Identity, Dialogue, & Politics: Our Replies to Comments on "What lies in the future of teaching the history of psychology?"

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In our original paper "What lies in the future of teaching the history of psychology?" (Bhatt & Tonks, 2002), we set out to articulate our concerns over the future of teaching the history of psychology. Based upon our own personal experiences and those of others, from whom we received reports, we set out to explore the landscape of teaching the history of psychology in Canada. Our paper was initially designed as a conversation session at the 2001 meeting of CPA's section on History and Philosophy of Psychology. Our interest was in providing a 'history of the present' by initiating dialogue on the future of teaching the history of psychology with other Canadian psychologists (who teach the history of psychology).

Our Conceptual Frame

Our model of history is informed by the works of Collingwood (1965), Erikson (1964), and Dilthey (1894/1977), arising from a hermeneutical perspective. From this hermeneutical perspective we recognise methodological and paradigmatic pluralism where our discipline can be described as a varied landscape of perspectives. We contend that each of us interprets our current local and common histories against our own personal experiences and the social-political worlds in which we live. As Dilthey (1894/1977) indicates, understanding begins with specific histories or biographies and then may move on to a common or collective understanding. We can understand each other through the re-experiencing of common experiences as we interpret and re-interpret our shared experiences. In essence this paper was intended to form part of the larger negotiation of our collective identity as a communal process of "interliving" (Erikson, 1964), where identity is formed through the joint action of conversational realities (Shotter, 1993). At the heart of this exercise was our concern over our identity as psychologists and as historians of psychology.

Collingwood (1965) cites Croce in describing history as 'living' in the interpretations of individuals of a given era; he states "history is thought" (p. 7) and "thought is life" (p.15). As such, history is embodied or grounded in the thoughts of historians as part of a semiotic (Blackman, 1994) and moral event (Tolman, 1995), as Erikson (1964) identifies psychohistory making as a process of interpretation that is grounded in the somatic, phenomenological and politico-ethological spheres of being. Human life is necessarily political, and the socio-political worlds into which we are thrown, provide the contexts of our understanding of personal and collective living history or identity (Erikson, 1975). It must also be pointed out that a history of the present also involves political evaluation (Blackman, 1994), making commentary and interpretation potentially risky, given local political climates.

Introducing the notion of a 'history of the future,' Charles Tolman (1995) acknowledges the *praxis* of Canadian traditions involving the moral evaluation of our society, as applied to the betterment of our common future. It is from this orientation that we began this project, and again from this perspective we embark on an exploration of our future identity. Currently we revisit our concern over our identity as historians of psychology as we consider, once again, the making of a "history of the future" of psychology (Tolman, 1995, p. 24).

We began our account with a survey of various perspectives through which the history of psychology has been taught over the years. We continued our

account with a review of the question of direction or content of courses including an overview of a debate that has been waged between celebratory insider history vs. critical outsider history of psychology (Danziger, 1994). While this debate is far from simple, various issues and concerns surrounding these perspectives in the history of psychology have been articulated (Dehue, 1998). A brief survey of Canadian departments of psychology and their course offerings on the history of psychology was also provided as a context against which to view a more detailed qualitative account of the activities of two departments of psychology. Based upon this initial survey it was found that 86% (37 of 43) departments offer at least one course on the history of psychology, however only 60% (12 of 20) require one or more courses in the history of psychology.

While these statistics provide an overview of the status of courses on the history of psychology in general, they do not reveal what happens at specific departments of psychology. Dilthey (1894/1977) states that historical understanding begins with the individual case. Collingwood (1965) contends that for history, in contrast to science, the individual is not to stand merely as a case of the universal but rather "the individual fact is the end" (p.132). He continues to suggest that "the mistake of universal histories was that they did not take facts seriously enough. They did not realise that every fact is unique and not replaced by another" (Collingwood, 1965, p. 132). He continues, stating:

> there is no such thing as a total body of past facts which a sufficiently accomplished historian might know in its totality, . . . the attempt at a universal history is foredoomed to failure . . . . as no history can be universal, so no history can be final. . . . All history is thus an interim report (p. 138).

