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Editors' Note:

It has now been one full year since Mick Bennett's Editorial statement that cross-cultural psychologists should be more concerned with problem-oriented research at the local level. Since that time, we have received many opinions (generally in agreement) and several proposals for dealing with this challenge. The Newsletter has been suggested as a vehicle for communicating 1) the problems, 2) the location and 3) available information which may help answer the problem. The RESEARCH FORUM has not in the past been used for this purpose, but there is no reason why it cannot be expanded to serve the needs of applied as well as academic researchers. The report by Robert Serpell of Lusaka, Zambia in this issue may help to start the ball rolling. He outlines the involvement of academic psychologists in finding solutions to the problems of education, industry, and government.

I. We would now like to propose a call for similar reports from people who work in applied settings. The report may describe the nature of the problem you are working on, the type of intervention or the measurement techniques you are attempting to develop to tackle this problem, or the final outcome and evaluation (success or failure) of your efforts.

II. We would also like to solicit information or sources of information that would help answer the specific issues raised by Mick Bennett. They were:

What are going to be the effects of introducing commercial radio?

What properties are necessary to make an infant nutrition chart effective?

What conditions facilitate the introduction of organization development programmes in Malanesian societies?

What are the critical environment factors leading to delinquency?

Does decreasing trading hours of alcohol decrease or increase problems of drunkeness?

How do people perceive family planning propoganda?

Use the Communication Form at the back to outline either the problems you are working on or the resources which may help answer some of Mick's problems.

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ATTENTION IACCP members from India.

In view of the fact the Indian members have been experiencing difficulty in making payment of IACCP fees in dollars, arrangements have been made to collect dues in Indian currency. Members who like to pay in Indian currency may send the appropriate amount of their fees to Dr. Jai Prakash, Department of Psychology, University of Saugar, Sagar (M.P.) 470 003 INDIA. He will forward the dues to the Treasurer of IACCP in dollars.
"Speaking as a gasworks labourer ..."

Some comments on Weber's dilemma

Peter Ball
University of Tasmania
Hobart, Australia

In a recent Editorial, Weber has questioned the received doctrine of Cultural Relativism and drawn attention to what he sees as a social dilemma for cross-cultural psychologists. He observes that they find themselves in the inconsistent position of eschewing judgements on outgroups but at the same time feeling morally bound to pronounce on socio-political issues in a fashion which requires just such judgements. In these remarks, I try to show that Weber's dilemma arises from a misunderstanding of the social scientist's role in the community, tacitly granting him an unjustifiable degree of political influence. The strictly scientific adequacy of a relativist posture is something I shall not discuss.

It is important to recognise that when a social scientist adopts a public moral stand on a social or political matter it is he, not the science, who takes that stand. In taking it he implicitly suspends his scientific role for that of the morally concerned individual, though he may still have, by reason of his occupation, privileged access to knowledge which is valuable relevant to the matter. And the same applies to a plurality of scientists. Even an organized body, writing its ethical code, is really acting as a concerned group of people trying to constrain the scientific activities of another group -- whose membership happens to coincide with its own. The design of a professional code of ethics is not part of the group's scientific enterprise, however socially desirable a concomitant to that enterprise it may be deemed. Another group of scientists, inspired by some alternative moral doctrines, could draw quite different conclusions without differing in its scientific orientation, nor thereby betraying either more or less scientific competence. Mind-mancers from the KGB or CIA may make the scientific discovery of the century, whatever their professional morality. If scientific bodies criticise them on ethical grounds, their scientific status is not thereby impugned. And likewise, if social scientists wish corporately to condemn or commend governments in Africa or elsewhere, it is important to distinguish between judging them morally and assessing their sophistication in areas of scientific knowledge. For the former exercise a socio-political hat replaces the scientific headgear and the scientific credentials of the critics are irrelevant; not so for the latter.

The temptation to confuse scientific and civic roles is seductive -- especially since the former frequently offer convenient status and influence, which may be used (or, rather, misused) to some effect in the civic sphere -- but no useful cause can possibly be served through the attempted resolution of ethical problems with scientific facts, or by plugging gaps in scientific knowledge with disguised moralising. On the one hand, science is immodestly presented as an oracular activity; on the other hand, the advance of knowledge is impeded by denial of ignorance.

