Psychology in Latin America: Legacies and Contributions - Part 1

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Historically, psychology in the United States of America (USA) has been markedly influenced by contributions from Europe. In more recent decades, a growing influence can be noted from Asia. As such, the exchanges of scientific and professional knowledge in psychology have traditionally traversed an East-West corridor. There is a marked need for a complementary exchange that traverses a North-Central-South corridor, specifically as it relates to the Americas, including the Caribbean. In a modest effort to advance North-Central-South American exchanges, we thought it relevant to highlight an existing organization that has made its mission to foster such exchanges, to describe the ways in which it has carried this out, and to offer a brief notation of the accomplishments by the Spanish or Portuguese speaking psychologists who have been distinguished with the Interamerican Psychology Award. This article is the first in a series highlighting the work of the awardees.

The Interamerican Society of Psychology is known as SIP (www.sipsych.org), for the acronym of its name in Spanish, Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología. SIP is an organization that has been among the most significant promoters of North-Central-South American dialogues and collaborations in psychology throughout the Americas, including the Caribbean. SIP is a nonprofit, scientific and professional organization, serving psychologists in the Americas and beyond. SIP’s purposes are twofold: to foster scientific and professional collaboration among persons concerned with psychology and related fields while promoting an understanding and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences in the Americas; and to aid in the development of psychology as a science and as a profession in all of the countries of the Americas.

SIP was founded on December 17, 1951 by a group of behavioral scientists that were attending the 4th International Congress of Mental Health in Mexico City organized by the World Federation for Mental Health (Ferdman & Van Oss Marin, 1999). SIP’s first president was Enrique Eduardo Krapf (a German psychiatrist who emigrated to Argentina in 1934), assisted by Werner Wolff as vice-president (a German born professor of psychology who taught at Bard College in New York from 1942 until 1957), and Oswaldo Robles as Secretary General (a Mexican physician,philosopher, and psychologist who taught at the National Autonomous University of Mexico) (Gallegos, 2012). Other members of the original board included associated vice-presidents Jaime Barrios Peña (Guatemala), Carlos Nassar (Chile), and William Line (Canada) as well as treasurer Hernán Vergara (Colombia). Other founding members included Guillermo Dávila, Rogelio Díaz Guerrero, Manuel Falcón (all from Mexico), and José Bustamante (Cuba) (Colotla & Urra, 2006). The international composition of SIP’s first board of directors and founding members that chose the name “Interamerican” for the newly formed psychological society was indeed Interamerican. In 1999, SIP was incorporated in Puerto Rico as a nonprofit organization.

Since 1951, SIP has provided different venues to advance the North-Central-South dialogues. Among such venues, SIP has successfully organized 33 Interamerican Congresses of Psychology in 16 different countries. The first congress took place in the Dominican Republic in 1953 and was organized around the theme “Cultures and Values in Psychology” (Angelini, 1979). In addition, starting in 2004 with an initiative of then President Héctor Fernández Álvarez, SIP has organized four Regional Congresses in as many countries. It should be noted that these accomplishments could not have materialized without the sustained engagement of the committed officers of SIP’s board of directors and numerous SIP members. Furthermore, the support of many organizations played a crucial role in these advancements, including: universities, particularly the University of Puerto Rico, Recinto de Rio Piedras that has hosted SIP’s central office for many years; national and local non-governmental organizations in the congresses’ host country; and the American Psychological Association, particularly the Committee on International Relations in Psychology (CIRP) and the Office of International Affairs, first with Joan Buchanan, and for the last several years through the indefatigable work of Merry Bullock and Sally Leverty.

