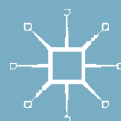


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# THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF CRITICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Edited by Brendan Gough



# The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Social Psychology

Brendan Gough  
Editor

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## Foreword

This is a real Handbook, an exhaustive overview of different debates within social psychology by leading scholars in their fields of research and who now bring a critical cutting edge to a series of theoretical and methodological approaches that comprise the sub-discipline today. And sub-discipline it is. Social psychology began as a core approach in the discipline of psychology at the end of the nineteenth century, helping to define how psychology itself understood human agency and experience as the discipline broke from philosophy and defined its own path as an accomplice of burgeoning capitalism in the Western world.

The first investigations into perception—introspective studies carried out by Wilhelm Wundt in the university attic space in Leipzig—were quickly written into the laboratory-experimental tradition that became dominant in the discipline through the twentieth century. Wundt's own work into 'folk psychology', which he viewed as the masterwork that would mark his contribution to the new science, was written out of the history, barely appearing in psychology and social psychology textbooks today. And then, as psychology shifted focus from experience to measurable behaviour, the first psychology experiments were actually into the effects of 'social' variables, the effects of the presence of other people on an individual 'subject', individual as undivided and cut off from the others—fake, limiting individuality.

This book both effectively returns to the origins of psychology as such, and that is why the chapters take such care to situate their own arguments in historical context, and it takes psychology itself forward. This is a Handbook of social psychology that delves into the highways and byways of an area of

work that usually now appears as a sub-discipline of psychology as its host discipline, but it quickly becomes clear as we work our way through the many marvellous contributions to the book that all of this matters to psychology itself.

The chapters can be read as revolving around a question about the ‘social’ that psychology puts on the agenda within the peculiar alienated and oppressive conditions of possibility that made it welcome, that made it necessary. This question is double-faced, and the chapters in very different ways tackle it methodologically and theoretically as they cogently spell out what the limitations of social psychology are and what it would mean to be a ‘critical social psychologist’. The first face of the question concerns the attempts to overcome the individual–social dualism that psychology inhabits and reproduces. This dualism separates the individual from the social and reflects the experience of people separated from their own creativity and from the products of their labour.

The second face of the question concerns a deeper epistemological and ontological quandary that traditional psychologists themselves are unable to escape; in what ways does the attempt to fill out the ‘social’ in contemporary academic research actually serve to plug a much-needed gap in the discipline. That is, how might we keep open the space for innovative theories and methods that enable us to be ‘social’ in a diversity of ways: cultural, sub-cultural and authentically individual; this is the individual as an ensemble of social relations. This path-breaking book offers a variety of answers to the problem of the ‘social’ that never loses sight of the importance of keeping those questions open, making for an assemblage of ‘critical social psychologies’.

Ian Parker, August 2016

# Acknowledgements

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Brendan Gough, August 2016

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lications—which focus on Q methodology, IPA (interpretative phenomenological analysis), and qualitative analysis in particular—have been cited in excess of 1500 times over the last five years.

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## About the Editor

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# Part I

## Introduction

# 1

## Critical Social Psychologies: Mapping the Terrain

Brendan Gough

Having co-authored a textbook on Critical Social Psychology, I was delighted to have the opportunity to build on this by putting together a handbook. There are of course handbooks of (mainstream) social psychology (e.g. Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010) and now we also have a handbook of Critical Psychology (Parker, 2015): this handbook of Critical Social Psychology complements the latter while offering a clear contrast to the former. The handbook obviously focuses on the terrain of social psychology, although inevitably this terrain is reconfigured, expanded and transgressed as analyses pull together elements which appear as discrete and disparate in the mainstream texts and handbooks. It is also recognised that other critical subdisciplines exist, perhaps most obviously Critical Health Psychology, which has its own website, conference and textbooks (see <https://ischp.info/>; Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006; Murray, 2004). Arguably, Critical Social Psychology can be considered to be something of a foundational field which has informed the development of other/related critical psychologies through the promotion of theories and methodologies applicable to domains such as health, educational and clinical psychology. Yet, the work of critical social psychologists remains dispersed, often contributing to more specialist conferences and books focusing on, say, Feminist Psychology, Qualitative Research or Mental Health. Which is why

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bringing together the rich variety of Critical Social Psychology contributions ‘under one roof’ will help to further establish and promote this important and influential field.

This handbook features a range of authors working on key social psychological issues (e.g. prejudice, identity, intergroup relations) and reflects a diverse, buoyant and developing commitment to a social psychology which eschews psychologisation, reductionism and neutrality. The handbook is structured along familiar lines: theories/methods/topics/applications, so that it can be read alongside (and in counterpoint to) established mainstream social psychology texts and handbooks. That is not to promote such a traditional format which artificially decomposes social psychological phenomena into discrete topic boxes—as critical psychologists we understand the connections between theory and methodology, between self and society, and between social identities and relations—but following the conventional format is a pragmatic choice which will facilitate critical comparisons with mainstream work. The handbook also provides insights into some of the most pressing social issues we face today, including the migrant crisis affecting Europe, the devaluing of Black lives in the USA, and poverty and ill-health relating to austerity in the UK.

## Critical Perspectives

The theoretical resources which critical social psychologists draw upon are many and varied. For example, feminist scholarship has exerted great influence over Critical Social Psychology and provides sophisticated analysis of gender, sexuality, intersectionality and marginalisation from diverse standpoints, including a critical engagement with ‘post-feminist’ ideologies. Jeanne Marecek and Eva Magnusson provide a useful overview of feminist work within/on the edges of social psychology, from classic to more contemporary contributions (Chap. 2). The role of feminist psychologists in challenging mainstream assumptions and practices, for example, around sex difference research, and in helping to develop and promote alternative, qualitative research methods, is highlighted. Less prominent is the influence of Marxism in Critical Social Psychology, although perhaps many of us have encountered Marxism in our learning and are at least indirectly influenced by his work. Michael Arfken provides us with a thoroughgoing Marxist critique of mainstream social psychology, for example, work on class and ideology, before offering a version of Critical Social Psychology with a key focus on political economy, class structure and commodity fetishism (Chap. 3).

Chapter 4 by Vivien Burr and Penny Dick summarises a social constructionist perspective, emphasising the importance of societal discourses as well as language use in social interaction. The contrast with a cognitivist social psychology, where language is treated as a way into the mind and knowledge presented as the outcome of scientific methods, is marked. To illustrate, they offer two instances of social constructionist research, one study of sexual harassment and the other of paranormal activity.

Perhaps Feminism, Marxism and Social Constructionism are the most obvious influences on Critical Social Psychology, but other perspectives and movements are also becoming influential. In Chap. 5, Tom Goodwin underlines the radical dimensions of psychoanalytic theory, lamenting the uptake and sanitisation of Freudian concepts within North America. The power of psychoanalytic concepts to destabilise the familiar and present provocative analyses of sociopsychological phenomena is emphasised—a power that has in fact long been recognised outside psychology (e.g. in cultural and media studies) and in particular regions (e.g. Latin America). In a different way, Chap. 6 on Queer Theory also prioritises deconstruction and otherness; indeed, the influence of psychoanalytic theorists (especially Lacanian) is noted. Here, Damien Riggs and Gareth Treharne summarise the contribution of Judith Butler to Queer Theory, highlighting the socially embedded, transitory and incomplete nature of gender and sexual identities and the explosion in gendered categories in recent years beyond the traditional male–female and straight–gay binaries. The contingency and fluidity of identities are illustrated with recent research examples focusing on (trans)gender categories. In Chap. 7 by Phia Salter and Andrea Haugen, the focus shifts from gender/sexuality to race, where a Critical Race Psychology is articulated. In critiquing mainstream social psychology for its cognitive treatment of race and racism, they present a social perspective which locates race/racism within social institutions, structures and discourses, with a particular focus on legal spaces. Instead of focusing on a minority of racist individuals, a Critical Race Psychology advocates awareness of and challenges to pervasive cultural and material forces which privilege Whiteness while marginalising Black identities. In the final chapter (Chap. 8) of this section, Maritza Montero focuses on the lives of disadvantaged minorities in Latin America using the lens of Liberation Psychology. Here she documents how psychologists in collaboration with other professionals and community members work to improve the lives of communities in need, promoting a participatory action research approach present across critical (social) psychology domains and prominent in the Critical Applications section of this handbook.

## Critical Methodologies

The diversity of theoretical resources for critical social psychologists is matched by the range of methodologies available. Although critical work can involve experiments, surveys and statistics—for example, highlighting pay differentials between men and women or linking an increasing suicide rate to austerity measures—for the most part, critical social psychologists use qualitative research methods to progress their projects. There is now a wealth of qualitative research methods available which can be used for a variety of purposes. While data collection often involves individual interviews or focus groups, these can be re-imagined and expanded to add other dimensions, for example, visual techniques and materials (e.g. photo-elicitation). At the same time, we are witnessing a blossoming of fresh methods, often facilitated by digital technology, which provide new opportunities for gathering data from diverse spaces such as social media, blogs and online discussion forums (see Gough & Lyons, 2016). There is also a wide repertoire of analytic methods, ranging from phenomenological and narrative approaches to discursive and psychosocial orientations. More broadly, the methodologies which underpin specific method choices encompass both constructionist and (critical) realist philosophies.

In Chap. 9, Darren Langdridge argues for the power of phenomenology to capture, respect and promote the experiences of research participants, including those who have been excluded, marginalised or dispossessed: one example cited in the chapter considers the voices of mental health service users. Moreover, the traditional focus on individual accounts within phenomenology can be complemented by a simultaneous focus on the ‘lifeworld’ which situates and constrains lived experiences: for the mental health service users, their concerns and choices are seen to be undermined by an institutional culture in which medication and incarceration were prioritised. In Chap. 10 by Michael Murray on narrative, this connection between the personal and societal is again foregrounded, with individual stories viewed and shaped by prominent community and cultural narratives. Murray also notes that narrative can be construed as a guide to action, citing the work of feminist psychologists, including work with survivors of domestic violence which challenges dominant patriarchal narratives of heterosexual relationships. He also references his own research with community groups, which connects everyday stories with the development of a narrative of community change wherein residents assume more control to institute new ways of living within the community. Something which both Langdridge and Murray point out is that phenomenology and narrative share certain assumptions, origins and agen-

das; more generally, it makes little sense to speak of entirely discrete methodologies in light of the overlap between approaches and the different versions of particular methods which have developed over the years (see Madill & Gough, 2008).

Compared to phenomenological and narrative approaches, discourse analytic approaches are often regarded as more explicitly critical and social—although not all discursive work is critical, and as Langdridge and Murray clearly demonstrate in this handbook, phenomenology and narrative can easily be deployed towards critical ends. Certainly, although discourse analysis (DA) has been developed in different disciplines, leading to many versions, traditions and labels (see Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001), its emergence within UK social psychology in the late 1980s and early 1990s has been well documented (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Burman & Parker, 1993). Martha Augoustinos in Chap. 11 does a wonderful job of recounting the origins and development of different discursive approaches within social psychology, highlighting key issues and debates, and identifying current trends. She provides a great example of discursive analysis which highlights how discrimination can be skilfully accomplished by focusing on a televised debate on the subject of same-sex marriage between the Australian prime minister and a father whose son is gay. Although this focus on language/discourse within DA and Critical Social Psychology more generally is important, some authors have complained about the disappearance of a subject inscribed by dominant discourses. The emergence of Psychosocial Studies, an interdisciplinary field which has become prominent in the UK and beyond, can be viewed as an attempt to recover the subject but without lapsing into essentialist accounts. Chapter 12 by Stephanie Taylor charts the development of Psychosocial Studies and focuses on three key concepts: in-betweenness, the extra-rational and affect. The psychoanalytic strands of Psychosocial Studies are explicated (and critiqued)—there is clearly a debate between advocates and critics of psychoanalytic theory within this field. Three examples of psychosocial research projects are presented on girlhood, migrant mother–daughter relationships and transitions to fatherhood—showcasing the diversity and richness of work in this area.

The final method chapter (Chap. 13) by Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke and Debra Gray introduces critical social psychologists to a selection of fresh and exciting methods, with a primary focus on data collection. Trends towards online digital research (e.g. focusing on blogs, discussion forums and social media materials) and multimodal research designs (e.g. incorporating visual data and material objects) are presented as positive alternatives to (mainstream) qualitative research using interviews and focus groups. In addi-

tion, some traditionally quantitative methods are reworked to give us qualitative surveys and story completion tasks, and the critical potential for these methods is also demonstrated. Three main research examples are presented: visual–spatial methods for understanding young people’s negotiation of urban spaces, a qualitative survey work on orgasm and a story completion study of sexual fidelity. The authors challenge us to think creatively about the design of our critical research projects and offer a variety of tools to do so.

## Rethinking Social Cognition

The critical traditions and methodologies noted above have been variously harnessed to deconstruct the cognitivist research paradigms and assumptions which dominate mainstream social psychology—and to showcase alternative ways of understanding and exploring ‘classic’ textbook topics such as prejudice, altruism and obedience to authority. This section features five chapters which respecify such topics as phenomena which are context-bound, negotiated and fluid. In Chap. 14, Chris McVittie and Andy McKinlay focus on how we make sense of the world (attitudes and attributions), presenting a critique of mainstream methods and concepts and arguing (as subsequent chapters do) for a more socially embedded approach which is sensitive to complexity, function and fluctuations in everyday accounts and explanations. In other words, attitudes and attributions should not be thought of as reflecting internal entities but rather as social accomplishments tied to interactions, relationships and wider cultural norms. This respecification is heavily influenced by DA and discursive psychology, and here illustrated with respect to data extracts from research on family mealtimes, chronic fatigue syndrome, sport and conflict. Chapter 15 by Stephen Gibson and Codet Smart tackles what is arguably the quintessential social psychology topic: social influence (obedience/conformity/compliance). Some of the most famous (notorious) experiments in this area are problematised before critical discursive work is described. The authors point to work on how claims about being influenced are made in practice, for example, how those suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome are positioned as ‘jumping on the bandwagon’, implying that such formulations operate to undermine illness accounts. Work on how social influence can be achieved during social interactions is also considered, for example, how parents may persuade their children to eat their meals. So, in contrast to mainstream laboratory research, critical social psychologists study social influence in action, across diverse contexts. Work on attitudes, attributions and social influence segues nicely into theory and research on



prejudice, the focus of Chap. 16 by Keith Tuffin. Conventional explanations based on perception, personality and group behaviour are critiqued before critical qualitative research concerning racism against Maori people in New Zealand is presented. For example, research is cited which focuses on how Maori participants understand and resist racism in the context of a changing, bicultural society.

Another classic topic for social psychology relates to altruism, or prosocial behaviour. In Chap. 17, Bruna Seu provides a critical review of mainstream cognitive–experimental work in this area, with a focus mainly on charitable giving. She proceeds to highlight recent work in Bulgarian, Irish and UK contexts, illustrating how issues of historical and national identity are dawn upon in participant rationalisations for responding to particular charitable pleas while glossing over other requests. In discussing her own work, she draws on Billig et al.'s (1988) notion of ideological dilemmas to underline multiple and contradictory constructions of the 'others' who might benefit from charitable donations. The final chapter (Chap. 18) in this section, by Simon Watts, similarly critiques the individualism and scientism of social psychology (cf. Harre, 1989) as manifested in the study of interpersonal relationships. Here, dominant theories, for example, based on cost–benefit analysis (social exchange theories) or evolution (attachment theories), are exposed as reductionist and mechanistic. Citing his own work with Paul Stenner, Watts highlights a range of constructions that people use when talking about love and relationships, and while some accounts do foreground individualistic notions, many do not, most obviously when love is conceived as the connection between two people. As with all chapters, it is the social dimensions in which individual lives are embedded which, missing from mainstream social psychology, are revived and inextricably linked to the personal within Critical Social Psychology research projects.

## Social Identities/Relations/Conflicts

In this section, specific identity categories, and the ways in which these are understood and deployed, are discussed. A range of major categories are covered: gender, race, class, sexual orientation and dis/ability, bookended by chapters on 'the self' and 'intersectionality', the latter an increasingly important concept in the social sciences which links together patterns of relations and inequalities, rejecting a preoccupation with one particular identity or cause. In Chap. 19, Chris McVittie and Andy McKinlay point to the proliferation of self-related constructs in the social psychological literature, ranging from self-

actualisation to self-esteem and self-efficacy, noting that the self at the centre of these states and processes remains undertheorised. They also note flaws in an ostensibly social account of the self—Social Identity Theory—a European perspective that perpetuates cognitivist assumptions about the individual. A critical focus on how individuals themselves construct identities in practice is advocated, with the functions which particular versions of self serve in social interactions studied closely. And, as they point out, the construction of self online is an obvious and rich source of increasing (critical) social psychological research.

The next two chapters focus on gender and sexuality, offering critiques of mainstream theories and showcasing some of the latest research from critical, feminist and queer psychologists. In both chapters, essentialist accounts which present men and women as fundamentally/naturally different are deconstructed, for example, psychobiological notions that men are naturally more active and aggressive than women—accounts which can be used to justify, say, men's greater success and remuneration in the workplace, or men's sexual violence towards women. In Chap. 20, Sarah Riley and Adrienne Evans chart changes and continuities in representations and evaluations of gendered practices and identities, ranging from the 'new man' to 'bromance' between (straight) men, and 'girl power' and post-feminist positions for women. Drawing on a range of theories and studies, they, the authors, take care to notice power plays in gendered interactions and to undermine claims about gender equality which are promoted in neo-liberal, mediated and consumerist spaces. Chapter 21 by Majella McFadden similarly engages critically with post-feminist, sexualised femininities, for example, discussing research on 'poledancing', highlighting the oscillations between liberatory and objectified perceptions and practices. She also reflects on recent claims about the declining significance of homophobia for straight men, juxtaposing this research with other work on lad culture, sexism and anti-gay talk at university.

Attention moves from gender and sexuality to race categories in Chap. 22 by Simon Goodman. The notion of race as a straightforward, biologically based entity is deconstructed with reference to recent genetic research; notwithstanding this science, the persistence of race as a variable within social psychological studies is noted. Instead of treating race as something discrete and fixed, the author advocates a broadly social constructionist, discursive approach where race-related categorisations are studied in situ—how race related claims are made and the functions they serve in practice. For example, he cites research on how disclaimers work in race-related talk to dispel accusations of prejudice, and his own research on how race is sometimes de-emphasised in talk about asylum seekers and immigration ('discursive deracialisation').

Chapter 23 by Katy Day, Bridgette Rickett and Maxine Woolhouse focuses on social class—a category which has received much less attention than, say, race and gender, as if social psychologists have left the study of class to sociologists. In reviewing those efforts to consider class by mainstream social psychologists, they highlight the promotion of meritocracy and individual ‘choice’ and, relatedly, a failure to analyse how class-related discourses and structures impact on individual lives; for example, children from poorer backgrounds may be blamed for their lack of success at school (failures in motivation, ability, etc.) without the middle-class nature of educational cultures taken into account nor the constraints and values under which the child is operating. They point to recent research which interrogates class representations on popular TV programmes, foregrounding assumptions and images which work to devalue and demean working-class lives. The focus of Chap. 24 turns to disability which, like social class, has not enjoyed much social psychological attention. Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom, Kirsty Liddiard and Katherine Runswick-Cole challenge the critical social psychological community to connect with disability politics and activism, highlighting the contributions of disability scholars to understandings of self-other relations, care and dependency which undermine neo-liberal, self-governing images of humanity. One illustration cited relates to sexual practices and pleasure: while desiring intimacy and experience like everybody else, sexuality for many disabled people is disrupted, expanded and transformed by the deployment of assistants, prosthetics and technologies, so inviting us to rethink conventional sexed ideas and practices.

Finally, we arrive at the topic of intersectionality, perhaps one of the defining concepts in critical social science work today, one which ties multiple identity categories together to enable us to understand the complexities and contradictions inherent in social psychological phenomena. In Chap. 25, Lisa Bowleg notes the move away from ‘single-axis’ thinking in critical work (e.g. a sole focus on gender or race or class) towards a ‘matrix’ level of analysis where various points of difference and inequality are regarded as interlocking and mutually constitutive. In other words, to understand, say, gendered identities and experiences as fully as possible, one must also consider how such identities are intersected by other relevant identities. Critical social psychologists then are especially interested in illuminating the experiences of the multiply stigmatised and disadvantaged (e.g. poor Black lesbian women; young Hispanic trans men) and the intersecting discourses and institutions which perpetuate discrimination and constrain opportunities. Bowleg recognises that (critical) social psychologists have been slow to take up an intersectional lens, that this important work is mostly located outside psychology (e.g. in queer, anti-racist

and feminist scholarship and activism). She points to recent protests and initiatives in the USA, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, to highlight the impact of invidious intersections on particular communities and invite critical social psychologists to contribute to such important projects.

## Critical Applications

In many ways, the preceding chapters have illustrated applications of critical (social) psychology in diverse settings. In this section, five different (but, again, related) contexts are considered in-depth—health, clinical, educational, occupational and environmental—where particular efforts have been made by critical social psychologists to intervene and improve well-being, broadly defined. The opening chapter (Chap. 26), by Antonia Lyons and Kerry Chamberlain, elaborates a Critical Health Psychology movement which is now well established and international in reach. Employing some of the critical theories and methodologies featured in this handbook, they present a challenge to medical and ‘biopsychosocial’ paradigms which privilege ‘expert’ professionals, biological processes and rational systems over the messy, embodied subjectivities of ‘naïve’ service users and consumers. In addition, they cast a critical spotlight on the pervasive individualism which constructs health, well-being and lifestyle as matters of individual choice and responsibility, irrespective of contextual or cultural constraints. Critical health psychologists often work with vulnerable groups and communities (e.g. those with HIV; sex workers; LGBTQ groups), frequently using qualitative participatory approaches, to address particular health issues and improve service access and delivery. An allied group of critical psychologists focus on mental health issues under the umbrella of ‘critical clinical psychology’. As Steven Coles and Aisling Mannion note in Chap. 27, clinical psychology is informed by ‘scientific’ methods and individual-centred therapeutic interventions which neglect the impact of social problems and institutions on personal well-being. They also point out that in the UK at least, psychological programmes are aligned with government policies which seek to return people to work and out of the benefits system—ironically into jobs which are often low paid and detrimental to health. They advocate a dual focus on discourse and materialism to understand and challenge psychiatric practices and their embodied impacts. Further, they argue that psychologists working with clients in distress need to be mindful of pertinent contextual and structural issues, for example, around housing, education and employment, in order to fully appreciate and respond to the problems at hand. As with critical health psychologists, they suggest working with groups and com-

munities to co-ordinate action-oriented research to make a difference in the well-being of individuals.

The educational domain is another focus for critical social psychological attention. In Chap. 28, China Mills documents the alignment of educational psychology with scientific–medical practices of assessment, diagnosis and treatment, focusing on ‘problem’ children while failing to address problematic environments. She focuses particularly on poverty in austerity Britain and its impact on the educational experience and performance of children from deprived communities. A ‘psychopolitical’ analysis is proposed, which links other emancipatory projects to education, including psychiatric survivorship literature, critical disability studies and feminist scholarship and activism. In sum, critical educational psychologists pay attention to forces which directly impact on the educational experiences of many children from poor and working-class backgrounds, including debilitating environments and the stigma associated with being ‘other’ in middle-class school settings. In Chap. 29 by Matthew McDonald and David Bubna-Litic, the focus shifts to the world of work, where psychologists have influenced the behaviour and policies of organisations since the early twentieth century. As with other chapters, they lament the impoverished nature of psychological theorising and the impact of theory-driven practices on workers—in the interests of corporations (to increase productivity and profit) rather than employees (well-being; working conditions). They look outside psychology, mainly to sociology (Marx; Ritzer), and deploy concepts such as ‘commodified self’ and ‘McDonaldisation’ to help understand the forces at work which bear upon labour in a globalised consumerist economy. As critical organisational psychologists, the importance of analysing the operation of power within companies and against workers is emphasised.

Chapter 30 focuses not so much on a specific site or institution but on something much bigger: the natural environment. Here, Matthew Adams presents the now familiar critique of psychological approaches to ‘green’ issues as restricted to an emphasis on individual behaviour change—even when social contexts and barriers are highlighted, these are invariably reduced to measurable variables and therefore stripped of meaning and power. An alternative critical perspective would take the social seriously and adopt a transformative agenda to social relations. As with other critical applications, DA could be used to interrogate taken-for-granted knowledge about the environment and the various ‘solutions’ to environmental problems; there are also spaces for psychoanalytically informed analyses. Other critical approaches might take the form of collaborative protest against corporations and polluters, a more physical or material intervention.

In the end, there is no one, unified Critical Social Psychology. This handbook emphasises the diversity and debates within the field, and different possibilities for action and social change. It is an interdisciplinary endeavour which borrows from allied disciplines while sitting on the periphery of (social) psychology. Critical social psychologists inhabit liminal spaces where there is not only uncertainty and anxiety but also hope and collaboration.

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# Part II

## Critical Perspectives

# 2

## Feminisms, Psychologies, and the Study of Social Life

Eva Magnusson and Jeanne Marecek

As the feminist movement of the 1960s gained momentum, psychology was targeted as one of its enemies—part of the problem, not part of the solution. Feminists attacked Freudian ideas about feminine personality and women’s mental life. Psychotherapy came in for a special drubbing. “The-rapists”, as one especially caustic critic called them, were accused of being agents of the patriarchy, adjusting women to misery and urging them into subordinate roles. A famous article by Naomi Weisstein, an American psychologist, emphatically asserted that psychology “has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially because psychology does not know” (1968; reprinted in 1993, p. 197). Weisstein’s article was reprinted over 40 times and read by tens of thousands of scholars and students.

That was then and this is now. Feminism has changed and psychology has too. There are many feminists in psychology and they have produced a substantial body of knowledge exploring gender, sex, sexuality, the relations between women and men, and many previously unexamined aspects of women’s (and men’s) lives. Nonetheless, some feminists still do not find psychology a congenial home, mainly because some of the orienting assumptions of

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mainstream psychology do not sit easily with them. For instance, feminists' commitment to politically engaged research goes against the grain of psychology's claims to value-neutrality. In addition, many feminists have embraced research approaches that lie outside the boundaries of conventional social psychology. These are among the issues that we explore in this chapter.

Social psychology is far from a single unified endeavour. Indeed, as Elliot Aronson quipped, "There are almost as many definitions of social psychology as there are social psychologists" (1972, p. 4). As you might expect, social psychologists' preoccupations are shaped by their social circumstances, locations, and political contexts. In different parts of the world, the field has different disciplinary homes (e.g., sociology vs. psychology). Ways of producing social psychological knowledge differ widely, so much so that approaches that are acceptable in some parts of the world are scorned elsewhere. Furthermore, the topics and issues that preoccupy the field shift dramatically from time to time and place to place. In short, social psychology is not a settled field with agreed, clearly demarcated boundaries. In consequence of this heterogeneity, we do not limit our focus exclusively to work that is explicitly named as social psychology, but consider more broadly work in psychology that addresses questions about social life and social groups.

In what follows, we begin with a brief account of the history of feminism, contemporary feminist movements, and feminist psychology. We then discuss in some detail critiques of psychology that feminists have brought forward. We end by briefly describing some alternative approaches to the study of social life that feminist psychologists have devised.

## **Feminisms: Political Ideology, Social Movements, Academic Discipline**

The word *feminism* was coined in the mid-nineteenth century to denote the ideology of equality for women. Feminism today encompasses a range of ideologies and movements with the broad goal of establishing political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women equal to those of men. However, because feminism has spanned different time periods, locales, and cultural settings, feminists' struggles have taken many forms. Feminists around the globe do not always agree. Feminists have disagreed about whether the primary locus of women's subordination is their role in reproduction or their position in the labour market. Different feminists have different ideas about what constitutes subordination, how to end it, what it means to be a woman or a man (or a member of another sex category). Not surprisingly, differ-

ently positioned feminists give priority to different issues (cf. Ray, 2012; Rutherford, Capdevila, Undurti, & Palmay, 2011). For example, the issue of land rights may be of little import for women in high-income western countries today, but it is and has been paramount for women in countries in which agriculture is a primary form of income generation. All of this diversity leads us to speak of feminisms, not feminism.

In Western Europe and North America, the feminist movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s agitated to gain basic citizenship rights for women. These rights included the right to vote, to own land and property, and to have equal access to education. Throughout the twentieth century, movements for women's rights and gender equality emerged in many other parts of the world, often linked to anti-colonial struggles (Jayawardena, 1986). Among the diverse goals of feminist movements are equal access to advanced education and professional training; an end to discrimination in employment; adequate family leave policies; access to contraception and abortion, as well as an end to forced sterilization; divorce reform; and social acceptance and legal rights for lesbians and other gender-nonconforming women. Feminists have also fought to end child marriage; compulsory genital surgery; son preference and female infanticide; gender-based violence; and sexual assault.

## Feminisms in the Academy

Beginning in the 1970s, many universities established academic units devoted to teaching and scholarship about women and gender. These academic units have brought together scholars from across the academy, thus creating opportunities for collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. Such collaborations have greatly benefited feminists in psychology and the development of feminist theories inside psychology.

Academic feminism and feminist activism share core orienting assumptions. One such assumption is the necessity of situating women's experiences in social, economic, political, and cultural context. A key question for feminist researchers is "What conditions of possibility do the social institutions, the political economy, and the values and symbolic meanings of the culture afford to women?". Another core assumption is that gendered power asymmetries are crucial elements of social life. Feminist researchers have made use of sophisticated understandings of power in modern societies. Modern power, as Steven Lukes (1974) has persuasively argued, often does not involve brute force but takes more subtle forms. Lukes identified three components of modern power: the ability to make decisions for others; agenda-setting power, that is, the authority to determine what can and cannot be brought to light in

public discussions; and ideological power or the power to shape how people experience their world. The significance of social and cultural context and the centrality of power have guided feminist psychologists' theory and research. This insistence on the crucial significance of power-laden social contexts has given feminist psychology a distinctive character among other subfields of psychology.

## Feminisms in Psychology

Feminist treatises on female (or feminine) psychology were written well before psychology existed as a formal discipline (e.g., Mill, 1869/1929; Wollstonecraft, 1792/1996). And it did not take long after the inception of scientific psychology in the late 1800s for the first major debate to erupt among psychologists about "female nature", women's abilities and proclivities, and their proper roles (Shields, 1975). The debate was sparked in large part by contemporaneous feminist movements for women's vote and women's access to higher education (cf. Rutherford, Marecek, & Sheese, 2012). Debates in the discipline about women's proper roles and women's nature and capacities continued sporadically, but it was not until the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s that feminist psychology coalesced as a subfield of psychology in the USA (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). By the 1980s, similar subfields had emerged in Canada, in the UK, in several other European countries, and elsewhere. Women psychologists in those days had ample reason to align themselves with feminism, as many felt the brunt of presumed inferiority, as well as discrimination, exclusion, belittlement, and harassment at the hands of their male colleagues. As a result, feminist psychologists melded science and activism: They agitated for equitable conditions of work at the same time as they challenged conventional psychological knowledge and pressed for changes in psychotherapeutic practices and ethics.

Feminists aim to produce knowledge that directly benefits women's lives or promotes social justice more widely; the activist commitments of feminist psychologists have often guided their choice of research questions (Wilkinson, 1986; 1996). For example, feminist psychologists of the 1970s turned attention to many topics that until then had not been part of social science research. Such topics either had escaped the eyes of male researchers or, because they "only" concerned women's lives, had been regarded as unimportant or of little general interest. Over the years, feminist psychologists have produced extensive knowledge about the experiences of women and girls, about men and boys, and about gender relations (cf. Unger, 2004). Going beyond empirical studies, a good deal of feminist analysis has challenged persistent derogatory

shibboleths about women. For example, Mary Brown Parlee (1982), troubled by the flawed measures and faulty research designs in the extant research, studied women's moods and capacities across the menstrual cycle. With properly designed studies and adequate measures, Parlee found few menstruation-related impairments in women's performance.

Many feminist psychologists have been part of interdisciplinary programmes in Women's Studies or Gender and Sexuality Studies. This alliance has stretched their intellectual horizons, exposing them to ways of producing and appraising knowledge beyond the confines of conventional psychology. Through interactions with colleagues across a range of disciplines, feminist psychologists have often developed a heightened capacity for self-scrutiny and disciplinary reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988). For many feminist psychologists, their interdisciplinary outlook has raised doubts about how psychology produces knowledge, about psychological metatheory, and about the reigning epistemologies in psychology. Although the mainstream of psychology regards its research methods as a means to produce truth—that is, knowledge that is value-free and unbiased—many feminists doubt that this is possible. Instead, they see that it is impossible for knowers—including scientific researchers—to disengage themselves from the interpretive communities to which they belong (Fleck, 1935/1979). Knowledge, as a result, is inevitably imbued with the standpoints and perspectives of the knower.

In what follows, we briefly summarize four broad critiques of social psychology that have been brought forward by critical feminist theorists. First, many conventional psychological theories and measurements are laced with androcentrism. Second, psychology—as part and parcel of western culture—is permeated by an individualistic bias. This leads both to extolling the self-determining power of the individual and to overlooking or minimizing the power of societal contexts to determine human action. Third, conventional psychology, in its aim for scientific prestige, posits universal explanations and theories (Sherif, 1978/1992). This drive for universalism has diverted attention away from the particular and specific circumstances that lead to oppression and injustice. Fourth, when psychologists think in terms of male–female differences, they do not see that the categories “women” and “men” are malleable and contextually determined.

## Androcentrism in Psychology

One of the earliest critiques by feminists in psychology was directed against the male-centred nature of many of psychology's proclamations about women. In retrospect, this was hardly surprising: prior to the 1970s, the “interpretive

community” of psychology consisted almost exclusively of men. Like Naomi Weisstein (1968/1993, quoted above), feminists of the early 1970s did not recognize themselves and their experiences in what they were taught about women’s lives (Haavind, 1973). It was as if a large part of psychology’s knowledge about people was in reality knowledge about (some) men. Furthermore, many of psychology’s constructs and measurements were formulated from the vantage point of men; in other words, they were androcentric.

Androcentrism means seeing and evaluating the world from the perspective of a man or of men as a collective. Androcentrism also means that this perspective is the self-evident or dominant perspective. In many cultures historically, men and masculinity have been taken to be the norm; men’s ways of being and behaving are not only seen as unproblematic; they need no explaining. They are just the way things are and ought to be. As you might guess, the androcentrism that infuses many of psychology’s claims, constructs, and theories went unnoticed until feminists pointed it out. Indeed, the term androcentrism did not exist in psychology’s lexicon until feminists introduced it. And the term still is rarely invoked in mainstream social psychology.

It is easy to find examples of androcentrism in the history of psychology. One famous example is Sigmund Freud’s statement that “after all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology” (Freud, 1926/1959, p. 32). The knower in this statement is “psychology”; the statement is written from the perspective of science and not from an explicitly male perspective. It is clear, however, that “adult women” are not included among the psychological knowers. Psychology in Freud’s time was made up almost exclusively of men, and their views of women’s sexuality were based on the androcentric assumption that men’s sexuality was the norm against which women’s sexuality was to be compared (Segal, 1996).

Feminist critics identified androcentric biases in the assumptions, theories, and assertions of much of psychology, as well as in the procedures and measurements that psychologists used in their research. Examples can be found in research and theory concerning self-esteem, assertiveness, aggression, executive function, attachment, and several other traits. In some cases, experiments made use of situations, instruments, or experiences that were more familiar to men than to women, thereby placing female participants at an immediate disadvantage. Sometimes, questionnaires and scales that psychologists devised took men’s life experiences and life situations as the norm. For example, the original inventory of Stressful Life Events did not include items such as rape, miscarriage, and wanted or unwanted pregnancy (Kravetz, Marecek, & Finn, 1983).

## Individualism in Culture and Psychology

Individualism is central to the folk psychologies and moral visions of many western high-income societies. The ideology of individualism holds the self as separate from others, society, culture, and nature. That is, although individuals are in dynamic interaction—like atoms or billiard balls—they are taken to be fundamentally independent (Bishop, 2007). Many feminist thinkers have found fault with individualism as a cultural ethos. For example, socialist feminist thinkers promoted ideals of collectivism, communitarianism, and group solidarity over individualism. Other feminists have argued that the ideology of individualism is class-bound (e.g., Fox-Genovese, 1991). Coming from a different vantage point, cultural feminists of the 1980s saw self-contained individualism as inimical to women. They extolled what they saw as women's intrinsic propensity for connection, interdependence, and care of others (e.g., Miller, 1976). Other feminists criticized these ideas of womanly ways of being for their essentialism and their failure to acknowledge diversity among women (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Nonetheless, the ideas remained popular among a broad swathe of women for several years, at least in the USA.

The psychologies of western high-income countries—especially the USA—are permeated by the ideology of individualism, as many critical psychologists have observed (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014; Cushman, 1995; Morawski & Bayer, 2013; Sampson, 1977). For example, psychological theories of human development equate maturity with being self-defining, that is, capable of rising above cultural constraints and freely choosing who one will be. Theories of development often describe adolescents' rebellion against their parents as a necessary step towards adulthood. Even though such "breaking away" from the family does not occur in many cultures, it is portrayed as a natural and universal step to adulthood. Furthermore, psychologists' definitions of optimal mental health often include such elements as autonomy, independence, and nonconformity ("marching to the beat of one's own drum").

Some feminist psychologists have criticized the notion of the individual as solitary, bounded, and self-contained. For example, Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1986) argued that ideals of mental health such as autonomy and independence rest on the privileges conferred on high-status men. Such men's apparent independence and self-sufficiency often depends on the invisible labour of subordinated others, such as secretaries and wives. Thus, the "autonomy" is largely illusory. Other feminists have argued that goals of child development construct a solitary, self-controlled, and autonomous

individual (Miller & Scholnick, 2015). Miller and Scholnick pointed to children's executive function (or cognitive self-control), a topic that currently commands much attention among developmental psychologists. Miller and Scholnick argued that theorizing about executive function "places the competitive corporate model in the brain" (2015, p. 271). Yet other feminist psychologists have criticized technologies of change that promote self-improvement and self-actualization to the exclusion of social change (Becker, 2014). Psychotherapy is the prime example, but social psychologists have devised several such technologies as well. Consider the numerous self-help books and apps that purport to offer scientific methods to improve one's happiness, love relationships, optimism, stress management, and the like (Becker & Marecek, 2008).

In what follows, we examine how the individual-centred model of the person has shaped theory and research in psychology. First, we explore the individualist construal of the person and the focus on static interests, capabilities, and desires that are supposedly rooted "inside" the person. Then, we examine the way that the "social" is configured in large parts of social psychology, noting how limited and sterile that configuration often is.

## Configuring the Individual in Social Psychology

The individual-centred model of social psychology often is paired with internalism. Loosely speaking, internalism is the presumption that people's thoughts, actions, and feelings are based in or caused by factors that are internal to the person. Following from that premise, it is possible to theorize human behaviour without reference to anything outside the boundary of the individual (Wilson, 2004). Differences between people, then, are attributed to putative internal characteristics, without reference to the social or cultural surround.

In psychology, internalism often leads researchers to search for and posit inner characteristics of people who inhabit a particular social category. In some instances, such an individualist bias has led researchers to take the stance that Crawford and Marecek (1989) called "Women As Problem". For example, when women first gained entry into prestigious positions in the workforce, they were said to suffer from the Impostor Phenomenon, to subconsciously "fear success", and to be ignorant of the "secrets" of career success. Such claims belaboured the presumed internal deficiencies of women; in doing so, they distracted attention from disadvantageous conditions of work,



such as patterns of exclusion, sexual harassment, or demeaning treatment. Moreover, claims of deficiencies in women often rest on a false homogeneity: they assert that all women share the same personality traits.

An individualist frame of reference often leads to holding individuals responsible for social inequities. If people are seen as self-determining, they are presumed to have freely chosen the circumstances they are in. A good example is the landmark lawsuit brought by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) against a large retailer, Sears, Roebuck and Co., in 1986 (Jellison, 1987; Riger, 1988). Sears admitted to funneling women into low-paid sales jobs, reserving the better-paying jobs for men. In the courtroom, Sears offered expert testimony that women were not interested in well-paying jobs: they supposedly preferred jobs that did not interfere with their family responsibilities, disliked the pressure of working on a commission basis, and were uninterested in selling “traditionally male” products (like plumbing, furniture, furnaces, and automotive supplies). The expert for the EEOC disputed these claims. She drew on the historical record to show that what are mistakenly regarded as women’s “choices” are in fact determined by the opportunities available to them.

Another example is the question that seems never to die: Why do women stay in (or return to) intimate relationships that are physically abusive? Some psychologists have suggested that such women have developed “learned helplessness” or “Battered Women’s Syndrome” (a putative mental disorder). Explanations like these are surely an improvement over earlier allusions to female masochism and Masochistic Personality Disorder. However, a critical feminist approach shifts the focus from inner deficits in women to features of the larger social and cultural context in which the woman and her violent partner live. These include material circumstances and lack of resources; family, religious, and community pressures on women to remain married, especially if they have children; and fears of violent retaliation by the abuser and members of his family. An even broader social analysis might examine structural features—related to class, ethnicity, and migration status, for example—such as lack of affordable housing; limited access to legal resources; inadequate police protection; stigma; and social isolation (Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003; Radtke, 2009).

On a more general level, feminists have taken issue with the individualist notion of untrammelled free choice. All choices, they argue, are constrained by the context in which they are presented. That context limits the range of options available and it governs the costs and consequences associated with



those options. The options for people in privileged social positions likely differ from the options for less privileged people. Further, the meanings associated with various choices reflect the norms and values of the community of which an individual is part.

## Configuring the Social in Social Psychology

Many contemporary strains of social psychology rest on narrow definitions of the “social”. Gordon Allport, one of the founding fathers of social psychology in North America, offered perhaps the narrowest definition. In the opening chapter of the first *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Allport wrote that “social psychology understand(s) and explain(s) how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings” (Allport, 1954, p. 5). Allport’s chapter, with this definition, was reprinted in the 1969 and 1985 editions of the *Handbook*. Today, many social psychologists construe the “social” as nothing more than collections of individuals, each acting independently in accord with his or her inner capacities and interests. For example, social psychologists who study group processes often use laboratory simulations that bring together a small set of strangers who take part in a brief interaction contrived by the experimenter, and then disband with no chance of further interaction.

Configuring the “social” so narrowly ignores at least three elements important to feminists. The first is the myriad of enduring and intertwining social ties that exist in real-life groups, such as families, couples, and friendships. Such groups are bound by affinity, they share a history and a future, and their members have mutual obligations towards one another. In those ways, these groups are quite different than a group of strangers in a brief laboratory encounter. The second aspect is the need to study group processes and relationships in everyday settings. For example, feminists have studied negotiations between members of heterosexual couples about sharing household work and childcare (e.g., Magnusson, 2005); they have studied the interactions that lead to coercive heterosexual encounters (e.g., Gavey, 1992), and they have studied how young women and men portray themselves on social media (e.g., Dobson, 2014). These social relations are a far cry from the scripted, highly artificial situations contrived by experimenters. Third, feminists insist on expanding the definition of the “social” to include the “societal”. That is, feminists insist that the proper study of social life needs to take into account the social institutions that structure public and private life, the political economy, the structures of power and privilege, and cultural ideologies and norms.

