

12 Social Psychology

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Studying the Individual and Society: A History of American Social Psychology

American social psychology is commonly defined as the study of how individual cognition, emotion, and behavior are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others (Aronson & Aronson, 2012; Myers, 2012). Social psychologists study a wide variety of phenomena, including attitudes, prejudice and stereotyping, social influence, interpersonal relationships, social conflict, aggression, culture, and altruism (Kruglanski & Stroebe, 2012; van Lange, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2012). They work in many settings, including laboratories and classrooms, the military, health settings, businesses, and industry. Social psychologists engage in basic research, aimed at understanding social cognition, emotion, and behavior, and they also work in applied settings where they use that research to create social change.

How was this particular type of social psychology formulated and how did it become instituted as a common field of study? What kinds of social and intellectual conditions fostered a social psychology that studied topics such as social behavior, attitudes, prejudice, and social influence? How did social psychologists connect with the military, businesses, and industry to apply their work to social issues? Finding answers to these questions requires looking back on more than a hundred years of scholarship focused on the study of social life. The study of social psychology reaches across geographical, temporal, and disciplinary boundaries. Social psychological ideas have been addressed for centuries by philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists all over the world. This chapter, however, focuses primarily on the development of American social psychology, specifically within the field of psychology from the 1800s to the present. American social psychology has a unique history that reflects the social, economic, and political climate of the United States. Furthermore, although social psychology exists as an active subfield in the discipline of sociology, the histories of the two subfields diverge significantly in the early twentieth century.

This chapter begins with an introduction to ideas about social life in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States, exploring different disciplinary and theoretical approaches developed in this period. The establishment of social psychology as a subfield of psychology focused on the social aspects of

the individual is then explored, followed by an examination of social psychology's early textbooks and methods. I then describe the increasingly diverse reach of social psychology in the interwar years and the rapid explosion of social psychological research during World War II. The postwar expansion and solidification of the field is presented with a focus on the large-scale research and training programs that developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, I explore historical and contemporary critiques of the field's methods, subject matter, and approaches.

Social Psychological Thought at the Turn of the Century

In 1890, William James published his monumental two-volume text, *The Principles of Psychology*. In this work, James called attention to an important dimension of self, the *social self*: "A man's Social Self is the recognition which he gets from his mates . . . a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (James, 1890, pp. 293–294). James argued that the individual life is inherently social, filled with envy, pride, love, and ambition and directed by the pursuit of an ideal social self and the desire to please others. For James, the effects of social others on the self were critical in the life and development of the individual.

James's work on the social self was just one among many works to emerge in the late nineteenth century focused on describing the relationship between mind, body, self, and society. Discussions of the social nature of the individual and the structure, function, and development of societies have maintained a constant and dynamic presence in social philosophy for centuries. However, these discussions took on a new form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as new academic disciplines – including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science – began to formalize (D. Ross, 1991; R. Smith, 1997). It is in this context that the field of social psychology was formed.

Studying the Social in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Discussions regarding an organized science of social life became prominent in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, due in part to the social and cultural climate. Instability created by the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and German unification drew attention to concepts such as social change, states, nations, and social class. In an attempt to make sense of these changing social conditions, scholars explored different ways of studying social life. Some of these approaches were holistic, focusing on the study of society, the "social mind," and social collectives. For example, *organicism* was rooted in the idea that society is an integrated entity, comparable to a living organism (Barberis, 2003). This approach was fostered by Charles Darwin's work on

evolution, which provided a natural-scientific framework for thinking about society as an evolving, adapting organism. In Germany, scholars promoted a different kind of science of the social, called *Völkerpsychologie*, an approach that resembled contemporary anthropology. These scholars examined the development and general properties of the “folk mind” or culture, as well as the properties of the cultures of different groups. Wilhelm Wundt, known widely as one of the earliest founders of experimental psychology, also promoted a form of *Völkerpsychologie* that studied the mental products of social life, including language, myth, and customs (Greenwood, 2004; Klautke, 2010).

Organicism and *Völkerpsychologie* influenced many nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars of social life, but many critics saw these approaches as abstract, based on casual observation, philosophy, and anecdote. They were also viewed as being too focused on large-scale social phenomena, with little attention to individuals and the interaction between them (Klautke, 2010). While Wundt’s experimental psychology became the model for experimental psychology in the United States, his program for a *Völkerpsychologie* was practically ignored (Greenwood, 2004).

Alternative approaches to the study of social life were offered by social statisticians. The establishment of statistical offices was widespread in Europe in the early nineteenth century, contributing to increased attention to social phenomena such as crime rates, population, suicide rates, and poverty (Schweber, 2001). Social phenomena became visible and analyzable with social statistics; for example, scholars could now examine crime rates, birth rates, and poverty rates and demonstrate relationships between them, often in hopes of charting social change and solving social problems (Schweber, 2001). Many social statisticians believed that social statistics served as a gateway for understanding the psychology of social life: once social phenomena like fads or the spread of deviance were uncovered through statistical regularity, the psychological processes underlying them could be explored. Some believed this approach could be the basis for a new science called “psycho-sociology” or “social psychology” (Tarde, 1903).

Psychological mechanisms of social life were also explored in nineteenth-century Europe within the rising field of crowd psychology (van Ginneken, 1992). In Italy, Scipio Sighele studied the evolution and characteristics of the criminal crowd. In France, Gustav Le Bon’s work on crowds examined the ways in which “mental contagion” arises from individual thought and behavior. Crowd psychology and the processes behind mental contagion were also explored in France through nineteenth-century work on suggestibility, hypnosis, and altered states of consciousness. Such work drew attention to the importance of how individuals affect one another, forming powerful, complicated hives of social influence. By the end of the nineteenth century, European scholarship was rife with theories, methods, and approaches for understanding the various institutions of social life and their relationship to individual psychology.