SIP has published the Interamerican Journal of Psychology (IJP) continuously since 1967, a particularly noteworthy feat in the Latin American context. It is perhaps the only journal in the world that accepts and publishes articles in four languages (Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French), the official languages of the Americas. IJP has published several special issues such as one on Caribbean psychology and one on international perspectives on AIDS stigma. The editors of IJP include Carl F. Hereford (USA, 1967-1970), Luis F. Natalicio (USA, 1970-1975), Horacio Rimoldi (Argentina, 1975-1976), Gordon Finley (USA, 1977-1982), Luis Laosa (USA, 1983-1989), José Miguel Salazar (Venezuela, 1990-1998), Irma Serrano García (Puerto Rico, 1998-2003), Silvia Elena Koller (Brazil, 2003-2010), and Edil Torres Rivera (USA, 2011-). SIP’s commitment to the advancement of open access to the world scientific literature has resulted in making IJP available online without restrictions.

Every other year, SIP’s board of directors, in consultation with nominations from SIP’s membership, grants an award to an English or French speaking psychologist and another to a Spanish or Portuguese speaking psychologist whose work has advanced psychology as a science and profession in the Americas. The list of English or French speaking psychologists include luminaries well known to psycholo-
The first Spanish or Portuguese speaking psychologist to receive the award was Rogelio Díaz Guerrero (1918-2004) from Mexico in 1976. Díaz Guerrero was a physician and psychologist who lived in the USA from 1943 until 1947 while obtaining master’s and doctoral degrees at Iowa State University. He was a founding member of the American Psychological Association (APA) and has published over 300 scientific articles. Díaz Guerrero was a prolific researcher, a charismatic mentor to generations of Mexican psychologists, academics, and investigators, a visionary who advanced systematically the fields of transcultural psychology, social psychology, the psychology of values, and educational psychology, and an engaged national and international leader of the discipline as a science and as a profession. Particularly noteworthy to APA’s Division 52 members are Díaz Guerrero’s long-lasting collaborations with many colleagues in the USA (e.g., Diaz Guerrero & Szalay, 1991; Holtzman, Díaz Guerrero, & Swartz, 1975; Spielberger, & Diaz Guerrero, 1976).

Arrigo Leonardo Angelini (1924-2011) from Brazil, received the award in 1979. He earned a Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of São Paulo in 1953. His areas of research and contributions to psychology include the assessment of intelligence and aptitude in diverse cultural contexts, the adaptation and standardization of several of Thurstone’s instruments in Brazil, and the development of an original scale to assess interests. Perhaps most noteworthy are Angelini’s engagement in multiple international collaborations. These include a cross-national study of coping styles and achievement among school children with Robert Peck of the University of Texas at Austin, a study on achievement with David McClelland of Harvard University, and a study on personality and sexuality with David Schmitt of Bradley University. Among Angelini’s 110 publications, one of the best known concerns human motivation (Angelini, 1973).

Jacobo A. Varela (1911-1997), from Uruguay, received the award in 1981. A civil engineer by training, and a Renaissance person by action, Varela sought to solve significant social problems by applying social psychology knowledge (Rodrigues, 1997; Varela, 1971). Varela is known for the term “social technology” which he defined as “the activity that leads to the design of solutions to social problems by means of combinations of findings derived from different areas of the social sciences” (Varela, 1975, p. 160). He cared deeply about transforming societies by utilizing applied social psychology to redress matters such as crime, bureaucracy, racial conflict, and social unrest (Varela, 1977). He valued active engagement by social scientists and was fond of saying, “If you wish to make an improved product, you must already be engaged in making an inferior one” (p. 921). He argued eloquently that “problems are solved around problem-centered synthesis rather than by further theory-oriented analysis…it is perhaps time for the social sciences to end their long isolation down the course of research and analysis and to begin also to travel down the way of solving problems by synthesizing what is known” (Varela, 1974, p. 469). One of Varela’s most famous essays (Varela, 1990) was dedicated to the memory of Leon Festinger, an important interlocutor with whom Varela maintained many dialogues. In this essay, Varela sought to advance a general law for psychology, and illustrated it by applying it to inter and intragroup antagonism, conceptualizing an individual’s symptoms as “the very common case of being forced to cope with conflicting but essential roles” (p. 121). He was a pragmatist, advocating that it was “the nature of the conflict that determines the type of assistance the helper should provide, rather than the preferred theory or practice that the helper holds” (p. 135).