## Universal Explanations Versus Situated Understandings

Feminist psychologists have taken issue with conventional psychology's claims to achieve explanations that are universal, that is, valid for all human beings. Such explanations, feminists claim, ignore diverse experiences, as well as the oppressive social structures that produce them. This section describes the assumptions that underlie psychology's claims to produce universal knowledge. We also point to some consequences of these assumptions.

If a psychological explanation were truly universal, it would be valid for all humans or for all humans in a certain category (such as all women). Developing universal explanations and theories has been the goal of many psychologists. Indeed, psychologists' explanations and theories are typically couched in language that suggests that they apply to all human beings everywhere. The goal of producing universal explanations and theories has not been uncontested, however. Feminists and other critical psychologists have argued that humans and human contexts are far too diverse for universal explanations to be possible. Further, they argue, human activity always takes place inside social and cultural frames of reference. Consequently, it can only be understood by studying it within those frames. Here, drawing on the work of Hornstein and Star (1990), we discuss four assumptions held by psychologists who seek universal explanations for human behaviour.

First, researchers must assume that the psychological phenomena they study do not change over time or from location to location. This assumption implies that any phenomenon can be described in the same way regardless of time and place. Local context and other particular conditions are eliminated from the description of the phenomenon and also from the explanations and theories that are proposed about it. Researchers who hold this assumption are prepared to draw conclusions about all humans in all places and for all times from a single study. That is, a single study—which is necessarily carried out at one specific time and place and with one specific participant population—is assumed to represent all possible instances of a phenomenon.

Excluding the context of a phenomenon from the possible explanations of it necessarily excludes the consequences of varying life conditions for individuals' behaviour. The search for universal explanations may therefore ultimately lead researchers to blame individuals for societal inequities. Already in the early 1900s, feminist psychologists such as Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1916) pointed out that psychologists' fondness for universal explanations led them to disregard the different life conditions of women and men and how those

different life conditions might affect their behaviour. Feminists, along with other critical psychologists, have also pointed out how a disregard for context leads to a disregard for the asymmetrical life conditions of people of different social statuses.

The laboratory simulations typical of much social psychological research often are based on this assumption that the phenomenon under study can be abstracted from the context that surrounds it. Laboratory simulations test a hypothesis by varying a single element of a situation while ostensibly holding extraneous elements constant. It is, of course, rarely possible to control extraneous factors in the real world. The possible responses that a participant can make (such as ratings on a scale) are similarly highly controlled by the experimenter. Some feminists, among others, have raised several reservations about the usefulness of laboratory simulations. One of the reservations is that laboratory simulations exclude the social and cultural context of the phenomena under study.

A second assumption underlying universal explanations is that the context in which theories, research apparatuses, and measures are developed is irrelevant. Based on this assumption, many researchers believe that measures or indicators, once they have been validated and shown to be psychometrically sound in one set of circumstances, hold for all times and places. For example, it is not uncommon for researchers to use antiquated instruments such as the AWS (Attitudes Toward Women Scale; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) or the BSRI (Bem Sex Role Inventory; Bem, 1974) in present-day studies. Consider, however, whether a questionnaire item such as “It is ridiculous for a woman to run a locomotive and for a man to darn socks” indexes the same attitude today as it did 40 years ago. This assumption has often led researchers to export scales, measurements, and interpretations to countries and peoples with very different cultural traditions than their own. Exporting tests and measurements around the world presumes that they index the same attitudes, characteristics, abilities, or psychological disorders no matter where they are used. This is not likely to be true, and therefore conclusions drawn on the basis of such research likely will misrepresent some of the populations that have been studied (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Similarly, research that tabulates behaviours (such as smiling, making eye contact, or averting one’s gaze) across diverse groups of people and assumes that those behaviours always carry the same social meaning likely misrepresents some of the groups that are studied.

The third assumption underlying universal explanations is that one subset of the human population (such as men, members of the White middle class or young university students) can stand for humans as a whole. This assumption

(which is often unspoken) has characterized a good deal of social psychological research. For example, many scales and measurements were standardized using populations of men, and yet they were used for both men and women. This procedure had at least two drawbacks. First, women were judged by standards developed for men. When the life experiences of women were not taken into account, their abilities and characteristics were likely to be misjudged. The second drawback is more far-reaching: if we allow one part of humanity to stand for the whole, then we accept that part of humanity as representing the norm or standard.

A fourth assumption underlying universal explanations is that categories like “women” and “men” are homogeneous enough to make universal statements about each category and to make wholesale comparisons between the categories. Following from this assumption, all members of each sex category possess traits or characteristics that are distinct from those of all members of the other sex category. (Note that this presumes the existence of only two sex categories.) In essence, this assumption holds that cultural background, class, race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, and experience are extrinsic to and separate from sex category. This assumption, which forms the grounds for the study of psychological sex differences, has been questioned by feminists from the very inception of psychology (Thompson Woolley, 1910).

## On the Search for Male–Female Differences

Every year, psychologists publish thousands of studies comparing women and men. Some studies are aimed at documenting differences between the sexes, while some are aimed at challenging heretofore accepted differences. After decades—in fact, by now, a century—of such studies, they seem to continue unabated. Few, if any, conclusions have been reached. Of course, few people doubt that men and women differ in a variety of ways; that is not the issue. The issue is which differences are “real” or intrinsic (e.g., the product of heredity or of brain–biological differences) and which are the product of the circumstances, opportunities, learning histories, and constraints associated with sex category membership.

Although some feminist psychologists have avidly pursued the study of sex differences (or similarities), others have registered several reservations (Kitzinger, 1994; Magnusson & Marecek, 2012; Marecek, 1995). We have already discussed one such reservation, namely, that the sex difference approach reflects a universalist outlook. To recapitulate, the search for sex differences presumes that all members of a sex category—regardless of social

location, historical time period, and cultural circumstances—share certain attributes. To the contrary, members of a sex category vary widely in terms of attributes such as their social status, racial or ethnic background, sexuality, age, health, and ability.

Additionally, there are stumbling blocks in interpreting comparisons of men and women. From early infancy onwards, the socialization experiences of boys and girls differ. How then is it possible to distinguish the effects of learning from “intrinsic” sex differences? Studies that find male–female differences may actually be registering how the local gender order expresses itself. Furthermore, focusing on *differences* between women and men (or boys and girls) draws attention away from the *asymmetries* or inequalities in their life situations. Societal divisions and hierarchies that are justified on the basis of sex differences may not *follow from* differences between women and men, but in fact *create* those differences.

Finally, the conventional practice of comparing men and women rests on the idea that there are only two sex categories. Today, however, that simple two-sex model is no longer adequate to capture the profusion of new sex categories put forward by individuals who refuse the sex binary. Some examples of these new sex categories are transman, transwoman, genderqueer, gender-fluid, and gender-creative.

## Feminist Developments

Over the past 40 years, feminist psychologists have amassed large and diverse body of scholarly work. Some of this work constitutes corrective scholarship that has challenged stereotypes of women. Other work has taken up topics that were overlooked by mainstream psychology. Yet other work has been aimed at calling attention to and rectifying societal injustices. Perhaps the earliest example of such claims-making research was carried out by the social psychologists Sandra Bem and Daryl Bem (1973). The Bems carried out a pair of studies to demonstrate that sex-biased wording in job advertisements and the practice of running such ads in sex-segregated columns discouraged people from applying for jobs for which they were qualified. The Bems’ research formed the basis for a legal challenge, which ultimately led to a ban on such practices.

Later in this book, you will read about a number of critical methods for studying social life. Feminists have used all these methods in their research; indeed, feminist scholars often have played a key role in the development of the methods. For example, feminist researchers have made important contributions to the development and systematization of qualitative research in

psychology. Examples include thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013); focus groups (Wilkinson, 2004); conversation analysis (Kitzinger, 2000); participatory action research (Torre, Fine, & Fox, 2012); and semi-structured interviews (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Feminists have also been centrally involved in developing approaches to discursive psychology, such as post-structuralism (Weedon, 1987); Foucauldian discourse analysis (Gavey, 2005); and critical discursive psychology (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). Feminists have also played a prominent role in developing psychoanalytically inspired psychosocial methods (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Intersectionality theory, an approach developed largely by feminist thinkers and critical race theorists, has been introduced into psychology by psychologists who are feminists (Magnusson, 2011; Shields, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). (See also chapters by Riley and Bowleg in this volume.)

## Summary

As activist scholars, feminist psychologists are engaged in a quest for justice and social equality. Research and theory that engages in such a quest must of necessity situate people in the larger societal and cultural contexts in which inequalities and injustices arise and are sustained. Social relations of power, privilege, and oppression constitute key topics of study for feminist psychologists.

Feminist psychologists have been sharply critical of several aspects of mainstream social psychology. One of these is androcentrism, that is, the male-centred perspective that is often embedded in psychological theories, research practices, and interpretations. Androcentrism has taken many forms in psychology, including taking men (particularly White and middle-class men) as the standard against which other groups are evaluated. In addition to androcentrism, certain orienting assumptions that prevail throughout much of psychology are incompatible with those of feminist psychology. One such assumption is internalism—the propensity to focus on the “inside” of individuals and to see inner motives, traits, and capacities as the sole determinants of behaviour. Another such assumption concerns the propensity to frame psychological theories and explanations in universal terms. That is, psychologists often assume that theories and explanations hold for all people everywhere, irrespective of the widely varying conditions of people’s lives. Sex difference research—a perennial favourite of psychologists—exemplifies this inclination towards false universalism and the pitfalls associated with it. We ended our discussion with a brief overview of some critical methods that feminist psychologists have found useful in their work.

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# 3

## Marxism as a Foundation for Critical Social Psychology

Michael Arfken

The separation of facts and values is a cornerstone of scientific research. To remain a credible scientific discipline, it is often necessary to assure a sceptical public that the facts uncovered through rigorous investigation disclose the way the world is rather than the way we would like it to be. In a discipline such as social psychology—where the distinction between facts and values is always in danger of collapsing—anxieties surrounding credibility are likely to be particularly acute. These anxieties are certainly not abated by the succession of crises that have followed social psychology up to the present day (Bartlett, 2014; Collier, Minton, & Reynolds, 1991; Elms, 1975; Parker, 1989). While each crisis has given social psychologists a chance to reflect on the values embedded within the very structure of their discipline, few have sought to interrogate in any systematic fashion the basic assumptions that guide social psychological research and practice. It is here that Marxism furnishes us with both a rigorous and sustained critique of orthodox social psychology and an important framework for developing a critical social psychological alternative to mainstream theory and practice. Yet to fully grasp the importance of a Marxist critique, it is necessary to bring the assumptions underlying orthodox social psychology into view.

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## Orthodox Social Psychology

Although the questions animating orthodox social psychology have their roots in antiquity (Taylor, 1998), its methodological orientation largely took shape during the first half of the twentieth century. From Allport's (1924) commitment to carving out a unique identity for the discipline to Lewin's (1931) attempt to construct a new science of the social on the foundation of Galilean physics, orthodox social psychology has since its inception striven to be an *experimental* social science. And while Lewin's views on the importance of theory and the limitations of statistical analysis have more or less fallen on deaf ears, his commitment to experimental methodology continues to exert a considerable influence on the discipline (Collier et al., 1991; Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010; Smith, 1988). To fully appreciate the central role that experimentation plays in orthodox social psychology, it is important to see it within the context of revolutionary developments in the natural sciences.

At the heart of the scientific revolution is a radically new way of looking at the universe. Whereas Aristotelian physics was often closely aligned with everyday experience from the setting of the sun to the motion of objects as they fall to the ground, Galileo's investigations suggested that underlying our ordinary reality one could discern with proper methodological rigour a more primordial world of mechanical motion (Machamer, 1998). Yet in order to bring the essential features of this new reality into view, it was necessary to abstract from the world of everyday experience. Indeed, it was only through this abstraction that the mechanical forces lurking in the shadows could be brought into the clear light of day.

According to Koyré (1943), the emergence of this mechanistic view of the universe involves:

a replacement of the classic and medieval conception of the Cosmos—closed unity of a qualitatively determined and hierarchically well ordered whole in which different parts (heaven and earth) are subject to different laws—by that of the Universe, that is of an open and indefinitely extended entirety of Being, governed and united by the identity of its fundamental laws. (p. 334)

In a universe governed by mechanical laws, the very nature of knowledge is also radically transformed. For Aristotelian philosophy, knowledge and history are interwoven so that the movement of an object is intimately related to the nature of the object and its purpose within a particular social and historical context. In contrast, within the abstract space of a mechanical universe, the connection between knowledge and history is severed so that particular

objects become little more than occasions for observing the universal forces underlying mechanical motion (Lewin, 1931). Within the abstract world of Galilean physics, interest in an object's historical context was largely eclipsed by the systematic study of the field of forces operating on an object at any particular moment.

To observe these forces, Galileo argued that it is necessary to construct a machine at least in thought if not in reality (Machamer, 1998). In order to build a machine, it is first necessary to identify all of its essential components. Once these components have been identified, it becomes possible to construct a model in which the forces and dynamics of the system are clearly specified. Here analysis refers to a process of atomization and recombination—what Galileo would come to refer to as the resolute–compositive method (Cassirer, 1951; Macpherson, 1962). Through this analysis, the forces and dynamics within the machine itself are manifest while anything that cannot be transformed into a mechanism and integrated into the machine is systematically excluded.

There are a number of ways that orthodox social psychology bears the imprint of this mechanical view of the universe. To establish itself as a science, social psychology endeavoured to identify universal features of social thought and behaviour. As a mechanistic science, social psychology constructs an abstraction—the social situation—where all the variables and essential features of that situation can be brought under experimental control (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1968; Festinger, 1953). Within this abstraction, attention is restricted to the forces operating within this artificial context while the historical dimension of the social situation is either controlled or systematically excluded (Lewin, 1931).

The methodological constraints of experimentation also shape the way orthodox social psychology conceptualizes the nature of social reality. To understand the various forces at work in these specific social situations, it is necessary to resolve social situations into constituent elements so that the latter can be brought together in a systematic way. Through this process, the social is redefined so that social reality becomes an aggregate of individuals. The result is that “the norms of a certain kind of experimental practice were now equated with the essential structure of the social reality to be investigated” (Danziger, 1992, p. 321). Here the attempt to fashion a science of the social on the mechanistic approach of seventeenth-century natural science contributes to a radical restructuring of the nature of social reality.

If the use of experimental methods gave orthodox social psychology its scientific credentials, it still remained necessary to carve out a space for a uniquely psychological investigation of social phenomena. To this end, social

psychologists emphasize the extent to which a social actor's interpretation of a social situation influences his or her thoughts and behaviour. Congruent with transformations in twentieth-century psychological theory, these interpretations are treated as *cognitive* processes occurring in the minds of individual social actors (Bless, Fielder, & Strack, 2004; Collier et al., 1991; Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Moskowitz, 2005). While this enables orthodox social psychology to fortify its unique disciplinary territory, the emphasis on cognition also makes it possible to treat the human mind as a mechanical or computational device. Here the emphasis on cognition facilitates a scientific explanation of the psychological forces underlying social reality that is consistent with the redefinition of the social as an aggregate of individuals.

Another central feature of the cognitive orientation of orthodox social psychology is the view that an individual's interpretation of social reality is a process of active construction (Taylor, 1998). The metaphor of construction suggests that out of a collection of elements in their experience, individuals fashion a particular representation of their social worlds. Here representation refers to "an encoding of some information, which an individual can construct, retain in memory, access, and use in various ways" (Smith, 1998, p. 391). This process of construction is active insofar as social actors continually draw on and modify these mental representations as they navigate social reality. Within this framework, activity is viewed first and foremost as a psychological process so that all social activities can in principle be traced to mental activities occurring in the minds of individual social actors.

One consequence of this approach to interpretation is the assumption that our engagement with the world is fundamentally indirect. For Ross et al. (2010), if a core message is to be taken from social psychology, it is that "people respond to subjective rather than objective reality" (p. 23). To the extent that individuals differ in their interpretation of social reality, it is because the unique experiences of each social actor produce various and in some cases competing representations of reality. So while the content of our mental representations is subject to social and cultural variation, orthodox social psychology views the fact that we relate to our social world through our representations of that world as a universal feature of human psychology (Arfken, 2015).

In both its methodological commitments and its view of the nature of social reality, orthodox social psychology embodies a philosophical anthropology or a specific conception of *social being*. For those working within the discipline (Fiske, 2010; Taylor, 1998), the notion of social being serves as something of refuge from the dizzying array of metaphors and theories that have dominated orthodox social psychology since its inception. So while the social actor has

been variously conceived as a “naïve scientist”, “cognitive miser”, or “motivated tactician”, the notion of social being secures a measure of stability that is vital for the development a coherent disciplinary identity. As we have seen, at the heart of orthodox social psychology’s conception of social being is a commitment to experimental methodology and social cognition.

To date, critics of orthodox social psychology have challenged both the emphasis on experimentation and the cognitive framework for investigating social reality. With respect to experimentation, critics argue that a disciplines methods or ways of knowing the world necessarily draw on ontological commitments about the nature and structure of that world. So while experimental investigations of social reality may help us understand the dynamics of a particular social situation, they also inevitably reinforce the notion of social being that serves as the foundation of that knowledge. In addition, while critics agree that people actively construct their social worlds, they argue that modern psychology is perhaps best understood as the outcome rather than the foundation of this process. In other words, to speak of some psychological activity existing in our heads is already to participate in a social and cultural world in which something like a psychological discourse is intelligible.

The most general term given to these critiques of orthodox social psychology is *social constructionism* (Gergen, 1999; Potter, 1996; Burr & Dick, this volume). While scholars working under the banner of social constructionism exhibit a range of methodological and theoretical commitments, these commitments tend to gravitate around the notion that mental construction emerges against the background of a more primordial realm of social practice. Insofar as orthodox social psychology endeavours to identify the universal psychological mechanisms underlying our interpretations of social reality, it constitutes a form of cultural imperialism whereby the goals and values of a dominant culture colonize and dominate more local and marginalized practices. Here orthodox social psychological discourse appears less as a means for investigating the underlying structure of social reality and more as an ethnocentric indigenous psychology.

Although a Marxist critique of orthodox social psychology addresses many of the same issues raised by social constructionism, it places these issues within the context of a critique of political economy. Within this framework, experimentation and social cognition are not so much cultural constructions or discursive practices as they are reflections of the social relations of production within a competitive market society. In order to contrast a Marxist conception of social being with the one advanced by orthodox social psychology, and so articulate a Marxist version of Critical Social Psychology, it is important to appreciate the fundamental idea animating Marx’s work in general.



## Commodity Fetishism

According to Marx (1859/1977), the guiding thread of his critique of political economy can be summarized in the following way:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (p. 389)

In every epoch, our way of interacting and engaging with one another necessarily emerges within the context of a historically specific organization of the social relations of production. The basis of these relations of production is not cognition but rather human labour (Doyal & Harris, 1983). Under the capitalist mode of production, labour is organized around the production of surplus-value and the private ownership of the means of production. One of the consequences of this organization of labour is that most people have to sell their labour in a competitive market in order to survive. At the same time, the wealth generated by this labour is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a narrow section of the population. It is against the background of these social relations that larger institutional structures come into existence and remain intelligible. Psychological theories of human thought and behaviour are thoroughly embedded within this institutional structure such that these theories inevitably bear the imprint of the economic organization of society. Here the contrast between orthodox social psychology and Marxism is particularly striking. Because of its commitment to experimental methodology and representational theories of knowledge, orthodox social psychology begins with a collection of basic psychological processes that provide the necessary foundation for human social activity. In contrast, Marxism approaches social being as an economic process where the social relations of production create a framework within which anything like a human psychology is intelligible. In this sense, social being is first and foremost social and economic and only derivatively psychological. Moreover, while a Marxist approach to social being treats human practical activities as primary, it also emphasizes the fact that



cultural and discursive practices must always be reconciled with the existing social relations of production.

Within his early work—particularly the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844)—Marx argues that the principle mode of existence in a competitive market society is one of alienation. Under the capitalist mode of production, a gulf divides workers from their world, from the products of their labour, and from one another. Within these conditions, the mass of workers are reduced to little more than sources of surplus-value and consumers of an ever expanding collection of commodities—a state of affairs that is actually magnified by the worker's own labour. According to Marx (1844/1964), the estrangement of labour operates in direct proportion to the amount of labour expended so that workers paradoxically reproduce the conditions necessary for their own exploitation:

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*—and this in the same general proportion in which it produces commodities. (p. 107)

Under capitalism, labour is transformed into a commodity to be bought and sold within a competitive market. Workers not only supply the fuel for this economic system but also produce themselves as commodities. In Marx's mature work, he traces alienation to the very structure of the commodity form through his analysis of *commodity fetishism* (Eagleton, 1991).

At a fundamental level, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism explores the role that objects play in human activity. To the extent that an object is created or modified to serve human needs, its function in the service of those needs and its origin in human labour remains entirely transparent. For example, through human labour trees are transformed into lumber which provides the material for constructing a table. By sitting at the table and using it in the service of human needs, the table is directly consumed and the entire process from tree to table remains entirely intelligible. Alternatively, a table may be built not for the purpose of direct consumption but rather to be sold or exchanged within a competitive market. According to Marx (1867/1990), when objects are brought into contact with one another through an exchange market—that is, when they become commodities—they begin to exhibit an unusual quality:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. (pp. 164–165)

Through the process of exchange, human labour assumes the form of an objective property of the commodity itself. Here the social relations between producers are objectified or transformed into a property of the commodity at the same time as the relations between objects on an exchange market are socialized. For Marx, with the rise of the commodity form, human productive activity is increasingly divorced from and eclipsed by the activity of commodities in a market economy.

Marx also stresses that the emergence of a market economy is necessarily a function of the degree of development of the division of labour within a particular society (Mandel, 1967). In the absence of a division of labour, individuals have little need to exchange commodities since most of their productive activities are oriented towards producing what they require for direct consumption. As the degree of the division of labour increases, there is a shift from the production of objects for direct consumption to the production of commodities. Isolated from one another and banished to a narrow section of the production process, workers are increasingly compelled to participate in a market economy in order to secure those basic commodities that they have neither the time nor the means to produce through their own labour. With the dawn of advanced capitalism the production of commodities for exchange overtakes the production of commodities for direct consumption.

Insofar as human relationships emerge against the background of a system of commodity exchange, a historically specific commodity form comes to be experienced as an inexorable feature of human existence. According to Callinicos (1999), “since the social relationships between producers is mediated by the exchange of their products, the market economy comes to be seen as an autonomous process governed by natural laws beyond human control” (pp. 88–89). Since the value of commodities fluctuates according to aspects of the market that transcend the decisions of individual producers, exchange value is experienced as an objective characteristic of the object itself. To the extent that social relationships are organized around the satisfaction of human needs, nearly every dimension of human interaction from family dynamics to the institutional structure of society is brought into conformity with the objective value of the commodities themselves (Balibar, 1995). So while the

social relations under the historically specific conditions of capitalistic accumulation set into motion the alienating organization of production, the process of exchange makes these social relations of production appear natural and objective.

With the rise of the commodity form, market relations are increasingly viewed as a universal feature of human nature rather than a stage in the evolution of the relations of production. Moreover, since the degree of the division of labour is proportional to the rise of the commodity form, fragmentation appears not as a consequence of the social relations of production but rather as the immutable structure of social reality. As a consequence of a historically specific organization of the labour process, the isolated individual comes to serve as the basis for constructing larger social structures from the ostensibly free labour contract to democratic forms of government. For Marx, the reification of human labour and the fragmentation of social relationships reaches its zenith in classical political economy where the objectivity of the commodity form is treated as a natural law:

Marx presents this elementary objectivity, which appears as soon as a simple relationship with commodities on the market exists, as the starting-point and model of objectivity of economic phenomena in general and their laws; it is these laws which are studied by political economy, which ceaselessly compares them—either explicitly, by the use of mechanical or dynamic concepts, or implicitly, by the mathematical methods it employs—with the objectivity of the laws of nature. (Balibar, 1995, p. 58)

Under market relations, the commodity form becomes a new standard of objectivity. Here the abstraction produced by the rise of the commodity form intersects with the abstraction underlying seventeenth-century mechanistic science (Goldberg, 1999; Machamer, 1998; Sohn-Rethel, 1978; Zizek, 1989). As we have seen, the mechanistic abstraction of seventeenth-century science inverted reality so that the everyday world of human existence is now derived from a more primordial universe of mechanical motion. In a similar fashion, the commodity form transforms a historically specific organization of the relations of production into the very foundation of social reality.

Much as a map serves as a condensed representation of a territory (Schumacher, 1977), the commodity form increasingly replaces our direct engagement with the fruits of our labour, with the world, and with one another. As a map, the commodity form emphasizes those features of the landscape that are most conducive to its own reproduction while minimizing those features that could threaten its existence. While this abstraction clearly

comes to bear an imprint on human consciousness, the source of this abstraction is not to be found in the mind but rather in the social relations of production underlying the economic structure of modern society. In advanced capitalism where the production of commodities has overtaken the production of goods for direct consumption, the commodity form is also a map that increasingly extends over the entire territory (Dubord, 1977). Rather than simply standing in for certain elements in reality, under the commodity form representations ultimately become a surrogate for that reality. Here the claim that social actors encounter their representation of social reality rather than social reality itself parallels the underlying structure of the commodity form. In this light, the psychologization of social relations (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Parker, 2007, 2015) is not so much a cultural or discursive practice as it is an expression of social relations under the capitalist mode of production.

In contrast to Marx's earlier work on ideology (Marx & Engels, 1846/1998), his analysis of commodity fetishism resists being transformed into a psychological process operating within the minds of individual social actors (Eagleton, 1991; Ripstein, 1987). According to orthodox social psychology, social actors encounter not the world but rather their representation of that world and it is this indirect relationship that makes it possible to treat social activity as the outcome of a collection of basic psychological processes. The beauty of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism is that it invites us to approach the fetishism of the commodity as an epistemological or psychological issue *in order to* reject this picture. Indeed, once commodity fetishism is viewed within the context of a Marxist approach to social being, it becomes possible to see the entire enterprise of orthodox social psychology in a radically new way.

Within a Marxist framework, commodity fetishism is not so much an illusion that prevents social actors from grasping the true nature of the social situation as it is a feature of the social situation itself. Bensaïd (2009) takes us down this path when he argues that:

Fetishism is not simply misrepresentation. If it were, an ordinary science would suffice to divest it of its disguises and unveil its hidden truth. If it were only a bad image of the real, a good pair of spectacles would suffice to rectify it and exhibit the object as it really is. But the representation of fetishism operates constantly in the mutual illusion of subject and object, which are inextricably linked in the distorting mirror of their relationship. (p. 227)

Whereas orthodox social psychology points to the psychological mechanisms underlying a social actor's interpretation of social reality, the notion of commodity fetishism redirects attention to the social and historical context within

which this epistemological picture has remained dominant. As this context is brought into the foreground, it becomes clear that the epistemological picture underlying orthodox social psychology is ultimately a symptom of a more primordial rupture (Taylor, 1995). For Marx, the source of this rupture can be traced to the social relations underlying the commodity form itself:

to the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are*, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between person in their work, but rather as material relations between person and social relations between things. (Marx, 1867/1990, pp. 165–166; italics mine)

Here it is crucial to appreciate Marx's claim that the social relations between their private labours *appear as what they are* (Callinicos, 1999; Geras, 1972; Harvey, 2010). The fetishism of the commodity is not simply an illusion to be traced to an individual producer but an actually existing feature of the process of commodity exchange. To the extent that individuals experience the products of their labour as possessing a value independent of that labour, it is because with the rise of the commodity form, the value of commodities has actually been severed from the productive labour that brought them into existence. As Eagleton (1991) notes:

It is not simply a question of the distorted perception of human beings, who invert the real world in their consciousness and thus *imagine* that commodities control their lives. Marx is not claiming that under capitalism commodities *appear* to exercise a tyrannical sway over social relations; he is arguing that they actually do. (p. 85)

Placed within the proper context, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism suggests that the epistemological picture underlying orthodox social psychology is woven into the very fabric of the commodity form itself. To interrogate the commodity form, it is necessary to loosen the grip of this epistemological picture.

If we combine Marx's conception of social being with his analysis of commodity fetishism, we can begin to see interpretation not as a psychological event occurring in our minds but rather as a practical activity embedded in our engagement with the world. This means that within a Marxist framework, the social relations of production under capitalism are themselves an interpretation of social being. Transforming these relations is not so much a process of shifting world views as it is engaging in concrete political action and revolutionary struggle. Indeed, for an emerging generation of critical

social psychologists concerned about the social, economic, and increasingly environmental chaos engulfing our world, the primacy of practice makes it possible to see the relationship between modern institutions and orthodox social psychology in an entirely new light.

The picture that emerges from this analysis is one in which orthodox social psychology is less a means for investigating alienation and more a potent institutional expression of that alienation. Under capitalism, social actors are increasingly in direct contact with a world turned upside down. Insofar as orthodox social psychology emerges against the background of this inverted world, its interpretation of social being can do little more than reproduce that world. In this sense, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism makes it clear that at a fundamental level, orthodox social psychology is incapable of engaging with the class struggles woven into the underlying structure of modern social existence. While this points to the general inadequacy of orthodox social psychology, it is also important to see how these problems emerge within more specific areas of investigation.

## Ideology and Class

Within orthodox social psychology, the analysis of *ideology* is typically approached as a topic within the broader domain of attitudinal research. For example, Eagly and Chaiken (1998) define ideologies as "clusters of attitudes and beliefs that are interdependent in the sense that they are organized around a dominant societal theme such as liberalism and conservatism" (p. 284). According to Maio et al. (2003), ideologies exhibit a number of conceptual features that bring them within the domain of orthodox social psychology. First, ideologies are evaluative insofar as they reflect a positive or negative valence towards a particular entity. In addition, ideologies are subjective in that they "reflect how a person sees the world and not necessarily how the world actually exists" (p. 284). Here ideologies can be understood as a lens or a subjective representation of an objective reality. Finally, in terms of their underlying mechanism, ideologies may operate either consciously or unconsciously. At the most basic level, ideology "helps to explain why people do what they do; it organizes their values and beliefs and leads to political behavior" (Jost, 2006, p. 653). Each of these features suggests that within orthodox social psychology, ideology is construed first and foremost as a psychological mechanism with important social and political implications.

In an effort to forge a link between social psychological and Marxist investigations of ideology, some scholars have drawn on Neo-Marxist interest in

“false consciousness” (Jost, 1995; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Despite the fact that the term was never used by Marx, it has created a somewhat tenuous opening for an orthodox social psychological reading of Marx’s critique of political economy. According to Jost (1995), false consciousness refers to “the holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that are contrary to one’s own social interest and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or the group” (p. 400). Within this framework, social actors contribute to their own subjugation by maintaining a collection of erroneous beliefs and ideas about the true nature of their predicament. By failing to comprehend their actual interests within a system of oppression, social actors ultimately play a powerful role in the justification of that system.

For scholars working within the critical tradition, orthodox social psychological conceptions of ideology are problematic on a number of fronts. As we have seen, the emphasis on individual mental processes often obscures the very real contradictions embedded within the economic organization of society (Augoustinos, 1999; Goldberg, 1999; Parker, 2007). By locating distortion and illusion within the minds of individual social actors, orthodox social psychology confines the struggle for social justice to an exceedingly narrow section of the full economic and political spectrum. As such, it plays a powerful role in the reproduction of the existing social relations of production.

In addition, although psychological views of ideology emphasizes that our ways of knowing form the basis of social and political life, they fail to appreciate that these ways of knowing are themselves a product of a complex and tumultuous history. The questions animating seventeenth-century science and epistemology were born out of a radical transformation in the economic organization of society (Polanyi, 1944). From its mechanistic models of human mental functioning to its reconfiguration of the social, orthodox social psychology bears the imprint of this transformation. In this sense, a psychological conception of ideology appears less as an explanation of the forces and dynamics underlying a social actor’s interpretation of social reality and more as a potent expression of the alienated state of social relations under the capitalist mode of production.

It is also clear that the notion of ideology does not provide particularly fertile ground for linking Marxism with orthodox social psychology. As we have seen, Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism was in many ways a break with his earlier engagements with ideology (Balibar, 1995; Eagleton, 1991). Recognizing the limits of grounding his critique of political economy in a philosophy of consciousness, Marx followed through on his unwavering commitment to situate consciousness against the background of the social relations of production that dominate within a particular society. It is therefore



surprising to see orthodox social psychologists attempting to forge a link between psychological conceptions of ideology and Marxism. For example, Jost and Jost (2007) argue that if one surveys Marx's entire oeuvre, it is clear that having become dissatisfied with the modest gains in the philosophy of his day, Marx largely abandons philosophical inquiry in order to pursue more systematic empirical investigation within the nascent social sciences. Within this framework, Marx's analysis of ideology is transformed into an intellectual antecedent of orthodox social psychological investigations of social reality. Yet if Marx did leave philosophy for social science, he certainly did not bring the notion of ideology with him. Indeed, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism makes it clear that the attempt to make consciousness the foundation of social scientific investigation does not so much dispense with philosophical contemplation as it grants such contemplation a scientific status. Far from anticipating orthodox social psychology, Marx's work represents an incisive and stinging rebuke to the discipline as a whole.

If we shift attention to the way that orthodox social psychology engages with the *class* structure of society, it is clear that its conception of social being also puts certain constraints on its approach to social and economic stratification. To appreciate this, it is important to highlight some of the different ways of approaching the concept of class (see also Day et al., this volume). In some instances, class is treated as an objective location in a distribution (Wright, 2005). Here it assumes what Wright (1979) refers to as a gradational form:

The hallmark of the gradational view is that classes are always characterized as being "above" or "below" other classes. The very names given to different classes reflect this quantitative, spatial image: upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, lower class, and so forth. (p. 5)

This approach to class is closely linked with popular discourse surrounding income distribution and policy initiatives geared towards transferring wealth to and from different locations on a spectrum (Wright, 2005). Despite the fact that these objective positions form a hierarchy, the emphasis at this level of analysis is on the position of individuals or groups within a distribution rather than the social forces that bring various positions within the distribution into contact with one another.

Another way to approach class involves focusing on how social actors locate themselves and others within a system of social inequality (Wright, 2005). Here the notion of subjective socioeconomic status (SES) has been particularly influential. In contrast to the objective measures that locate individuals along a distribution of social and economic inequality, subjective SES focuses



on the way people perceive class and status (Wright, 2005). By focusing on the way people perceive social class, it is possible to link the experience of social class with other experiences of social stratification and group differentiation. Within this context, the notion of identity is particularly important since it functions as a psychological mechanism that connects social actors to a system of social and economic stratification (Frable, 1997). Once social class is understood as an identity, it becomes possible to explore the various ways that a class identity contributes to specific interpretations of social reality. Here the notion of intersectionality draws attention to the overlapping injustices that individuals face when they identify with several marginalized and oppressed groups (see Bowleg, this volume).

When class is treated as either an objective or subjective position within a distribution, attention is firmly focused on an unequal distribution of resources whether these resources are material (wealth, income) or social (prestige, honour). When class is used to highlight the life chances that individuals and groups face in a market economy—that is, when the emphasis is on ensuring equal access to certain resources—then social and economic stratification emerge exclusively against the background of distribution and exchange (Wright, 1979). Yet it is clear that restricting attention to the distribution and exchange of resources obscures certain fundamental dimensions of social class. For example, treating social classes as categories that identify groups based on the distribution of resources tends to pull apart the processes of distribution and production. The consequence is that classes become, “merely inequalities in the distribution of income, and therefore that class conflict can be alleviated or even eliminated altogether by the introduction of measures which minimize discrepancies between incomes” (Giddens, 1971, p. 37).

As we have seen, shifting attention to the social relations of production makes it apparent that the conflict between labourers and employers is embodied in a labour process oriented around the production of commodities. Focusing exclusively on the market and the conflicts arising through the process of distribution and exchange overlooks the fundamental conflicts within the social relations of production (Crompton & Gubbay, 1977; Wright, 1979). While relational approaches to class draw attention to important features of class that are largely obscured by gradational approaches, restricting attention to the level of distribution and exchange obscures the role that production plays in producing and sustaining inequality. So while an emphasis on market exchanges may help us understand how social and economic resources are *acquired* and distributed by individuals and groups, it is only by focusing on the process of production that we can come to appreciate “the manner in

which new values are *created*, and the social relationships arising out of and sustaining this process” (Crompton & Gubbay, 1977, p. 16).

The emphasis on distribution and exchange also contributes to an important shift in the way that orthodox social psychology conceptualizes class. Insofar as class is approached as an identity, it becomes possible to understand the disadvantages and burdens that members of certain social classes experience as a consequence of the way people or institutions are oriented towards that identity. In other words, if racism, sexism, and homophobia describe a process of marginalizing and devaluing individuals because they identify with a certain race, gender, or sexual orientation, it is reasonable to infer that a similar process is responsible for the disadvantages and burdens that members of certain social classes experience. It is within this context that the notion of *classism* has come to play a central role in social psychological investigations of social class. Classism refers to stereotypes and prejudices about class position that contribute to discrimination and domination (Bullock, 1995; Lott, 2012). Here the burdens and hardships that certain classes face are no longer located in the social relations of production but rather in the unequal distribution and exchange of recognition and the stigma associated with being a member of a devalued class.

The transformation of class from an economic to a cultural category is but one more example of the psychologization of social relations under the domination of the commodity form. Whatever role the emphasis on classism may have in reproducing the existing economic structure of society, it is of little help in addressing injustices grounded in the social relations of production. As Michaels’ (2006) observes:

it’s not true that the problem with being poor is that people with more money don’t think of you as their equal. The problem is that, with respect to money, they’re right. And this problem would not be solved if rich people stopped looking down on poor people and started appreciating them instead. For while it may be plausible to think of cultures as different but equal, it cannot be plausible to think of classes in the same way. (p. 107)

There is little doubt that cultural categories are well suited to struggles over recognition (Arfken, 2014). Indeed, a range of social justice movements have made important strides in this area. The mistake is to transform the economic categories of class into a cultural category or identity (Fraser, 1995, 2003). By shifting the emphasis from class to classism, orthodox social psychologists fail to appreciate the fact that cultural categories are only contingently devalued while the notion of class is itself a measure of social and economic stratification

(Arfken, 2013; Bensaïd, 2009; Eagleton, 2011; Michaels, 2006). It is not the appreciation but only the destruction of class that radically engages with the social relations of production.

When it comes to ideology and class, the orthodox social psychological conception of social being contributes to the affirmation rather than the transformation of the existing social relations of production (Fraser, 1995, 2003). Regardless of its utility in addressing oppression and domination, this conception of social being is ill equipped to interrogate the exploitive social relations that are a defining feature of capitalism. It is here that Marxism can serve as an important correction not only to orthodox social psychology but also to those forms of social constructionism that fail to engage with the class structure of modern society.

## The Future of an Objective Illusion

According to Habermas (1971), one of the most important aspects of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism is that it draws attention to the fact that within modern capitalism, class antagonisms that were once institutionalized by political domination and social force are increasingly legitimized through the wage labour contract and embedded in the very constitution of the commodity form. This state of affairs is an "objective illusion" existing not within our minds but in the social relations underlying the capitalist mode of production. To the extent that traditional structures of power have been reorganized to entrench our present predicament, it becomes incumbent upon us to search for new forms of resistance in order to destabilize this illusion.

Insofar as it remains committed to its current conception of social being, it is clear that orthodox social psychology is of little help in resisting this illusion. Although research on embodiment—particularly when it is informed by ecological psychology (Arfken, 2015; Gibson, 1979; Reed, 1996)—has the potential to shift attention to the central role that human labour plays in the constitution of social reality, orthodox social psychologists have for the most part remained reluctant to revise or abandon those assumption that put unreasonable constraints on this line of research. The result has been an exceedingly superficial appropriation of embodiment and one that is incapable of engaging with its more radical possibilities (Gallagher, 2015).

On the critical side, there is some reason for optimism. Although critical psychological scholarship emerges from a wide range of theoretical and methodological traditions, a number of influential scholars (Hayes, 2004; Parker, 2007; Parker & Spears, 1996) continue to place Marxism at the

centre of their work. Two recent conferences and special issues devoted to topics at the intersection of Marxism and psychology (Arfken, 2011; Painter, Pavón-Cuéllar, & Moncada, 2015) also point to the viability of this form of scholarship. At the same time, it is important to remember that the most important work is not always found between the pages of a book or journal. Looking towards the future of Marxist scholarship, Bensaïd (2009) suggests that “it only has a genuine future if, rather than seeking refuge in the academic fold, it succeeds in establishing an organic relationship with the revived practice of social movements—in particular, with the resistance to imperialist globalization” (p. xv). By organizing and participating in concrete political action and by pushing beyond the increasingly obsolete compartmentalization of the academic and the political, critical social psychologists are well positioned to interrogate a range of issues that will define both this and future generations. With the looming threat of environmental collapse and economic catastrophe, Marxism is more important now than ever before.

## Summary

At the heart of the orthodox social psychological conception of social being is a commitment to experimental methodology and a representational view of human cognition. While scholars working under the banner of social constructionism have challenged this conception of social being, they have too often failed to appreciate the role that a Marxist critique of political economy can play in their critiques. Drawing on Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism, it becomes clear that orthodox social psychology is not so much a tool for addressing modern alienation as it is a potent expression of that alienation. This is particularly clear when we explore orthodox engagements with issues surrounding ideology and class. By placing Marx’s critique of political economy at the foundation of Critical Social Psychology, it becomes possible to interrogate with renewed vigour many of the most pressing concerns of our age.

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# 4

## Social Constructionism

Viv Burr and Penny Dick

### Key Features of Social Constructionism

#### Language

The core tenet of the social constructionist approach is that how we understand and even perceive the world and the objects (including people) and events within it does not necessarily reflect the nature of that world but rather is a product of how the world is represented or produced through language. Thus, for example, what we perceive as a tree is, from the social constructionist's perspective, largely a consequence of how classifications (such as 'flowers', 'shrubs' and 'weeds') are produced through language rather than being a natural consequence of our perceptual capabilities. This is not to suggest that trees do not have various 'natural' characteristics that could be identified and charted, but rather that what are deemed to be the defining characteristics of trees are primarily a product of language. This argument is perhaps best exemplified by the use of social rather than naturally occurring phenomena. Take, for example, the current preoccupation in the media, and perhaps society more generally, with body size and what counts as thin versus fat. While it

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is probably the case that society has noted differences in body size from time immemorial, its salience or importance as a primary defining characteristic of individuals is more recent. Hence, while all objects (including people) in the world have definite properties, for social constructionists, what is more interesting is why certain properties assume importance and, critically, are then used as the basis for social or scientific evaluation (we will return to this idea below).

## Cultural and Historical Specificity

How the world is classified and categorised varies culturally (i.e. from place to place) and historically (over time). For example, we are all familiar with the idea of the class system in European societies which broadly categorises people as belonging to working, middle or upper classes. Not only is this division highly contested in the current era but it has also expanded to include such categories as the ‘underclass’. However, if we go back in time just 200 years, there was no such category as the ‘middle class’—this emerged during the industrial revolution as a consequence of changes in property rights and relative prosperity (Stallybrass & Whyte, 1986). Similarly, 150 years ago, it was highly unusual for women to go into higher or further education and those that did were often called ‘blue stockings’ to draw attention to their novel status as scholars in further and higher education. Some of you may well be familiar with or have read about the genocide that occurred in the African state of Rwanda in 1995. This was a consequence of conflict between two groups of Rwandan people—the Hutus and the Tutsis. This classification was actually developed by the Belgian colonialists who used it as a means to divide and govern Rwandan society. Prior to colonialism, this categorization did not exist. We will say a bit more about historical and cultural specificity later in the chapter.