Against this conceptual backdrop, we provided a brief account of events at two specific institutions where we offered possible interpretations of the importance of these particular events to the future of teaching the history of psychology. As well, we reflected on the comments made by individual instructors in response to our survey on the status of the undergraduate history of psychology courses. It allowed us to derive some shared perspective on how the future of the history of psychology courses was being shaped. Some of these comments are presented in Table 1 (see p. 23). In closing we considered the issue of relevance to mainstream psychology and the hiring of 'amateur' versus 'professional' historians of psychology against the case history of two psychology departments in Canada.

Responding to our Commentators

Our commentators offer corroboration and refutation of our account. We are pleased that many interesting and evocative comments were generated by the initial paper, several of which we will presently address. We will consider the general model of history invoked, the role of interpretation, and the pragmatic interests behind the communication of ideas.

In response to our paper (Bhatt & Tonks, 2002) "What lies in the future of teaching the history of psychology," Adrian Brock (2002) titled his commentary "*Reports of our death are greatly exaggerated*". We fully agree! Unfortunately the report of exaggeration we are referring to is Adrian Brock's. Nowhere in our paper do we mention the word death, nor do we suggest that there is an imminent death of history looming around the corner. It is true that we offer a "pessimistic" interpretation of the events to which we were witnesses and we do mention our concern over a crisis resulting from the reported events. We stated:

> . . . at the extreme, there seems to be a trend emerging to discount the value of history of psychology courses altogether. In a less extreme, but equally of crisis fashion, the critical historiographic approach is being challenged and squeezed aside by curricular changes based upon ideological warfare. (Bhatt & Tonks, 2002, p. 6)

Perhaps the pivotal word here is 'crisis,' but what does this mean? It would appear that some interpret it as nearing death, however, we use it in the Eriksonian (1982) notion of being a normative period of identity growth. Here we intend to convey the notion that such challenges to the teaching of history of psychology courses constitute grounds for critical evaluation of our individual and collective identities. As with the intimation of meaning in the *I Ching* (Legge, 1971), our 'crisis' means both challenge and opportunity. Here the challenge is to maintain the continuity of identity and values from the past through the present into the future, and the opportunity is to redefine or re-negotiate identity through the political process of dialogue.

It is transparent from Brock's (2002) comments that an empirico-statistical model of accounting is at

the heart of his working model of history. This model, as outlined by Collingwood (1965), is based upon the 'scientific' perspective that stands in pursuit of general or universal laws. It is clear that Brock (2002) has read our paper with glasses tainted with a positivist hue. He has completely missed the perspective and goals that oriented our paper: namely, to initiate a collectivist dialogue. The format and the venue of the publication that invited commentators to share their perspectives was a strong indicator of the collective dialogue that was at the core of the discussion. We would like to reiterate that we were not following the hypothesis-testing model of *natural science* with a general thesis about the nature of the discipline at large. Rather we provided a descriptive account of several events that reflect aspects of our disciplinary identity as expressed by members of a variety of communities. We are drawing from a hermeneutical model of history that recognises the interpretation of identity for individuals and the community. As such we recognise that each event has different meanings when interpreted at different times by different people. There is not one single history to uncover, but multiple histories to be considered as the unfolding identities of those who partake in that history, or call that history their own (Tonks, 1999; Erikson, 1975).

Brock (2002) further raises the issue of interpretation when he states "they interpret these sources in a idiosyncratic way" indicating "the authors' tendency to read statements into the articles ... that simply are not there" (p. 14). We argue that it is impossible to avoid such subjective or idiosyncratic interpretations; as Collingwood (1965) points out regarding "the attempt to eliminate this 'subjective element' from history . . .. if it succeeded, history itself would vanish" (p. 138). That having been said, we also contend that Brock (2002) repeatedly misinterprets and reads statements into our article. While we have cited the discussion of various ideas that make meaning out of the specific events we have reported, we do not make the claims that are charged against us. Brock (2002) contends that we claim there to be a *general* trend of the devaluing of the history of psychology. Again nowhere do we make such a claim. Another Statement that Brock (2002) erroneously reads into our article is the "mass unemployment" (p. 13) that he attributes to us. Nowhere do we make such a claim. He is reading into our paper his interest and pursuit of a generalist universal history. Returning to the citation of Dehue's (1998) statements in our original article, we were raising issues that "Dehue commented on" (p. 8). Ascribing such ideas to the author was not in our interest, nor in our intentions. To interpret our article as such is to miss the pragmatic function of our words, namely, to engage in conversation and in the making of our collective identity.

