewing techniques for elucidating personal constructs (1955)

have been adapted to get information for constructing componential analyses (Spradley 1979). Providing such illustrations for psychologists could help to reduce the stigma associated with anthropology. Perhaps team teaching courses with psychologists on topics like sexual behavior, drug use and abuse, gender roles, or "race" could help sensitize psychologists to how much anthropological knowledge exists, and how impoverished their perspective is as a result of an overly restrictive definition of science.

### Ethnocentrism

Psychology in the United States is overwhelmingly composed of monolingual, monocultural individuals who, if they have left the country at all, have done so only as tourists. Reading proficiency in two languages used to be required for the doctorate. But the disappearance of the language requirement from American psychology has taken place at roughly the same time as a wave of immigration to the United States from around the world.

Over the last few decades, the field has been shifting from predominantly male to predominantly female (as is already the case for psychology in the rest of the world), and real progress has been made in recruiting minority students and, to a lesser extent, faculty. This may be good news in terms of social justice, but it involves relatively little change in the monocultural nature of the field. As Americans, psychologists confuse physical appearance with culture (this is discussed further below), so many may even be deluding themselves that the changing face of the field reflects significant cultural broadening. Psychologists as a group are unaware of how small and unrepresentative of human variability is the range of behavior that constitutes American culture. If *diversity* is to refer to minority groups in the United States rather than to a range of other cultures around the planet, then there will be few psychologists who can recognize from personal experience the culture-specific nature of purportedly universal psychological generalizations.

The field does understand about issues of discrimination and representation but has not yet figured out that a description of how a group has been mistreated does not tell you much about what the group is like. Even when psychologists are immigrants from another culture, those who lack an anthropological background are often at a loss when—having been anointed as cross-cultural specialists—they are asked to describe their culture of origin. As a result, discussions of culture-related issues by those psychologists who deal with them are of quite variable quality. Not only does this lead to inadequacies in training the next generation of students but also to the widespread impression among psychologists that there is not much content to courses dealing with culture and, by implication, that there is not much to culture.<sup>3</sup> This confirms, in a self-sealing manner, psychologists' negative impression of anthropology's

scientific respectability. (Anthropologists who take a "postmodern," anti-empiricist line also contribute to this view. Greenfield [2000] discusses psychology and postmodernism in detail in her companion article.)

### Psychologists and Status

Psychology is both an academic discipline and a licensed profession. As a result, status issues found in the professions are more prominent in psychology than in other academic disciplines. Psychologists divide into two major groups that are subdivided into dozens (if not hundreds) of specialties and subspecialties. Experimental psychologists (scientists) have greater intellectual status; applied psychologists (like engineers) make more money and pay more attention to their clothes ("dress professionally"). Within both groups, specialties that are more biologically oriented, and hence closer to physics, have more prestige than those closer to education. For example, among experimental fields, physiological psychology has greater intellectual status than educational psychology; in applied fields, clinical psychology (practiced in hospitals) is more prestigious than school psychology.

Clinical and other applied psychologists make a point of calling each other "doctor."<sup>4</sup> Newsletters perennially carry letters to the editor concerning whether those with master's degrees in psychology should be referred to as "psychologists." There are over 200,000 of them, but as long as I have been in the field, the answer has remained no. To avoid offending psychologists, one should refer to people with M.D.'s as "physicians." Clinical and other applied psychologists are involved in a never ending battle with psychiatrists who condescend to them. Psychologists will gladly explain to you that a Ph.D. is a higher degree than an M.D., and that they have done research dissertations, unlike physicians.

Becoming a psychologist involves entry (occasionally continuation and, rarely, descent) into the upper middle class. This is serious business. Anthropologists not only rub shoulders with the *hoi polloi*, they seem to like it, and this further confirms psychologists' negative impression of them. A European American anthropology graduate student might eat chitterlings and Coca Cola; the corresponding experience for an African American psychology graduate student might be brie and white wine.

Every spring toward the end of classes, my wife's anthropology department has a picnic featuring a goat roast. Undergraduate students from a lithic technology course use stone tools they have made to butcher two goats that have already been slaughtered and gutted. Students gain an appreciation for the skills of our ancestors, and a good time is had by all. One year I enthusiastically showed the announcement for the goat roast to a colleague in my department—expecting that it would be seen as an imaginative

alternative to our activities. "Psychologists," he responded, "eat in restaurants."