Michel Foucault, the French social theorist, was particularly interested in how processes of classification and categorization proliferated during and following the enlightenment period (seventeenth century). Foucault (1977, 1979) points to how this proliferation was closely tied to changes in society, notably the expansion of the population and growing urbanisation and industrialization. Such changes prompted the necessity for more effective forms of what Foucault termed ‘governance’—which refers to all the ways through which populations are regulated and governed. Foucault argues that these governance processes were directly responsible for producing categories of ‘being’ that we all take for granted in our current epoch, such as academic

ability, mental stability, sexual orientation and so forth. The point he makes is not that these categories did not exist prior to this time, but rather, similar to the example of body size above, they became central and defining characteristics of modern personhood for particular reasons at a particular time. Specifically, contemporary categories of being are closely aligned with the needs of a capitalist economy and the need for individuals to be productive in both a biological and physical sense (see Rose, 1990, 1996).

## Discourse and Disciplinary Power

Discourse for social constructionists refers to sets of ideas that are culturally significant or what could be called 'broad meaning systems' (Speer, 2005) and that can be used to make sense of the world and events within it. Thus for instance, it is very common in today's society for us to make sense of what people do and say through the discourse of 'personality' or 'disposition'. This meaning system produces the idea that individual behaviour is a consequence of largely internal traits or motivations that are either inherited or learned. Not every idea counts as a discourse. Thus, for example, 'fruit' is not generally seen as a discourse even though it is a category derived from language that we use to classify certain edible matter. What differentiates discourse from ideas more generally for the social constructionist is its *productive* power. That is, discourses do not simply describe the world, an event or a person, they actually influence what we do and how we act (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Thus, for example, because the dominant explanation for the causes of human behaviour is currently 'personality', we tend to see people as responsible for their own fate and well-being in life. We tend only to accept that someone lacks such responsibility if they are shown to be mentally ill or incapacitated in some way. Thus when someone commits a crime, the societal response tends to be punishment of some sort and often attempts to rehabilitate or retrain the individual so that their internal 'faults' causing the criminal behaviour can be corrected. However, critical scholars point out that a lot of criminal behaviour appears to be the consequence of poverty and lack of access to education and employment (e.g. Reiner, 2007). While such causes of criminality are widely acknowledged, the dominance of the 'personality' discourse means that interventions targeted at improving persons are more frequent than interventions designed to alleviate, say, poverty.

A further productive aspect of discourse comes from its *disciplinary* effects. Returning to Foucault's ideas, he argued that one of the most effective modes of modern governance is disciplinary power or, to grossly simplify, the desire

of individuals to conform to norms in society. Discourses of personhood, for example, produce ideas about what 'normal' people should be like. Currently, for instance, having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 25 is said to show that the individual is 'overweight'. And because, as outlined above, body size is currently such a central defining characteristic of personhood, this is producing much behaviour aimed at reducing BMI such as diet and exercise regimes. Not every discourse produces strong disciplinary effects and indeed, the more discourses operate to normalise certain modes of behaviour and being, the more 'resistance' is generated and counter-discourses are often produced (Foucault, 1979). A study conducted in 1995, for example, looked at the influence of discourses of beauty on Black British women (Mama, 1995). Mama argued that because dominant discourses in the West push the idea that beauty is dependent on being white, blonde and blue-eyed, this can have a deleterious effect on those who do not possess such characteristics, such as Black women. Mama found that the Black women in her study resisted this discourse by celebrating the physical attributes of Black women—but only once they had become conscious that their feelings of 'lacking beauty' were a consequence of this culturally produced discourse. These processes of conformity and resistance are what lead to the proliferation of categories, particularly of personhood, that typify late modernity (Frank & Meyer, 2002). Consider, for instance, how many different and socially accepted sexual orientations there are today compared to 100 years ago when heterosexuality was the only publically acknowledged form of sexuality.

## Power Relations

As mentioned above, social constructionists are interested in why certain properties of the world and individuals assume importance and are then used as the basis for social or scientific evaluation. We have already discussed body size as one relevant contemporary 'property' that has influenced how people act and evaluate themselves and others. Body size is also currently a dominant measure of health. But why has this property assumed such contemporary importance? Power relations refer to how the positions occupied by people in society, such as occupations and class, allow some groups to have more authority (and therefore power) than others. Thus for instance, doctors and other elite professionals have considerable power in our society, whereas individuals said to belong to the 'underclass' have very little. While power relations are never fixed or invariable, those occupying more authoritative positions are able to set the standards and the norms to which the rest of us

are expected to conform. In the current epoch, for example, doctors possess much power because health is essential to our survival and because demand for health services is infinite, growing and financially costly. Hence, because doctors are able to both intervene in order to (sometimes) improve our health and make legitimate claims about the personal factors that increase health risks, other authorities, such as governments and educational establishments, see the views of the medical profession as critical to their own survival and prosperity. In concert, this means that the medical profession is able to set standards (such as those pertaining to body size) that we are then exhorted to meet through various policies and practices, such as nutritional guidance and school dinners/breakfast clubs. Power relations exist both at the level of society (as between the medical profession and the rest of the population) and between individuals. In the next section, we will look at some research that illustrates the link between these two levels and its influence on the production of discourse.

## Relativism

One potentially troubling consequence of social constructionist philosophy is that it leads us to the position that there is no definitive 'truth' to the nature of the world or of people. Rather, what we take to be true at a given point in time cannot be divorced from the processes of power outlined above and their relationship to language. This means that if we are going to embrace a social constructionist philosophy, we also have to accept that there are multiple perspectives on any given event, person or object and that which perspective is currently accepted as correct is more a matter of politics and power than of some attribute of the perspective itself. Thus for instance, in our contemporary era we tend to believe accounts of objects, people or events if they are supported by what we deem to be appropriate evidence, but unfortunately this is not quite as straightforward as we might think. We tend to think, for example, that if someone claims they have been sexually harassed that we can find out the truth of this by means of say, witnesses, or perhaps video or audio recordings of particular events and interactions or by the personal account of the person being harassed. However, in reality, it is very difficult to establish whether or not a particular interaction can indeed be unproblematically classed as an instance of sexual harassment. As the film *Bridget Jones* clearly shows, a sexual comment from a particular man can be read as a compliment by a particular woman and the same comment from another man as sexual harassment. Policy on sexual and other forms of harassment tends to fudge

this issue by emphasising that it is individual perceptions of an event that is important in deciding whether or not it is harassment, but there are real dangers here, including the generation of double standards in which some individuals are 'allowed' to make sexual comments and others are not (see below).

## Critique of Mainstream Social Psychology

Social constructionism (see Burr, 2015) critiques mainstream social psychology, focusing on the latter's commitment to an inappropriate model of the person and commitment to a model of social science which arguably asks the wrong questions and is blind to key features of human life. It also raises the important issue of who sets the agenda behind the questions that are asked by the discipline, and therefore about the role of psychology in the perpetuation of social inequalities.

Social psychology has inherited the assumptions of its parent discipline, which has in turn modelled itself upon the natural sciences. The natural sciences, which study the nature of the physical world through disciplines such as biology, chemistry and physics, have developed within a positivist theoretical framework; the properties of the natural world have been explored principally through key techniques such as experimentation and observation, with an emphasis upon objectivity. As psychology emerged as a new discipline, academic respect appeared achievable through developing its own credentials as a science, and psychology therefore adopted the methods and theoretical framework of the natural sciences. A great deal of mainstream work has consequently been concerned with isolating and measuring psychological 'variables', and this is no less true of mainstream social psychology.

Social constructionism continues the critique of this mainstream work that began with the 'crisis' in social psychology in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Armistead, 1974). Social psychology emerged as psychologists during the Second World War in the USA and Britain were asked by their respective governments to provide knowledge about people that could help the war effort. For example, psychologists suggested ways of keeping up the morale of troops and of encouraging people to eat unpopular foods (Guthe & Mead, 1943; Hovland, Lumsdane, & Sheffield, 1949); social psychology was therefore funded by and served those in positions of power, and over the following decades it became a matter of concern to some within the discipline of social psychology that it implicitly promoted the values of dominant groups. As we discussed in the previous section, this concern with power relations is a key feature of critical social psychology and social constructionism today.

Another concern raised at this time was that the ‘voice’ of ordinary people was missing from social psychological research; mainstream, experimental researchers gathered typically quantitative data from their ‘subjects’ which they then interpreted. The participants in such research had little or no opportunity to account for their behaviour, which was typically decontextualised by the laboratory setting thus ignoring the social contexts which give behaviour its meaning. For example, Solomon Asch’s classic social psychological studies on conformity in the 1950s are often reported as demonstrating that a surprising number of people are prepared to deny the evidence of their own eyes in order not to appear to disagree with their peers. This prompted much theoretical speculation as to what kind of social influence might be operating in such a situation, and which experimental variables might be the most important factors in producing conformity.

But later attempts to replicate Asch’s studies in different populations reported very varied levels of conformity. Of particular note is a study by Perrin and Spencer (1981) in which they introduced interesting variations on the conformity research paradigm. In some of these studies, they drew their sample of experimenters, confederates and naïve subjects from West Indians, Whites, probationers and probation officers. Although they had previously found very low levels of conformity in a student sample, in these variants they found similar levels of conformity to those reported by Asch when the experimenter was White and the naïve subject West Indian, and when the experimenter and confederates were probation officers and the naïve subject was on probation. The responses of the naïve subjects in these studies seems best understood as a response to the meaning of the situation they found themselves in, a meaning grounded in the social context of their lives outside of the social psychology laboratory and one suffused with power relations.

Cherry (1995) provides an insightful and thoughtful re-consideration of the ‘bystander intervention’ research paradigm in social psychology, in her discussion of the murder of Kitty Genovese, the incident which arguably prompted research interest in this topic in the 1960s and 1970s. Second-wave feminism had begun to have an impact on psychology, and there was concern about the way that women’s experience was often distorted by research and theory. Furthermore, critical writers were keen to point out that psychology, while dressing itself as apolitical and value-free, often subtly reinforced and legitimated oppressive attitudes and practices (see later in this section).

Cherry argues that incidents such as the murder of Kitty Genovese cannot be properly understood outside of the material conditions and power relations existing in the society in which they take place. Whereas bystander research has typically presented its findings as illustrating general principles of



social behaviour, Cherry locates the murder of Kitty Genovese within its cultural, racial and gendered context, re-framing it within the social problem of violence towards women. In the 1960s, when the attack took place, the widespread abuse of and violence towards women was not recognised as a social problem, and Cherry points out that many of the witnesses to the murder were reluctant to intervene in what they perceived as a 'lovers' quarrel'. She argues that the fact that Kitty Genovese was a White woman, and that she was killed in a middle-class area of New York, is what made the incident shocking to people. If Kitty had been Black or killed in a poor neighbourhood, her murder would not have been nearly so 'newsworthy'.

The idea of human behaviour as intelligible only when isolated from the 'contaminating variables' of social life is enshrined in Floyd Allport's (1924, p. 12) definition of social psychology: 'The science which studies the behaviour of the individual in so far as his [sic] behaviour stimulates other individuals, or is itself a reaction to this behaviour'. Allport's definition invites us to see people as self-contained individuals who exist prior to social life and who impact upon each other with particular effects. But for social constructionism the social context in which we live is not just a set of important variables to be taken into consideration when trying to understand behaviour. Without the social realm, people as we know them would not exist at all; we become human by virtue of taking part in social life. This view of the person as socially constituted stands in critical contrast to the individualism of the mainstream discipline. Allport's definition may be seen as embodying an assumption about people that has been entrenched within western thinking since before psychology began and which is arguably becoming even more so. The model of human beings intrinsic to mainstream psychology and social psychology is a particularly individualistic one; it celebrates and privileges the unique, self-contained person. And the content of this individual is the stuff of psychological and social psychological research—traits, drives and motivations, attitudes and beliefs.

This individualism became part of the discipline of psychology as it developed and flourished in the early twentieth century in North America, where the individual is arguably especially celebrated (see Farr, 1996). Such individualism has resulted in, and continues to feed, a reductionist, 'intrapsychic' account of a number of psychological and social phenomena. We are invited to consider problems such as eating disorders and dyslexia as syndromes or illnesses contained within the individual. But social constructionism is critical of this approach, arguing that such phenomena can be best understood at the level of the social realm. Our interactions and relations with others, especially power relations, provide us with an understanding of such phenomena that



is ultimately more facilitative, since the ‘psychologisation’ of such problems (see Burr & Butt, 1999) ultimately places the origin of, and therefore blame for, problems within the individual’s psyche. As in the cases of personality and health that we examined in the previous section, this ‘psychologisation’ can be seen as an example of how discourses can affect how we account for our experience and behaviour, especially when these are promoted by powerful groups such as medical professionals.

It is worth noting that this individualism is not present in the sub-discipline of social psychology that emerged from sociology, sometimes referred to as ‘sociological social psychology’ (see Farr, 1996), a body of work that has been influential in the development of social constructionism within psychology. The origins of this can, paradoxically, be traced back to the work of Wundt who set up the first psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879. Despite now being lauded as the founder of experimental psychology, Wundt believed that only some psychological phenomena were suitable for laboratory study and saw myth, religion and culture as key social factors in understanding human conduct. This focus on the social and cultural realm was taken up by George Mead at the University of Chicago. Mead had studied with Wundt and his work later became developed by Herbert Blumer as Symbolic Interactionism. The psychologist John Watson began his career as a PhD student under Mead’s supervision, but later diverged from him in his focus on behaviourism. Arguably, the split between Mead and Watson was influential in producing the parallel careers of psychological and sociological social psychology, with the psychological variety maintaining a focus on the self-contained individual and a vision of the person as analytically separable from its social context.

Psychological social psychology is committed to a vision of science that is positivist and reductionist, and it holds up the experimental paradigm as the epitome of ‘good science’. This approach brings with it a view of knowledge whereby what we come to ‘know’ through our research is assumed to build a more and more complete, a more and more accurate, picture of the world as it really is. The unwritten assumption is that psychological and social psychological research will eventually provide accurate answers to the question of how human beings function psychologically and socially. The mainstream discipline therefore makes the assumption that its knowledge is (at least ideally) good for all time and for people in all cultures.

Social constructionism challenges this assumption and argues that the individualistic model of the person that psychology assumes is in fact a very local one, both historically and culturally. It is born out of specifically western ideologies that are rooted in styles of thinking that have emerged in Europe

over the last few hundred years. Increased geographical mobility in modern times has highlighted the diversity of alternative conceptualisations of personhood that exist throughout the world. For example, it has been suggested that social life in some non-western cultures is much more rooted in 'community' and that, as a consequence, people who are part of such cultures do not conceive of or experience themselves in individualistic terms but as being in an interdependent relationship with others (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, psychology has assumed a narrative of progress towards a single, accurate understanding of human functioning. For example, in Greco-Roman medicine (around 350–450 BC) people were thought to have one of four types of temperament, called the 'four humours'. These were sanguine (optimistic, leader-like), choleric (bad-tempered or irritable), melancholic (analytical and quiet) and phlegmatic (relaxed and peaceful). The Greek physician Hippocrates believed human moods, emotions and behaviours were caused by an excess or lack of four body fluids (the humours): blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. Today, such a theory is regarded as inaccurate and personality is seen in terms of traits that have a genetic basis. Our contemporary understanding is seen as more enlightened and as a product of scientific progress, although evidence for the existence of personality traits as concrete entities or structures (rather than theoretical constructs) could be said to be no greater than that for the four humours.

Psychology has responded to the historical and cultural diversity of ways of conceptualising people by incorporating them into its own narrative: other ways of thinking are mis-informed because they are not founded on the scientific evidence that we have painstakingly built. The spread of western psychology across the world and into other cultures has been regarded by critical psychologists as a form of colonisation, replacing their indigenous psychologies. Social constructionism takes a pluralist, or relativist, view which regards all other approaches to understanding people as alternative constructions. As we outlined in the previous section, from such a viewpoint there can be no accurate or 'truthful' account of the person; different constructions must instead be explored for how they potentially restrict or facilitate human life.

One of the key critiques of mainstream psychology and social psychology that social constructionism shares with other critical psychologists is that it engages in a kind of hypocrisy. Like the natural sciences, psychology regards itself as free from vested interests and power relations, and as apolitical; it views its research activity as producing objective 'facts', and its objectivity is taken to mean that such facts therefore cannot, in themselves, advantage some groups of people over others. The claim that psychology is value-free becomes questionable when one examines the assumptions lying behind its research

activities. For example, the case of IQ is now well rehearsed in this respect; the measurement of the 'trait' of intelligence was assumed to be value-free, but we now regard the content of traditional IQ tests as reflecting the concerns and world view of White, middle-class males and it should therefore be no surprise that people lying outside of this privileged social group have often performed less well on such tests. And it need hardly be pointed out that the lower IQ performance of Black and working-class people has served to reinforce rather than challenge their relatively powerless position in society. It can therefore be claimed that psychology has routinely operated in a way that has political effects while claiming that it is apolitical and value-free.

This concern with power relations, together with the desire to include the 'voice' of research participants referred to earlier, has led social constructionism to radically challenge the conception of language implicit in the mainstream discipline. The 'turn to language' that is a key feature of social constructionism has brought a preference for qualitative research methods such as semi-structured and narrative interviews, diaries and other forms of discourse. Despite the greater use of qualitative methods within the mainstream discipline today, the mainstream retains a value system whereby quantitative methods are seen as more likely to produce 'hard facts', data that can objectively, reliably and accurately inform us about the nature of the social world. But since social constructionism challenges these values and rejects the notion of a single, objective truth, qualitative methods are championed as highly effective ways of gaining access to individual and socially shared constructions.

Furthermore, in its assertion that all the phenomena of social and psychological life are constructed in the course of human interaction, social constructionism radically transforms the role and status of language in social psychological research. Within the mainstream discipline, language is implicitly taken for granted rather than interrogated; our talk is assumed to unproblematically constitute a vehicle which carries our interior life, such as our thoughts, attitudes and emotions, into the social realm. When we say 'I remember', 'I feel' or 'in my view' it is assumed that the content of pre-existing psychological states and structures are being communicated to others via our language. Social constructionism argues that, rather than simply describing the (interior and exterior) world, language is a key site where these worlds are constructed. Social constructionist writing has therefore re-framed psychological and social psychological topics that have formed the mainstay of the research agenda for decades, such as attitudes and memory. Classic works such as Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edwards (1997) have challenged the mainstream conception of attitudes, memories and other cognitive events,

emphasising instead the constructive and performative powers of language; within this view, people are highly skilled social actors who employ language to build accounts and to perform identities that are useful for them. Other social constructionists have focused on the power of prominent discourses and texts circulating in society to create identities and subject positions which may be problematic for those individuals who are implicated in them. For example, there is a now a large stream of literature that has examined the problems women experience as leaders and managers in organisations because of how these roles are constructed through particular discourses of masculinity which valorise certain behaviours and attitudes, such as work centrality, upward mobility and presenteeism (see e.g. Mills, 1992). Not only do some women (and men) find it difficult to conform to such discourses of the 'ideal manager' in general (Haynes, 2012) but they also may find they are seen by others to be less professional and committed once they have a family and decide to devote more time to their non-working life (Dick, 2015).

## Social Constructionist Research

The key principles of social constructionism mean that the aims and practices of social enquiry must be radically transformed. We cannot investigate the psychological and social world using our old assumptions and practices, because their focus on internal psychic structures and processes is inappropriate. Instead, our research must focus more on language and other symbolic systems. In addition, social constructionism brings into question some of the key criteria we are used to associating with 'good science'.

Because social constructionism problematises all truth claims, the familiar ideal of objectivity becomes inappropriate; there is no single 'truth' to be revealed by taking an objective stance to the world. Furthermore, we must all encounter the world from our particular location in the social world; our questions, theories and hypotheses, must therefore stem from the assumptions embedded in our perspective. For example, the extensive research literature on sex differences (see Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974) says less about the psychological differences between the sexes, which turn out to be relatively few, than it does about psychologists' assumptions that women and men must be different kinds of people. The task of the researcher therefore becomes to acknowledge the influence of their own background and involvement in the research process, reflecting on the part that this may play in the findings.

The familiar concepts of reliability and validity likewise become problematic. Reliability is the requirement that the research findings are repeatable,

and therefore not simply a product of fleeting, localised events; and validity is the requirement that the scientist's description of the world matches what is 'really there'. But social constructionism argues that there can be no final description of the world, and 'reality' may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it. Nevertheless, social constructionist researchers recognise the need to demonstrate the rigour and robustness of their work, and a variety of alternative criteria have been put forward as ways of demonstrating that the analysis has been carried out systematically and that the interpretation has been soundly argued. In fact, these are criteria that are more broadly used within qualitative research, such as 'trustworthiness'. Practically this involves such things as providing in-depth information about the steps in the analytic procedure, and 'member checking' whereby the researcher asks for feedback from the research participants themselves.

Social constructionists argue that, since there can never be any objectively defined truth about people, all claims to have discovered such truths must be regarded as political acts; they are attempts to validate some forms of human life and to invalidate others. Psychology is criticised because it has achieved its political effects precisely through its claim to be value-free and therefore apolitical. This also obscures the ways that psychological research has been used, and continues to be used, to address the concerns of relatively powerful groups in society. Some social constructionist researchers therefore use their research as critique, to reveal how language can be used to legitimate and support unequal power relations.

Social constructionist research also implies a preference for qualitative research methods since these are ideal for gathering linguistic and textual data and are also seen as less likely to decontextualise the experiences and accounts of respondents. The preferred method of a psychology that models itself on the natural sciences is the experiment. In this research paradigm, the experimenter and subject are positioned in an undemocratic relationship, where the experimenter's 'voice' is heard but that of the subject is not. The reported experience of the subject also becomes decontextualised; the control of variables seen as irrelevant to the concerns of the experiment effectively strip subjects' behaviour of the context that gives it meaning and rationale, replacing this with the experimenter's own interpretations. This is one of the concerns that fuelled the 'crisis' in social psychology.

Data used in social constructionist research may include interviews, transcripts of naturally occurring speech, newspaper articles, advertisements and so on—in fact anything that could be considered a 'text' to be read for meaning. Data are then often analysed using one of a number of approaches that are collectively referred to as 'discourse analysis'. Both spoken discourse (such

as interview transcripts, or transcripts of political speeches) and written texts (such as news articles) are often analysed through these methods, but other kinds of materials such as pictures, films or even the built environment can also be treated as texts and analysed for their symbolic meaning. To illustrate some of the methodological and epistemological issues outlined above, we will now discuss two examples of social constructionist research that examine very different phenomena. The first example is a study of sexual harassment in the police service and the second is a study of paranormal phenomena.

## Sexual Harassment

Mainstream approaches to the study of sexual harassment follow the positivist tradition we have critiqued above and assume that sexual harassment is an objectively verifiable experience that can be measured and quantified by using such instruments as questionnaires and surveys (e.g. Klonoff & Landrine, 1995; Somvadee & Morash, 2008). Typically the extent of sexual harassment in a given context, such as a workplace, will be assessed by asking respondents to specify how often they have been on the receiving end of 'unwanted sexual comments', for example. One problem with this approach, however, is that it does not easily capture whether individuals find such experiences distressing which makes it difficult to use the results of such research to draw firm conclusions about sexual harassment. Furthermore, qualitative and mainly feminist researchers have argued that if norms in a given context operate to sanction and render 'normal' sexualised behaviour, then sexual harassment may be masked or complaints about it 'silenced' (Clair, 1998).

From a social constructionist perspective, however, both ideas (that the extent of sexual harassment can be measured and that norms render sexual harassment invisible) are problematic because they assume that sexual harassment exists independently of our interpretations of that experience. That is, the literature assumes that certain actions, activities and practices (including talk) can be unproblematically categorised as sexual harassment. A recent study by Dick (2013) tackles this issue from a social constructionist perspective.

Using a discursive psychology approach which focuses on how individuals construct accounts of their experiences and the extent to which these accounts 'work' to produce credible versions of reality, Dick (2013) argues that sexual harassment cannot be viewed as an objectively verifiable experience but needs to be understood as a discursive accomplishment which is rendered more or less difficult dependent upon the precise nature of the interactional context

in which the claim about sexual harassment is being made. So, for example, imagine that a woman is at work and a man makes a comment to her, for example, 'you look sexy in that skirt'. She then discusses this with one friend who is of the view that this is an outrageous example of sexual harassment and another who thinks it is typical of the man concerned—'he says that to all the young girls in the office'. Now imagine that this woman comes to agree with the view of the first friend and decides to report this to her manager. Her manager is an older man who, following organisationally recommended procedures, asks her whether the 'harasser' has made more than one such comment to her or has done anything else she finds offensive. He suggests she returns to see him if any other incidents occur or that she asks the man concerned not to talk to her in this way if it happens again. On leaving her manager's office, she is now less certain about how to interpret the sexual comment that was made to her and she is also now a little concerned about what to do when she sees this man again.

This vignette raises a number of issues that Dick (2013) explores in her study. First, interpretations of experiences such as sexual harassment are difficult to make and are facilitated or inhibited by the interactional context in which the interpretation is negotiated. The idea that a comment can be interpreted as sexual harassment, for example, may be much more likely in a context with another female who dislikes such behaviour than in one with a female who sees such comments as normal and unremarkable or where the other party is sceptical about whether the comment was 'meant' to be sexual or harassing. Second, these contexts are characterised by particular relations of power that render some interpretations more acceptable than others. For instance, where the manager as the more powerful party in an interaction expresses scepticism, this is more likely to affect either how an individual interprets his or her experience or the extent of the effort the individual has to make to render her interpretation 'believable'. For example, in Dick's study, she shows how her own position as a feminist researcher influenced the construction of an account in which sexual harassment was constructed as normal and harmless. The research participant producing this account had to put a lot of effort into persuading the researcher that the behaviour she was discussing (sexual innuendo) was 'in the mind of the observer', efforts that proceeded from Dick's interrogation of what this innuendo involved. Third, the category 'sexual harassment' is itself a product of particular societal relations of power. That is, sexual harassment emerged as a credible category of experience once women (and some men) in workplaces began to object to the subordination of women in organisations. Like any discursive category, this has disciplinary effects in as much as most individuals in con-



temporary society would not want to be labelled as a sexual harasser. This in itself is likely to be having distinct effects on how men and women relate to each other in the workplace, in turn influenced by shifting relations of power occurring as a consequence of these disciplinary effects, that is, men are much more aware that they need to be careful about the comments they do make to women in the workplace. Finally, Dick (2013) argues that when scholars insist that particular experiences should be interpreted as sexual harassment, they are themselves reproducing relations of power in which the researched are seen to be 'naïve' and the scholars 'correct'. This in itself, Dick argues, has distinct effects on how individuals interpret and account for their experiences in the workplace, with many research participants unwilling to accept that the researcher's interpretation of what a given experience means should be privileged above their own interpretation. For instance, a study by Scarduzio and Geist-Martin (2008) looked at male professors' experiences of sexual harassment in academe. They noted that their participants were very reluctant to name certain experiences as sexual harassment, which they suggest may stem from the subject position 'victim' in sexual harassment discourse. Scarduzio and Geist-Martin argue that this subject position is not easily taken up by men, especially high status men, who may experience high levels of internal conflict and ambiguity in using this term, as they attempt to define and make sense of their experiences. It is also equally as feasible that these men did not want to be labelled as a 'victim' by the researcher and hence their unwillingness to label their experiences as sexual harassment may be a product of the research interview as much as any 'internal' reason.

## Paranormal Experiences

A second example of social constructionist research also conducted using a discursive psychology approach is Robin Wooffitt's (1992) work on paranormal experiences. Paranormal experiences can be difficult to discuss in an interaction because there is always a risk that the person claiming to have had such an experience will be seen as 'odd' or in some way 'unreliable'. Wooffitt brackets the issue of whether or not a person is telling the truth when they claim to have seen a ghost, live in a haunted house or experienced any other form of occult experience and instead looks very closely at how individuals build accounts of paranormal experiences. Wooffitt notes two particular characteristics of such accounts that tell us much about our contemporary Western culture. The first is that when individuals are constructing accounts of paranormal experiences,



they put significant effort into building a picture of themselves as an ordinary and not a strange, reactionary or deluded individual. They do this with a number of what are called discursive devices (patterns in talk that transmit particular meanings). One such device is known as ‘avowal of prior scepticism’ whereby an individual will claim that prior to the particular paranormal event experienced, they too did not believe such phenomena existed. They tend also to preface their account of the experience with descriptions of highly mundane actions. For example, ‘I was just having a cup of tea with Mary when we heard this funny noise’. These two devices work to persuade the other party to the interaction that the individual was not expecting to have a paranormal experience, and had never experienced such an event previously. Thus the other party in the interaction is being instructed not to read the individual as someone who is always anticipating that such events might occur. A further important element of building a believable account of a paranormal experience is related to what Wooffitt terms ‘auspicious contexts’. Similar to the point made by Dick (2013) regarding the extent to which power relations make it more or less difficult for an individual to be believed, Wooffitt argues that some contexts are more conducive to an individual being believed than others, for example, being with those who believe in the paranormal versus with those who are highly sceptical.

The nature of the efforts that individuals put into building accounts of paranormal experiences do seem to indicate particular features of our contemporary culture that influence how we make sense of the world, ourselves and others. First, in Western contemporary culture, we tend to be more inclined to believe that a particular phenomenon exists if there is ‘scientific evidence’ for it, that is, objectively verifiable indicators of its existence, which in the case of paranormal experiences might be video or audio recordings of such activity. Pollner (1987) refers to our contemporary desire for such evidence as ‘mundane reasoning’. He argues that while this preference is probably entirely sensible if trying to, for example, verify the speed at which a car was travelling, for more ambiguous social phenomena this form of reasoning is not necessarily helpful. Nevertheless, it explains why individuals put so much effort into constructing facticity (i.e. that the experience being recounted is a product of objective rather than subjective circumstances) when providing accounts of contested phenomena. A second and related issue is that when people construct accounts of experiences that are widely viewed as spurious or lacking credibility, there is the danger that they will be interpreted as ‘odd’ or ‘strange’. Again, the fact that individuals devote so much effort into constructing themselves as ordinary individuals who have had extraordinary experiences shows how dispreferred such self-attributions are in our society. This, we suggest, is

evidence of the dominance of rationality—the idea that a sane and therefore reliable and normal person is one who is governed by reason and logic, not fantasy and emotion.

As our two examples here suggest, discourse analysis can be used to investigate a very wide range of phenomena (see Augoustinous, this volume). But the focus is always upon the constructive power of language and how it is used. A Foucauldian discourse analysis is often used when the researcher wants to identify the discourses (ways of speaking about and otherwise representing something) that are prevalent in society around a particular topic and identifying the possible ideological and political effects of these. However, political concerns are not necessarily central to all social constructionist research. Some social constructionists, such as discursive psychologists, are often more interested in investigating the workings of language and the construction of accounts for their own sake; the approach to analysis they take is more likely to consist of a fine-grained exploration of naturally occurring interactions ('conversation analysis') and the aim is to answer questions about how people manage their identities, make truth claims and build justifiable accounts during their interactions. Increasingly, researchers are adopting 'hybrid' versions of discourse analysis, aimed at investigating both prevailing discourses and how discourse is used in interaction. A good example comes from Speer (2005), who examines how discourses of femininity and masculinity influence how individuals discuss such issues as gender inequalities. As Speer shows, discourses have both context-free and context-dependent meanings and it is the latter that can illustrate their essentially dynamic, contingent nature. Speer critiques the idea that 'hegemonic masculinity' (the idea that certain characteristics are important for being masculine) is a prevailing discourse, constraining the identities of men such that they are disciplined by these ideas (i.e. feel motivated to conform to them). Speer illustrates that how participants construct their identities can be understood as fuelled not by the discourse itself but by the interactional demands generated by the research interview, and the extent to which these render masculinity an accountable matter. In doing so, she is able to avoid reifying masculinity while, nevertheless, illustrating how participants may orient to this category as a normative construct within interactions.

## Recent Trends in Social Constructionism

The focus of social constructionism upon the constructive power of language has arguably led to its neglect, and even denial, of key aspects of being a person. Our subjectivity and sense of self, our emotions and other bodily

experiences, while key to mainstream psychology, have been problematic for social constructionist theory. One reason for this has been the reluctance of social constructionists to set in motion a 'slide back' into essentialism; talking of such things as selves and emotions as psychological entities appears to re-introduce the very ideas that social constructionism has been at pains to critique. Instead, the study of the self and subjectivity has been replaced by the study of how identities are constructed, and the study of emotions has become the study of how these are performed during interactions.

However, in recent years there has been a growing feeling among social constructionists that the theory really must engage with human subjectivity; what it feels like to be a person, our hopes and fears and the choices we make are crucial aspects of human life. At best, social constructionism has in the past regarded such things as side-effects of discourse, or has looked only at those aspects of them that can be seen as 'performances' during interaction. But recent work has seen a real concern to include human subjectivity within social constructionist theory. One attempt to do this has been through the development of 'psycho-social studies' (see Frosh, 2003; Taylor, this volume) which aims to dissolve the constructed division between the psychological and social realms. However, the use of psychodynamic theory within this approach has been critiqued by others (e.g. Edley, 2006) as fundamentally incompatible with the tenets of social constructionism.

The importance of the body and of the emotions in human experience has also recently received a great deal of attention from social constructionists. The term 'embodiment' is used as a way of signalling the desire to overcome the mind–body dualism of mainstream psychology, and the term 'affect', likewise, is used in preference to 'emotion'; affect covers a wide range of subjective experiences that do not come pre-categorised as in the case of emotions such as anger, love or sadness. As in the case of subjectivity, the aim has been to disrupt the constructed divisions between the body, the mind and the world of language to find a way of understanding the person holistically as an embodied, biological, psycho-social-linguistic entity (Burkitt, 2014; Cromby, 2012; Wetherell, 2012).

## Summary

Social constructionism argues that the concepts and categories we use to think and communicate with are socially constructed rather than 'natural' features of the world. These concepts and categories are historically and culturally specific, making our 'knowledge' of the world relative rather than absolute and rendering the idea of 'truth' problematic. Furthermore, the creation and

reproduction of what we think of as ‘knowledge’ is intimately tied to power relations; people in some sections of society have more power than others to decide what counts as legitimate knowledge, and some ways of speaking (or ‘discourses’) frame experience and identities in ways that can be oppressive. Social constructionists have therefore been critical, of mainstream psychology and social psychology, which have arguably contributed to oppressive regimes of knowledge while professing to be value-free and apolitical. Social constructionism has also challenged the individualism of the mainstream discipline, arguing that human behaviour and experience cannot be properly appreciated when divorced from its social context. This critical focus of social constructionism means that its research agenda is concerned with how language is used to build accounts and representations of people and events, and the implications of these. Although not all social constructionist research is concerned with issues of power and ideology, the challenge that the approach presents to the mainstream discipline characterises it as a form of ‘critical social psychology’.

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# 5

## The Radical Implications of Psychoanalysis for a Critical Social Psychology

Tom Goodwin

To include psychoanalysis in a volume dedicated to critical social psychology is not without contention. In its myriad forms from classical Freudianism, through the developments of Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan and others, to the orthodoxy of ego psychology in the United States, psychoanalysis has itself been subject to pertinent radical critique for, amongst other things, its truth status, its normative clinical function and its political conservatism. In recent iterations of critical psychology, exemplified in Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin's (2009) collection *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*, the pervasive notion of a radical project comprises critiques of both individualising and exclusionary tendencies in traditional psychological practice. Here, mainstream psychology connects to regimes of truth in which a model of a White, bourgeois, heterosexual, non-disabled male epitomises normality and pursues goals of self-fulfilment that support and replicate capitalist economic systems. The demise of cooperation between participants and intolerance towards human difference within these regimes places the onus for psychological well-being on socially assimilated individuals and pushes those who cannot adapt towards the margins. The response of this strand of critical psychology is, laudably, to highlight the oppression of marginalised groups and effect positive changes in the status and lifestyle of those excluded. Liberation and community psychologies dominate such thinking with an agenda of emancipation

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and a model of psychological health and well-being that, moving beyond individual concerns, has “psychopolitical validity” (Prilleltensky et al., 2009).

In such a critical model, psychoanalysis is often found wanting. In Freud’s lifetime, for example, his work was criticised for an essential conservatism in the pages of Karl Krauss’s radical newspaper *Die Fackel* (The Torch), which levelled accusations against the “cult” of psychoanalysis whose practitioners place “their knowledge and skills at the disposal of the ruling classes” (Krauss in Szasz, 1990, p. 135). Krauss similarly denounces Freud’s quietism over issues such as the illegality of homosexuality and the compulsory treatment of the mad, questions that Freud was well placed to challenge. The history of psychoanalysis since Freud’s death also reveals a number of darker faces that question it as a radical enterprise. The complicity of certain psychoanalysts with the military Junta in Argentina during the late 1970s (Levinson, 2003) and the failure of the (mostly Jewish) psychoanalytic community to anticipate and resist the rise of Nazism in Germany and then deal appropriately with its legacy (Frosh, 2005; Landa, 1999) are particular low points. Whilst both these examples demonstrate the extremes of a politically reactionary psychoanalysis, they also highlight a more quotidian spirit of conservatism in the general psychoanalytic project such as the relation between clinical practice and normative processes, its individualised response to trans-individual phenomena and its often inflexible conceptual frame.

Since its inception, however, psychoanalysis has had a major impact on critical thinking in the humanities and social sciences that continues today. Stephen Frosh acknowledges a “cyclical pattern of repudiation and resurrection that psychoanalysis seems to undergo within academic settings” (2010, p. 5), a polarised reception which testifies to uncertainty in what it offers. What Frosh highlights is that neither uncritical acceptance nor outright rejection is an adequate response to psychoanalysis and reflects instead a fundamental tension that Freud places at the heart the human subject. This is a tension, furthermore, that feeds into theory, making psychoanalysis from the outset a necessarily restless discipline built on a foundational conflict. As a result of this, and to the frustration of analysts and critics alike, there is no single and unifying theory of psychoanalysis, and the contemporary landscape reveals a programme that, despite institutional attempts to the contrary, is internally divided and globally dispersed. As Sergio Benvenuto (2009) interestingly notes, unlike other academic and clinical disciplines, psychoanalysis does not have a lingua franca and responds anew to each linguistic and cultural context where it embeds.

Freud produced two substantive models of the psyche; a first topography or dynamic model based primarily on his model of dreams and a second



structural topography in which the psyche is divided into distinct agencies that interact. To suggest a simple progression between models, however, would be a generous reading at best. The various theoretical strands within Freud often rub against one another, producing confusing and often contradictory statements that cannot be ironed over. The post-Freudian context is in many ways defined by groups favouring either the earlier or later work and emphasising different aspects of these. In her examination of radical trends within psychoanalysis, Andrea Hurst notes how Freud's "texts are not presented as the final 'writing up' of a theoretical foundation ... they are, rather, the provisional documentation of theoretical insights that remain open to modification" (2008, pp. 16–17). For many in the mainstream psychological traditions, this poses a problem for coherence and respectability that cannot be ignored.

Rather than seeing the conflicted nature of psychoanalytic discourse as reason for dismissing its insights, however, I will argue that this impasse reveals instead something at the heart of the Freudian project that opens up its radical potential. Whilst the admirable focus on social justice, welfare and emancipation for all individuals is not disputed here, at the heart of any critical social psychology must always be the opportunity for the radical reimagining of ideas and the transformation of frames of understanding and the object or subject to be understood. Each element in the designation "critical social psychology" needs continual interrogation for it to avoid the claims of discursive mastery and expertise, whose exercise in arbitrary power structures it so successfully and highlights the challenges in mainstream psychology. Psychoanalysis provides impetus for this through Freud's "discovery" of the unconscious and its linking to sexuality, which places ineradicable conflict at the heart of the psyche and produces a *decentred* subject that is stripped of all prior philosophical assurances. This introduces fluidity into any conception of the individual that allows connections to be drawn between psychological, social and historical realms. Whilst psychoanalysis structures together personal and social domains, Freud's originary concepts also place their distinction and separation continually under question, allowing for critical reflection in both fields.

Even before the specific theoretical concepts that Freud develops and the challenge that these pose to the scientific and philosophical ideas of his day and ours, there is a radical spirit in his investigations that underpin their formalisation. This spirit is born of the conflict that Freud traces in the human subject and whose understanding he attempts to contain in language and concepts that are never adequate. Psychoanalysis offers critical social psychology a multifaceted consideration of how the self is produced from disparate

and often contradictory demands, giving rise to unstable subjectivity. Not only does this enable its programme of individual emancipation and social transformation, but there is also an additional sense of profound *resistance* to straightforward understanding and interpretation in the object of investigation, which opens up any account to the uncertain ground of its own formulations and assertions. The psychoanalytic enterprise is continually undermined by its object, and any related discipline that draws on or is drawn into its orbit must contend with this disturbance. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, this is not necessarily negative, although it can and has led to defensive measures against dissolution that have produced institutional stasis. Like the individual and social milieu it engages in, cohesion and instability are in constant tension in theory such that the threat posed by its object is also the promise of its future reimagining and survival.

The three motifs of conflict, decentring and resistance that I have identified in this introduction will feed through the remaining consideration of the radical implications of psychoanalysis for critical social psychology. I will first identify the psychoanalytic challenge to traditional psychology and its stubbornly held notion of centred subjectivity which Freud recognised as untenable but that seems inexorably wedded to western understandings of selfhood. Unusually in a volume such as this, the focus of critical attack will not be *another* type of psychology but a particular North American characterisation of psychoanalysis that shares much common ground with mainstream psychology. A critique of its own internal forms will not only have implications for any psychology predicated on a unified and transparent notion of selfhood but will also demonstrate a problem inherent in psychoanalysis itself that I will trace back to Freud's work. This problem is the tension between conservative and radical tendencies that psychoanalysis locates in the human subject and which feeds into its own theories and practice. For reasons that I will explore, radical insight too often gives way to a more tempered and culturally assimilable form of psychoanalysis that supports rather than challenges existing psychical and social arrangements. Psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche argues that this is where Freud and his legacy often "goes astray" (1999, p. 82) and misrecognises the significance of its insights. The rebuttal of these reactionary positions is provided in the tensions that inhere in psychoanalytic concepts that become radical as their roots are interrogated. I will focus on what are for many the two exemplary and revolutionary psychoanalytic theories, those of the unconscious and sexuality, and demonstrate how these concepts are founded on radical principles that have profound ramifications for (social) psychological understanding.

## Psychoanalytic Orthodoxy: The Problem of/with the Ego

For many critical theorists, the reactionary formulations that dominate public understandings of psychoanalysis are derived from its reception and development in North America (Frosh, 2010; Jacoby, 1975; Marcuse, 1955). The American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) was formed in 1911 and, in opposition to Freud's (1926) views on the selection of analysts, pursued between 1938 and 1987 a training agenda that excluded non-medical practitioners. As such, the practice of psychoanalysis was firmly embedded in psychiatry, and the medico-scientific respectability of this connection was opposed to the laxness of training statutes in the psychoanalytic institutions of other nations such as Britain and France. This approach fed into a golden age of psychoanalytic popularity in the United States as the APsaA rose to dominance on the global stage and reflected an image of its practice out across the world. Producing "training regimes that reward conformity and militate against creative and critical thinking" (Frosh, 2010, p. 14), however, created an aura of stiffness and conservatism within the APsaA, and treatment followed a similarly conformist trajectory. Curative ideals were founded on models of normative development that in its most influential iterations posited identity formation and ego integrity as their goal.