Interestingly, Brock (2002) begins to "sound repetitive" (p.15) in his complaint that we have "a sample of one" (p. 11), in spite of the fact that he acknowledges that we "refer to *three* nameless universities" (p. 11, emphasis added). We had reported specific facts from "two universities" (Bhatt & Tonks, 2002, p.6). Unfortunately his interest in establishing statistical support is not matched by his keeping his numbers straight. Apart from the mis-numbering, at a larger level, the root of such criticism may be found in the 'scientific universalist-positivist' perspective to which Brock (2002) seems to ascribe. As such, our qualitative perspective with an aim to inspire dialogue has been completely missed. This is further reflected in Brock's (2002) discounting "oral" and "anecdotal" histories. Calling into question the authors' integrity he states: "we cannot be certain that the authors are telling this story in good faith" (p. 14). Brock (2002) is concerned with the scholarly value of having reliable sources of information. We agree that this is an important value in the sciences as well as history. However, at one level, the same *ad hominen* argument can be made against any author with respect to the goodness of their faith. At another level, however, is our genuine ethical concern that is being overlooked. One of our main informants explicitly requested to remain anonymous. Coming from a relatively small department, this source's identity was in jeopardy if we had named the university in question. We found ourselves caught in a moral dilemma. Thus our turning to the feminist and hermeneutical value of emancipation (Farganis, 1989; Thom, 1989; Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988), along with the Canadian Psychological Association code of ethics regarding dignity, respect, and social responsibility (Pettifor, 1996; Dunbar, 1998; Sinclair, 1998), we find justification for not revealing the identity of our sources at this time.

To summarize our response to Brock (2002), we contend that history and science too, are grounded on interpretation. Since interpretation, by virtue of the fact that it is always grounded against some

background context of understanding (Collingwood, 1965; Tonks, 1999), necessitates a 'biased' foundation, we can never avoid having some kind of interpretive bias (Gadamer, 1975). We are always already thrown into a semiotic world of understanding. Additionally, the history of the present is not as clean as history of the past when it comes to the living social-political world. Retribution and *real* consequences arise which have an impact on the lives of those involved.

Turning our attention to our other commentators, we find some support from Alexandra Rutherford (2002) who recognises the political challenges of keeping the courses going in times of budgetary restraints. As a new faculty member she recognises that her fate, and that of her courses, is not entirely in her own hands; although she does focus on the positive potential of such a critical exercise. Having acknowledged the challenges involved in teaching the history of psychology courses, such as: "lack of enthusiasm of faculty members towards history of psychology" (p. 17), and having "to defend the fundamental value" (p. 17) of the course, Rutherford (2002) has offered some pragmatic strategies to secure the future of teaching psychology's history

The interpretation of the death of the pedagogy of the history of psychology is also brought up by Greer (2002) in his comments on our article, but he rightly attributes it to Fukuyama (1993) and not to us. Instead, Greer (2002) identifies the paradoxical nature of the history of psychology as he comments on the tension between scholarly and pedagogical histories of psychology. Like Brock (2002), Greer (2002) also finds himself in a supportive environment where the history of psychology appears to be flourishing. Having hired him to teach the history of psychology his department has made a conscious choice to maintain a historical perspective within their community. Like us, Greer (2002) also suggests that there can be a disciplining of the discipline where the critical historiography can play an important role in the development of our disciplinary identity (and how others perceive us), in part through the psychobiographical approach.

