

A New Unified Theory of Psychology

Gregg Henriques

A New Unified Theory of Psychology

 Springer

Gregg Henriques
Department of Psychology
James Madison University
Harrisonburg
VA, USA
henriqgx@jmu.edu

ISBN 978-1-4614-0057-8

e-ISBN 978-1-4614-0058-5

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4614-0058-5

Springer New York Dordrecht Heidelberg London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011931083

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2011

All rights reserved. This work may not be translated or copied in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher (Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, 233 Spring Street, New York, NY 10013, USA), except for brief excerpts in connection with reviews or scholarly analysis. Use in connection with any form of information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed is forbidden.

The use in this publication of trade names, trademarks, service marks, and similar terms, even if they are not identified as such, is not to be taken as an expression of opinion as to whether or not they are subject to proprietary rights.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

To Andee

Preface

Seeing the Forest Through the Trees

We persevere in looking at small questions instead of large ones and our view of the forest is forever obscured by the trees. Yet specialized knowledge derives its meaning from the context of larger perspectives and questions. When it loses touch with that larger context, it loses its coherence.

William Bevan (1991, p. 475)

Ask a biologist, “What is biology?” and you are likely to get a relatively unambiguous response. Biology is the science of life. In contrast ask a psychologist, “What is psychology?” and if the individual has considered the question in depth, you are likely to get something along the lines of the following: “It is basically the science of the mind, except for the fact that there still are a number of psychologists who think of it as the science of behavior, and argue that ‘the mind’ is not a helpful scientific construct. So you can call it the science of behavior and mental processes, but that glosses over the basic philosophical problems that initially pitted behaviorism against mentalism. It currently deals primarily with human behavior, although historically many psychologists studied animals, perhaps most notoriously the lab rat. And yet, the line between humans and other animals—if there is one at all—is not generally agreed upon. Some scholars believe that psychology is really a loose federation of subdisciplines and that as our scientific knowledge becomes more advanced it will break up into fields like neuroscience, cognitive science, linguistics, and other areas. And now there are quite a few psychologists, especially those studying culture and continental philosophy, who question whether natural or even social science epistemologies are appropriate. They argue that psychology is best thought of as a collection of studies and belongs as much with the humanities as the sciences. Finally, there is the issue of whether the discipline is mainly a science like biology or is mainly a healing profession like medicine, or is simultaneously both. Given all of this controversy, it is probably best just to think of psychology as an institution, a human construction that doesn’t necessarily map directly onto nature. Rather than worry about definitions, we should spend our energy conducting studies on phenomena of interest.” Such is the current state of our knowledge on the question of “What is psychology?”

It does not have to be this way. The unified theory articulated here paves a way to logically and coherently define the field of psychology, resolve the long-standing

philosophical problems, and weave together key insights from various paradigms into a coherent whole. The unified theory offered here consists of four separable but interlocking ideas that fit together to allow one to see the forest of psychology and how it can be clearly and crisply defined in relationship to biology from below and the social sciences from above. The unified theory also integrates and assimilates key ideas from the major paradigms, clarifies the relationship between the science and the profession, and ultimately helps to show how and why psychology connects to each of the three great branches of learning—the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities—more than any other discipline.

This book is written for anyone with a broad interest in psychology. I am especially writing for advanced undergraduate and graduate students who yearn for a more coherent way to view the field. Students, for example, who have been in classes with professors who subscribed to behavioral or cognitive or psychodynamic or humanistic or evolutionary or cultural or neuroscience perspectives and have found themselves wondering, “This seems to make sense, but what my other professors say also seems to make sense. Do they have to be defined against one another? Is there any way to integrate these perspectives into a coherent whole?” I am also writing for professional psychologists who see themselves as eclectic or integrative in their approach to psychotherapy because they have come to see that each of the major schools has good insights to offer, and it seems that there should be a way to blend them together in a manner that makes sense. I am also writing for scholars of the field, those who have probed deeply into the theoretical and philosophical problems associated with the discipline and its subject matter. To them, I offer a solution to a previously unsolvable problem. Finally, this book is written for those individuals outside the discipline who have a keen interest in obtaining a larger sense of the field and want a comprehensive set of ideas that help make sense of the human condition.

