Psychology, history, and society

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Psychology, in particular clinical Psychology, has experienced strong growth in the twentieth century. This growth has been the strongest in industrialised, urbanised democracies, and as a result, the discipline has come under criticism for its Western bias. While not denying the possibility of such bias, this paper argues that an historical analysis provides a more thoroughgoing explanation for what has happened in the relationship between Psychology and these societies. Following Foucault, it is argued that there is a special affinity between Psychology and the government of individuals, and as a result, between Psychology and the self-understanding of individuals. As a result, the subject matter of the discipline itself is historically variable, and Psychology is reflexively involved in this process. The discipline already has an inescapable presence in "non-Western" countries, but how the interplay between government, Psychology, and its subject matter constructs and reconstructs human subjectivity in these societies remains unpredictable.

It has become almost standard practice for the sciences, natural, human, or social, periodically to assess or evaluate their positions. Typically a discipline will be examined along a set of dimensions that may include strengths and weaknesses, contributions to the solution of problems in society, training provided, standing in the scientific community, and so on. In 1995, for example, the Human Sciences Research Council commissioned papers to review methodological and theoretical developments and innovations in a collection of disciplines in South Africa (Mouton, Muller, Franks, & Sono, 1998). In Psychology, periodic reviews appear about its international position (for example, Sexton & Hogan, 1992; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996), and in the local South African context (Louw, 1992; Seedat, 1998). The present paper is a response to a request to broaden the analysis of these "state-of-the-art" reviews from within a wider theoretical perspective on the discipline and its development.

Among the social and human sciences Psychology remains one of the few that experienced an exponential growth after the Second World War, and has maintained that until the present. Gross had this to say as early as 1979 about the discipline: “Today, psychology is art, science, therapy, religion, moral code, life style, philosophy and cult. It sits at the very centre of contemporary society as an international colossus whose professional members number in the hundreds of thousands” (Gross, 1979, p. 3). Since then, the discipline has grown even more rapidly in many countries of the world.

This growth is of course uneven, and differs from country to country. There is general consensus that most of the world's psychologists work in the USA (Sexton & Hogan, 1992). They reported for example that more than 3000 doctoral degrees and 8000 Master's degrees are awarded in Psychology annually in the USA. In 1988 the estimated total number of psychologists in the USA was 254 000, with a growth rate in university graduates in the discipline since 1978 that placed it third after computer science and mathematical sciences. Nevertheless, numbers of students of Psychology in tertiary institutions in countries outside the USA have increased quite rapidly as well. Lunt and Poortingsa (1996), for example, have provided impressive evidence of the enormous expansion of Psychology in Europe, while in Australia, the number of Psychology graduates has increased dramatically between 1986 and 1993, although Psychology as a proportion of all first degrees has remained steady at 3.5%. In 1993, 3500 students completed their first degrees in Psychology (Australian Research Council, 1996). Indeed, when the discipline is institutionalized in other countries, at a later stage than in the USA, there is evidence that in some countries it grows at an even faster pace (see Sexton & Hogan, 1992).

In South Africa, Psychology certainly takes a special position among the social and human sciences. As an area of university study, it is immensely popular. Louw (1992) estimated that approximately one in five university students takes a course in Psychology. Richter, Griesel, Durrheim, Wilson, Surenroft and Asafa-Aguye (1998) calculated that in 1993 about 8% of total student enrolment at South African universities were studying Psychology at first year level. Professionally too the discipline shows strong growth. Richter et al. showed that between 1987 and 1988 402 new registrations as professional psychologists were noted, increasing to 585 between 1990 and 1991, and to 603 between 1993 and 1994. In September 2000, the Professional Board for Psychology had 4455 psychologists on its register, of which 2575 were women.

In countries in Africa other than South Africa, a very different situation prevails. In the book by Sexton and Hogan (1992), only three African countries appear: South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Egypt. About-Habib (1992, p. 125) said of Psychology in Egypt that it had "low status", although it was probably the country that had the greatest number of qualified psychologists in North Africa and among the Middle Eastern countries that belong to the Arab League. In Zimbabwe, only 51 psychologists were registered in 1988 (Jordan, 1992). Akin-Ogunodeji (1991) estimated that there were about 150 psychologists in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria combined. He laments that Psychology in Nigeria "is still largely a classroom-research enterprise" with little practical relevance "to the problems of living in contemporary Nigerian society" (p. 3).