Psychologists' strong identification with the upper middle class<sup>5</sup> provides an additional insight into their ethnocentrism. An attempt in one's private life to understand, identify with, and enact the behaviors of a particular subculture does not foster the perspective of a neutral cultural observer.

## Culture

There are many ways in which psychologists do not understand the concept of "culture." To begin with, "culture" is seen as something other people have, like foreigners or members of minority groups. I have given counterexamples from other cultures to purported psychological generalizations and received a "So what?" response—as if such people were not standard issue humans and were therefore irrelevant to the assertion under discussion. Especially if the counterexample is from a small nonliterate tribal group, it tends to be dismissed as irrelevant exotica. "Anthropologists just say 'cultural relativism,'" one colleague complained; "cultural curiosities" was the way a psychology editor referred to it.

Because psychologists' ethnocentric understanding of "the environment" is implicitly limited to the United States today, they have a truncated view of environmental influences on behavior that confirms their bias toward biologized explanations. For example, what psychologists refer to as "studies comparing identical twins reared apart," anthropologists might call "studies of identical twins reared in very similar environments compared to those reared in extremely similar environments." (Statistically, the effect of limiting environments from "those on the planet" to "those in the United States" is to inflate the heritability estimate for IQ or whatever else is being studied.)<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps anthropologists might help to persuade psychologists that the universality of principles of perception, learning, and other "basic processes" needs to be investigated rather than assumed. Some such studies have been done—for example, it has been shown that, although different cultures use different color names for different parts of the visible spectrum, physically normal people in all cultures have the ability to distinguish among the range of color stimuli (Berlin and Kay 1969). Similarly, despite culture-specific display rules governing facial expressions, it appears that basic emotions—anger, disgust, enjoyment, fear, sadness, surprise—are experienced similarly in all cultures (Ekman 1992). On the other hand, growing up in a "carpentered world" with straight lines and right angles, or in a flat environment with open vistas (where individuals experience the foreshortening of visual perspective), enhances the experience of optical illusions (Segall et al. 1966). It is unfortunate that there is no sense of urgency among psychologists about the need to verify the generality

of the range of psychological fundamentals, since urbanization, globalization, and the destruction of indigenous cultures are leading to a rapid decrease in cultural diversity around the world.<sup>7</sup>

The behavior that psychologists study is the behavior of individuals. Since culture is by definition shared, the psychological perspective will—if not specially trained (which, in general, it is not)—tend to overlook or distort it. Thus, shared cultural knowledge or norms might not be recognized or might be misunderstood as individual knowledge or norms, and the social processes by which they are constituted might escape examination.

Even "social psychology" is defined as the study of "the individual in society"—that is, people function as unique individuals, and society (and, as indicated below, culture) can be seen as a set of independent variables, like genes or other biological factors, that affect the individual's behavior. This perspective of psychology fits in well with, and can almost be regarded as an exemplification of, American individualism. Psychologists have even postulated basic human drives like "self-actualization" that can be understood as individualism universalized into theory.

In this way, the worldwide spread of psychology can be viewed in part as an example of the spread of cultural assumptions from the United States to increasingly Westernized intellectual elites. Training in psychology, especially graduate training, becomes in part—along with learning statistics and experimental methodology—a way of learning to think in terms of those assumptions.

Meanwhile, back in the United States, psychologists with their individualistic perspective have difficulty in grasping what a cultural perspective might be. They understand the concept of "egocentrism," but "ethnocentrism" is understood not as its cultural counterpart but as something diffusely bad and roughly equivalent to "discrimination" or "racism." Psychologists, when asked to explain why someone thinks, feels, or acts a particular way, typically give an individual explanation that varies according to their theoretical orientation. They might refer to factors such as the person's distinctive early childhood experiences, or his or her more recent learning history, to neuropsychological predispositions (e.g., "right brained" vs. "left brained") or to cognitive schemata. They would be unlikely to offer the explanation that those are the kinds of thoughts, feelings, and actions produced in people of comparable social circumstances in the United States today and that these contrast in certain ways with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people in parallel circumstances in another culture.