Weber seems to regard his own hope for an emergent, derived emic, universal psychology as forlorn, and it is hard to understand why he wishes to persevere with it.
What is already known of human nature suggests that any psychological universals are likely to be extremely abstract in character and untranslatable into terms applicable to socio-political issues in quite the way Wober envisions. In any case, as he shows convincingly, the empirical quality of such universals logically precludes their such use. Especially if human nature is as plastic as it seems, but even if it is not, there can be no question of determining "acceptable" needs for arousal, release from frustration, etc., on an exclusively scientific basis. Politics will finally decide what is "acceptable", as it already does where such things as labour and housing standards are concerned. To make such matters the final responsibility of science, instead of politics, would be to set up a Dictatorship of the Professoriat, and, in my opinion, would be an unwelcome innovation.

It may be noted here in passing that the absence, or weakness, of a universal psychology no more precludes the political setting of international socio-political standards than the presence of a descriptively potent universal psychology would prescribe what such standards had to be. It is not hard, of course, to think of reasons why both humane and tyrannical governments should be reluctant to initiate such an international political process at present, but, if it were to happen, the information cross-cultural psychologists could supply would be useful -- even if it amounted only to the news that it is human nature to be culturally variable (which rational politicians might take into account by making the chosen standards less, rather than more, detailed and restrictive).

Quite apart from the foregoing considerations, we should not in any case assume that a scientific Cultural Relativism necessarily offers ethical advantages over Universalism (whatever the scientific pros and cons). It has helped to avoid hasty and evaluative comparisons of people we have studied by forbidding comparisons of any sort, though in practice the ban has applied only to ones with an evaluative bouquet such as those involving intelligence. Rash judgements on factual matters are scientifically rectifiable, while evaluative comparisons, in principle, may be removed from the domain of science (by, e.g., careful and explicit definition: "primitive" is definable in value-neutral terms). The alternative scientific approach of Cultural Universalism (or, if preferred, "Absolutism"), whilst encouraging the formation of factual, scientific comparisons between peoples, does not demand that such judgements be either rash or evaluative, and could never be cited to exculpate scientists who made rash or improperly evaluative comparisons. Thus, Cultural Relativism is not the only answer to hastiness or value-bias; as an answer, indeed, it is rather a clumsy one.

To sum up, wittily or not, Wober's dilemma results from seeking for the social scientist, qua social scientist, a role which accords him special or socio-political influence (in this respect it differs from the kindred "Malinowski's Dilemma", which also issues from cultural relativism, but which arises strictly within the scientific domain). If the social scientist recognises limits to his ex officio responsibilities, he is not thereby debarred from participation, through parties or other pressure groups, in the political process, and thus to discharge to the full his civic duties. Since such activities lie beyond the realm of science, the inhibitions on judgement inherent in a culturally relativistic scientific posture do not apply -- whatever other may. A character in Bill Norton's comedy All in Good Time is interrupted, as he prefaces a pontifical utterance with the words, "Speaking as a physiotherapist ...", by a thick, gravy-pudding voice retorting: "And speaking as a gasworks labourer ...!". Cross-cultural psychologists might as well spare themselves from inviting ripostes of that sort.
It happens to be true that we often, like Plato, think that if our profession ruled the world it would be better governed. Also like Plato, each of us no doubt fancies himself as leader of such a government, in his wilder moments, at least. But, whoever rules, government is bound to have many unforeseen and haphazard results, and the cross-cultural psychologist, like any other specialist, can justifiably and realistically aspire only to make a finite contribution towards its betterment. The more thoroughly his scientific endeavours are pursued -- the more rigorously, and vigorously -- the more will his specialised competence inform the policy and humanity beyond; the more thoroughly he discharges his civic obligations as one of the community, the greater his moral contribution to mankind. However great the overlap, in time, space, and personality, of these two contributions, they are distinct in type, and neither is enhanced by confusing the two.

