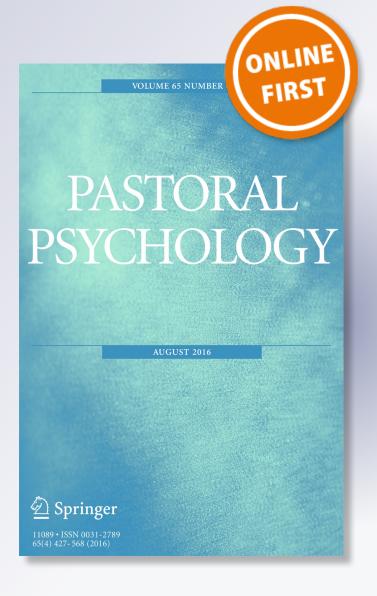# Western Cultural Psychology of Religion: Alternatives to Ideology

Al Dueck, Jeffrey Ansloos, Austin Johnson & Christin Fort

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Western Cultural Psychology of Religion:
Alternatives to Ideology

Al Dueck[1] · **Jeffrey Ansloos**[2] · **Austin Johnson**[1] ·
Christin Fort[1]

Abstract This essay is an extended reflection on Belzen's (2010) groundbreaking book *Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion: Principles, Approaches, Applications.* We will critically examine the terms culture, psychology, and religion separately and in relation to each other. The question we address is whether unconsciously Western understandings underlie these concepts and then are exported into non-Western cultures. The concept of 'culture' may reflect a Western bias and may be injurious when exported if culture means de facto becoming self-consciously modern, remains an abstract idea, reinforces "othering," and serves to colonize the other. It is proposed that we listen to voices of non-Western scholars as they reflect on what 'culture' means to them rather than assuming that the meaning of the word 'culture' is universally the same. Second, we examine briefly the ways in which our understanding of religion reflects our Western biases in terms of the presumption of secularization, the meaning of religiousness, the Christian influence on defining religion, the use of religion in Western colonization, and the degree to which religion is defined abstractly. Third, we are concerned that the psychology utilized in the emerging discipline of psychology of religion is Western in that it reflects a capitalist, industrialized, individualistic, and pluralistic culture that may be less present in other cultures and perhaps even eschewed. Further, we think that in various cultures of the world, psychological knowledge emerges less from scientific observation but from the local religious/cultural traditions themselves. Finally, we examine how cultural psychology intersects with religion. We propose a model in which the specific religious cultures nurture the attitudes, emotions, behaviors, and relationships that reflect their critical values.

Keywords Cultural psychology of religion · Western religion · Indigenous psychologies

✉ Al Dueck
adueck@fuller.edu

[1]   Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, CA, USA

[2]   University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

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This essay examines how culture, psychology, and religion interact from a particularist, Western point of view.[1] What follows are meditations and reflections stimulated by Jacob Belzen's (2010) ground-breaking book *Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion: Principles, Approaches, Applications*. For several decades now, Belzen has sought to bring together the fields of cultural psychology and psychology of religion such that the former would serve as a context for the latter. We applaud his persistent reminder, his unwavering commitment, and his articulate writings on the topic of a cultural psychology of religion. His book deserves careful review as it charts new territory.

The sweep of Belzen's research is broad, the approach reflective and, at points, provocative and critical. He makes no assumptions about his work being definitive or a textbook. Belzen calls for change that is urgent and radical, a pluralistic approach with many cultural psychological theories. He hopes that the cultural psychological approach will address some of the old debates that are part of psychology of religion over the past century. He wishes to convince us that "it is indeed possible and worthwhile to apply cultural psychological perspectives to research on religious phenomena" (Belzen 2010, p. 19).

In response to Belzen, we contextualize in Western culture the terms culture, psychology, and religion separately and in relation to each other. Is it possible that unconsciously Euro-Western understandings underlie these concepts and that we then unconsciously export them? One could assume that the meanings of all three terms are culturally universal. However, if we do not recognize the social location of our theories, we may unwittingly impose our own definitions of culture, psychology, and religion on the ethnic minority communities we study or on non-Western psychologists who read and contribute to Western journals or attend Western conferences.

My (first author's) first encounter with this problematic came in the form of a question from a colleague after I gave an address on cultural psychology in a non-Western setting. She asked me what I thought my audience understood by the word 'culture.' Naively, I assumed their definition was at least similar to mine. Culture is what a people have in common: their beliefs, practices, convictions, desires, rituals, symbols, and so on. My colleague countered: "What if they don't have the intercultural or international experience necessary to grasp the notion of 'culture'?" I was brought up short. I wondered what implicit Western meanings of culture I had been transmitting to my audience.

This essay argues that our definitions of the nature of culture, religion, and psychology do in fact reflect Western cultures. To privilege Western meanings is ideological. Moreover, these terms as we use them to describe a field of study are problematic not only in our own context but also in non-Western communities. The definitions and descriptions we create are read by the subjects of our cultural descriptions and shape their sense of cultural identity—or evoke their ire.

Some would disagree with our thesis. The commitment to a universal meaning for the word 'culture' has persisted into modernity.

Thus, it was assumed Hallowell (1955) notion that people everywhere are likely to develop an understanding of themselves as physically distinct and separable from others. Head (1920), for example, claimed the existence of a universal schema of the body that provided one with an anchor in time and space. Similarly, Allport (1937) suggested that

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[1] For the purpose of this paper the authors have utilized the term 'Western' to refer to European and other non-indigenous traditions. In doing so, the authors also acknowledge the tension of the potential for the rhetorical erasure of indigenous nations, peoples, and traditions existing in Western geographic contexts.

there must exist an aspect of personality that allows one, when awakening each morning, to be sure that he or she is the same person who went to sleep the night before. Most recently, Neisser (1988) referred to this aspect of self as the ecological self, which he defined as 'the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment: 'I' am the person here in this place, engaged in this particular activity' (p. 3). Beyond a physical or ecological sense of self, each person probably has some awareness of internal activity, such as dreams, and of the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings, which are private to the extent that they cannot be directly known by others. The awareness of this unshared experience will lead the person to some sense of an inner, private self. (Markus and Kitayama 1991, p. 225)

This Shweder has referred to as the assumption of a universal, central information-processing mechanism:

The main force in general psychology is the idea of a central processing device. The processor, it is imagined, stands over and above, or transcends, all the stuff upon which it operates. It engages all the stuff of culture, context, task and stimulus materials as its content. (Shweder 1991, p. 80)

Characteristic of a core processor is the ability of individuals to construct meaning (Osgood et al. 1975) according to linguistic universals (Jakobson 1968). Following Darwin (1871/1896), Ekman (1971) proposed that there are universal facial expressions for emotions experienced. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell (1949/ 2008) presumed that the structure of the psyche he borrowed from Carl Jung is universal. Hinde (2009) and others (Barrett 2011) argued for the universality of a religious instinct. Kohlberg (1981) seemed to assume that his stages of moral development were universal. A canon of scientific research is generalizability. Thus if we do not specify the scope of generalizability, the default appears to be universality.

Research in psychology over much of the past century has been conducted in an experimentalist paradigm that brackets culture. In fact, many have assumed that human nature is constant with only slightly different reflections in various cultures. Human nature is universal; culture is incidental. Alongside the development of science generally and of the science of the person, a different strand of thought emphasized the historical, particular, local, and unique. The Greek Herodotus (460–359 BCE) visited more than 50 cultures and created detailed portraits of the different cultures, including their religion, art, and daily practices. He referred to them as barbaric, but this word then meant "people who are different." Fellow countryman Thucydides (455?–395 BCE) attempted to explain why Athenians were not warlike. Both Herodotus and Thucydides believed that people in most cultures were ethnocentric, and Hippocrates thought that geography and climate were the source of that diversity.

As the modern era emerged, Descartes, Vico, Herder, John Stuart Mill, Dilthey, and Wundt all made a fundamental distinction between science and history. Descartes (1637/2015) rejected the historical as unscientific because the human mind played a role in it. Vico (1970) made the same distinction but declared the inapplicability of natural science models to the study of human nature. Human nature should be understood through an historical analysis of language, myth, and ritual, which, he

believed, could lead to a universal set of principles of human nature. Herder (1784/1969) proposed that psychological processes depend on time and space and introduced the term *Volk* to describe the sense of group identity generated by traditions, language, and customs. He believed that culture shaped mental processes and that each culture should be evaluated on its own terms.

