


# A New Scholarly Imaginary\* for General Psychology

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More than 20 years ago, the founding editor of *Review of General Psychology* (RGP), Peter Salovey, articulated a vision for this journal that it would “publish innovative theoretical, conceptual, or methodological articles that cross-cut the traditional subdisciplines of psychology . . . or that focus on topics that transcend traditional subdisciplinary boundaries.” As the journal’s new co-editors, we seek to refresh this vision while also extending it in new directions. We appreciate the journal’s reputation for publishing provocative articles that stimulate new connections across the many subdisciplines of psychology while also striving to connect with cognate disciplines. It is our hope that these signature characteristics of the journal endure and thrive to maintain the possibility of communication even as the broader discipline of psychology becomes increasingly hyperspecialized.

There is historical evidence that the decline of the *general* can be traced to the 19th century in epistemology. In that period, philosophers proposed a *system model of science* (Hegel) that attempted a general capture of the totality of reality in a conceptual system, as distinguished from a *research model of science* that was successfully applied in the natural sciences of physiology, physics, chemistry, and so on, with the goal of understanding reality by first focusing on particularities. The research model of science spread into many other disciplines with the goal of being analytic, examining parts of reality (in the case of psychology it was expressed as subdividing mental life into smaller bits and pieces), and privileging narrow expertise over general intellectuality while the idea of a general system declined. Over time, students in psychology have become increasingly unaware that such a field as general psychology exists or has ever existed. From a historical point of view, the fragmentation of psychology into more and more specialties and the creation of an apparently endless variation of professional areas have undermined the project of a general psychology. Specialization, now embodied in the educational practices of many graduate programs in psychology in North America (NA) and elsewhere, and a research model that has been focused on understanding details of the psychological have made it difficult to support the idea of a general psychology.

Along with the difficulties of communication and cooperation among areas of psychology and with cognate disciplines that hyperspecialization in psychology has created, the internationalization and globalization of psychology, with their recognition of indigenous knowledges predicated on different intellectual and experiential bases, have generated theoretical critiques that call into question the ontological and epistemological bases of psychology, general or specialized. Once these bases are questioned, then, by necessity, critiques arise.

Yet, our basic assessment means that we understand the historical transformation of general psychology not only as a problem but also as an opportunity. The problems presented to a general psychology by fragmentation, globalization, and theoretical critique are real, but they also present an opportunity to re-think, re-envision, and re-calibrate general psychology. We accept the challenges of doing so in and through RGP. As we seek to extend and refresh RGP, we begin by embracing a broad scientific and intellectual approach that acknowledges psychology as having its roots and foundation in the sciences *and* the humanities. Thus, we will re-center the journal to draw upon, and re-create where necessary, its linkages with both its scientific heritage and its older origins in what are now called humanities. Doing so opens new possibilities for a general psychology that is more than another specialty and which is capable of incorporating multiple ontological, epistemological, methodological, and even ethical bases.

The particularization of the psychological at the same time necessitates, from a scientific or intellectual point of view, the project of a general psychology that provides an

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\*A scholarly imaginary is the default sense of what defines and guides a scholarly field. Here, we use the term to indicate a new approach to understanding and enacting general psychology (see Taylor, 2002).

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integrated or comprehensive understanding of large bodies of research, mental life, and its analyses and applications. The journey to such a general psychology means that we must begin with the notion of a complex foundation of mental life. This allows us to expand the meaning of general psychology beyond the contemporary idea of general psychological processes analyzable by natural sciences approaches to re-connect and re-forge general psychology's historic linkages to the humanities and social and conceptual sciences.