Nicholson (2002), on the other hand reports having found himself in a situation not unlike those reported in our initial article. Having spent time in the "dustbowl" of empirical psychology he reports being misunderstood by his colleagues to the point of it being a sublime incoherence of history and theory of psychology. He also reports a recent dearth of advertisements of position in the history of psychology relative to other fields. Time will tell whether or not there is a trend in opening positions for teaching the history of psychology. In spite of these challenges, he also notes having found a supportive environment in which to continue his career as a historian of psychology.

To conclude, we wish to thank all the commentators for an engaging dialogue (which was our goal when we undertook our project). Brock (2002), Rutherford (2002), Greer (2002), and Nicholson (2002) have all shared their personal experiences, observations, and reflections. Whereas Brock (2002) had a very different perspective on the future of teaching of the history of psychology, Rutherford (2002), Greer (2002), and Nicholson (2002) have shared our perspective to some extent in acknowledging challenges involved in teaching courses on the history of psychology. Perhaps the situation abroad is positive and history is flourishing, however, the comments heard about a variety of challenges experienced by teachers of the history of psychology (Table 1, see p. 23) suggest a hint of 'crisis' in Canada.

The landscape of teaching the history of psychology is like the discipline itself, varied. Reports from some communities are that the history of psychology is alive and well and flourishing. Elsewhere, in terms of its pedagogical role, challenges to historical gains that courses in the history of psychology have made appear to be retreating either through intentional attacks or through ideological incommensurability. As Danziger (1994) suggested, there are many centres of psychology each with its own practices and principles. The future of our discipline is impossible to predict, but it is inevitably drawn out of the present and grounded in the past. Our understanding of ourselves and our discipline will surely never be complete. However, as we engage in these conversations over the nature and scope of our general and specific perspectives, we are engaging in a ritual of identity, the making of our history and our future (Erikson, 1964).

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Table 1

Comments from the Teachers of the History of Psychology

- While I was on my last sabbatical, proposals were floated to dilute my history courses. Given only a year left before my retirement, and the negative mood in the department, I decided to give up
- Can't be sure if we will get an upcoming retirement position replaced in our history & theory program-although it would be a history position per se that could be lost
- Up until two years ago we offered a full 6 credit class in History of Psychology. The instructor retired, and we have not been able to offer the class since his retirement
- I am taking an early retirement package... No initiative to replace me with a full-time professor with a specialization in History has been made and it is unlikely that such a move will take place
- There are no plans to hire a historian, although I will argue for this. Unfortunately, I am pessimistic. ... My department has officially announced that it is an "applied" department (clinical and applied social), which to me signals a further moving away from intellectual and critical investigation of the discipline. On a more positive note, there are two recently hired tenure-track faculty ... in my department with interests in teaching history
- ... 25 years ago when I arrived [at this university] there was ... a history concentration. This is now whittled down to one course, optional, at the third year level. Some of this had to do with the fact that three people went on to become department chairs, deans etc. Some of this had to do with the complete inability and lack of energy [on my part] to engage in departmental politics....So it has dwindled away, and interested students have gone to York program.
- The attitude is, of course, that apart from the low value placed on history, whatever history might be relevant is covered as part of every individual psychology course! Our department has never appointed anyone with explicit interests in history and I expect it will not in the immediate future (even as we have made eight new appointments this past year and expect to make another six or so next year
- Being strictly a science department, it is unlikely that we would ever have position devoted solely to the history of psychology
- I will be retiring within the next five years, and it is by no means clear that the Department will be looking for a historian specifically to replace me. In the past year or two.. a non-historian has been teaching the core history course when I have not been able to
- One faculty member has expressed interest in teaching the history class, but it would have to be at the expense of other courses offered, and we cannot entertain that possibility at the present time
- After [the person teaching the course]... became disabled, the course was taught by others on a year to year basis (sometime a disaster, other times ok).... It is not a pretty story; and possibly worse than in most other departments
- We have lost one historian ... through non-renewal of a tenure-stream contract
- If there are any plans to dump the [history] course, no one has told me about it. However, that doesn't mean dumping wouldn't happen, as this department has always been controlled by advocates of "hard" psychology

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