John Stuart Mill (1843/1875) disagreed with those who assumed that thoughts, feelings, and actions could not be the subject of scientific study. For him, the laws of association represented simple psychological laws analogous to gravity. However, the combination of these elementary psychological laws created individual character, which was a science he called ethology. Each science required different methodologies. Dilthey (Dilthey and Betanzos 1923/1988) continued the tradition of dual sciences but assumed that psychology would provide support for an historical-social approach. Wundt (Wundt and Schaub 1916/1994) is famous for his studies in psychophysics, but he considered the study of language, myth, and religion as more important for understanding individual consciousness. He referred to this second psychology as *Völkerpsychologie*, namely, how culture is integral to psychological processes. Meanwhile, in the United States, Sapir (1921) proposed that language, culture, and thought are inextricably connected.

Without question, if human nature is constant, then culture is secondary, an adornment, a veneer. Such has been the assumption for much of Western history. Plato emphasized stable universal processes of the mind that he considered timeless, and hence he argued that certain knowledge could be constructed by the universal properties of the knowing organism. The term 'psychic unity' of humankind pointed to the assumption that at some level of abstraction all humans are alike. Vico (1744/1970) stated: "It is another property of the human mind, that whenever men [*sic*] can form an idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand" (p. 18).

On defining culture

The process of inventing Maori culture has been ongoing on over the past century. Hanson's (1989) controversial essay suggests that the process of inventing Maori culture was first conducted by Westerners on two fronts: the sophisticated Io religion and the origin story of the Great Fleet. The story first told by Arthur Thomson (1859) was that around 1350 CE a fleet of seven canoes from Tahiti arrived in New Zealand and that these Tahitians eventually populated the country. According to Percy Smith (1913), the cult of Io included the belief in a supreme, eternal, an uncreated being who presided over a pantheon of gods and who verbally called the universe into being from a primal void.

Although first constructed by Westerners, both of these narratives have been fully embraced by the Maori, incorporated into educational materials, and become part of the creation of their ethnic identity. In 1950 the Maori leader, Sir Apirana Ngata, a long-time Member of Parliament, advanced the idea of a celebration to commemorate the arrival of the Great Fleet (Sorrenson 1979). The traveling exhibition "Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections" (Mead 1984) was shown in New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Chicago in 1984–1986. And, back home, it was recommended that Maori studies be elevated to department status in New Zealand universities and that a university be established that was sensitive to Maori beliefs and customs (Mead 1983).

However, both of the pillars of Maori culture, the Io religion and the Great Fleet, have been seriously questioned. Io's creative abilities have much in common with the Genesis account of the Hebrew God, and the story of the Grand Fleet is a myth constructed by European scholars (Simmons 1976; Simpson 1997). This once again makes Christian (Euro-Western) narratives the normative, comparative lens for those on the periphery seeking historical identity.

From this example it is clear that how we describe a culture and its origins has weighty political consequences. We are not questioning the value of this cultural construction for the Maori sense of identity today. The only point we wish to make is that delineating how we define culture generally and, in this case, particularly, can have a profound effect on those who read the writings of historians and cultural psychologists.

Over the past century, Western intellectuals have developed a myriad of definitions of culture. Raymond Williams (1976) once declared that he rued the day the word was coined in the first place—the word had too many meanings. Culture is a complicated word with a complicated history of use. The ubiquity of the word 'culture' is surpassed only by its ambiguity. By 1952, anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1966) were able to list some 164 definitions! They constructed culture as

> patterns, explicitly and implicitly, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (1952/1966, p. 357)

Geertz's (1973) definition adds a few new features. For him, culture is.

> an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [*sic*] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life. (p. 89)

Fiske (2002) understands culture as "a socially transmitted or socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment" (p. 85).

Finally, Terry Eagleton (2000) provides a wide-ranging outline of the meaning of culture that shifts it from an activity to an entity: from what is concrete and material to what is secular and abstract; from religious cult to culture; and from what is contained and available in nature to what is refashioned as culture. Culture implicitly carries the distinctions between (1) the provincial and the urbane, (2) the artificial and the natural, (3) what we do to nature and what nature does to us, (4) the real and the constructed, (5) the autonomous laws of nature and the regulating rules of culture, (6) organic determinism and cultural freedom, (7) naturalism and idealism, (8) desire and will, passion and reason, (10) disruptive internal drives and anarchic social forces, (11) human being and being human, (12) self-acceptance and self cultivation, (13) barbarism and refinement, and (14) the uncultivated and the cultivated. No wonder Williams despaired!

The definition of culture created by Belzen builds on some aspects of the definitions above but is not as exhaustive as Eagleton's definition. Belzen states that culture is "a system of signs, rules, symbols and practices that, on the one hand, structure the human realm of action, structures that are, on the other hand, constantly being (re)constructed and transformed by

human action and praxis" (Belzen 2010, p. 37). He goes on to state that culture is fluid, dynamic, hybridic, and constantly changing. So it is more than a simple, static context or situation. Culture constitutes, facilitates, and regulates human subjectivity.

We agree. Belzen's view of culture is similar to the definitions of culture above. We wonder if these Western construals of culture are at times too abstract and reifying, secular and apolitical. We think the word "culture" as we use it is problematic in our own context and also in reference to non-Western communities. The definitions of culture we create may be written for our professional colleagues but as Abu-Lughod (1991) observes, the subjects of our cultural descriptions read our works. She aptly calls this the "Rushdie effect."[2]

We argue that our use of the word 'culture' reflects a Western bias and may be detrimental when used to describe other cultures. Wittgenstein (1958) reminds us that meaning is community dependent, and so we would do well to listen to definitions of culture of those who emerge out of non-Western traditions, are educated (or not) in the West, and then reflect on the accuracy of our Western descriptions of their native communities. The authors we cite have primarily non-Western backgrounds: Abu-Lughod (1991); Said (1978), and Turner (2006). Specifically, the voice and experiences of the second author, whose primary community is the Fisher River Cree Nation of Canada, and of the fourth author, who is an African American female, are integrated into the essay. The third author is Texan, which, he defends as a culture unto itself.

We suggest that definitions of culture would do well to place greater emphasis addressing the following issues. First, implicit in Western definitions of culture is a myopic modern sensibility that may not be shared by non-Western societies. Second, the notion of culture in several of the definitions above seems excessively abstract rather than concrete and/or experiential. Third, our use of the term 'culture' may in fact reify and calcify otherness because of the fundamental assumption that other cultures must ipso facto be different. Fourth, definitions of culture tend to be ahistorical which may then mute voices that call for a historical awareness of oppression and colonization of the other. We consider each of these ideological in that they privilege Western construals of culture.

Culture as the coming to consciousness of modernity

One notion of the word 'culture' is that it is actually a narrative reframe of the picture of medieval Christendom with its (presumed) solid foundation and relative coherence. With the progressive demise of Western Christendom in which the world is given, created, and understood in terms of divine revelation, the word 'culture' effectively removes the religious overtones and fills in the resulting vacuum. In the modern world, culture is construed as a human creation where the future is unhinged from the past. In this vein, Bauman comments on the effects of modernity by noting the following: "The world appeared ever less Godlike—that is, ever less eternal, impervious and intractable. It assumes instead an ever more human form, becoming more in 'man's image' [sic]—protean, fickle and flickering, whimsical and full of surprise" (Bauman 1999, p. xi). All human arrangements turn out to be temporal, a human and

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[2] The British Indian Salman Rushdie's (2011) novel *Satanic Verses* made controversial references to texts in the Koran that were attributed to the devil. The title and the content of the novel provoked protests from Muslims and death threats were made against him.

not a divine feature. Human effort could change the structure, texture, quality and beneficence of culture. Of this modernist, humanist culture, John Carroll (1983) wrote that

> It [culture] attempted to replace God by man [*sic*], to put man in the centre of the universe.... Its ambition was to found a human order on earth, in which freedom and happiness prevailed, without any transcendental or supernatural supports—an entirely human order.... But if the human individual were to become the still-point of the universe he [*sic*] had to have somewhere to stand that would not move from under his [*sic*] feet. Humanism had to build the rock. It had to create out of nothing something as strong as the faith of the New Testament that could move mountains. (p. 2)

Revelation was replaced by rationally grounded truth. Order in culture was created based on legislation rather than on divine imperative.

Sometimes the meaning of culture is more obviously assumed to be modern. For example, in the late 1960s in Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government, the Indigenous Affairs minister Jean Chretien addressed the 'Indian problem' in the now infamous White Paper of June 1969 (Turner 2006). The view of culture in this document is that of Western liberalism. This view privileges the individual as the fundamental moral unit and views political justice in terms of individual freedom and equality. Although there had been a consultative process initiated by the prime minister, the final version of the White Paper did not involve First Nations members in developing a culture of rights *from within their own understanding of their collective identity*. So, for many First Nations people, this White Paper portended cultural annihilation as it imposed on them a Western understanding of culture as a collection of individuals, and it forced First Nations people to explain and defend their way of life to the Canadian government in the latter's modernist language of culture as individual. In a mere 13 pages, this document called for the assimilation of Indigenous people and First Nations into mainstream Canadian culture—by force, if necessary. Harold Cardinal's (1969) angry voice in *Unjust Society* called for more indigenous understandings of First Nations culture.

