The Pursuitworthiness of Majority World Psychology

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Abstract

The recent pluralist turn in philosophy of science claims that we ought to support and maintain multiple epistemic frameworks for learning about phenomena. This position is especially clear in Massimi's Perspectival Realism, which argues that it is only by having more than one perspective on a phenomena that the potential for reliable knowledge about it emerges. This paper applies Perspectival Realism to the case of psychology — with a focus on developmental psychology— arguing first, that the discipline has pursued frameworks almost exclusively within a Minority World perspective, and second, that the lack of alternative perspectives precludes the field from knowing if its methods of knowledge production are reliable. To redress this problem, it advocates the pursuit of Majority World psychological frameworks, and points towards ways in which this could be achieved.

Keywords

Majority World; Pursuitworthiness; Pluralism; WEIRD; Developmental Psychology; Cross-cultural psychology; decolonisation; anti-colonisation; operationism

1 Introduction

Psychology has, to date, been alarmingly homogenous in the frameworks that it uses to explore psychological concepts. This homogeneity manifests in the dominance of what I will call 'Minority World psychology', that is, the concepts and practices of researchers who are embedded in a Minority World culture. Following other authors (Alam, 2008; Khan et al., 2022), I use the term 'Majority World' to refer to those countries that hold most of the world's population. This choice emphasises that the Western world is a minority population,[1] albeit one that dominates academic psychology (and philosophy) both in terms of authors and participants in studies (as will be discussed in section 2).

This paper argues that the dominance of Minority World frameworks in academic psychology raises significant concerns for the epistemic integrity of the discipline. I support this thesis through two recent movements in the philosophy of science: Michaela Massimi's 'Perspectival Realism' (2022) and Uljana Feest's 'Operationism' (2025). Feest's Operationism lends the tools to demonstrate just how deeply our folk psychology penetrates the study of cognition, while Massimi's Perspectival Realism shows the necessity of diverse perspectives for the reliable

[1] "The term [Majority World] highlights the fact that we are indeed the majority of humankind. It also brings to sharp attention the anomaly that the Group of Eight countries —whose decisions affect the majority of the world's people —represent a tiny fraction of humankind" (Alam, 2008, p. 89). Despite the dissolution of the G8, the point remains that countries whose researchers dominate internationally recognised academic journals hold a minority of the world's population.

production of knowledge. I argue that these insights entail that advancing our knowledge of human cognition demands diversifying the frameworks used to study it.

The philosophical discussion of pursuitworthiness tends to focus on when and how we should pursue new theories. Majority World psychologies are not new theories. They are theories which are successfully used on a daily basis by the majority of the world's population. But their absence from mainstream academic psychology means that these theories are new to this field. Hence, it remains a useful enterprise to use ideas developed in the pursuitworthiness literature to motivate a call for more engagement with Majority World psychologies in academic psychology.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets the foundations by presenting reasons to believe that Minority World psychological frameworks dominate academic psychology, arguing that this remains the case despite concentrated efforts in the past fifteen years to diversify participants in psychological research. It describes methodological problems caused by the dominance of Minority World psychology, and gestures towards how these perpetuate different forms of epistemic injustice. Although the epistemic injustices arising from the neglect of Majority World thought clearly motivate my thesis, my aim in this paper is to harness arguments specifically from the philosophy of science in support of the pursuitworthiness of Majority World psychology. Thus, considerations of epistemic justice feature only tangentially in this piece.

Sections 3 and 4 present the philosophical support for my claim that more diversity is required in academic psychology, with a focus on the concepts used to explore cognition. Section 3.2 presents a case study of sensitivity responsiveness as it manifests in different cultures to support these arguments. Then, having laid out the philosophical motivations for the pursuit of Majority World psychological frameworks, section 5 turns to how such pursuit could be realised. I discuss how literature about evaluating the pursuitworthiness of different questions, in

conjunction with the issues discussed in sections 3 and 4 point to the value of citizen review, and demonstrate through a case study of *Many Labs Africa* how we can empirically investigate Majority World psychological concepts in ways that avoid the methodological pitfalls outlined in section 2.

2 The dominance of Minority World psychology

There is a significant body of meta-analyses and research evidencing the absence of Majority World voices in academic psychology (Draper et al., 2024; Moriguchi, 2021; Singh et al., 2023). This may appear surprising; Joseph Henrich and colleagues' paper 'The WEIRDest people in the world' persuasively argued this point back in 2010 and remains a seminal paper on the topic, cited over 7000 times and featuring on psychology and philosophy syllabi across higher education. There are journals dedicated to the study of cultural differences in cognition,[2] as well as innumerable psychology papers arguing that particular cognitive concepts or processes (e.g. theory of mind (Taumoepeau & Ruffman, 2008; Wellman, 2014), moral cognition (Barrett et al., 2016), number cognition (Tang et al., 2006), empathy (Kuntoro et al., 2013)) manifest differently in a Majority World population, in contrast to a Minority World one. There is seemingly no shortage of psychology experiments taking place in Majority World countries; whence, then, comes my claim that it is under-represented in academia?