The numerous reviews and social analyses of Psychology published in the last twenty years or so have been critical of the discipline in a number of ways. One of the criticisms often raised is that Psychology shows a singular lack of responsiveness to different cultures or for its cultural one-sidedness. These critiques are often phrased in terms of "Eurocentric" (e.g. Bulhan, 1985; Hewitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994); "Westocentric" (Holdstock, 2000); "individuocentrism" (Holdstock, 2000); "irrelevance" (Berger & Lazarus, 1987), and "ethnocentrism" (e.g. Marsella, 1998). This cultural critique of Psychology has become very influential in the debate involving Psychology, its knowledge and its position in different societies. The debate is of course a little wider than this, and has been extended to include the notion of indigenous Psychology (Heelas & Lock, 1981) or even cross-cultural Psychology (Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998), albeit in a less critical mode.

The brief reference to "contemporary society" made above by Akin-Ogunnadeji (1991), and in one way or another addressed by the "cultural critics", is the critical theme I want to explore in this essay. However, I want to suggest that while "culture" may be a useful framework for a critique of Psychology, it is less
useful as a framework for analysis. Instead, I should like to 
argue that history provides a more powerful starting point for an 
analysis of the position and functioning of Psychology in 
"contemporary societies".

Charles Taylor (1989, p. xi) has said (paraphrased) that 
understanding Psychology argihat is "an exercise in retrieval". In 
recent years historians of Psychology have produced a number 
of influential studies that used history in this way (e.g. 
Danziger, 1990; Richards, 1996; Rose, 1996; and Smith, 1992). 
I am going to rely on these historical analyses to emphasise two 
points: that the subject matter of Psychology in itself is 
historically variant; and that the origins of Psychology as it is 
practised today in contemporary societies lie in the practical 
requirements of everyday life (Van Hoon, 1989). I will then 
argue why I regard this kind of analysis as useful in thinking 
about the status and future of Psychology in South Africa.

The historicity of human subjectivity

Until recently very few psychologists would have been 
impressed by the ability of historical studies in the discipline to 
provide us with a critical understanding of Psychology. So-
called "conventional" histories had quite different intentions, 
mostly to do with socialising students into a particular 
interpretation of the discipline's identity. Central to the identity 
of the discipline was (and is) its scientific status, and 
conventional histories told the story of how "scientific" 
Psychology emerged from a pre-scientific, speculative type of 
activity. However, since Young (1966) criticised these 
approaches to history as "Whiggish", "internalist", and " 
presentist", it has become increasingly difficult to simply see 
history in this way. As the history of Psychology became less 
celebratory and more critical of the discipline's achievements, it 
created the opportunity for history to serve the analytical 
purposes I have in mind in this paper. Paraphrasing Paul 
Forman (1991, p. 83), who wrote about the history of science, 
one could say that this kind of history will give priority to 
society in understanding how scientific knowledge is 
constructed.

One of the questions that benefited in no small way from 
historical studies, is: What is the subject matter of Psychology? 
Danziger (1999) pointed out that there is an implicit assumption 
that Psychology studies a fixed and timeless human nature, 
which exists quite independently of the discipline. This human 
nature is then studied in its "psychological" aspects, such as 
intelligence, motivation, emotions, learning, etc. These 
psychological categories, not surprisingly, are assumed as 
"historically invariant phenomena of nature" (p. 79).

If questions are asked about the subject matter of Psychology, 
and how these are linked to a social reality beyond the 
discipline, Psychology itself does not help us much. We need to 
turn to history, to ask how these phenomena have come to be 
declared as the subject matter of Psychology, and how they were 
constituted in certain ways (and not in others). What we will 
find, is that the history of Psychology is not independent from 
the history of its subject matter, human subjectivity (Danziger, 
1999; Richards, 1996). It is useful here to follow a distinction 
made by Graham Richards, between "psychology" with a lower 
case "p" when we refer to its subject matter, and "Psychology" 
for the discipline itself. The advantage offered by history is that 
"The historian of Psychology is not only looking at the history of 
a particular discipline, but also at the history of what that 
discipline purports to be studying" (p. 4).