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NEW PUBLICATIONS

Articles


Dawson, J.L.M.* Hong Kong. In B.B. Wolman, (Ed.) Psychology around the world, in press (* Department of Psychology, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.)


Melikian, L.H., & Karapetian, A.* Personality change over time: Assimilation of an ethnic minority in Lebanon. Journal of Social Psychology, 1977, 103, 185-191. (*Faculty of Education, P.O. Box 2713, Dohar, Qatar)


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RESEARCH FORUM

The nuts and bolts of relevance: how academic psychologists interact with society in Zambia

Academic psychologists in the Third World, as elsewhere, are generally based in universities. Their institutional setting thus prescribes two major activities, teaching and research. In addition, however, it is commonplace for other institutions outside the university to call on Third World academics, both collectively and individually, to explicate and in various degrees to implement the practical implications of their research for the wider society. How should the academic respond to these challenges? I think she or he is best advised to try and perform two types of consultative function in parallel, which I shall call 'helping out' and 'policy development'.

Helping out

This role has fallen to academic psychologists in Zambia, mainly because of the shortage of applied psychologists in the country. Professional workers in the fields of education, industry and medicine, who in industrialised nations would have access to technical assistance from psychologists within their organisations, have often turned to the small Psychology Department at the University of Zambia for minor advice or assistance.

Often these approaches are premised on the avowed academic interests of an individual lecturer or researcher which she or he has expressed in a public lecture, a 'popular' article in a local magazine, or more informally in conversation on a social occasion. Thus, following a recent address to the Psychological Association of Zambia on 'Worker participation in industry' Dr. Phillip Kingsley of our department was approached by the manager of a public corporation for advice about morale among a section of his industry in which productivity was flagging. Some years ago I wrote an article on pictorial perception problems for a magazine published by the Zambia Association for Science Education. As a result the editors of two locally produced magazines for children have consulted me informally about the quality of the illustrations they include in their publications. In addition, I was invited to serve on a working committee of the Ministry of Education concerned with the visual impact of new curriculum materials for use in primary schools. During 1971, the late Dr. Ogboolu Okonji's interest in socialization prompted the Pre-School Association of Zambia to request his advice on the development of materials for nursery schools. In 1974, Dr. Muyunda Mwanalushi approached the National Road Safety Council with a view of initiating research on drivers' behaviour leading to traffic accidents. As a result he has acted since 1975 as a consultant to the Road Traffic Commission and has assisted them in the formulation of testing procedures for driver certificates.

On the other hand, the initiative for consultation may sometimes arise from outsiders' views of what a Psychology Department should be qualified to do. As long ago as 1966, when the department had as yet no clinically qualified personnel, Dr. Jan Deregowski and I were approached from time to time by psychiatrists at the neighbouring mental hospital to help with the psychological assessment of individual patients in their care. These informal consultations have built up over the years a tradition of mutual understanding and cooperation between the hospital and our department which has greatly facilitated the more ambitious policy development enterprise described below. Another quite different example of unsolicited roles assigned from the outside was Dr. Mwanalushi's appointment last year to serve on a sub-committee of the ruling United National Independence Party's Central Committee, concerned with Elections, Publicity and Strategy.

The kind of 'helping out' I have illustrated should be clearly distinguished from more formal types of consultation, such as Professor Alastair Heron's enquiry into the causes of accidents in the Zambian mining industry, the Zambia Language Surveys, the UNESCO report on the impact of education and the information media on racism in Zambia since independence, and the current proposal from WHO for a study of community response to alcohol-related problems in Zambia.

Commissioned research of this kind, whether the initiative originates from national government, private enterprise or an international organization, has both advantages and disadvantages compared to the more informal types of assistance. The commissioned researcher acts with more authority than the informal consultant but usually with more strictly defined terms of reference. Public visibility is more
or less guaranteed for commissioned research, which may ensure a wider impact on thinking about the problem. On the other hand, many politicians and administrators are more receptive to new ideas in the context of informal consultation than when responding to a public report. Formal research carries with it the opportunity for systematic evaluation, generally an attractive prospect for an academic. But for many professional practitioners and administrators such evaluation appears diversionary, threatening or even destructive of morale. Thus the very absence of any formal evaluation may paradoxically constitute an asset of the 'helping out' exercise, by generating mutually supportive attitudes between the academic and practitioners involved.