The grounding concern of this paper is that, despite the large amount of experimental data collected from Majority World countries, those cultures' concepts of mind are rarely explored in depth, or used as the foundation of psychological experiments. In the near totality of cases, research aims to see if a concept fundamental to Minority World psychology manifests in the same way, or generalises to, a Majority World culture. Adeyemi Adetula and colleagues' astutely titled paper 'Psychology should generalize from —not just to —Africa'

[2]e.g. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Journal of Cultural Cognitive Science, International Journal of Intercultural Relations

(2022) captures this point, arguing that while Minority World academics are keen to see if core concepts from their psychological theories generalise to a Majority World culture, there is less intellectual traffic going the other way. This point is also urged by Kopano Ratele:

> What original insights are to be gained from African centred psychology studies about, say, some children's multiple traumas, cognitive development among traumatised children, aggression after a traumatic childhood?
>
> We hardly know, it is true. *Very little research exists; that is a fact.* And extremely importantly, almost nothing exists in the way of testable explanations – what is often called theory – from African-centred psychological perspectives to illuminate how societies around the world consider embodied heart-and-mind suffering and embodied mind-and-heart healing.[...] [A]lthough we do not have a solid body of African-centred psychology, there is discernible potential for African-centred psychology to become a real positive force. *A massive need exists for African-centred psychological work.* (Ratele, 2019, p. 97, my emphasis).

The voice of a world-leading, multiple-award winning African psychologist lamenting the absence of African concepts in their field cannot be ignored. Concepts central to Minority World theories of child development, such as the ability to attribute false beliefs to others, or the fostering of secure attachments between infants and their primary carer, have been amply explored in Majority World cultures, while far less resource has been dedicated to understanding how South African children develop the concept 'Ubuntu' that is so central to their daily cognition (Adetula et al., 2022), or how children in India come to understand the plethora of socially constructed roles that dictate so many of their interactions with others (Lavelle, 2019; Miller, 1984), and whether these cognitive abilities generalise to Minority World populations.

This neglect of Majority World psychology has important epistemic consequences, which will be developed in the following sections. Before turning to these, I want to highlight two especially pernicious consequences of the dominance of Minority World framing. First, when discussing the performance of Majority World children on a developmental task conceived in a Minority World culture, there is a danger of using Minority World children as a standard against which to compare those in Majority World countries, a phenomenon referred to as 'the deficit assumption' (Draper et al., 2024; Kline et al., 2018; Rogoff et al., 2018; Scheidecker et al., 2022; Singh, 2024). For example, Japanese and Filipino children's performance on false-belief tasks is described as 'lower' than their Western counterparts, and their mastery of the concept is 'delayed' (Gracia et al., 2016; Lavelle, 2022a; Naito & Koyama, 2006).

As will be explored further in section 3, the framing of false belief as a signficant developmental landmark is an artefact of Minority World folk psychology. Had a different folk psychology been more prevalent in the framing of psychological concepts, perhaps false belief would be given less weight. Yet describing Majority World performances on the task in value-laden terms evidences how Minority World concepts are implicitly held as the standards to which others are compared.

The second consequence is evidenced in Scheidecker and colleagues' analysis of what constitutes 'Nurturing care' for children (Scheidecker et al., 2022). The authors observe that the UNICEF criteria for nurturing care are skewed towards a Minority World vision of what this entails (e.g. having toys and books at home, attending day-care). Nurturing care is considered a pre-requisite for healthy socioemotional development, with the implication that children who do not meet the UNICEF criteria are socioemotionally deficient. Hence "The findings [...] imply that most people in Low to Middle Income Families, and almost all Chadians, are cognitively and socioemotionally deficient"(Scheidecker et al., 2022, p. 24). Scheidecker and colleagues suggest that, if a significant portion of the

world's population fail to meet the criteria for healthy social and emotional development, we should at least consider the possibility that the measure has failed to adequately capture the multitude of ways in which nurturing behaviour can be manifested in different cultures. In this case the reliance on Minority World conceptual frameworks amplifies the deficit assumption in problematic ways.

Thus, despite the increase in diversity of populations in psychological research of the past years, I maintain that the framework of Minority World psychology maintains deeply rooted, and that this research remains mono-thematic in its outlook. The next section looks to Uljana Feest's work on Operationism to demonstrate just how embedded this framework is, before turning to the epistemic disadvantages of this monolithic approach in section 4.

3 Conceptual pluralism

3.1 Operationism as a research tool

Feest's recent book (2025) explores the importance of operationism as a research tool, with a focus on areas where relatively little is known about the phenomenon under investigation. She aims to move our understanding of operationism beyond its standard relegation as a failed theory of meaning, towards seeing how the ways in which scientists operationise the phenomenon they are examining shapes the ways in which research is carried out and how knowledge claims are made. Her distinction between two types of operationism —wide and narrow —is especially useful for highlighting the pervasiveness of Minority World psychology in the study of cognition, and in so doing points towards ways in which it can be addressed.

When little is known about a phenomenon under investigation, Feest describes our understanding of it as 'epistemically blurry' (Feest, 2025, pp. 19–20). The scientist's aim is to bring the phenomenon into clearer focus, and a core tool in this endeavour is the way in which they choose to operationise it. Epistemically blurry phenomena are typically difficult to observe or infer, therefore researchers

must decide which measurable features serve as evidence for it. This process is operationism. As researchers progress with their study, they may choose to change their operational definition of a concept based on their experimental findings (which Feest illustrates through a case-study of working-memory). Feest's position is distinct from operationism as a theory of meaning because she does not claim that there is no more to a concept's meaning than the ways in which it is operationised. Instead, a scientist's operationisation of a concept is used as a tool through which she can begin to access the phenomenon of interest.