Rubén Ardila (1942-), from Colombia, received the award in 1983. Ardila is arguably, together with Maritza Montero and Héctor Fernández Álvarez, one of the three best known, living South American psychologists. Ardila received a Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and is a professor at the National University of Colombia. He has conducted research on the experimental analysis of behavior, the history of psychology, and the application of psychology to socio-economic development. He has also written extensively on Latin American (e.g., Ardila, 1968; 1986) and international psychology (e.g., Ardila, 1982) as well as homosexuality (1998). Ardila has published 31 books and more than 300 scientific articles. Ardila is perhaps best known for his work on a paradigm he termed “the experimental synthesis of behavior” through which he has sought to unify psychology around a behavioral focus, the experimental method, a focus on learning, an emphasis on the social and physical environment, and the use of technology (Ardila, 1992; 1993; 2006). Ardila has concerned himself with training in psychology, organizing the first Latin American conference on the topic, and articulating a Latin American model of training in psychology, known as the “Bogota Model” (Ardila, 1978). His most recent book is entitled El Mundo de la Psicología (The World of Psychology) (Ardila, 2011), a compilation of 35 articles he has written over almost five decades. He founded the prestigious Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología (Latin American Journal of Psychology) in 1969, and edited it until 2003. He is also the...
Carlos Albizu Miranda (1920-1984), from Puerto Rico, received the award posthumously in 1987. He earned a B.A. in education from the University of Puerto Rico, a M.S. in experimental psychology and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Purdue University. Albizu was a professor of psychology at the University of Puerto Rico until 1975 and a well-known clinician and diagnostician in the community (Wagner, 2002). Concerned with the shortage of mental health professionals in Puerto Rico and with the lack of culturally competent training to work with Puerto Ricans, he founded, together with Norman Matlin, the Instituto Psicológico de Puerto Rico [Puerto Rican Psychological Institute] in 1966. The Institute, which was the first professional school in Puerto Rico was later renamed the Centro Caribeño de Estudios Posgraduados [Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies]. In 1980, he established the Miami Institute of Psychology, a sister campus to the Caribbean Center (Wennerholm, 1985). In 2000, both campuses were renamed Carlos Albizu University, in his honor. Albizu received an award by the American Psychological Foundation for the development of psychology education in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. The citation reads “Through his vision, dedication, and leadership, he played a central role in establishing and developing doctoral training in clinical psychology in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean area” (Carlos Albizu Miranda, 1981, p. 93). He was the author of several publications on psychological assessment, the role of culture in service delivery, and the impact of poverty, and sought to advance a culturally competent training model for minority psychologists (Albizu Miranda & Matlin, 1967). Albizu’s lifelong contributions are perhaps best characterized in his own words: “Education without love is sterile. Knowledge which is based only on logic and reason can become dehumanizing, and is not at the service of man. Education which is guided by love emphasizes the social good, rather than individual competition. It is not competitive knowledge but rather cooperative knowledge” (Albee & Santiago Negron, 1987, p. 818).

In this first article of a series, we have discussed the Interamerican Society of Psychology and highlighted the Spanish or Portuguese speaking psychologists distinguished with the Interamerican Psychology Award. We have done so as a way to advance the dissemination of psychological knowledge generated in Latin America and the Caribbean. In service of this goal, we have briefly noted the accomplishments of the first six out of 19 awardees and will complete the list in future articles for this series.

1 Based on a motion by John Adair which was approved by the board presided over by Rolando Díaz Loving, the award for a Spanish or Portuguese speaking psychologist has been called the Rogelio Díaz Guerrero Award since 2007.
2 Both Varela and Díaz Guerrero had articles published in the international issue of the American Psychologist, 32 (11), 1977.

References
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Authors’ Note

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