One of the biggest problems with 'helping out' is that quite often one may feel that the enterprise one is helping with is inherently misconceived. If the problem has been wrongly or inadequately defined, partaking in an attempt to solve it is seldom satisfying. Responses to this dilemma can vary considerably: one may refuse absolutely to become involved except on one's own terms, or (at the other extreme) one may suspend one's broader evaluation and offer 'technical' advice within the constraints of someone else's definition of a problem. An intermediary approach is sometimes feasible. Willingness to help out may earn the academic an entry to more long-term involvement with the agency in question, which will ultimately enable her or him to influence policy more effectively from within than is normally possible from without.

Policy development

Members of our Psychology Department have at various times participated more or less directly in the formulation of government policy. Probably the most central involvement was that of Professor Alastair Heron in the establishment of the now flourishing Educational and Occupational Assessment Service (EOAS) in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services. This unit was charged initially with the creation and administration of verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests for use in the nationwide selection examination for progression from upper primary to lower secondary school. (There are currently available places at this level for less than 20 percent of primary school leavers in Zambia). This task is now managed by the Ministry of Education Psychological Service, and the EOAS concentrates more on selecting employees according to job specification for government, parastatal and private institutions. It also maintains a central register of performance on examinations and tests by all secondary school leavers.

A much more limited contribution towards policy was the participation of Dr. Kingsley and myself in three of the ad hoc committees set up in 1976 within the university to react to the Ministry of Education's Draft Statement on Educational Reform, which contained wide-ranging proposals for change. The committees on which we sat examined the theoretical and practical implications of these proposals in respect of (a) the introduction of peer assessment as a criterion for progression within the school system, (b) the return to a policy of busing instruction in the lower primary grades in the medium of local Zambian languages, and (c) the initiation of a programme for identifying, assessing and providing education for children with special learning difficulties. The reports of these committees are being considered by the Ministry in drawing up its final recommendations.

A long-term and less formally structured policy development exercise in which our department has been involved is the provision of a Psychological Service for Chawama Hills Hospital. Despite its considerable size (about 500 beds) this mental hospital had until last year no establishment provision for a clinical psychologist.
Since 1970, however, a series of supernumerary staff with some relevant training have been seconded to the hospital. The role of our department was initially to map out the range of activities in which these temporary staff could be most usefully engaged, and to guide them in gaining access to relevant local resources. Three main areas of activity were identified: therapy, assessment and test development. A number of attempts have been made in the children's ward to specify behavioural objectives for severely handicapped children and to allocate responsibility among the nursing staff for pursuing these objectives through appropriate instruction. Assessment (which is, of course, an essential step in specifying such objectives) has been the largest single focus of activity, covering not only the handicapped children but also a wide variety of adult patients referred by the psychiatrists for assistance in diagnosis. A large proportion of patients, however, come from rural subsistence communities and have very little formal education; and for people with this background the existing published tests of intellectual and emotional functioning are of dubious relevance. Hence the need for this professional service to undertake research.

Research into test development has been the easiest of the activities to integrate with the university's regular work. From the earlier tradition of the Human Development Research Unit it was only a small step to move in the direction of intellectual test development. Clinical diagnosis stresses different considerations from educational and occupational selection. Ability is mainly of interest to the clinician in relation to the individual's past and present environment, rather than some potential future occupation. This prompted us to embark on a programme of research into conceptions of children's intelligence by rural Zambian communities. One of the para-professional staff of the hospital, Mr. Shadreck Sipu, participated in this research and has continued to work in the Psychological Service. One of our more promising tests was further refined by Ms. Bernice Ezeilo, a student for the M.A. degree and administered with two other measures to samples of urban schoolchildren and handicapped children resident at the hospital. Meanwhile another M.A. graduate from our department, Ms. Olive Allison, became the first formally appointed Clinical Psychologist at the hospital and began to use a number of exploratory instruments in the course of her regular assessment work. Her successor, Ms. Ann Griffiths, has recently taken a number of tests, including several derived from the earlier work, for more formal standardization on a sample of rural adults ranging in age from 20 to 65.