In other words, rather than seeing themselves as situated within and exemplifying a culture, psychologists view culture as a variable (or set of variables) affecting behavior—perhaps as a default explanation to appeal to when a psychological explanation is not at hand ("it must be cultural"). An undergraduate cross-cultural psychology

textbook even has the title *Understanding Culture's Influence on Behavior* (Brislin 1993).<sup>8</sup>

The marginal status of cultural perspectives in psychology can be illustrated in several ways. While cultural perspectives are relevant to all specialties dealing with humans, traditionally they have been most problematic for social psychology—even though social behavior is by definition permeated by cultural elements. To understand social psychology's problems with culture, it is necessary briefly to discuss some relevant background—including the ways both applied psychology and culture contaminate the ideal of experimental purity. (Mainstream social psychologists do laboratory experiments on topics such as attitudes, conformity, and small group processes.) Ultimately, these problems led to two splits within social psychology.

The American Psychological Association (APA) has 84,000 doctoral-level members and the main home for "scientific" social psychology is Division 8—Personality and Social Psychology.<sup>9</sup> The division title itself evokes images of people acting socially because of their individual personalities. Psychologists leave it to sociologists (who have a parallel field of social psychology) to examine social behavior in terms of what might be called "society in the individual." The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) was created in 1936 mainly by social psychologists who wanted to study important social issues, like prejudice and discrimination, outside of the laboratory.<sup>10</sup> As part of a reorganization of APA in 1945, SPSSI entered as Division 9. While the issues addressed by SPSSI may be of social import in the United States, social psychologists do not usually consider cultural issues or deal with cross-cultural perspectives.

Cultural issues kept coming up in social psychology, and more recently they split off to form (along with content from other areas of psychology) the field of cross-cultural psychology, thereby retaining social psychology's scientific purity.<sup>11</sup> The centrality of cross-cultural psychology to social psychology is illustrated by the cross-cultural psychology text *Culture and Social Behavior* (Triandis 1994), written by the senior editor of the first edition of the *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Triandis et al. 1980–1981). The implication of the title is that cross-cultural psychology deals with the subject matter of social psychology.

Some other APA divisions that deal with cultural issues include 7, Developmental Psychology; 35, Psychology of Women; and 45, Society for the Study of Ethnic Minority Issues. More recently, Division 52, International Psychology, was formed, and psychologists interested in culture may have found a refuge, if not a home, there. However, the division's main activities revolve around relationships with international psychology organizations, as well as national psychology organizations in other countries, rather than the viewing of human behavior through a cultural lens.

For the sake of completeness, I should mention that the small minority of American psychologists who identify themselves as concerned with cultural issues (and who are more varied culturally than other American psychologists) refer to themselves as "cross-cultural psychologists," "cultural psychologists," and "multicultural psychologists." These terms are not well defined and are in an ongoing process of self-definition and political negotiation. My tentative impressions are the following. American cross-cultural psychologists tend to be whites born in the United States or immigrants, are interested in comparative cross-cultural studies of psychological issues, and may be members of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) or of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research (SCCR) or other organizations where they can interact with sociologists and anthropologists. Cultural psychologists (e.g., Cole 1996) are new and scarce and I've only met a few—Greenfield (2000) represents this perspective. My impression so far of American cultural psychologists is that their leaders and founders are predominantly whites born in the United States who are interested in cultural processes and meaning construction and who make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both cross-cultural psychologists and cultural psychologists are interested in *Understanding Human Behavior in Global Perspective* (the title of the 1999 cross-cultural psychology text by Segall et al.)

In contrast, American multicultural psychologists are far more numerous than the other two groups combined, are far more likely to be members of minority groups, and tend to be concerned with applied and power issues in the United States, such as stereotyping, discrimination, affirmative action, and social justice. Multicultural psychologists are often members of APA Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues.

While international (IACCP) and interdisciplinary (SCCR) organizations exist, there is no APA Division of Cross-Cultural Psychology because such a small proportion of American psychologists share a global perspective. (By way of illustration, the following are some other divisions that do exist in APA: 19, Military Psychology; 23, Consumer Psychology; 46, Media Psychology; 47, Exercise and Sport Psychology.) Culture remains marginal and marginalized. If ethnocentrism is the glue that holds cultural groups together, then American psychology as a cultural group has been remarkably effective at maintaining a unity of purpose and vision.

### Etics and Emics

The etic and emic concepts, which have made their way into cross-cultural psychology, are otherwise unknown in the field. (Instead of etic vs. emic, psychologists think in terms of quantitative ["scientific"] vs. qualitative ["unscientific"].) If these concepts became part of psychologists'

general knowledge—and were not marginalized as an exotic import from anthropology—psychologists would have to acknowledge that most of their purportedly scientific generalizations about humans have their origins in American cultural categories (and are based mainly on data from the United States). Since all of physics is culture-neutral, psychologists might come to the conclusion that the kinds of generalizations they seek are unattainable, and might become more open to a cultural perspective.