The central work of Erik Erikson (1950), for example, focuses on identity and posits a stage theory of development in which stability and unity of ego function are the ultimate achievements. Such a developmental aim coincides with social relationships that are ultimately adaptive, thus creating harmony and continuity between psychological health and appropriate social interaction and behaviour. In the clinic, similar ideals gave rise to ego psychology as the distinctively American face of psychoanalysis. A term coined by Heinz Hartmann in 1939, ego psychology is a theory and therapeutic technique that focuses on the organising functions of the ego as it develops autonomy. This understanding derives from Freud's second model, where the psyche is divided into distinct agencies, and the ego "puts itself forward as the representative of the whole person" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 452). In this structure, the ego is seen as being subject to unreasonable demands from internal drives and the external environment and needs to protect itself.

As the child develops, its newly formed and vulnerable ego employs defence mechanisms to manage the various threats and tensions that assault it. As Anna Freud noted, in her 1936 text *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, these are invariably maladaptive in the infant and seek to protect through

exclusion. Conflict thus returns as if from outside in unexpected and distressing ways. Successful development, which provides a model for psychotherapeutic practice, coincides with producing more adaptive responses that deal with conflicts directly in an increasingly autonomous ego, enlarged through progressive internalisation (i.e. representation) of instinctual and external forces. Mental health and psychopathology are conceived in terms of this adaptive function, with therapy identifying maladaptive defences that constrain the individual and building ego integrity more securely so that forces imposing negatively on the self can be mastered and thereby overcome. The ego becomes a centring structure that responds appropriately to and autonomously of social strictures and tames a drive life perceived to threaten both the self and the established social fabric. By focusing on the ego, ego psychology was assimilable to psychiatry and enjoyed a close correspondence with the general psychological revolution in twentieth-century America that made the individual its focus.

For a critical social psychology framework, there are considerable issues with this approach to psychoanalytic theory and technique. Writing at the high point of its popularity in the 1970s, Russell Jacoby rejects ego psychology as inherently reactionary because it ignores the impact of social forces in the constitution and positioning of the individual subject. This “social amnesia” in its theory produces a defensive individualism that repeats and feeds into the capitalist structure of North American society. In treatment, the innovation and critical reflexivity required for radical change (initially in, although not restricted to, the individual patient) is eschewed in favour of a clinical practice that measures cure in terms of how successfully the analysand identifies her ego with that of the analyst. The impact of social forces on the individual, particularly as these generate the oppressive conditions that frame the personal repressions and conflict so central to Freudian theory, is largely ignored. Influenced by Freud’s later works on civilisation and the mutual impact of social and psychical structures, the Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse (1970) acknowledges how every internal barrier that generates repression was first an external obstacle knitted into the fabric of the historical process that constitutes a society. Before the individual can self-determine, they are determined by a network of historical and social relations that are then distilled in the psyche. Social oppression and psychical repression are intimately related in ways that eschew the simple formulations that a discrete and autonomous individual must accept the laws of social living, despite conflict with its instinctual demands. Instead, social and historical processes are traced into the heart of subjectivity to the extent that even the concept of the individual is constructed through specific ideologies. The autonomous self

so celebrated in late-capitalist ideology is one such distillation of the historical process at the level of the individual.

Jacoby sees how “ego psychology grinds down the cutting edge of psychoanalysis” (1975, p. 41), separating the psyche from its relational and contextual milieu in a way that is more palatable for the individualist market place in North America. This criticism against US psychoanalytic orthodoxy is echoed by a number of psychoanalytic schools in mostly European and South American contexts. It is the force of this response which reminds us of the critical edge that psychoanalysis still fosters in its classical Freudian guise and its key reimagining in the works of Melanie Klein and the object-relations theorists in Britain, the work of Jacques Lacan and the innovative post-Lacanian generation in France and the varied developments and combinations of these approaches in the rest of the world. There is a sense in these related positions that ego psychology is somehow a misreading of Freud that sanitises his key insights and seeks to resolve an irresolvable foundational conflict with notions of selfhood that return to a unified subjectivity he had already undermined. Whilst ego psychology is a limited reading of psychoanalysis that removes its potentially radical spirit, it does, however, represent a very distinct trend within Freud’s corpus that cannot be ignored and opens up profound questions for the possibility of conceptualising that which fundamentally resists comprehension; these questions will be explored in due course.

Ego psychology derives from Freud’s mature reflections following his text *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and the construction of his second topography. Here, the first topography which opposes the unconscious to the preconscious–conscious as different levels of representation in a dynamic system is supplanted by distinct and localisable psychological agencies. In the first topography, Freud understands the psyche as a closed system around which drive energy flows and that functions according to the primary process (or pleasure principle). The uninterrupted flow of a manageable quantity of energy maintains homeostasis which can be interrupted when pressure is allowed to build up at various points. Pressure generates discomfort which is inherently pleasurable when released. In his 1915a texts *Repression* and *The Unconscious*, Freud clarifies the relationship between the body (soma) and the psyche as that of the instincts and their representatives. The instincts are not a direct component of the psyche, and are in themselves unknowable, but their force is imprinted on the psyche through the ideas they attach to in the course of an individual’s development. Freud speaks of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* (the ideational representatives) to denote this transfer from the functioning of the body to that of the psyche. Different levels of consciousness are determined by the

quality of representation and how these allow drive energy attached to be expressed and hence discharged. As the expressions of instincts that are unbounded by moral pressures, the ideational representatives are subject to censorship as the developing self undergoes necessary reality testing. This process removes the possibility of conscious articulation from certain representatives as these are deemed personally or socially transgressive. This censorship of psychical material and its crystallisation into various unspeakable complexes is what Freud describes as repression and in his first topography, denotes the formation and contents of the unconscious. Pressure from the unconscious persists unabated, and its satisfaction must be sought through partial means in the form of compromises. Modelled on his theory of dreams, the transfer from repressed content to its disguised expression accounts for a whole range of largely disruptive psychical phenomena including, most significantly, the symptoms manifest in neurotics.

The inadequacies of this model were revealed in the clinic as Freud encountered cases that did not neatly fit his understanding of neurosis. These non-neurotic cases, as André Green describes them, (2005) included disorders of the personality (e.g. narcissism), self-distortions (e.g. melancholia) and numerous borderline phenomena (straddling both neurotic and psychotic experiences) which all somehow implicated the development and operation of the ego. This required a new understanding of the psyche with a focus on the ego as a centring structure of the self and the way this is constructed in relation to processes of investment (love) and identification with significant others. The ego mediates between instinctual demands, the demands of reality and a further demand from the parental and social expectations that we internalise as we enter a civilised community. Instincts, along with repressed material, are now placed in a new conceptual agency termed the id (*das es*), whilst the agency that judges and criticises the self according to the standards of the internalised parents is denoted the superego. The ego develops out of the id as a surface “which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world” (Freud, 1923, p. 25). Constituted as the perception system represents and affords a basic reflection upon pleasure-seeking activities, it is formed of various precipitates as it mediates and represents its relationships with significant objects in the world “transforming the id’s will into action as if it were its own” (*ibid.*, p. 25) and directing instincts to more acceptable ends. Development of the ego as a discrete psychical entity requires it to be loved and invested by the id as though it were an object, which leads Freud to postulate his key concept of narcissism in a text of the same name from 1914. Not simply the vanity and self-obsession of certain adult pathologies,

narcissism becomes a necessary stage in psychological development that allows the tenuous self-boundaries of the infant to be shored up before opening out onto object love.

Freud's focus on the ego and the narcissism necessary for its construction is a defining aspect of the transition from first to second topographies and shifts the theoretical emphasis from conflict to defence. The ego psychologists exploit Freud's description of ego formation and transform it into a prescription for ideal therapeutic outcome and an imperative for late-capitalist living. In its theorisation of narcissism as a fundamental stage in psychological development, psychoanalysis "indirectly favoured narcissism's cultural primacy," giving way to a "troubling cult of one's own psyche" (Benvenuto & Molino, 2009, p. 18) where the pains and frustrations of conflict are no longer engaged with as a fundamental instability in the subject but are defended against with the ultimate goal of their resolution and removal.

This ego-centring and its celebration of narcissistic individualism is clearly at odds with critical social psychology. For many psychoanalysts, it is also a tempering of Freud's revolutionary insight that, as Green (2005) argues, is a feature of his second topography in particular. The centring on the ego already noted is pre-empted by a corollary centring of the psyche on the id in which the unconscious is often reduced to instinctual processes explicable in a biological register. As Jacoby (1975) notes, the Freud of the later period seems caught between a psychology of the ego that is in danger of reverting to pre-Freudian notions of the humanist self and an id psychology that strays closely to biological essentialism. An original decentring of human subjectivity often succumbs to a counter-tendency that re-centres the individual according to new psychological agencies. This creates a psychoanalytic project that not only fits more readily into an institutional mould but is also its greatest betrayal. The ego and id psychologies that Freud vacillates between are two sides of an inward turn that tempers the radical edge of the psychoanalytic revolution by ignoring the social, relational and contextual factors that produce and yet put in question the sanctity of the individual. Laplanche sees this reactionary centring action as almost inevitable, as ego integrity and its corollary notion of biological instinct covers over harsh realities of psychological fragmentation to justify unquestioned appeals to greater social and psychological cohesion. With such politically problematic and fundamentally deceptive tendencies, he highlights the necessity of returning to what is most radical in Freud's work, especially the notion of unconscious and its intimate links with sexuality, to present a counter-trend to these commonsense formulations. He notes a "domestication of the unconscious" (1999, p. 67) that is effective both at the level of



the developing individual and, through what he terms *theoreticogenesis*, at the level of the theory that describes this. Freud's work falls into this pattern almost from the outset as he attempts to systematise the unconscious and establish its economic principles. His first model of repression, for example, postulates the existence of unknown content in the structure of the self, but for the most part (until he considers the thesis of primal repression), these contents were once experiential traces whose ability to be expressed has simply been removed by censorship. Locked away in the depths of the psyche, they are still tangible and can make logical (hence economic) connections to restore them to comprehension. Like Freud's recourse to biological instincts, the centring on ego structures is simply replaced by a centre that is hidden from view in the unconscious. Laplanche uncovers this fundamental "going astray" (*fourvoisement*) in all the major post-Freudian schools, even those that demonstrate radical openings such as the Kleinians and Lacanians.

## The Radical Implications of Unconscious Alterity and Its Roots in the Sexual

Laplanche returns to the meaning of Freud's self-proclaimed Copernican revolution and its foundational gesture of decentering. He examines Copernicus's radical displacement of the earth (and hence Man) from the centre of the universe as an unfinished revolution in which heliocentrism (that the earth spins around the sun) is one step in a repeated movement of eccentricity (i.e. does the sun itself spin around a centre which in turn spins around a centre and so on). What Laplanche clarifies is that the Copernican revolution is the continual refusal of any centring action (at least as a permanent fixture). Here, the construction of systematic description is not only essential to avoid the chaos of incomprehension but also necessarily incomplete. This point echoes Hurst's argument as she considers deconstructionist responses to psychoanalysis. She highlights an irresolvable tension in the conceptual apparatus of Freud that vacillates between sense, in which a coherent economic system can be formulated, and something that points beyond and rubs against this, a remainder of the ineffable that points towards (continual) future elaboration. Freud's concepts, therefore, draw on and vacillate between the fundamental aporia of an economic system of explanation and its aneconomic conditions of "unpredictability, chance, anomaly, irreconcilability, and conflict" (2008, p. 42). The aneconomic must continually be assimilated into the economic, but this is always unsuccessful, leaving a remainder of understanding that explains the restlessness of Freudian theory and the psychoanalytic legacy.



There is no greater example of the tension between economic and aneconomic moments in Freud's work than in his introduction and continual reformulations of the concept of the unconscious. The idea, as Freud acknowledges, is not his own but has a long history in figures such as Plato, Goethe and Schopenhauer, recognising that humans are fundamentally self-deceptive and cover over troubling aspects of existence such as lust and aggression. In Freud's early clinical work, he had direct experience of this resistance to knowing in hysterical patients. His famous formulation that "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (Breuer & Freud, 1897, p. 7) recognises how an aspect of experience can be refused conscious articulation because it is traumatic and yet is still retained in the psyche. In its non-acknowledgement, it continues to act on conscious life in the form of disruptive and symptomatic behaviour. Freud sought to systematise this basic description of the unconscious to remove its spiritual and metaphysical roots and use it to understand a number of disparate and inexplicable clinical phenomena. It is this systematisation of the unconscious that is Freud's greatest contribution to the history of ideas as he sought ever more effective economic explanations. The danger of such a move, however, is that "the economic constitution of any closed or regulated system, in any domain, necessarily goes hand in hand with the suppression of the aneconomic or that which in relation to a system remains errant, disordered, resistant, aleatory, unexpected or nonsensical" (Hurst, 2008, p. 98). To order the unconscious in a closed economy presumes a centre which, by not considering the system as necessarily incomplete and open to reimaginings, potentially loses sight of what in it remains radical. Freud's theory of the unconscious is at its most innovative and revolutionary where it reveals the "aporetic logic that makes it necessary to avoid a choice between economic and aneconomic" (ibid., p. 101). Characterising the unconscious in terms of "*exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process (mobility of cathexes), timelessness and replacement of external by psychical reality*" (1915b, p. 187), Freud highlights the challenge of the unconscious to structures of proper and good sense. Laplanche extends this element of the illogical and draws on the notion of *otherness* inherent in the concept. This is an idea of the other that bears little resemblance to a second consciousness in a coherent dialogue but is instead a radical alterity that cannot be found, systematised or successfully accommodated in the contours of the self and that continually disturbs its presumed integrity.

It is against this radical otherness that the self is constructed and must be maintained. The unconscious is foremost a foreign body that opens onto non-self structures and yet, whose alien-ness suffers continual domestication. Just as the ego's defensive functions seek to quell its disruptive action, theoretical

efforts similarly attempt to contain its elusive action in forms that render it once and for all. Freud's notion of the id in his second topography, for example, is borrowed from his contemporary Georg Groddeck but stripped of its intended sense to denote how we are "'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces" (Freud, 1923, p. 23). This sense of "it" (the more direct translation of *das es*) as an alien structure of demands to which the self must respond is lost, as Freud's complex understanding of sexual life is forgotten in favour of a biological instinct that is included in the economy of the psyche. As Hurst recognises, Freud seems caught in a "residual metaphysical commitment" (2008, p. 134) that often prevents him from pushing the radical implications of his ideas or sees him return to ideas he had already overturned. It is the potential of his ideas on sexuality and how they underpin his original conception of the unconscious that is arguably where Freud is at his most radical and demonstrates the value of his insight for critical social psychology. Challenging instinctual models that fix the sexual aim in the reproduction of the species, Freud's sexual theories resist the closing-in of the human being and remind us of our eroticised connection to other people as this generates subjectivity yet also, as Adam Phillips notes "makes us feel at odds with ourselves" (1995, p. 91). The security of social and psychological identity is always predicated on a renunciation of sexuality as a fluid and connective process, thus opposing self-knowledge to sexual pleasure and affection.

The radical nature of sexuality, which also removes it from a simple instinctual register, lies in the prematurity of human birth which places the helpless infant in a relation of absolute dependence on another person. Freud ascribes the primary care role to the mother who not only meets the child's needs but also elicits pleasure and affords satisfaction. For Freud, the first relation is erotic through and through as the mother "not only nourishes it but also looks after it and thus arouses in it a number of other physical sensations, pleasurable and unpleasurable" (Freud, 1938 [1940], p. 188). Theorising a dynamic of physical and sensate relations between child and mother, Freud controversially introduces a theory of infantile sexuality which implicates another person in the eroticisation of the child's body. Caught in this relational dynamic, human sexuality is no longer understood as a pre-programmed biological function but instead characterised as "a whole range of excitations and activities ... which procure a pleasure that cannot be adequately explained in terms of the satisfaction of a basic physiological need" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 418).

Freud uses the German word *Trieb* to distinguish the human sexual impulse from *Instinkt*, the hereditary characteristics of a species (this distinction is not clearly and consistently translated into English). *Trieb* (best rendered

as “drive”) is the demand of the child’s body, firstly on maternal care and, through the progressive internalisation of this relation as the self forms, on the psyche. A concept at the limit of the psyche and soma, *Trieb* attaches to psychical representatives providing a motive for human life but is in itself unknowable. Irreducible to the body, it is first experienced by the infant as unfocused and non-specific pressures demanding satisfaction. Freud theorises the fragmented quality of drives at this early infantile stage and designates these as “polymorphously perverse” (1905, p. 191) because their function resembles those of the perversions in later adult life. As maternal care focuses the child’s attention on different physiological and social processes such as feeding, potty-training and the separation from dependency, “his care affords him an unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction from his erogenous zones” (ibid., p. 223), meaning that different aspects of the child’s body become eroticised, creating associated component instincts. All the developmental milestones that produce the sexual and socialised adult enter an economy of pleasure and unpleasure which is modelled on sensual sucking at the breast.

Intimately tied to the possibility of human subjectivity and active at all points as its motivation, sexuality also introduces alterity by placing the relation with another person at the core of being. Laplanche identifies two key aspects to this notion of otherness that offer radical possibilities for rethinking notions of the psychological and the social. The first of these is a notion of asymmetry; that the other precedes who we are, and despite the best efforts at ego integrity, it imposes its might and threat unabated. This intrusion of the other into the structures of the self is troubling and frequently evoked with the language of trauma as its necessary but unwanted demand shakes us to the foundations. The second aspect is its enigma, its fundamental unknowability that cannot be comfortably brought within the comprehension of an assimilating ego. This is alterity without form; the pre-linguistic sexuality that characterises early relationships and which, through our latter repressions, constitutes the economy of the unconscious and its aneconomic foundation. As Laplanche states, Freud accorded primacy to sexuality because it “opens directly onto the question of the other, and in the case of the child, onto the adult other in his or her alien-ness” (1999, p. 64). As the prototype for the encounter with asymmetry and enigma, the eroticised first relation is traced as inassimilable infantile experience, defining the unconscious in its radical alterity.

Freud’s notion of the sexual eroticises the individual from the outset and compromises the concept of stable identity that underpins liberal humanist ideology. Sexuality is dangerous and a challenge to reactionary social structures

and the psychological stability this underpins. Civilisation requires not only the control of sexual forces but also the occultation of erotic life in the process of repression. The tenuous and permeable boundaries of early infant experience are covered over and divested of their enigmatic sexual content as the ego increasingly steps out as an autonomous subject. As a consequence of the civilising demand, psychoanalysis has also effected a “progressive shrinking of the field of sexuality” (Green, 2005, p. 82) in its own theorising. The constraints on sexuality in the direction of civilised living are echoed in clinical and developmental theories that advocate the same or simply divest it of its alterity, just as Freud did in his return to the biological instinct. What is lost most fundamentally in this neglect of the sexual is a connection to the other that is more foundational than the self. The subject faces alterity from the outset of existence and must somehow construct itself against and in spite of this. Of course, what was once other can be accommodated within the structures of the developing ego, but this is never once and for all, as Freud’s radical notion of the unconscious attests. Conceptions of otherness in psychoanalysis are various as theorists have wrestled differently with the implications of a self constructed in the intermediary space between the instinctual body, intimate relationships and the socio-symbolic structures that frame these. Each of these aspects has been the focus of different psychoanalytic approaches for theorising the alterity at the heart of subjectivity.

The unconscious other, for example, can be inscribed in the drive, as Freud increasingly contended, when pressure from the body erupts into consciousness as uncontained anxiety, or when mediated as a symptom or a dream, combines reassuring repetitions of behaviour with a disturbing unfamiliarity. For the object-relations theorists, in contrast, alterity is traced in the relation to the object and not to the id. The alterity of the external object is precipitated in the psyche through a representational process to become the inner world. Here, as Green elaborates, the object is a “*property of the ego ... to ward of the strangeness of the object*” but at the same time has a “*part that is irreducible to any form of appropriation by the ego* which calls for the recognition of difference and alterity” (p. 117). Linguistic theories of psychoanalysis such as Lacan’s add to the theory of the object by extending the notion of individual representation from the realm of the image and the personal relation to a consideration of what Green refers to as “the cultural tradition and its productions laid down as a ‘treasure of the signifier’” (2005, p. 105). The alterity of the object and the drives it arouses as if from another place are mediated by a structure of representation which is also not our own. We encounter language as an external force, the alterity of our social world, whose insistence that we engage in its community constructs our symbolic existence but always as

inadequate. The alterity of language carves out the unconscious as it constructs the unspoken (Lacan designates this the *real* which also describes the preverbal drives) and the unspeakable (the prohibited connection to and desired satisfaction of those drives as prescribed by socio-symbolic existence) aspects of subjectivity as an internal other, an alterity even more radical because it also compromises the inner-outer boundaries. Wherever the alterity inscribed in the subject is located by successive psychoanalytic theories, attempts to render the form and operation of the unconscious always prove inadequate. Theory here reflects the individual faced with a message or demand from the other which, in its asymmetry and enigma, calls for codes and deciphering that are never sufficient, leaving something out “something untranslatable which becomes the unconscious, the internal other” (Laplanche, 1999, p. 101).

Despite the persistent attempts to sanitise psychoanalytic insight of its most radical aspects in the pursuit of institutional stability and respectability, Freud’s original discovery of the unconscious and its foundations in sexual life provides a continually renewed opening towards alterity. This radical awareness of the causal nature of otherness in both personal and social life challenges typical accusations that psychoanalysis neglects the impact on the subject of social and historical forces. Psychoanalysis provides a structure for explaining ego development and its necessary role in assuring a sense of personal and social stability. For Freud, however, it is conflict that characterises the human being, and this is largely generated as the civilising environment demands some renunciation of the instinctual body. Theoretical attempts which ignore this invariably repress the most radical psychoanalytic insights and produce reactionary accounts of subjectivity and instrumental therapeutic efforts that leave the sense of a critical project far behind.

As Benvenuto acknowledges, however, psychoanalysis provides a “revolutionary paradigm of a new type of knowledge and practice” (2009, p. 20), at the heart of which a radical notion of the unconscious connects to social critique. As something alien at our core, the unconscious constitutes the psyche as a hybrid space in which the separation of inner and outer realms is never complete and notions of ego mastery are continually undermined. Selfhood is constructed between often incommensurable social and personal realms and as such has a provisional character that also opens it up to potential transformation. Psychoanalysis can and must theorise this just as it posits various reasons why it too often does not happen.

Psychoanalytic theory is poised over a fundamental non-knowledge in its object, the unconscious. The provocative and unique theses that psychoanalysis offers for the range of human experiences and behaviours always rub against a primary uncertainty. Whilst its conceptual tools revolutionised the

understanding of psychopathology, psychotherapy, selfhood and social processes, perhaps the most valuable contribution of psychoanalysis is its legacy of equivocal formulation that produces “a way of describing both the limits of what we can know and the areas of our lives in which knowing, and the idea of expertise, may be inappropriate” (Phillips, p. 17). Whilst psychoanalysis enables us to theorise subjectivity in terms of the intersection of bodily drives, social demands, object representations and the symbolic systems that organise them, the concept of the unconscious does not afford us any certainty in locating its parameters or a stable point of inquiry. Analysing how specific forces acting in and on the subject can be brought into contact with each other ties psychoanalysis to critical traditions within social and psychological theory as “the criss-crossing of bodily and symbolic networks ... create points of coherence that fade away and re-form” (Frosh, p. 120). The intersectionality of various human realms in the production and understanding of the human being necessitates a conceptual frame that is itself dynamic and critical of its own ability to centre authoritative commentary.

With the notion of the unconscious signalling a formative alterity and insufficiency at the heart of subjectivity, the idea of human completeness that is available to absolute description disappears. As a clinical practice, the imperative to integrate ego functions or adapt these to prevailing social structures is increasingly inadequate as a developmental aim or curative ideal. The stable and adaptable structures that ego psychologists make the pinnacle of successful individuation are unrealistic and maintained only within a reactionary social environment where self-knowledge is also a mechanism of forgetting. A radical psychoanalytic practice would eschew such ethically contentious premises and re-establish conflict and alterity as the basis of selfhood. As Phillips contends, the aim of psychoanalysis is less to make people intelligible to themselves than “to tolerate and enjoy the impossibility of such knowing” (p. 101). Psychoanalysis is a way of making strange our taken-for-granted assumptions and the patterns of reaction, interaction and behaviour that repeat themselves as seemingly fixed characteristics. Unpicking and unsettling these ego formations confronts the individual with the limitations of identity and the restrictions it places on freedom. Psychoanalysis returns the subject in therapy to the unstable grounds of subjectivity where, far from fostering the collapse of selfhood, the tension between ego integrity and unconscious other should be persistently exposed to entice curiosity and experimentation with a more fluid (although certainly not unrestricted) appreciation of human existence. As Freud recognised from the outset, the aim of psychoanalysis is not to remove conflict but allow us to live it more keenly, recognising it as a motor-force of existence and its transformation, as much as a cause of unhappiness.

Although its institutions are often criticised for excessive dogma in clinical technique, Freud always held that psychoanalytic theory should be ready to adapt to what it encounters in therapy. This imperative to imagine, challenge and rethink, however, is not so easily translated into other domains of inquiry. The attempt of psychoanalysts across the twentieth century to impose an interpretative frame on related disciplines is one that is beset with problems, as Shoshana Felman (1982) famously notes in relation to literary interpretation. Psychoanalysis persistently fails to appreciate the specificity of new objects of research from diverse fields and simply imposes its schemas on what it analyses to find its own truths. Processes within the object of interpretation that are intrinsic to its function and which exceed the psychoanalytic frame are reduced to its concepts. Frosh (2010) reiterates this point with regard to the psychoanalytic examination of social processes that could provide the basis for critical social psychology. He discusses the problems of psychoanalysis functioning as a colonising discourse that exerts mastery over related disciplines through the extension of unmodified concepts. Drawing on Felman's notion of *implication* (which opposes blank *application*), to which the title of this chapter alludes, Frosh reiterates Freud's insight that psychoanalysis must itself be transformed as it enters into new domains and less familiar encounters.

The unconscious already implicates social and relational processes in the self that resist the appropriations of consciousness and of theory. The exploration of these must be at the heart of critical social psychology, and for this, psychoanalysis provides a theoretical vocabulary and a set of tools. As a theory of subjectivity, it also places the individual back in a perpetual dynamic with social forces that extend to intimate relations, the historical and ideological contexts that frame these and the symbolic systems that provide mediation. Each of these aspects is played out in the individual and different critical psychologies explore the various intersecting levels that impact on and constitute the human subject. From radical family therapies to Marxist and discursive analyses of subjectivity, each facet has its critical representative. Unearthing the bio-socio-sexual substratum of the individual, the critical investigator is faced with the destabilised knowledge of the unconscious that underpins the necessarily protean concepts of psychoanalysis. The alterity inscribed in this exemplary psychoanalytic object is transformed as it crosses disciplinary boundaries, leaving the problematisation of these in its wake. No longer the expert discourses that its institutional forms mistakenly believe, the most radical aspects of psychoanalysis shake the very grounds on which related discourses stand, providing critical social psychology with the spirit of Freudian subversion that provokes breaks in commonsense and notions of authoritative truth. Extending this radical function into critical social psychology,



psychoanalysis has itself changed in the interaction as it reminded of and forced to engage once more what Jacques Derrida describes as “the idea of a ‘subject’ installing, progressively, laboriously, always imperfectly, the *stabilised*—that is, non-natural, essentially and always *unstable*—condition of his or her autonomy: against the inexhaustible and invincible background of a heteronomy” (2004, p. 176). Its challenge, if it is to remain radical and relevant, is to map this strange and shifting “subject” in a discourse that recognises its own destabilised foundations and yet provides a hope of revolution that, like its Copernican prototype, opens questions and a process that cannot rest and whose interminable promise of transformation (psychological, social, theoretical) is still to be felt.

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# 6

## Queer Theory

Damien W. Riggs and Gareth J. Treharne

### Introduction to the Meanings of 'Queer'

In this chapter we provide an overview of queer theory and share some key examples of how we and others have applied queer theory in social psychology research. Throughout the chapter, we highlight a differentiation of queer theory and queer research methodologies from queer studies as an emerging academic discipline and 'queer' as an identity category. As has been noted previously (e.g., Hegarty & Massey, 2006; Nic Giolla Easpaig, Fryer, Linn, & Humphrey, 2014; Warner, 2004), queer theory has received relatively little attention within psychology, despite the shared focus on the inherently social nature of identity within both queer theory and social psychology. As Clarke, Ellis, Peel, and Riggs (2010) suggest, this relative lack of attention may be a product of (1) the dearth of interdisciplinarity in certain fields within psychology, (2) the perceived complexity of queer theory, and (3) what has been seen as the inapplicability of queer theory to psychological methods. These three points draw attention to the important distinction that we make about our understanding of what is meant by 'queer'. Whilst we will discuss this distinction in more detail throughout this chapter, it is important to signal here in

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our introduction the differences between (1) queer theory, (2) what are commonly referred to as queer research methodologies, (3) the burgeoning field of queer studies, and (4) the reclaimed identity category 'queer' that clashes with queer theory's premise of problematising the construction of identity as category labels and questioning the seeing of some categories as 'natural' or 'normal'. The research examples we draw upon provide further clarification of these differentiations as does a focused review of literature using the term 'queer' over the past century.

Queer theory, as we elaborate below, is an oppositional orientation to understanding how bodies and psyches are produced not through individual intent or experience *per se* but rather through what Butler refers to as 'matri[ces] of intelligibility' (1990, p. 17). In terms of gender and sexuality specifically, Butler describes 'the matrix of coherent gender norms' (1990, p. 24). These kinds of 'cultural matri[ces]' (Butler, 1990, p. 24) are a way of thinking about a coalescence of social norms within which particular modes of being are, at certain moments in social history and in certain locations, rendered unintelligible and impossible (e.g., women sexually attracted to women) whilst other modes of being are intelligible and possible (e.g., women sexually attracted to men) but always tentatively so. These renderings are far more complex and subtle than quantifying overt hostility towards people who self-identify with or who are labelled as being within certain identity categories, and queer theory draws our attention to the ways in which intelligibility polices possibility (Butler, 1993).

More broadly than sex, gender, and sexuality, queer theory suggests that all bodies and psyches are offered intelligibility through their relationship to a particular set of norms, ones that privilege the idealised White, heterosexual, middle-class, young, normatively sized, and abled body. Importantly, such a set of norms cannot *per se* refer to an actual normative body (though some people will indeed approximate it) but rather a normative fantasy in which a particular privileged mode of being could be arrived at and following this arrival, be unassailable because normativity can never been achieved in finality. In this sense, whilst queer theory is typically focused on those who are most marginalised by the norms described above, it does not operate from the principle that other groups of people are always already within the norm. Rather, it demonstrates how approximation to a norm is always an approximation and one that is always at risk of 'failure', which Butler (1993) describes as haunting by the spectre of the non-normative:

These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (p. xvii)

Butler argues that queer theory speaks to how marginalised groups can gain agency and recognition as intelligible because ‘realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone’ (Butler, 2004, p. 29).

There is a growing body of social psychological research that has applied the core premises of queer theory, particularly making use of Butler’s (1990, 1993, 2004) concept of performativity—the doing of identity that is embedded in daily life that maintains the fantasy of achieving the normative (e.g., being a good heterosexual) and simultaneously maintains the related norms (e.g., heterosexuality). Eichler (2012), for example, carried out an autoethnographic study of ‘coming out as a queer man [in the US]’ (p. 1) in which the identity of ‘LGBTQ individuals’ (p. 1) is related to performativity through a ‘consumptive pedagogy’ centred on material goods, gay bars, and online marketplaces for relationships. Hayfield, Clarke, Halliwell, and Malson (2013) explored the visual identities of bisexual women through semi-structured interviews. The women tended to position themselves as outside appearance markers of lesbian identity and constructed bisexual visual identity as in between, or as a blend of, ‘an implicitly excessive lesbian ‘masculinity’ and an equally exaggerated heterosexual ‘femininity’ (p. 178) in ways that align with queer theory’s questioning of identity categories as stable: ‘I’m not gonna fix myself into a rigid identity just because it makes somebody else feel comfortable. I am keeping my options open as a human being so ... I’m gonna keep my options open in terms of my appearance as well (Rose)’ (p. 179). Phoenix, Pattman, Croghan, and Griffin (2013) also applied Butler’s concept of performativity in their research on young people and consumption. Both girls and boys who took part in focus groups referred to women’s bodies within their descriptions of consumption as performative of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, female and male participants discussed sexually revealing female clothing as demarcating ‘sexualised gender boundaries’ (p. 426), revealing an overarching disparaging of femininity. These findings demonstrate some ways in which research informed by the key concepts of queer theory can reveal the naturalisation of certain categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, whilst also revealing spaces of critical resistance.

Although these research examples demonstrate productive applications of queer theory, Warner (2004) highlights the problems that researchers may face in attempting to draw upon queer theory in social psychology research:

Often a queer researcher may eschew offering a clear definition of their terms, for they do not want to risk essentializing or reducing any of the categories. Instead they refer the reader to the way the term unfolds in their research, and in the flow of a given text. (p. 326)

Authors such as Nic Giolla Easpaig et al. (2014) have suggested how queer theory might inform a range of approaches to social psychology research, for example, within the field of community health psychology; however, to a certain degree, these approaches are weighed down by the disciplinary injunction to produce replicable findings. Nic Giolla Easpaig and colleagues propose that ‘collective analysis’ (p. 121) by community members might offer one way of avoiding the individualising tendencies of mainstream psychological research. Whilst their proposal has considerable potential, it does not necessarily guarantee a queer theory-informed method, as it may still result in findings that essentialise a particular truth about the lives of community members. If anything, texts such as *Textuality and Tectonics* by the collective known as Beryl Curt (1994) are arguably closer to a queer theory-informed psychological ‘methodology’ than most publications that are currently presented as such. This text presents a range of voices that are never reducible to either the individual or the collective and in this sense, challenges the imposition of a normative subject upon the text. More broadly, the work of queering within applications of queer theory functions to perpetually avoid new forms of normativity becoming inscribed.

These points about the production of queer narratives in research bring us to the third use of the term ‘queer’ raised above, namely the burgeoning field of queer studies and its alignment with more established disciplines such as gender studies, women’s studies, gay and lesbian studies, or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) studies. Queer studies, whilst potentially informed by queer theory, is not automatically so. Instead queer studies, similar to, for example, ‘lesbian studies’, typically focuses on the lives of people who identify as queer. Several universities offer courses in ‘queer studies’, and Duke University’s (Durham, North Carolina) sexualities studies website hosts a list of ‘LGBTQI Studies & Sexuality Studies Programs in North America’ (n.d.). Duke University’s own sexualities studies programme is (at the time of writing) incorporated within the women’s studies programme (Duke University, 2015). The University of California, Irvine, offers a minor in queer studies within the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies (University of California, Irvine, n.d.). City College of San Francisco has a LGBT studies programme which was ‘a pioneer in the development of the field of queer studies’ (City College of San Francisco, n.d., ¶1) and is located within the School of Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences, and Multicultural Studies. Humboldt State University (Arcata, California) has a Department of Critical Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies with an undergraduate programme that integrates Multicultural Queer Studies with Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies. This select description of queer studies programmes

is by no means a genealogy of the field of queer studies and is very much focused on North America, where the discipline is perhaps most established or best marketed and thus does not represent the world stage of queer studies. A focused search for queer studies programmes based in the UK revealed a masters programme called Queer Studies and Arts Based Practice at Birmingham City University (2015) and an interdisciplinary masters programme in Sexuality and Gender Studies at the University of Birmingham, with an explicit focus on queer theory amongst other critical approaches (University of Birmingham, n.d.). This select information on queer studies is not intended to be by any means comprehensive but gives an indication of the diverse identification of academic departments/programmes teaching queer studies and the relatively scarce existence of queer studies as a specific discipline, particularly compared to the vast number of universities with psychology departments and programmes.

Beyond our identification of locations where queer theory is explicitly branded as a part of course curriculum, there are a number of key points to be made about queer studies as an area of academic study. First, as mentioned above, queer studies may not automatically be representative of queer theory. Whilst this may seem anomalous, we make this suggestion because the collectivisation of ‘queer people’ may be considered to run against the grain of queer theory (i.e., by producing a universalising truth beyond that arising from the effects of demands to intelligibility). It could be argued, following Fuss (1989), that such collectivising represents a form of strategic essentialism (knowingly deploying the idea that identities are a ‘true’ inner state); however, we would want to be careful about making this claim about all who are seen to fall under the banner of ‘queer studies’.

Also in regard to queer studies, it is important to acknowledge that not all people who identify as ‘queer’ will do so through an orientation to a queer theoretical critique. Whilst many such people may well report an oppositional identification that is informed by queer theory, many people may use the identity category ‘queer’ as shorthand for ‘non-heterosexual’ or as a more general critique of normative gender binaries. Our point here is not to undermine the identity claims of people who identify as queer but rather to make a distinction between the various uses of the word ‘queer’. This point about the uses of the word ‘queer’ in queer studies brings us to a point we take up later in this chapter, namely that of coercive queering. As Ansara (2010) suggests, the labelling of certain groups (such as trans people) as ‘queer’ when this is not a label they would use is a form of cisgenderism (defined as the ideology that delegitimises people’s own understandings of their bodies and gender identities, see also Riggs, Ansara, & Treharne, 2015). This enforced labelling

is an issue that will be an ongoing concern for queer studies as much as it has been for the gay liberation movements from which it grew in part (Hegarty & Massey, 2006).

In the following sections of this chapter, we elaborate in greater detail some of the points made above with specific focus on the relationship between queer theory and social psychology. We begin by examining the limited ways in which queer theory has appeared in leading social psychology journals, demonstrating that there has been little uptake within mainstream academic outlets. We then outline in some detail what we believe to be the central arguments of queer theory, before then taking up these arguments with application to some of our own work. From there we highlight some of the key areas that we believe, into the future, hold opportunities for the use of queer theory within critical social psychology. We conclude by drawing attention to the fraught nature of any attempts at the institutionalisation of queer theory, in this case within the context of social psychology.

## Queer Theory as a Critique of Mainstream Social Psychology Theory and Research

Given how queer theory is not premised on equivalency, it is difficult to posit a 'mainstream' social psychological equivalent of queer theory. It would potentially serve to unduly normalise queer theory to place it, for example, on a trajectory that begins with pathologising anti-gay research, and then proceeds through to what was termed 'gay affirming' research, and then onto the more recently developed 'LGBT psychology' (which has at times drawn on queer theory). In other words, whilst queer theory has been drawn upon by social psychologists, and indeed offers fruitful directions for critical social psychology, it would be a disservice to queer theory to simply co-opt it into any form of social psychology through comparison to other approaches within social psychology that focus on 'sexuality' or 'sexual orientation'. These categories are themselves called into question in queer theory, as we explain in the following section. Instead in this section, we felt it more productive to examine how queer theory has been taken up within mainstream social psychology. In order to do this, we undertook a bibliographic analysis of the top ten social psychology journals, as determined by *Scopus*. Table 6.1 summarises the journals that we examined.

Looking over the past three decades at nine of the journals (and since its inception for one journal), it is perhaps unsurprising that the word 'queer' is only used a total of 53 times across the ten journals anywhere in the full text



**Table 6.1** Mentions of the word 'queer' in top ten social psychology journals

Journal name	SJR indicator	Number of mentions
Personality and Social Psychology Review	7.447	3
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	5.443	0
Research on Language and Social Interaction	4.396	5
Advances in Experimental Social Psychology	4.326	0
Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency	3.015	3
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	2.717	7
Research in Organisational Behaviour	2.567	2
Journal of Health and Social Behavior	2.502	7
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology	2.340	5
Journal of Personality	2.266	21

SJR: Scimago Journal Rank from Scopus

**Table 6.2** Uses of the word 'queer' other than to refer to queer theory in top ten social psychology journals

Use of 'queer'	Number of mentions
To mean 'unusual'	14
To pathologise	6
To describe an identity category	4
As an adjective	3
Reference that included the word	14

of articles. What is perhaps somewhat surprising is that queer theory itself is only explicitly mentioned three times. We can tentatively extend this figure somewhat by including mentions of the word 'queer' in journal articles where it appears in a reference that might be classified as queer theory. This occurred in nine instances. In only one of the papers, however, was queer theory elaborated in any detail. This appeared in a paper by Kitzinger (2005), who takes up the work of queer theorists to suggest that 'heterosexuality should be inspected for the ways in which it is produced as a natural or normal way to be' (p. 233).

Given that of the 53 total uses of the word 'queer' only 12 of these were to queer theory in some form, it is important to examine how the word was used in the other 41 instances. We suggest this may provide us with some further insight as to the state of things in mainstream social psychology with regard to how 'queer' more broadly is understood. Table 6.2 indicates how the word 'queer' was used in ways other than in reference to queer theory.

In terms of the first two categories listed in Table 6.2, we would note that these all appeared in one journal (*Journal of Personality*), and all appeared in the years between 1930 and 1969. In 14 instances in this period, the word 'queer' was used to signify something unusual, whilst in six instances, it was



explicitly used in articles focused on psychopathology (including homosexuality). Moving beyond these somewhat dated uses of the word, there are two other ways in which it was commonly used in journal articles: to describe an identity category and as an adjective.

Use of the word 'queer' as an identity category, alongside LGBT has been identified as a concern by Chambers (2009) in his discussion of the problematic appending of the category 'queer' onto the acronym 'LGBT'. In all instances where this occurred in the social psychology articles examined, this use of the word 'queer' was similarly problematic, given that it was treated as equivalent to these differing identities. For example:

Participants included 202 students who identified as heterosexual, 100 as lesbian or gay, 40 as bisexual, and 14 as 'other' nonheterosexual identities (e.g., 'queer'). Two participants did not identify their sexuality. Given the small numbers of bisexual and 'other' identified participants, we combined the three groups of nonheterosexual-identified participants into one group and compared them with the heterosexual-identified students. (Konik & Stewart, 2004, p. 823)

Equally problematic was the treatment in one article of 'gay' as standing in for 'queer':

The study was introduced as a survey concerning gay people's experiences of treatment in society. In the introduction, it was stated that the terms *gay* and *gay people* were intended inclusively and were meant to refer to anyone who in some way identified with that label or community (e.g., through being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer). (Morton & Postmes, 2009, p. 659)

Finally, in reference to queer as an identity category, 'queer' is referred to in one article as appealing to gay men as it offers 'flexibility':

Today's cohort of gay men are increasingly resisting traditional categories of sexual identity in favor of the more flexible 'queer' identity. (Hammack, 2008, p. 237)

The word 'queer' was also used as an adjective to denote something akin to 'pertaining to non-heterosexual people'. Two examples of this are:

There are also a number of studies suggesting that queer work organizations often intentionally mix the realms of intimacy and work. (Anteby & Anderson, 2014, p. 19)

Bisexual women (n = 84) were recruited by contacting college lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer organizations and asking that the link to the online survey be posted in the group's newsletter, website, or Internet listserv. (Conley, Rubin, Matsick, Ziegler, & Moors, 2014, p. 82)

With only one exception (i.e., Kitzinger, 2005), then, these uses of the word 'queer' in mainstream social psychology journals illustrate the core issues at stake with regard to the use of queer theory in social psychology. Taking up the points made in the introduction to this chapter, the use of the word 'queer' in the top ten mainstream social psychology journals indicates a lack of understanding of the differences between queer theory, queer research methods, queer studies, and queer identities, instead treating the word as a catch-all for non-heterosexual identities and as a descriptor for anything that people who occupy such identities engage in. The following section takes up in more detail why this misapplication of the word is so problematic in terms of our understanding of queer theory within social psychology.