Contrary to the view that Psychology studies trans-historical 
"human nature", historians would submit that Psychology's 
subject matter is at least co-created by the discipline itself. 
"More specifically, we are looking at Psychology's role in the

dynamic psychological process by which human nature 
constantly recreates, re-forms and regenerates itself, primarily 
in Western cultures" (Richards, 1996, p. 5). Without the 
psychologist's intervention there would be no category of 
people like "research subjects" or "clients" or "multiple 
personality disordered"; these are shaped by the discipline's 
own professional activity. There are no "natural" categories of 
people like these that exist independently of psychology's 
investigation or professional practice. For Hacking (1986, p. 
229) "the category and the people in it emerged hand in hand", 
as Psychology creates or shapes phenomena of interest through 
their investigative practices and procedures.

This is not an argument that these categories are arbitrary, and 
that they can be construed in any way whatsoever. As the quote 
from Richards (1996) above reflects, these categories are 
culturally embedded, particularly in "Western cultures". In that 
sense the cultural critics are correct - these psychological 
categories exist in a cultural context, and represent ways in 
which members of a particular culture make sense of human 
life. But without an historical dimension, a cultural critique is 
vulnerable to the same pitfalls of a timeless conception of 
human nature, only now outside the Euro-American axes of 
Psychology. When Holdstock (2000), for example, refers in 
numerous places in his book to sub-Saharan Africa in terms 
such as "the holistic dimension of the way of being", the 
spiritual dimension, extended interrelatedness, and other-
centredness, as characteristics of human nature in Africa, he 
comes close to a position that makes these categories of human 
nature appear self-evident, "natural" and trans-historical. 
Granted, the subject matter of Psychological study will look 
very different in the kinds of society often referred to in these 
writing, but they too are historically determined: "...all 
psychological categories have been historically variably 
constructed. To gain an understanding of the categories in 
common use at the moment, we need to see them in historical 
perspective" (Danziger, 1999, p. 82).

Psychology thus has a reflexive character, and produces (or 
produces) its own subject matter. Richards (1996, p. 5) put it 
bluntly: "Psychology is produced by, produces, and is an 
instance of, its own subject matter." But there is another way in 
which Psychology is historically reflexive. Human beings use 
the categories and vocabulary of psychology to refer to 
much of what we say in our daily lives, and how we think of ourselves. People's 
actions and experiences are not independent from their 
categorisation, and this categorisation does not leave humans 
unaffected. Ian Hacking (1994) called these "looping effects" or 
"purely interactive kinds" (Hacking, 1999) - how people react to 
the categories in which they or their actions are assigned. To put 
it differently: how we interpret our experiences and understand 
ourselves change in the course of these looping interactions. 
What is more, if we think of ourselves differently, with different 
concepts, we change ourselves. "What we are is expressed in 
the categories of psychological discourse, so that, as we change, 
the categories we use to describe ourselves to ourselves also 
change" (Danziger, 1994, p. 479). Indeed, the reflexive 
incorporation of Psychological categories into our own lives, 
and the way social processes act on these categories, make them 
true. When someone hears that she "has an IQ of 140", she is 
going to structure her experiences and her self-understandings 
differently from before - now according to the vocabulary of 
Psychology. In addition, the individual also will be treated 
differently by the social institutions in which she participates. If 
she does not perform at the top of her class, parents and teachers 
may well urge her to "apply herself more" because she is 
"under-performing". Hacking provides another example of how 
this may occur in practice, using California's school policy of 
integrating a certain number of "special education" children into 
every classroom:
"The regular teachers complain bitterly that the result is class disruption; the specially educated know how they are classified; they develop not only individual but collective new patterns of behavior. One can make a strong prediction that not only will the procedures be modified, but also the ways in which these children are classified will be modified because of the new kinds of behavior that have emerged" (1999, p. 112).

The properties of Psychology’s subject matter change over time and space, or, at least, we don’t know which ones are invariable and which ones are not (Richards, 1987). This is the historicity of human subjectivity that the heading of this section of the paper refers to. It means that the very objects of Psychology have been constituted as part of human history, and first and foremost need to be analysed historically. Such an approach makes an historical analysis central to our understanding of Psychology and its subject matter in all societies, and is why an historical analysis is given prior status here to a cultural analysis of Psychology’s position in society. It allows us to address the question: Why is Psychology so “Eurocentric,” and “Westocentric”?, to produce an answer that is simultaneously similar and different to the answers given by the cultural critics. The answer is because the very object of Psychology, its subject matter, its vocabulary and its frameworks have been constituted historically in the Western world. The classification of human individuals according to certain Psychological categories, and the kinds of persons consequently created, have to do with culture, but to identify them we need history.