Here is an example. Psychologists develop tests to measure psychological constructs, like intelligence, extroversion, or anxiety. Over the years, an impressive methodology has been built up for defining the dimension, sampling relevant behaviors, developing a pool of test items, standardizing the test, measuring reliability and validity, seeing how it compares with and relates to other relevant measures, and so forth. As a result, the investigation of an American emic domain produces an etic dimension that is seen as comparable to other etic dimensions, like height or weight. That is, height is seen as quantitatively different from extroversion, because it has a greater test-retest reliability, but not qualitatively different. Psychologists do not view height as a culture-neutral dimension and extroversion as a culturally derived dimension because they do not think in terms of etics and emics.

Techniques exist, such as the use of back translation, to enable the development of equivalent versions of a test in other countries. This, in turn, permits one to provide quantitative answers to questions such as “How do people in England, Israel, Japan, and the United States compare on extroversion?”

The problem, which anthropologists see immediately but which has to be explained to psychologists who do not specialize in cultural issues, is that the neutral-sounding “psychological construct” that is being compared cross-culturally is culture-specific in origin. A test for it was developed in the United States because of its salience here, and its cross-cultural generality was assumed rather than investigated. (The more diverse the cultures compared, the more unlikely it is that they all organize the world in terms of the same salient psychological dimension.)

Once something psychological has been operationally defined, it can be investigated anywhere. New psychiatric diagnoses are proliferating in the United States. They are voted into existence so therapists can receive insurance reimbursement for treating them; but once they have been operationally defined (e.g., as the presence of five or more “symptoms” on a checklist of a dozen) they can be investigated around the planet.

As a result, once the world has been measured or classified in terms of our dimensions or categories, its cultures can be ranked. Psychological tools allow us not only to rank cultures according to how extroverted they are or according to their incidence of passive-aggressive personality, but according to how intelligent, or sexist, or lazy, or

dishonest, or for that matter—if operationally defined—un-American they are.

The minority of psychologists who specialize in culture are well aware of these problems—for example, Berry (1969) coined the term *imposed etic* to refer to such practices. More recently Greenfield (1997) discussed the issue with regard to ability assessments, and Segall et al. (1999) explained it as well. But, as with other issues—such as experimental studies of American undergraduate students conducted in order to make generalizations about “human behavior”—I have seen no evidence of or prospects for such knowledge diffusing to the field as a whole.

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Anthropologists could make a real contribution by communicating a deeper understanding of culture to psychologists, especially the concepts of etics and emics. (Harris [1999] discusses the debate in anthropology over whether observable behavior needs to be included in the definition of “culture.” Those who would exclude it are not likely to have much impact on psychologists.)

Even describing the discipline of anthropology to psychologists would help. They have not heard of the four fields and would be surprised to learn, for example, that linguistics is part of anthropology. Explaining and using biological concepts (e.g., breeding population and cline) and data from physical anthropology will enhance anthropologists’ credibility, as will the use of statistically analyzed quantitative data in general. Whether such efforts will be sufficient to make a dent in psychology’s ethnocentrism remains an open question.

### Psychologists’ Belief in “Race”

Psychologists’ ethnocentric assumption that emic categories of “race” in the United States are biological realities appears particularly intractable, in significant measure because of the circumstances described above. My frustration at the imperviousness of American psychology, as a cultural group, to attempts to challenge this assumption with scientific data from anthropology has led me to a perverse respect for the power of ethnocentrism. It has also led me to write about “race”—including efforts like this article aimed at encouraging anthropologists to help out (Fish 1983, 1995a, 1995b, 1996: ch. 9, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999; Fish and Newton 1998).

With few exceptions, psychologists believe that there are two sexes—male and female—and three (principal) races—Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. Among the reasons for the belief that the human species is divided into biological races are an ethnocentric acceptance of the validity of folk categories in the United States and a desire to make biologically based generalizations about human behavior because they are more scientific than socially based

ones. An additional reason, however, is psychologists' lack of basic knowledge from physical anthropology (e.g., Marks 1995) and cultural anthropology (e.g., Smedley 1998)—as well as from other fields, such as genetics and history.<sup>12</sup> How to get such knowledge into psychologists' heads (and textbooks) is a real problem—but there are so many psychologists and psychology students that it is worth thinking about.