So I am introducing a new unified theory of psychology that is geared toward students, professional psychologists, academic scholars, and others interested in the human condition more generally. Needless to say, this creates problems of both breadth and depth. Any way you slice it, psychology is a broad field, so I am going to be covering a lot of ground and only have one book to do it. At the same time, it needs to be written in a manner that is accessible to students, is practical enough for professionals, and holds up to the scrutiny of scholars. To achieve this admittedly difficult goal, I am employing a frame I call qualitative generalizability. Einstein’s famous equation, $E=mc^2$, is a pinnacle of quantitative generalizability because it parsimoniously represents the quantitative relationships between the foundational variables of energy, mass, and the speed of light. In contrast, qualitative generalizability refers to the ability to introduce a frame that represents relationships between key variables in the subjective field—that is, the field of human consciousness and human understanding.

One of the great strengths of folk psychology (i.e., the way each of us makes sense of ourselves and others in our everyday lives) is that it is strong on qualitative generalizability. When we listen to a rich story and are readily able to empathize with the characters, we are doing so based on folk psychology. In contrast to folk

psychology, many perspectives in psychology are weak in qualitative generalizability. For example, the theories of Skinner and Freud, the two men who have probably had the greatest influence on the discipline, are both weak in this regard. Although Skinner has much to offer the field, his strong anti-mentalistic approach fatally handicapped the capacity of radical behaviorism to produce a qualitatively generalizable framework. And where Skinner seemingly refused to dive at all, Freud's psychoanalysis dove so deeply into the hidden layers of the human mind that it ended up claiming truths about human nature far different than everyday experience would suggest.

The unified theory outlined here paints a picture that is much closer to folk psychological conceptions than either of these approaches. It argues that humans have interests shaped by biology, learning, and culture, and that they spend their time and energy attempting to coordinate the flow of important resources in a manner that aligns well with economics. The unified theory further argues that social influence is a crucial resource and that much of human psychology is about relationships and navigating the dynamics of power and love and freedom and dependency in the social environment. And the unified theory posits that humans are unique animals because of symbolic language. However, it adds a specific twist to this common conjecture by pointing out that the evolution of language resulted in the adaptive problem of social justification. This is the problem of determining what is socially legitimate and explaining one's actions in accordance with those pressures. The unified theory argues that, as a consequence of the adaptive problem of social justification, the human self-consciousness system evolved to function as a justification system, and this ultimately is why humans are constantly justifying their actions to themselves and to others and why they seek out justification narratives that provide meaning and make sense of the world and their place in it.

If my point about qualitative generalizability is on target, these ideas should resonate with you. That is, it should not take long to see yourself as working to control the flow of resources, that social relationships are crucial to your mental life, and that you often—either implicitly or explicitly—are using language to justify things to yourself or to others. Indeed, according to the unified theory, you should be pondering the justifiability of my argument at this moment. Moreover, as you think about human culture—especially its laws, norms, religions, roles, and values—the notion that these are large-scale collective systems of justification that function to coordinate populations of people should make sense. My point is that although the unified theory itself is grounded deeply in science, the ideas offered here mesh reasonably well with folk psychology. That is good news because it means that the gap between folk psychology and psychological science is not nearly as wide as some have believed.

As a licensed professional psychologist, professor, and director of a doctoral program that combines Clinical and School Psychology, I wear a number of different hats. I am a clinician, researcher, educator, supervisor, and administrator. I am also a theorist and something of a philosopher. This book is written from my perspective as an educator, clinician, and theorist. The goal is to introduce to the psychological community concepts that can go a long way toward organizing findings and

providing the field with a shared language and conceptual framework for how the world works. I have attempted to write it in a way that emphasizes communication and understanding, and the goal is for one to “get” the ideas I am sharing.