In the case of psychology, how researchers initially choose to operationise a phenomenon will be shaped by their folk psychology. Thus, researchers working within a broadly Western philosophical tradition operationise the phenomenon of belief as 'taking the world to be a particular way'. This is what Feest refers to as wide-operationism, or 'operationism^{WIDE}': it operationises a concept in a way that fits with the investigators' folk psychological usage. This, in part, will include describing behaviours that serve as evidence for our attributions of particular beliefs to people (e.g. certain verbal behaviours, or movements). Gathering empirical data to further our understanding of BELIEF[3] requires more specific operational definitions which "formulate unique experimental conditions of application for specific instances" of the broadly defined (operationism^{WIDE}) BELIEF (ibid). These operational definitions apply to specific experiments aimed at finding out more about the general BELIEF phenomenon, and are labelled operationism^{NARROW}. To continue with the example of BELIEF, the philosophers Gilbert Harman (1978) and Daniel Dennett (1978) pointed out that a defining feature of this concept is grasping that beliefs can sometimes be false. This led to the development of the massively influential location-change false belief task (Wimmer & Perner, 1983),[4] which uses children's predictive behaviour as evidence

[3]Words in SMALL CAPS denote concepts.

[4]In a location-change false belief task, the child watches as an agent places an object in one of two locations. The agent leaves and a second agent enters, who moves the object from where the first agent left it into the other location. They

of their understanding (or lack thereof) of BELIEF. This is a paradigmatic example of operationism^{NARROW}, as it operationises the concept BELIEF relative to a specific experiment, namely, one where a particular behavioural outcome is taken as evidence that the participant can recognise false beliefs, which under this narrow operational definition amounts to grasping the concept BELIEF.

3.2 Sensitivity responsiveness: a case study in diversifying operationisations

Attachment theory, as developed from the work of John Bowlby maintains that the optimal relationship between a child and her primary care-giver is one of secure attachment, that is, that the child must feel that her carer is available and responsive to her needs while also allowing her freedom to explore. A precursor to a securely attached child is 'sensitivity responsiveness' from her primary carer: "sensitive and prompt responses to infant attachment signals" (Mesman et al., 2016, p. 854). In this case the epistemically blurry phenomenon that psychologists are investigating is a particular kind of connection the infant has towards her primary carer. The operationism^{WIDE} based in Western folk psychology is the availability and responsiveness of the carer, and how the carer encourages the baby to explore the world. This in turn leads to further wide operationisations, for example, of sensitivity responsiveness. Sensitivity responsiveness is operationised^{WIDE} as sensitivity to the infant's wants and needs, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on agency and autonomy (Funk et al., 2023; Keller, 2022).

By looking at the practice of how infants are weaned - a universal phenomenon - we see a narrow operationisation of sensitivity responsiveness. Infant-led weaning consists in offering baby a selection of different foods to try and encouraging her to feed herself. The practice centres the infant's autonomy by giving her choices

leave, the original agent returns, and the child is asked "Where will [first agent] look for the object?"

about what to eat, and self-sufficiency by encouraging her to feed herself. Thus, infant-led weaning exemplifies a Western, narrow operationisation of sensitivity responsiveness. Yet this operationisation^{NARROW} of sensitivity responsiveness risks missing nurturing food-giving behaviour that does not prioritise the infant's choices, as seen in Bambi Chapin's ethnography of feeding practices in central Sri Lanka (in Funk et al. 2023):

> I describe daily interactions in which children were fed by hand by affectionate mothers and other caregivers who were confident about what their children needed. As they made little balls of rice and curry with their fingers and popped them into their children's waiting mouths, children's cooperation was needed but not their verbal participation or expression of preferences. (Funk et al., 2023, p. 25)

Chapin later adds that "The children I observed in Sri Lanka were learning that their seniors know what they need and will provide it and that the outcome will be satisfying and delicious" (Ibid. p.30). The feeding practices observed by Chapin are infused with love and affection without meeting the standard Western operationisations (WIDE and NARROW) of 'sensitivity responsiveness'. The Western operationisations are one tool to examine the epistemically blurry phenomenon that is the infant's connection with her caregiver, but if we rely on them as the only tool then we miss instances of nurturing care as described by Chapin and risk deficit assumptions of the kind discussed in section 2. Similarly, a focus on responding to baby's psychological needs risks missing manifestations of nurturing care that centre on her bodily well-being, which is so important in many cultures. This is exemplified in Heidi Keller's work with Nso families in Western Cameroon and Gujarat families in northern Rajput, both of whom highly value bodily stimulation (massage, holding babies upright, boisterous physical play) as a way of accelerating motor development (Keller, 2022, pp. 119–126). Keller also reports families' belief that an upright position has important health benefits for the baby (aiding digestion, urination) and social benefits, e.g. it is easier for carers

once babies can stand as they no longer have to carry them as much, and their clothes do not need washing so frequently (Ibid. pp. 123-4).

Seen through Majority World operationisations of sensitive responsiveness as attending to a baby's choices, practices designed to encourage the baby to stand as soon as possible (whether she wishes it or not) because of the benefits it brings to the family could appear callous by being dismissive of the baby's own wants and needs. Yet, seen from a perspective where one's conception of self is intricately bound with those around you, as is the case in many Majority World psychologies, learning to participate in and contribute to one's community are goals which are constantly reinforced and celebrated (see also Nsamenang 2008). Learning to stand as an infant embodies an important contribution to the flourishing of those around you, and in so doing nurtures one's own flourishing. This perspective of "conceiv[ing] of people as primarily part of the other with whom they live" (Ratele, 2019, p. 166) allows us to see nurturing care in practices that do not meet the operationisations of 'sensitivity responsiveness' born of a psychology that "is founded on the idea of people as primarily individuals" (Ibid). It demands that we "unlearn some of the ways in which the discipline of psychology understands people" (Ibid).