Modernity assumed that the achievement of culture was the universal possibility of all humanity. And it is this Western notion of the culturalization of nature and religion that we have exported and imposed on our understanding of the rest of the world. What might be the social consequences of imposing this notion of culture as modernity on a society that replaced an older "sacred canopy" that stretched over their way of life (Berger 1967)?

Culture as an abstract idea

Although Western definitions of culture (see examples above) describe customs and rights abstractly, many traditional languages point to more embodied epistemologies of everyday life. To understand a particular community, one must experience it in daily life. For example, in traditional Cree language there is no direct translation for the Western word 'culture.' Rather, many of the words that might be closely aligned with a definition of culture describe action. For example, *isihcikewin*, refers simply to "the doing of living." This is perhaps the only ethical and truly indigenous way to understand Cree 'culture'; that is to say, understanding what it is to *be* Cree is about *living* Cree. Rather than trying to define what it is to be Cree, being Cree becomes the methodology of learning, and in so doing, the question of cultural definition, which ultimately seeks to instrumentalize culture, becomes irrelevant as one more fully participates in the dynamic life of the Cree community (Shweder and Bourne 1982).

Abu-Lughod is an American anthropologist with Palestinian and Jewish ancestry. She suggests that one strategy for concretizing culture is the writing of ethnographies on particular communities so as to avoid over-generalization. The abstract approach to writing in the social sciences in the West is not neutral description (Foucault 1978; Said 1978). Abu-Lughod proposes that the study of societies remain as close as possible to the language of everyday life. This will involve a narrative about specific individuals living in particular times and places. She states, "By focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness" (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 476). Although ethnography is a culturally thick approach to research, ethnography has also been sharply critiqued for its essentialism and colonial objectification. What is needed therefore, are critical ethnographies, participatory and community-engaged sociocultural research, and autoethnographies.

Culture as othering

Appadurai (1988), an anthropologist from India, asserts that the description of indigenous peoples emerges from the anthropologist's imagination and may therefore incarcerate them as 'other' in space and time. For an example of othering, consider the words of former First Lady Laura Bush, who commented on November 17, 2001, that the war in Afghanistan had liberated Muslim women from the prison of their homes giving them the freedom to listen to music, to teach their daughters, and even to wear nail polish. In her insightful article, "Do Muslim women really need saving?," Abu-Lughod (2002) responds to Bush by making the point that it is imperative we not place feminism on the side of Western culture, thereby assuming that burqa-covered women in Afghanistan are automatically oppressed. ("Salvation" here refers here not to the Christian notions of redemption but to the gospel of secular liberalism.) This objectifying posture presumes knowledge of what Muslim women should be saved from and what they should be saved for. As such, the Westerner participates in an oppressive and aggressive act of cultural violence—of othering.

A cultural psychology of religion would do well to begin not only with indigenous cultures to understand the individual but also with indigenous understandings of the very notion of culture itself. For example, from her particular background Abu-Lughod (1991) views Western conceptions of culture as essentialist and as reifying the distinction between self and other. She states:

> The effort to produce general ethnographic descriptions of people's beliefs or actions tends to smooth over contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and circumstances. The erasure of time and conflict make what is inside the boundary set up by homogenization something essential and fixed. These effects are of special moment to anthropologists because they contribute to the fiction of essentially different and discrete others who can be separated from some sort of equally essential self. In so far as difference is, as I have argued, hierarchical, and assertions of separation a way of denying responsibility, generalization itself must be treated with suspicion. (p. 475)

Abu-Lughod is prepared to write against the very use of the language of culture because inevitably cultural discourse enforces separations and carries a sense of hierarchy. Our understanding of culture is implicitly and explicitly constructed across the non-egalitarian divide of the West and the non-West, as well as the Global North and the Global South. What are the alternatives to this problematic construal of culture? Abu-Lughod (1991) suggests that we should be writing against Western conceptions of culture in several different ways. She

suggests we emphasize practice (Bourdieu 1977) rather than theoretical discourse on culture. That would allow us to analyze social life without assuming cultural coherence. Rather than focusing on rules, models, and texts, this approach "is built around problems of contradiction, misunderstanding, and misrecognition, and favors strategies, interests, and improvisations over the more static and homogenizing cultural tropes of rules, models, and texts" (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 147). Discourses that tend to refuse the distinction between ideas and practices or texts and world practice and discourse are useful in that they work against the notion of boundedness and idealism (Asad 1983).

Philip Cushman (1995) suggests that the notion of culture has been forged in the individualistic models of personal capital. In the forming of American society, Cushman suggests that psychologically

> Indians [*sic*] were portrayed as inadequate bourgeoisie: savage, ignorant, lazy, dishonest, and communal. They survived on the Great Plains by hunting, rather than by individual initiative, personal achievement and the calculation and utilization of the labor of others. They were unaware of Western science, the concept of linearity, or the inevitability of progressive development. They appeared unable to delay gratification, save money, or accumulate capital. In other words, they were the antithesis of bourgeois values. (p. 59)

In the essentialist and degrading view of indigenous people, nations, and societies, North American colonial settlers proliferated a technology of the indigenous self as *the other*. In a sense, the cultural and social differences of indigenous societies came to be seen as the pathologies that put the dominant culture at risk. Being less productive in terms of capital, or in understanding one's experience through nonlinear rationality, or in the engagement of communal obligation and ceremony became characteristic of what we now call mental illness. Cushman points out that "it was through participation in the roles of 'the other,' the dynamic of vicarious masquerade and disavowal, that middle-class whites could configure the self" (p. 62).

Culture and history: Colonization

A further concern about Western definitions of culture is how Platonic, i.e., ahistorical, the definitions of culture are. As a consequence, there is an egregious absence of reference to oppressive colonialism by the colonized in the definitions of culture given above. These definitions of culture fail to address the yearning of those societies to recover from their traditional culture that which could still be of use to temper the onslaught of modernity and colonization. In this regard, we think of Virgilio Enriquez (1988) in the Philippines, Ignatius Martín-Baró (1994) in El Salvador, and Dalal and Misra (2010) in India.

In the period of a century (from 1815 to 1914), European direct colonial dominion expanded from 35 % to about 85 % of the earth's surface (Said 1978). Over 40 years ago, in his trenchant critique of anthropologists' cultural construals, Asad (1973) argued that the lens of colonialization distorted anthropologists' understandings. He made the observation that anthropology emerged concurrent with the beginning of the colonial era in the sixteenth century and became a flourishing profession near the end of colonization just after the Second World War. "Throughout this period its efforts were devoted to a description and analysis—carried out by Europeans for a European audience—of non-European societies dominated by European power" (p. 15). Anthropologists provided the West with cultural and historical information about the societies it oppressed and created an 'objective' knowledge thereby reinforcing the inequities between European and non-

European worlds. Asad pointed out that this power relationship affected "the uses to which knowledge was put; the theoretical treatment of particular topics; the mode of perceiving and objectifying alien societies; and the anthropologist's claim of political neutrality" (p. 17).

Asad (1973) maintained that there is an element of the ideological in the understanding of culture. Quite apart from the designation of the objects of their description as primitive, simple, preliterate, or barbarian, there is the sophisticated use of culture that emerged out of the anthropologists' own cultural context and was imposed on their descriptions so as to give theoretic coherence. Specifically, the presence of colonialization in the communities that were studied resulted in apolitical constructions. Asad focused on the cultural metaphors used to describe traditional Africa: "a balance of powers, reciprocal obligations, and value consensus" (p. 105). Anthropologists focused

> on the integrated character of the body politic; on the reciprocal rights and obligations between rulers and the ruled, on the consensual basis of the ruler's political authority and administration, and on the inherent inefficiency of the traditional system of government and giving every legitimate interest its due representation. (p. 105)

This description of typical local African structures ignored the political fact of European colonization and Africa's dependency. The anthropologist's commitment to an ahistorical, Durkheimian sociology led him or her to focus on the cohesiveness created by common religious values and symbols. The fundamental theoretical question asked by the functionalist-oriented anthropologist was: What holds society together? But, Asad avers, they took the problem of social order as their fundamental theoretical concern because they had come from a crisis-ridden Europe. Besides, colonial ideology had stressed the essential integrity of African political cultures as a result of colonial rule. Asad concludes that by creating a particular image of African culture, the anthropologist helped to justify colonial rule and, by addressing how Europe had imposed its power on Africa, the discipline was basically affirming of colonial ruling classes.