## Presentation of Critical Alternatives Offered by Queer Theory

Having presented what we see as the limited uptake of queer theory in a sample of mainstream social psychology journals, we now turn to outline an understanding of queer theory. In his discussion of queer theory in the context of the discipline of psychology, Minton (1997) suggests that:

Resisting the discourse of homophobia, by assuming a de-essentialized identity that is purely positional, constitutes a queer rather than a gay identity. Unlike a gay identity, which is grounded in an affirmative choice of homosexuality, a queer identity has meaning only in terms of its oppositional relation to what is normative and dominant. (p. 338)

At its simplest, then, queer theory is understood as oppositional, as we suggested in the introduction to this chapter. The question this begs, then, is opposition to what? A simplistic interpretation would be opposition to normative gender binaries, or an opposition to heterosexual hegemony, or an opposition to White patriarchy (or indeed all of these things together). A more complex account, however, would emphasise oppositionality to the very idea of any truth claimed to be the product of inclusive representationality (e.g., trying to define a comprehensive 'list' of sexualities). In other words, queer

theory stands in opposition to any claim that what we think we know stands outside of the ways in which this knowing is produced. As Warner (2004) suggests with regard to sex and gender, the relationship between these two descriptors is the product of a claim to an ontological difference between two presumed categories (male and female, man and woman), one that trades upon the belief that they are universal and consistent, rather than culturally produced and contingent. This production of difference, Warner argues, functions to create modes of intelligibility through which bodies are produced as either intelligible (i.e., those that approximate particular social norms) or unintelligible. The latter category thus becomes the site of deviance, of social control, and of social marginalisation and exclusion. Importantly, as Butler (1990) argues, subjectivity properly (i.e., normatively) constituted is only possible within matrices of intelligibility—outside of these, intelligibility is denied. Moreover, as Warner suggests, these matrices of intelligibility are only partially constituted through the ‘facts’ of any given person’s approximation to social norms. These ‘facts’ are perhaps more properly, Warner argues, constituted through the *assumption* of approximation and the ways in which this is regulated:

Consider this: of all the men you interact with on a daily basis, how many of their penises have you ever really inspected for biological authenticity? Do we not usually just presume their existence and move on from there? In practice, judgements of gender identity are based on public performances, not private parts. (p. 324)

As is oft-repeated in summaries of queer theory, however, these ‘performances’ are not merely those of actors on a stage. Butler (1993) was at pains to demonstrate that the performativity of gender is not akin to drag, although drag is a genre that both questions and reproduces gender. Rather, performativity is a performance so fundamental to subjectivity as to appear naturalised. As Butler (1993) put it:

performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. (p. xii)

The description of queer theory that we have provided above may seem entirely negative, so much so that some early proponents of queer theory famously disengaged with the label ‘queer theory’ soon after it rose to popularity in the early 1990s (see Jagose, 1996). If intelligibility polices possibility (Butler,

1993), then what hope is there for anything but normative performances of socially condoned modes of subjectivity? The response to this, from the position of queer theory, is that to be 'queer' is to highlight the ways in which social norms are naturalised: How they are reliant upon sets of binary categories that are culturally contingent. This does not mean that queer theory speaks from a position outside of norms of intelligibility. As a prime example, Warner's (2004) above quote about men and penises makes recourse to cultural knowledge to make a queer theoretical comment on gender from within norms of intelligibility.

In terms of a critical social psychology, Hegarty and Massey (2006) suggest that queer theory might be useful for the fact that it both critically interrogates social norms and finds ways to productively live through them from marginal locations. Commenting specifically on mainstream social psychological attitudinal research and HIV/AIDS, they suggest that:

Queer theory might suggest how social psychologists could have their attitude technologies and deconstruct them, too. In the context of HIV/AIDS from which queer theory largely emerged, it became necessary to critically read the biomedical discourse through which 'facts' about AIDS were being produced and to develop strategies for living with the virus. (p. 61)

For Hegarty and Massey (2006), then, queer theory offers both modes of reading and modes of living. Such an approach, we would argue, is central to any critical social psychological project that seeks not only to describe people's lives but perhaps more importantly to explore the ways in which their lives are both proscribed and prescribed and from there, to make a truly 'social' contribution by rendering intelligible alternate ways of being. In the following section, we take these points about description, proscription, and being and apply them to some of our own research.

## **Application of Critical Perspectives/Methods to 'Real Life' Situations**

As we noted above, the use of queer theory within the context of critical social psychology may allow us to see how people's lives are proscribed. In this section, we first examine an example from Damien's survey research where this was potentially the case, and we examine the ways that the research perpetuated this proscription. In the second section, we outline some of Gareth's research in which he has reflected on how focus group procedures and tick-

box questions on demographic questionnaires in his research with lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, and queer (LGBPTQ)-identified research participants have also perpetuated this proscription and how focus groups also make it possible to explore how identity categories can be strategically employed but also resisted.

Over a period of two years, Damien and his colleagues have conducted a series of survey projects focused on the lives of Australian transgender people. Within this research, Damien and his colleagues intentionally utilised open-ended options for questions about gender identity, rather than only making available a narrow list of options from which participants could select. When it came time to analyse the data, however, the requirements of statistical testing made it necessary to reduce these categories. As Damien and his colleagues note in one publication:

In terms of self-described gender identity, just over half of the sample (51.5%) described their gender identity as female, whilst 26.9% described their gender identity as male, and 21.6% described their gender identity in a range of ways that for the purposes of the analysis below are grouped as 'gender diverse'. Descriptions included in this latter category include 'gender queer', 'non-binary', 'neutrois', 'agender', and 'gender fluid'. The authors acknowledge that it is problematic to group these differing gender descriptors into one category, but for the purposes of statistical analysis, it was necessary to create these categories. (Riggs, von Doussa, & Power, 2015, pp. 248–249)

Once the data had been reduced in this way, no statistically significant findings were identified that differentiated participants who identified as either male or female from those who identified with one of the categories grouped under the heading of 'gender diverse'. Whilst data reduction for the purpose of analysis is a common phenomenon, and whilst in regards to Damien's data set it may not have significantly shaped the reported findings (other than the finding of no difference between groups), it nonetheless highlights how the psychological search for differences creates the very differences it seeks to examine. In other words, by only seeing difference in terms of analysable variables, and when those variables rely on the narrowing of a broad range of experiences into relatively few categories, then what disappears are the shades of grey that we suggested above may be important for challenging normative categories.

This point about the effects of data reduction is especially poignant, given other analyses of data collected in one of the surveys indicated that there were significant differences between the assigned sex of participants and their gen-

der identity (Riggs & Due, 2013). Specifically, participants who were assigned female at birth were much more likely to identify as genderqueer than were participants who were assigned male at birth. Whilst this difference was noted in one publication arising from the data, it was not a focus of subsequent publications as these group level differences disappeared after data reduction. A small number of extracts included in the aforementioned publication highlight why these differences, whilst not statistically significant, might nonetheless be important, as can be seen from the following descriptions of gender identity provided by three participants who identified as genderqueer:

- I am both male and female.
- I identify sometimes as a woman but nearly never as a man.
- I identify somewhere between femininely genderqueer and identifying wholeheartedly as a transgender woman. Slightly genderfluid but a definite lean to the feminine side.

As we noted earlier in this chapter, identifying as queer is not the same thing as engaging with queer theory, so we do not mean to conflate the two here. Rather, our point is that what disappeared in the above described analysis of Damien's survey data were precisely the types of accounts of subjectivity that queer theory might be especially attuned to. Whilst to a certain degree, the publications from the surveys broadly described the lives of participants, they also served to proscribe the breadth of stories reported by participants and thus the potential breadth of challenges to normative gender categories.

The main aim of Gareth's work that touches on queer theory was to explore the understandings of health and illness amongst LGBPTQ communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The project involved a series of 13 focus groups in 2013 and 2014, with 51 participants (see also Graham, Treharne, Ruzibiza, & Nicolson, [in press](#)). Three student volunteers/collaborators have been co-investigators—Katie Graham, Max Nicolson, and Christian Ruzibiza—all of whom attended multiple focus groups as co-facilitators (running three groups without Gareth present). Advertising for participants is the first of several ways in which Gareth's research was proscriptive of participants' identities. We initially used posters with the relatively standard acronym LGBT—leaving off the Q that stands for 'queer' (or sometimes 'questioning' of identity; e.g., Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Previous research in which we had emphasised the word 'queer' in advertising was picked up by local media in a story about 'odd' summer jobs that students could consider (see Treharne, 2011) and that had not helped recruitment. We initially organised groups for female-identified and male-identified participants so as to pro-

vide a safe and focused space for discussions particularly for women. This approach was not intended to exclude anyone but likely shaped our sample, of whom only three participants identified as having non-binary gender identities. One participant who identified as genderqueer/queer noted that they (their preferred pronoun) were not sure they could participate in the project based on the advert. Another participant who identified as bisexual (specifically) and transgender came to a focus group arranged for male-identified participants at a time before coming out and transitioning to female. The third participant with a non-binary gender identity identified as 'gender fluid' and pansexual and attended a focus group for female-identified participants. Another important component of recruitment for the focus groups was that we encouraged participants to invite LGBT friends along to the same focus group; through this process, participants instigated focus groups that were not segregated by gender continuing to be dominated by participants with binary gender identities.

At the start of each of the 13 focus groups, the facilitators present all introduced their gender identities and sexualities before asking participants to say something about their identity—all participants were happy to do so (unsurprising, as they knew they were coming to a focus group for LGBT individuals). This procedure created a space for participants to discuss how they feel about identity labels and their deployment (or withholding) in daily life. The researchers going first in discussing our identities could potentially have served to reinforce the power differential between us and the participants, but our aim was to take the pressure off from participants and subvert the mainstream idea that researchers' identities are outside the realm of research and that awareness of insider/outsider identity status 'contaminates' objectivity for researchers and participants. Prior to starting the discussion, participants completed a confidential demographics questionnaire. The questions and pre-defined options potentially contributed to opening up discussions about the diversity of identifications. Interestingly, although the facilitators always introduced their gender identity as well as their sexuality, two-thirds of female participants and half of male participants omitted any mention of their gender in introducing themselves whereas two of the three participants with non-binary gender identities explained their specific gender identities and the third, who described their gender identity as 'gender fluid' on the questionnaire, introduced themselves simply as pansexual during the focus group and went on to say 'Umm I dunno, I think it [gender identity and sexuality] was a big issue when I was younger, like the people I was around were not open with anything to do with sexuality let alone gender'. This omission of a declaration of gender identity by many participants may be a form of protest or resistance



for at least some individuals and raises questions of whether genders or bodies are considered to speak for themselves amongst cisgender individuals (whose gender identity aligns with their body and assigned sex) and particularly when at a focus group of people of the same gender identity.

A few of the cisgender participants highlighted that they would sometimes list their gender identity as 'other', as a form of protest or solidarity: 'when there are gender things, I quite often tick the 'other' even though I'm cisgender'. Participants spoke of strategic use of identity labels in relation to sexuality (e.g., 'depending on who I'm talking to, I'll say bi or gay') but also gender identity simultaneously. For example, the participant who reported identifying as 'gender fluid' noted: 'I identify as a pansexual woman, yeah and I like, I don't mind when people ask me although I often will say I'm a lesbian because it's easier whereas people go 'What's pansexual, is that like bisexual?' and things but I like it because I don't like to enforce the gender binary'. Modelling identity as tick boxes was seen as a simplification with some value for communicating strategically but problematic because of the ways in which female sexuality is commodified by many men: 'I hate the word lesbian, really hate it (laughter). [...] I feel like it's being used in such a derogatory way, especially in pornography [...] so I'm just gonna be like a woman who likes women'. Participants also queried the self-perpetuating attention to differences of gender and sexuality using idealism such as 'In an ideal world we wouldn't care' and 'everybody's equal'. This position perhaps connects to one of the most productive premises of queer theory: matrices of intelligibility that lead people to fear being outside 'everybody'. Overall, Gareth's research on identity categories sits at the borderline of quantitative demographics and qualitative identity research that demonstrates the queer complexities of negotiating and resisting gender and sexual identities.

## Current Trends

Having outlined some critical applications of queer theory with regard to our own research projects, in this section, we now consider some further trends within academic writing in the field of psychology that draws on queer theory. As we shall see, some of these trends have been more recently identified, whilst others represent long-standing concerns that require ongoing attention.

The first trend, which we referred to in the introduction to this chapter, is that of coercive queering. Ansara (2010) defines coercive queering as a form of cisgenderism, which, more broadly, refers to 'the ideology that delegitimises people's own understanding of their genders and bodies' (Riggs, Ansara,



et al., 2015, p. 34). With regard to coercive queering, then, this occurs when the label 'queer' is attributed to someone who does not personally identify as such. This commonly occurs in regard to people who are transgender or who identify as gender diverse (Riggs, Ansara, et al., 2015). As we discussed above with reference to the use of the word 'queer' as an identity descriptor in mainstream social psychological research, 'queer' often becomes a catch-all category to describe all people who are not heterosexual and/or who are not gender normative. This is a problem, then, when this terminology is not used by participants themselves: it is coercive in that it attributes the category 'queer' when it may not be used (or may indeed be dispreferred) by participants (Riggs, Ansara, et al., 2015). Given our coverage in this chapter about the differences between queer theory and queer studies, then, it will be important into the future that researchers continue to evaluate how the latter at times co-opts the former in ways that, whilst attempting to be 'inclusive', may in fact be exclusionary. Whilst queer theory, as we have noted throughout this chapter, takes an oppositional approach to understanding sex and gender, this is not the same as dismissing people's own understandings of their genders and bodies.

A second trend, which has received increased attention within queer theory across the past decade, are the operations of race privilege in terms of both the lives of people who identify as 'queer' and in queer theorising itself. Barnard's (2003) text *Queer Race* was one of the first to interrogate how norms of whiteness play out within queer organising, politics, and theory. Barnard questioned how White people are continually treated as the normative subject in queer theory and how this must continue to be examined if the critical potential of queer theory is to be realised. Damien has drawn upon Barnard's work and applied it specifically to the use of queer theory in the field of psychology. Specifically, in Riggs (2007), Damien suggested four key areas that require attention in relation to race privilege and the use of queer theory in psychology. These are (1) a need for greater recognition of the histories on which queer theory builds and especially Black feminist thought, (2) an understanding of how racial hierarchies continue to shape normative psychological accounts that rely upon individualising, internalising, and universalising accounts of subjectivity, (3) a continued focus upon the operations of racialised desire, a topic that has received recent attention in regard to racism on gay dating sites such as gaydar and on dating apps such as grindr (e.g., Callander, Holt, & Newman, 2015), and (4) an investigation of the implication of critiques of essentialism, specifically with regard to the ways in which they may be Western-centric and thus dismissive of Indigenous ontologies. A focus on race privilege (and we might, at the very least, add to this class

privilege) is thus a significant area that requires ongoing consideration when queer theory is applied in the context of social psychology, especially given the history of psychology as a key discipline used in the service of regulating race and class.

A third trend is one that has a long history with regard to queer theory and continues to shape it and thus warrants our attention. This trend, as Hegarty and Massey (2006) note, is the use of psychoanalytic theory (and specifically the work of Lacan) as an important lynchpin in a queer theoretical framework. Whether this be to critique psychoanalytic theory (as is the case in Butler's early work) or to utilise Lacan's work to develop queer theoretical aims (such as in the chapters in Dean & Lane's 2001 edited collection), queer theory is arguably indebted to psychoanalytic thought. Yet Hegarty and Massey suggest that this may be precisely why there has been so little uptake of queer theory within psychology, given that a focus on cognition has come to dominate much of the discipline of psychology, with psychoanalysis relegated to the margins. Whilst this may be true within mainstream psychology, arguably, there are traditions of critical social psychology that have long drawn upon psychoanalytic thought, such as the seminal text *Changing the Subject* (Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). In this text, psychoanalytic thought was treated as a centrepiece for critical psychological theories (see Goodwin, this volume).

In his recent work Damien (Riggs, 2015) has drawn on the work of Lacan to argue for an account of sexuation that repeats many of the central premises of queer theory. Specifically, Damien has suggested that Lacan's work is vital to understanding the subject as rendered intelligible through the ways in which it is formed around the fact of what Lacan (1998) referred to as the 'sexual non-relationship'. In his Seminar XX, and across much of his work, Lacan clearly elaborated an account of sexuation in which neither gender nor sexuality is the product of biology. Lacan refuted the idea that males and females are paired opposites, instead suggesting that there is no sexual relationship: there is no psychical rapport between that which we commonly refer to as 'the sexes'. Instead, Lacan emphasised an account of sexuation in which the subject is formed through lack, signified by the desire of the Other. In his work Damien takes up this argument and applies it to six of Freud's cases, arguing that when we restrict ourselves to a presumed relationship between bodies and identities, we lose sight of the relational ways in which subjects are formed. This account, then, contributes to a queer theoretical understanding of sex and gender by refusing 'the body' and the modes of intelligibility that are presumed to derive from it, instead emphasising the role of misreadings and misperceptions in the formation of the sexuated subject.

## Summary

As we have suggested throughout this chapter, there are likely barriers to the uptake of queer theory within social psychology, primarily in relation to the misunderstandings and misapplications of it that have occurred to date under the name of psychology, although some may argue the same about certain elements of our reading of queer theory presented in this chapter. At the same time, however, we have suggested that in a diverse range of ways, the theoretical framework offered by queer theory has long found its place within critical approaches to social psychology, with more recent applications extending this to focus on often overlooked areas (such as race).

Yet, despite the possible role for queer theory within critical social psychology, we would nonetheless suggest the importance of caution in regards to any attempts at the wholesale importing of queer theory into critical social psychology. Queer theory functions precisely because it refuses domestication and inclusivity. Given the tendency within psychology to colonise and institutionalise particular theoretical approaches and to apply them in a blanket fashion across topics and populations, it is vital that any researchers engaging with queer theory are mindful that it may often be precisely at the point where something becomes a norm that it ceases having a critical function. As such, whilst we would advocate for the utility of queer theory in terms of challenging the established norms of mainstream social psychology, we would also encourage those who draw upon queer theory to continue to interrogate how its co-option may at times weaken its analytic strength.

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# 7

## Critical Race Studies in Psychology

Phia S. Salter and Andrea D. Haugen

Critical Race Psychology (CRP) is a theoretical framework that integrates the main themes articulated in critical race theory and facets of critical psychological approaches to understanding race and racism. Instead of viewing racism as a particular domain for investigation via psychological scientific tools, a CRP approach takes racial power as a conceptual lens through which to analyze all psychological phenomena and conduct psychological science itself. The intellectual foundations of CRP can be found primarily in critical race theory and critical social-psychological approaches to understanding race and racism.

Historically, social psychologists have approached the problems associated with racism as primarily stemming from the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of biased and prejudiced individuals (e.g., Allport, 1954). The models guiding much of mainstream social-psychological research tend to discuss racist phenomenon in terms of hostility, negative bias, or the result of ignorance among dominant group members who ultimately subject racial and ethnic minorities to differential treatment (Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008; see Goodman, this volume). Advances in social neuroscience have further tried to pinpoint the neural mechanisms that facilitate race-based ingroup versus outgroup biases and processing (e.g., Chekroud, Everett, Bridge, & Hewstone, 2014; Eberhardt, 2005). Taken together, traditional approaches locate the driving force

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behind racism in individual prejudices inside people's minds. The models guiding much of mainstream social-psychological research decompose racist phenomena by reducing them to "basic" social-psychological processes like stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination as they apply equally to ingroups versus outgroups, majority versus minority, or high-status versus low-status groups. In other words, racism is assumed to be best understood as basic underlying components (representation and status) and/or equal to the sum of its parts (see "racism equals prejudice plus power"; Operario & Fiske, 1998).

In contrast, critical race perspectives within social psychology emphasize the extent to which most societies are deeply entrenched in racialized power asymmetries. Instead of aiming to discover whether there is racial bias inside one's mind (whether implicit or explicit), critical race perspectives consider racism as fundamentally embedded in society; thus, racism is primarily located in the broader sociocultural context. From this perspective, the psychology of racism is best understood as the reproduction, maintenance, and internalization of preexisting, historically derived, systemic racial dynamics regardless of individual-level racial animus. This idea is elaborated on by several critical scholars across psychological sub-areas but also notably in psychological approaches that embrace critical race theory.

## Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory began in the 1980s as an identity-conscious intervention in legal studies that critiqued the dominant frames of civil rights and meritocratic discourse within the law (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; see also Crenshaw, 2011). The prevailing frames within legal studies regarded the best approaches to legal doctrine as objective, colorblind, and neutral; therefore, racial discrimination was considered to be the unfortunate byproduct of irrational, racially biased individuals (historically, this is also true of mainstream social psychology). In contrast, critical race theory emphasized the extent to which racial bias and hierarchies are infused in the everyday operation of every institutional space, perhaps especially the law. Critical race theory scholarship not only challenged traditional legal studies but also pushed against critical factions of legal studies that aptly acknowledged structural power dynamics in law practice but were reluctant to embrace explicitly race-conscious analyses of the law. Critical race theory scholarship centered race in both epistemology and praxis.



## Core Ideas

At least five core ideas are often cited as common themes that can be found among critical race theory scholarship in their analyses of race and the law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). First, and perhaps most central, critical race theory perspectives presuppose that racism is a systemic force embedded in the structure of American society and other colonial contexts invested in White supremacy (e.g., Bell, 2000; Mills, 1997). It is not limited to isolated cases of bigotry but instead infuses everyday life in mainstream institutions. Second, critical race theory perspectives hold that narratives of liberalism, individualism, colorblindness, choice, and meritocracy mask the permanence and centrality of race. They serve as epistemologies of ignorance (Mills, 1997) that launder or whitewash (Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, & Oppenheimer, 2003) inequality by making race-based outcomes appear to be the consequence of something other than racism. Third, critical race theory perspectives draw attention to interest convergence (Bell, 1980): the idea that broad-based support of civil rights for people of color emerges only when it aligns with interests of White Americans. Rather than selfless regard for others, this tenet emphasizes that White support for civil rights has its basis (for better or worse) in self-interest. Fourth, critical race theory perspectives hold that White identity (and its cultural manifestations) is a profitable possession—akin to rights in property (Harris, 1995)—that brings benefits to the bearer. As a consequence, White people invest in the defense of both White identity and the white-washed ecologies of reality that constitute racial privilege (Lipsitz, 2006). Finally, a fifth common theme among critical race theory perspectives is the practice of counter-storytelling as a tool for revealing and deconstructing the racialized bases of everyday society. Facets of critical social-psychological research resonate with each of these core tenets (Salter & Adams, 2013). This is especially true among psychological perspectives that draw explicitly upon the epistemological position of people from marginalized groups as a means to denaturalize and contest white-washed constructions of everyday situations.

## Critical Race Perspectives in Psychology

During the past 25+ years, critical race theory and its core ideas have traveled widely to influence other social scientific disciplinary spaces outside of law, including education (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2011); cultural studies (e.g., Perry, 2005); political science (e.g., Yamamoto, 1997); philosophy (e.g., Fraser,

1998); sociology (e.g., Bracey, 2014; Moore, 2008); public health (e.g., Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010); and psychology, as well (e.g., Adams & Salter, 2011). Primarily, the connection between critical race theories and scholarship within critical social psychology has been similar to conventional accounts of racism in mainstream practices. Although psychologists have tended to approach racism from the perspective of a “prejudice problematic” (Dixon et al., 2010; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) that treats racism synonymously with prejudice (biased feelings or affect), bigotry (intolerance or hatred toward those with differing beliefs), stereotyping (biased thoughts and beliefs), or flawed generalizations, social psychologists with critical orientations consider how traditional social-psychological findings reflect the ways in which racism is embedded in society (see Adams, Biernat, et al., 2008). For instance, the large body of work on stereotype threat demonstrates that racism is embedded in sociocultural contexts. Discussed as “the threat in the air”, stereotype threat is an example of race-based outcomes that can occur without the prototypical prejudiced perpetrator (Steele, 1997). It is the broader cultural associations between race (or gender) and intelligence that produce this phenomenon. Similarly, cultural representations also afford White ownership of the category “American” (e.g., Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010) that render some Americans as forever “foreign” in mainstream American imagination. Finally, critical social psychologists conducting discourse analyses of racist speech demonstrate how individualist, merit-based, colorblind, neoliberal narratives mask the underlying connections to racial or ethnic bias (Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

## Identity-Conscious Approaches

Examples of critical race perspectives in psychology can be found in identity-conscious, psychological approaches like Black Psychology. From its inception, Black Psychology questioned the typically obscured or unmarked (White) identity positions that were inherently embedded in the theories, research, and practices of mainstream psychology (e.g., R. L. Jones, 1991; White, 1970). Black Psychology highlighted the centrality of race and racism in American psychology, especially concerning the promotion and endorsement of “objective” scientific studies that implied the universal superiority of White men and the pathological inferiority of “other” patterns that deviated from this prescriptive standard (e.g., Akbar, 1991; Guthrie, 1976; Myers, 1988). Similarly, the perspective of Liberation Psychology (see Montero, this volume) draws upon the epistemological perspective of “majority world”

(Kağıtçıbaşı, 1995) or postcolonial contexts to emphasize the need for a psychological endeavor that (1) is oriented toward the needs of marginalized peoples, (2) uses methodologies and ways of knowing aligned with perspectives and social realities of the oppressed, and (3) is critically conscious of its own transformative power (Martín-Baró, Aron, & Corne, 1994). Liberation Psychology perspectives draw upon identity-conscious knowledge to reveal the role of ordinary science in reproducing domination. Common perspectives in Multicultural Counseling are also noteworthy for advocating purposeful consideration of one's own identity-positioning within psychological practice, including explicit awareness of one's values, assumptions, and biases (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The emergence of Multicultural Counseling can be linked to early attempts to understand culturally different worldviews and the development of culturally appropriate interventions and practices. Work in Multicultural Counseling psychology challenges White practitioners to recognize that, although their experience of events may feel objective or transcendent of an identity position, this is a benefit they enjoy because of racial privilege and domination (e.g., Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). By illuminating how denial of the racialized character of experience is constitutive of privilege and power, work in Multicultural Counseling psychology resonates with the critical race theory's goal of revealing racialized subjectivities inscribed in disciplinary practice. Indigenous psychologies (e.g., Enriquez, 1993; Gone, 2011; see Kim & Berry, 1993), whiteness studies (e.g., Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007; Riggs, 2004; see also Fine, Weis, Powell Pruitt, & Burns, 2012), feminist standpoints, and intersectional psychologies (Cole, 2008; Hill Collins, 2000) are also critical perspectives utilized in psychology that draw upon identity-conscious knowledge to reveal and counteract manifestations of racism and neocolonialism in society and psychological science.

## Critical Disciplinary Approaches

Critical race perspectives in psychology also challenge psychologists to reveal and dismantle institutions and conventions that constitute racial power not only in society at large but also within the discipline itself. More broadly, critical perspectives within social and cultural psychology highlight the ideological assumptions that pervade psychological science and present alternative theoretical positions to challenge the relationship between science and inequality. Critical social psychologists problematize the ways in which mainstream psychological science largely considers individuals abstracted from social context and their (racialized) position in society (e.g., Hook &

Howarth, 2005). Notably, one of the key elements that characterizes critical psychology—an emphasis on the extent to which dominant discourses in psychological research can operate in the service of power and privilege—can be countered with self-critical reflexivity about the ways in which psychological science reproduces domination (Finlay & Gough, 2008). By rejecting assumptions of neutrality, an objective “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986), and the idea of a pure science abstracted from context, critical social psychologists aim to disrupt “business as usual” practices that ignore the ways in which everyday frames are gendered, classed, and racialized (also see Cundiff, 2012).

Conventional approaches to cultural psychology tend to highlight the extent to which mainstream psychological science often relies on a Eurocentric standard by either ignoring diverse samples or treating other patterns as a deviation from a natural baseline that requires explanation (WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Although cultural psychologists have tended to sidestep issues of oppression and domination (cf. J. M. Jones, 1991, 1997), cultural-psychological perspectives often reveal the particular positioning of allegedly positionless mainstream theory and research. When making efforts to diversify the science or make it less “weird”, Adams and Salter (2007) emphasize two strategies for psychological science. The first strategy is to provide a *normalizing*, context-sensitive account of “other” patterns that mainstream psychological science regards as abnormal. The second strategy is to “turn the analytic lens” or *denaturalize* patterns that mainstream psychological science tends to portray as standard. Applied to analyses of race, turning the analytic lens (Adams & Salter, 2007) can reveal the resonance between mainstream psychological science and White understandings and desires (e.g., defining and approaching racism from an isolated, individual perspective; Adams, Edkins, Lacka, Pickett, & Cheryan, 2008; Sommers & Norton, 2006). The practices and institutions that pass for “natural” standards in psychological science reflect preferential selection and the reproduction of the understandings of people in positions of power.

Notably, psychology has also traveled to critical race theory. Critical Race Realism utilizes research from across the social sciences and, in particular, from social psychology to understand the way racial bias manifests at every level of the legal system. These critical race theory legal scholars have drawn upon social-psychological research to challenge the narrow, conventional understandings of discrimination as individual, intentional, racially motivated antipathy, or prejudice that typically pervades legal doctrine (e.g., Krieger, 2004; Parks, Jones, & Cardi, 2008). While conventional legal standards of racial discrimination require “proof” of deliberate, differential treatment, Critical Race Realism instead draws upon empirical-psychological research,

demonstrating the pervasive occurrence of discrimination that can occur without conscious awareness by people who sincerely strive to act in a non-discriminatory fashion (e.g., Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995).

Although Critical Race Realism utilizes contributions from social-psychological science to support critical race theory propositions, they do not necessarily challenge the disciplinary assumptions and conventions of social-psychological science that reflect and reproduce positivist (Richardson & Fowers, 1998), methodologically hegemonic (i.e., experimental, Potter, 1997; cf. Wilson, 2005), and individualist (Dixon & Reicher, 1997; Shweder, 1990) approaches that are regarded as “good” science within psychology. Instead, critical voices within psychology advocate a more identity-conscious, self-critical, reflexive form of inquiry that acknowledges the positionality and ideology inherent in theory and method to produce good science.

## Critical Race Psychology Applications

Early on in the first author’s experience in graduate school, she had the opportunity to take an esteemed social psychologist to breakfast. When the esteemed guest asked about her research interests, she indicated that she was interested in race, ethnic identity, and racism. Without hesitation, the scholar declared that ethnic minority researchers should not worry about doing ethnic research; instead, he insisted, they should focus on basic research and conducting good science. The scholar insinuated that studying race and racism was political and in opposition to good science. Indeed, standard advice to graduate students in psychological science is that they should leave their identities and political sensibilities at the door of the laboratory, strive to conduct their research as positionless observers, and allow the data to speak for themselves. It is standard practice that nearly all undergraduate and graduate students in psychology (regardless of subdiscipline) receive statistical training, but there is not much consistency in training across the discipline with regard to the relationship between psychological research or practice and multicultural issues (Gone, 2011). The idea is that researchers can easily check their biases at the door by simply denying that one’s personal identity would actually inform one’s research. This, in many ways, parallels claims that one is non-prejudiced because one merely claims not to see color. These everyday training practices that deny the identity position or racialized subjectivity of scientific knowledge itself can reproduce bias in analysis. In contrast, applications of CRP include centering race in epistemology (i.e., ways of knowing) and

praxis (i.e., integrating theory with practice). A CRP perspective argues that students should learn how to utilize their positionality in assessing the ideological assumptions that guide their research questions and analyses (Rhoads, 1997). A CRP perspective strives to locate the presence and function of racism in the structures or everyday patterns of any given cultural context.

What follows next is a brief description of bodily, material, and institutional practices, patterns, and artifacts of race and racism in the USA. Although organized into separate subheadings, the manifestations of race and racism that we discuss as “bodily”, “material”, and “institutional” are not necessarily distinct from each other. They reflect the “basic” ways race and racism impact everyday lives of both racial majority and minority group members.

## The Bodily

Contexts are constitutive not only of psychological experiences but also of physical bodies (Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005); thus, the bodily can be used as an example of racism embedded in context. This analysis builds on two critical social psychologists’ assessment that “the body itself of course, along with questions of the psychology of embodiment—and questions of embodied racialized experience—deserves far greater attention within critical psychological perspectives on racism” (Hook & Howarth, 2005, pp. 509–510). Examinations of how racialized contexts are incorporated in “the bodily” might best be entered through a short discussion of evidence that psychological experiences of race and racism are embodied among Black Americans before discussing how privilege might be embodied among White Americans (see also Latimer, 2008, for further discussion of the body as “world-reflecting” and “world-building”). In other words, the racialized body reflects the context in which it is embedded, and that world affords a particular racialized experience because it also reflects the ideas and ideologies that maintain that world.

For instance, several researchers suggest that experiences of racism are life stressors that adversely affect Black Americans’ quality of life (e.g., Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003; Schnittker & McLeod, 2005; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). This includes work linking self-reported experiences of racism to increased anxiety (Carter, 2007), blood pressure (Krieger & Sidney, 1996), higher rates of hypertension (e.g., Steffen, McNeilly, Anderson, & Sherwood, 2003), and decreased self-esteem (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). In other words, many Black Americans’ experience of race is constituted by a context in which “being black” is stigmatized and devalued; thus, experiences of this devaluation is manifested through negative bodily consequences. Furthermore, physiological data suggests that the reluctance to recognize instances of racism is related

to higher levels of blood pressure among persons experiencing racist events (Harrell et al., 2003). In other words, *denial* of racism and discrimination in one's life compounds the trauma among Black Americans (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Caughy, O'Campo, & Mutaner, 2004; Daniel, 2000) and has negative implications for well-being (e.g., Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holmes, 2005). Together, these studies suggest that Black bodies reflect societal devaluation and when incorporated, this devaluation adversely affects their mental and physical health.

In turn, White Americans' experience of race is constituted by a context in which "being white" is *raceless* and valued (Lipsitz, 2006). To the extent that contexts in which racism denial (incorporating devaluation) affords negative health consequences for Black Americans, the same incorporation of racism denial might afford freedom from these health consequences for White Americans. Therefore, a CRP perspective suggests White Americans profit (bodily and otherwise) from contexts in which racism denial is "desirable" and "being white" is normative. As such, contexts imbued with race- and racism-denying ideologies should afford positive health consequences to White Americans. To our knowledge, there is yet to be empirical research explicitly linking denial of racism with positive health benefits for Whites (we propose that this particular research agenda becomes evident primarily with a critical race analysis of health and privilege); however, there is some existing research supporting this idea. This possibility stems from three different areas of existing research: (1) research on the pervasive medical and mental health disparities in which White Americans are granted longer life expectancies (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), (2) the literature linking preferences for just world beliefs, colorblind ideology, and social dominance to various dimensions of modern racism (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009; O'Brien & Major, 2005; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004), and (3) lines of research linking just world beliefs to positive self-esteem (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007) and adaptive positive mental health outcomes (i.e., just world beliefs as a personal resource; Dalbert, 2001; Furnham, 2003; Otto, Glaser, & Dalbert, 2009). Cultural tools such as ideologies that minimize the impact of racism in the USA would not only confer social power to dominant groups but also afford the positive benefits of racialized health privileges for White Americans. On one hand, contexts affording race-neutral ideologies promote positive experiences of whiteness and better health outcomes. On the other hand, White American preferences for and deployment of ostensibly race-neutral ideologies (e.g., individual responsibility; Salter, Hirsh, Schlegel, & Thai, 2016) reflect contexts promoting positive bodily experiences of race (or racelessness, in this case) for Whites. Depositing these preferences back into the world further perpetuate their value and racialized privileges.



## The Material

As another example of racism in everyday context, mainstream representations of race, ethnicity, and nationality are not just reflections of neutral categories; rather, they are historically derived ideas about superiority and inferiority embedded in powerful positive associations with whiteness and negative associations with persons of Indigenous, African, Hispanic, and Asian descent (e.g., Devos & Banaji, 2005; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004). Representations of whiteness do not just grant the benefits of racial neutrality, but whiteness affords ownership of the category “American”. For example, to the extent that implicit association tests reflect cultural representations, research suggests that in general, Americans<sup>1</sup> attach the category “American” more strongly to Whites than to Asian Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009; Devos & Ma, 2008), Latinos (Devos et al., 2010), and African Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Rydell, Hamilton, & Devos, 2010). Further evidence suggests that this effect extends to prescribing ownership of “American” to other non-American White persons. That is, White Americans attach the category “American” more strongly to White *Europeans* (e.g., Kate Winslet and Hugh Grant) than to non-White *Americans* (e.g., Connie Chung and Lucy Liu; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Ma, 2008). This expression of racialized privilege—“to be American is to be white” (Devos & Banaji, 2005, p. 463)—is not only incorporated into individual beliefs but also deposited back into the world by media representations, educational materials, and everyday discourses. During the 2008 election season, leaders and representatives from the Republican McCain-Palin campaign made statements declaring some geographic spaces were “real” or “pro-America” while insinuating that other geographic areas were not. Then, Vice Presidential Candidate, Sarah Palin made one such claim:

We believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit, and in these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard working very patriotic, um, very, um, pro-America areas of this great nation. (Excerpt from Palin’s 2008 Greensboro, NC Fundraiser Speech, as reported by Juliet Eilperin, 2008)

Palin did not have to explicitly name whiteness as a requirement for “real America” for subsequent interpretations of such. Work on the racialization

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<sup>1</sup>With the exception of Black Americans (see Study 5 of Devos & Banaji, 2005), White, Latino, and Asian Americans alike showed the American = White effect (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010).



of space suggests that the space she describes—small towns in red states—is linked to predominately White, “middle class” families in mainstream American imagination (opposed to urban centers which are characterized as predominately Black and Latino; Brown, 2007). Furthermore, at the time, appropriations of “Joe the Plumber” by the McCain-Palin campaign (and later by the Obama-Biden campaign) as a representative of real American concerns and ideals further contribute to the objectification of patriotic or “real” America as non-urban, predominately White, and middle class. This representation simultaneously reveals and perpetuates the illusion that “American” legitimately belongs to some people (i.e., White Americans) and not others (i.e., non-White Americans). These expressions are not merely behavioral manifestations of psychological beliefs but comprise material traces of mind deposited into popular discourses and popular media. As these discourses become a part of the ecological structure of the context, they continue to reflect and shape others’ experiences.

Within this perspective, representations of history can also illustrate racism in everyday context (e.g., Adams, Salter, Pickett, Kurtis, & Phillips, 2010). Specifically, representations of history are illustrative of how memory and identity not only reside in the structures of mind embodied in the brain but also are inscribed in cultural worlds or embedded in “cultural stuff” (e.g., school classrooms, textbooks, museums, and national holidays; Adams et al., 2010; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008; Wertsch, 2002). Namely, representations of history are cultural repositories of memory and mediate peoples’ understandings of their collective past (e.g., Kurtis, Adams, & Yellowbird, 2010; Loewen, 1999; Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2002). In terms of racialized privilege, the presence and absence of particular history narratives are not the product of happenstance but the reflection of dominant group preferences, needs, and desires (e.g., Baumeister & Hastings, 1997; Kurtis et al., 2010; Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997; Sahdra & Ross, 2007; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). For instance, presidential proclamations regarding the “First American Thanksgiving” are not neutral accounts of a colonial encounter but narratives grounded in White American traditions and ideals (e.g., religious freedom) that provide the tools necessary for creating nation-glorifying citizenship (Kurtis et al., 2010).

Additional evidence for this idea comes from an investigation of displays for Black History Month (BHM) in Kansas City area schools (Salter & Adams, 2016). Despite its obvious relevance for Black Americans, Black History representations created in mainstream contexts work to maintain racialized privilege and perpetuate the desires and needs of White Americans. Salter and Adams observed that BHM displays sampled from schools with majority

White populations were qualitatively different from schools with majority Black populations and were likely to reflect mainstream White American preferences for racelessness (e.g., likelihood to link BHM to larger issues of cultural and global diversity while de-emphasizing race-conscious topics such as the Civil Rights Movement). As anti-racism educators suggest, celebratory narratives of heritage and heroism maintain the status quo by validating the existing racial hierarchies and inequalities (Pitre & Ray, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). The extent to which mainstream historical narratives promote denial of racism in contemporary society by omitting the narratives of the oppressed and other objectionable events (e.g., genocide, slavery; Kurtis et al., 2010; Loewen, 1995) illustrate the ways in which “basic” psychological processes like producing positive collective self-images are indeed racialized. Although what happened in the past and its relevance to the present is inherently ambiguous, the power annexed in mainstream representations of history affords advantageous and privileging interpretations of historical “facts”.

## The Institutional

Historically derived ideas regarding White supremacy and Black inferiority in the USA are not only inscribed in textbook cases of legalized dehumanization of Africans and Jim Crow segregation laws but are continually realized through contemporary power relations. Arizona House Bill 2281, mandating a ban on ethnic studies programs, provides a contemporary example of how value is ascribed to whiteness in institutional practices and how these practices provide constructions of whiteness that afford racialized privilege. In this case, the bill and similar measures<sup>2</sup> embody mainstream desires to associate standard education practices with whiteness by constructing courses with race-conscious material as “ethnic”, irrelevant, and problematic. State Schools Chief Tom Horne has advocated for the ban for several years because he believes “the Tucson school district’s Mexican-American studies program teaches Latino students that they are oppressed by white people” (Cooper, 2010). Proponents of the bill devalue race consciousness by employing color-blind ideology—that is, emphasizing the sameness of people and purposefully ignoring racial categories (Plaut, 2010; see also Crenshaw, 1995 for discussion

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<sup>2</sup>For example, among other contested changes, Texas State Board of Education’s textbook curricula changes included amendments deleting a requirement that sociology students explain how institutional racism is evident in American society, deleting Dolores Huerta, cofounder of United Farm Workers of America, from lists of historical figures who exemplified good citizenship, and rejecting inclusion of specific Tejano defenders at the Battle at the Alamo (McKinley, 2010).

of colorblind ideology and the law)—and advocate for a staunch individualism in the classroom. For example, the ban prohibits classes that “advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of students as individuals” (State of Arizona, 2010, HB 2281). Assuming that individualism is inherently good is neither a neutral nor a naturally occurring position. Instead, this construction of reality reflects racialized privilege to the extent that this belief procures advantages for dominant group members. Work by Augoustinos et al. (2005) illustrates the power of an individualist lens for maintaining and perpetuating social inequalities that benefit the dominant group. Without explicitly denying the disadvantaged status of Indigenous people, White Australian students justified opposition to Affirmative Action by employing egalitarian, meritocratic, and individualist discourses (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Every, 2005). By emphasizing the importance of individual merit, White Australian students gainfully obscured the need for race-conscious collective action to redress Indigenous disadvantage and simultaneously constructed any positive outcomes on their behalf as deserved and well-earned. This constitutes another example of privilege as mind in context to the extent that there are multiple discursive tools available to students (and law makers), but their particular selections are directive and purposeful in maintaining contexts in which whiteness is valued and racial inequalities persist.