Sociology, Psychology, and Social Psychology in the United States

Like European scholars, American scholars were grappling with understanding social life. In the late nineteenth century in the aftermath of the American Civil War, rapidly changing social conditions spurred growing interest in the establishment, development, and dissolution of social institutions (Martindale, 1976; D. Ross, 1991). Rapid immigration contributed to massive population growth and urbanization, both of which dramatically altered the landscape of the United States and contributed to the development of several disciplines devoted to studying social history and social change (R. Smith, 1997). However, collectivist approaches like organicism and *Völkerpsychologie* failed to take root in the United States, a country characterized by individualism; collectivist thinking was alien to the American experience and often associated with authoritarianism (Martindale, 1976). For most early Americans, steeped in progressive, democratic ideals, it was difficult and undesirable to consider society as an organic whole or an independent entity. Collectivist theories of society were therefore greeted with much skepticism.

At this time, two new disciplines were forming in the United States – sociology and psychology – both of which were invested in understanding the individual, society, and the relationship between them. During the 1890s, sociology began to acquire all of the usual procurements of an independent discipline (Martindale, 1976), including the establishment of departments of sociology, the creation of the *American Journal of Sociology*, and the publication of textbooks (D. Ross, 1991). Simultaneously, the field of psychology was also taking its place among the many emerging human sciences. The first graduate programs in psychology began to emerge in the United States in the 1880s, and in 1892, the American Psychological Association was founded. Journals also began to appear in the late nineteenth century, and laboratories were established (Leahey, 2012).

American psychology, with its focus on studying the principles, structures, processes, and contents of the average, normal, adult mind initially had very little input into the study of social life. Nonetheless, both psychologists and sociologists were searching for an approach that could address the abrupt urbanization, labor unrest, and general change and upheaval that was so characteristic of turn-of-the-century American life. The earliest psychology and sociology departments were physically situated in some of the largest and most tumultuous of urban environments – Chicago and New York City. It is not surprising, therefore, that these early sciences turned away from abstract theories toward approaches that could shed light on individual differences, social change, and adaptation (Green, 2009).

The psychology that developed in this context was a functional psychology rooted in evolutionary theory (Green, 2009). Darwin's *Origin of Species* had demonstrated the critical importance of environment in the survival of species, and his work on emotion had begun to demonstrate the possibilities for

applying the theory to humans. Leading psychologists of the late nineteenth century, including William James, James Mark Baldwin, and John Dewey, framed their approaches to the new psychology in the context of evolutionary theory (Baldwin, 1897; James, 1890; Judd, 1910). Studies of abstract mental principles and laws therefore gave way to studies focused on the organism as a coordinated, adaptive, changing unit, and treated mental life or consciousness as an adaptive tool that helped the organism adjust to the environment (James, 1890). One of the outcomes of this shift in perspective was an increased emphasis on the role played by the social environment. As Dewey (1884) explained, mental life could no longer be viewed as “a *rendezvous* in which isolated atomic sensations and ideas may gather” (p. 287). Instead, mental life was considered an integral part of the adapting, changing organism in a constantly changing social and physical environment (Dewey, 1884; James, 1890). Dewey and others promoted a science of psychology that explored the plasticity of human thought and behavior, the creation of social habits, and the general ways in which organisms adapted to both the natural and social environment (Baldwin, 1897; James, 1890; Judd, 1910). Scholars interested in psychological approaches to consciousness began expanding their approaches to examine “social consciousness,” “social habits,” “social activities,” and the “social environment” (Baldwin, 1896; Washburn, 1903).

Sociologists, too, were establishing themselves as experts on the study of the relationship between the individual and society, exploring the development of the social self, the importance of language in social relationships, and the patterns and properties underlying group life (Martindale, 1976; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018). Their work was similar to that of psychologists studying the social individual, though from the beginning, sociologists were more interested in social institutions and social groups, while psychologists attended to individual psychological processes. Leading sociologist Charles Ellwood, for example, saw sociology as the study of group-level concepts such as the family, mob behavior, and political revolutions (Ellwood, 1899). Sociologists also tended to view the relationship between the individual and society as being bidirectional, and many saw the psychological individual as an abstract idea: the individual was both a product and producer of social life and could not be understood outside of it. George Herbert Mead (1910), for example, studied the meaning that arises from social interaction between individuals, and how this meaning then comes to shape social relationships. Charles Horton Cooley (1902) similarly studied the “looking glass self,” focusing on how the individual self is defined through social relations. Cooley argued that social organization and specifically, primary groups such as the family, are central in creating and carrying meaning for the individual. Both Mead and Cooley criticized psychologists for proposing a unidirectional, causal relationship between environmental factors and individual behavior and consciousness. Furthermore, they criticized psychology’s method of constructing the psychological individual as something that could be separated from the social context.

The Rise of Psychological Social Psychology in the United States

At the turn of the twentieth century, the study of social life was pursued enthusiastically and simultaneously by both psychologists and sociologists, focusing on a wide variety of topics using many different kinds of methods. By the 1920s, however, a very tangible split began to form between psychologists studying the social individual and sociologists studying larger-scale phenomena such as groups, communities, and the “collective mind” (Good, 2000). Psychologists, focusing on consciousness and habit formation in the individual, began to claim social psychology as the study of the social aspects of individual consciousness and behavior. This turn toward the study of the individual mirrored the trends of general psychology at the time. As Kantor (1922) noted in his review of psychological textbook writing, several trends had gained prominence in the field, including increased attention to objectivity, less borrowing from other disciplines, an increased focus on psychological data and on the nervous system, and a dismissal of subject matter that could not be studied using objective scientific methods. This objectivist framework seemed particularly important for social psychology, due to the social and political nature of its subject matter; it was believed that experimental methods might serve as a buffer for inevitable biases (Young, 1923). Harvard psychologist Floyd Allport was the most vocal critic of sociological forms of social psychology, and a strong proponent for a social psychology of the individual. He argued that while sociologists could describe groups, only a reductionist, natural-scientific psychology could explain them (F. Allport, 1924). There was a growing consensus among psychologists that social psychology should be the scientific study of the behavior of individuals toward and in response to other individuals and the roots of such behavior in the nervous system (S. Smith & Guthrie, 1923).