We have discussed the effects of the colonization of Africans, but we would be remiss if we did not mention the colonization of African Americans in the North American context. This group includes descendants of the African diaspora who were captured, sold, and purchased by European Americans and brought to Native American soil against their own will. Their story—my story (fourth author)— of cultural identity formation does not properly belong in either the category of "indigenous" nor "colonizing people groups in the West. Certain landmarks of our development as a unique ethnic group have been observed in reference to certain holidays (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr's birthday) and Black History Month in February. However, the unprecedented nature of our identity formation as a kidnapped and displaced people brought to stolen land and then thrust into the privileged Western world—devoid of economic status and material possessions and unrecognized as human beings by many—represents a distinctive space for the emergence of cultural identity that must not be overlooked. In particular, the roles of psychological resilience, religious ritual, and spirituality have factored heavily into our cultural development. Thus, we note the importance of the impact of colonization in this conversation regarding culture, psychology, and religion in regard to African Americans as well as to Africans.

Does Belzen address the issue of colonization in his understanding of culture? Belzen does plead for a greater awareness of the historical-cultural dimensions of the object of psychological study (Belzen 2010, p. 28–35). The object of study of a cultural psychology is the historical subject. He states, "The relation between a human being and (her or his) culture,

after all, is not a natural but a historical one" (p. 28). A historical psychology, Belzen points out, recognizes that psychology emerges out of a particular history, namely, modern history. Further, a historical psychology precludes the assumption that human beings are essentially always and everywhere the same. If psychology is historical, then the personal events that occurred in one time and place are not generalizable. This applies to a psychology of religion as well.

What appears absent from Belzen's analysis is the interaction of colonial power, the history of nation-states, and the Westernized nature of local psychology and religion. His discussion of the nature of historical psychology, psychological historiography, and psychohistory in relation to cultural psychology does not address the impact of colonialism. His emphasis on history is primarily to counteract the essentialist notion that human beings are always and everywhere the same. A historical perspective on the person does not permit universalizing tendencies (Danziger 1990, 1997, 2008; Gergen 1973). However, Belzen does not address colonialism in relation to a cultural psychology of religion, something we consider imperative. In his book, there is no mention of the colonization literature by Fanon (1967), Said (1978), Nandy (1989), or Spivak (1999, 2003).

In this section, we have argued that as cultural psychologists our use of the concept of 'culture' may reflect a Western bias and may be problematic when exported. We have listened to non-Western voices as they have reflected on the meaning of culture for them in their context. We cannot assume that culture is synonymous with modernity, nor do we seek to reify otherness. We have argued that colonization must be considered in the way culture is construed in a given society.

So what are the alternatives to an ideological Western model of cultural psychology of religion? We have suggested the following with regard to culture:

- Remember that the meaning of culture is not synonymous with modernity;
- Recover the embodied nature of culture in practices rather than positing abstract dimensions;
- Privilege the writing of ethnographies over collecting survey data;
- Acknowledge that there are both similarities and differences between cultures/religions and within cultures/religions; and
- Avoid reinforcing colonization by affirming liberatory effects.

Religion and culture

Does religion have a legitimate role in the development of cultural psychology as a discipline? The notion that religion is optional as an object of research is a legacy of Western secularism. Taking religion and spirituality in indigenous psychology more seriously than is allowed for in secular psychology is warranted by the study of traditional societies in which religion and spirituality have played an important role. Because of the intimate relationship of culture and religion, cultural psychologists do not have the option that general psychology has exercised in leaving out religion (L. Sundararajan, personal communication, February 2016).

Since a cultural psychology of religion addresses religion as an object of study, the question becomes whose definition of religion is used as the point of departure. We begin with a discussion of culture as ethical religion. Then we suggest that, like the above definitions of

culture, cultural psychology has assumed a Western construal of religion. After all, the notion of religion was birthed in the West. In this section, we argue that a Western bias is evident. First, the absence of religion as a dimension of culture is a telling bias given the prominence of religion in many societies of the world. Second, religion has served the purposes of Western colonizers in their socialization of subjects. Third, religion as a Western intellectual construction can serve to undermine lived religions.

Religion as ethical culture

The notion of a moral imperative is implicit in the Western meaning of culture. A review of the etymology of the word 'culture' in the Oxford English Dictionary (3rd ed.) (2008) confirms this. The meaning of the word began as a verb to describe nurture and cultivation. The moral aspect of culture was connected to its roots in the word 'cult,' which meant to honor with worship, and developed in parallel to the secular meanings of culture. In English vocabulary and meanings, culture as worship first appeared in Caxton in 1483 (Jacobus et al. 1483/1900 as cited in Williams 1976, p. 77).

The word 'culture' emerged concurrent with the rise of the modern world. The word first surfaced in the twelfth century, when it referred to the action of cultivating land and plants. By the sixteenth century, it included the development of language and literature, and by the seventeenth century it meant mental development through education. In the 18th and 19th centuries it was associated with the state of development of ideas and customs within a society (Williams 1976). Culture, in the English world, now became an abstract social process of intellectual and aesthetic (rather than moral) socialization into the existing mores of a specific society. So, Jane Austen (1816/1999) could say of Emma: "Living constantly with right-minded and well-informed people, her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture" (p. 108). In this context, the word culture is closely related to civilization and the process of becoming morally civilized.

Geertz (1973) and Shweder et al. (1997) do include the prescriptive or moral dimension in their definitions of culture. Geertz refers to the two dimensions of culture as a model *of* reality and a model *for* reality. This suggests that culture has a normative force, an 'oughtness.' On the one hand, it maps the worldview of a culture (descriptive) through our language, how we think and feel, and how we experience and express our thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, it creates a moral ethos (prescriptive), developing normative expectations and offering a variety of constellations of right and wrong, good and evil. Geertz suggested that culture seeks to explain the inexplicable, to give meaning to suffering, to provide moral insight. We are moral beings because we are cultural beings.

However, in our experience, after the cultural discourse of social scientists is exported to non-Western societies, the moral/ethical dimension of culture is reduced to description of the customs and mores of a society. Note that the definitions of culture above are largely descriptive, identifying the dimensions of culture in general such as beliefs, sentiments, behaviors, and rituals. It also seems that the descriptive work is disembodied not only in the practice sense but also in terms of the actors/humans themselves. Does the descriptive meaning of a ritual in its sociopolitical context matter without an understanding of the moral identity of the performer?

The secularity of construals of culture

That definitions of culture are mute with regard to religion/spirituality appears to us a strange elision given that some 86 % of the world's population professes some form of religion (Pew Research Center 2012). Any definition of culture that does not recognize the overwhelming religiosity of the rest of the world may well reflect a Western secularized understanding of culture. Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006), in their influential volume on indigenous psychologies, barely touch on the subject of religion. Similarly, Michael Bond's (2010) *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology* addresses the issue of values but not of religious traditions. To export a view of culture that does not take particular moral and religious dimensions seriously potentially invalidates the experiences of members of those cultures and subcultures who are fundamentally religious.

The psychologies of indigenous peoples that are emerging in the colonial settler states of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia might serve as exemplars of how we might integrate religiosity into cultural psychology as religion is considered intrinsic to the way psychology is explored in these contexts. Morrisette (2008) suggested that "[a] First Nation worldview does not differentiate healing from spirituality, but instead considers it an integral part of the process" (p. 64). Ho et al. (2004) point out that for indigenous peoples, "Religion is incorporated in their being from the time of conception, when many tribes perform rites and rituals to ensure the delivery of a healthy baby, to the death ceremonies, wherein great care is taken to promote the return of the person's spirit to the life after this one" (p. 81). Religion does not simply play a social function but rather is integral to the Native conception of identity. To impose an understanding of culture as areligious would distort an understanding of Native identity and, if accepted by Western-trained Native anthropologists, this understanding of culture as secular might well be injurious.

Turner (2006) suggests that decolonization may result in a recovery of indigenous, normative, and spiritual traditions. He laments:

> In a sense, this is *the* most significant difference between indigenous and European world views. As indigenous people, many of us believe we can explain our understandings of the "spiritual" and that the dominant culture will some day "get it." But history has shown us that at least at this time in the relationship, we must keep to ourselves our sacred knowledge as we articulate and understand it from within our own cultures, for it is this knowledge that defines us as indigenous peoples. (p. 110; italics in original)

Perhaps, following Wittgenstein (1921/1990), he suggests, "Whereof one cannot speak, therefore one must be silent" (p. 189). But Turner does not stop there; he insists that we must find the right word in the settler's discourse for indigenous spirituality.

