Preface: Special issue on the indigenous psychologies
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Preface

Special issue on the indigenous psychologies

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The indigenous psychologies are an interesting new phenomenon in psychology. They illustrate a questioning and decentring of Western-dominated psychological research. How these new psychologies should be characterized is very much an open question. However, indigenous psychologies may be described as a set of approaches to understanding human behaviour within the cultural contexts in which they have developed and are currently displayed. They can also be seen as attempts to root psychological research in the conceptual systems that are indigenous to a culture, including the philosophical, theological, and scientific ideas that are part of the historical and contemporary lives of people and their institutions.

The recent development of indigenous psychologies in their many forms presents both a challenge to, and the possibility for renewal of, mainstream psychology. For example, indigenous psychologies promise to provide information and insights into new phenomena that might have been difficult to identify without them. Thus, indigenous psychologies are likely to lead to discovery of new aspects of reality. Furthermore, indigenous psychologies are of interest not only for psychology, but also, for example, for anthropology and philosophy, since at least some versions of indigenous psychologies involve attempts to question descriptive categories for phenomena as well as methodologies, forms, and values of science that are usually taken for granted.

Another feature of indigenous psychologies is their wide variety. They now differ among themselves and it is possible that they will differ even more in the future. It is not clear whether common denominators will eventually be established for all or most forms of indigenous psychologies.

This special issue aims to present a sample of thinking about, and current research on, indigenous psychologies. It includes a core article by Allwood and Berry (with contributions by other authors). This article provides a picture of the current conceptions of 15 leading researchers in the indigenous psychologies field. They were asked to give their views on how the indigenous psychologies originated globally and in their own country. We also asked them to give their views on what the important characteristics of indigenized psychologies are on the global, world level, and in their own country today. The editors then discuss these contributions in terms of 8 important themes that we discerned in the 15 contributions. Among the many conclusions were that the indigenous psychologies show both homogeneity (for example with respect to their critique of Western-dominated mainstream psychology) and heterogeneity (for example with respect to the research methodology used). There is also an important tension within indigenous psychologies with respect to the degree to which they identify themselves with what is commonly called “cultural psychology.”

The distinguished historian of psychology, Kurt Danziger, then provides an article that comments on the main paper. He discusses the indigenous psychologies with respect to science, discipline, and voice, thus putting them into a broader context.
The last set of contributions to this special issue provide examples of ongoing research programmes into indigenous psychologies in various parts of the world. Although most contributions come from East Asia, this reflects the current active research work going on in this region. There is also much important work on indigenous psychologies taking place in other cultures. Despite our attempts to involve scholars from other regions, we were not able to sample their activities adequately. We hope that this special issue will spur further research and debate on indigenous psychologies in all parts of the world.

This special issue on Indigenous Psychologies is dedicated to the memory of Professor Rogelio Diaz Guerrero, whose life work contributed so much to the understanding of indigenous approaches to human behaviour.