3.3 Epistemic prudence and Humility

The previous sections argued that how we operationise concepts plays a fundamental role in the ways in which we explore and learn about them. Feest's operationism demonstrates how folk psychological features permeate much deeper into our study of cognition than previously realised. The Minority World dominance of academic psychology has meant that perspectives from this cultural heritage have almost exclusively shaped our study of cognition. The case study of sensitivity responsiveness shows the epistemic riskiness of this approach, as it is easy to miss opportunities to learn more about a phenomenon (e.g. the positive emotional bond between infant and carer) when only one perspective shapes the

operationisations used to explore it.

We can reframe the epistemic deficit inherent in a solely Minority World approach to psychology through Hasok Chang's considerations of epistemic prudence and humility (Chang, 2012, 2020). Epistemic humility maintains that we should not assume by default that the frameworks we are using to explore a phenomenon are the best ones. Indeed, as there is an indefinitely large number of frameworks that could be used, the chances that we have hit upon the optimal ones are slim. As Chang observes, "We are limited human beings trying to understand and engage with an external reality that seems vastly complex, apparently inexhaustible, and ultimately unpredictable. If we are not likely to find the perfect system of science, it makes sense to foster multiple ones, each of which will have its own unique strengths" (Chang, 2012, p. 255). As has been argued throughout this paper, academic psychology has not fostered multiple systems of science, promoting instead only those that fit with Minority World conceptualisations of mind. Epistemic prudence builds on epistemic humility by maintaining that it is unwise to sink all our resources (financial, cognitive, etc.) into one scientific framework (Chang Ibid., see also Šešelja and Straßer 2014). Rather, we should spread them so as to support multiple systems of science, which may or may not be immediately compatible with each other, so as to increase the chances of gaining reliable knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, if one framework should fail, it is prudent to have alternatives to pursue.

4 Perspectival Realism

The second philosophical position I draw on to support the claim that Majority World psychologies are pursuitworthy is Michela Massimi's work on Perspectival Realism. Perspectival Realism maintains that a plurality of different epistemic standpoints is necessary for the reliable production of scientific knowledge. Each knower is situated in their own 'particular geographical, socioeconomic, political, historical, and cultural location[s]' which inevitably shapes the ways in which they

structure and carve-up their epistemic landscape (Massimi, 2022, p. 18). One of the markers for reliable scientific knowledge, on this account, is when different perspectives intersect. In order for such intersection to happen it follows that we need two or more perspectives on a particular problem or phenomenon. Turning that framework to the present argument, this would suggest that psychology lacks the potential to achieve this marker of reliable scientific knowledge, as it is so homogenous in the Minority World frameworks that it pursues.

Unpacking this argument requires a closer examination of perspectives, cross-validation, and the ways in which they contribute to the reliable production of scientific knowledge.

4.1 Origins and vanishing points

One of the (many) original features of Massimi's account is the recognition that perspectives not only vary in their origins (i.e. the position of the perceiver), but also in their 'vanishing points', that is, how the knower constructs the boundaries of their knowledge:

> Philosophical discussions of perspectival representations have to start by acknowledging the role of the human agent not just as a spectator, but first and foremost as an architect in arranging lines of composition and creating in painstaking detail the perspectival effects of a 'window on reality' (Ibid, p.32).

In Minority World conceptions of social cognition, the 'vanishing point' is the inner psychological states of another agent. The lines of composition that we create constrain the inferences that we make from behaviours to mental states, as well as guiding us towards where to look for evidence of other's minds. The origin of the perspective is our place in a particular "geographical, socioeconomic, political, historical, and cultural location" (Ibid.), and also plays a constraining role in determining the vanishing points of our knowledge. Building on the

discussion in section 2, it is clear that Majority World perspectives can and do differ from those in the Minority World in both their origins and vanishing points. Take Ubuntu philosophy as an example:

> The African idea of persons: persons exist only in relation to other persons. The human self... only exists in relationship to its surroundings; these relationships are what it is. And the most important of these are the relationships we have with other persons (Shutte 2001, p.21, cited in Graness 2020, p. 35).

Persons in the geographical and cultural contexts where Ubuntu philosophy is dominant delimit the contours of their perspectives on other people towards a vanishing point that is a deep understanding of community values and one's place in a community. If one's grasp of selfhood exists only by virtue of how one relates to others, then a salient research question would be how children come to know these relations. Hence within the Ubuntu perspective, a different empirical phenomenon becomes the focus and rallying point for developmental research.

Similarly, the case of sensitivity responsiveness exemplifies how different vanishing points foreground different phenomena as worthy of focus and investigation. The agency-oriented 'window on reality' has as its vanishing point an agent able to realise their psychological needs in the service of " self-fulfilment and mental reasoning" (Keller, 2022, p. xi), whereas the positions described by Keller and Chapin (section 3.2) have as their vanishing point an agent whose desires are more often realised in the service of their community.

Do these case studies offer a marker of reliable knowledge through intersection? Addressing this requires thinking through the ways in which a human mind shaped by community-oriented goals and desires is different from one that is shaped by individual self-expression. Are the vanishing points of the different perspectives so distinct as to preclude intersection? As a reviewer helpfully notes, culture shapes psychological phenomena with the result that some phenomena could not be considered universal. Yet perspectives can cross (intersect) without converging.

