

*Psychology has, at best, only made a modest contribution to efforts aimed at resolving the problems of developing societies. While other disciplines have produced specialisations addressing the difficulties of the world's poorer nations, psychology has failed to do so. It is suggested that psychologists in developing countries lack a framework for applying psychological knowledge to their local settings and conditions. We present a conceptual methodology which incorporates Reconstituting, Restating, Refuting and Realising the relevance of "Western psychology" to the challenges of development. Each of these pathways to a "Psychology for Development" is illustrated by describing some recent psychological contributions to identifying problems regarding development in Malawi.*

## ***Pathways to a Psychology for Development: Reconstituting, Restating, Refuting and Realising***

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***The application of*** psychology to developing countries has often met with a poor reception (Eze, 1991; Kamwendo, 1985; Wober, 1975; Akin-Ogundeji, 1991). In part this may be due to the fact that psychologists have sought to apply psychologies from "somewhere else" to the problems of development in developing countries, and found a poor fit between the two. While cross-cultural research is of great interest and some practical value (see Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990), it has often been that such research has compared a developing country with another and "more developed," usually "western" country. Comparing the citizens of New York and Nairobi, for example, is likely to be of no more use in developing Nairobians than it will be in developing New Yorkers. Thus, to some extent, the pursuit of cross-cultural psychology may

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have distracted resources away from the psychological study of indigenous problems as a topic in their own right.

Kamwendo (1985) wrote: "As psychologists working in third world countries it is imperative that we demonstrate the applicability and relevance of the principles [of psychology] to the local settings and conditions in which we work" (p. 135). Yet, although there is much agreement on this point (Serpell, 1976; Eze, 1991; Wober, 1975; Carr and MacLachlan, 1993), it is often difficult to grasp exactly *how* this should be done. The production of a psychology, for and of development, lacks a blueprint, a framework, a conceptual thrust.

In this paper we seek to outline some "pathways" for the pursuit of psychology in developing countries: a psychology which will address the "local settings and conditions." Specifically, we discuss four pathways to developing a psychology which will be of relevance to the problems facing the world's poorer nations. The pathways are rather abstract in themselves and so we have illustrated them with examples of our own work in Malawi, and invite the reader to travel along them. While for many of us our personal development has incorporated the "three Rs" of reading, writing and arithmetic, we offer the a new set of "four Rs" to foster the growth of a "psychology for development."

### ***Reconstituting***

The word "reconstituting" may be taken to have two different meanings. First, the idea of restoring something to its original state, as when one reconstitutes dried milk by adding water to it. This meaning has an element of "bringing back to life" in it. Second, reconstituting may be used to describe the rearrangement or reorganisation of, for example, a committee or board of members. We have chosen this word to describe our first pathway because bringing some existing ideas "back to life" by reorganising them is the very essence of this approach. Drawing from our experience, in deriving the "Double Demotivation Hypothesis" (Carr and MacLachlan, in press; MacLachlan and Carr, 1993a) we entered into a process of what might be called "psychological alchemy." On the

basis of existing psychological concepts we sought to explore the motivational ramifications of a situation extant in many developing countries throughout the world. Many expatriates who work alongside locals, but who are paid by their own governments or aid agencies, often earn more than ten times the salary of their local homologue. What are the likely effects of such pay differentials? We derived the hypothesis that in fact both the much lower paid local person and the very well paid expatriate are likely to become demotivated. To do so, we drew on existing ideas from the frame of reference of western psychology: "Equity," "Minimal Sufficiency" and "Belief in a Just World."

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that the local development worker may lower his inputs by, for example, working less hard or less well, or by absenting himself psychologically or physically. The expatriate, for his or her part, may distort cognitions, developing an inflated view of his or her inputs. The principle of "Minimal Sufficiency," derived from Dissonance theory among others (Festinger, 1957), may also apply to the expatriate. Over-payment, relatively speaking, may transfer the locus of motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic factors, producing a change in the quality of motivation. Finally, "Belief in a Just World" (Lerner, 1970) may influence expatriates to "blame the victims" for their comparative misfortune, whether the victims in question are the local development workers the expatriates are working alongwith, or people whom the expatriates are paid to help. The local development worker, for his or her part, may come to believe in some kind of superiority of the expatriate.

The "Double Demotivation" concept therefore refers to the demotivation of both groups (local and expatriate) of development workers. Such a demotivation could have the effect of retarding national development on those very projects where such development is needed the most. Having forged a new concept through the reconstitution of existing ideas to be found in "western" psychology, we are now testing a psychological hypothesis relevant to the problems of national development. Could such a demotivation be responsible for the fact that so many educated Africans do not work in their own country, or for the dissatisfaction of so many expatriate workers with the projects on which they work?

### ***Restating***

Restating is the process of reviewing, modifying or qualifying an idea, and then stating it again. Sometimes one may make only a few changes to an existing statement, while at other times more substantial revision may be involved. This pathway approaches the local conditions in developing countries and asks, to what extent does a particular principle of “western” psychology apply in this setting?

Let us take as an example Festinger’s (1954) notion of a Unidirectional Drive Upwards—an idea which is widely accepted in the industrialised world (Turner, 1991). Briefly, Festinger suggested that we all need to evaluate our abilities, and to do so we compare ourselves to reasonably similar others (others with similar background, experience, ability, seniority, etc.), being perpetually driven upwards to outperform these others. Dissimilar others are not supposed to interest us. Thus, when taking up a new sport, we pick matches against novices like ourselves, not against the local champion. Festinger’s view is that we are forever individually striving to promote the self in its own insular world.