How then can we understand this discipline, with its connection to its subject matter, and its rise to prominence in particular societies? If we again take the cultural critiques of Psychology in Africa as a starting point, it is clear that many of them base their critique on the ideological nature of knowledge claims in Psychology. The discipline, according to them, participates in the domination of individuals or groups, or legitimises this domination. If one asks how this happens, the answer typically lies in the nature of power and how power relations are exercised. These analyses use the language of interests, motives, and ideologies, and become like a judicial investigation, where one has to arrive at a judgement. No matter how profitable it might be, this line of critique still assumes (and takes as its starting point) human subjectivity as an unproblematic, immutable given. In the rest of the paper, I should like to outline one way to investigate the historical construction of human subjectivity in "the Western world". We need to comprehend how human subjectivity (and Psychology) has become so important in these societies, to be able to conceive of ways in which it will be similar and different in other societies, and whether Psychology will be about giving the powerful more power.

Governing others

Psychology emerged as a discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century in countries that shared many political, economic and social characteristics, mainly industrialisation and democratisation. In the twentieth century it prospered in the same countries, and in particular in the USA, once it arrived on its shores. Taking my cue from Michel Foucault (e.g. 1985; 1986), who argued that the history of the “psy” disciplines is intrinsically linked to the history of government, I would suggest that it is no accident that these countries formed the historical heartland of Psychology.

In the modern, post-industrial capitalist societies in the western part of Europe and the USA, characterised by a political system of “advanced liberalism”, citizens are defined as individuals with rights and freedoms. The values of individuality, freedom, and choice are greatly emphasised. The question then becomes how to govern these free individuals; how to manage, regulate, and direct citizens toward social and moral objectives, in a way that their freedom as individual actors is not perceived to be under threat. In his work, Nikolas Rose (e.g. 1990; 1996) has argued convincingly that this is accomplished in liberal democracies through individuals regulating (governing) themselves, by acting upon themselves as subjects of freedom. In these societies it became accepted wisdom that the major areas of social and economic life, such as public health, industrial productivity, and education of children, had to be regulated in order to achieve certain desired objectives (Rose, 1988). And to be very clear about it: these were positive objectives: to minimise maladjustment, extend the benefits of modernisation to all members of society, prevent disease, promote health and happiness, create contented and productive workers, and so on. To achieve these objectives, information was required, and became central in coordinating complex social activities in modern societies.

The connection between achieving positive social objectives through the use of carefully collected information has become so firmly entrenched in modern societies that it goes almost unnoticed. An example drawn from the history of methodology may make this explicit. In nineteenth century Britain, for example, attempts were made to understand and manage poverty via survey methodology. Social surveys were conducted to establish the extent of poverty in Britain, and to get to know the city slums. Indeed, in both England and America the first social surveys were instigated by public health concerns (Bulmer, Bales & Sklar, 1991). Thus the relationship between research and social action, between knowledge production and social policy, was established from early on in the social sciences. The practice of social surveys for policy purposes continues: In the mid-1980s in the USA, for example, when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Pew Memorial Trust wanted to fund medical clinics for homeless persons, an accurate count was considered necessary to assess how well these clinics would cover the potential clients (see Rossi, 1987). Policy formulation could only take place on the basis of statistical information available about the “social problem” of “homelessness”.

Butchart (1998) gave excellent illustrations of this process at work in early twentieth century South Africa. The plague of 1900, and the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, highlighted public health as a concern of the state, and contributed substantially to the introduction of the Public Health Act of 1919. This Act established the Department of Public Health “as a central coordinating body charged with standardizing the methods of observation and mechanisms for the ‘prevention and suppression’ of infectious diseases deployed by each local authority” (p. 135). This new emphasis on public health required better statistics to establish patterns of disease, and the social survey was the most prominent technique through which such numbers would be supplied in South Africa as well.

Foucault has argued that we are dealing with a particular way of understanding “government” in these instances, “Government” here does not refer to the political apparatus of the state, but to “a way of conceptualizing all those more or less rationalized programs, strategies, and tactics for ‘the conduct of conduct’, for acting upon the actions of others in order to achieve certain ends” (Rose, 1996, p. 12). Modern societies are characterised by a rationality of government: “a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governing), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practised” (Gordon, 1991, p. 3).
How does this happen? Rose (1988; 1990) provides a useful analysis in which modern institutions take a central role, and I draw heavily on his work in the remainder of this section. The hallmark of modern societies, in particular advanced industrial states, is the pervasiveness of bureaucratic organisations that manage ("govern") the lives of its citizens. In modern societies the capacity of traditional institutions to meet citizens' demands and service requirements is exceeded. New specialised institutions are created, or old ones radically transformed, to provide concentrations of the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise, to address these needs. Thus people in such societies live their lives deeply under the influence of major institutions such as hospitals, schools, courts, prisons and factories.