Much has been written on the evolution of phylogenetic parenting behaviours in humans (Belsky, 1999; Bjorklund, 2022; Keller, 2015), presenting a view where certain parenting aims remain universal across humanity, even though their manifestations may vary significantly across cultures (Keller, 2022, p. 14). 'Primary care' —the provision of food, shelter and hygiene for infants —is a universal feature of human societies. Thus, if two (or more) perspectives are contoured towards the different vanishing points which are optimal primary care within their culture, it is not inconceivable that there will be points of intersection that could yield reliable knowledge. For example, we may learn something about the psychological mechanisms behind our motivation for food and nourishment through data-to-phenomenon inferences from infant-led and carer-led feeding practices.

Second, even when looking at psychological phenomena that are unique to a particular culture, e.g. certain emotions, there is still the possibility of intersection with perspectives looking at analogous cases. For example, the Chinese emotion *Weiqu* (very loosely translated as 'grievance') may only be visible from a perspective constrained by specific cultural norms. Yet this perspective's possible intersection with one targetting a related British emotion context (e.g. grievance) has the potential to yield knowledge about psychological processes of negative emotions.

Massimi observes that methods for generating reliable knowledge, and standards to which it is held, will be local to the perspective within which it is embedded. To borrow one of her examples, beekeepers on the Yucátan peninsula have extensive knowledge about when to release their bees for the first pollinations of the year. This involves inferences about weather conditions, the appearance of different blooms, previous years' honey collection that have been honed and systematised through many generations of beekeepers. The inferences are considered reliable when they serve their functions of maximising honey yield and the health of the bees. These inferences draw on very different kinds of evidence

than that used by European botanists, also interested in the pollination patterns of different mountain flora but perhaps with a different vanishing point in mind, e.g. satisfactorily categorising the flowers by their genus or evolutionary history. Yet by preserving the heritage of each of these reliable inferential patterns, European botanists and the beekeepers of the Yucátan were able to spot points of intersection, that is, data-to-phenomenon inferences that matched across their two perspectives and in so doing enhanced both epistemological frameworks for understanding pollination phenomena. And, while space is too limited to explore this feature more fully, this is precisely where the *realism* of Massimi's view takes hold: a phenomenon is real when different perspectives, using different types of inference and evidence, intersect. That point of intersection is an indicator that these perspectives are tracking something that exists independently of our scientific conceptualisations of it.

4.2 The importance of multiple perspectives

Massimi's central thesis is that multiple perspectives are required to gain reliable knowledge about a phenomenon, as it is the intersection of these perspectives that serves as a marker of knowledge. It is worth reiterating that the claim is about *intersection* rather than *convergence*: two perspectives with different vanishing points intersect without converging. European botanists and the beekeepers on the Yucátan had different vanishing points for their knowledge on pollination, but despite this were able to spot points of intersection across their perspectives.

In the case of infant and child developmental psychology, researchers aim to uncover how a child's concepts develop, whether there is uniformity in this development across populations, what scaffolds or hinders it, and so forth. Even within a broader cultural framework there will be many perspectives with different vanishing points which can shed light on this. For example, Massimi's case-study of dyslexia describes how the different perspectives of neuroscientists, educators, developmental psychologists and others intersect when diagnosing the cause of a

child's difficulty with reading (Massimi, 2022). This paper does not deny that *within* Minority World psychology there are diverse ways of studying phenomena, each with their own epistemic standards, measurements and concepts. But these diverse perspectives are, nevertheless stemming from a shared 'geographical, socioeconomic, political, historical, and cultural' heritage. The neuroscientists are looking for the neural correlates of cognitive processes that have been demarcated and operationised through a broadly Western way of framing cognition. While diverse, these perspectives fail to offer the conceptual pluralism that would come from the inclusion of Majority World philosophies.

Majority World psychologies offer different inferential routes to identifying psychological phenomena. This applies both to phenomena framed by different folk psychologies, and areas of psychology which aim at non-folk phenomena, e.g. vision science or psychopathologies. Just as Emily Martin's work (1991) demonstrated the pernicious influence of gender stereotyping on fertility science (the subject matter of which is intended to be scientific rather than 'folk'), there remains the possibility that Majority World psychologies individuate non-folk psychological phenomena in different ways.

In order to fulfil realise this possibility, however, more resources need to be dedicated to research that gathers the datasets necessary for testing those psychological theories, in ways that are appropriate to those data. Within perspectival realism, evidence for a phenomenon "does not accrue by accumulation of more data of the same type" (Ibid. p.134). Running false belief tasks on different populations falls into this trap: it accumulates more measurements of children's predictive behaviours in a very specific type of situation. More diverse measures of children's social cognitive phenomena (e.g. social cognitive phenomena as picked out within Ubuntu philosophy, or sensitivity responsiveness that prioritises a baby's physical rather than her psychological states) demand a dramatic rethink of what is being tested for.

Experiments are a fundamental method of knowledge acquisition in academic

psychology. In advocating for the pursuit of Majority World psychologies within academic psychology, it follows that this entails using Majority World psychologies to ground experimental work (e.g. through operationisation). But this assumes that experiments are the best way to pursue Majority World frameworks, and this is not an assumption that should be taken for granted. For it may be that using experiments to test hypotheses is itself a methodology uniquely suited to Western European knowledge structures (Darder, 2018; Denscombe, 2025). Are experiments, then, a methodology that accumulate more data of the same type?

If we are to adopt the pluralism urged by Massimi's Perspectival Realism then experiments should be one methodology of many used to explore psychological phenomena. It has been suggested that a cause of psychology's replication crisis has been a premature focus on experiments over other forms of empirical work (Eronen & Bringmann, 2021; Rozin, 2001; Scheel, 2022). This should not preclude the study of Majority World concepts through experiments; on the contrary, as has been argued here, the absence of such work is problematic. Majority World psychologies offer an opportunity to pursue alternatives to experiments as methods of knowledge acquisition (as evidenced in the Yucátan pollination example), offering a counter to a broader bias towards experiments evident in the disipline.

