Abstract

Cultural psychology is now a significant approach in many areas of psychology. However, today’s cultural psychology has little to say about mental disorder, which is otherwise a key theme in psychology as such. Most theorizing on mental disorder has historically been dominated by psychodynamic, cognitivist, and behaviorist schools, and more recently by the neurosciences. This article tentatively articulates an approach to the very idea of mental disorder from a cultural psychological perspective. It is argued that cultural psychology has the potentials to develop a comprehensive understanding of mental disorder that combines awareness of the brain and body with sociocultural norms and practices without reducing mental disorder to either of these. In that sense, it may steer a course between essentialist models of psychopathology on the one hand, and radical social constructionist ones on the other. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in adults is referred to as an illustrative example, but the theory presented here has more general ambitions.