In the new or transformed institutions of modern societies, that emerged from the second half of the nineteenth century, people were concentrated in larger numbers than ever before. Education provides a good example of such new state institutions. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the state in most Western countries started to play an ever-increasing role in education, as evidenced by legal prescriptions for schools and type of schooling to be provided. By 1900, compulsory education was introduced in most Western European countries and North American states. In one sense this was the result of a (middle class) feeling for order and civilisation. In another sense, it was a response to the new demands of an industrial society for more educated labour. For our purposes here, however, a small detail proved to be the most important: it brought large numbers of children together in one facility; often in one class (Jansz & Van Drunen, 1996). The difficulties that schools, teachers and administrators experienced as a result, and the consequences for psychology, are well documented (e.g. Fancher, 1990; Wolf, 1973). In France, these difficulties would lead to the formulation of a request by the French Ministry of Education to devise a technique for identifying children who would not be able to keep up with normal schooling. As all students of Psychology know, this was the beginning of modern intelligence testing, through the work of Alfred Binet.

I have concentrated here on education as an example partly because it was the first practical field where psychology would get a foot in the door. Examples of the difficulties experienced by modern states when large numbers of individuals had to be regulated in one establishment can be given from other social domains as well: the military (as a result of the introduction of compulsory military service, and participation in major wars); industry (with the rise of mass manufacturing in purpose-built factories); and mental health (with the creation of large-scale mental hospitals).

The concentration of large numbers of people in one institutional space had a paradoxical consequence: it made the individual visible. When people are gathered in large numbers in one "plane of sight" against which certain things appear, they can be observed as entities that are both similar and different (Rose, 1988). To take the education example already used above: in the classroom with large numbers of children in it, the individuals who are different will stand out more; the ones who cannot keep up, for example. This is indeed what happened in the French classrooms, that made it possible and necessary for Binet to devise a classifying technique to identify these individuals. In the factory geared towards mass manufacturing, it will be the unproductive worker who will emerge as "different", through not being able to keep up with the pace of the assembly line, or being unable to meet production targets.

The norms and standards of these establishments conferred visibility on certain features of those within them, as they orchestrated and coordinated the activities of individuals towards the achievement of particular ends. Thus the need for programmes of government in modern societies also became a need for programmes of governing individuals. And this is what would drive the development of Psychology in the twentieth century in liberal democracies in particular: the need to operate upon the capacities and qualities of human individuals, to achieve socially desirable objectives through the government of the human factor (see Rose, 1988). Psychology would supply the concepts, calculations and techniques and practices that made this possible. Psychology then can be seen as the institutionalisation of the attempts to manage the difficulties associated with individual differences in the emergence of certain kinds of societies: city-centred, industrialised, and democratised.

Gordon (1991) indicates that Foucault understood 'government' in both a wide and narrow sense. The general use is reflected in the previous discussion about the government of others, that is called "disciplinary of human difference". But there is an additional meaning in the concept of governmentality, in so far as it also relates to the government of oneself. Foucault refers to this as the "technologies of the self" or "self-steering mechanisms"- the ways in which we experience and understand ourselves. There are numerous ways in which the practices of governing others are intrinsically linked to the governing of oneself. And in this regard Psychology (and psychology) has been equally essential.

**Governing ourselves**

The individual freedom that is so central to liberal-democratic societies is tied to the kinds of subjects within them, and thus to human subjectivity. In "the West", human beings are understood as being equipped with an interiority, with an inner domain, that in the nineteenth century became the subject matter of Psychology. Of course, the contours of this inner domain are already visible in Western Europe prior to the mid-nineteenth century, under the influence of Romanticism (see Ellenberger, 1970, for some of the Romantic influences on psychoanalysis). But once Psychology emerged in the second half of the 19th century and flourished in the 20th century, it increasingly articulated the inward turn in Western culture. "The essence of the modern is psychology, the experience and interpretation of the world according to the reactions of our inner selves, as if in an inner world; it is the dissolving of all stability in subjectivity" (Simmel, cited by Le Rider, 1993, p. 29). In this rich inner life some form of truth may be discerned (Taylor, 1989), and individuals pursue knowledge of their inner lives, via introspective self-examination of some kind or another. One has to learn to examine aspects of oneself and make the results of that examination intelligible to others. As human subjects address themselves to understanding their own experiences, they develop ways of experiencing or understanding themselves.