4.3 Segue

Both Feest's Operationism and Massimi's Perspectivalism are unabashed realist positions. Feest believes that psychological phenomena exist but remain, at present, epistemically blurry, with operationism serving as a tool to bring these phenomena into clearer focus. Whether the operationisations serve this function depends not on the phenomena, but the operationisations themselves. Massimi's Perspectivalism similarly accepts the existence of mind-independent phenomena. Her project is an epistemological one: what are the best ways to learn about these phenomena? Her answer to this, of course, is that each epistemic perspective has its own criteria of reliability, measurement, and conceptualisations of data, and

that our knowledge of phenomena becomes more reliable as more of these perspectives are developed and tested for potential cross-validation.

This realism should be of comfort to psychologists intent on uncovering universal features of human cognition. For it brings into relief my thesis that Minority World psychology offers but one way of examining cognition. My argument is not that it is necessarily the wrong way, but rather that, at present, we lack sufficient epistemological assurance that it is the right way. Indeed, the pluralism of Massimi's account suggests it is unlikely that just one perspective ever will constitute the 'right' way of examining a phenomenon. When, to this uncertainty, we add Chang's considerations of epistemic prudence and humility, it becomes clear that there are significant problems with the concentration of resource (financial and cognitive) into a way of framing cognition that resonates with a minority of the world's population. The combination of Feest, Massimi and Chang's philosophies point to the epistemic urgency of pursuing Majority World psychological concepts. The remainder of this paper gestures towards how this could be done.

5 How to pursue Majority World psychology

The previous sections argued that there is significant value to be gained from pursuing psychological research grounded in Majority World concepts and philosophies. This section sketches some ways in which this could happen, all of which share a common theme: including more Majority world citizens (scientists and non-scientists) in decisions about what, how, and why a particular psychological research project should be pursued is essential to loosening the grip of Minority World psychology.

5.1 How *not* to pursue Majority World psychology

Before discussing different ways in which we could usefully pursue Majority World psychological frameworks, I want to return to a discussion started in section 2, namely, why I believe efforts to achieve this have, to date, been insufficient. As mentioned in section 4.2, taking an experiment conceived within Minority World frameworks to observe how Majority World populations perform, exemplifies the accumulation of more data of the same type. But it may not even attain this limited goal. In many cases, Minority World experiments are so far-removed from the daily lives of Majority World participants that it is not clear they even succeed in tracking the concepts that they aim to capture. This well-known problem of ecological validity has been discussed elsewhere (Broesch et al., 2020; Chaudhary & Sriram, 2020; Rogoff et al., 2018); here I highlight a few select points to further support the arguments of sections 3 and 4.

It is often assumed that changing features of an experiment to be more familiar to participants in a different culture is sufficient to ensure that the experiment taps the psychological phenomena of interest, e.g. I-Ning Fu and colleagues carefully detail how to make a false belief task appropriate for Taiwanese children by using Taiwanese sausage as the hidden object, and Taiwanese names for the puppets enacting the scene (Fu et al., 2024). Yet these changes do not speak to broader cultural expectations, e.g. what one can expect of strangers; whether one should always speak the truth (about where the object is hidden). Furthermore, as is discussed by the ethnologist Christine El Ouardini, many children are unused to one-to-one attention from an adult, or being the only child in a situation:

> "Because of the focus on individual performance, children growing up in multiple-generation families, rural environments, or other family settings systematically underperform [...] Popular methods of observation or assessment have expectations like exclusive attention, undisturbed circumstances, and familiarity with individual testing. Based on the evidence provided, such assessment tools or methods that

> fail to account for the cultural conditions cannot claim ecological validity" (Funk et al., 2023, p. 67).

Thus, not only might it be the case that the psychological concepts under investigation may not be salient within some psychological frameworks, but in addition even if children do have competence with the concept, their performance is masked by cultural features not realised by the researchers. This in turn has the potential to fuel the 'deficit assumption' discussed in section 2.

One way to avoid these pitfalls is to ensure that local researchers and stakeholders are involved in research projects from their inception. Not only are they embedded within the norms of the geographical and cultural location, and thus better positioned to advise on the optimal ways of testing for particular concepts, but their knowledge is also crucial in determining the research questions of interest to begin with. I turn to this next.

5.2 Diversifying who chooses

Questions are a cornerstone of the pursuitworthiness literature. As Peter Achinstein argued, in demonstrating the pursuitworthiness of a new theory, advocates should show "what questions the theory will attempt to answer, subject to what empirical conditions, what justifiction there is for raising these questions and imposing these conditions, and what answers the theory provides" (Achinstein, 1993, p. 111). As already mentioned (section 1), Majority World psychologies are not new theories per se, but they are new to academic psychology. This paper has argued that there is ample justification for raising different questions and studying different phenomena within the realm of academic psychology. Here I explore some ways in which this could be realised.

The starting point for my analysis is Carlos Santana's work advocating for more citizen peer-review of research proposals. Santana writes:

> Why should we let outsiders decide which scientific projects to fund? Because although they might not be experts in the relevant scientific

> field, simply by virtue of being members of society they're sensitive to what matters and what's interesting. Moreover, as outsiders, citizen reviewers can be more willing to support promising but unorthodox research projects (Santana, 2022, p. 20).