During Ms. Griffiths' absence for research, the regular assessment work of the Psychological Science is being helped out by two new members of our department, Mr. Binney's Mutati and Ms. Birgit Vrang. As will be apparent from this brief sketch, they have available a range of locally developed tests for assessing Zambia patients with little or no formal education. In addition, they can draw, in the case of formally educated patients, on the attainment and ability tests devised by the Ministry of Education Psychological Service and by the EOAS. Imperfect though these various resources may be, they constitute a substantial improvement over the earlier practice of relying for assessment on culturally foreign tests for which no local normative data existed. I am not sure whether the kind of research I have described fits the label 'cross-cultural', but (in response to the qualms expressed in their very different ways by Harry Triandis and Mick Bennett) it does seem to be serving a social need of the community, and it has benefitted from one of the implicit values of cross-cultural psychology, namely cultural relativism.

Who knows what is relevant?

I have tried to show in these remarks that the role of an academic can legitimately overlap with that of an applied psychologist. We have never had any difficulty
persuading our academic colleagues and employers that involvement in the practical undertakings of clinical, educational and industrial psychology is pertinent to our work. If nothing else, such dabbling acquaints lecturers with the problems which their students are going to face when they go out into the big, wide world, and this awareness has tended increasingly to permeate our teaching. There remains a problem of balance in determining the initiative for involvement. Three strategies can be distinguished: (1) responding to demand, (2) monitoring policy development, and (3) raising new issues. Each carries its own dangers.

(1) If an academic responds to a specific request from government to address an issue of policy, she or he takes the risk of failing to meet expectations. The risk is of course, highest when the problem is a big one. Those of us who were involved in the Zambia Language Survey have often been perturbed by public statements implying that the survey, when eventually published, would 'solve' the nation's language problems in a definitive manner!

(2) Monitoring policy involves standing on the sidelines. Sometimes this may be the only stance compatible with moral integrity. But the price you pay for standing aloof may be that you will be cast in the role of a purely destructive critic. Even if a radical change seems the best option, it may still be possible to mitigate the damaging effects of a policy through limited participation while waiting for the big change to come. I view the drastic selection for secondary school places and for industrial employment as politically deplorable features of contemporary Zambian society. But since I see no likelihood of their disappearing in the near future, I have reconciled myself to participating with industrialists and educators in policy discussions aimed at minimizing the injustices in the actual selection process.

(3) Raising new issues is of course an attractive role for academics, and needs little justification. One of the great advantages of the academic life is the time it allocates to developing new ideas. In the context of interaction with the wider society this approach tends to evoke the charge of unrealistic idealism. As an individual one may counter this charge by showing a willingness to 'help out' and to participate in down-to-earth policy development. But there may be a long-term value in retaining a touch of idealism. Most of our university's graduates will receive little encouragement from their employers to question the basic premises of the organizations in which they work. If the seeds of scepticism are sown in their minds in the course of their studies, the hope is that they will become a more powerful force for constructive innovation when they are employed as practising psychologists.

Robert Serpell
University of Zambia
Lusaka, Zambia.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

International Dimensions of Bilingual Education

Date: March 15-18, 1978
Place: Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
Address for further information: Dean James E. Alatis
Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1978
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20057, U.S.A.
Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Psychology

Date: May 2-4, 1978
Place: University of Hawaii
Address for further information: Tony Marsella, Tom Ciborowski, or Roland Tharp
Department of Psychology
Gartley Hall - Room 110
University of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822

Second International Conference on Psychological Stress and Adjustment in Time of War and Peace

Date: June 19-23, 1978
Place: Jerusalem
Address for further information: Norman Milgram
c/o P.O.B. 16271
Tel Aviv, Israel

NATO International Conference on Rehabilitation, Treatment, and Management of Learning Disorders

Date: June 20-24, 1978
Place: Mont. Ste. Marie, Canada
Address for further information: Robert M. Knights
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6

Society for Psychotherapy Research

Date: June 21-24, 1978
Place: Toronto, Canada
Address for further information: Alan S. Gurman
Department of Psychiatry
University of Wisconsin Medical School
Madison, Wisconsin 53706, U.S.A.