The discourse of individuation and freedom hails autonomous individuals into existence, who "accept" the norms of greater rationality, independence, and self-knowledge. These are Foucault's "technologies of the self", when individuals are required to effect certain changes in themselves "in relation to the true and the false, the permitted and the forbidden, the desirable and the undesirable" (Foucault, 1988, p. 144). Various authorities (in the schools, factories, financial institutions, mental hospitals, and prisons, for example) seek to govern through such responsible self-regulation of citizens. Because, as we come to relate to others and ourselves as subjects, we render ourselves intelligible, and hence manageable.

In a recent paper, Durrheim and Foster (1999) used such a Foucauldian framework to analyze the South African Regulation of Gatherings Act of 1993 as a form of social control through self-regulation. They argue that the Act is in
line with theories of crowd control that achieve their effects through the production of discourses that can be translated into workable technologies. The crowd must be managed by regulating itself, though regulatory technologies such as prior negotiations with the authorities to institute "joint responsibility", working with organizers of marches, establishing peace monitors, etc. What the authors call the "new crowd psychology" incorporates "a system of surveillance which institutionalizes crowd self-regulation" (p. 72).

Most countries outside the historical heartland of Psychology did not share in the cultural and historical process through which human individuals in "the West" interpret themselves and others as "subjects" with a unique inner life. When Psychology is imported into these countries, it introduces a lack of fit between the discipline and its socio-historical context. At one level, Psychology is attractive to all modern (or modernizing) societies, as a result of its promise to achieve socially desirable objectives through the disciplining of human differences, as argued earlier. The lack of fit between Psychology and its new host culture is most pronounced when technologies of the self are imported – because the regulation of the self depends so heavily on the prior creation of a certain kind of subject.

Although Psychology has not created the cultural interest in the inner world of the unique individual, its expansion in the 20th century had powerful effects. Psychology provides the guidelines on the road to self-discovery, and bestows upon us the techniques for examining and evaluating the self. It provides vocabularies that we use to make our lives meaningful to ourselves, to disclose to friends and lovers who we are, and to express whom we want to be. We utilise Psychological knowledge to live our lives in psychological terms, as we work out how to conduct ourselves in sexual relations, in bringing up children, in work, etc. It is an essential resource as we work upon ourselves as free, autonomous subjects in democratic societies, governing ourselves through the Psychological techniques of self-scrutiny.

A practical science

By now it is clear that such a history of Psychology is not a "conventional" history, or a history of ideas. It is a history of Psychological practices, developed in a range of practical sites, to address the issues of "government". It is via a detailed historical examination of Psychological practices that further light will be cast on the nature of the relationship between Psychology and its subject matter.

Psychological phenomena are created partly through practical intervention, precisely where and when individualizing patterns of social regulation have become dominant. The institutional spaces of prisons, factories and schoolrooms, for example, form the "surfaces of emergence" for Psychological objects (Foucault, 1972, p. 41), as Psychology provides practicable solutions to difficulties experienced. The development of twentieth century Psychology is dominated by applied-practical concerns, and most (or a substantial part) of Psychology's knowledge developed as part of a search for knowledge that is useful in practice – not through laboratory experiments on the nature of mind. Lunt and Poortinga (1996) for example, showed how the practical-applied elements of psychology developed in Europe. These developments affected not only the clinical aspects of Psychology, but also professional fields like health Psychology, organizational and consulting Psychology, forensic Psychology, traffic Psychology, and sports Psychology, to name but a few. The proliferation of applied-practical aspects of Psychology often occurs in unexpected places as well. In studies on perception for example, normally regarded as a laboratory-based aspect of Psychology, much research has been conducted to improve traffic safety, develop safety procedures in the workplace, devise postal codes that are easy to remember, and to train fighter pilots.

The development of Psychology as an applied-practical science accelerated in the period after World War II, in virtually all countries where the discipline was institutionalized. And where it is absent, psychologists bemoan that absence, as Akin-Ogundeji (1991, p. 3) remarked about the lack of a Psychology of practical relevance to people's "problems of living" in Nigeria. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the growth of Psychology as a social service profession; in short, of clinical Psychology.

