 [IP--report on the APA symposium, and reflections on consilience](#) by Louise

S. [2012, Aug 23]

Dear All,

Two things to share. First, it is my pleasure to report on a successful symposium at this year's APA Convention, Orlando, August 5th. The symposium is entitled "Culture and Creativity: Toward a Psychology beyond the STEM model." Although it was scheduled toward the end of the convention, we had a good turn out, comparable to some of the prime time sessions I attended. Most important, there was strong support from Division 32 (Society for Humanistic Psychology)—the incoming president Louis Hoffman was there; and Scott Churchill, the council representative of the division volunteered to serve as the Discussant. What was especially encouraging was the ethnic diversity of the audience--psychologists from Poland, Romanian, India, etc.-- and their responses. One person said jokingly to me, "How dare you bringing God to APA?" There was a palpable sense of freedom in the air, the minute people realized that we were not approaching culture as a lifeless, disinfected specimen of science. A discussion on the STEM model of psychology ensued, and we heard the cry, "APA needs to be educated by us; why go along with APA's policy?" It was when indigenous cultures were given their due that the open mindedness, the creativity, and the courage for change emerged out of nowhere and gained momentum. This is the most important lesson I learned from that session.

The STEM movement in psychology is one of the many variations of globalization. Another rhetoric of globalization is consilience. Below is Rick Shweder's critique of this movement, which he posted on a different list, circulated here with permission.

Enjoy,

Louise

PS. To give some context to Shweder's critique, I have also attached the original article on consilience by Slingerland.

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Dear readers of this interdisciplinarity love-in,

I am (and always have been) a fan and advocate of this cause, having received my graduate education in anthropology in the Dept of Social Relations at Harvard in its latter years and having spent almost my entire academic career in the oldest surviving interdisciplinary social science department in the USA - the Department of Comparative Human Development (founded in 1940 by luminaries in sociology, anthropology, psychology and education and long known as the Committee on Human Development). But I do think one should be alert to the hazards of the trend to create Centers and Institutes that has been witnessed in the academy over the past 25 years. In my experience Centers are often fiefdoms build around the agendas of particular faculty and insulated from real debate and criticism. And increasingly Institutes are becoming mechanisms for administrators to centralize control over the evolution of academic agendas and ways to leverage funding and push the institution

to get involved in research directions that external donors (and fashion) favor. Whether this is a good thing or bad thing can be debated but if faculty appointments in departments get tied to funds available from donors through Institutes the process become much more top down than bottom up. The pendulum has been swinging in that direction, and without sufficient debate.


For those who might be interested I have attached my critique of at least one version of the consilience agenda, titled "The Metaphysical Realities of the Unphysical Sciences: Or Why Vertical Integration Seems Unrealistic to Ontological Pluralists." This appears in a recent book titled "Creating Consilience" edited by Edward Slingerland and Mark Collard.

Also a response essay titled "Anthropology's Disenchantment with the Cognitive Revolution" (another one of those big interdisciplinary movements that became less and less interdisciplinary over time) which appears in Topics: Journal of the Cognitive Science Society. It is a response to a target essay titled "Should Anthropology Be Part of Cognitive Science?."

Warm regards,

Rick Shweder

Harold Higgins Swift Distinguished Service Professor

University of Chicago  [2012 - Anthropology's Disenchantment](#)  [2012 - Metaphysical Realities of Un-Physical Sciences](#)  [Consilience llingerland](#)