Sociologists, meanwhile, continued to explore large-scale social phenomena such as social customs and social institutions, examining how they are formed, how they function, and how they break down. The differences between sociological and psychological approaches to the study of social phenomena are perhaps best evidenced by the contents of two leading journals of the time. Articles published in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, a publication edited by psychologists, focused on individual adjustment and behavior and argued against the scientific study of group-level concepts. These included an article by Robert Gault (1921) arguing against the notion of studying collective concepts, an article by Floyd and Gordon Allport (1921) interpreting personality as a social stimulus that produces adjustment and response, an article on sympathy as a conditioned reflex (Humphrey, 1922), and a host of articles discussing instincts as the basis of social behavior (e.g., Hocking, 1921). This content stands in rather stark contrast to the articles published during the same period in the *American Journal of Sociology*, a publication edited by sociologists. The publication included an article on the social organism (Park,

1921), an article on the importance of understanding culture (Herskovitz & Willey, 1923), an observational study of neighborhoods in Columbus, Ohio (McKenzie, 1922), and a study of culture and group conflict (Case, 1922). By the 1920s, a division of labor had clearly begun in terms of explaining and describing social life. The rise of laboratory studies in 1920s psychological social psychology solidified this division, and psychological social psychologists firmly devoted themselves to the development of a psychological science focused on the social aspects of individual cognition, emotion, and behavior.

Textbooks and Early Definitions of Social Psychology

In the early twentieth century, social psychology began to formalize into a recognizable, independent field of study. This was due in part to the publication of the first textbooks of social psychology. In 1908, two textbooks appeared almost simultaneously: Edward A. Ross's *Social Psychology* and William McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology*. The two works presented two very different versions of the field. Ross (1908) viewed social psychology as the study of social forms and processes that result from interactions between individuals. For example, Ross believed social psychologists should study the ways in which psychological processes like imitation result in social phenomena such as crowd behaviors and fashion trends. McDougall's view of social psychology was quite different. For him, social psychology was the study of how society and social aspects of the individual arose out of inherited natural instincts and capacities (McDougall, 1908). Though both these early texts were successful, neither became a standard textbook for the emerging field of social psychology. Ross's text was critiqued for its reliance on anecdotal rather than observational or experimental evidence. Psychologists saw it as part of an antiquated tradition of philosophical analysis and therefore out of step with the new, objective psychology (Washburn, 1908). McDougall's book was better received, but few seemed to see it as a book about social psychology. Instead, they evaluated it as a book about instincts and innate tendencies (Rudmin, 1985).

In 1924, Floyd Allport published the first textbook on social psychology to fully adhere to the new objective framework that was so appealing to psychologists in the early twentieth century. In this text, Allport (1924) defined social psychology as the scientific study of individual behavior and consciousness. He saw social psychology as a simple extension of general psychology, studying social stimuli and social responses. Allport argued that although social behavior might be more complex, it was not really any different from the kinds of behaviors studied daily within the psychological laboratories that had spread across the United States in the early twentieth century. Reactions to people, he argued, were no different than reactions to objects; both involved a state of need or maladjustment in the organism, followed by a behavior aimed at adjustment or adaptation of the individual to the environment. Both, he argued, could be studied objectively and experimentally.

Floyd Allport's *Social Psychology* served as a sort of manifesto for the field, providing psychologists with a clear definition of social psychology. It also promoted social psychology as a distinct subfield of psychology, something that further alienated sociologists, who were also studying the individual and society. In his work, Allport had argued that social institutions, culture, groups, and other sociological topics were reducible to individual psychological processes and that sociologists must rely on psychological explanations of these kinds of phenomena. Understandably, sociologists attempted to refute Allport's social psychology, arguing that it was reductionist and mechanical, ignoring the reality of social phenomena and the influence they exert over individuals (Graumann, 1986; Greenwood, 2004). In the 1920s, many psychologists therefore came to practice a kind of social psychology very different from that practiced by sociologists.

Establishing Experimental Social Psychology

The early twentieth-century focus on the individual responding to the social environment gained considerable traction in the United States when a new research paradigm was created for exploring this topic experimentally. This new paradigm opened up the possibility for social psychology's contemporary focus on measuring the psychological effects of social stimuli such as the actual or imagined presence of others. The earliest and most well-known experiment in this arena was published in 1898 by Norman Triplett. Triplett (1898) was interested in how the presence of spectators and fellow cyclists affected the performance of cyclists. To explore this idea, he devised an experiment where children performed activities alone or along with other children. Triplett found that children completed their tasks more quickly when they worked alongside others compared with when they worked alone. Triplett's work demonstrated a way of studying interindividual influence and has come to be known as the first study of *social facilitation*, the tendency for individuals to perform differently and usually better in the presence of others (Guérin, 1993).

Psychologists interested in social influence also drew on work done in Germany. German teachers and scholars had begun conducting experiments observing performance on academic tasks completed alone in the home environment versus in a group in the classroom (Burnham, 1910). The studies demonstrated that the individual is affected by the presence of others and that these effects are systematic and measurable. The effects of social others on the individual were also demonstrated by German scholar Walther Moede, who studied how the presence of others affects performance on a variety of tasks including attention, memory, and word association tasks (Danziger, 2000).

Floyd Allport also experimented with social influence in the laboratory. Drawing on Moede's work, Allport (1920) examined how the presence of others affects judgment, free association, analytic thinking, and other tasks. Aside from Triplett's studies, Allport's were the first of this kind in North America. They also differed from the work done in Germany in that Allport employed

adult subjects as opposed to children; this difference was significant, since children were thought to be much more susceptible to social influences. Furthermore, Allport's experiments were much more systematic, conforming to the ideals of laboratory experimentation emphasized in psychology at the time. His work on social facilitation was well-received and sparked interest in the area in the 1920s, giving rise to a number of experiments on the influence of others on individual behavior (Dashiell, 1935; Guérin, 1993).

The Expansion of American Social Psychology in the Interwar Years

Armed with a definable subject matter, textbooks, and research paradigms, American social psychology expanded quickly, adopting the methods and approaches of individual psychology and applying them to various aspects of social life. Though the field continued to be diverse in subject matter and method, there was a growing consensus among psychologists that social psychology should strive to be scientific, objective, quantitative, and rooted in systematic observation and experiment (Murphy & Murphy, 1931). In this period, social psychologists moved away from their focus on defining the field and its methods and began delving into social psychological research.