In 1988, 55% of psychologists around the world reported their field of specialty as either clinical or counselling Psychology (Sexton & Hogan, 1992). In the USA, Heelas (1996) estimates that there are an estimated 300 000 psychotherapists active, with some 12 million participants in self-help therapies. In South Africa, 63% of psychologists were registered in the clinical or counselling fields in 1996 (Richter et al., 1998). If educational Psychology is added to this general category, then it rises to 85%. In Australia, of 3325 psychologists registered in 1995, 1582 were clinical or counselling psychologists (Australian Research Council, 1996).

In modern societies, the concept of the therapeutic has found much wider application than an attempt to cure pathology (Giddens, 1991). Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton (1985) view therapists as central characters in modernity, as they re-shape subjectivity. They exhort individuals to know themselves, and to be true to those selves. Psychological practices, such as personality assessment techniques, intelligence testing, psychotherapy, vocational counselling, etc., thus are not just another way of treating people as objects (Louw & Danziger, 2000). They assist human beings to constitute themselves as subjects of a certain kind. It seems we cannot "know ourselves" without the experts of subjectivity, but need the tools and techniques provided by the expertise of psychologists. Psychotherapy and counselling are the technologies of self-examination that guide individuals to reconstitute their understanding of themselves toward greater autonomy, self-reflexivity and self-steering. It is exactly these kinds of individuals who are the objective of modern mentalities of government, as they are required to "govern themselves".

The South African citizen

What has this got to do with Psychology in South Africa? South Africa is hardly a post-industrial society, and only very recently a democracy. Indeed, many would argue that, given South Africa's history, this analysis has little bearing on the position of Psychology in the country. But that would be a premature conclusion (see Butchart, 1998; Louw & Danziger, 2000). Present-day South Africa is a democratic country, under a constitution that is almost a model of a liberal democracy. Like others of its kind, the South African constitution frames the regulation of conduct of its citizens in terms of the notions of personal responsibility in law, and individual rights and individual freedoms in politics. (For examples of non-liberal governmentalities, see Geuter, 1992; Louw & Danziger, 2000; and Rose, 1996, pp. 13-17).

Chapter 1 of the South African Constitution declares that "Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law." Chapter 2 contains a Bill of Rights, which states: "This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom" (quotes are from the 1996 South African Constitution, to be found at www.gov.za/constitution/1996).

The citizens of South Africa thus are governed under a Constitution framed in the language of rights, and of individuals. The Constitution establishes and hails all citizens to be free and autonomous individuals within a legal and constitutional framework that protects and nurtures such individuals. Democracy after all exists on the basis of free and equal citizens. The Constitution therefore forms the bedrock for constituting citizens of the state as autonomous, self-regulating agents endowed with rights. Many of the micro-techniques to do this have been in place for a long time, but not applied equally to all citizens (Louw & Danziger, 2000). For example, only recently was education made compulsory for all children under a certain age in South Africa. Education is a powerful individualizing force in society – school performance is always recorded as individual performance, and determines a child’s individual progress through a system of grades. It is therefore of little surprise that education is such an important practical field for the expertise of Psychology, as Binet’s work in France demonstrated. The reality of educating a child in a graded, mass education system is almost inevitably done according to the vocabulary and techniques of Psychology. For a parent simply to ask whether the child is “school ready”, is to invite the experts of individualised subjectivity permanently into their lives.

The very conditions that made Psychology such a pervasive force in modern societies thus are already present in a fairly advanced state in South Africa. In numerous practical sites the capacities for individuals are resources for governing authorities, and for individuals themselves. Exactly how human subjectivities will be constructed in these sites, given the numerous and different cultural resources individuals will draw on in South Africa, is almost impossible to predict. Part of the reason for such unpredictability is the plurality of sites where these constructions will take place. Education and crowd psychology have been given already as examples above. Consider also the decision to have only one child (or to have none). In many places in the world it is choice rather than tradition or habit that determines how many children a family would have. Such choice is often made in unexpected communities: the decline of fertility among women in countries like Canada, Japan, Germany and Italy is well-known, but places like Mauritius, Guadeloupe and Sri Lanka also have fertility rates below replacement levels (Hacker, 2000). “Culture” here is an inadequate explanation (indeed, one would have difficulty with traditionally Catholic countries like Italy and Spain, which have particularly low birth rates). The choice about number of children presupposes a woman who sees herself as an independent, autonomous human being, who can enter into and prevail in the complex inter- and intra-personal negotiations that such a choice requires.