Not only does Arizona’s House Bill objectify the preferences of White Americans for racelessness in the classroom, but research also suggests that the institutionalization of this idea could adversely affect productivity, reduce feelings of belonging, and threaten the identity safety of racial minority students (e.g., Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008). Although conducted in a different context (i.e., in the workplace), research suggests that White American’s endorsement of colorblind ideology negatively predicts Black Americans’ psychological engagement (Plaut et al., 2009). In other words, selecting policies that devalue race consciousness creates an environment that affords a particular racialized experience in which Black Americans are more likely to be disengaged and Whites are likely to look (and be) more engaged by comparison (further compounding the profits incurred by White Americans). Colorblind ideology, in turn, becomes a tool for racialized privilege.

However, racialized privilege is not the sum total of individual experiences of unearned benefits either. The value afforded to whiteness is intentional in the cultural, structural, and physical world (whether it is bodily, material, or institutional). White Americans’ everyday experiences do not merely reflect racialized privilege, but they afford and promote racialized privilege as well. This psychological value afforded to whiteness under the guise of

racelessness functions to uphold contexts that confer dominance to White Americans (Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). Contexts conferring power and dominance to White Americans oppress and disadvantage racial and ethnic minorities.

## Globalizing Critical Race Studies in Psychology

Although the summary of CRP thus far has been US-centric, parallels can be drawn across global experiences of domination and the reproduction of oppression among various cultural contexts with differing geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural histories. Globalizing critical race studies not only requires considering how racism affects similarly situated groups in other global contexts but should also consider the development of power, dominance, and White privilege as a global social construct itself (e.g., Green et al., 2007). Namely, the power asymmetries that underlie the particulars of systemic racism in the USA also underlie the broad spectrum of systemic features that confer power, dominance, and White privilege worldwide. Inequitable access to resources and exploitive labor conditions often afflict poor people of color within majority world settings—that is, among people associated with the “developing world” who represent the majority of humankind (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1995)—and the targets of racism and discrimination in countries around the world are often Indigenous peoples (e.g., Indigenous Maori people in New Zealand; Kirkwood, Liu, & Weatherall, 2005) or members of immigrant groups (e.g., Africans, Arabs, Asians, and Yugoslavs in Sweden; Akrami, Ekehammar, & Araya, 2000). Furthermore, dominant groups around the world tend to deploy similar group-level stereotypes to locate the source of racial group differences in the practices and shortcomings of racialized targets (e.g., lazy, dangerous; Durrheim & Dixon, 2000).

Research also suggests a cultural shift from overt to more subtle expressions of racism in American contexts (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986) and a similar cultural shift occurring among dominant groups more globally. In Australia, for example, “old racism” (blatant and overt) has been mostly supplanted with a “new racism” (subtle and indirect) that understands racial and cultural differences as being insurmountable, hindering national unity, and having staying power in a—largely unacknowledged—White-dominated society (e.g., Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004). Emergence of a “new” racism has been observed cross-culturally; psychologists document similar patterns in New Zealand (Kirkwood et al., 2005), Sweden (Akrami et al., 2000), Romania (Tileagă, 2006), France, Great Britain, Germany,

the Netherlands (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), South Africa (Durrheim & Dixon, 2000), and Canada (Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama, 2007). These subtle “new” forms of racism proliferating globally are particularly of interest to critical race psychologists because they are difficult to illuminate within the mainstream models of racism as outright hostility and negative bias, and they constitute an artificial measure of progress that discourages institutional change.

## Concluding Summary

Critical race studies in psychology work together to dispel that idea that racism is primarily perpetuated by individual bigots and racists and instead looks toward the everyday beliefs, justifications, ideas, and behaviors that are inextricably tied to the broader sociohistorical context of systemic inequality. Drawing from several critical approaches in psychology, this perspective tries to convey that both elements of individual subjectivity and cultural context condition the persistence of racism and power more broadly. CRP utilizes identity consciousness as a tool to reveal the sociocultural and psychological resources, holding current societal structures in place that might otherwise remain invisible to the untrained eye. Instead of looking beyond race variables for more parsimonious or “basic” explanations of otherwise race-relevant outcomes, critical race perspectives challenge those approaches as one-way psychological science that reproduces power asymmetries by minimizing the central role race has played in organizing whose bodies and identities *chronically* make up the outgroup versus ingroup, minority versus majority, or low-status versus high-status group. In turn critical race psychologists ask to what extent do analyses that aim to move “beyond race” reflect the same implicit colorblind models and tools located within dominant group preferences that confer power to majority groups in the first place.

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# 8

## Psychology of Liberation Revised (A Critique of Critique)

Maritza Montero

In this chapter, I summarize what has happened during the 15 years of existence of an organized Psychology of Liberation (LP), and what has been produced as LP. Fifteen years may seem a short time to develop a whole way to read, think about, practise, and criticize. Nevertheless, much has been achieved as LP has exerted influence beyond Latin America (LA). For example, an Italian journal, *Psicologia di Comunità* (Vol. 1, N° 1, 2012), devoted a special issue to LP, which included three critical analyses of LP: one about its presentation and application in Italy (D. Marzana & E. Marta); another on epistemological, methodological, and ethical questions (S. Tagliabue); and one introducing freedom in LP (Arcidianono & Di Martino); a fourth paper focused on LP in Seville, Spain (V. Paloma, M. García Ramirez, & C. Camacho). In 2013, another Italian article by Natale, Arcidiacono, and Di Martino, published in *Universitas Psychologica* (a Colombian Journal), concerned an experience-based Liberation and community project designed to enhance the well-being of the inhabitants of Caserta, Italy (“*From ‘Gomorrhah domain’ to ‘Don Peppe Diana’ lands: A Southern Italian experience of work-based Liberation, networking, and well-being*”). My task here is to review key features and applications of LP within LA and beyond, and how this “liberation” psychology is not only creating ways to do that but also how, in such a short time, it is producing a new praxis while including the Other and opening the totality.

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## The Beginnings

Liberation Psychology is the latest expression of a Liberation Paradigm initiated in the sixties in LA. I consider that what happened in LA, since Freire, Fals Borda and their disciples and colleagues, as well as theologues and philosophers Dussel and Scannone, developed a line of thought with the same intention and context. Liberation is characterized by not being the way of a single person, or a single line of studies—it always is the work of many people, collectively and actively doing research and using some classic ideas when they are useful in particular living conditions. In addition, new methods may be deployed, sometimes created ad hoc, with an emphasis on ethical and political ways to do psychology (Freire, 1963, 1970 and 1973).

After the end of the Second World War, Liberation movements began to emerge beyond the American continent. Africa and the Asian Southwest are clear examples. The need to de-colonize as well as grow out of underdevelopment, dependency, monopolist capitalism, and cultures of violence led to claims for new forms of democracy, for freedom and equality, expressed by the books written by Frantz Fanon in the Antillas, or by Albert Memmi in Northern Africa, among others, or expressed by Patrice Lumumba, the only president elected by the people, and fighting for democracy, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, killed in 1961.

By the 1960s, in LA a movement was developed by economists, sociologists, and political scientists (such as F. E. Cardozo, H. Jaguaribe, C. Furtado, V. Bambilra, E. Faletto) from many countries, creating a *Theory of Dependency*, which was a critique of the social model that was being proposed after the Second World War, and adopted for countries like those in LA that were supposed to become industrialized, therefore jumping into international markets; but in spite of having favourable market conditions, that did not happen. Cardozo and Faletto (1969), and many other economists, sociologists, and anthropologists, considered that traditional societies should have created new ways to develop the economy, as well as developing their peoples, decolonizing them, while developing better conditions of life, from Mexico in the North, to Chile and Argentina in the South. LA had problems deriving from international capitalist inversions, producing a new division of work, changing the type of dependency existing before the Second World War. In our countries, ways to create equality were being demanded, but, by the end of that decade, those who had created that theory, internationally criticized, were also criticizing their own work, and those ideas were discarded.



For those who were not economists, sociologists, or political scientists, there was the possibility of a different world. Dependency theory claims were the seed for the idea of a liberation produced from other perspectives that immediately began to grow. So, what was discarded in the late 1960s began to produce new ways to see and to do. First was a pedagogy of liberation in Brazil, followed very soon by a Sociology of Liberation (Colombia), and a theology of Liberation that covered our part of the continent, and immediately, a Philosophy of Liberation which bloomed in the 1980s and is still in progress. The latest expression, so far, is Liberation Psychology (LP), announced in 1986 by Ignacio Martín Baró (IMB) in a paper (*Towards a Psychology of Liberation*) published in the Psychology Bulletin at his university in El Salvador. Subsequently, IMB (1987–1989) pointed out the need to change the LA way of life, as lived by the poor (the majority of the population). His untimely death, when all the priests at his university were killed by soldiers, did not prevent his inspirational ideas from influencing other LA countries, as well as some places in USA, and in Spain, the UK, and Italy.

The late 1970s and 1980s heralded a time of change for the sciences: Prigogine and Stenger's book *La Nouvelle Alliance: Métamorphosis de la Science* (1982) was one of many contributions which helped transform science. The conflictive character of science was highlighted, time was rediscovered, and the social sciences also began to change. A door was opened in LA psychology. In some countries, social and political psychologies began to transform the discipline, and participatory action research opened a way to reach the people so that new voices could be heard. Old methods such as life history and biographical approaches were renovated, and new methods and concepts, such as problematization (2007), and conscientization (2012a), among others, began to be studied and practised. Community psychology with a participatory emphasis was created, developing ways for psychological researchers to talk and work with the people. Psychology began to respond sooner to the demands received from the people that needed its interventions.

The first and most important method adopted was Participatory-Action-Research, developed by Fals Borda (1960, 1978, 1986), immediately followed by the discovery that talking and working with the people was necessary. Other social scientists also adopted participatory methods, including C. Rodriguez Brandao (1981, 1987) and P. Demo (1984). And very soon, some other ways to practise and theorize began to be produced (see also Chap. 13, this volume).

LP had a period of latency that lasted until 1998, when Jorge-Mario Flores-Orsorio and a group he convened at Cuernavaca, Mexico, prepared the "opening" to LP in 2000. That was the beginning of Liberation Psychology and of



the production of ideas, methods, and practices regarding that new way to do psychology. From 2000 until 2010, there were LP symposia in various LA countries, every year initially and then every two years. At the beginning, they were regarded with interest and produced new ideas which were discussed and critiqued. As usually happens, LP can cover both large areas of work and study, like the Ceará programme, in Brazil, that was created with an impressive LP vision, since the mid-eighties and until today; many smaller-scale projects have also been conducted.

## From Critical Psychology to Liberation Psychology

As new ways to do social, clinical, political, and community psychology were written, read, heard, and seen in our part of the continent, Freire's ideas became a necessary resource; critical philosophers such as M. Foucault, P. Feyerabend, A. Heller, R. Rorty, and social scientists such as B. Latour, R. Boudon, among many others, were consulted. Universities and laboratories began to exchange papers and books; meetings and conferences became places where knowledge was exchanged, along with many ways to do participatory psychology. IMB produced an influential book in 1983, in two volumes: *Social Psychology from Central America: Action and Ideology* (1983) and *Social Psychology from Central America: System, Group and Power* (1989).

In 1982, at the same time when other people were creating new methods and ideas, in Ceará, Northern Brazil, Cezar Wagner de Lima Góis, a rather unknown psychologist, began to perform community psychology, including working with peasants along with sociologists, social workers, clinical psychologists, priests, economists, and politicians (Góis, 1994, 2005, 2008). New methods were created providing social benefits, practices, and activities, including arts-based activities such as biodance and street theatre, as well as concrete strategies to tackle poverty and inequalities, such as *Mutirao* (a way to help someone, without payment, carried out by a group of people living near her/him).

All these methods were discussed and designed by psychologists collaborating with community members. Góis describes them in his first book: *Nocoes de Psicologia Comunitária* (1994). He has written about his experiences of working with communities from a Liberation Psychology standpoint, including rural and urban communities (2005, 2008). For example, in Fortaleza, the capital city of Ceará, he and his students and colleagues have, in a very participative way, changed people's lives by opening up study and recreational spaces for the Ceará peasants.

Góis's way to do LP, although an excellent model, was not known in LA until the mid-1990s. By the end of the eighties, the practice and theory provided by other places, such as Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, other places in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Perú, Guatemala and Venezuela were reported in journals, papers, and classrooms.

## Liberation as a Paradigm

A paradigm is a way or mode to create knowledge and to interpret that knowledge; a systematic group of ideas and practices regulating interpretations about a phenomenon, or a way to do things or ideas of a same kind (Oxford Dictionary, 1959, p. 1428; Montero, 2009, pp. 89–93). Beyond the classic trilogy of domains—ontology, epistemology, and methodology, I consider that LP introduces two more domains—ethics and politics—considered fundamental to the knowledge produced. Ethics is included in first place as personal subjects that at the same time are social, that need to distinguish between morally positive and negative actions. Politics refer to systems of rules that are part of every human ambience and the need to challenge unequal distributions of power and resources within society. Both ethics and politics are fundamentally connected to liberation.

*The Liberation Paradigm key features* (Montero, 2009) include the following:

*Ontology:* The subject is constructed in the relation at the same time that s(he) constructs that relationship. Any knowing subject creates reality while at the same time s(he) is constructing him/herself. The so-called subject of knowledge is not a singular One. It is created by the I with the Other. An Other is always present in front of us or as within our ideas, positive or negative; since no One can exist without an Other calling her/him that mentions my name, as I mention her/his name; so naming the other. And the dyad that is created by both Others produces knowledge. Therefore, the person “researched” is not just a subject but an active human being. S(he) is not only reactive in relation to what the researcher is doing; they also construct reality. An individual (a One) is not the only and last expression of the subject. The I resides necessarily in a I-You relationship.

*Epistemology:* There is fluidity and complexity in the relation between the subject and that One who was considered as an object to be known. Both are objects of knowledge. The subject constructs a reality that transforms, or limits, or impels that subject in a dynamic process that constantly produces movement that can be dialectic or analectic. And all this happens in society. Knowledge is reflexive, active and open, participatory, and also dialogic,

analectic, inductive, deductive, and abductive. There is a continuous dynamic dialectic process of reciprocal construction, because reality is active every day, as well as symbolically built by people. It is in the subject, out of the subject and, around the subject. External agents should be facilitators, not distant experts, because dialogue and participation are necessary. As we work along with those living beyond the academic totality, it is necessary to join scientific knowledge with popular knowledge.

*Methodology:* The methods used in the Liberation Paradigm have been mainly created in pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. There are two basic aspects that necessarily should be present: Participatory-Action-Research, already mentioned, and Critical Psychology. An aspect that needs to be taken into account is the capacity for people to change themselves according to the rhythm of transformation produced in specific situations where liberation is necessary, and participation as created by Góis, and many other psychologists, has produced many ad hoc ways to be used. *Participatory-action-research* has produced many ways to do, since it depends on what is happening and it is necessary to respond to the specific conditions of the place, the ambience, and many other conditions. *Dialogue and hearing*, as probably happens everywhere, are methods that tend to be dynamic and collective.

*Biographical methods* also have a tradition mainly used in narratives, reports, life histories and autobiographies. Perhaps the notion that has had the most interesting change is *Conscientization*, which is both a concept and a method, that has progressed since the time of Barreiro (1974) and Freire, and now we know that it is not induced by the psychologist. It happens in the mind. It is there where consciousness work and decides to do or not to do something (Montero, 1998, 2015). An aspect that needs to be taken into account is the capacity of people to change themselves according to the rhythm of transformation produced in specific situations where liberation is necessary.

About *Methods for Consciousness* the first to be considered as that, is Problematicization (2007), seen during the last decade of the past century as the producer of Conscientization (Montero, 2012a). In my practice I have obtained different results. Problematicizing is not always the opening of a door for conscientization. In many cases, people I have been working with take some time before being conscious of a specific change. It depends on several aspects, such as how the problem is presented, especially by leaders or people considered as important. Some people want to have time to think. Because of that, problematicizing does not, necessarily, respond immediately to conscientization, although it is useful in moving consciousness.

In what I have named *Methods for Consciousness*, the most important one is conscientization, which can be defined as the capacity to reflect, and understand while observing, noticing, and also acquiring or producing ideas (Montero, 2015).

*Ethics*: This domain includes the Other as part of every relationship. Its centre is the responsibility that every human being should have for others. Emmanuel Levinas in his book *Totality and Infinite* (1971) presents this point of view. One can only be if we are with Others and among Others. We all are Others with rights and obligations. The I (One) has to take care of the Other, thus protecting human life. The main liberating questions are: Who are the internal agents? Who are the external ones? Are there differences that can create distinctions in ethical terms? What are the interests of ones and others? What is made out of the knowledge produced?

Respecting the Other is a basic mode of practising ethics, as also is the inclusion of diversity, opening towards new knowledge coming from others. Inclusion is another necessary ethical way; there cannot be participation if others are left out, and including the poor is a liberation task. Also it is necessary to create parallel situations producing equality of interests, as well as defending the right of liberty for any human being, and that leads to the freedom to create and to live.

The analectic method presented by Dussel (1985) is an ethical method that liberates by including diverse groups. It includes the diversity of the Otherness that is very different from us, but that because of that enriches our totality, and makes the world more important, more interesting, more human. Introducing the poor, as said, is a task for LP, one that allows meeting the totality of those Others, that although they have not had the best opportunities in society, as human beings they also have constructed a Totality, in the outskirts of the big cities or in faraway places. Other totalities (created by those that are seen as Others) also do exist and, it is the LP task to find them and understand them. There is always someone with an idea, and with a different idea, contrasting the first, and a way to reach a solution assuming something of each one or, from a better proposal. If LP wants to liberate, it is necessary to know those others to understand their way to live and their way to know the world they inhabit, opening our ideas to them, and opening our eyes to their ideas.

*Politics*: Politics refers to public space and to how people relate with that. Politics in LP has to develop and strengthen citizenship and democracy. A basic aspect is distribution of power. The idea of generating modes of doing politics where power could be symmetrical needs to be promoted. Power and its asymmetry are responsible for most of the problems at all levels of society,

and it is time to begin working in order to obtain equality in politics. As de-alienation and de-ideologization, used as political methods, change the influence of ideas presenting modes of living, those living out from that more powerful conditions that does not allow the same possibilities, to the poor, or to a different ethnic group. Those other people also have a totality, one that can think about the differences and can become conscientized about their rights and their capacities, as they also construct their totality, LP has a task to study and to develop.

Also it is important to see how in Liberation politics of democratization, Fals Borda (1981) denounced intellectual colonialism in LA, as well as economic injustice, and advocated a political science not only directed to political parties, but one which is ethical and inclusive, thus developing conscious citizens.

## What Is Being Done in LP

Psychologists working since the beginning of the new century have produced some interesting ways of doing, involving a range of actors, teachers, young people, men, women, grandmothers, fathers, boys, and indigenous people, along with researchers and leaders. I have selected some brief examples of recent LP work:

1. *Researching and Communitary Praxis*. An LP project changing an ethic of individualism for an ethic of Otherness, and its effects in psychological praxis, is being carried out by J. M. Flores-Osorio, both in Mexico and in Guatemala, working with Mayan groups, who have decided to systematize their praxis. He, along with groups of students, has been working for several years in transformation/research, which is part of a Liberating education inspired by Freire, named by Flores-Osorio as Research-Reflection-Action (IRA in Spanish). That is, research about reflection on the recovery of the community's historical memory, organizing critical communities; reflection by way of critical action regarding social and political aspects, and pointing towards transformation. In terms of Action, instruments and strategies are developed to solve problems and improve quality of life. The process has three moments: (1) *Research*: retrieval of their history and daily problems. (2) *Critical reflexion*: action about social and political problems that make their life difficult, transforming them in strategic ways. (3) *Action*: to create a project able to resolve their main

problems; collective planning and avoiding negative attitudes (see Flores-Osorio, Part III: 89–121, 2011).

That process also operates at different levels. The *first level* is to analyse the concrete problem, evaluating their daily life, and identifying local wisdom, as well as the relation between what is particular and what is universal, and the nature of the relationships between those aspects. The *second level* is useful for the analysis of contradiction between theory and practice and to create sound projects for problem solving. The *third level* is to complete the final liberating practice.

2. In Australia, Christopher Sonn from Victoria University and colleagues Quayle, Sonn, and Kasat (2015a), Sonn and Baker (2015b), Sonn, Smith, and Meyer (2015), in partnership with community-based agencies (e.g., Community Arts Network and Western Edge Youth Arts), have been exploring community arts and cultural development (CACD) as liberatory praxis. This work has been aimed at understanding how such practice can be mobilized to challenge racialized forms of exclusion, foster intergroup relations, and generate new narratives for belonging.

*Theatre of the Oppressed* (also used by Góis in Brazil) can be used to foster intercultural dialogue between Indigenous Australian young people and young people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Community drama is defined by several key features, including participation and involvement of multiple social actors, story-telling and process. Ethics and politics are focused on oppression and consciousness-raising (Sonn, Smith & Meyer, 2015). Sonn, Quayle, Mackenzie, and Law (2014) have shown how story-telling from the point of the excluded is an important analectical method (Dussel, 1991; Montero, 2016) used to challenge and contest dominant taken-for-granted “knowledge” reproduced by self and others. Story-telling is also a vital tool for the recovery of historical memory and of excluded and silenced stories. Through the process of story-telling and performance, individuals and groups are able to deconstruct and give new meanings to their social worlds, fostering cultural pride and building connections between differently positioned social actors.

3. In Colombia, in 2002, at Javeriana University, a group of teachers and students began to work with victims and people displaced by the four groups that for 60 years had been fighting in that country—leaving the

poor poorer than ever and forcing them to work for some of the four armed groups in conflict. They began their work by developing a culture of peace and helping the victims displaced from their communities and homes by the guerrilla movements (see Sacipa-Rodriguez & Montero, 2014). This Colombian group worked to find places and ways to live for those people and families in order to save their lives. They also worked with organized rural communities using educative strategies and strengthening social relationships doing “endowment of power and capacity to decide” (Sacipa, 2014, p. 9). Their task is a very difficult one, not only because of the sorrowful situation of the victims but also because of the complex psychological task of helping them to overcome trauma and accepting new ways to live, away from their past. Which decision-making, among other many problems, should they undertake first, when life, death, and violence are out of the hands of those people? Appealing to Liberation has pointed to a door, although not yet completely open.

4. In 2014, Brazilian psychologists Ana Maria Melo de Pinho and Ana Luisa Teixeira de Menezes also engaged in LP, creating a citizenship project working with women in two cities: Fortaleza and Porto Alegre. These women work recycling paper and waste. They received information about what is to be a citizen, their rights, and ethical position, pointing to humanizing community conditions by way of dialoging, hearing, and overcoming prejudices; demonstrating the significance of a liberating praxis. As Melo de Pinho (2014, p. 33) says: “liberation is asserted as a perspective to see, to understand and to analyze reality, mainly to explain and to understand social problems and human development”.
5. In Venezuela, psychologists and students from Catholic University, in Caracas, have worked since 2001 with a community created 40 years ago in that city. That is Catuche, a poor community, that in spite of their lack of money, have constructed 10 buildings, distributing their flats to those who need more and have less. They have received the support of both the University and also, at certain times, from the government. The University provides engineers and architects, and the community provide the workers and the administration. Community leaders, along with stakeholders, decide how the flats are distributed (women with many children, very poor families, those that have elderly people, etc.). From the beginning, they have had problems with delinquents and drug traffickers. In the last four years, they decided to find a solution to that problem.



The Catuche programme, organized by community members, teachers, and students, decided to obtain the participation of the whole community, organizing the following aspects: Development of respect, mobilizing the women supporting the pact to stop the fire (guns). Negotiation, in order to develop contention Networks and acting within them using cultural and material resources. To build a pact of conviviality, respect the other part of the community, and not to forget tretas and menaces. So far it is working, and last year they gathered with all those that participated or were interested into celebrate the programme and its benefits. (Zubillaga, Llorens, Núñez, & Souto, 2015).

Conviviality, and acknowledging others, both positive and negative, has come at last after all those years, also having the joy to receive an apartment. Liberation by ways of an accord, without losing someone, in peace, has arrived to Catuche. Liberation of 40 years of hating the other, of answering by way of a bullet, and yet sustaining the hope of a future with a real house, and a peaceful life, by way of their work and their confidence in themselves has been achieved.

6. Also in Venezuela, Alejandro Moreno, a psychologist and priest, has developed two epistemes (ways of knowing): one about Otherness, that is the presence of the others, not only those near to the One but also those we do not know, but that do exist. The other episteme is about Relationship. That was presented in 1993, and as he says, he was inspired by IMB, and although his work is very different, it is LP oriented. He works with people living in slums near the city of Caracas, introducing the otherness of those people by using the life histories method in a participatory way. Poverty and how the poor manage to create lifeworlds is part of what as a psychologist he presents in his books and discusses with the people.

Moreno's work is characterized by the following: (1) Working with the Other and finding that what is individual may be collective, and also intimate. (2) The intrinsic value of affectivity in both the individual life, in the community, and in what is familiar. (3) The vital character of praxis. And the union in action along his work with each person. (4) The first (1993, p. 13) episteme, named as *Popular*, meaning the way to know the poor by living near them, generating a different totality. (5) Truth as experience of the "vital immersion within real relationships" (1993, p. 15). Liberation does not only depend on perfectly designed studies; it has to know and to be in accord with the specific problems of the people.



## Conclusion

The LP paradigm has both a historic and a praxis development. At its beginning, it was a way to do Critical Social Psychology, at the same time used as part of Critical Psychology and Critical Community Psychology (that was during the eighties). During the latency period, there was time to think about what to do, and psychologists, at the beginning of the new century, began to think not only about what Martín Baró had emphasized but also about what was happening around them, about what was necessary to do, and how to do it. Theory and praxis began to show the importance of the development so far reached, and at the same time, how much could be done.

Liberation took its place in psychology, producing new interesting ways of working, taking care of their usefulness and its capacity to approach and deal with new problems. LP then was opened up, thus attending to the many problems happening in our countries and also around the world. Although first regarded as utopian, it is contended that utopias should be regarded as projects for better futures. Positive results may be found in any places, even if they are small; they can be remembered, and by working on them, better ideas may come out. Liberation Psychology as a concept is also part of social sciences. It, slowly, has been changing, settling in several psychology branches, leaving its mark, and also being enriched by them. LP is not easy to do, its main reward comes along with people's consciousness and, with their capacity to manage their lives, understanding what has been and is no more, and how to know, and how to go ahead. The main point presented by IMB in 1986.

LP is not a branch of psychology, it belongs to the Liberation paradigma as an ethical and political way to do psychology. At its beginning in the past Century, it was best seen as a politically oriented social psychology (ibid., p. 599), a characteristic that still is useful, but that does not cover all the possibilities of liberation in many other ways to do psychology. That means that LP still needs to work within other ways to do psychology, demonstrating its capacity to reach other problems, while not being exclusive of specific aspects.

Works such as those of Flores-Osorio, Moreno, Sonn, and groups working with aboriginal communities in Chile, Perú, Guatemala, and Mexico (among many other places) make efforts that take a lot of time, as is the case of Ceará, in Brazil, or a couple of psychologists, who entered in an Aymará indigenous group, trying to escape from political persecution and still live and work with them (see the history—*Mendoza y Zerda*—in Montero & Serrano-García, 2011). Now is too soon to ask of branches, or tendencies, although it can be

said that there are some interesting developments. There are clear debts to the works of Freire, Fals Borda, or Martín-Baró, and with the critical social psychology developed during the two last decades of the past century and with those coming in the beginning of the Millenium (such as Goldman, Foucault, Bruno Latour, Hacking, J. Ibañez, and T. Ibañez, among many others), and also the critical schools that we were reading in the seventies, eighties, and nineties.

Sixteen years of LP have neither covered a long time nor many participants, although it is expanding. Knowledge has neither country nor creed; so, let us go ahead.

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# Part III

## Critical Methodologies

# 9

## Phenomenology

Darren Langdridge

### Introduction

Phenomenological psychology has been growing rapidly in popularity in European psychology over the last 20 years but is rarely classified as a *critical* perspective. To some extent this is understandable, given that the majority of phenomenological psychologists do not directly engage with power and politics or any explicit notion of critical social theory in their work. However, I argue here that this risks us missing the ways that phenomenological psychology offers a powerful alternative to mainstream psychology, with considerable emancipatory potential. First, the phenomenological focus on description of *the things in their appearing* allows us to attend closely to *lived experience* such that we prioritise the voices of our participants in a truly ethical relationship between researcher and participant. And second, the focus on description of the *lifeworld* in phenomenology can be supplemented by social theoretical critique if we engage with ideas from hermeneutics. All phenomenological methods work with the former, whilst the latter is the product of some recent attempts at developing the field.

In this chapter I will first introduce the fundamental principles of phenomenological psychology. A number of key concepts underpin all phenomenological methods, including the notions of *intentionality*, *epoché* and the *phenomenological reduction*. This is presented in the context of the

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development of the earliest systematic phenomenological methodology in the Anglophone world. Giorgi (1970, 1976, see also 2009) and colleagues sought to offer a radical theoretical and methodological alternative to mainstream psychology. I will then explore the ways that extant methods of phenomenological psychology might be understood as *critical*. Building on developments in hermeneutics, I also introduce my own attempt at theoretical development that seeks to enable phenomenological researchers (and practitioners) to better engage with a critical perspective within their work. This primarily concerns the use of a *moment of critique* that draws on hermeneutics from critical social theory. Finally, I discuss two examples of phenomenological research that differently show how phenomenological methodologies might be considered ‘critical’ approaches to qualitative research (Bhavnani, Chua, & Collins, 2014).

## Fundamentals of Phenomenology

Phenomenological psychology concerns a form of psychology in which there is a systematic application of phenomenological philosophy to psychological research (and practice). Phenomenological philosophy is most associated with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), with its formal foundation at the very beginning of the twentieth century. He was particularly inspired by the work of Franz Brentano (1838–1917), who sought to develop a philosophical foundation for a descriptive psychology based on the apodictic (demonstrable) self-evidence of consciousness itself. Husserl took on and transformed Brentano’s focus on consciousness, and particularly the concept of *intentionality*, to produce his science of the essential structures of consciousness (with accompanying method of investigation).

Phenomenology has been described by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur as a series of deviations from Husserl. That is, whilst Husserl founded phenomenology proper, and elaborated its unique methodology, his own project failed to convince those that followed and was subsequently transformed. Arguably the most important of the figures that followed Husserl was Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), whose transformation of the Husserlian project inspired a generation of philosophers including the existentialists Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, amongst others. The intersection of phenomenology and existentialism formed the basis for the development of *existential psychotherapy* that might be considered the practical arm of phenomenological psychology. This therapeutic perspective emerged with the work of Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966) and Medard



Boss (1903–1990), two psychoanalysts who drew on ideas from phenomenology and existentialism (principally the work of Heidegger) in the 1930s to forge a new approach to psychotherapy. This psychotherapeutic perspective is alive and well today, albeit relatively marginal, with *The British School* a particularly vibrant branch. The British School has built on the critical work of R. D. Laing (1927–1989), amongst others, and continues to engage with ideas from critical social theory (Langdridge, 2013).

Phenomenological psychology was first systematically developed as a research methodology by Amedeo Giorgi in the 1960s, with his major publications emerging in the 1970s. Giorgi (1970, 1976) set out to offer an alternative to the methods of positivist mainstream psychology that would provide a foundation for a new human science. The aim was to focus on qualitative description of the *lifeworld*, the world as lived by any person in a particular historical and cultural context, as a systematic means of investigation. With no prior method to build on, Giorgi created his own method of descriptive phenomenological psychology that drew directly on the philosophy of Husserl (1913/1931, 1936/1970), along with a number of other phenomenological philosophers (e.g. Gurwitsch, 1974; Merleau-Ponty, 1942/1963, 1945/1962). Giorgi's (2009) method remains the most significant form of phenomenological psychology worldwide, with numerous people continuing to use this approach in their research. Since Giorgi's foundational work, there has, of course, been further development and innovation in phenomenological methods in psychology and the human sciences in general (see Langdridge, 2007) that are discussed further below. There are also other forms of descriptive phenomenology comparable to that of Giorgi, such as the methods of Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994), which similarly draw heavily on Husserlian philosophy. All of these classic phenomenological methods rely on a set of concepts that are described in turn below.

## Intentionality

The fundamental concept of intentionality concerns the idea that all acts of consciousness relate to an object of consciousness: that is, we are always conscious *of* something. This deceptively simple idea was first introduced by Brentano (1878/1995) but was refined and developed by Husserl to become a foundational concept underpinning phenomenology. This idea speaks to a long-standing problem in philosophy that Sokolowski (2000) refers to as the egocentric predicament. This revolves around the dualistic idea that if we have minds inside bodies, then how is it possible for minds to reach out into

the world and engage directly with it. This problem is predicated on an idea that derives from Descartes (1641/2003) that there is *mental stuff* that is not extended in the world (*res cogitans*) and *material stuff* that is extended in the world (*res extensa*). That is, our thoughts are mental stuff (that does not extend in space), whilst our bodies are physical stuff (that does extend in space). And this is where we face the egocentric predicament: if we want a drink to quench our thirst such that we decide to get a glass of water (a mental act), then how does this mental act ‘speak’ to our body to make it reach for the glass and fill it with water from the tap? How does ‘the mental’ interact with ‘the physical’? It is here where the concept of intentionality helps, as it allows us to neatly sidestep the egocentric predicament. If we subscribe to the notion of intentionality, then there is no inherent separation of mind and body (or thinking and acting), for all acts of consciousness are already connected to the world through their intentional relationship to an object in the world. Every act of consciousness intends something, whether it is a real object in the world or something in our memory or imagination. Consciousness (mind stuff) is not a free-floating realm of thoughts and ideas contained within the physical vessel of our bodies but is something turned out in the world in an intentional relationship. The focus of phenomenological investigation therefore becomes the investigation of *intentional acts or experiences (Erlebnisse)*. In analysing the intentional structure of an act, it makes no difference to the experience whether the object exists or not. The object of consciousness is *as given*, hence the famous rallying cry of Husserl (1900–1901/2001, p. 168) that we must turn ‘back to the “things themselves”’ and focus on the way things are actually given in experience. This radical stance is why there is a focus on experience in phenomenological research, for it is only through a description of experience that we gain access to consciousness.

## Noema and Noesis

Two terms in phenomenology that relate directly to the notion of intentionality are *noema* (the object of consciousness) and *noesis* (the manner in which one is aware of the object of consciousness). They are controversial in phenomenological philosophy (see, e.g. Bell, 1990) but still often prove useful for human scientists engaged in phenomenological analysis. In very simple terms, noema refers to the *what* of experience and noesis to *how* it is experienced. They are inherently correlated and not separate concepts, with Husserl (1913/1931) deploying them in an attempt to ensure that intentionality was not understood as ‘inside’ (e.g. inside a person’s head) whilst always related to

something ‘outside’ (e.g. a real object). That is, the notion of intentionality is much more radical than suggesting a simple link between cognition and world, and the noema–noesis correlation is an attempt to move us away from any idea of cognition occurring inside some inner realm, separated from the world. For Husserl, phenomenology must therefore involve the description of both aspects of the noema–noesis correlation, both the *what* of awareness and *how* it appears to us. Human scientific research stays close to this principle through a fundamentally descriptive stance in which we seek to investigate the *what* and *how* of experience.

### Three Structures: Analysing Part and Whole

Husserl (1900–1901/2001) elaborated three structural forms that recur repeatedly in any phenomenological analysis. Sokolowski (2000, p. 22) describes them as follows: ‘(a) the structure of parts and wholes, (b) the structure of an identity in a manifold, and (c) the structure of presence and absence’. These structures not only describe the method of phenomenological analysis but also offer a radical alternative to more traditional methods and modes of understanding in psychology and the human sciences more broadly. I will detail all three structural forms below.

The structure of *parts* and *wholes* involves us attending to the way that parts relate to wholes in any intentional act. Any *whole* can have two different parts: *pieces* and *moments*. Pieces are parts that are independent and can be separate from the whole, whilst moments are parts that cannot be understood separately from the whole. To give an example, a person in a group (if the group is ‘the whole’) is best understood as *a piece* in that they can exist independently of the group whilst also playing a part in constituting the group itself. In contrast, an emotion is a *moment* if the phenomenon in focus is human experience, as emotions can only exist through the whole of the person experiencing the emotion. A further distinction concerns the way that parts and wholes may be understood as *concretia* or *abstracta*. A whole is a *concretum* as it is something that can be experienced as a concrete individual thing. A piece can become a *concretum* and be experienced as a concrete individual thing, like a person in a group, whilst a moment, on the other hand, cannot become a *concretum* but is instead an *abstracta* in that it exists only as blended with other moments. We may talk about a particular emotion, like anger or sadness, as if it were a concrete thing, but in reality it is a moment that can only be understood in relation to the other parts making up the whole. This theoretical stance has profound implications for how we might conduct psychology and the human

sciences, with a need to think carefully about the appropriate mode of investigation in any situation such that we resist artificially reducing the complexity of human experiencing to individual variables.

*Identity in a manifold* refers to the multifaceted nature of our perception of the identity of some aspect of the world we inhabit. To give an example, imagine we are seeking to understand a person's identity. Someone may present as her profession on first meeting (a doctor, for instance) and this reveals one facet of her identity. We may then come to know them as a mother of three children with our understanding of their identity further enriched by this knowledge. Over a glass or two of wine, we may come to know that they want more out of their sex life and we gain another perspective on their identity. The phenomenological research project is very much about the way that we seek out the rich array of identity manifolds of any object of study. Context helps frame our perception of the identity for any object and there are invariably (with human beings at least) endless new facets to explore in our investigations.

Finally, there is *presence* and *absence*, sometimes referred to as filled and empty intentions. A filled intention is where the intention is bodily present before the one who intends, whilst an empty intention concerns something that is absent. A filled intention would be the experience of fighting with our partner in the moment, whilst an empty intention might be the memory of such a fight. People tend to concentrate on the present in phenomenological research and may, as a consequence, neglect absence. This risks us gaining only a very partial perspective on any phenomenon. For instance, if we are away from home and feeling lost and homesick, then this empty intention reveals much of what is important to us. Phenomenological analysis should therefore involve us looking out not only for what is present to us in the experience being presented in the interview/text but also what is absent.

## Epoché and the Psychological Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological description is achieved by attempting to set aside our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, to move away from the *natural attitude*. Phenomenology approaches any object of study in a systematic way, with an attempt to encounter the object in a fresh and unbiased way. That is, we seek to elaborate a description, in which we put aside our preconceptions and biases. We achieve this through the *phenomenological reduction* (Husserl, 1913/1931). The phenomenological reduction requires that

we avoid all abstraction, theorising and generalisation. Husserl (1913/1931) described two procedures that are central to the *reduction* called *epoché* (pronounced ‘*epokhē*’, from the ancient Greek). The aim is to gain access to *the things themselves*, Husserl’s famous rallying cry for phenomenology, meaning a focus on how things are given in experience itself. The first epoché involves setting aside prior (natural) scientific understanding, something that is particularly important for psychology as so many aspects of our discipline are shrouded in a natural scientific (often medical) understanding. This is regardless of whether we think there is value in these theories or not. The key is that we need to approach the phenomenon in its own terms, rather than through the lens of the various theories of science.

Setting aside scientific understanding does not mean that phenomenology simply returns us to the uncritical and unreflective stance on the world of the *natural attitude* (in which we take the reality of what we experience for granted). Instead, the second epoché involves us moving from the natural attitude to a *phenomenological attitude* in which we focus on experience itself and hence the subjective meaning of the *lifeworld*, the historically and culturally situated world that any person inhabits. In effect, we move our focus from the *what* to the *how* of the intentional relationship with an object. The question is not does X exist but rather how does X exist *for a given concrete person* or, to put it differently, how does X exist within the lifeworld of the participant under investigation (Husserl, 1936/1970). This focus on the meaning of any phenomenon for the person who has experienced it serves to reduce the field of investigation to something properly *psychological*. That psychological field of experience is brought to life through an analysis designed to shine a light on its subtle details.

The essence of the message above is the need to put any natural scientific preconceptions to one side when investigating a topic and to seek out a person’s subjective experience of that phenomenon, trying to understand how it appears to them and what it means in their own terms. The epoché is necessarily quite philosophical, but it translates into a relatively simple practical method. Ihde (1986), drawing directly on Husserl’s work, provides a helpful guide to how we might achieve a phenomenological reduction where we approach the phenomenon with a phenomenological attitude. This involves three processes: description, horizontalisation and verification. Description is at the heart of the phenomenological method and the central process in getting close to *the things themselves* in their appearing is to engage in rich description of the experience itself, resisting any temptation to draw on existing psychological theories. In order to help with this, we need to horizontalise the phenomenon and treat all elements equally, resisting our natural tendency

to put things in hierarchies of meaning or importance. It is only when we have the meaning confirmed by the person him- or herself that we can start to do this. Until that point, we remain agnostic about everything we encounter. The way that we can check on meaning is through the process of verification where we repeatedly check our understanding of the meaning of someone's experience back with them and/or the data (e.g. through the transcription of an interview). In phenomenology, we have to stay close to the data, repeatedly checking that we understand the meaning of any unit of analysis in context, and not rushing off beyond the data making wild interpretations.

An important thing to note is how the phenomenological reduction will require continual effort throughout the analytic process: it is not a once-and-for-all operation. Of course, it is never possible to achieve perfection and view the phenomenon with a 'God's eye view', with nothing of us present in our analysis (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). But this does not mean we should not try as best we can to bracket our own preconceptions and engage a phenomenological attitude to the best of our ability. Our focus must be on the experience of the participants in a research project, seeking to understand it in *their own* terms, as it is lived by them in their lifeworld.

## Eidetic Intuition

For Husserl (1913/1931), the goal of phenomenology is to identify the *essence* (invariant structure) of the phenomenon we are interested in. We are seeking to intuit the *eidos* (the form) of the object of consciousness *as given*. The process is, therefore, termed *eidetic intuition*. In any phenomenological analysis, we therefore seek to separate out the invariant (the essence) from that which varies across experience. Most analyses will not ignore the material that varies but rather use it to inform the meaning of the invariant structure as a product of particular social and cultural contexts. One strategy for gaining access to the essence is to engage in maximum variation sampling where we actively seek to recruit a set of participants with a common experience but varying background features (e.g. in terms of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity/race, class, disability etc.). The idea is that these different perspectives on an experience will enable the analyst to identify those elements that are common to all the participants and those which vary according to some demographic factor.

In addition, when engaging in a phenomenological analysis, we might seek to employ the *free* or *variational method* (sometimes also called *imaginative variation*). The idea here is to explore alternative analytic possibilities for any phenomenon, to engage in thought experiments where we consider the

impact of background variables on the phenomenon. So, for instance, we might think through the implications of class on a phenomenon and imaginatively vary the class of the participants (in our heads) to see if this would fundamentally change our analytic understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. That is, if we changed the class of our participants, would we still understand the structure in the same way? It is possible to work through (imaginatively) multiple aspects of the lifeworld until we feel we have reached saturation and can be confident in the essence of the particular phenomenon being researched.

## Empirical Traditions in Phenomenological Psychology

As mentioned above, Amedeo Giorgi devised the earliest systematic method of phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University, USA, in the 1960/70s. This method continues in widespread use today, particularly in the USA, along with a group of other similar methods that includes van Kaam (1959), Colaizzi (1978), and Moustakas (1994). These methods are often categorised as *descriptive* or *Husserlian phenomenological methods* (Langdrige, 2007). All of these methods work with the core phenomenological concepts outlined above, producing rich descriptions of phenomena that seek to identify the essence. Some researchers (e.g. Ashworth, 2006) further interrogate their data through a variety of dimensions of the lifeworld such as temporality, spatiality, embodiment, intersubjectivity and so on. These dimensions, that are thought to be universal across the lifeworld, are used as a heuristic to further analyse the data. A considerable body of work has grown up that has used these methods on a very wide variety of topics, from the experience of being a victim of crime (Wertz, 1985) to the experience of feeling anxious (Fischer, 1974).