The research conducted in social psychology between the two world wars was diverse, guided by influences within the field as well as by the currents and concerns of interwar American society. Social psychologists enthusiastically explored applications of this new approach to the study of a wide range of topics, including social influence and group behavior. They also drew on the successes experienced by general psychology in World War I, and began to explore the objective measurement of inner social psychological states, such as attitudes and stereotypes. Finally, interwar social psychologists began to explore the possibilities of applying social psychology to pressing social problems such as race relations, poverty, intergroup relations, and labor relations. By the time the United States entered World War II, social psychology had cast a wide and promising net within psychology and within American society.

The Study of Interindividual Influence

One of the most popular areas of early research was the study of the "individual in the group situation" (Murphy & Murphy, 1931). Following the experimental paradigm established by Moede, Floyd Allport, and others, psychologists studied how individuals influence the behavior of one another. The goal of these studies was to uncover widely applicable laws of social behavior (Dashiell, 1935). For example, does task accuracy increase or decrease with the presence of others? Does competition help or hinder performance? How does behavior vary as the number of people present varies? In its simplest form, this type of social psychology explored how the presence and behavior of one or more

individuals affected the behavior of others. This line of investigation was very amenable to experimental methods; researchers made slight changes to the social variables of the situation, including the number of people present, whether they were passively observing the experimental subject or also participating in a task, and whether they were in competition or cooperation (Dashiell, 1935). Researchers manipulated these variables and observed changes in behavior as a result of these variations, using tasks common to general psychology (e.g., multiplication speed and accuracy, word associations, recall, problem-solving). These kinds of studies were further extended, as social psychologists began adding multiple levels of variables to their work. For example, they explored how individual differences such as intelligence and attitudes interacted with findings on social influence. They also explored how incentives and praise interacted with competition or cooperation to influence performance (Dashiell, 1935). These early studies seemed to demonstrate the vast possibilities of a new experimental, laboratory-based social psychology.

The Study of Groups

At the same time that many social psychologists began exploring interindividual influence, others turned their attention to groups. Initially, the earliest kinds of these studies were very much tied to studies of interindividual influence, with a focus on how the presence of others affects individual judgment and perception. For example, a group of individuals would be given a perceptual or recall task like viewing two very similar images for a set amount of time, and then they were asked to recall the differences between the two images. The group would then be directed to discuss their individual findings and indicate the number of differences again. Invariably, group discussion led to better performance and strongly impacted individual judgments (Dashiell, 1935).

Other researchers, however, believed that interindividual influence did not fully explain the processes that were at work when individuals come together in a group. Social psychologist Muzafer Sherif's work on frames of reference demonstrates this alternative theoretical approach. Sherif (1935) exposed his participants to a motionless light and asked them to estimate the distance that it moved. They did this alone, or in the presence of others who called out their estimates. When individuals were tested together, calling out their answers for others to hear, their responses began to converge over the course of a hundred trials, with all individuals eventually estimating within the same narrow range of distances. Sherif (1935) argued that this demonstrated the establishment of a social norm, used as a frame of reference by the individuals in the group. The emphasis of Sherif's work was not on other individuals as stimuli for behavior; instead, it was on social factors of the group situation, such as social norms or frames of reference.

Research on social groups also gained prominence in the 1930s through the work of Kurt Lewin, a psychologist who immigrated to the United States from Nazi Germany in 1933 (Marrow, 1969). Lewin's approach to social

psychology – focused on studying the climate, function, and dynamics of social groups – was very different from that of his American colleagues. Lewin and his students observed groups, often manipulating the climate of the group. While social psychologists who were focused on individuals tended to study the simple presence or absence of others and record performance on common tasks, Lewin examined how groups changed and behaved, keeping detailed observation records of these changes, with the idea that each study brought the field closer to understanding the laws of group dynamics.

In the interwar years, Lewin also pioneered the laboratory study of groups, demonstrating that the kinds of social issues that were important in the 1930s could be studied in the laboratory. In 1939, Lewin and his students created experimental groups and assigned them different kinds of leaders: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders. They then observed these groups, recording variables such as productivity and cooperation levels. This study was just one example of Lewin's work, which opened up the vast possibilities for studying social groups in the laboratory (Marrow, 1969).

The Study of Attitudes and Public Opinion

In addition to studying individual and group behavior directly, social psychologists of the interwar period also studied internal aspects of the individual that affected social behavior. The study of attitudes and public opinion was one of the most successful and enduring areas of concentration in early American social psychology. Between 1920 and 1940, research on attitudes and public opinion took center stage in the field (G. Allport, 1954). As government interest in social trends and public opinion gained traction in the 1920s, social psychologists began exploring ways to define and measure these constructs. The rise of this kind of research can also be attributed to the extensive military testing program designed and administered by psychologists during World War I. During the war, psychologists created the first group tests of intelligence and administered them to almost 2 million recruits. This wide-scale testing program seemed to demonstrate the vast possibilities for objective testing of individual differences in psychology (Kevles, 1968). Furthermore, the use of paper-and-pencil tests seemed to provide an objective, scientific method of measuring seemingly subjective qualities of the individual. The period between the two world wars therefore witnessed an explosion of psychological testing of all kinds of abilities, interests, and aptitudes, and it provided psychologists with a new audience and clientele and a new way of understanding the inner life of the individual (R. Smith, 1997).

By the 1930s, social psychologists were studying social attitudes and public opinion related to all types of relevant social issues such as labor relations, religion, and war (G. Allport, 1935). The study of attitudes also opened the door for studying stereotypes, which – like attitudes – were viewed as creating a psychological state within the individual, readying him or her for action. Though the word “attitude” was scarce in the first two decades of the twentieth

century, by 1930, it appeared in 80 percent of psychology and sociology texts (Danziger, 1997). This was partially due to the fact that psychologists began pioneering new, useful methods for measuring attitudes, leading to the development of several widely used attitude scales (Murphy & Murphy, 1931).