Religion as colonization

The structure and experience of religion as exported by a colonial power may undermine the psychological life of both the individual and the community to the advantage of the colonizer. If the religion of the colonizer is abstract, mystical, and individual, it may break down the collective dimensions of the extant religion in a more collective culture and render the already colonized subject more pliable in the hands of the colonizer.

The colonialist rendering of religion was recently highlighted for me (second author) at a "clinical diversity training event" I attended. The training was supposed to provide exposure to Indigenous

approaches to healing for helping professionals. During this "training session," many Indigenous ceremonies were practiced. The presiding Elder, who provided teaching and medicine, called all participating members to prayer. The Elder asked everyone to share their prayers throughout the ceremony. As I listened, I was struck by the difference between the prayers of the helping professional participants and those of the First Nations participants and Elders. The helping professionals offered highly personal "meditations" and "reflections" about their own worries, fears, and anxieties, while the Elders and other First Nations participants offered prayers, directed to the Creator, on behalf of the environment, people impacted by natural disasters around the world, people suffering in hospitals, and the pain of previous and future generations. The interpretation and exportation of religious practices like prayer by cultural psychologists may lead to the thinning of the moral significance of the experience. This example highlights that even non-Indigenous engagement in an Indigenous activity transforms a highly particular and contextually nuanced activity (such as a prayer directed to the Creator) to a much more general and universally appealing experience (such as personal spiritual reflections or meditations). Hence, the ethical domains of cultural life, such as communal, ecological, and spiritual responsibilities, are sacrificed on the altar of cultural imperialism.

Future analyses of religion from the perspective of cultural psychology need to factor in colonialization. Sugirtharajah (2009) analyzes how exegesis of the New Testament has been shaped by colonialization. Kwok (2005) reflects on feminist theology from a postcolonial perspective. To date, that task has not been initiated in the cultural psychology of religion.

Religion as an intellectual construction

The semantic journey of the concept of 'religion' in the West appears to have followed the same trajectory as that of the notion of culture, namely, toward abstract intellectual systematization. Spiritual experience in the West began with the piety of relating to a transcendent being. However, with the rise of modernity, faith traditions became systematized religions. This process, Wilfred Cantwell Smith suggests (Smith 1963), is a consequence of members of spiritual traditions becoming culturally aware of other spiritual communities/cultures. In the process of comparison, similarities and differences are noted. Smith observes:

> One's own 'religion' may be piety and faith, obedience, worship, and a vision of God. An alien 'religion' is a system of beliefs or rituals, an abstract and impersonal pattern of observables.

> A dialectic ensues, however. If one's own 'religion' is attacked, by unbelievers who necessarily conceptualize it schematically, or all religion is, by the indifferent, one tends to leap to the defence of what is attacked, so that presently participants of a faith—especially those most involved in argument—are using the term in the same externalist and theoretical sense as are their opponents. Religion as a systematic entity, as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a concept of polemics and apologetics. (42–43)

The result is that religion becomes an abstraction, which is apparent in some of our contemporary definitions of religion. Geertz (2000) defines religion as:

> a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [*sic*] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence

and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the mood and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (p. 90)

Geertz's definition of religion around symbols and conceptions rather than around practice reflects this move toward abstraction.

Smith's (1963) conclusion is that religion as such does not exist. It is an abstraction. Belzen (2010) critiques abstract construals of religion when he states that religion "is much too broad a term; it fails altogether to subsume the worldwide multitude of phenomena called 'religion' into a single, comprehensive, universally valid definition or concept" (p. 8). There is no religion as such. Belzen proposes that we research such phenomena "that are plainly recognizable as religious in a given culture" (p. 12).

And, given his critique of religion, Belzen argues that the lack of consensus on the meaning of religion has a clear implication: The psychological research on one religion cannot be generalized to other so-called religious phenomena. Belzen finds more adequate the approach that psychologists of religion take of specifying the phenomena, the tradition, and the location in which they engage in their research on religion. His research report in the final chapter of the book follows his own advice.

In this section we have argued that using western understandings of religion to study the psychology of religion in other cultures may be problematic. We suggest the following alternatives:

- Consider religion and ethical obligation as dimensions of culture even if a given society is largely secular and pluralistic;
- Recognize how Western culture has shaped religious experience;
- Affirm efforts at developing indigenous theologies that reflect local constellations of faith practices; and
- Begin with the practices local communities label as religious or spiritual.

Western psychologies and psychology of religion

Sandwiched between culture and religion in the emerging field of cultural psychology of religion is the discipline of psychology, whose modern history is a little more than a century old. In the West, the received tradition has it that psychology emerged from the psychophysical research of Wundt (Wundt and Schaub 1916/1994), was first systematized by James (1890/1950), and then was brought to the status of a science over the past century as an empirical and experimental science (Leahey 2013).

For Belzen (2010), psychology is an independent discipline with its own theories, methods, and findings that serves as a vehicle capable of understanding human experience in general and religion in particular. As a scientific discipline, psychology of religion is "to be done from a scholarly, distant perspective, remaining as interpersonally detached as possible," as is required in all of the scholarly disciplines (p. 4). He is critical of standard Western psychologies and opts for a more hermeneutic/narrative approach. This approach, we argue would lead to local psychologies to interpret local religions (Geertz 1983). These local psychologies may be found in folklore or ethno-religious narratives. We argue that indigenous psychologies are critical for understanding religions practiced within particular cultures or subcultures.

Belzen (2010) is not interested in a psychology of religion "that belongs to, is part of, or articulates or serves the perspective of any single 'religion'" (p. 4). Psychology of religion is therefore not "religious psychology." He grants that religious professionals may have insight into psychological functioning, but he states, it is not scientific (even while affirming a hermeneutical approach). Rather, it belongs to the humanities and with psychologists like Carl Jung. Nor is psychology of religion to be associated with the dialogue between psychology and theologies. In contrast to Belzen, Browning and Cooper (2004) propose that psychologies are various forms of religious thinking. Is the psychology of religion as neutral and objective in its interpretation of religion as appears to be assumed by Belzen? If the psychology of religion is studied from an ethical and emic point of view, is the above perspective on the nature of the psychology of religion affirmed or challenged? Although Belzen insists that psychology of religion is not religious psychology, we think that when one honors the implicit psychology in local religions that serve a particular culture, one is compelled to be less critical of a "religious psychology."

We respond to Belzen's perspective in two ways. First, Western psychology is a tradition with origins and societal contexts, namely, Western industrialized, individualistic, capitalist and plural societies. While that argument is not new, it bears repeating in this context because we are asking whether the scientific psychologies indigenous to the West may distort our interpretations of religions nested in particular, less modernized cultures. Second, we are not convinced that psychologies and religions are as easily separated as Belzen suggests. We will review the work of Dalal and Misra (2010) that focuses on the indigenous psychology implicit in religions in India and that argues Indian Psychology (IP) has its own religious, ontological, and epistemological foundations.

Western psychologies

Over four decades ago, Kenneth Gergen (1973) proposed that there is an intimate, dialectical relationship between social psychology and history. He summarized his argument as follows:

An analysis of theory and research in social psychology reveals that while methods of research are scientific in character, theories of social behavior are primarily reflections of contemporary history. The dissemination of psychological knowledge modifies the patterns of behavior upon which the knowledge is based. It does so because of the prescriptive bias of psychological theorizing, the liberating effects of knowledge, and the resistance based on common values of freedom and individuality. In addition, theoretical premises are based primarily on acquired dispositions. As the culture changes, such dispositions are altered, and the premises are often invalidated. (p. 309)

In that same era, Buss (1975) proposed a new field entitled "sociology of psychological knowledge." He stated:

Psychology as practiced by professional academicians occurs within a social context—psychological knowledge is tied to the infrastructure of a society or socially defined groups. By attempting to come to grips with the social basis of psychologists' theories and activities, a study of the sociology of psychological knowledge may lead to greater self-understanding. (p. 988)

He hoped that the field of sociology of psychological knowledge would.

> have as its goal to begin understanding the role of politics, ideologies, values, economic systems, and in general, society and its underlying structure and dynamics—in the birth, development, and death of some of the classical psychological theories, perspectives, paradigms, models, or approaches that have and continue to exert considerable influence. (p. 991)

Buss was building on the theories of Marx (Marx and Engels 1867/1967), Scheler (1924/1980), Weber (1905/1958), and Durkheim (1912/1965) to understand knowledge creation in the face of the radical social transformations associated with the rise of Western capitalism, science, and democracy. Concurrently, Habermas (1971) was writing in depth about the relationship between knowledge and human interests. Berger and Luckman (1966), in their *Social Construction of Reality*, implicitly reinforced the notion of a socially constructed psychology.