The other primary group of phenomenological methods in common usage are often described as *interpretive* or *hermeneutic phenomenological methods* (Langdrige, 2007). These phenomenological methods draw more heavily than those mentioned above on what might be termed the *hermeneutic turn* in phenomenology. The hermeneutic turn in phenomenology began with the work of Heidegger (1927/1962) and built on the earlier work of the hermeneutic philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), amongst others. Hermeneutics has been traditionally concerned with textual interpretation and particularly biblical exegesis. The



concern is with the interpretation of texts in order to discern their meaning. Interpretive phenomenological methods tend to draw on the work of Heidegger (*ibid.*) and more recent hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer (1975/1996) to produce a more interpretive form of analysis. These methods vary enormously in how much they adhere to the principles of phenomenology detailed above. As a result, there is some controversy here about whether these methods should be classified as phenomenological methods at all (see Giorgi, 2011).

There has been a significant growth in the popularity of methods that are interpretive or that are a blend of descriptive and interpretive methods. Methods derived from the Dutch Utrecht School have gained enormous popularity across a variety of disciplines (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984; Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; van Manen, 1990), as have varieties of Scandinavian hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g. Dahlberg, Drew, & Nyström, 2001). In the United Kingdom, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; note the arcane spelling of *interpretative*) has assumed almost hegemonic status, with many people unaware of the many other and earlier traditions of phenomenological psychology. This approach was formulated in the 1990s with a very clear (teachable) method that has led to widespread use in psychology and health research in particular (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These interpretive methods vary considerably in method but all tend to engage with some sort of thematic analysis, as is common in much qualitative research. The aim is for the researcher to work reflexively with the data to discern patterns and themes across the experience: the focus remains on understanding lived experience in context, with the themes a description of the invariant structure of the phenomenon being studied.

A final group of phenomenological methods also draw on hermeneutic philosophy, particularly the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), to understand the lifeworld through the stories people tell of their experience (Langdridge, 2007). This group of *narrative phenomenological methods* is founded on the central idea that we must focus on storytelling to gain insight into a person's world: 'If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am' (McAdams, 1993, p. 11). This work has the potential for greater engagement with language, power and politics and is arguably the most 'critical' of all phenomenological methods, though is much less commonly used than the methods above, probably due to the demanding nature of the methods. Narrative phenomenological methods include the work of Freeman (1993), McAdams (1993, 1985), Polkinghorne (1988) and my own development of critical narrative analysis (Langdridge, 2007, 2009), amongst others.



## Phenomenology as a 'Critical' Methodology

### The Need for Description

A common complaint about phenomenological methods is that they are *too descriptive* and do not provide enough analytic depth/theoretical development for psychology. This criticism needs to be unpicked further as there are a number of responses to this charge. First, we need to understand what is meant by a method being *too descriptive* and what this implies about the perceived needs of psychology as a discipline. Phenomenological methods are primarily descriptive if by that we mean a descriptive stance opposed to an explanatory one. That is, there is a theoretical resistance to explanation and the search for causes and instead a focus on description and reasons. Description can also be contrasted to interpretation and it is here where there is more variation. The descriptive phenomenological methods discussed above are, of course, focused on description of the essence of the phenomenon. However, the more interpretive methods move—in different degrees—away from description. Even here though there is a general resistance to the importation of external interpretive frameworks, such as those derived from psychoanalytic theory, as these would undermine the focus on the *things in the their appearing*.

Key to understanding the charge that phenomenological methods are *too descriptive* is a critical examination of the kind of psychology that is being invoked with this position. The resurgence in psychoanalytic methods in critical psychology (and the broader social sciences) suggests the presumed alternative. These methods are an anathema to phenomenological psychology for the way that they invoke an external theoretical framework to 'uncover' hidden meaning. Such attempts to engage in an archaeological excavation of the unconscious necessarily undermine the phenomenology, as the contents of consciousness are subsumed by the allure of material assumed buried in the hidden depths. These methods also serve to construct a subject that is limited by the normative developmental theories that underpin these methodologies (see Langdrige, 2008). The phenomenological project, in contrast, is concerned with describing the world of another *as lived* such that we can come to understand more about human experience itself. Such acts of illumination have enormous potential for effecting change, from the gains made through individual insight to an understanding of the social processes at play in any experience.

## Giving Voice

The notion of *giving voice* is a central feature of critical work in psychology and the human sciences more generally. This feminist principle underpins a considerable body of work that has illuminated the interplay of power and politics across a wide variety of phenomena (Davis, 1994). The voices of women have been systematically silenced with early feminist research seeking to address this failure through the notion of *giving voice*. These ideas have been taken up further by researchers working with other people (often minorities) affected by oppression. This mode of research is at the heart of the phenomenological project with the focus on engaging the epoché such that we can gain insight into the lifeworld of another person, and thus hear their ‘voice’. The focus on experience *as lived* is central to phenomenology, with researcher and participant working together to gain insight into the lifeworld as it relates to a particular phenomenon.

Concerns have been raised about the notion of *giving voice* and methods designed around this concept (see McHugh, 2014). Whilst there has been recognition of the value of research that has prioritised women’s voices (rather than the default work privileging the voices of men only), there have been complaints that this work risks essentializing women (and men), suggestive of an *authentic* womanhood that is fixed rather than constructed (Davis, 1994). In addition, there have been concerns that work in this tradition may involve particular groups of women (often those with other lines of privilege, e.g. around race/ethnicity or class) speaking for other women and actually obscuring different voices (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Tavris, 1994). There is a risk of producing *universalising spokespersons* that seek to speak for others, which may lead to further oppression. This is, of course, true for not only women but also many other groups, particularly oppressed minorities.

The concerns that have been raised about researchers privileging particular voices, speaking for the other and the need to attend to different voices are—at least in part—addressed by the strong descriptive stance of many phenomenological methodologies. Of course, there remains the question of who decides the focus of the investigation and who reports the findings, but the desire to get maximum variation in the sample and the strict focus on description helps ward off the charge that the researcher is imposing their agenda. The phenomenological attitude also involves the researcher seeking an ethical—open and honest—engagement with participants. There is no deception involved or analytic moves that might undermine the standing of the participant (that we might see with psychoanalytically informed

critical research). In addition, there are many examples of phenomenological research that are thoroughly collaborative, with people engaged in groups as participant-researchers or researchers working together with participants to formulate projects collaboratively from start to finish.

## Power and Politics

Beyond the focus on description and the value of this mode of investigation in *giving voice*, there have also been attempts to engage with hermeneutics from critical social theory in order to examine the interplay of power and politics with particular phenomena (Langdrige, 2007). My own work in phenomenological psychology has been specifically focused on bringing power and politics directly into phenomenological research (and practice). To this end, I draw primarily—though not uncritically—on the extensive hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (e.g. 1970, 1976, 1981) to develop a new form of critical narrative analysis (CNA). This work is located within the narrative tradition of phenomenological psychology, described above, in which there is an explicit focus on the stories that people tell of their experience. This focus on storytelling not only reflects our everyday way of communicating experience (particularly concerning selfhood) but also recognises the way that we mostly understand experience through language. CNA was created to serve a specific purpose in my own research programme on sexualities and also resolve some of the epistemological tensions that I saw with other similar methods (Langdrige, 2007).

The distinctive element to this method is the inclusion of a moment of critique, in which hermeneutics of suspicion are deployed. To be more precise, this method engages with two analytic moments in a hermeneutic arc. The first moment is what Ricoeur would refer to as a *hermeneutic of empathy* and is that descriptive mode of understanding common to all phenomenological methods. The second moment involves the use of specific methods of interpretation—or in Ricoeur's terms *hermeneutics of suspicion*—to critically interrogate the social imaginary, the world of stories into which we are all immersed and that allow and limit our ability to understand and narrate our experience. Ricoeur (1970) identifies Freud, Marx and Nietzsche as the *three masters of suspicion*, but here I depart from Ricoeur and argue that we need to turn to different critical social theories for our critique. That is, if we take Freud as our example, by engaging in an archaeological trawl through the unconscious for hidden meaning, we undermine the phenomenology of our participants. For me, the key to using hermeneutics of suspicion is to draw on

critical social theories such as queer theory or postcolonial theory as *imaginative hermeneutics of suspicion* turned out on the social world of the participants such that we might open up new ways of understanding. This enables us to critique the ideology of the social worlds of researcher and participant alike for how it allows and limits understanding and narrative expression.

Arguments about the place of hermeneutics in phenomenological research continue, some productive and others less so. The productive arguments raise interesting questions about the possibility for phenomenological research to be more attuned to language, power and politics. There are, however, many phenomenological psychologists who would see the explicit incorporation of hermeneutics from critical social theory as incompatible with phenomenology. This is true if we limit our understanding of phenomenology only to that informed by Husserl. I am less concerned, however, about philosophical purity or boundary setting than seeking to work with methods that are intellectually coherent *and* meet our practical needs as human science researchers. I see a place for multiple members of the phenomenological psychological family in contemporary critical psychological research; the debates will continue and that is healthy.

## Applying Critical Phenomenological Methods

I shall briefly discuss two examples of phenomenological research here that offer insight into the value of this methodology for critical psychology. The first example concerns the work of one of my former doctoral students, Simon Wharne, on the experience of decision-making in mental healthcare. This work employed a fairly traditional phenomenological method, in the spirit of the Utrecht School, to gain greater insight into the way that mental health service users and others make sense of decision-making processes concerned with mental health treatment and care. The focus in this work was—to some extent—on *giving voice* to people who are often silenced. The second example involves a case study that I conducted in which I used a CNA to make sense of the experience of someone living as a sexual lifestyle slave. This study involved me working with a psychotherapy client who had been struggling with his sexual identity and relationships to generate data for a phenomenological analysis. The study involves me working analytically through the ways that the social world might oppressively limit a person's understanding of their own sexual desire.

Wharne, Langdridge and Motzkau (2012) reported a part of a larger study into decision-making in mental healthcare. Decision-making in mental

healthcare is complicated through the ways in which decision-making is constructed by mental health professionals as rational calculation, which is often at odds with the lived experience of mental health service users. This article describes the experience of three men who have been users of mental health services that have been diagnosed as suffering from psychosis and detained in hospital repeatedly under mental health law. What emerged from this work were the tensions between the lived experience of these men and the desire amongst mental health professionals to 'empower' them in their own healthcare through incarceration and medication. That is, the current focus in contemporary healthcare in the UK on 'empowerment' (Fitzsimons & Fuller, 2002), whilst well intentioned, often resulted in conflict with the desire of these men to escape from the struggles of existence. This phenomenological work does not provide ready solutions to the almost impossible 'management' of mental healthcare, but instead rich and respectful description of the lifeworld of people who are rarely heard. As such, it offers a small contribution to improving the processes of decision-making in mental healthcare.

In Langdridge (2009), I describe a piece of case study research with a psychotherapy client in which I seek to work with the client to critically interrogate the prevailing pathologising stance around BDSM (bondage, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism). This work involved me conducting a research interview with a long-standing psychotherapy client about his experience as someone struggling with his identity and relationships as a (wannabe) 24/7-lifestyle slave. My client had spent much of his adult life secretly visiting professional dominatrices. Late in life, he had decided to explore his sexual identity more fully and he had been living with a mistress as a 24/7-lifestyle slave in the USA until this relationship had broken down. The CNA of his biographical interview involved me drawing on ideas from critical sexology studies and queer theory to explore Brian's (the client-participant) lifeworld through the stories he told me in a biographical interview. Consensual BDSM has been subject to continued pathologisation, with some recent progress, and so it was necessary to critically engage with how this socio-cultural context framed much of Brian's experience. When this material was stripped away, it became apparent that many of Brian's pressing concerns were similar to many other people struggling with the end of a relationship. His experience was, however, framed through two primary narratives: the first concerned his 30-year history of visiting professional dominatrices, and the second his love affair with his mistress as a 24/7-lifestyle slave. Whilst his story was inflected with shame, it was less about the external pathologisation of his sexual identity (though he did not escape the impact of this entirely) and more about the perception that paying for sex might be exploitative of women. His move

away from paying professional dominatrices to a love affair with a dominant partner was reflected in a rupture in his *narrative identity* (Ricoeur, 1992), such that this became a story of progress from control through uncertainty to belief in the possibility of living happily with his minority sexuality. This work served both to highlight the individual needs of one person and also the ways that a BDSM sexual identity, which is frequently subject to profound oppression, has the potential for ethical relating similar to any other relationship.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an introduction to the fundamentals of phenomenological psychology and also argue that this perspective is *critical*. Whilst few self-identified phenomenological psychologists would adopt an explicit critical position, I have sought to show that phenomenological methods are *inherently* critical. The strong descriptive stance and deeply contextual nature of these methods, which emerges from the philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger and others, offer huge potential for those of us seeking to understand the interplay of power and politics, and effect social change. A fundamental principle of phenomenological methodologies is the focus on *giving voice* to the other, seeking to illuminate their lifeworld in rich detail. I have also briefly discussed contemporary developments in phenomenological methodologies that show how it is possible to work directly with critical social theory. Such developments offer considerable promise for researchers working on topics that are deeply inflected by oppression or that feel a need to engage more directly with the interplay of power and politics in the research process.

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# 10

## Narrative Social Psychology

Michael Murray

Over the past generation, the use of the term *narrative* has spread from literary studies through the social sciences and now into everyday discourse. It is not uncommon to hear policymakers speak of political narrative or politicians in turn speak of historical narrative. What was initially a rather specialised term to describe a particular literary form has now a broader meaning for an imaginative construction of a sequence of events. Thus, rather than life being ‘one damned thing after another’, we give it a certain order and meaning. In this chapter the aim is to explore somewhat the emergence of this concept within psychology and how it can contribute to enhancing our understanding of everyday life. We will consider the background to the growth in interest in narrative, the different types of narrative, the role of narrative in personal and collective identity and the potential of narrative approaches within critical social psychology.

We can start with some definitions. A narrative can be defined as an organised account of a sequence of events which provides it with a certain coherence and meaning. Elliott (2005) distinguishes three elements of narratives: (1) narratives are chronological in that they are concerned with events that occur over time; (2) they are meaningful but it is the narrator who provides the meaning through organising the certain narrative structure; and (3) they are social in that they are shared with others. Other researchers will offer other

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definitions but they all centre around this concern with temporal meaning making.

Although the primary focus of narrative psychology has been on personal narratives, that is, individual narrative accounts of particular experiences or series of experiences, we can also talk about societal narratives which are shared accounts of how groups or collectives have changed over time. An important focus of narrative social psychology is exploring the connections between these personal and societal narratives. While some discursive researchers have explored the interpersonal context within which narratives are constructed (e.g. De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012), the focus of this chapter will be more on the connection between the personal and the socio-cultural narratives.

As a preliminary, we can consider some historical forebears to the turn to narrative which includes reference to both theoretical and methodological concerns. We will consider how the dominant experimental approach within psychology emerged in the nineteenth century, but alongside it was a concern with a more 'romantic' view of humans which emphasised the importance of language and human experience and a more expansive approach to research methods. There was also a tension between a more value-free version of science and one which not only reflected social change but contributed to it.

## Some History

All around us, there are stories such that we can say that we are born into a storied world, live our lives through stories and are remembered through stories. Stories are not fixed; rather, we refashion them in interaction with others. In the same way, in reflecting on the history of narrative psychology, we select certain key figures and ideas and ignore others such that we can develop a certain coherence to our account as well as in some ways an origin myth.

While we can argue over the nature of psychology and its origins as a distinct discipline, a frequent origin narrative traces it back to Wilhelm Wundt, who established the first psychology laboratory in Leipzig, Germany, in 1879. This, of course, is the origin that experimental psychologists would prefer, but it reflects a certain selective view of Wundt's work. One of the features of Wundt's heritage was that only a small portion of his extensive writings was translated and that was largely to do with his experimental work (Wong, 2009). He also wrote voluminously about *volkerpsychologie* which can be interpreted as shared cultural understandings the study of which required careful attention to everyday language and the myths that people share. Here

Wundt was emphasising the importance of what could be described as the societal narratives which give a sense of shared identity to the members of a particular society. This concern with shared identity reflected the tensions within the disparate elements of German society at that time and the search for a unifying *Volksgeist* (Valsiner, 2013). In recent years, the tensions over European integration and the mass migration of peoples from outside the continent has brought to the fore similar debates about shared cultural narratives and the role of the state and political institutions in promoting such narratives. Within contemporary social psychology, this work has been referenced within the social representation community (Laszlo, 1986; Murray, 2000) with its concern with shared social understandings. For example, social representations of a community can be said to have both contemporary and historical dimensions, with the latter expressed through both personal and cultural narratives. Further, social representations are both constructed and expressed through different narratives.

While these ideas of Wundt were largely ignored in the new experimental psychology of the twentieth century, there were echoes in early sociology such as in the work of Thomas and Znaniecki, whose classic five-volume work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* was published in 1918–1920. This work is sometimes referred to by contemporary sociologists as providing the origin of *biographical sociology* (e.g. Sinatti, 2008; Stanley, 2010) a means of integrating accounts of personal experience with their social context. In their research, Thomas and Znaniecki made substantial use of the letters and correspondence between emigrants to North America and their families and friends in Europe. They also included as one of the volumes in the series an autobiography. The book series was extremely influential in North American social science up until the 1940s with the US Social Science Research Council even commissioning three formal critiques including one by Gordon Allport.

The critique by Allport (1942) focused on the value of personal documents and in it he argued for their potential contribution to social psychology methodology. He traced back the use of the personal document to such figures as Goethe, Helmholtz, William James and Sigmund Freud who adopted an approach which many in the new positivist social science felt did not meet with ‘modern scientific standards of sampling, validity, observer reliability and objectivity’ (p. 1). Allport considered the work of Thomas and Znaniecki and the various critiques about the representativeness of the documents they used. He also explored in more detail the wide range of personal documents including diaries, autobiographies and artistic representations before concluding that despite many concerns about their use within the social sciences, they provided an important source for psychologists allowing them to ‘anchor

the discipline in the bedrock of human experience' (p. 191). Allport became fascinated by life histories and subsequently spent 20 years analysing the autobiographical 'Letters from Jenny' which involved a detailed analysis of several hundred letters from 'Jenny'. In a subsequent commentary on this work, Allport (1965) argued: 'I know of no other case material so rich and exciting and challenging for those who like to explore the mysteries of human nature, whether they be students of psychology or devotees of literature or simply observers of life' (p. x). Although there is debate about these letters (e.g. Winter, 1993), they still confirm Allport's interest in personal documents as a fruitful source of research material.

Despite this early interest in narrative and autobiographical accounts, social psychology in the post-war period became dominated by experiments and surveys. However, the linguistic turn which erupted in the 1970s opened psychology to ideas from philosophy and literary studies. There emerged a series of influential texts in the 1980s which reasserted the potential value of analysing narrative accounts of different phenomena. In particular, among these texts was the collection *Narrative Psychology* edited by Ted Sarbin (1986) in which he argued for the value of narrative as a superior 'root metaphor' for understanding human beings. Sarbin asserted that narrative should replace the more mechanistic or organic metaphors which were dominant in psychology.

Around the same time, Elliott Mishler (1986) published his critical reflections on the growing use of interview methods in his book *Research Interviewing*. In this, he argued that people are natural storytellers and that the research interview provides the opportunity to tell stories. Unfortunately, the tendency has been for the researcher to dismember these stories in the collection and analysis of interviews. Mishler called for a form of analysis that was more sympathetic to the narrative structure of accounts. He also emphasised the importance of the immediate discursive context of the research interview within which the narrative account was generated.

The third key person was Jerome Bruner (1986) who distinguished between paradigmatic or scientific ways of thinking and narrative or everyday forms of thinking. Bruner was a student of Allport and actually worked with him on the critique of the use of personal documents in the 1940s (Greenfield, 1990). Although Bruner was to the fore in promoting the 'cognitive revolution' in the 1960s, he became frustrated at what he believed was the turn from a concern with meaning making to a focus on information processing. For Bruner, narrative was at the centre of everyday meaning making: 'while a culture must contain a set of norms, it must also contain a set of interpretive procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful in terms of established

patterns of belief. It is narrative and narrative interpretation upon which folk psychology depends for achieving this kind of meaning' (p. 47).

These researchers drew ideas from a range of sources including literary and philosophical studies. For example, the literary theorist Northrop Frye (1957) conducted a detailed analysis of classic literature and argued that the main forms could be classified as tragedy, comedy, romance and irony. Gergen and Gergen (1986) used a similar classification in their characterisation of personal narratives as progressive, regressive or stable. Murray (2002) subsequently contrasted the literary and the psychological approaches and found many similarities. He also noted the link with Herzlich's (1974) characterisation of social representations of illness as liberation, destruction or occupation showing the interpenetration of the personal with the social. The link with literature is important as many contemporary narrative researchers within the social sciences frequently make reference to literary concepts in their interpretation of narrative accounts. The literary scholar Peter Brooks (1994) commenting on the connection of literature with everyday thinking opined: 'the structure of literature is in some sense the structure of mind' (p. 24). Literary concepts penetrate our everyday interpretations of the world with particular literary figures having especial resonance in different societies in different eras (Moghaddam, 2004). For example, Kiberd (2009) argued that in Joycean Dublin, the residents were familiar with characters from classic literature such that they could easily identify with characters in Ulysses.

From phenomenological philosophy, there developed the concern with exploring how human experience was constructed and organised in everyday life. Of particular importance for narrative psychology was the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), who was initially concerned with language and discourse. However, it was in his consideration of the phenomenology of time that Ricoeur began to explore the nature of narrative as central way of bringing order and a sense of meaning to the ongoing flux of the human experience of time. He considered this process in detail in his three volume *Time and Narrative*. Discussing this work, subsequently Ricoeur (1998) referred to two central concepts: configuration and refiguration. The former referred to those narrative operations within language which enable the 'emplotment' [*mise en intrigue*] of actions and characters. The latter refers to the transformation of one's own experience through narrative. Narrative was central to our meaning making. As Ricoeur (1984) stated: 'Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (p. 52).

This historical prologue highlights the many influences on the growth of interest in the study of narrative. Central to its concern was the focus on the process by which we develop an understanding in and of the social world and of ourselves.

## Narrative and Identity

Unlike other psychological approaches to the study of identity which considers it as something fixed or constructed by various social forces, narrative places emphasis on the active role of the agent within a changing social setting. While much of narrative psychology has drawn upon the phenomenological tradition of understanding human experience, narrative-making does not exist in a vacuum. This is where our concern with individual meaning making moves to a concern with the broader social and cultural context. Drawing upon Doise's (1986) four-level analysis of social psychology, Murray (2000) argued that narrative should be considered in a similar fashion. At the intrapsychic level were those narrative accounts which were of the classic phenomenological form which has been the concern of much research on personal stories. At the interpersonal level, the concern was on how narratives are developed and shared in everyday social interaction. Here narrative research intersects with various forms of discourse analysis and was taken up by Mishler (1986). This interpersonal level overlaps with the positional level which is concerned with who is telling the narrative and to whom. At the cultural level were those broader cultural narratives which defined a particular group, community or society. This cultural level of narrative provides an historical dimension to social representations. It is the interpenetration of these levels of analysis which opens up the opportunity for a sophisticated understanding of meaning making in context. This process is apparent in research which explores the role of narrative in identity formation.

In the 1990s, Mark Freeman, who was a student of Ricoeur in Chicago, was able to reassert the value of personal documents in the study of identity. In his book *Rewriting the self. History, Memory, Narrative*, Freeman (1993) considered a series of autobiographical and fictional accounts of life. He brought to his interpretation of these accounts a sophistication informed by Ricoeur's thinking about the role of narrative in shaping our lives and our interpretation of our own and other's lives. For Freeman, narrative is at the very centre of meaning making: 'the very act of making sense of ourselves and others is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself' (p. 21). In his detailed analysis of a series of autobiographical accounts, Freeman began with



the account of Saint Augustine. He considered the spiritual context within which this autobiography was constructed: 'Augustine, from the very beginning of his text, has in mind the "ending" he has become: a man who has seen the light of God and who, consequently, could look back on his life and see how it had been orchestrated by forces unseen and unknown at the time' (p. 33). Thus, in developing his personal narrative, Augustine was immersed within this larger spiritual narrative which he had accepted later in his life and he shaped his life story within this spiritual context.

Dan McAdams (1993) also placed narrative at the centre of his theory of identity. As he argued: 'We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories' (p. 11). He considered how various religious motifs had become integral to the socio-cultural narratives within which personal narratives were constructed. He developed the concept of the redemptive self which he argued is a particularly powerful cultural narrative in North America. Here he drew upon notion of generativity which Erikson's (1963) argued is the major psychic challenge we face at mid-life. It is concerned with the commitment to give back to others and to make the world a better place. In McAdams' work, he explored what he termed generative super-stars or individuals who devote their lives to making the world a better place. These individuals were actively shaped by the master redemptive self-narrative. According to McAdams, these people 'make sense of their own lives through an idealized story script that emphasizes, among other themes, the power of human redemption' (p. xiv).

In his research, McAdams explored the life histories of these highly generative individuals who he argued often recall some early advantages in their lives which made them special in certain ways. They recalled also the disadvantages of others and how they now wanted to redress this imbalance by giving back. Here they are drawing on the broader American cultural narrative which presents them as in some ways a special people who were blessed and had overcome adversity and wanted to make the world a better place. McAdams traced this American cultural narrative back to what he termed the Puritan myth which blended sacred Christian and Jewish narratives to present the early settlers as God's chosen people. These contemporary generative individuals were enacting this Puritan myth.

In another study, Kleinfeld (2012) explored the power of the frontier romance narrative in North American culture. This cultural narrative celebrated the original European settlers who moved west to establish a better life, and in doing so, they overcame adversity and promoted self-reliance and individualism. In her research, Kleinfeld (2012) considered the influence of such

a narrative in shaping the life experiences of many contemporary residents of Alaska. Kleinfeld defined this dominant or master narrative as 'a ritualized story that moves through many imaginative forms – history, literature, art, advertising, film, and television' (p. vii). The frontier romance has three basic elements: the hero leaves the security of home, ventures into an unstable world and encounters many challenges but returns stronger to shape a better world. Within this narrative is promoted the virtues of freedom, individualism and self-reliance. The power of this narrative is that it provides emotional security when the individual encounters various forms of uncertainty and challenge.

Kleinfeld argued that while this narrative has particular American features, it is widespread in Western culture. She compared it with Campbell's (1949) monomyth of the heroic individual such as Jesus or Oedipus. However, in the American version, the hero is not someone special but everyman. This narrative pervades American culture and feeds into an antipathy towards the state and the virtue of 'the right to bear arms'. It celebrates risk taking as opposed to conformity as epitomised in the words of the US national anthem which defines the nation as 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'.

In her study of a sample of residents of Alaska, Kleinfeld explored the power of this master narrative to shape lives, for example, through the desire to leave a secure home elsewhere in the USA and to seek adventure. She also explored how the master narrative created conflicts in people's lives. The study was conducted over 10 years and involved biographical interviews with a sample of 75 people coupled with sustained participant observation. She concluded that people use narrative to create a sense of self which is not a fixed essence but rather one which is in evolution. It was through narrative that people made sense of their lives but they also used narrative as an orientation and even a guide to future action.

Hammack (2004) also distinguished between what he described as the cognitive, social and cultural levels of narrative analysis (cf. Murray, 2000). He developed the concept of 'narrative engagement', which is the process by which the individual actively engages with a master cultural narrative to create their own personal narrative identity. The term *engagement* connotes an active process by which the individual is shaped by but also resists the conflicting master narratives in their everyday practices. Hammack (2011) explored the interpenetration of personal and cultural narratives in his study of Israeli and Palestinian identity. This study also involved extensive ethnographic fieldwork to collect the biographical accounts of the young people but also to observe their everyday activities. Through this he explored how on the one hand the Israeli youth engaged with the master cultural narrative which portrayed their nation as the inheritor of the victims of the Holocaust who must defend

themselves at all costs against possible threats to their autonomy. On the other hand was the Palestinian youth whose master narrative was one of destruction of their homeland by the invader which they must regain. Both master narratives shared the importance of national identity which as Hammack argued has taken on renewed force in the postcolonial era.

In his discussion of narrative engagement, Hammack also drew on Erikson's concept of identity not as something fixed entity but one which is socially, culturally and historically located. He referred to Erikson's (1959) notion of identity as 'a maintenance of an inner *solidarity* with a group's ideals and identity' (p. 109). For Hammack, identity is not something which is static but rather is 'a verb' (p. 31). He goes further to argue that in the present late modern historical period, this active process takes on a reflexive character as we manage multiple identities. It is through the detailed study of the process of narrative engagement that social psychology can grasp the changing nature of social identity and connect the personal with the social.

## Narrative and Social Action

Narrative is not just a means of making sense of a changing world but can also be construed as a guide to action in that world. It is for this reason that many feminist and activist scholars have considered both the constraining and the change potential within narrative. On the one hand are what have been termed the master or dominant narratives which reflect the broader ideological forces with any society. For example, much of the postmodern debate concerned the legitimacy of so-called grand narratives which have emphasised the progressive nature of Western culture. Counter narratives were those alternative approaches which challenged these hegemonic narratives.

Feminist psychologists have been concerned with developing a challenge to the dominant patriarchal narrative in everyday social relationships. In their collection, McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2014) considered ways women can work together to challenge such narratives. This involves them sharing their stories of abuse and developing a collective story of resistance. The sharing of stories builds a common social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which in turn can provide a psychological force for joint action to challenge abuse.

Lykes (2010), in her work with Mayan women in Guatemala, used narrative as a guiding framework. In her participatory action research with these women who had experienced years of savage political oppression, she noted that at the outset she and the women did not share a common language. However, through the means of photovoice she encouraged the women to tell

and share their horrific stories of various form of degradation. She argued that it was 'the processes of remembering and generating individual and collective stories – and sharing them with the local community – that contributed to reducing tensions in the community and enhancing some participants' understanding of the root causes of the armed conflict and the challenges of post-conflict transitions'.

While the sharing of personal stories has become quite widespread as a means of building solidarity among oppressed groups and developing ways of resisting various forms of social injustice, it also holds out the potential of promoting inaction by potential allies and by those in authority. It was this that led Costa and colleagues (Costa et al., 2014) to argue that the public sharing of stories of oppression could be considered pornographic in the sense that it provided the passive listener the opportunity to obtain relief while not taking action. Similarly, Kleinman (1997) has noted that the frequent public portrayal of human suffering in the media leads to a stunting of viewer compassion for victims of oppression. In extending this argument, Wilkinson and Kleinman (2016) contend that contemporary social science has moved from a concern with ameliorating human suffering to dispassionate inquiries. It is for this reason that Costa et al. (2014) have argued that oppressed groups should reflect upon the impact of public sharing and the extent to which it can contribute to social change.

Murray and Ziegler (2014), in their work with community workers, explored the role of narrative in shaping their everyday practice. On the one hand, they discussed the use of small stories by the community workers. These were the everyday conversations they had with local residents in which they shared personal experiences and through this became part of the community. On the other hand was the big narrative about community change which encompassed a vision of a revitalised community within which the residents exerted control. The sharing of everyday small stories was essential to the work of the community workers. It was not ephemeral but rather a central means of building a relationship with the residents. It was through sharing small stories that the community workers came to identify themselves more with the community. It was through positioning themselves in this context that the community workers gained the residents' trust and introduced a bigger story of change. These bigger stories of change offered possible new ways of living. The role of the community worker was to convince the residents of the potential of such a new story. Similarly, Tilly (2002) has argued that stories 'do essential work in social life, cementing people's commitments to common projects, helping people make sense of what is going on, channelling collective deci-

sions and judgements, spurring people to action they would otherwise be reluctant to pursue' (p. 27).

Political scientists have also taken up the concept of narrative as a term used to describe a symbolic organising force in society. While the dominant political narrative is one of the value of stability and consensus, alternative political narratives articulate an interpretation of society which is oriented towards change. Selbin (2010) presents what he describes as four basic stories of revolution: the Civilizing and Democratizing story, the Social Revolution story, the Freedom and Liberation story and the Lost and Forgotten story. Each of these stories enable a group of people to 'make sense of the past, explain the present, and envisage and enable a future' (p. 4). It is the politician's role to articulate a clear and compelling societal narrative with which people can identify.

The nineteenth century was a period when particular national stories were articulated which galvanised people to push for social change. Historians have illustrated the role of literature in popularising certain national narratives. For example, in the case of Ireland, the literary revival of the nineteenth century contributed to the growth of Irish nationalism (Foster, 2014). This centred on popularising though stories and verse the notion of the Irish nation as having a very distinct heritage which was shared by its people but had been repressed by British imperialism. Foster quoted the Irish mystic George Russell writing in 1923 on the importance of this sense of injustice: 'it was the psychological factor ... which made the Irish regard the State which inflicted such things upon them as tyranny by aliens'. The extent to which these cultural narratives gain currency depends upon the extent to which they connect with the material realities. As Selbin (2010) has argued, these historical narratives reflect 'the context, material as well as ideological, of people's everyday lives' (p. 9). In Ireland's case, the cultural narrative gave expression to the social and political repression experienced by many Irish residents.

## Collecting Stories

Since stories are all around us, we can adopt a variety of methods in our research. The most common method preferred by narrative researchers is the biographical or episodic interview. However, this has often been replaced by more ethnographic open-ended conversations. The focus is on encouraging the participants to 'tell their story'. For that reason the researcher often approaches the participants with minimum guidance and invites them to share their experiences. For example, the researcher might want to explore

the participant's experience of a traumatic event such as the onset of a serious illness. The researcher starts by gaining the participant's trust. In a conversational format, the researcher might begin by inviting the person to talk a little about themselves—their family, work and so on. Throughout the discussion, the researcher's role is to facilitate the narrative-making rather than to interrogate the participant. While single interviews may yield comprehensive narrative accounts, often it requires repeated meetings to gain the participants' confidence and enable them to provide more elaborated accounts.

However, interviews are not dispassionate events in which the interviewee is simply encouraged to reveal a hidden narrative account. Rather, as Mishler (1986) has emphasised, they are social events: 'the interviewer's presence and form of involvement – how she or he listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics, and terminates responses – is integral to a respondent's accounts. It is in this specific sense that a "story" is a joint production' (p. 82).

While single interviews remain popular, increasingly narrative researchers are turning to much more extensive interviews. Such was the case in the work by Henry Greenspan (1998), who conducted repeated interviews with Holocaust survivors over a period of 20 years. In his analysis of these interviews, Greenspan considered the nature of narrative, the challenge of giving narrative coherence and meaning to what was and remains an unending horror for the survivors, the process of telling someone else and the broader societal context within which the narrative was told. With regard to this cultural context, he referred to the contemporary use of the concept survivor which has spread throughout Western society. Greenspan considered two ways of imagining survivors in Western culture. On the one hand, we can celebrate survivors as 'heroes', while on the other they are depicted as 'ghosts and wrecks' (p. 48). An important feature of the heroes is that they are expected to bear witness—to publicly declare the horrors they had experienced and which had in many ways strengthened them. However, there remained the challenge of recounting the horrors, and as Greenspan emphasised, for many that is not possible.

Similarly, in his study of Holocaust survivors, Kraft (2002) explored the lack of structure of their narrative accounts. Instead he refers to what he describes as an episodic testimony. As one of his participants said: 'Episodes, not time. Time seemed to have stood still. I just know episodes. Specifics. That comes back to mind repeatedly' (p. 18). This person is echoing Ricoeur's notion of the temporal dimension of experience around which narrative constructs meaning. The experience of the Holocaust was too horrific that it evades this narrative coherence and psychological resolution.

The narrative interviews/conversations are generally tape-recorded such that the researcher can spend time analysing what is said. The type of transcript developed will partly depend upon the form of analysis planned. In general, the narrative researcher aims to preserve the conversational element of the interview such that all the commentaries of both parties are transcribed. In addition, certain linguistic features such as silences and sighs are included in the transcript. Those researchers who intend a more detailed analysis of the linguistic elements of the narrative may include other elements of the speech (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012).

Another way of collecting narratives is through the use of a written or electronic diary. In this case the researcher provides some guidance to the participant. The growth of electronic communication provides new opportunities for narrative researchers. An example of such a resource is the online forums where people discuss various issues such as illness. Many of these are quite reflective and include discussion of the form of narrative accounts (e.g. <http://www.aissg.org/articles/TELLING.HTM>). In addition, there has been the growth in the publication of everyday accounts of tragic events. These 'pathographies' have led to the development of a whole subgenre of literary analysis. Some psychologists have begun to explore the psychological content of both fictional and autobiographical accounts.

In addition, narrative researchers are keen to explore multiple sources of data. These can include archival data such as written personal accounts and other documents about particular events. Such archival data has been the primary research material for historians. For example, there has been a massive historical project exploring the accounts of the survivors of the Holocaust. Langer (1991) made use of the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. He compared these oral testimonies with the more polished written testimonies by such people as Primo Levi. While the latter have a certain coherence, the oral testimonies in the archive were more disjointed revealing the challenge of providing order and meaning to this catastrophic personal and social tragedy. This tragedy remained with the survivors and could not be neatly filed away. Conversely, 'written memoirs, by the very strategies available to their authors – style, chronology, analogy, imagery, dialogue, a sense of character, a coherent moral vision – strive to narrow this space, easing us into their unfamiliar world through familiar (and hence comforting?) literary devices' (p. 19).

The use of the term testimony is important. It is a particular type of narrative which conveys a sense of moral being. As Ricoeur (1980) explained: 'the term testimony should be applied to words, works, actions, and to lives which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience



and history which nonetheless transcend experience and history' (cited in Scott, 1997, p. 20). Similarly, Kraft (2002) notes that 'to give testimony is to remember for the purpose of remembering' (p. xvii). The person giving their account, no matter how disjointed, is giving it for posterity – as a witness.

Recently, some social psychologists have begun to connect with historians (Tileaga & Byford, 2014) and to realise the potential of archival sources, both recent and more historical, which they can access. An example is the work of Skjelsbaek (2015) which involved the detailed analysis of sentencing judgments at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia of perpetrators of sexual violence during the conflict in the early 1990s. She identified three primary narratives: the chivalrous, the opportunistic and the remorseful. Each of these narratives had a particular plot: the normal person responding to what was seen as a normal situation, the abnormal person responding to an abnormal situation and the normal person responding inadequately to an abnormal situation. An important contribution of this analysis was the integration of notions of masculinity and militarism into the different narrative plots.

## Analysing Stories

The previous examples show that while narrative accounts can be collected or accessed from various sources the analysis can also take various forms. A prominent form of analysis that derives from sociolinguistic theory is that developed by Labov and Waletzky (1976/1997). This approach developed from an analysis of the everyday language of young residents of inner city New York. Their study was designed to challenge the idea that the language of Black youth was inadequate for learning. They argued that 'fully formed' narratives consist of six separate elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda.

This approach is useful in that it enables the analyst to obtain an overview of a narrative account and to extract the core elements from a more lengthy discursive narrative account. Mishler (1986) has emphasised the importance of revealing what exactly the story is all about—what is the narrator trying to get across. However, the challenge is that the underlying meaning is not always apparent and it requires frequent rereading of the account before the analyst can tease out the core elements. It is also a useful means for comparison between narrative accounts. By identifying the elements in a series of accounts, the analyst can reveal the commonalities but also the differences if any.

However, a focus on the structure can be limiting in that certain elements may be missing or implied. For example, several researchers have emphasised the importance of the evaluation within the narrative account but this is often implicit or conveyed by the tone of the account. Indeed, the very fact that a particular story is told implies a certain evaluation by the narrator. In addition, this Labovian model formally ignores the dialogical nature of storytelling although the researcher can integrate that into her analysis. Thus the Labovian model can be considered a starting point for a developed narrative analysis. Rather than a universal template which can be applied to all narrative accounts, it provides an entry point for more detailed analysis both in terms of structure and in terms of content, context and function.

Another form of structural analysis that derives from the literary tradition is that of Gee (1991). He explored the poetic structure of narrative and argued that 'all speech is produced in terms of lines (often a clause long) and stanzas (a small group of lines with one perspective and a narrow topic)' (p. 9). He went further to argue that in many ways poetry is a 'fossilised' form of everyday speech. This form of analysis pays close attention to the underlying rhythm of the narrative which can require listening to the audio-recording of the account which may reveal features that are not apparent in the transcribed version. However, there are cultural variations in the character of poetry which may be reflected in or shape the nature of narrative accounts. For example, a close reading of narrative accounts might be informed by a grasp of popular culture which can reveal how popular poems and songs penetrate everyday narrative accounts.

A particular innovation was the approach termed Critical Narrative Analysis which was developed by Langdridge (2007). It overlaps with other approaches but is distinct in placing an emphasis on what he describes as the *hermeneutics of suspicion*. He describes this approach as proceeding through six stages although these should not be considered discrete. Here we will briefly outline the particular features of this approach.

1. Critique of the subject's illusions: this initial stage is concerned with the researcher reflecting upon their own perspective and assumptions about the topic of investigation. The researcher is encouraged to think about how their own background may have influenced the character of the research. In beginning to read the text, the researcher should consider what the topic means to them personally. He suggests adopting two types of hermeneutics of suspicion in this personal reflection or reading of the text. The first is depth hermeneutics in which the researcher is looking for the unconscious dynamics behind the narrative, such as the narrator defending themselves

against anxiety. The second is imaginative hermeneutics which connects the narrative with the broader socio-cultural discourse.

2. Narratives, tone and function: this stage is concerned with an overall description of the content of the narrative and possible sub-narratives. Part of this is the tone or changing tone in the narrative and the narrative function—what is the narrator trying to do. Here Langdridge is particularly concerned with the rhetorical character of the narrative which is being used to convince or to justify certain practices.
3. Identities and identity work: this stage is concerned with who exactly the narrator is and how they are being presented through the narrative. In particular, how does this relate to the particular focus of the research, for example, illness, ageing.
4. Thematic priorities: this stage is concerned with identifying the major themes in the narrative and how these are related.
5. Destabilising the narrative: here the researcher is engaging with the hermeneutics of suspicion to further interrogate the text and its underlying assumptions. Langdridge describes this stage as being ‘explicitly political’ and the researcher needs to go beyond description to consider why a certain narrative is being developed in a certain socio-cultural context.
6. Synthesis: this final stage integrates the various stages to present an account which has a person at its centre who is struggling to make sense of their world. In presenting this synthesis, the researcher comes full circle and positions themselves as someone who is in part shaping this interpretation.

This approach borrows from other approaches but places at its centre the hermeneutics of suspicion. The researcher is not simply describing the structure and context of the narrative but interrogating it from different perspectives—considering the role of the researcher, the role of unconscious processes, the role of the rhetorical function of the narrative and the role of the broader socio-cultural discourse. Langdridge admitted that taking all of these processes into account was challenging and that is why complete narrative analysis can be both unnerving and time-consuming. It is also why research which adopts a narrative approach is rarely consistent in its reportage. Rather, the concern is in developing an understanding of what the narrative is about.

## Summary

Throughout this chapter, we have explored the central role of narrative in meaning making and in identity construction. A central challenge faced by narrative researchers is the breadth of its theoretical heritage and modes of research. It has connected with psychology in different ways. There has been the concern with meaning making. Within critical social psychology, a central focus has been the power of language, in particular of everyday discourse, in shaping our understanding of the world. Narrative is shaped through discourse whether it is spoken or written. We also considered the importance of the process of narrative engagement through which the personal narrative connects with the broader cultural narratives.