The Study of Race and Culture

The study of attitudes was related to the study of race and culture, an important area of research that flourished in the interwar period. In the 1930s, social psychologists explored the cultural and social bases of racial differences, responding to the prevalent belief that such differences were innate (Jackson, 2001). Working with children from the Yakima Indian Reservation and a sample of white children, Otto Klineberg (1927) found that Indian children valued accuracy over speed, a cultural difference that led them to perform more poorly than white children on standard intelligence tests. Klineberg (1935) also worked with African American children from the south and the north, as well as African Americans who migrated from the south to the north. He found that the intelligence scores of northern African Americans far exceeded those of southern African Americans and nearly matched those of white northerners. Further, when African Americans from the south moved north, their scores improved over time. Klineberg and others used their work to argue for the environmental influence of racial differences in standard intelligence scores, demonstrating the important influence of the social and educational environment.

This turn toward understanding the social and cultural bases of difference led to research on social inequality and the psychological factors that contribute to it, including racial stereotyping and racial prejudice (Jackson, 2001). It also encouraged the study of the development of racial attitudes and racial identity in children. It was in this period that Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark began their seminal work on racial identity in African-American children. In the late 1930s, Mamie examined the development of racial identity in children, concluding that African-American children became aware of their own race at a very young age. She and Kenneth built on this research in the 1940s, conducting their well-known “doll studies” (Clark & Clark, 1947). In these studies, the Clarks presented children with black and white dolls and gauged their racial preferences, their knowledge of racial stereotypes, and their own racial identification. Children indicated, for example, which doll was the nice doll, which doll they wanted to play with, and which doll looked like them. The Clarks found that the children preferred the white doll and saw it as the “good” doll. They cited this as strong evidence of low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority in African-American children. In the 1950s, the Clarks, along with Otto Klineberg and several other social scientists, used their findings on prejudice, racial attitudes, and racial identity to testify in *Brown v. Board of Education*, a case that ended legal segregation in the United States in 1954 (Jackson, 2001). These studies of racial attitudes would gain further traction during and after World

War II, as the powerful grip of German antisemitism demonstrated the possible consequences of prejudice and stereotyping. The divisiveness of such attitudes, their incompatibility with American ideals of democracy and freedom, and the wartime focus on group unity and harmony all served as a catalyst for further exploration of prejudice and experimentation with methods of prejudice reduction. After the war, racial attitudes were studied intensely and the topic continues to be central in contemporary social psychology (Jackson, 2001).

The Study of Social Issues

Much of the early research on race and prejudice was done by social psychologists who were part of a new group devoted to exploring the application of social psychology to pressing social issues. This group grew out of the difficulties of the Great Depression and the stark reality of unemployment for psychologists. Like the rest of the nation, psychologists struggled to find work in the midst of the Depression, with more qualified candidates than open positions (Nicholson, 1997). This group began pressuring the American Psychological Association (APA) to use their power to address unemployment among psychologists, along with the myriad of social issues facing the nation in the 1930s, including poverty, labor disputes, and fascism. After much resistance from the APA, these psychologists founded an independent group – the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) – focused on using a socially and politically engaged psychology to examine and ameliorate social problems (Nicholson, 1997).

Founded in 1936, SPSSI became an important central hive for the development of social psychology in the 1930s and 1940s, bringing together groups of psychologists working on socially relevant issues and advocating for the role of social psychology in American society. Many of American social psychology's most prolific writers, researchers, and mentors grew up within the close-knit network of social psychology created by SPSSI, including Gordon and Floyd Allport, Kurt Lewin, Muzafer Sherif, and Gardner Murphy. This growing network and its focus on ameliorating social problems would take on an increasingly expansive role in the field as the United States readied itself for involvement in a global conflict.

Social Psychology and World War II

In the years leading up to World War II, social psychologists were prepared to offer expertise and assistance (Herman, 1995). Textbooks and handbooks had been published, promising lines of research had been developed, and the possibilities for applying this work were being fruitfully explored. The distinct climate of World War II also helped to encourage the participation of social psychologists. The power of propaganda had been demonstrated in World War I and the US government was very interested in research on propaganda,

persuasion, morale, public opinion, and attitudes (Faye, 2007). Social psychologists – with their focus on topics such as attitudes, group dynamics, social influence, and social issues – were suddenly much-sought-after experts.

In the 1930s, social psychologists began taking advantage of this situation, putting their expertise to work in war-related projects and research. By 1942, a large number of social psychologists were employed by government agencies (Cartwright, 1948), and perhaps even more were engaged in war-related research and teaching on college campuses. Studies of attitudes seemed to provide an inroad for understanding both civilian and military support for the war, and studies of attitude change served as a platform for understanding the effects of morale-boosting efforts and propaganda campaigns.

The most extensive work on attitudes was conducted by the Information and Education Division of the War Department's Research Branch. Headed up by sociologist Samuel Stouffer, a team of psychologists and sociologists carried out a massive survey program examining the attitudes of enlisted men, officers, and military personnel (Ryan, 2013). They explored soldiers' wartime needs and difficulties to gauge ways of improving military morale. They examined attitude formation, change, and stability in relation to performance, military morale, psychological casualties, and other factors, suggesting methods of improving outcomes. By the end of the war, they had conducted more than two hundred surveys and tested more than a half a million officers and enlisted men. The results were used by the government in policy planning and implementation (Ryan, 2013). This project demonstrated the vast possibilities of social survey methods and attitude measurement. It also created relationships between social scientists, the military, the government, and funding agencies.

Studies of attitude formation and change also served as a gateway for studies of persuasion. As wartime social psychologists turned their attention to morale and propaganda, they began exploring how different kinds of messages and mediums persuade audiences. The army – seeking a way to employ films, television, and radio to invoke attitude change – provided opportunities for social psychologists to put their experimental methods and measurement techniques to work. From 1942 to 1945, Yale psychologist Carl Hovland worked with Stouffer's Research Branch exploring attitude change. Their work (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949) demonstrated how experimental techniques could be used to determine how factors such as message timing, source credibility, and audience intelligence affect attitude formation and change. For example, using army training films to present persuasive messages, Hovland and his team examined the effectiveness of one-sided versus two-sided messages. They found that messages that present both sides of an argument are more effective for attitude change (Hovland et al., 1949). At the end of the war, Hovland and his colleagues used funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to set up the Yale Communication and Attitude Change Program, which served as a training ground for social psychologists like Philip Zimbardo, Harold Kelley, Irving Janis, and Muzafer Sherif, who went on to become leaders of the field in the postwar world.