The dominance of Minority World psychology has evolved in large part due to the insular nature of academic research. Those with ideas that fit within or advance the Minority World conceptual framework are more appealing to funders or research teams that share this folk psychology, and as these are the funders which hold the majority of the world's resources it is unsurprising that Minority World concepts have been studied to the extent that they have. By opening the choices of which projects get pursued to citizens outwith this bubble, we increase the chances of more research from Majority World perspectives being pursued.

A natural objection is one of quality control: surely experts in a field are the best qualified to evaluate whether a project is worth pursuing? Adequately addressing this question demands an analysis of the growing literature on the benefits of peer-review as balanced against its disadvantages (e.g Balazs et al. 2025, Heesen and Bright 2021, Santana Ibid.) that is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will unapologetically cherry-pick what I take to be the main themes of relevance, namely, that a brief survey of this literature indicates that current peer-review systems are at best in need of a major over-haul (Balazs et al. 2025) and at worst should be discarded altogether (Heesen and Bright 2021). Common to these criticisms is the lack of epistemic diversity in the current peer-review system, adding further support to the arguments of this paper. With the jury still out regarding the advantages of expert-review, I cautiously suggest that the benefits to be accrued from broadening the scope of who chooses which research projects are pursued outweigh concerns about quality control.

This is discussed at length by DiMarco and Khalifa (2022, p.94), who draw on contemporary standpoint theory to suggest that 'outsiders' to a particular field bring a distinct type of epistemic access to the questions under discussion, which

in turn contributes to one's evaluation of their pursuitworthiness. Two consequences (with the same outcome) fall out from this argument. First, a research pursuit that may seem obviously crucial to those within a field (the question of how children develop metarepresentational abilities, for example) may have its value queried by those outwith it. This works within conceptual frameworks (e.g. what seems critical to an academic psychologist may not be seen as important by a early years practitioner), as well as across them (e.g. grasping other's false beliefs may not be key landmark in Ubuntu child psychology). This need not mean that the question should cease to be pursued, but it can serve as an impetus for those doing the research to reconsider and evaluate their reasons for focussing on it. Second, it may be that a research question is worth pursuing, but that we should reconsider *who* pursues it. For instance, if a Minority World and Majority World research team agree that understanding how and when children grasp false beliefs is a useful question to pursue, then they should also consider whether this research should be carried out by the same people in the same way across field-sites (as discussed in 5.1).

5.3 *Many Labs Africa* — A case study

Many Labs Africa[5] draws on the expertise of African researchers to guide choices about which psychological projects to pursue. A report for this group describes a project where African researchers were consulted about studies from African countries that they thought were interesting candidates for a replication project (Adetula et al., 2024). First, researchers were asked to nominate research based on "concepts/problems native to their countries or other African countries, conceptualised/defined by an African researcher, and previously investigated in an African country" (Ibid. p.3). From these nominations, five studies were picked as candidates for further investigation, based on a series of evaluation criteria focusing on "locality, feasibility for a multi-site study, and reproducibility" (Ibid.

[5]https://osf.io/vh6td

p.6). Finally, an international group of researchers were asked to choose three of the five studies to go forward to the replication phase, basing their evaluation on a series of questions including "To what extent do you think the general population in your country is interested in the topic of this study?" and "To what extent do you think this effect is culturally applicable in your country?" (Ibid. p.9). The authors found that African and European researchers had significantly different preferences for which studies would be of most interest to pursue, especially in the responses of "How interesting is this study to you as a researcher", and "How relevant is this study to people in your country?". Because the stated aim of the project was to advance empirical understanding of African concepts, the authors weighed the African vote more heavily, opting to move forward with the studies chosen by those researchers.

It is not surprising that African and European researchers differed in their evaluations of which concepts and problems to advance through empirical investigation. But this concrete example of disagreement exemplifies the importance of the contributions from Majority World researchers when choosing empirical projects, especially when those projects are aimed at their populations. This feature also reduces the risk of a particular kind of epistemic exploitation that can occur in cross-cultural research, namely, perpetuating existing power disparities between Minority World funded researchers and the populations they are studying. The psychologist Catherine Draper describes her experience working with the South African Initiative 'Foundation for Community Work' (FCW), which supports home visits from carers and health professionals to vulnerable communities:

> [I]t soon became clear that, as researchers, we needed to be able to answer the "What's in it for us" question that was posed by FCW. This question was the product of FCW's previous experiences of outside partners (e.g. researchers, other organizations, funders) of coming in, extracting the information they want, and leaving with little

> acknowledgment of their contribution. [...] Due to these experiences, FCW resolved to only say yes to partnerships where mutual benefit was evident, and where there was alignment of goals and values. (Draper et al., 2024, p. 232)

Time and cognitive energy spent by local academics developing the required methodologies and infrastructure necessary for visiting Minority World researchers to conduct their work, is time and cognitive energy taken away from their own projects which are more likely to serve the needs of their communities (Berenstain, 2016).

Many Labs Africa highlights how Majority World researchers offer different perspectives on scientific endeavours, and that these perspectives would have been missed in a less diverse and rigorous process for choosing which projects to pursue. Adetula and colleagues' report is a real example of how African researchers' perspectives have different origins and vanishing points to their European counterparts, and how to foster and develop those perspectives (in other words, to 'operationise' them) to the point where we can begin to perceive potentialities for intersections with Minority World perspectives.

6 Challenges and concerns

The scope of this paper is broad and I have tried to address challenges and critiques as they arise. Inevitably there are questions which do not neatly fit into one section or another, so let me address those here.

