

## In praise of marginality

Theory & Psychology  
22(3) 377–379  
© The Author(s) 2012  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0959354311430534  
tap.sagepub.com



L. P. Mos (Ed.), *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*. New York, NY: Springer, 2009, IX, 245 pp. ISBN: 9780387885001.

**Reviewed by:** Adrian C. Brock, *University College Dublin*

The title of this piece is not original. It was originally used by Kurt Danziger as the title of an invited address in 1992 (Danziger, 1992). It seems particularly appropriate here. The editor writes in the introduction:

Our contributors ... find themselves as contributors to and participants in a discipline, marginalized, sometimes profoundly, from its various intellectual traditions. To the knowledgeable reader, this will come as no surprise; indeed, it is of their remarkable and yet marginal status in the discipline that our contributors were selected and agreed to contribute to this volume. (p. vii)

No less than three of the seven contributors use the word “marginal,” or “marginalization,” in the title of their chapters, while another describes himself as a “maverick.” Yet another chapter has the title, “Against the Tide.” The contributors can be forgiven for any replication since they did not know what the other contributors were writing. It shows, however, that “marginality” is the overriding theme of the work. The only keyword that the publisher’s website gives for the book is “marginalization” (<http://www.springer.com/psychology/book/978-0-387-88500-1>).

The book is not to be confused with the series of the same title that began in 1930, and currently consists of nine volumes (Lindzey & Runyan, 2007; Murchison, 1930). It has a different publisher and is a completely separate work. Given this situation, the editor might have chosen a different title for the book. “An *alternative* history of psychology in autobiography” seems particularly apt. The contributors are in order of appearance: Erika Apfelbaum, David Bakan, Kurt Danziger, Amadeo Giorgi, Carl Graumann, Robert Rieber, and Joseph Rychlak.

The book was clearly long in the making. Mos writes in his introduction that the plans were formulated in 1999, and the invitations issued in 2002. Although at least three of the contributions had been received within a year, the book did not appear until 2009. Two of the contributions are posthumous. David Bakan passed away in 2004 and did not make much progress on his chapter since, among other things, he was looking after his wife who suffered from dementia in later years. His contribution consists of a series of

rambling notes that were made in response to questions about his early life and work that Robert Rieber had asked. These are supplemented by a short essay by Bakan's former colleague at York University, Fred Weizmann, about his many years there. Without doubting the choice of Bakan for inclusion in the volume, I wonder about the wisdom of including this material in the book. It is not an autobiography as such but the kind of raw material that a future biographer might use. At 52 pages, it is also the longest contribution and would have benefited from some serious editing. The other posthumous contribution to the book is that of Carl Graumann, who passed away in 2007, and his chapter was finished off by his wife and a translator. It is much less problematic since Graumann had already published an autobiography in German and so there was a more solid basis from which to work.

The opening chapter by Erika Apfelbaum is one of the more interesting autobiographies in the book. She draws attention to the fact that she is the only woman in the volume and makes the pointed remark that gender discrimination has been less salient to her than it might have been to other women because of the "racial" discrimination that she experienced as a Jew. Her parents were political refugees from Nazi Germany but they only moved as far as France. She mentions that her father was gassed in Auschwitz. In spite of this, it is clear from her autobiography, and from her career, that she strongly identifies with women as a subordinated group and has supported other subordinated groups, such as the Algerians in their struggle for independence.

This chapter points to a missed opportunity in the book. Marginality in psychology is not just a matter of holding different views from those of the mainstream. These views are often the product of membership of a social group which has been marginalized due to factors like gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or being from a country that is thought to be on the "periphery" of the field. All the other six contributors to the volume are white and male and, with the sole exception of Graumann who spent his career in Germany, they are or were based in North America. Four of the seven contributors are or were originally from the United States.

In spite of this, there are pointers in their backgrounds to a future career on the margins of psychology. The most explicit chapter in this regard is that of Giorgi, who suggests that, as the child of Italian immigrants in the United States, he was never a part of the mainstream of American life. Danziger provides yet another example. Like Apfelbaum, he left Nazi Germany as a child. Although he spent the war years in the relative safety of South Africa, he went into political exile for a second time in 1965 when his very public opposition to apartheid made it too dangerous for him to stay. I recall him once saying to me that he had spent his entire life as an "outsider" and would not know how to be anything else. In spite of this, he would probably be the first to acknowledge the view of Kurt Lewin that behaviour is a product of the interaction between person and environment. He came to psychology from a background in chemistry and there is nothing in his autobiography to suggest that he was marginal in this field.

The similarities and differences between psychology and the prestigious and well-funded natural sciences to which it aspires have been debated for a long time. This book highlights a candidate for a difference that is often overlooked: the tendency of psychology to marginalize some of its most intelligent and creative minds.

**References**

- Danziger, K. (1992). *In praise of marginality*. Invited address presented at the annual meeting of Cheiron-Europe in Groningen, the Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://www.kurtdanziger.com/Paper%2014.htm>
- Lindzey, G., & Runyan, W. M. (Eds.). (2007). *A history of psychology in autobiography* (Vol. IX). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Murchison, C. (Ed.). (1930). *A history of psychology in autobiography* (Vol. I). Worcester, MA: Clark University Press.