The book is not written as a traditional psychological research project in the sense that one will not find much in the way of lab-based experiments, hypothesis testing, or rigorous quantitative analyses. At one level this is a weakness of the book, as such research methods are absolutely necessary for detailed scientific understanding. Given this, let me acknowledge at the outset that there is some validity to a likely criticism from some scientifically oriented psychological researchers that many complicated issues are glossed over, many specific areas of psychology untouched, and many important questions unanswered. Although true, my response is that the level of detail required relates to the goals of the communication. For too long psychology has failed to address questions pertaining to the forest. This book is about the forest, and its central justification is that if we can effectively map the forest then the careful scientific work we do examining the trees will be much more meaningful and informative because we will then be able to put our findings into a context of a shared understanding that can then be given away to the public in a positive and impactful way.

Acknowledgements

The development of the unified theory has been something of a life journey, and there are many people who have had a powerful influence on me in my travels. During my graduate training at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, I was extremely fortunate to have deep-thinking professors who were dedicated to the enhancement of student learning. Richard Tedeschi's course on psychotherapy integration provided the initial spark that led to the ideas articulated here. Lawrence Calhoun, my thesis advisor, has offered much wisdom and guidance, and I deeply appreciate his mentorship and friendship. I also am grateful for the support of my dissertation advisor, Harold Leitenberg, now retired from the University of Vermont. My dissertation was on the construct of cognitive errors, and it was crucial to my landing a job as a postdoctoral fellow working for Tim Beck at the University of Pennsylvania. It was a true honor to work with such a luminary, and I learned an enormous amount from him in my 4 years there.

I came to the Combined-Integrated Doctoral Program in Clinical and School Psychology at James Madison University in 2003, and it has been a great environment for cultivating the unified theory. I am indebted to each of the core faculty members in the program, Harriet Cobb, Craig Shealy, Anne Stewart, Elena Savina, and Trevor Stokes. Humanistic and scientific, thoughtful and innovative, with an eye toward social justice and globalization, my friends and colleagues here have significantly impacted the development of the unified theory, especially in regards to its large-scale application and the ultimate values in which it is grounded. I am also grateful for Ashton Trice's careful reading of the entire manuscript and his insightful reflections about substance and useful critiques of its style. Steve Keffer, Dave Pruett, and I shared many stimulating conversations about the nature of knowledge.

I am thankful for the support, encouragement, curiosity, and constructive criticism of the doctoral students in the program. Several dissertations have been heavily informed by the unified theory and have advanced it into new areas. Heather Gow showed how the theory could provide a framework for organizing many of the conflicting perspectives in intimate partner violence. Parisa Montazeri deepened and advanced the Influence Matrix. Chase Levesque applied the unified theory to developing a systematic approach to assessing outcomes in psychotherapy. Jason Stout wrote an excellent dissertation articulating how the unified theory can assimilate and integrate key ideas from other integrative approaches in psychotherapy, such

as cyclical psychodynamics, dialectical behavior therapy, and schema-focused therapy. Current projects are underway examining well-being, personality trait theory, and the development of a unified approach to psychotherapy, indicating that the system will continue to grow and evolve.

I have had good collaborations with many colleagues outside of JMU. Leigh Shaffer, Steve Quackenbush, Jason Bessey, Jeffrey Magnavita, Jack Anchin, Andre Marquis, David Geary, Keith Stanovich, Paul Gilbert, Bob Sternberg, and Larry Beutler have all been helpful in advancing the ideas offered here. I also want to thank the numerous participants of the two Visions of Integration Conferences, which resulted in much stimulating interdisciplinary dialogue.