Both sex and race can be rated reliably by psychologists, and their ratings correlate highly with subjects' ratings of their own sex and race, thereby establishing the desirable psychometric characteristics of these categories. The two sexes and three races can be combined into six cells to study the effects of race, sex, and the race  $\times$  sex interaction on any variable of interest, such as mathematical ability. Not surprisingly, psychologists like to have it both ways. On the one hand, as scientists, they have learned that they should be cautious in generalizing the results beyond the local populations represented in their study. On the other, especially when studies are cited in articles or appear in literature reviews, qualifying statements tend to drop out, and the discussion shifts to universal generalizations about abstractions like "cognition."

Once data from outside the United States are included, ethnocentric assumptions about "race" become evident. For example, a psychologist might want to compare black-white IQ differences in the United States with black-white IQ differences in Brazil. It would rapidly become apparent that Brazilians have many more "racial" categories than exist in the United States (Fish 1983, 1995b, 1996: ch. 9; Harris 1964, 1970) and that to do such a study would force the great majority of Brazilian subjects into "racial" classifications from the United States that they would view as inaccurate (or protest with stronger adjectives).

Sometimes the categories, instead of being labeled as "race," are labeled "race/ethnicity," or occasionally "ethnicity." But the implicit understanding—that some biological component is involved in the different classifications—means that the question remains as to the extent to which biologically based "racial" factors, however they may be labeled, are responsible for obtained group differences.

Psychologists who protest the "political correctness" of colleagues opposed to studies of "racial" differences may have a point in the following odd sense. Both groups believe that biological races exist; one thinks that a commitment to science implies that differences between them must be studied, and the other thinks that a commitment to social justice means that such studies should be avoided since they could be used to harm people who are already disadvantaged. The conflict could be resolved (or at least diminished by those open to outside evidence) if both groups of psychologists would learn some anthropology.

A common set of psychological comparisons is among categories labeled as "white," "black" or "African American,"

and "Hispanic" or "Latino." Since this article is written for anthropologists and not psychologists, I will not belabor the point that these folk categories from the United States represent neither biological races nor cultural entities. Briefly, "African Americans" are more culturally diverse than "whites," since the former include non-Western immigrants from Africa, while non-Western "whites" are rare. They are also more varied in physical appearance because people in the United States with one "white" parent and one "black" parent are classified as "black." The categories misclassify Brazilians as "Hispanic" (although they speak Portuguese); and "Latinos" include both monolingual English speakers and speakers of Spanish and other languages who are immigrants from countries with long histories of armed conflict among them. Furthermore, the range of physical appearance of Latin American immigrants varies greatly from one country of origin to another. (Some people also benefit from American "racial" categories, especially those who intermarry or are children of intermarriages within a given category. For example, a Chinese-Japanese marriage in the United States is much less problematical than it would be in either China or Japan, because both spouses are "Asian." Similarly, the children of a Mexican-Puerto Rican marriage are protected from conflict over their ethnic identity because they are "Latino, just like their parents"; and the children of a Nigerian-African American marriage are "black, just like their parents.")

Despite the problems with these categories, much psychological research that passes for "cultural" involves comparisons among these three groups, in large measure for two reasons discussed above. The first is ethnocentrism—psychologists in the United States study rather than question the categories they have been raised to use. The second has to do with the scientific methodology psychologists are committed to. Only by lumping culturally diverse people together (e.g., immigrants from Nigeria, Haiti, and Jamaica along with rural southern and urban northern African Americans are all "black") can they get enough subjects per cell to do the requisite statistical analyses.

Once a number of such studies have been done, they become self-perpetuating. That is, if one criticizes them based on the questionable nature of the categories used, the justification is that continuing to use the same categories allows for comparability of results across studies. (This same perpetuation of error occurs in the other social sciences—for example, as a justification for the use of "race" in the census.)

\* \* \*

Whatever the explanation, psychologists' lack of basic knowledge about human physical variation and the differing folk taxonomies by which it is classified in different cultures is a major shortcoming. Anthropology could perform a real service for psychology by communicating its

knowledge; and cross-cultural psychology—marginal within psychology though it may be—would seem to be the best place to begin. (Segall et al. [1999] have made a start in this direction.)