Western mainstream psychology is a discipline that reflects its social origins (Marsella 2014). Raised in the capitalist, technological, and secular ethos, its approach tends to be linear and positivist. Language in research is operationalized and concepts measured. Knowledge generated is presumed to be scientific, certain (or at least probable), and therefore generalizable. From their non-Western perspective, Liu and Liu (1997) make the case that Western psychology is a reflection of modernity in its "search for natural laws and unified theory using impartial methods..." (p. 159).

Over the past century, the Western psychological discipline and the community of psychologists have focused on the modern individual (Sampson 1971, 1988; Bellah et al. 1985/2007), participated in military tactics that served political purposes (Zuniga 1975; Risen 2014), endorsed eugenics (Buss 1976; Whitaker 2002), promoted secularism (Smith 1986), adjusted the cost of their services to a capitalist market (Roberts 2015), eschewed the philosophical heritage of the discipline (Leahey 2013), privileged prediction, mastery, and control of behavior (Leahey 2013), neglected feminist concerns (Robinson 1995), denied its collusion with racism (Guthrie 2004), and pathologized homosexuality (Herman 1995). Thus, psychological analysis of culture and religion is hardly culturally neutral.

The issues that swirl about in Western psychology, such as nature versus nurture, determinism versus agency, mechanism versus holism, the importance of evidenced-based practice, and individual versus community, are tensions that arise naturally on Western soil and reflect the interests of a capitalist society. The psychological testing industry serves well a capitalist, technological society committed to efficiency. A scientific psychology finds support in the assumption that certain knowledge can be successfully generated, as in the physical sciences. An individual psychology is reinforced by an emphasis on the rights of individuals and the fear of communal ideologies.

Liu and Liu (1997) argue that the bastion of modernist psychology is the United States. In Europe and various non-Western societies, there is a greater openness to postmodern perspectives in psychology, where post-positivism and social constructivism are explored, as is evident in Belzen's treatise. There are notable exceptions in the West in such people as Gergen et al. (1996); Giorgi (1976), and Sundararajan (2015) who chart new directions. Following Foucault (1970), these authors understand the power relations between discourse, domination, and exploitation.

What other limitations might shape psychology's ability to interpret culture and religion? Western psychologies are being used as an instrument to interpret non-Western culture and religion. How can a psychology that emerges from mainstream Western society be capable of

providing insight into other cultures and religions? Liu and Liu (1997) argue that "the language for scientific discourse furnished by the West revolves completely around issues of the epistemology and not value. The language of social science as it now stands is not equipped to manage disputes over value" (p. 170).

Western psychologies qua experimental research are not neutral with regard to religion. In experimental research, it is not unexpected that religions are viewed instrumentally as independent variables and that, when manipulated, result in positive or negative consequences to mental and physical health. It is no surprise that Western individualistic psychology construes religion as an individual experience. Belzen (2010) argues that psychology made a major theoretical and methodological mistake by focusing exclusively on individuals in an effort to mirror the natural sciences. In doing so, it has naturalized religion as its object of study. "Its *modus operandi* is marked by de-subjectivization and de-contextualization as it tries to produce universally valid results" (p. 10). Wundt (Wundt and Schaub 1916/1994), for example, argued that psychology should study not only individual psychological processes but also customs, justice and religion.

How can contemporary psychology serve as a tool to interpret religions? How can a psychology that has been described (Cushman 1990) as having an "empty self" serve as a lens for understanding culture and religion? At issue is the question which psychology is most suited to the study of religion.

At times Belzen (2010) makes the case that the standard scientific paradigm is insufficient and at other times that there is need of a hermeneutic paradigm that addresses meaning. He states,

> A hermeneutical psychology is continually confronted by history, since, on the one hand, a human being is shaped by a culture which has already reached a certain (historical) stage of its development and, on the other hand every individual is the outcome of the process of becoming, of an idiosyncratic history within a particular historico-cultural context. (p. 28)

We affirm this qualification and wish to go a step further. We think indigenous psychologies utilized by a cultural psychology of religion best emerge out of the culture in which a particular religion is practiced. Ho (1998) defined indigenous psychology as "the study of human behavior and mental processes within a cultural context that relies on values, concepts, belief systems, methodologies, and other resources indigenous to the specific ethnic or cultural group under investigation" (p. 94). We think that is what Dalal and Misra do in their exposition of the psychology hidden in classic Indian religious texts.[3]

Psychology implicit in local traditions labeled as religious

The legacy of exporting Western psychology to India persisted until the 1960s, and as a result Indian psychology reflected British psychology in the methods, research questions, the focus

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[3] The fact that we are examining texts for an implicit psychology of a society is not to imply that only texts shape identity. A folk psychology is shaped by a myriad of factors: institutions, economies, communities, friends and family.

on the individual, the behaviorist ideology, and the positivist epistemology. Dalal and Misra (2010) observe:

> IP [Indian psychology] is different and broader than the academic psychology as it began in India in the beginning of the last century under the aegis of the scheme of Western domination. IP characterizes the Indian psychological viewpoints which are rooted in the Indian civilization. IP has evolved through rigorous observation, experimentation and reflection, through training under Gurus, continuous contemplation and sharing of personal accounts of inner experiences. This knowledge base has grown, diversified and survived through many challenges and upheavals. It still continues, in a plural mode, to shape in explicit, as well as implicit ways the dominant cultural ethos of the Indian people.... Integrally bound with Eastern philosophies, IP has evolved not as a moralistic but as a cultural discourse on world-views and epistemologies, which offer an alternative to the logico-positivistic enterprise of Western psychology. Though originated in the Indian subcontinent, the concern has been to free human beings from bondages and suffering, wherever they are located and whatever their sources.... The idea of psychology and its preferred way of categorization and conceptualization was held pre- or a-cultural and culture was given no place in the constitution of psychological materials or elements. For example, motives drives, needs, perceptual learning and various cognitive phenomena were kept separate from the cultural tradition. (pp. 122, 125)

In the mid-1900s, Sinha (1965) gave a clarion call for the integration of psychology with Indian culture and civilization. Slowly, Indian psychology drew on the classic texts (Vedas and Upanishads) and native Eastern philosophy. Indian psychology situated the individual in personal, communal, and cosmic contexts. The worldview of IP emphasized interdependence and relationality. Drawing on the sages, IP today focuses on the inexhaustible mystery of life, sees unity in diversity, and finds no contradiction in holding opposites. Dalal and Misra celebrate the plurality of historical voices that make up the core of Indian psychology.

> IP is a complex field of knowledge comprising philosophy (*Darshana*), life science (*Āyurveda*), principles of personal and social conduct (*Dharma Shāstra, Artha Shāstra, Kāma Shāstra*), spirituality (*Āhyātma Vidya*), Jain and Buddhist scriptures, and texts of various socio-spiritual movements. The Muslim influence, particularly that of Sufism and Bahai, is also visible. (p. 133)

Unlike the West, Indian psychology views the individual as profoundly religious. Dalal and Misra (2010) comment:

> Even when consciousness, mind and intuition are included as the subject matter, IP stands as a body of knowledge rooted and pursued with different ontological and epistemological premises. More than materialistic-deterministic aspects of human existence, IP takes a more inclusive spiritual growth perspective on human existence. In this sense no clear distinction is made between psychology, philosophy and spirituality, as conjointly they constitute a comprehensive and practical knowledge or wisdom about human life. (p. 131)

In the case of Indian society, developing traditioned identity required a rejection of much of the colonists' view of culture and the recovery of ancient wisdom valued prior to the arrival of the colonists was considered paramount. Dalal and Misra (2010) point out that now Indian psychology has developed comprehensive understandings of justice, poverty, interpersonal

relationships, creativity, concept of self, pain and suffering, emotions, religious behavior, and well-being from an Indian perspective. They offer numerous examples of how Indian psychology differs from Western psychology in its descriptions of selfhood and consciousness. Here, perhaps, is their greatest achievement. They go far beyond describing how Western terms are nuanced in Indian culture. Rather, they eschew the translation of Western psychology in favor of describing Indian ideas using Indian terms. They show how notions such as the four *Purusharthas* (life pursuits) organize the experience of life. "Manifest and unmanifest parts of our existence" are shown to play a role in "accepting the emergent nature of reality" and suggest "plausible explanations and strategies to deal with uncertainty" (p. 135). This, they claim, provides a basis for "going beyond strict determinism" (p. 135). Other descriptions bear resemblance to values held by cultural psychologists. Indian psychology "does not view human action as neutral, value free or a-moral. Instead it brings out the essential interdependence and interconnectedness of the worlds of human experience in which human beings are responsible players" (p. 136).