An all-encompassing and life-altering project such as this one clearly requires support from both the domains of work and love. I am thankful for the many long and thoughtful conversations about the unified theory I have had with my parents and my three brothers. My father, Dr. Peter Henriques, is a historian who listened, questioned, supported, and lovingly cautioned me about the difficulty big ideas encounter in the academy. My mother, Dr. Marlene Henriques, is an award-winning educator who encouraged me to dream big and to share my insights. I want to extend a special acknowledgement to her for carefully reading the entire manuscript with an editor's eye for grammar. Some of the most meaningful moments I have had have been teaching the basic elements of "Daddy's work" to my three children, Sydney (11), Jon (10), and Lanie (7). I thank them for giving me such purpose in life. Last and most importantly, I thank my wife, Andee, for, well, everything.

Contents

Part I Introduction and Overview

1 From Racing Horses to Seeing the Elephant	3
Sparking the Search for the Elephant	5
The Currently Dismembered Elephant: Reviewing Key	
Insights from Major Paradigms	9
Psychoanalysis and Psychodynamic Theory	9
Behaviorism	10
Existentialism and Humanistic Psychology	11
The Cognitive Approaches	11
Evolutionary Psychology	12
Cultural Psychology	12
The Elephant: The Four Pieces That Make Up the Unified Theory	13
The Development of the Justification Hypothesis	17
The Nature of Justification Systems	19
Toward a New Vision	24
2 The Problem of Psychology	29
Psychology's Philosophical Woes	30
Problems of Definition and Subject Matter	31
Problems in the Philosophy of Mind and Behavior	33
Problems of Epistemology, Mission, and Values	34
Problems of Disconnected Domains of Causality	36
Problems of Proliferation	38
Psychology on the Fault Lines of Human Knowledge	40

Part II The Four Pieces that Make Up the Unified Theory

3 Behavioral Investment Theory	45
The Six Principles of Behavioral Investment Theory	48
Applying the Insights of Behavioral Investment Theory:	
The Behavioral Shutdown Model of Depression	57
Behavioral Investment Theory and the Connection	
with Other Proposals	63

W. T. Powers’ Perceptual Control Theory 63

Arthur Staats’ Psychological Behavioral Theory of Learning 66

Peggy LaCerra’s Adaptive Representational Networks 68

David Geary’s Motive to Control as the Central Principle of Mind 68

Behavioral Investment Theory and the Architecture
of the Human Mind 71

Level 1: Sensory-Motor 73

Level 2: Operant Experiential 74

Level 3: Imaginative Thought 76

Level 4: Linguistic Justification 77

An Everyday Example 77

Conclusion 80

4 The Influence Matrix 81

The Basics of the Influence Matrix 84

The Key Elements of the Influence Matrix 86

 The Need for Social Influence 86

 The Initial State of Dependency 86

 Competition and Dominance 87

 Cooperation, Altruism, and Affiliation 88

 Autonomy and the Freedom from Influence 90

 The Negatively Reinforcing Defensive Strategies
 of Hostility and Submission 91

 The Dynamic Interrelationships Between the Dimensions 93

 Emotions on the Outer Ring 93

 The Self-Other Quadrants 94

 Spheres of Influence 95

Assimilating and Integrating Major Programs
of Research with the Influence Matrix 96

The Influence Matrix and Psychodynamic Theory 96

The Influence Matrix and the Interpersonal Circumplex 98

The Influence Matrix and Attachment Theory 100

The Influence Matrix and Parenting Styles 101

The Influence Matrix and Sociometer Theory 102

The Influence Matrix, Agency and Communion,
and the Self-Other Dialectic 103

The Influence Matrix and Personality Trait Theory 104

Putting the Influence Matrix into Action: An Analysis
of Ordinary People 106

Summary and Conclusion 111

5 The Justification Hypothesis 113

Linking Human Self-Consciousness to the Adaptive
Problem of Social Justification 114

Review of the Evidence for Advanced Capacity
for Self-Consciousness in Humans 116