### In Conclusion

While I believe that this is an article that needed to be written, as I was working on it I felt twinges of disloyalty at times for doing so. Much of the above critique of psychology, especially the methodological part, applies to other disciplines as well—above all to other social sciences—in differing ways and to differing degrees. It would be interesting to hear from historians, political scientists, and sociologists as to what anthropology could do for them. Law, literature, and medicine (to mention only a few) are three other fields that immediately come to mind as potential sources for articles comparable to this one. Psychology is not the only ethnocentric discipline; my own group loyalty encourages me to believe that it is one of the better ones. (That is what I find so troubling.) But each discipline is ethnocentric in its own way, and anthropology as an overarching field can help.

### Notes

*Acknowledgments.* Thanks to Harold Takooshian for his comments on an initial version of this paper and for sharing with me a paper on field research methods for psychologists (Takooshian et al. in press). Feedback from Patricia Greenfield, Marshall Segall, and three other AA reviewers with a variety of perspectives gave me much to think about, led to many improvements, and is greatly appreciated. (Greenfield, Segall, and Takooshian are psychologists.) Dolores Newton has, as always, been generous with her advice and supportive of my interdisciplinary forays.

1. I am using the term *culture* as a shorthand to refer to the subject matter generally regarded as cultural without confronting problems of definition. I am aware of Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) multiple definitions, and I have written about problems with the concepts "personality," "culture," and "society" (Fish 1996). Similarly, I do not attempt to define "eties" and "emics," since the concepts are familiar to anthropologists and are used widely, albeit in a variety of ways (Harris 1999). In addition, although all inhabitants of the New World could rightly be thought of as "American," I use the term to refer to people in the United States because that is the folk term we use to refer to ourselves, just as another culture might use a term that means "the human beings." Finally, I use terms like *white* and *black* because they are the folk terms Americans use to refer to purported "races"—even though our species has no races in the biological sense.

2. Questionnaire surveys, because they are quantitative, are viewed by psychologists as more scientific than ethnographic interviews; but they are seen as less scientific than experiments because experiments yield causal inferences.

3. An example of the problem can be seen in the widely used and highly regarded edited volume, *Ethnicity and Family*

*Therapy* (McGoldrick et al. 1996), now in its second edition. Following an introduction, the book contains 47 chapters, each of which describes American families from a particular cultural background and discusses issues relevant to family therapy with them. The great majority of chapter authors are family therapists (social workers, psychologists, and a few psychiatrists) whose main qualification to write about the ethnic group in question is their membership in it rather than specifically relevant training in the social sciences.

My point is not that the cultural content does not exist; the three-volume second edition of the *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Berry et al. 1997) is just one example to the contrary. Rather, it is that awareness of the existence of the content and of the complexity and pervasiveness of culture has not diffused to the great masses of psychologists (as well as others, like social workers and psychiatrists—though this article is not about them), unfortunately including many who teach psychology courses with some form of the word *culture* in the title.

4. Psychologists also make a point of distinguishing among their doctorates to emphasize their expertise and training and to more clearly distinguish themselves from psychiatrists and social workers. The Ph.D. is a research degree awarded to scientists and scientist-practitioners (e.g., clinical psychologists). The Psy.D. (Doctor of Psychology) is an applied degree awarded to practitioners by university psychology departments as well as both university-based and freestanding schools of professional psychology. The Ed.D. degree (Doctor of Education) implies a focus on education and the schools and is usually awarded by schools of education to educational psychologists and school psychologists. Ph.D. psychologists are the most numerous, and the Ph.D. is the most prestigious degree; the Psy.D. has been in existence for only a few decades but has rapidly become widespread; Ed.D. psychologists are on the wane, with educational psychology tending toward the Ph.D. and school psychology becoming dominated by the Psy.D.

5. The social class origins and aspirations of social scientists are a topic of evident importance and worthy of empirical investigation. My observations of psychologists are impressionistic but are consistent with the following. Eugene Ogan (n.d.) presents evidence for the upper-class and upper-middle-class roots of American anthropology. Anne Roe's 1953 study of 14 eminent psychologists and 8 eminent anthropologists suggested that the anthropologists came from money while the psychologists worked their way up.