So then, Dalal and Misra (2010) have unearthed an Indian psychology implicit in traditional Indian religions. The content of Indian psychology is shaped by the history of India and the yearning to free human beings from bondage and suffering, to find out one's own *dharma* (duty), and to pursue one's own path of development in a broad time-space framework. The focus of Indian psychology is less on a science of human behavior than it is on human possibility and progress. Indian psychology implicit in Indian religions is nurtured by a worldview that assumes continuity, interdependence, and connectivity across all life forms. It is not a discourse on metaphysics but is primarily focused on how people can lead purposeful and harmonious lives in this world.[4]

To summarize, Belzen (2010) comments insightfully that the fate of psychology of religion is hooked to the fate of psychology in general. Criticisms of psychology as a discipline then devolve onto psychology of religion as a field. Psychology as a modern discipline is limited by the thin generalizations it constructs, the focus on the individual as the object of study, the limitations of experimental and survey research, the bias towards middle-class participants in research, and the preoccupation with imitating the natural sciences (Giorgi 1976). These limitations then impact the construction of a psychology of religion.

If the above critique is correct, we would ask when and/or whether it is appropriate to use a modern, Western scientific psychology to interpret non-Western religions. In this section we wondered whether a psychology entrenched in Western culture can indeed illuminate the nature of religious experience in the non-West, e.g., Hinduism, Chan Buddhism, Indonesian Islam, or Chinese Christianity. Rather, we propose the following:

• Qualify the use of Western psychology in analyzing the psychological nature of religious experience in non-Western cultures; and
• Utilize implicit local and non-local psychologies to understand local cultures and faith traditions.

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[4] Although we are using Dalal and Misra (2010) to illustrate the close connection between a cultural psychology and religion, we acknowledge that their position on cultural psychology is at variance with ours. They argue that Indian psychology "is deemed to be a universal psychology. It cannot be subsumed under the labels of indigenous, folk or cultural psychology, if that purports to delimit the scope of psychological inquiry" (p. 137). And again: "Indian Psychology is more than such indigenous (or folk) psychologies for the reason that it offers psychological models and theories, derived from classical Indian thought, that hold promise of panhuman interest" (p. 145).

Culture, religion, and psychology

In the last several decades, there has been concern to understand the human psyche as emergent from within culture. From an ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) compared American and Soviet approaches to child-rearing practices. Comparing various cultures, Shweder et al. (1997) suggested that there were major differences in the roles of autonomy, community, and divinity. Hwang (2012) carefully delineated the contours of a Chinese psychology constructed on a Confucian foundation. Sundararajan (2015) focused on the cultural niches that encourage a particular cognitive style (holism) and how this style of thinking shaped Chinese emotions such as the experience of harmony, happiness, and intimacy. Belzen (2010) recognizes that emotions are sociocultural, determine patterns of experience, and create new forms of expression. Belzen wants to know how "a specific cultural context made the specific action, knowledge and experience possible" (p. 26).

As stated earlier, Belzen (2010) thinks that the psychological study of religion is best conducted from the perspective of cultural psychology. He proposes to interpret religion from a disciplinary, cultural psychological perspective and to integrate this field into psychology of religion. He is of the opinion that Wundt's insight that cultural psychology is the primary means for studying religion is still valid. The cultural psychology of religion includes both culture and the individual's experience of religion. He states, "First, religiosity should be studied as the result of the subject's being embedded in religion at a cultural level; and second, psychology should not forget to try to say something about religion as a cultural phenomenon too" (p. 11). We agree and seek to push further into culture as a dynamic process.

Cultural psychology of religion aligns with historical scholarship to interpret religious experiences. It grounds its theoretical categories in the language users in specific cultures who share religious language, practices, and experiences. At issue is how culture instigates and regulates human behavior and behavior that a person deems religious (Taves 2011). Cultural psychology examines changes in religious/spiritual functioning concurrent with modifications in cultural conditions. Individual psychological processes such as thinking, feeling, and relating are inherently cultural and will hence be reflected in religious experiences.

Belzen (2010) insists that in cultural psychology the meaning of an action to the actor is central, not simply the action in and of itself. Cultural practices, including those labeled as religious practices, are conceived as symbolic and do more than regulate behavior. Social institutions, ecclesial organizations, psychological concepts, and epistemological categories are dependent on cultural distinctions embodied in language, discourse, and everyday social practices.

We concur with Belzen's (2010) fundamental assumption that the object of cultural psychology of religion is historical in nature. The relationship between the individual and culture is not natural but historical (p. 28). Social roles are defined prior to the entrance of the individual on the stage of history. The individual lives in a variety of communities of shared meanings. Historically oriented cultural psychologists of religion pay much attention to the concrete, specific, individual, and qualitative aspects of the person and his or her faith practices. Psychological processing such as cognition, emotion, memory, personality, identity, and mental illness are shaped by history and hence influence religious experience.

The problem with experimental psychology of religion

Most importantly, Belzen (2010) avers that cultural psychology avoids using the analogy of a mechanism in the study of human beings. By implication, cultural psychology is less interested

in how a given variable "causally" impacts another variable. He wants to know how a given culture incarnates itself in the subjectivity of the individual. Belzen states, "In contemporary [psychological] research, common techniques like experiments, tests and questionnaires are... abandoned in cultural psychology in favor of so-called 'experience-friendly' methods like the interview, participatory observation and self-confrontation" (p. 27).

In a similar vein, Kenneth Gergen (2010) proposes that causal models are less appropriate than process models in research on human relations, a model we began exploring in an earlier essay (Dueck and Johnson 2016). Gergen states that this will involve "a shift from research devoted to establishing empirically based covering laws to a science invested in generating futures through participatory practices" (p. 55). This orientation of co-constitution and confluence illuminates "the collaborative or co-active constitution of what we take to be entities, an ongoing process required to sustain the world of independent events or actions" (p. 55). Rather than focus on the billiard model of causal relationships between enduring entities (Morris et al. 1995), the orientation affirmed here is toward an emphasis on dynamic process to be found in Heraclitus (Kahn 1981), Bergson and Mitchell (1923), and Whitehead (1925/2010). Boundaries are blurred between so-called 'entities.' Shweder et al. (1997) comments critically on the integrated rather causal view in folk religions in connection with a cultural psychology of religion. He points out:

> In folk psychology the idea of causation does not rule out the possibility of influence at a distance. It not rule out influence by unobservable forces. It does not demand attention to all necessary conditions. It does not treat all necessary conditions as equally relevant or as of the same kind. Quite crucially, the idea of causation in folk psychology is deeply shaped by human interests in assessing "normality," attributing responsibility or blame, and exercising control over future events. Thus, the numerous logically necessary conditions for the production of a given event do not all have equal status in the folk psychology of causation. Indeed, in folk psychology the elevation of this or that necessary condition to the intellectual status of an attributed "cause" is an act of selection and interpretation that can be understood only within the context of practices and institutions aimed at finding fault, righting wrongs, and gaining control over future events. (pp. 123–124)

Consistent with the perspective of Winch (1958/2008), Shweder notes that the causal language of the physicalist is quite different from the moral language in folk religions.

Culture/religious influence on psychological processes

Cultural psychology of religion can be parsed atomistically as the cultural context of psychology of religion. Then the research question is: How does the cultural context shape the discipline of psychological experience of religion? Each is a discrete entity. We propose that given our above analysis of religion as a form of culture, the question changes to: How does religion as a cultural dynamic influence psychological processes (Cohen and Hill 2007)?

Shweder and Bourne's (1982) emphasis on psychological processes came as a result of their research with the Oriyas in India. They found that Oriyas in India use descriptions of actions when describing the nature of a friend whereas Americans use abstract labels or personality traits. Oriyas, for example, would say, "She brings cakes to my family on festival days," but Americans were more likely to say, "She is friendly"; "He shouts curses at his neighbors" versus "He is aggressive and hostile"; "He does not disclose secrets" versus "He is

principled." The Oriyas more frequently provided a context, whereas the Americans tended to give acontextual responses. In a subsequent study, they found that Oriyan informants had the ability to recognize objects in terms of overarching categories.