We consider general psychology as focusing on what human and other-than-human beings share in terms of psychological processes, content, and activities, with the intent to develop a comprehensive understanding of mental life. In making this statement, we are well aware that extensive critiques of the assumptions or declarations of generality have made it more difficult to sustain such a project. Feminist studies have pointed to gender bias and epistemic location, cultural studies to ethnocentric problems, and disability studies to ableist notions in psychology that appear to undermine the project of general psychology, which is an unfinished and unfinishable but indispensable project that must draw upon both intellectual and scholarly traditions of Western civilization, sciences, and humanities while opening itself to non-Western ontologies and epistemologies. Doing so re-envision and re-energizes general psychology as a project capable of understanding the historicity, sociality, and culturality of mental life. We all share that we live, act, and engage in historically and culturally constituted societies. Thus, the necessity of psychological humanities as foundational to general psychology. In addition, we need metatheory in psychology to reflect upon the possibility and impossibility of generality and generalizability, methodology, induction, and so on. We envision a contextually constrained concept of general psychology, where generalization is less important than generalizability and in which a comprehensive understanding of the psyche is made central.

Our work as co-editors using this approach means expanding the horizon of the journal to include more interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work performed by psychologists and researchers inside and outside of the discipline to understand and identify common and local processes and contents of the psychological. For example, many scholars working in the traditional humanities draw upon psychological theory and practice to inform their work. In a reflexive loop, their scholarship holds the potential to deepen and enrich psychological theory and practice. It means encouraging scholarship on topics such as human subjectivity, mental life, and the psyche, drawing on research and scholarship in all psychological thought and their intersections. It means giving primacy to the ontological that may require not only quantitative but also qualitative, historical, and metatheoretical work as long as an idea is developed within a broad notion of general psychology.

We embrace a refreshed and re-envisioned general psychology that we believe will open up new possibilities for expanding the range and the depth of what psychology is and can be and that in doing so, we are helping to create a general psychology that offers conceptual resources suitable for the complexity and diversity of the 21st century. From an ontological point of view, we believe that as human beings we share some universal features, but we also know that we have different ways of addressing these commonalities. From an epistemological point of view, it is not only important to reflect on the conceptual differentiations among the general, generality, generalization, and generalizability, but also to address the complexities of methodologies as they have developed in various sites to capture the psychological. Many of the emergent critical and indigenous methodologies may challenge and enrich methodologies grounded in Western Enlightenment rationality. Founding editor Peter Salovey spoke to this very need in his argument that the journal should promote challenges to the dominant views of the time while encouraging intellectual risk-taking. We envision enacting this approach through the use of special issues or special sections, such as the one that appears in this issue, and also through alternative formats, for example, point/counterpoint features, that would appear periodically in the journal.

RGP under our editorship welcomes contributions from the psychological sciences, psychological humanities, metatheoretical sciences, and applied frameworks, as long as they address the project of general psychology. It is clear to us that American journals need to be less "Western." This means an active policy (not just a commitment) to diversity in the editorial board and actively encouraging academics outside of English-speaking NA to contribute to the journal. Under our co-editorship, we aim to include other disciplines in conversation with general psychology. Examples may include work in philosophy with its potential to clarify research on psychological topics, objects, and events; scholarship from history that reconstructs the development and trajectory of mental life; as well as political and social theories that address the process of subjectification. We also realize that scholarship in science and technology studies (STS) that addresses the recent developments in genetics, epigenetics, and information technology that have led to changes in the psyche speaks to a truly general psychology. One final example, perhaps of greatest importance, is our goal of including work drawn from indigenous, postcolonial, and critical methods outside the Global North that addresses the hegemony of Western theories of psychological experience and offers alternative constructions that hold potential to deepen and extend the psychological in humane fashion. We have an interest and focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work, even as we understand that the academic reward system gives preference to staying within disciplinary boundaries. Still, we offer an open invitation to

those whose work addresses the psychological, regardless of formal discipline, to join us in this recalibration of general psychology. Such a recalibration is timely and will provide us with a sound basis for participation in thought and action on the urgent issues of our time.

Of course, the project of a general psychology must be addressed by a community. For that reason, we dedicate a special section in this and future issues to articles that specifically re-envision general psychology. We embrace our role in re-envisioning the project of general psychology for the 21st century while being aware that this process is slow but necessary should general psychology have a future as an area of research. We want to make the journal a primary outlet for leading psychologists thinking beyond the particularities of a subfield and believe that the RGP is

a location where those concerned with the psychological from around the world will embody the general aspirations of psychology.

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