Another large-scale collaborative wartime project was headed up by psychologist Rensis Likert, working with the United States Department of Agriculture's Division of Program Surveys. Likert and a team of two hundred employees conducted massive surveys and intensive interviews, collecting and analyzing attitude and opinion data on civilian reactions to wartime policies and efforts (Capshew, 1999). After the war, Likert also headed up the US Strategic Bombing Survey, focused on analyzing the effects of bombing on civilian morale in Germany and Japan (Capshew, 1999). Likert and his team interviewed thousands of German and Japanese civilians, finding that while bombing seemed to impact civilian morale, the effects were perhaps smaller than officials had anticipated. These are just a few of the examples of the kinds of massive, collaborative projects that were undertaken by social psychologists during World War II. Social psychologists also launched large-scale research projects on wartime rumor and morale (Faye, 2007), racial tensions on the home front (Herman, 1995) and studies of civilian food habits and rationing (Wansink, 2002).

It is almost impossible to grasp the extent to which American social psychology expanded and diversified during World War II. Once the war was over, social psychology grew exponentially. In 1948, the Personality and Social Psychology division of the APA had 339 members; by 1960, it had 1,346 (Tryon, 1963), nearly a 300 percent membership increase. The 1940s served as a serious springboard for the coming "golden age" of social psychology, characterized by the classic and memorable experiments of Leon Festinger, Solomon Asch, Muzafer and Carolyn Wood Sherif, and Stanley Milgram. Indeed, World War II was a watershed event in the establishment of social psychology as a distinct, legitimate, and socially relevant field of study.

"The Golden Age" and the Postwar World

As the war ended, social psychology entered what has since become known as its "golden age" (Sewell, 1989). The early years of the golden age were characterized by interdisciplinary connections and collaborations, a flurry of research activity on new social psychological topics, increased attention to social cognition, a focus on development and testing of social psychological theories, and the expansion of available research methods and statistical techniques. The war had opened up a new space for social psychology within the social and behavioral sciences as well as within the landscape of American society. The social psychology that emerged after World War II looked very different from the one that had begun to form in the 1930s. In this period, social psychology began to consolidate itself as a self-conscious discipline.

Interdisciplinarity

The interdisciplinary collaborations and connections that had been initiated during the war served as a foundation for building research infrastructure in the

postwar period. Social psychologists had experienced and witnessed successful collaborations of psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and statisticians during the war. Leaders of the field sought to continue the success of their wartime collaborations through the establishment of collaborative teams housed together in departments and research centers. In the postwar period, funding agencies like the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and the Social Science Research Council were eager to fund interdisciplinary projects and approaches, serving as further incentive for this kind of research (Capshew, 1999; Sewell, 1989). Funding relationships established with the US government also continued to thrive after the war, providing abundant support for interdisciplinary collaborations (Capshew, 1999).

These factors contributed to the establishment of several interdisciplinary research centers, departments, and projects. In 1946, the Harvard Department of Social Relations was formed, drawing directly on interdisciplinary wartime projects (G. Allport & Boring, 1946). The Yale Institute for Human Relations, which had been established in 1929, gained impetus from interdisciplinary wartime study, exploring factors related to war, peace, culture, and personality (May, 1971). The University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center was also established during the war and flourished afterwards, conducting surveys on a variety of topics including mass communication, intergroup relations, political affairs, and postwar problems. Columbia University established a similar enterprise, the Survey Research Center (Sewell, 1989).

Perhaps the most successful postwar interdisciplinary research enterprise, however, was the Institute for Social Research (ISR), established in 1949 at the University of Michigan. The ISR grew directly out of social psychological wartime efforts and projects. Likert, sensing that the scope of government survey work would decrease in the postwar period, sought a new home for survey projects and for the people that he had collaborated with during the war. He suggested a university-based survey center that would focus on survey research and its applications to social problems. Established in 1946 at the University of Michigan, the Survey Research Center explored political, economic, and voting behavior. Likert and his team also studied organizational behavior, examining variables such as productivity and employee satisfaction in a variety of organizations (House et al., 2014). In 1947, the Survey Research Center expanded to incorporate the Research Center for Group Dynamics, a research group established by Kurt Lewin at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1945. The Research Center grew out of Lewin's work on group dynamics and his wartime experience using basic research to study and ameliorate social problems. When Lewin died in 1947 and MIT's support for the Research Center waned, it was moved to Michigan and joined with the Survey Research Center to form the Institute for Social Research (ISR; Seashore, 1958). The ISR served as a significant incubator for social psychological training and research in the postwar period. The Research Center for Group Dynamics was led by Lewin's students, who conducted pioneering research on group productivity and efficiency, leadership, communication and perception,

and intergroup relations (Cartwright, 1950; Seashore, 1958). They also continued Lewin's methodological tradition of combining laboratory research and field studies and applying findings to social problems (Collier, Minton, & Reynolds, 1991). Between 1945 and 1950, the Research Center for Group Dynamics issued more than a hundred publications and dissertations (Marrow, 1969). By 1954, the ISR had more than three hundred staff members from a variety of academic backgrounds working together on social research and social issues (Seashore, 1958).

New Areas of Research

Looking back on social psychology's history, Dorwin Cartwright (1979) stated, "If I were required to name the one person who has had the greatest impact upon the field, it would have to be Adolf Hitler" (p. 84). Indeed, many of the topics pursued by social psychologists in the postwar period reflect the desire to understand the war. Social psychologists' experiences living through the war served as a catalyst for postwar research focused on intergroup conflict, authoritarianism, conformity, and prejudice. While they had conducted research on these topics prior to the war, they delved into them with fervor in the postwar period, trying to understand unfathomable events like the war itself, the power of dictatorship, and the Holocaust.

In 1949, Muzafer and Carolyn Wood Sherif, seeking to understand how intergroup conflicts begin and how they might be resolved, began their now famous Robbers Cave Studies. In these studies, the Sherifs (Sherif & Sherif, 1953) divided boys at a summer camp into two groups and observed group cohesion, the development of intergroup conflict, and situations necessary for instigating intergroup cooperation. They reported that when groups share a common goal or must work together to solve a common problem, cooperation ensues (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). The SPSSI also addressed the issue of conflict, using social psychological research and theory to argue that war is unnecessary and avoidable (Murphy, 1945).