Shweder and Bourne (1982) propose that what really differentiates the Oriyas from Americans is that the former

> place so little *value* on differentiating (e.g., person from role), generalizing (e.g., "treat outsiders like insiders"), or abstracting (e.g., the concept of "humanity") and, the relativist is quick to point out, they show so little interest in such intellectual moves because Oriyas, Balinese, and other such folk live by a metaphor and subscribe to a world-premise that directs their attention and passions to particular systems, relationally conceived and contextually appraised. Indeed, a central tenet of a relativist interpretation of context-dependent person perception *is that the metaphors by which people live and the worldviews to which they subscribe mediate the relationships between what one thinks about and how one thinks.* (p. 189, italics in original)

Luria (1976), as cited in Shweder and Bourne 1982) illiterate peasants explained to him that it is "stupid" to ignore the way objects and events are related in action sequences. Glick (1968), cited in Shweder and Bourne 1982) informant insisted that objects should be grouped in terms of their function since "a wiseman can do no other." When asked "How would a fool group the objects?" the informant gave the "Westerner the answer he wanted—a linguistically-defined equivalence structure!" (p. 192). Different people adopt distinct worldviews, and these worldviews have a decisive influence on what is considered normative cognitive functioning (Shweder and Bourne 1982).

Cultural psychology of religion: Examples

In the final chapter of his book, Belzen (2010) conducts an analysis of a Calvinist community in the Netherlands. He indicates that he will not examine the cultural part of the psychic functioning of an individual but the "psychic part in the development and makeup of a subculture" (p. 215). He wishes to explore which psychological theories might help interpret this religious subculture. Hence he examines pillarization with an emphasis on the creation and maintenance of group identity within a cultural-religious context. Pillarization is the phenomenon whereby a society is fragmented and divided into closed, autonomous groups or subcultures, each possessing their own religious or ideological worldview that sets them apart from other "pillars" of the broader society. Nineteenth-century Netherlands, for example, consisted of Calvinists, Catholics, liberals, socialists, and a few other groups, each existing as a silo with its own subcultures and social institutions with almost no interaction between groups.

In 1884, the Dutch Calvinists founded the Association of Christian Care for the Mentally Ill, a distinctly Calvinist mental health care clinic, and this is the community Belzen analyzes. The idea was to create a distinctly Calvinist form of psychiatry. In this clinic, "The patient and the personnel were entirely absorbed in a clearly recognizable organizational relationship cut off from the outside world, with a specific way of life and an atmosphere all its own" (p. 225). This meant a subtle difference in language, emotions, clothing, and prayers of members of the isolated group.

Calvinist pillarism is a religious culture propagating its own unique mentality. Its styles of cognition and emotion can best be understood in the history of separatist Calvinism of 19th-

century Netherlands. Its identity as "an aggrieved group, unjustly treated, humiliated, debased, and mocked" sheds light on its members' perception of their own social institutions, such as their mental hospital, as the only religious institution despite evidence to the contrary (Belzen 2010, p. 229). "The insults that were applied to them were words that they themselves continued to repeat into the next century to illustrate their debased position.... They were a group with an extremely wounded self-image.... It is this feeling of having been unfairly treated, discriminated against, despised, that we also find in their depictions of how non-religious psychiatry regarded them, their faith, and their initiative to establish Calvinist care for the mentally ill" (pp. 229–230). Belzen examines the psychological dimensions of the motives of emancipation, protection, social control, conflict regulation, and responding to modernity to explain the nature of this isolated community.

Belzen's goal is to explain not just the motives of Calvinist pillarization but why this form of society took on such a rigid mentality. The answer, he suggests, lies in the members' unconscious drive to preserve their group identity. The content of Calvinist psychiatry barely differed, if at all, from general psychiatric theory and practice of the time. What was important, though for a cultural psychologist of religion, was that a distinctly Calvinist identity could be nurtured by social institutions at every level of society.

A second example comes from the research of Hood and Williamson (Hood 2014; Hood and Williamson 2008) on religious snake handlers in the American Appalachian Mountain region. Like Belzen's community, this is an isolated, indigenous religious culture in conflict with mainstream culture and religions. The religious culture included the affordances of being possessed by the Holy Spirit, which they believed made them immune to the poisonous bites of the snakes they were holding and which, they reported, gave them an indescribable experience of joy and connection with others. This is a religion more of the heart than of the head.

Hood's work is emic in that he stays close to the language of the group, to the lived reality of the religion, avoiding the use of surveys, and depending on participatory observation and interviews. He and his colleagues refer to the model they develop as intertextual in that the King James Bible is the authoritative text and the oral tradition that frames the life of the community. At the same time, they accept the diversity of experiences of the Holy Spirit. Handling of snakes is based on the biblical reference in Mark 16:17–18 in which those who believe will be given the power to cast out devils and hold snakes without being hurt. Hood (2014) summarizes: "It is this focus upon religious experience of the Holy Spirit mediated by grace that... best defines AMR [the Appalachian Mountain region] and we think illuminates the serpent handling tradition that refuses to transform itself in the name of a progress that says little to them about meaning or salvation" (p. 33).

For more than 30 years, Hood and his students have studied Appalachian snake handlers. His approach is profoundly emic as he has interviewed dozens of leaders and participants. The research by Hood and Williamson qualifies as culture/religious research on the psychological processes in that the biblical narrative (positive) and the cultural narrative (negative) inform the psychology of courage and defiance in the face of opposition from mainstream religionists. Moreover, the non-religious society is the context of the religious community of snake handlers. They clearly form a close community in the presence of antagonism; this is the case in spite of the fact that there have been 55 reported deaths to date by snakebites.

Hood and Williamson honor local explanations and also use etic modes of research. For example, they found empirically that those who handled snakes more frequently were more likely to be bitten. They use Soulen's role theory to explain the nature of religious leadership

and church/sect theory to explain the tension between snake handlers and their host culture. The locals' explanation is the protection of the Holy Spirit, but non-members may be skeptical or even outright dismissive. Hood defends the group's religious freedom and exposes the misinterpretations by outsiders.

Although there is some use of causal explanations, the analysis is largely interpretive and hermeneutic (role theory, psychoanalysis, evolutionary psychology, church/sect analysis). Hood and Williamson (2008) use a variety of methodologies: archival research, biblical exegesis, phenomenological interviews, court rulings, laboratory studies, and ethnography. In contrast to Belzen's rejection of experimental methods in psychology of religion research, Hood ran a quasi-experimental study that used six different anecdotes of a person's (Bill) conversion that involved either snake handling, Bible studies, "speaking in tongues," drinking poison, healing the sick, and casting out demons. Religious participants were asked to indicate whether Bill's conversion was (a) legitimate, (b) likely to be long-lasting, (c) well grounded, or (d) unfortunate. Note that the participants were asked to judge Bill's conversion not their own religiousness commitments. Hood (2014) found that:

> As a general overall statement, Bill's conversion based upon serpent handling was perceived to be less legitimate, poorly grounded, and unlikely to be long-lasting compared to the Bible study condition and to the three low-risk signs. Based upon the handling of serpents, Bill's conversion was also judged to be unfortunate, even by religiously committed participants. (p. 28)

> ...Statistical controls indicated that people, who reject serpent handlers for rational reasons, also stereotype them, have negative emotional reactions to them, and seek to avoid them. Thus, their rational rejection is not untainted by three different indicators of prejudice. (p. 29)

Court records of decisions by policy makers included inaccurate information on the snake-handling group. To test whether providing additional information on snake handlers would change a person's attitude toward them, Hood and his colleagues (Hood et al. 2000) conducted a second study in which they used two tapes, one of actual snake handling services and another of a service without snake handling. Participants completed pre- and post-test prejudice instruments designed to measure whether they thought the snake handlers were sincere. The results indicated that persons presented with factual information from handlers themselves, located in their religious context, changed the views of the participants to viewing the snake handlers as having greater sincerity and supporting greater legal protection for the religious group.

Both Belzen and Hood illustrate ways of avoiding the critique presented in this article of Western construals of culture, religion, and psychology.

- The groups they describe do not appear to be socialized into modernity, based on the author's construction of their sociality.
- The authors studiously avoid abstractions but focus on the daily life of the communities they describe.
- Their review of the community is not an attempt to colonize.
- They follow the suggestion of Abu-Lughod to write ethnographies and thereby limit their generalizations to a particular group.

- Their view of religion follows carefully the local group's description of its spirituality, reflecting on their use of sacred texts and practices rather than engaging in abstract theology.
- They do not reductively analyze the religion of the groups through social science discourse.
- The psychological analysis of the group's spirituality is culturally contextualized. That is, their understanding of psychology is not primarily from Western psychological perspectives but emerges from their analysis of the group's implicit psychological perspectives.

Conclusion

When the World Series in American Major League Baseball includes only teams from North America, it is not a *world* series. Similarly, when a cultural psychology of religion privileges a unique cluster of cultures as the context for the study of psychology of religion, it remains ideological. The same critique holds true for construals of religion and psychology when their definitions are assumed to be universal but are, in fact, local. But then, our model too may be culturally provincial in ways unknown to us.

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