World Congress on Future Special Education

Date: June 25 - July 1, 1978
Place: Stirling, Scotland
Address for further information: Council of Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091, U.S.A.

International Council of Psychologists, Inc. Regional Conference on Resolution of Conflict.

Date: July 16-19, 1978
Place: Guilford, Surrey, England
Address for further information: International Council of Psychologists, Inc.
4014 Cody Road
Sherman Oaks, California 91402, U.S.A.
PERSONAL PROFILE

Sushila Singhal

I teach Social Psychology of Education at the Zakir Husain Centre of Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, as part of an interdisciplinary research programme. I received my Ph.D. degree in Tests and Measurement from Calcutta University in 1965 and did thereafter post doctoral research at the University of Illinois, Urbana, SUNY, and State Department of Education New York, Albany, N.Y., U.S.A. for approximately 44 years. My main interest has been in applied research in educational as well as industrial organizations. I finished a report on one of the research projects sponsored by the Indian Council for Social Science Research, entitled Academic leadership and student unrest. Anyone interested in this topic may write to me. Currently I am working on personal, social, psychological and environmental correlates of entrepreneurship, since education for self-reliance is important for most nations - developing and developed. I would be interested if some research collaboration on this is established for obtaining comparable data. My immediate future interest is to probe into the ecology of various groups of poor and non-poor children, relate this to their biochemical, neurophysiological and psychological functioning and derive implications for future intervention strategies.

* * * * * * *

If anyone has actually seen the "skin and bones" profile or knows the address of one of the following people, would they please let us know:

Dr. L.A. Becker, Columbia U.S.A.
Dr. Edward S. Conolly, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
Dr. Henry P. David, Washington, D.C. U.S.A.
Dr. Harry R. Day, Claremont, Calif. U.S.A.
Miss Carolyn S. Hillier, Arlington, Va., U.S.A. Dr. Berta Davis, Tokyo, Japan
Laraine Lippe, New York, U.S.A.
Dr. Kenneth B. Little, Washington, D.C. U.S.A.
Dr. Wallace D. Loh, New Haven, Conn. U.S.A.
Dr. R.E. Lopez, San Luis Obispo, Calif. U.S.A.
Prof. John MacDougall, Los Angeles, Calif. U.S.A.
Mr. Martin L. Maehr, Urbana, Ill. U.S.A.
Mrs. C. Marsh, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.
Mr. Daniel P. Mejia, Irvine, Calif. U.S.A.
Dr. Arnold Mysirur, Washington, D.C. U.S.A.
Dr. James Quen, Los Angeles, Calif. U.S.A.
Dr. Garry L. Quinn, APO San Francisco, U.S.A.

Dr. D. Raddock, Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.
Linda Argiary Rouck, Geneseo, N.Y., U.S.A.
Miss Mary Ann Shaw, Houston, Texas, U.S.A.
Dr. Jing-Jyi Wu, New York, U.S.A.

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American Institute of Research, Washington D.C., U.S.A.
Management Research Center, University of Rochester, N.Y., U.S.A.
Peace Corps Training Center, Puerto Rico.
International Social Science Information Services and Technologies

We would like to find someone in IACCP (and ICP) who would have a special interest in the problems of international communication of psychological data and research results who might be interested in working with us. Please write to: Fred W. Riggs, Political Science Department, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822, U.S.A.

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Request for Information on ANOREXIA NERVOSA

I am currently engaged in research into anorexia nervosa at Salford University, Lancashire, England. I am investigating, as part of my thesis, the cultural implications for the prevalence of this condition in Western Society. I am interested to know how much of a problem anorexia nervosa constitutes in the non-western world. I would be most grateful therefore if you could suggest any means by which I could obtain figures reflecting the incidence of anorexia nervosa across cultures. Please contact: Patricia Hartley, Pool End Close, Macclesfield, Cheshire, England, SK10 2LD.

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- [ ] New Publications
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