Commentary on Kim A. Bard, Heidi Keller, & David A. Leavens, Let's go WILD: Increasing Inclusivity in Theories of Developmental Psychology, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*
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Ethnographic methods can help psychology overcome its WEIRD problems

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Abstract
We are persuaded by Bard et al.'s argument that cross-cultural work in psychology requires not only a greater diversity of participants but also a greater diversity of theories. We encourage the authors to consider that the solution lies not only in improving experimentally-oriented theories, but also in adopting non-experimental methods, including purely ethnographic methods.

Main text
We agree with Bard et al. that, beyond the problem of unrepresentative samples, researchers need to reflect on how psychological science itself might be culturally blinkered. This is something we discussed in our book, *Psychology's WEIRD Problems* (2023), which we were pleased to see the authors engage with. Our argument in the book was that overreliance on unrepresentative samples, although a real issue, is actually a symptom of a deeper set of conditions. Psychological science is WEIRD not only in its subject pool, but also in its metatheoretical commitments, its methodological assumptions, and the institutional structures that give shape to experiments. There are many points of convergence with Bard et al.'s article. Building upon this common ground, we would like to challenge the authors to sharpen their critique on two fronts, relating, respectively, to methods and metatheory.

(1) *Methodological WEIRDness*. Bard et al. describe five steps toward making developmental theories more inclusive. We broadly agree with their suggestions. However, we would like to invite the authors to expand on the first step: conducting ethnographic work on the target population. Bard et al. treat this as a preliminary step on the way to formulating more inclusive

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experiments. Ethnographic work can, however, be valuable in its own right, independently of whether it informs later experimental research.

A notable example of cognitive ethnographic research focused on child development is the work of Barbara Rogoff (1990, 2003). A recurring theme in Rogoff's work is the role of guided participation in how children develop skill in tool use, planning, problem solving, and so on. In WEIRD societies there is commonly a clear separation between the world of adult work and child-specific spaces and activities; caregivers "take responsibility for organizing children's involvement by managing their motivation and by instructing through the provision of lessons" (Rogoff et al. 1993, p. 151). In many indigenous societies, in contrast, it is common for children to participate in adult activities as side-participants. The result is that, in these societies, children are socialized gradually into adult activities without formal schooling, with the children themselves taking "the responsibility for managing their efforts" (1993, p. 152).

Rogoff's work is an example of a successful research program investigating the cultural specificity of behavior using primarily observational rather than experimental methods. Indeed, it investigates child development at a scale that could not possibly be captured in a laboratory experiment. Ethnography is a tool for "rewilding psychology" (Baggs and Sanches de Oliveira 2024), regardless of the implications (if any) that this work may have for experimental research. We submit that promoting experiments as the primary method for knowing about development is itself WEIRD!

(2) Metatheoretical WEIRDness. The authors criticize Shared Intentionality Theory on the grounds that it relies on data from WEIRD participants, and Attachment Theory on the grounds that it does not generalize to children in non-WEIRD contexts. We would add that these theories are WEIRD in metatheoretical terms as well. They take for granted that the aim of psychological science should be to uncover the contents of a universal human nature. Interestingly, Bard et al. seem to have no problem with this. They write in their conclusion, "Psychological theories that exclude data and perspectives from the majority of the world cannot accurately represent human nature." The notion of human nature, however, already commits the researcher to certain WEIRD metatheoretical assumptions (Laland and Brown 2018), such as the assumption that explanations of group outcomes should ultimately be reducible to processes inside the individual. There are good reasons to doubt that the individualistic explanatory strategy is always appropriate when applied in non-WEIRD contexts.

A compelling illustration can be found in Thomas Gladwin's (1970) classic work on Micronesian navigation. The Micronesian system of navigation allows sailors to reach distant islands without the aid of Western compasses or charts, instead using stars, wave patterns, and other sources of information. It is, in short, a highly intelligent system. However, this does not mean that WEIRD ideas about the nature of intelligence and associated testing methods are well-suited for studying

it. Gladwin (1970, p. 228 ff.) tried to measure the cognitive abilities of the master navigators using a Western-style logic puzzle in which the participant is asked to find pairwise combinations of colored poker chips. He found that the islanders were unable to solve this puzzle, with the exception of two islanders who had completed a Western-style education. This anecdote suggests that the Western conception of intelligence as a general capacity for problem-solving may be ill-suited to capture systems of behavior that developed outside the influence of Western schooling. As Gladwin warns us, "we must not slip into the assumption that Puluwatans view their navigators as highly intelligent. They do not. They view them as navigators" (p. 220).

The two points above can be considered independently from each other. We would like to mention an important point of convergence. (1) Being open to a diversity of methods (getting over our WEIRD obsession with laboratory experimental research), and (2) being open to different ways of construing mind and behavior (getting over our WEIRD assumptions about the universality of psychological phenomena), are relevant to psychological science as a whole. Engaging with these critical points can inform better research practices even within WEIRD contexts. A good example of this is an ethnographic research program we've discussed elsewhere (Baggs and Sanches de Oliveira, 2024), Roger Barker's behavior settings program, carried out in a small town in Kansas between 1947 and 1972 (Barker, 1968, Barker et al, 1978, McGann et al. 2024). Barker sought to identify how settings—classrooms, sports meetings, grocery stores, and so on—are important in giving shape to behavior, including the key finding that small schools encourage greater participation in extra-curricular activities, a finding which challenged the school consolidation program at the time (Barker and Gump, 1964).

In short, we echo Bard et al.'s call for more cross-cultural research, and we would add that casting off our WEIRD theoretical and methodological baggage promises to improve psychology as a whole, including how research is conducted even in WEIRD contexts. Going WILD is, we suspect, the path to making psychological science not only more inclusive, but also more accurate.

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Conflicting interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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