Preface

It is customary in most volumes to write a preface that typically discusses the motives, reasons, and circumstances that led to writing the volume. In the case of this volume, the editors’ motives, reasons, and circumstances have arisen from a professional orientation involving life-long career interests and commitments to the study of cultural and international psychology, especially as the study revealed the biases, limitations, and inaccuracies of the Western psychology present throughout the teaching, research, and clinical practices in psychology. For the editors, these questionable characteristics were understandable as products of Western culture, but they were not acceptable, especially in a world that demanded an understanding and appreciation of the diverse people of the world and the validity and legitimacy of their psychologies.

Whether the population of interest was American ethnic and racial minority groups or international groups, it was clear that the Western psychology used to study them was a cultural creation – a set of assumptions, beliefs, methods, practices, and conclusions rooted within essential Western historical and cultural traditions regarding ways of knowing the world (epistemology), ways of acting in the world (praxiology), and ways of constructing views of human nature (ontology).

While the obvious ethnocentrism of Western psychology was not destructive or malicious in itself, it became obvious to many scientists and professionals across the world that there was a critical need to reconsider the content, roles, and functions of Western psychology as they were often indiscriminately applied in cross-cultural and international training, research, and services (e.g., Gergen et al. 1996; Marsella 1998; Mays et al. 1996; Moghaddam 1987; Sinha 1994; Sloan and Montero 1990).

It is important to recognize that the concerns of these scientists and professionals was not simply the need to study ethnic minority and racial groups and international populations accurately, but rather to acknowledge that in the course of studies, it was important psychologists using Western theories and methods understand the cultural roots and contexts of their approaches, and the consequences their conclusions could have for both resolving major domestic and international social problems, and for advancing psychology as a valid scientific body of knowledge and approach
to inquiry. Thus, it was a matter of conscience, ethics, and justice, and it is a tribute to the integrity of psychologists whose energies and voices advanced these concerns in an emerging global community.

There were many psychologists – ethnic and racial minorities and international – involved in changing the consciousness and course of psychology via critiques of the foundations of Western psychology. These psychologists helped establish a number of specialty areas in psychology from the post-WWII era to the present, including cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, ethnic minority and racial psychologies, indigenous psychology, and more recently, international psychology and global psychology. But it was not so much the specialties that are important, as the recognition that the cultural context of psychology’s knowledge needed to be considered. There is no single date, nor single person, that we can point to as a turning point in this quiet revolution in thought that has now permanently altered psychology around the world, and that now serves as a major impetus for this volume. Clearly, there are scores of pioneer figures that could be cited, but this will have to await another publication.

Yet, even as we recognize the roles of individual psychologists from across the world, it is also necessary to cite the American Psychological Association (APA) itself, which served the important function of forming linkages with different international psychology organizations and agencies across recent decades. In addition, the APA also deserves credit for establishing the Committee for International Relations (CIRP) as a locus for addressing international concerns. Indeed, it was within CIRP that the idea of “internationalizing psychology” gained popularity and prominence in the early 1990s under the leadership of Joan Buchanan and subsequently, Merry Bullock. CIRP also provided leadership in developing APA Division 52 (International Psychology) and its new (2011) APA journal, Perspectives on International Psychology, under the current editorship of Dr. Joan Gibbons.

Today, the issue of internationalizing the psychology curriculum is no longer the subject of debate and widespread resistance of past decades. Psychologists around the world are alert and responsive to the demands of our global era for understanding diverse people and for addressing major global challenges with a full consideration and respect for cultural and national sensitivities and resources. To that end, the present volume was prepared to serve as a resource for internationalizing the psychology curriculum in the USA. It is a beginning. There are many suggestions and much hard earned wisdom that will be found within the following pages. It is also clear that efforts should be made to internationalize the psychologies of other nations and other cultures. That is to say, develop indigenous and national psychologies, and recognize their inherent limitations and possibilities.
We live in a global community. Because of this, psychology and psychologists have responsibilities, obligations, and duties to respond with an understanding and respect for the diverse people of the world. From the following chapters to the closing appendix, it is our hope that the material in this volume will continue to advance psychology as a profession, science, and art that serves humanity and all life.

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References


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