- The Role of Language in the Emergence of the Problem of Social Justification 118
- A Tripartite Model of Human Consciousness 120
- A Dual Processing Model of Cognition and Consciousness 122
- The Three Domains of Human Consciousness 123
- The Context of Justification 126
- The Two Filters 127
- Assimilating and Integrating Lines of Research with the Justification Hypothesis 131
- The Justification Hypothesis and the Interpreter Function of the Left Hemisphere 132
- The Justification Hypothesis and Cognitive Dissonance 133
- The Justification Hypothesis, Attributions, and the Self-Serving Bias 135
- The Justification Hypothesis and the Forces That Guide the Organization of Self-Knowledge 136
 - The Enhancement Motive 137
 - The Accuracy Motive 137
 - The Consistency Motive 138
- The Justification Hypothesis and Research on Implicit and Explicit Attitudes 139
- The Justification Hypothesis and Research on Reason Giving 140
- The Justification Hypothesis and Research on Reasoning 142
- Culture As the Rise of Collective Justification Systems 145
- The Justification Hypothesis and the Transmission of Technology 146
- The Justification Hypothesis and the Emergence of Norms 147
- The Justification Hypothesis and the Emergence of the Cultural Dimension of Complexity 148
- Culture as Large-Scale Collective Systems of Justification 148
- Conclusion 150
- 6 The Tree of Knowledge System 153**
 - Seeing the World Through the Prism of the ToK System 155
 - A New Approach to Emergent Evolution 160
 - The Modern Evolutionary Synthesis and the Emergence of Sociobiology 163
 - Wilson’s Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge 168
 - Consilience 169
 - Reductionism Versus Emergence 170
 - The Relationship Between the Natural and Social Sciences 170
 - The Fact-Value Distinction and the Relationship Between the Sciences and Humanities 171
 - The Need for Unification and the Nature of Knowledge 171
 - Achieving Consilience with the ToK System 172
 - Reductionism Versus Emergence 173
 - The Boundaries Between the Natural and Social Sciences 174

The Fact-Value Distinction and the Relationship
 Between the Sciences and Humanities 174
 The Need for Unification and the Nature of Knowledge 175
 Aggression: A Concrete Example Contrasting the Two Approaches . . . 176
 Conclusion 178

Part III Solving the Problem of Psychology

7 Defining Psychology 181
 Defining the Basic Science of Psychology As the Science
 of Mental Behavior 184
 Mental Behaviorism 185
 Psychology’s Three Great Branches 190
 Psychological Formalism 192
 Human Psychology 194
 Professional Psychology 197
 The Relationship Between Research and Practice
 in Professional Psychology 200
 Conclusion 206

8 Toward a Unified Psychotherapy 209
 Assimilating and Integrating Key Insights from the Major
 Approaches in Psychotherapy 212
 Key Components of Contemporary Behavior Therapy 214
 Behavior Therapy Through the Lens of the Unified Theory 216
 Key Components of Contemporary Cognitive Therapy 216
 Contemporary Cognitive Therapy Through the Lens
 of the Unified Theory 219
 Key Components of Contemporary Experiential Therapy 220
 Contemporary Experiential Therapies from the Vantage
 Point of the Unified Theory 223
 Key Components of Contemporary Psychodynamic Therapy 224
 Contemporary Psychodynamic Therapy from the Lens
 of the Unified Theory 227
 The Unified Component Systems Approach
 to Conceptualizing People 229
 The Biological Context 232
 The Learning and Developmental Context 233
 The Sociocultural Context 234
 The Habit System 234
 The Experiential System 235
 The Relational System 236
 The Defensive System 237
 The Justification System 237
 An Example Applying the Unified Component Systems
 Approach to Conceptualizing 239
 Conclusion 243

Part IV Conclusion

9 The Fifth Joint Point 247

 The Unified Theory As a New Scientific Humanistic Worldview 248

 The Science Wars 249

 Science As a Kind of Justification System 251

 The Elements of Justification Systems 253

 Valuing the Scientific and the Humanistic

 Components of Justification Systems 257

 The Story of the Universe As Told by the Unified Theory 259

 Religion and Creation Science from the Vantage

 Point of the Unified Theory 261

 The Unified Theory and Creationism 262

 Toward the Fifth Joint Point 268

10 Epilogue: The Future of the Discipline 271

References 273

Index 287