Psychologists' identification with the upper middle class may not make them unique—*Strangers in Paradise* (Ryan and Sackrey 1984) discusses the difficulties faced by academics of working-class origin in a variety of fields—but it is relevant to their work. For example, Sherwood and Nataupsky (1968) examined the biographical characteristics of 83 researchers who had studied "racial" differences in intelligence. They concluded that "investigators whose research was categorized as concluding that Negroes are innately inferior intellectually came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds" (p. 57). Similarly, Kaufman (1957) found that *status concern* (i.e., agreeing with statements like "Raising one's social position is the most important goal of life") correlated .66 with anti-Semitism—though this was not a study of psychologists or social scientists.

6. The heritability statistic is a fraction—the genetically associated variation in a population under given environmental conditions divided by all variation (both genetically and environmentally associated). By limiting the environments considered, one decreases the environmentally associated variation. This makes the denominator smaller and, hence, the heritability estimate larger.

7. Once again, from my point of view, the existence of outstanding counterexamples among psychologists specializing in culture (e.g., Berry et al. 1997; Segall et al. 1999) does not diminish the accuracy of this statement as it applies to the great masses of psychologists. Such people constitute nearly all of psychology and identify with the plethora of specialties whose titles omit the word *culture*.

8. The existence of such a title would seem to imply a recognition by the author that psychologists in general define reality in terms of individual behavior (even if cross-cultural psychologists do not). The implicit dialogue justifying the book's existence would go something like this. "I'm a psychologist, interested in understanding behavior. Why do I need to learn about culture?" "Because culture influences behavior."

9. Over time, the more numerous applied psychologists have come to dominate APA, to focus policy attention on guild issues, and to expand the number of applied divisions to reflect their concerns. As a result, the American Psychological Society (APS) was formed in 1988 as an explicitly "scientific" organization. In case applied psychologists didn't get the message, a movement developed to keep the acronym APS, but change the name to the "Association for Psychological Science." (Although 60% of members actually voted for the change, the proposal was defeated because it received less than the two-thirds of the ballots required by the bylaws.) The APS journal that goes to all members (corresponding to AAA's *American Anthropologist* or APA's *American Psychologist*) has been called *Psychological Science* from the start.

I was initiated into the status gulf between experimental and applied psychology as a graduate student at Columbia University in the 1960s. The experimental psychology programs were housed on the main campus, south of 120th Street (known to us as "the widest street in the world") and the applied psychology programs were housed at Teachers College. The subject matter and status distinctions were so important that the university even had two Ph.D. programs in social psychology—a program emphasizing laboratory experiments on the main campus, and one emphasizing the study of social issues at TC. And while much at Columbia has changed over the decades, the geographical demarcation of the two spheres of influence with their accompanying status distinctions, as well as the existence of two Ph.D. programs in social psychology, continue.

10. There are approximately 108,000 people with doctorates in psychology in the United States. Approximately another 213,000 have master's degrees, and about 71,000 of them are working in psychology. Over 70,000 people a year graduate with bachelors degrees in psychology, though few of them work in the field since positions generally require more advanced training.

The following figures are presented to give a sense of the order of magnitude of differences (1) between the memberships of psychological organizations and other professional organizations concerned with "culture" and (2) between the memberships of psychological organizations representing the field as a whole and those specifically concerned with "culture." Approximate memberships are: American Psychological Association, 84,000; American Psychological Society, 16,000 (many of whom are also APA members); American Sociological Association, 13,000; American Anthropological Association, 11,500; Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 3,000; Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, 1,200; International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 690 (260 from the USA, others from 69 countries); Society for Cross-Cultural Research, 200.

The assistance in compiling these numbers of the APA Research Office, of individuals in the various associations, of readers of earlier drafts of this paper, and of my graduate assistant Lily Hung is greatly appreciated.

11. The point here is not that cross-cultural psychology began recently—IACCP has been around for over 25 years. Rather, it is that the separate existence of an entity named "cross-cultural psychology" has served to isolate cultural issues from the mainstream field of social psychology and undercut the argument that cultural concerns are an intrinsic aspect of its subject matter. "You study culture, we'll do our experiments, and everybody will be happy" is the communication.

12. Here are two more illustrations of the ways in which psychologists seal themselves off from other disciplines' knowledge about "race." APA, like AAA and other professional organizations, is located in Washington, DC. The 1997 AAA convention, highlighting the issue of "race," took place there; and I asked the editor of the *APA Monitor* (comparable to *Anthropology News*) to send a reporter to cover some of the key presentations. She decided not to because the presentations were not by psychologists. Similarly, the editor of APA Books turned down a proposal for a multidisciplinary book on race and intelligence because too few of the chapters were by psychologists.

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