6.1 Pluralism could obscure actual deficits or bad practice

The UNICEF report on 'Nurturing care' (section 2) is a well-intended piece of research aimed at improving the welfare of children and families across the world. Similarly, researchers exploring children's understanding of the social world — be that Minority or Majority World populations — are motivated by children's

well-being. Does the pluralism of this paper run the risk of obscuring or permitting sub-optimal childcare practices under the guise of cultural relativism?

Keeping pluralism distinct from relativism is important for both scientific (Chang, 2012; Kusch, 2020) and moral (McGrath, 2019) pluralism. In the words of Hasok Chang "My slogan for pluralism is not *Anything goes* but *Many things go*"(Chang, 2012, p. 261). Both Massimi and Chang urge the epistemic necessity of multiple perspectives in the acquisition of reliable knowledge. As Chang observes, no such motivation exists with relativism, which can rest content with just one outlook provided everyone is happy with it.

More salient to the current debate, however, is the point that pluralist positions advocate for the pursuit of more than one framework, and permit standards for evaluating the reliability of the frameworks pursued. This comes out most starkly in Massimi's Perspectival Realism where she observes (a) that each perspective has its own inferential processes, the standards for which are set by the relevant epistemic community,[6] and (b) that it is the intersection of multiple perspectives that yields reliable knowledge (section 4.2). Care needs to be taken about where one looks for those points of intersection; for example, child-rearing practices that prepare children for their role in society as adults will look very different across cultures, despite sharing the same motivation (Funk et al., 2023). Untangling these differences is no easy task, but exemplars exist in other literatures which could serve as helpful templates (see, for example, Polly Mitchell and Anna Alexandrova's pluralist analysis of well-being (2021)).

6.2 Why does psychology need to be more reliable in its production of knowledge?

This paper takes for granted the reliable production of knowledge is a reasonable epistemic aim to strive towards, and argues that fostering multiple perspectives is

[6]See Nsamenang (2008, p.143) for a description of such epistemic regulation regarding childcare practices in African communities.

a step towards achieving it. But some might argue that such remedial work is unnecessary: psychology as a discipline has been very successful in generating knowledge, why advocate for change?

There is a lot to say here, so I will focus on just one reason to think that change might be needed: the replication crisis. As many authors have argued, the failure of experiments to successfully replicate can be explained, in part, by a lack of theory behind the concepts under investigation (Lavelle, 2022b; Levenstein et al., 2024; Muthukrishna & Henrich, 2019; Scheel, 2022). Consequently, replication failure can be seen as one indicator that our production of knowledge is not as reliable as previously thought, and that suggestions to improve this at least merit consideration. Then there are the further questions concerning success *for whom*? As explained in this paper, much of psychological research focuses on Minority World ideas and populations. Even if one firmly believes in the success of current psychological frameworks, there remains space for a better understanding of their potential limitations and vanishing points.

6.3 What about other minoritised psychological frameworks?

There are psychological frameworks within Minority World psychology that challenge representationalism and cognitivism, e.g. embodied cognition (Gallagher, 2023) and dynamic systems approaches (Thelen & Smith, 1994) which have not been pursued to the extent enjoyed by those dominant approaches. Why, then, should special status be granted to Majority World psychologies, when other frameworks also experience under-representation in the field?

A glib response would refer once again to the benefits of pluralism as explored in this paper. Yes, these alternatives to representationalism and cognitivism should be pursued, for all the reasons that pluralism is epistemically beneficial. But this is not all. Majority World epistemologies have not enjoyed the same kind of attention as Minority World approaches *because of* their geographical, social,

and cultural status. These are not epistemological reasons for failing to pursue a research programme. It is due to the legacies of colonialism that scholars and thinkers in these regions have been denied the resources to pursue their intellectual endeavours. Prioritising the pursuit of those psychological frameworks and research programmes offers one small way towards changing that historical trajectory.

7 Conclusions

The pluralism advocated by Chang and Massimi maintains that supporting more than one perspective on scientific phenomena is necessary for the reliable production of knowledge. This paper has argued that academic psychology has failed to foster perspectives outwith those prioritised by Minority World epistemological frameworks, and in so doing fails to meet this criterion for the reliable production of knowledge. Feest's Operationism offers a lens through which to see how deeply folk intuitions shape experimental research, a point I further illustrated with the case of sensitivity responsiveness.

While this paper has made the case that the neglect of Majority World psychological concepts is epistemically problematic, it has not provided many specific examples of Majority World concepts bringing new perspectives to phenomena that were previously framed solely by Minority World psychology. The aim of this paper is to motivate the pursuit of Majority World psychological frameworks; actually pursuing them is the task for future work. It will not be easy; to return once more to Ratele:

> Strengthening African psychology is a gargantuan task. This task includes the need for psychologists moved by the ideal of a more just world to keep these three ideas in mind: taking up the challenge to redefine the relation between psychology and Africa; vigorously and sophisticatedly locating Africa in global psychology; constantly highlighting the situatedness of all psychological knowledge and

> practice. [...] Still, even while psychological African studies does not yet exist as a coherent enterprise within African psychology, it is a potentially exciting growth area for African psychology as well as for global psychology. (Ratele, 2019, p. 167)

Addressing the epistemic shortcomings of a singularly Minority World approach to the study of psychological concepts demands prioritising research programmes grounded in Majority World philosophies of mind and cognition. Doing so not only provides a small step to redressing epistemic injustices of the past, but promises to further the reliable production of knowledge in this field.

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Data availability statement

Not applicable

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