However, we have come across much anecdotal evidence to suggest that Festinger’s drive concept requires restating in a developing country like Malawi so as to acknowledge the particular *cultural environment* in which it may operate. Furthermore, in this particular culture, the range of abilities over which comparisons typically occur may be much less insular than elsewhere. Both possibilities are captured simultaneously in the words of one of our students.

In our culture, African culture, the idea that people appreciate the superiority of others as Festinger suggests is rare. People always develop hostility towards those who are better than themselves. For example, there is so much witchcraft going on to reduce the ability of a colleague. And if there is no witchcraft, there is too much backbiting to discredit the other. We Africans don’t accept the superiority of the other without feeling jealous.

We call such an outlook the “Pull Down” motive, whereby individuals seek to prevent others from “getting ahead.” Other

examples include farmers sabotaging the crops of their more successful neighbours, and nurses and middle managers casting "spells" to prevent colleagues from being promoted. Thus, there is some evidence to suggest that Festinger's "Undirectional Drive Upwards" needs to be modified in Malawi, at least. While individuals may be pushing themselves upwards, they may also be engaged in trying to prevent the progress of their colleagues, and even of those who are "playing in a different league." Through investigating this "Pull Down" motive we aim to specify exactly how Festinger's notion should be modified and restated in this developing country.

### ***Refuting***

To refute is to prove that something is not the case. An instance of this may be where a "universal" law does not apply universally. If some aspects of an idea are worth retaining, then the idea may be restated, but if no evidence is found in support of an idea, then it may be refuted. There are many ideas from "western" psychology which may be of dubious relevance or applicability in other societies. We illustrate the pathway of refuting by once again considering some of our own research.

According to Festinger's theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957), an individual should experience some degree of psychological discomfort if he or she tries to hold to mind two logically inconsistent explanations for a particular event or set of events. In many African countries, beliefs in traditional forms of healing are still strong, and often contradictory to those advocated by modern—usually western—medical practitioners. As such, one might expect some degree of cognitive dissonance to exist for an individual who simultaneously holds these two sets of beliefs.

Yet, in several different studies (Pengani, Carr, MacLachlan, & Ager, 1993; Shaba, MacLachlan, Carr, & Ager, 1993; Ager, Carr, MacLachlan, & Kaneka-Chilongo, 1993) we have found that many people are able to tolerate ambiguity and contradictions in their own beliefs about health and illness. Anecdotally, we have encountered trained medical nurses who also believe in the necessity of spells to protect themselves from the "anti-promotion" wishes of

their colleagues. In the field of health within Malawi, the idea of cognitive dissonance has not been supported, an effect which we have chosen to call "Tropical Tolerance," and which has great implications for the expansion of health services in this developing society (MacLachlan and Carr, 1993b). Here, refuting a popular concept from "western" psychology and developing a new concept relevant to a psychology for development, offers a pathway for further applied research.

### ***Realising***

"Realising" is another word with various shades of meaning, and a consideration of its meanings helps to enrich our understanding of this pathway to a psychology for development. To "realise" is to be fully aware of something or to accept it as a fact. Thus the observation of a behaviour or a phenomenon may allow one to accept or realise its existence. However, the word "realise" is also sometimes used to carry the idea of something really happening—for example, to realise one's hopes or ambitions. In developing countries, psychology may have failed to realise the hopes of its advocates. Thus here the word "realising" may be appropriate when a psychological understanding of an event or phenomenon gives the subject of psychology the opportunity to make a contribution to problems of development. Finally, in a similar way you may "realise" the worth of an asset when it is converted into money: "How much did you realise on these shares?" This meaning of "realise" clearly implies some pay-off. In a similar way psychology may be seen to be a good investment when it provides a pay-off of applied relevance to the "local settings and conditions." "Realising" therefore has elements of becoming aware, achieving aims and paying something back from an investment.

In the 1930s, W.K. Kellogg set up a foundation to "help people to help themselves" (Kellogg Foundation, 1992). Since then this phrase has become the catchphrase of an ethos for development which empowers those most in need of help. In Malawi, however, there seems to be a new cost to the giving of aid. Instead of helping communities to help themselves, aid may be cultivating a situation

where the donor must pay the recipient to help himself. This "Pay Me to Help Myself" or "Pay Me ..." reaction could negate the very purpose of giving aid. For instance, during the recent drought and famine in Malawi, a town community refused to offload its own maize unless paid to do so. Similarly a rural community, given the equipment to build itself a well, also laid down the same conditions. At conferences and workshops, the *per diem* (or living allowance) is often way above the minimal level required. And school children allegedly will not cooperate with educational survey researchers unless paid to do so. Here, then, a "realisation" of the psychological implications of giving aid may, through further research, allow us to develop more effective assistance between the wealthier and poorer countries of the world.

### ***Research and Development***

Each of the pathways described above offer a means to identifying research issues which can address the "local settings and conditions" found in the world's developing countries. We have illustrated where these pathways have taken us in Malawi in terms of identifying what we hope will be fruitful seams of research. Our examples also illustrate that although the pathways we described may be conceptually distinct, a particular research idea may be relevant to more than one pathway, as with ambitious nurses believing in the necessity of protective spells. Such cross-fertilisation and flexibility is perhaps the essence of a "Psychology for Development."

The application of psychology to the problems of developing countries is not a luxury, it is an essential ingredient of national development. With the dramatic contrasts offered by "western psychology" and "impoverished local" frames of reference, it can be difficult to identify the first steps of developing a "psychology for development." It is our hope that the four pathways of Reconstituting, Restating, Refuting and Realising will encourage psychologists in developing countries to pursue research of applied relevance to their own settings.

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