Although the outcomes of these processes are impossible to predict, the argument presented in this paper is that they will come about as a product of Psychological practices. As they are brought to bear upon the problems of everyday life in many different institutional settings, we can fully expect the concepts of personhood, of subjectivity, to become more disparate. Since its inception Psychology has been the result of combinations of ideas, theories, and practices. Salmon Rushdie’s description of cultural change may be equally true of the unexpected transformations in Psychology and psychology: “Melange, hotchpotech, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world” (1991, p. 394, italics in original).

Conclusion
The task of analysing the position of Psychology in different societies is much more difficult than the cultural critiques suggest. For a start, the role of psychology is more fundamental and consequential than they propose. In Butchart’s words, “...the psychological sciences, for all their characterization by some of the deities of sovereignty as irrelevant and ineffectual in an African context, are, as a mode of discipline, omnipresent and incogitable” (1998, p. 127). To understand the relevance of psychology for these non-Western societies, we will have to do much more than talk about African worldview, ideology, and cultural imperialism. Analytically, it is not particularly useful to know in South Africa how many black psychologists there are; how the leadership of the profession is black but the membership is white, etc. The fact is that all psychologists hail citizens as subjects of Psychology, to think in different ways about others, and about themselves. The question for the future development of Psychology in South Africa would then be rephrased to the following: How would South Africans construct themselves as subjects in a dynamic matrix formed by modernizing forces, cultural meanings, a democratic state, and the technologies and vocabulary of Psychology?

The possibility that three aspects: a mentality of government, Psychology, and the subject matter of the discipline, are inextricably allied and must be treated seriously. Wherever Psychological practices (the clinical interview, epidemiological survey, educational and vocational testing, and assessment of individual competencies in the workplace, to name but a few) become a mode for regulating individual conduct in modernizing institutions, they will change the way individuals will experience themselves and their lives. As argued in this paper, a proper historical understanding of Psychology and its subject matter should make these practices the objects of investigation. Expressed in its most radical form, this will mean that “No theory of the psyche can provide the basis for a genealogy of subjectification, precisely because the emergence of such theories has been central to the very regime of the self whose birth must be the object of our inquiries” (Rose, 1996, p.10).

To live as psychologised human beings is to live in a paradox. Psychology and its practitioners speak the language of benevolence and beneficence: it promotes mental health; it guides individualisation and self-realisation and fulfimentment; it contributes to the creation of contented workers while increasing productivity; and it counsels those who are grieving or have been traumatised. Very few people will deny that Psychological practices have the potential to deliver on at least some of these objectives, and to contribute to increased freedom and autonomy of human beings. It may free individuals from internal or external constraints, while it extends and pluralises their responses to the difficulties of everyday life.

But Psychology simultaneously ties human beings just as surely into a new set of constraints, as it installs its own language and expertise as the media through which we will “discover” our inner selves. While it enhances our ability to free ourselves from imposed constraints, it conceals how it binds us into a network of disciplinary micro-powers with its own peculiar demands on us. It makes it look as if the interiority we need to explore and get to know is a natural given, revealed to us in ever richer detail as we embark on the voyage of internal discovery. At the same time it draws a veil about its own role in making it that subjectivity that it takes as its own subject matter. The very people who promise us this freedom, this escape from external power, are the ones who tie us into this new micro-network of disciplinary power – often being unaware of it themselves. We are drawn into new lines of obedience, and “Once inside the discursive world of enterprise, therefore, one cannot hand one’s autonomy back. Instead, one is forced, in effect, to exercise it continuously in order to guarantee one’s own survival” (du Gay, 1997, p.308).
How do we get free of Psychology, when abandoning it is not a possibility? Underlying the themes developed in this paper is a position that it requires a critical understanding of the ways in which Psychology has contributed to the present, and to what is taken as the natural givens of life. We need to be vigilant to understand its hold on us, and to what we take for granted of what Psychological experts say about our selves. Butchart (1997, p. 108) called for “... a constant vigilance, a perpetual monitoring not only of what these disciplines do, but of what it is that is done by their performance." This will not be easy, for “Human beings must interpret their past, and dream their future, as outcomes of personal choices made or choices still to make yet within a narrow range of possibilities whose restrictions are hard to discern because they form the horizon of what is thinkable” (Rose, 1996, p. 17).

References


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