The 1950s also witnessed a burst of research on conformity and social pressures, arising in the wake of postwar, McCarthy-era concerns about communism. In the postwar years, the focus shifted from interindividual social influence to social pressure, conformity, and compliance. In 1956, Solomon Asch published a series of studies examining the social conditions under which individuals conform to or dissent from group opinions and judgments. Demonstrating that individuals conform to a majority group's opinion approximately 38 percent of the time, Asch then explored how factors such as the size of the majority group and the presence of group dissenters affected conformity and independence (Asch, 1956). Asch (1955) employed his findings to argue that while conformity can lead us to make glaring errors, changes in the social situation can encourage independent thinking.

This focus on social pressure and compliance is perhaps most visible in Stanley Milgram's studies of obedience to authority, where research

participants were instructed to deliver increasingly strong shocks to another person under the precept of participating in a study of learning. Milgram believed this study, finding that most people obeyed the scientist and delivered the shocks, explained how the Holocaust and mass genocide were possible (Milgram, 1963). Milgram, Sherif and Sherif, Asch, and other social psychologists looked at the social world created during wartime and attempted to make sense of it using social psychological science. This resulted in a social psychology that was bursting with new research programs focused on topics with high social relevance.

Theoretical Developments

The postwar years also saw the development of several new and powerful theoretical approaches that provided social psychologists with a platform upon which to build entire research programs. In the 1950s, social psychologists had access to masses of wartime data and computers that allowed for storage and processing of large datasets, enabling the testing of complex theoretical models involving multiple variables (Sewell, 1989). These new theories prompted social psychological work that was more focused on hypothesis generation and theory testing and less focused on testing basic problems and answering singular questions in the laboratory (Krech & Crutchfield, 1948). This new foray into extensive theory building undoubtedly grew in part out of wartime collaborations, which encouraged a team approach to social psychological research, where groups of researchers join together to test various hypotheses related to some central theory. This approach, which remains common today, established strong programs of research passed from one generation of social psychologists to another.

This focus on theory building and testing was particularly prevalent among Kurt Lewin's students. Lewin strongly believed that effective social psychological research and action depended on the development of a good social psychological theory or framework. As his biographer explains, Lewin believed experiments should be undertaken "with the purpose of testing theoretical concepts, instead of merely collecting and analyzing elemental facts of classifying behavior statistically" (Marrow, 1969, p. 30). His field theory, developed in the 1930s and 1940s, served as an example of how a wide variety of hypotheses and experiments could be gleaned from a single framework.

The theory of cognitive dissonance serves as one such example. Although theories of cognitive balance and consistency were in development prior to World War II, they burgeoned in the 1950s, partly because of the intense research done on communication, attitudes, persuasion, and influence during the war. The most well-known and perhaps most influential of these approaches was Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Festinger, a student of Lewin and a leader at the Research Center for Group Dynamics, proposed that psychological discomfort arises when an individual has two ideas or cognitions that are inconsistent or contradictory (Festinger, 1957). In order to reduce this

discomfort, individuals change opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors to create consistency. Between 1957 and 1975, more than five hundred journal articles and two hundred dissertations were published focusing on or incorporating ideas from cognitive dissonance theory. Other theoretical approaches of the postwar period included attribution theory, social comparison theory, social learning theory, role theory, and achievement striving (Lindzey & Aronson, 1985).

The Rise of Social Cognition

One of the most visible characteristics of postwar American social psychology is the focus on social cognition. While prewar social psychologists focused primarily on behavior and stimulus–response relationships, postwar social psychologists increasingly studied internal cognitive states. Wartime studies of attitudes, ideologies, and social control convinced social psychologists and their audiences that understanding how we interpret and assimilate information from the social world required more than a stimulus–response psychology focused on behavior (Zajonc, 1968). Behaviorism began to loosen its grip on psychology in the 1950s and 1960s, and cognitive psychology was on the rise (Miller, 2003). Psychologists focused on studying individuals as “naïve scientists” and fallible problem-solvers who make sense of the world around them in predictable ways (Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1956). The study of social cognition and social perception, begun prior to the war, found a much more willing audience after the war.

Lewin’s influence can also be seen in social psychology’s focus on cognition. Lewin, who had been influenced by German gestalt psychology, strongly valued thinking and perception and studied the assimilation of new experiences into an organized perceptual system (Marrow, 1969). Lewin saw behavior as a function of both the inward states of the person and the environment, where the environment includes not just the physical environment, but the psychological environment, consisting of the subjective experiences of the person. His perspective diverged considerably from that of the behaviorists, and his experimental work demonstrated that psychological research could succeed beyond the study of stimulus–response relationships in a behaviorist framework (Kelley, 1980).

The work of Fritz Heider, a colleague of Kurt Lewin, also served as a catalyst for a cognitively oriented social psychology. Heider, a German scholar influenced by gestalt psychology and Lewinian field theory, used the principles of gestalt psychology to explore social perception (Collier et al., 1991). After immigrating to the United States in 1930, he published his work on *balance theory*, which focused on how perceptions of and relationships with people and objects create internal states of psychological balance and imbalance (Heider, 1958). Balance theory suggests that interpersonal relationships are strongly influenced by perceptions of balance. Imbalance arises when two people dislike one another or when two people who like one another have different feelings toward some third person or some object. When such perceived imbalances

arise, people change their social worlds to restore balance. Heider's work stressed the importance of understanding not just the external, objective relationships between persons and objects, but the internal perceptions of those relationships. Heider's work created a strong theoretical foundation for exploring the role of social perception and interpersonal relationships and the myriad of internal factors that influence them (Heider, 1958).

