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# Introduction to the Special Issues on the Unified Theory



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A unified theory of psychology has recently been proposed (Henriques, 2003), and the next two issues of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* are devoted to its elaboration and evaluation. The current issue consists of a target article, "Psychology Defined," which adds to the existing formulation and specifies how the theory can be used to effectively define the science of psychology. Distinguished experts in psychology contribute 13 commentaries offering a wide variety of perspectives on the proposed model. These are followed by two full-length articles in which one author articulates the need for the unified theory and the other offers a different but compatible approach at integrating psychotherapy and personality. In the next special issue, authors either elaborate on or critique elements of the unified theory. How the new theory lays the foundation for the development of a useful mass movement that could transform the discipline of psychology in a manner that unleashes its constructive potential is the subject of the concluding article. When viewed as a whole, the two issues show that the unified theory provides fertile ground for scientific and philosophical inquiry on multiple levels of analysis, and that it may play a central role in helping the discipline of psychology fulfill its constructive potential. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. *J Clin Psychol* 60: 1203–1205, 2004.

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## Introduction

It is often assumed that psychology, by virtue of its complexity and breadth, will never be successfully organized into a single, overarching system. Several authors have stated unequivocally that psychology cannot be unified (e.g., Koch, 1993), whereas others have argued that the diversity of incompatible viewpoints might represent strength (e.g., McNally, 1994). Ultimately, however, concluding that the mystery either has no solution or has an

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infinite number of them does not bring satisfactory closure to the issue. And the notion of a grand unified theory of psychology still tickles the imagination of many thinkers in the field (e.g., Funder, 1996). I have recently proposed just such a theory (Henriques, 2003); this and the next issue of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* are devoted to its elaboration and evaluation.

Although there have been several attempts to develop a coherent approach to unifying psychology (e.g., Anderson, 1996; Kimble, 1996; Staats, 1996), none have been met with widespread acceptance. When one examines the nature of the field, it is not hard to see why this is the case. It is not an exaggeration to say that the discipline of psychology confronts scholars with some of the most complex questions that can be asked, questions such as “What is mind and consciousness? What makes us human?” or “How do we reconcile the visions of the scientist with the visions of the humanist?”

The current proposal to solve psychology’s “epistemological woes” represents a radical departure from previous attempts at unification. It works through the introduction of a new form of “knowledge technology” called the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System, which offers a framework for understanding the evolution of complexity from the Big Bang through the present. It is often noted by scientists and philosophers alike that the universe has undergone a “cosmic evolution,” from the simplest “energy singularity” that existed at the beginning of time all the way to the incredibly complex human societies that exist today. Indeed, attempts to quantify this process have already been met with some success (see Chaisson, 2001). However, the ToK System clarifies this evolutionary process as occurring in four distinct phases, each of which involved the generation of a new dimension of complexity. The first phase of cosmic evolution gave rise to Matter; the second, Life; the third, Mind; and the fourth, Culture. The ToK System allows for a clear correspondence to be drawn between each of the dimensions of complexity (Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture) and each of the major classes of science (Physical, Biological, Psychological, and Social). This correspondence can then be used to crisply define the science of psychology as the science of mind and to specify with precision and depth how the discipline exists in relationship to the other sciences.

Readers of this journal may find themselves wondering why a proposal that focuses on such “big picture” issues and offers a framework for theoretically unifying the entire discipline is being elaborated upon in a journal devoted to clinical psychology. The reason is that clinical psychology is, in many ways, the most molar of the psychologies. A clinician must integrate information from biological, psychological, and social levels of analysis into a comprehensive formulation that provides a guiding framework to help other human beings in need of assistance. Furthermore, with its scientist–practitioner model and its attempt to bridge both basic and applied domains of human psychology, clinical psychology has had to struggle mightily with fundamental epistemological issues, such as the tensions between scientific and humanistic worldviews. In the end, as clinicians, we believe it is most appropriate that these issues be discussed in this forum.

In this issue the target article, “Psychology Defined,” builds on the existing formulation and demonstrates how the ToK System can be used to define the field. A wide array of opinions about the proposal is offered in the 13 commentaries that follow. There is an effective balance between pro and con—responses range from individuals who provide strong endorsements (e.g., Gilbert; Haaga; Stanovich) to individuals who are generally positive but have some questions and concerns (e.g., Kihlstrom; Presbury; Viney) to individuals who seriously question the merits of such an enterprise (e.g., Hayes; Stam; Yanchar). Following the commentaries are two full-length articles. One author articulates the need for the unified theory and the other offers a different but compatible approach at integrating psychotherapy and personality.

The second issue consists of six articles from authors who either elaborate on or critique aspects of the unified theory or offer compatible but different approaches to integration. These authors provide rich examples of how the unified theory sets the stage for building bridges between perspectives and across the various domains of science. When viewed as a group, they provide an impressive indication that the ToK System offers fertile ground for scientific and philosophical inquiry on many different levels of analysis.

In the final article, an attempt is made to fill in some of the missing pieces and clarify how the ToK system deals with the concerns raised by the critics. It also lays out a vision for the next steps that need to be taken in the theory's evaluation and development. It is concluded that the proposed unified theory provides a new way to organize and coordinate the discipline in a manner that allows its constructive potential to be more fully realized.

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