Crises, Critiques, and Current Status

The distinct character of postwar social psychology, with its flurry of research activity, theory generation, and interdisciplinary teamwork, lasted well into the 1970s. It took place against the backdrop of the optimism associated with the postwar boom in the American economy, the politically divisive environment of the McCarthy era, and the social unrest and revolution spurred by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. The rapid growth and change in social psychology during these years accompanied rapid growth and change in American postwar society. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the postwar promise of social psychology seemed to be fading. Several of the interdisciplinary departments and programs that had been established in the postwar period began to disband, including the Harvard Department of Social Relations in 1972 and the Yale Institute of Human Relations in 1955 (May, 1971). This was due in part to a lack of infrastructure to support these initiatives: research funding provided by military contracts, foundations, and government agencies, so readily available in the postwar period, began to dissipate (Cartwright, 1979). In short, institutional support structures that had nurtured postwar social psychology eventually began to wane, providing decreased resources for the field (Sewell, 1989).

During this same time, the field became the subject of both internal and external critiques of many different kinds. Even as the social psychologists of the golden age continued to rapidly produce theory and gather research results, questions and concerns arose regarding the field's subject matter, practices, and methods. In the context of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, when the United States was steeped in the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, many began to challenge the relevance of social psychology, questioning whether the discipline contributed anything substantive to society and whether it contributed to or ameliorated problems of inequality, prejudice, and power imbalance (Faye, 2012). Many looked to the field of social psychology to solve society's most pressing social problems and instead found a field steeped in laboratory data, far removed from the realities of the social world. Many within the field began to wonder whether experimental methods could adequately address socially relevant problems, arguing that in their attempt to acquire scientific status, social psychologists had given up the study of topics that were of gravest importance, but not easily studied in the laboratory: culture, meaning, and social context (Faye, 2012).

Concerns about the relevance of social psychology were strongly tied to concerns about the validity of laboratory findings. In the 1960s, social psychologists began to explore the experiment itself as a social psychological situation, where experimenter bias and participants' desire to please the experimenter often played a significant role in determining social-psychological findings (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969). A new area of research, deemed the "social psychology of the psychological experiment," came into existence and exposed a myriad of social variables at work in the laboratory setting, calling some of the field's most enduring findings into question (Rosenberg, 1965). Others believed the problems plaguing social psychology had more complex roots. Kenneth Gergen (1973) questioned the basic philosophical foundations and assumptions of the field, arguing that since social psychological subject matter is so dependent on time and place, it could not hope to formulate general laws. He argued that, instead, social psychologists should study their subject matter historically, contextually, and cross-culturally, seeking collaborations with other fields such as history, sociology, and political science. These concerns and others led many to diagnose 1960s social psychology with a crisis of confidence (Elms, 1975). Many causes for the crisis were suggested, including overreliance on the experimental method, a lack of adequate theory, and poor research practices. While some attempts were made to account for these issues, the field saw little change in the 1970s, aside from an increasing commitment to experimental methods and refinement of experimental and statistical techniques. Social psychology continued to press forward quite successfully, developing new theoretical orientations and research topics, many centered on social cognition and the self (Faye, 2012).

In recent years, social psychologists have again begun to reassess their field, its findings, and its orientations, resulting in another self-diagnosed "crisis" (Earp & Trafimow, 2015). Much of this questioning initially grew out of the 2011 Reproducibility Project, which aimed to replicate studies in three leading psychology journals to see if the findings could be reproduced. The *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, one of social psychology's leading publications, was one of the targeted publications. The researchers found that only 25% of the reproduced studies replicated the original results (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). Social psychologists, along with psychologists more generally, began engaging in a vociferous debate about the state of the field and the solutions to the replication crisis (see Stangor & Lemay, 2016, for a review). The majority of the proposed solutions to this crisis revolve around refining statistical techniques and inferences, focusing on issues surrounding sample sizes, significance tests, and effect sizes. Other solutions are more directed toward refining research practices, such as data sharing, nonselective data reporting, and replication of findings. In some respects, this current crisis mirrors the concerns and solutions explored in the 1960s and 1970s, when social psychologists began studying and exploring the limitations of social psychological experiments.

The current crisis also reflects ongoing concerns about the generalizability and universality of social psychological research, a problem that also surfaced in the 1960s literature. When replications failed, scholars considered the idea that if findings cannot be replicated from one laboratory to another, there is little reason to believe that they can be generalized to the world outside the laboratory. Others express concerns about judging studies by their replicability, since more complex studies are more difficult to replicate. If replicability becomes the gold standard for social psychology, highly contrived, simplistic studies may become more prevalent than those involving complex research protocols and longitudinal designs (Baumeister, 2016). Finally, some see the failure to replicate social psychological findings as indicative of a larger issue at the core of the discipline: social psychological phenomena are highly context-dependent and therefore may not replicate consistently. Social contextual factors, which are at the very heart of social psychology's subject matter, affect social psychological phenomena, constantly changing our findings. The laws and findings uncovered in the social psychology laboratory are laws and findings that depend very much on social context; they are at the very heart of what makes social psychology *social*.

The questions being raised by contemporary social psychologists are not entirely new, and they are not limited to this field. Indeed, psychology as a whole is grappling with the meaning of failed replications and issues of generalizability. Further, psychologists have confronted replication failures since the inception of the discipline in the nineteenth century (Benschop & Draaisma, 2000). Despite attempts to solve these issues through methodological refinements, they resurface repeatedly in the discipline, giving rise to moments of self-reflection and internal debate. These challenges and critiques are an important part of social psychology's past and present, as they offer opportunities to reflect on and refine a field that has grown, shifted, and changed for more than a century.

The success that the field experienced in the postwar period continues in contemporary psychology, where social psychology enjoys a strong and stable existence as a productive subfield. The APA's Society for Personality and Social Psychology is home to more than a thousand members. Most major departments of psychology in the United States offer a specialty in social psychology, and more than two hundred doctoral degrees are awarded in the field every year (National Science Foundation, 2015). Social psychologists continue to expand the limits of their work, exploring new theoretical outlooks such as evolutionary and cultural social psychology. They also continue to explore new methods of studying the topics that have interested them for decades, as is evidenced by the interest in unconscious social cognition and implicit attitudes in the study of prejudice. And, despite moments of self-reflection and critique, social psychologists continue to produce new, exciting, and useful research on topics that have fascinated them since the 1920s: attitudes, intergroup relations, and conflict. Indeed, twenty-first-century social psychology has found a firm footing within the landscape of American psychology and American society.

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