Narrative can also be considered as a guide for action. This change potential was taken up by Mishler (1986), who emphasised that the very process of narrative research opened up the potential for transformation: ‘Through their narratives people may be moved beyond the text to the possibilities of action. That is, to be empowered is not only to speak in one’s own voice and to tell one’s own story, but to apply the understanding arrived at to action in accord with one’s own interests’ (p. 119).

The change potential of narrative has been particularly prominent in clinical settings since the work of White and Epston (1990). It is now being applied in various social and political settings and opens up new opportunities for connecting critical thought with forms of social action. In Freirean terms, a critical narrative social psychology provides an opportunity to deconstruct oppressive social narratives and collectively develop new emancipatory narratives. The process is ongoing and reflexive.

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# 11

## Discourse Analysis

Martha Augoustinos

Discourse Analysis (DA) refers to the systematic study of *discourse* (both written text and talk) and its role in constructing social reality. DA is much more than a qualitative methodology: it is theoretically and epistemologically informed by social constructionism and has been central to challenging the dominance of cognitive and perceptual theoretical models in psychology. Although it is sometimes presented as a unified tradition in psychology, as this chapter will make clear, there are currently a diverse range of approaches to analysing discourse that differ markedly from each other. This chapter will consider this tradition of research, its intellectual influences, historical trajectory in psychology and the radical critique it has directed towards many of its taken-for-granted concepts. It will also outline some core principles in DA and demonstrate how they are examined in the analysis of discourse.

### DA's Critical Roots

The emergence of critical perspectives in psychology can in part be attributed to the increasing interest in the role and function of language as a socially constitutive force in consciousness and experience. The turn to language in the social and human sciences in the 1990s has been associated with generating new and fundamentally different ways of *doing* psychology that can

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be contrasted to the quantitative and experimental methods that have dominated the discipline. DA is one of these critical approaches. As a tradition of research, DA is fundamentally critical: first, it is critical of traditional psychology, its theories, models and practices, arguing that as a discipline, psychology has produced asocial, decontextualized and dehumanizing models of the person and second, by explicitly engaging with social and political issues, it is particularly critical of psychology's role in the maintenance, reproduction and legitimation of oppressive relations and practices (Hepburn, 2003). As a tradition of research, DA represents one of these critical approaches, but as we will see, there are a number of approaches to analysing discourse that differ philosophically from each other.

## The Emergence of DA in Psychology

In 1987, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (DASP) was published by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. This ground-breaking book is widely recognized as introducing DA to an increasing number of disaffected social psychologists and which generated something of a 'quiet revolution' in the years to come (Augoustinos & Tileaga, 2012). The epistemology advocated by this book was fundamentally different from the positivist and realist epistemology of traditional social psychology. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advocated for a social constructionist and non-cognitivist epistemology (and ontology) that fundamentally reformulated topics central to social psychology: psychological constructs such as self and identity, attributions, attitudes, social categorization and prejudice were reconceptualized as discursive practices that were enacted in everyday social interaction rather than cognitive processes that took place in the internal machinations of the mind.

DASP drew on several intellectual influences, not the least of which was the social constructionist movement and its critique of traditional psychology. It also drew on philosophical linguistics and in particular Wittgenstein's later philosophical writings (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953), which emphasized the interactive and contextual nature of language. In contrast to conventional theories that theorized language to be an abstract and coherent system of names and rules, Wittgenstein viewed language as a social practice. While the former treats language as a 'mirror of reality', reflecting a world 'out there', Wittgenstein argued that words and language do not have independent objective meanings outside the context and settings in which they are actually used. Moreover, Wittgenstein challenged the view that language was

merely a medium through which people expressed and communicated inner mental phenomena such as feelings and beliefs. Wittgenstein rejected the conventional and dominant understanding in both psychology and philosophy, that there are two separate and parallel systems—cognition and language—one private and the other public. Rather, Wittgenstein argued that, ‘language itself is the vehicle of thought’ (1953, p. 329).

This emphasis on language as a social practice is central to DA, which seeks to analyse empirically how language is used in everyday activities and settings by participants. The action orientation of discourse is associated with another important influence: John Austin’s speech act theory (1962). Speech act theory emphasizes how people use language ‘to do things’, to achieve certain ends. Words are not simply abstract tools used to state or describe things: they are also used to make things happen. People use language to persuade, blame, excuse and present themselves in the best possible light. Thus, language is functional, it ‘gets things done’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Another intellectual influence in DA (and one that has been central to the development of ‘Discursive Psychology’ (DP) associated with the Loughborough School) is Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is an ethnomethodological tradition that examines ordinary conversation in its everyday natural settings. In contrast to cognitive science and sociolinguistics that treat language as an abstract system of rules and categories, CA begins with people’s actual talk in social interaction—‘*talk-in-interaction*’, as it is commonly known. Central figures in the development of CA, such as Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, have demonstrated through the close analysis of conversational materials that everyday conversation is orderly and demonstrates reliable regularities in its sequential turn-by-turn organization (Sacks, 1995; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). CA attends to the ways in which participants’ talk is oriented to the practical concerns of social interaction; how, for example, descriptions, accounts and categories in conversation are put together to perform very specific actions such as justifying, explaining, blaming, excusing and so on. For example, a pervasive feature of everyday talk and conversation is that participants attend to their own stake and accountability (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Social psychology has typically treated talk-in-interaction as primarily inconsequential to social life. Moreover, as a source of data, everyday talk is viewed as ‘messy’, containing hesitations, pauses, interruptions, self-corrections and so on. CA, however, emphasizes how such features of talk may be highly relevant in interaction, which has led to very specific requirements regarding the level of transcription recommended for recorded materials in

CA work. It is typical in CA to include details in transcripts such as the length of pauses, overlapping talk, intonation, hesitations, emphasis and volume.

Another important influence in DASP and one that remains central in critical discourse analysis (CDA, see below) is post-structuralism and in particular, the work of Michel Foucault. Despite the enormous impact and influence that Foucault's work has had in the humanities and social sciences generally, psychology as a discipline has remained largely impervious to his prolific writings on the nature of knowledge and subjectivity. This is no surprise given the subject matter of Foucault's writings, which challenged traditional notions of truth and knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault was interested in the historical emergence and development of various disciplines of knowledge, particularly the social sciences and how this body of 'scientific' knowledge exercises power by regulating the behaviour and subjectivities of individuals throughout all layers of society. Foucault argued that modern power is achieved largely through the self-regulation and self-discipline of individuals to behave in ways which are largely consistent with dominant discourses about what it is to be human. These discourses shape and mould our subjectivities, the people we ultimately become. For example, dominant psychological discourses about the self for a large part of the 20th century have extolled the virtues of logical, rational thought, cognitive order and consistency, emotional stability and control, moral integrity, independence and self-reliance. These humanist discourses are powerful in that they have contributed to the shaping of certain behavioural practices, modes of thought and institutional structures which function to produce people possessing these valued qualities. Moreover, institutions and practices have emerged which rehabilitate, treat and counsel those who fail to become rational, self-sufficient, capable and emotionally stable individuals. Thus, psychology, as a body of knowledge and a 'scientifically' legitimated discipline, shapes and prescribes what it is to be a healthy and well-adjusted individual (Rose, 1989).

*Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984, 1998), was among the first books within psychology to directly engage with Foucault's writings on modern forms of subjectivity and psychology's role in producing subjects and identities shaped by the dominant discourses of individualism and cognitivism. As we will see below, discursive psychologists who draw from this tradition of work, and in particular from Foucault, understand and use the term 'discourse' rather differently from those who use this term to refer to everyday talk and conversation. Foucault's influence in DA, however, cannot be overestimated, especially in the development of CDA.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

Unlike the approach to DA originally advocated by Potter and Wetherell (1987) that is primarily located at the micro-level of everyday social interaction, CDA emphasizes how discursive practices or ways of talking about the world are predominantly shaped by influences outside of the immediate interactional context of speakers. Specifically, these influences are the historical, political and cultural contexts within which speakers live their lives. Critical discursive psychologists have argued that certain ways of talking or constructing objects and events become pervasive and dominant in particular historical moments, which make them more culturally available and thus more powerful in constructing social reality. Critical DP looks outside specific discursive interactions and reflects upon the social and historical context within which both everyday conversation and formal institutional discourse take place. What does this socio-political context say about power relations between groups and how do various institutions within the wider society propagate and reproduce particular constructions that come to dominate our subjective experience and our very individual and social identities (Edley, 2001; Henriques et al., 1998; Wetherell, 1998, 2001)?

As already noted, CDA draws heavily on post-structuralist theory and particularly, Foucault's writings on discourse, but again, there is no unified approach to this tradition. While major exponents such as Wetherell (1998, 2001) adopt this critical framework, her work is largely empirical and still shares important similarities with more conversation-analytic inspired discursive work. In contrast, Ian Parker (1990, 2012) eschews empiricism, is less interested in everyday talk and conversation and more concerned with identifying and describing hegemonic 'discourses' which proliferate within society and which inform, shape and construct the way we see ourselves and the world.

### Discourse as a Coherent Meaning System

Parker, and others inspired by post-structuralist writings, uses the term *discourse* to refer to a recurrently used 'system of statements which constructs an object' (1990, p. 191). So, for example, within western societies, there exist a number of dominant discourses which inform and shape various aspects of our lives. We have a biomedical discourse which informs our understanding of anything to do with health and illness; we have a legal discourse which provides us with certain codes of conduct and rules for behaviour; we have a

familial discourse which buttresses views about the sanctity and importance of the family. While Parker defines discourses as ‘coherent systems of meaning’, contradictions and inconsistencies within discourses are common, as are alternative discourses, which compete with dominant ones for recognition and power. Often discourses are related to or presuppose other discourses or systems of meaning. Discourses primarily function to bring ‘objects into being’, to create the status of reality with which objects are endowed. As already discussed above, they also position us in various ‘subject positions’, so that discourses invite us, even compel us, to take on certain roles and identities. For example, a nationalist discourse positions us in the role of a flag-waving citizen. Often, however, this is achieved by addressing us by virtue of our ethnic and/or racial identity which may effectively exclude some groups (e.g., immigrants). Parker does not restrict discourse to just spoken and written language. Discourses can be found in all kinds of texts, such as in advertising, popular and high-brow culture, non-verbal behaviour and instruction manuals.

As coherent meaning systems, Parker argues that discourses have a material and almost ‘physical presence’. Like Moscovici’s (1982) concept of social representations, discourses, once created, proliferate within society. Importantly, however, Parker does not view discourses in idealist terms but sees them as grounded in and shaped by historical and political (material) ‘realities’. Thus he does not subscribe to the linguistic and political relativism which is associated with some discursive approaches. Parker and other discursive researchers (e.g., Willig, 1999, 2001) position themselves as ‘critical realists’, who are committed to developing an approach to discourse which is sensitive to the material and socio-structural conditions from which discourses emerge and take shape. The political edge to this discursive approach is that it emphasizes how some discourses function to legitimate existing institutions and to reproduce power relations and inequities within society (Parker, 1990).

Parker’s notion of ‘discourses’ has been criticized for its reified and abstract status. For him, discourses, as entities, exist independently from the people who use them. In contrast, approaches that are located at the other end of the continuum of discursive work are attuned to the context-specific and functional ways in which talk or discourse is mobilized in specific situations. These approaches define discourse as a ‘situated practice’ and thus provide a more social psychological focus to discursive research (Edwards, 2012; Potter, 2012). However, this social psychological focus on how participants use language in specific interactional contexts does not preclude a critical and political analysis of how pervasive and recurring patterns of talk justify and legitimate inequitable relations and practices (Augoustinos, 2013) as we will see below.

## Current Trends: Discourse Analysis Now

Since the publication of DASP by Potter and Wetherell (1987), DA has flourished in psychology and has generated a significant body of scholarship (Billig, 2012). It is important however to emphasize that DA is also practised in other disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, historical and cultural studies which have developed their own analytic methods and approaches to analysis and interpretation. As with all intellectual traditions, several approaches to DA have developed within psychology itself, differing from each other in important ways. This diversity of approaches to DA can be represented as lying on a continuum between two distinct and influential approaches at either end. The first of these can be broadly identified by the work of Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards who have developed an approach that is significantly influenced by CA and its focus on the local, interactional and sequential nature of everyday talk and conversation in its natural settings (Edwards, 1997, 2012; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996, 2012). This is specifically referred to as DP and is associated with the Loughborough School. At the other end of the spectrum, there is CDA, which is perhaps best exemplified by Ian Parker's (2002) work. This latter approach specifically calls itself *critical* to emphasize its explicit political agenda and its critical realist and materialist epistemology. While this work is informed by social constructionism, emphasizing the difficulty in ascertaining a 'true' version of reality, it nonetheless maintains that it is possible to arrive at a veridical version that cuts through the mystifying layers of ideology. This is in contrast to Potter and Edwards' work which maintains a relativist epistemology that questions the notion of a fixed and knowable reality (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995). Moreover, like CA, DP is fundamentally concerned with how participants themselves treat the interaction, what participants treat as relevant, how they display understanding, disagreement and so on in their talk. Analysts should not impose their own categories of understanding on the conversational materials nor should they infer underlying motivations or cognitions for participants' talk. The talk itself and its action orientation is the focus of analysis (Schegloff, 1997). This particular directive for analysts to refrain from imposing their own interpretations of participants' talk has led to heated debate within the discourse community about how to conduct 'proper' analysis (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Smith, Hollway, & Mishler, 2005).

Discursive work in general can be located anywhere along this continuum. For example, prominent figures in the field such as Margaret Wetherell (1998; Edley & Wetherell, 1995) and Michael Billig (1991, 1999), whose work



borrowed from the insights of DP but also attends to the ways in which discourse (and rhetoric) is shaped by the sense-making practices and discursive resources that are pervasive in a particular society or culture, can be located somewhere in between these two contrasting approaches.

More recently, Parker (2012) has argued that these different approaches to DA can be organized hierarchically into eight different types at four levels of analysis ranging from the micro- (CA) to macro-levels (CDA). This range of approaches to DA reflects the increasing proliferation of qualitative research in psychology and the significant success it has had in challenging the dominance of positivism. This is in contrast to the intellectual climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s when the 'turn to discourse' and critical psychology more generally was just beginning to take off.

Despite its increasing acceptance in British social psychology, DA continues to attract considerable antipathy from the mainstream. Specifically, DA is often derided as lacking scientific objectivity and precision. The irony, of course, is that such criticisms fail to critically reflect upon the questionable assumptions that are built into the very fabric of quantitative research methods and their claims to scientific objectivity.

Potter (2012) and Edwards (2012) have recently addressed common misconceptions and criticisms of their discursive approach (DP) that have been used to legitimate its continued marginalization and exclusion from mainstream social psychology. Potter specifically addresses two major recurring critiques: that discursive research is primarily descriptive rather than explanatory and about construction rather than causation, and as such fails to meet the criteria for legitimate scientific inquiry (Manstead, 2008). Contrary to this mistaken depiction of DP, Potter details both the methodological and theoretical coherence of DP as an empirically driven programme of the systematic analysis of naturalistic records of human interaction and social action as they unfold in real time. Indeed, such an approach that emphasizes careful observation and description before generating hypotheses or building models is central to the scientific method. As Potter makes clear, it is surprising that a discipline like social psychology (and psychology for that matter) prefers to study human behaviour in contrived and artificial ways than in their natural settings of everyday life, where psychological matters are live concerns for participants. DP aims to identify and understand widely shared normative practices that regulate and sequentially organize social interaction.

Similarly, Edwards (2012) argues that the methodological imperative in DP to treat 'talk as talk' and as managed and organized for social action by participants is far less interpretative and subjective than experimental and quantitative psychology. Edwards questions the privileging in psychology of

cause–effect relationships and makes a strong case for a rigorous conceptual analysis of the ‘systematic, research tractable-set of practices by which people render themselves intelligible to each other’ (p. 433): that the intelligibility of social life is to be found in the normative bases of human practices and accountability. This is essentially what makes DP ‘psychology’ and thoroughly scientific.

## Core Principles in Discourse Analysis

Despite the different approaches to DA, all share some defining features that make them clearly distinct from quantitative and positivist approaches to psychology. Four of these core principles include (1) discourse is constitutive, (2) discourse is functional, (3) discourse is built and organized by shared repertoires of meaning, argumentative tropes and rhetorical tools and (4) discourse constructs identities.

### Discourse Is Constitutive

DA is primarily interested in how people use language to understand and make sense of everyday life. Discourse is viewed as reflexive and contextual, constructing the very nature of objects and events as they are talked about. This emphasizes the constructive nature and role of discourse as it is used in everyday life. This is fundamentally different from the approach taken in traditional psychology which has at its core a perceptual-cognitive metatheory (Edwards, 1997) that treats objects in the world or ‘reality’ as an unproblematic given. ‘Reality’, in this view, is directly perceived and worked upon by cognitive computational processes, which is then, finally, reflected in discourse. Perceptual cognitivism treats discourse as merely reflecting a stable and presupposed world ‘out there’. In contrast, DA inverts this traditional approach and treats discourse as analytically prior to perception and reality (Potter, 2000).

DA begins with discourse itself, with descriptions and accounts of events and issues that are produced in talk. Discourse is therefore constitutive—objects, events, identities and social relations are constructed by the specific words and categories we use to talk about them. This is in stark contrast to psychological approaches that treat language as neutral, a transparent medium that merely reflects the world (Wetherell, 2001). The dominant metaphor of language as a picture that reflects or mirrors reality views language as passive

and as 'doing nothing' (Edwards, 1997; Wetherell, 2001). In DA, language is viewed as actively constructing and building versions of the world.

Many social psychologists find DA's emphasis on language rather than cognition difficult to accept: our everyday experience of consciousness and thought furnishes us with the self-evident 'reality' of internal cognitive representation, and the very idea that our experiences and practices are not cognitively mediated may seem absurd. Cognitivism is indeed a 'discourse' that is dominant, not only within science but also in the everyday world where people live out their lives. Cognitive concepts such as attitudes and beliefs are part and parcel of our everyday language and most people talk of their 'attitudes', 'beliefs' and 'opinions'. DP, for example, treats these constructs as 'talk's topics': topics that participants themselves attend to in their talk in order to perform the important business of everyday social interaction (Edwards, 1997). The categories of the mind are therefore treated as topics of conversation rather than actual mental states that have an independent existence.

## Discourse Is Functional

Another central principle in DA is that discourse is functional; talk is a social practice that accomplishes social actions in the world. What people say (and write) depends on the particular context in which it is spoken and the functions it serves. In the ebb and flow of everyday life, the context within which discourse occurs and its function continually shift and change. As people are engaged in conversation with others, they construct and negotiate meanings or the very 'reality' that they are talking about. In contrast to most traditional approaches in psychology which look for stability and consistency in people's cognitions, DA stresses the inherent variability of what people say, as content is seen to reflect contextual changes and the functions that the talk serves. So, for example, people's accounts or views about a particular issue are likely to vary depending on how the talk is organized and what it is designed to do: for example, is it organized in such a way as to justify a position, attribute blame, present oneself positively? DA, then, is interested in analysing why a particular version of social reality is constructed in a particular way and what it accomplishes in that particular context. Thus 'the focus is on the discourse *itself*: how it is organized and what it is doing' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 4; original emphasis). This emphasis on the inherent variability of discourse challenges traditional approaches to the attitude construct in social psychology

where research is specifically designed to quantify people's attitudes. Related to this is the observation that discourse is often organized rhetorically to be persuasive. People orient to the availability of multiple and different versions of the world in their discourse by building specific constructions in ways that undermine alternative accounts. Billig's (1991) work on the argumentative and rhetorical context of discourse has been influential and has highlighted the dilemmatic nature of people's sense-making practices.

## Discursive Resources and Practices

Traditional cognitive constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, opinions and categories have been replaced within DA by an emphasis on identifying the resources and practices that are drawn upon in everyday talk when people express opinions, argue and debate (Potter, 1998). These discursive resources include interpretative repertoires—defined as a set of metaphors, arguments and terms—which are used recurrently in people's discourse to describe events and actions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Some DA researchers prefer to refer to these as themes or tropes. They also include the identification of specific discursive strategies and devices that people mobilize in their talk to build their accounts as factual, objective and disinterested (Potter, 1996). For example, a common device to warrant a particular view or argument is to claim that there exists a consensus on a particular issue, that everybody knows or agrees something to be true. This specific device is known as a 'consensus warrant'. Other discursive resources or tools include rhetorical commonplaces (Billig, 1987) or clinching arguments that participants mobilize in their talk. The use of idiomatic expressions such as clichés or proverbs, for example, has been shown to be difficult to argue against because of their vague but common-sense qualities (Drew & Holt, 1989). Some of these discursive resources and practices will be examined below to illustrate how DP reframes traditional topics through the detailed analysis of text and talk.

Discursive resources that are drawn upon to construct meaning in everyday talk are shaped by social, cultural and historical processes (Wetherell, 2001). People's sense-making practices and ways of understanding the world may vary and shift depending on the particular context, but these are nonetheless constrained by the cultural and linguistic resources that are shared within a particular language community.

## Discourse and Identity

Discourse not only constructs objects and versions of the world, it also constructs identities for speakers. Instead of seeing the self and identity as an inner psychological essence possessed by individuals, as in traditional accounts, DP argues that identities or 'subject positions' are brought into being through discourse. Different ways of talking invoke different subject positions for speakers, such as 'mother', 'daughter', 'lover', 'professional woman', 'friend' and so on, so that specific patterns of talk are recognizable for the work they do in discursively constituting identity (Wetherell, 2001). For example, the identity of a 'parent' can be worked up in a variety of ways by the use of culturally recognized narratives in talk regarding parental rights, responsibilities and moral obligations. Unlike the traditional notion of a stable, cognitive self, DP emphasizes the shifting and multiple identities that speakers actively construct in talk (some of which may even be contradictory) to accomplish a range of interactional goals. Discourse is constitutive of identity, that is, people can be positioned by particular ways of talking, but at the same time people can make active choices about the identities they mobilize in particular settings. People are 'constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate' (Davies & Harrè, 1990, p. 46). This account of identity is more in keeping with postmodern and post-structural theories which emphasize the multiple, dynamic and interactive nature of subjectivity.

## DA in Action: Justifying Discrimination

To demonstrate these four core principles in discursive research, let's examine an interaction between a member of the public who is asking a prominent politician to justify his opposition to same-sex marriage. Unlike other liberal democracies such as the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain and Ireland, Australia has yet to legalize same-sex marriage. Within the same-sex marriage debate both in Australia and overseas, pro-gay supporters have frequently attacked the opponents of gay marriage as practising discrimination, in which equal rights are being withheld on the basis of sexual orientation (Harding & Peel, 2006). Opponents of same-sex marriage are thus frequently faced with the delicate task of justifying their position against same-sex marriage, while

simultaneously maintaining egalitarian values and principles, which, after all, form the foundational basis of liberal democratic societies. As we will see in the extract below, opposition to same-sex marriage is typically associated with denials of prejudice and discrimination by constructing opposition to same-sex marriage as outside the boundaries of discrimination (see Matthews & Augoustinos, 2012).

The extract below is taken from the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) Q & A programme, on 16 August 2010, just days before the Australian federal election, in which Mr Abbott, the then Liberal Opposition Leader, was running for Prime Minister. Here, Mr Abbott is addressed by Mr Thomas, the father of a gay son who questions Mr Abbott's views against same-sex marriage.

### Extract: ABC Q&A (ABC, 2010)

- |    |              |   |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1  | Geoff Thomas | Thank you .hhh I am a Vietnam veteran (.) I have been a                         |
| 2  |              | plumbing contractor for 37 years (.) I support with a social                    |
| 3  |              | conscience (.) the Liberal philosophy .hhh I have a gay s↑on                    |
| 4  |              | (.5) when I was confronted with that situation in a very                        |
| 5  |              | short (.) amount of time and with due (.) consideration I                       |
| 6  |              | accepted his position and I overcame my ignorance and my                        |
| 7  |              | fear of (.) of gays and the idea of gay marriage .hhh when                      |
| 8  |              | will you Mr Abbott (.5) take up the sa[audience applause]                       |
| 9  |              | (.) will you sir overcome your fear and ignorance (.) of gay                    |
| 10 |              | people (.3) and give them the dignity and respect (.) that                      |
| 11 | Tony Abbott  | you'd <i>happily</i> give to all other Austral↑ians                             |
| 12 |              | Well Geoff I <i>absolutely</i> agree with you (.5) that people have             |
| 13 |              | got to be given dignity and respect (.) and I would always                      |
| 14 |              | try to find it in my heart (.) to give dignity and respect to                   |
| 15 |              | people regardless of their circumstances (.) regardless of                      |
| 16 |              | their opinions .hhh uh so that is <i>absolutely</i> my posit?ion (.4)           |
| 17 |              | <i>but</i> ?I think that uh (.) there are lots of <i>terrific</i> gay relation- |
| 18 |              | ships lot::s of terrific (.) uh <i>commitments</i> between gay part-            |
|    |              | ners but I just don't think (.) that (.) uh <i>marriage</i> (.) is the          |
|    |              | right term to put on it.  |

Thomas' question contains several interesting features, the most obvious of which is the way in which he renders Abbott's opposition to same-sex marriage as a morally accountable matter. Here, his question can be seen to construct two main realities. First it works to define discrimination as the unfair treatment of the 'innocent'. In this case, Thomas is able to use his subject position of 'abiding citizen' to highlight the injustice of how, despite long years of serving his nation (l.1–2), his family still faces marital discrimination due to his son's sexual orientation (l.1–3). Second, this account attributes discrimination as arising from ignorance and fear: Thomas' personal journey of revelation in which he was previously homophobic but then suddenly 'saw the light' functions to position Abbott's views against marriage as being similarly ignorant and ill informed. Thus, Thomas' account functions to construct the opposition of gay marriage as a form of real-life discrimination, which must be overcome, and results in Thomas questioning whether Abbott will ever change his mind to give gay men, like his son, the 'dignity and respect' (l.9) they deserve.

Abbott's response is structured in a way that conversation analysts have found to be common among interlocutors undertaking a dispreferred response (Pomerantz, 1984). That is, he agrees with Geoff at first (l.11–17), before disagreeing on l.17–18. This kind of discursive work allows Abbott to defend himself from the accusations of prejudice made by Mr Thomas. By initially agreeing with Mr Thomas, Abbott attempts to reassert his identity as a person who is not scared or ignorant of gay people but rather one who also believes in fairness for all. Indeed, from l.11 to 15, Abbott highlights his strong attitudes against discrimination and towards a society whereby everyone is treated the same. The use of words like 'dignity' (l.12,13), 'respect' (l.12,13) and 'heart' (l.12) taps into the ideological resource of morality, in which treating others differentially is seen as problematic and unethical and thus enhances Abbott's self-construction as a person who practices equality. The use of maximization, present in words like 'absolutely' (l.11,14) and 'always' (l.12), anchors the fact that Abbott understands—and 'always' has—the precise boundary line between discriminatory and non-discriminatory behaviour. Furthermore, in l.15,16, Abbott's talk can be seen to positively appraise same-sex relationships through repetitively using words like 'terrific'. This functions to protect Abbott from Thomas' accusations of fear and ignorance and instead situates Abbott as somebody who knows how successful same-sex commitments can be and thus is not ignorant.

Consequently, when Mr Abbott's disclaimer, 'but I just don't think (.) that (.) uh *marriage* (.) is the right term to put it on' (l.17–18), is delivered, it fol-



lows an account that positions him as so opposed to discrimination, that it is impossible to imagine his views as belonging to this category. Instead of refuting Mr Thomas' accusations, which may be viewed as a guilty defence, Mr Abbott instead aligns himself with Thomas' views on equality, thus affirming his disapproval at treating gay people unfairly. Consequently, Abbott's account constructs a reality whereby the prohibition of same-sex marriage simply does not classify as discrimination but is vaguely to do with 'terms' (l.17). Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) refer to this kind of discursive strategy as 'ontological gerrymandering', an accomplishment in which interlocutors 'manipulate a boundary making certain phenomena problematic while leaving others unproblematic' (p. 214).

Similarly, Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) have identified a pervasive discursive resource or practice that participants use to manage such inconsistencies in their discourse, which they called the principle/practice dichotomy. While on the one hand speakers invariably espouse egalitarian principles and ideals, on the other, they are undermined by practical considerations. Such 'practical talk' is deployed in ways that justify and legitimate existing inequities in society. Thus in more naturalistic conversational settings, people articulate a complex set of positions which blend egalitarian views with discriminatory ones. Discursive research of this kind is therefore able to explicate how existing inequities are maintained and reproduced in society despite claims to the contrary.

Notably in the example above, the analysis attends to both the local interactional concerns of the two speakers (their stake and identity as fair and moral beings) and the shared ideological resources that they invoke in their talk to construct specific realities or versions of the world (in this case, what does and does not constitute discrimination). Drawing from CA, we are able to see how people can do 'disagreement' in the most agreeable of ways to fend off accusations of discrimination and homophobia: at the same time, turning to more critical approaches, we can see how liberal individualist principles and values can be deployed in contradictory ways to justify existing inequalities and constrain the rights of minorities. However, CDA may be less interested in how speakers actually do disagreement as a social practice, especially in contexts where their values and identity may be at stake, but rather how resistance to marriage equality is part of a broader discourse of heteronormativity that operates throughout all layers of society. The emphasis and focus in CDA is on the parameters of this discourse, its historical development and its political implications.

## Summary

The discursive turn in psychology which began around 30 years ago is a central defining feature of critical social psychology. DA—the systematic study of text and talk—has led to the radical re-specification of social psychology's central topics: topics such as attitudes, social influence, identity, attributions and prejudice. DP rejects the search for internal mental representations and the reliance on internal mechanisms to understand social life. Instead, discourse is seen as *constitutive* and *functional* and hence is claimed to be the proper site of social psychological analysis. Discursive interaction is patterned and ordered, drawing on shared discursive resources such as interpretive repertoires to bring social reality into being and to manage people's identities. Unfortunately, however, social psychology remains largely unaffected by recent developments in DP. The following quote by Holtgraves and Kashima (2008) demonstrates the extent to which mainstream social psychology has remained impervious and blissfully unaware of the discursive turn in psychology.

Many of the processes that are most central to social cognition—attribution, person perception, stereotyping and so on—involve language in some manner. People use language to communicate to one another (and to researchers) their attributions, perceptions, and stereotypes, for example, with language use sometimes shaping the very products being communicated. ... It is, in fact, difficult to think of any social-cognitive processes that do not involve language in some manner. Clearly the study of language can contribute greatly to the understanding of social thought and action. ... Unfortunately ... The role of language has not received the focal attention that it deserves in social cognition. (2008, p. 73)

Hopefully this chapter has demonstrated that this is clearly not the case and that in the last 30 years there has been a systematic and rigorous programme of research that specifically addresses the role of language in social psychology's central topics. Later chapters in this book will demonstrate precisely how this has led to the theoretical and empirical re-specification of such topics.

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# 12

## Psychosocial Research

Stephanie Taylor

### Introduction

The most notable feature of psychosocial research is its exploration of problems in terms of the interconnections between subjectivities and societies, in contrast to more conventional research approaches which might separate ‘personal’ and ‘social’ or ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ as distinct categories and levels of analysis. Some of the best-known psychosocial research has therefore been transdisciplinary, bringing the foci of psychology and psychotherapies to topics like class and climate change which have more usually been studied by academics from, respectively, sociology and geography rather than psychology. However, the relation of psychosocial studies to the psychology discipline remains complex. Many psychosocial concerns are those of social psychology, including self, subjectivity and identity, relationships and intimacy, and emotions, sometimes linked to the newer concept of ‘affect’. In addition, there has been substantial input from psychologists into the development of psychosocial studies, through the work of both historic figures (William James, Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein) and contemporary social and critical psychologists, including Stephen Frosh, Wendy Hollway, Paul Stenner, Valerie Walkerdine and Margaret Wetherell. Yet, many psychosocial academics have come from other disciplines, such as sociology and geography, and one sociologist suggests, in a rather caricatured criticism, that a major attraction for

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many students and researchers is that psychosocial research addresses conventional psychological concerns, such as ‘minds’, ‘feelings’ and ‘people’, without ‘the besetting positivism and scientism of much academic psychology’ (Rustin, 2014, p. 198).

The first section of this chapter outlines how psychosocial studies developed in part as a response to claimed deficiencies in the tradition of psychology which includes social constructionist and discursive psychology. The following section looks at a definition of psychosocial studies and sets out three key concepts which are common to the variety of theoretical and research-based writing presented as psychosocial. These are the concept of an interface or ‘inbetweenness’, implicit even in the term psychosocial, the concept of the ‘extra-rational’ as aspects of problems and situations which psychosocial researchers attempt to capture, and the concept of ‘affect’ which has varied meanings but relates in some references to the extra-rational. The following section discusses several published studies as examples of the application of psychosocial research to real-life problems, with a special focus on the different methods which have been used. The final sections of the chapter review current trends in psychosocial research and discuss its future relationship to the psychology discipline.

## **Critique of Mainstream Social Psychology Theory and Research**

The formation of psychosocial studies as a distinctive area of research has followed in large part from critiques of the psychology tradition which includes social constructionism (e.g. Gergen, 1985), discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). This tradition, developed mainly in the 1980s, established within social psychology some of the premises associated with post-structuralism more generally. These include the rejection of predictive theories which model relationships and causality in terms of discrete factors, and also the rejection of the notion of a universal essentialist individual who may be to some extent socialised to adapt to a particular society but remains bounded and agentic. In addition, the discursive tradition introduced analytic techniques involving the close examination of language data. The development of the tradition has been associated with an attempt to shift psychology away from ‘an old positivist paradigm’ (Parker,



2012, p. 472). However, this 'turn to language' inevitably came to be seen as introducing new problems.

Many of the critiques of the discursive tradition follow from its supposed concern with language as a purely linguistic entity, that is, with words as separate from their contexts and whatever they refer to and, relatedly, with language use as rational and intellectual, concerned only with logical arguments and connections. Discursive approaches have therefore been criticised for what they exclude, including the material world, embodiment (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008), experience, personal investment (discussed below), and 'desires, anxieties, and needs' (Woodward, 2015, p. 62). Although these critiques rest heavily on an interpretation of both language and discourse which can itself be challenged as overly narrow (Taylor, 2015), they contributed to the development of psychosocial studies. For example, Paul Stenner (2014a), proposing a psychosocial approach which 'attends to experience as it unfolds in and informs those networks and regimes of social interactivity (practice and communication) that constitute concrete historical and cultural settings' (p. 205), refers to subjectivity as 'an aspect of experience that cannot be reduced to discursive practices, even if those practices structure it and pattern it' (p. 206, emphasis added).

This points to a further set of critiques, regarding discursive conceptualisations of subjectivity and the subject. In the discursive psychological tradition, the subject is assumed to be socially constituted, positioned within multiple (and unequal) relations. Because these relations and the situatedness are fluid, the subject is fragmented and unfinalised in its identifications and sense of self, shaped by ongoing activities and interactions. Discursive psychologists therefore challenge theories of a universal subject, insisting on the inescapability of relationality and context, including the aspects of society which are commonly discussed as cultural, economic and historical. Discursive psychologists also challenge cognitive psychological models of the person as a bounded individual, criticising assumptions of internal mechanisms and functions. For example, part of the discursive psychological argument is that a discussion of conventional psychological phenomena such as remembering or emotion should confine its reference to observable actions within discourse, treating these as situated and oriented to the immediate interaction, rather than as the expression of the underlying mental processes (e.g. Edwards, 1997) of a unitary 'container' subject.

This conceptualisation of a discursive subject is obviously inconsistent with most everyday or common-sense notions of the person. In addition, the notion that a person is no more than a loose aggregate of the different relations and positions given by multiple social relationships and activities

has been criticised by many academics. Yes, someone may be a mother and a teacher and a Green Party voter, middle class, Hindu by family religion and so on, but does she not also have a distinctive personal identity which is separate to these (and other) categorisations and more than all of them combined together? Questions of this kind and attempts to understand 'subjectivity as more than a subsidiary effect, as more than the sum total of combined discursive positions' (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 7) have contributed to the development of psychosocial studies in the UK.

One important starting point for an alternative theory of the subject was the collection *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (Henriques et al. 1984/1998), originally published in 1984. In this collection, Wendy Hollway argued that the multiple available identities or discursive positions are not all of equivalent importance (Hollway, 1984/1988). As in her later work with Tony Jefferson, Hollway drew on Object Relations Theory to propose that an attachment to one particular discursive or subject position can be understood in psychoanalytic terms as an 'identity investment' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 19). This investment is the outcome of a 'unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended against' (p. 24). Hollway and Jefferson's work therefore employs concepts from psychoanalysis and associated psychodynamic theories in order to address the problem of 'the disappearance of the (totally decentered) subject' (Hoggett, 2014, p. 192) in the discursive tradition, and in doing so reclaims the continuity and interiority of the subject which discursive theories had previously challenged. This is not the only version of a psychosocial subject, but it remains central to psychosocial studies.

The narrative of critique which I have presented in this section is inevitably over-tidy and linear because the discursive tradition did not replace or even substantially disrupt existing (social) psychology approaches. It is now one of several paradigms, including so-called positivist research, which coexist uncomfortably within the psychology discipline. In this context, psychosocial research is sometimes invoked to present similar critiques of mainstream psychology to those previously offered by the discursive tradition (although usually in less caricatured terms than those of Rustin, quoted in the introduction to the chapter). For example, Christopher Groves et al. (2016) present a 'psychosocial framework' to challenge the assumption that people are 'rational choosers of behaviours', criticising factor models in social psychology which centre on this concept. In another example, Rosalind Gill (2012), discussing 'the sexualisation of culture', argues against a trend of psychology-based US research which quantifies 'sexualised' media material and assumes a

unidirectional influence or causality of ‘harm flowing in one direction from the media to the individual’ (p. 488). Gill contrasts this with research in media and cultural studies which, she suggests, is also problematic because it tends to overstate the ‘active, knowledge, sophisticated and critical’ nature of audiences and media consumers (p. 489). For Gill, psychosocial research can avoid these extremes; she therefore calls for

psychosocial approaches that are capable of thinking about the complicated, entangled relationships between visual culture, desire and subjectivity, and rethinking media ‘effects’ not as discrete, measurable events, but as part of ongoing processes of the disciplining and reconstructing of selfhood—in which we are all implicated. (p. 494)

These examples suggest that psychosocial research has to some extent taken over a critical position in relation to the psychology discipline as a whole, including both the discursive tradition and more mainstream areas.

## Presentation of Critical Alternatives

The previous section offered a brief account of the development of psychosocial research as a critique of (some approaches in) social psychology, including discursive psychology. This section explores the distinguishing features of psychosocial studies, although the extent to which this coheres as a single field distinct from psychology is debatable. A useful starting point for discussion is provided by the following definition, developed for a recent book series:

Psychosocial Studies seeks to investigate the ways in which psychic and social processes demand to be understood as always implicated in each other, as mutually constitutive, coproduced, or abstracted levels of a single dialectical process. ... Psychosocial Studies is also distinguished by its emphasis on affect, the irrational and unconscious processes, often, but not necessarily, understood psychoanalytically. (cited in Frosh, 2014, p. 161)

The definition indicates the continuing importance for psychosocial studies of the concepts and theories from psychoanalysis which were introduced through the work of Hollway, Jefferson and others. The definition is open, suggesting that psychosocial research is ‘often, but not necessarily, understood psychoanalytically’ (emphases added), a point which has generated considerable debate. For example, Paul Stenner (2014a) has called for ‘an

open definition of psycho-social studies as a critical and nonfoundational transdiscipline' without 'the premature consolidation of a version... foundationed upon psychoanalysis' (p. 205). More specifically, Stenner rejects the psychoanalytic assumption of a separation between an 'inner world' and an 'outer world' (terms which are associated with 'British School psychoanalysis', Frosh, 2014, p. 163), arguing that both are abstractions which derive from modernity. Other writers, including myself, have argued that it is not necessary to adopt the language of psychoanalysis to do the work of 'psychosocial', proposing instead that developments within the discursive tradition of psychology can similarly merge conventionally separate levels and entities to explore the mutual constitution of subject and social context (McAvoy, 2015; Scully, 2015; Taylor, 2015; Wetherell, 2003). However, for many academics the psychoanalytic is an essential feature of the psychosocial. For example, Woodward suggests that the term itself refers to 'the connections, and ... the spaces between the social and the psychic' (Woodward, 2015, p. 2: emphasis added).

The definition also indicates some key concepts for psychosocial studies. The first follows from the point that 'psychosocial' does not refer to two separate or separable components that is 'psychological' and 'social' or 'psychic' and 'social'. Rather, psychosocial studies theorise and research how these are 'always implicated in each other'. Various terms and theorisations have been offered for the new site or unity produced by such 'connections or interfaces between the person and the larger realm of the social, variously defined' (Taylor, 2015, p. 9). The above definition refers to 'a single dialectical process', whereas Gill mentions 'ongoing processes' (plural) as well as 'complicated, entangled relationships'. Some writers have adopted an alternative spelling of the term 'psychosocial' as 'psycho-social', with a hyphen, in order to signal 'overlap and penetration' as another version of this mutual implicatedness (Hoggett, 2014, p. 192). The sociologist Kath Woodward, using the language of psychoanalysis, opens the interface into a 'third space' that is 'somewhere between the psyche and the social but that nonetheless involves both' (p.88). Somewhat differently, Stenner (2014b) suggests that 'betweenness' can be conceived using the concept of liminality which 'points to the importance of thresholds of transition, or zones of becoming'. It can be argued that a similar conception of mutual implicatedness already existed in social psychology, including in discursive psychology (Taylor, 2015). Nevertheless, the concept of an interface or betweenness is a key one for psychosocial studies and its project of connecting social and political issues with subjectivities.

A second key concept is indicated by the reference, in the definition for the book series quoted above, to 'the irrational'. This term is of course taken

from psychoanalytic theories. However, psychosocial research which draws on other traditions also attempts to go beyond the rational in its analyses, as in the attempts outlined above to take account of more than language, and also in Gill's suggestion, quoted in the previous section, that psychosocial research can go beyond what is 'discrete' and 'measurable', including to accommodate 'desire'. In this chapter, I therefore adopt the broader term of the extra-rational for this second key concept of psychosocial studies. This overlaps in its reference with a third key concept 'affect', although that term has a wider reference.

As part of its exploration of subjectivities and the extra-rational, psychosocial research often utilises the term 'affect' (in one but not all of its meanings) to refer to feelings and emotion, especially when reinterpreted as a social or collective phenomenon which operates between and across people rather than within individuals. For example, Steve Pile (2010), reviewing influential writing on affect from the geography discipline, suggests that affect is defined in contrast to 'cognition, reflexivity, consciousness and humanness' (p. 8), using 'cognition' in the sense of what is 'thought' or thinkable. Simon Clarke (2006), drawing closely on Hollway and Jefferson, suggests that the study of many 'societal phenomena', such as 'racism, sexism, inequality and social exclusion', requires an acknowledgement that

we are not just rational social creatures but live in a world of social relations that are tempered by feelings and emotive dynamics that are often not obvious, or to use psychoanalytic language, motivation in action is often unconscious. (p. 1161)

Clarke's work is therefore an example of psychosocial research which elides the irrational or extra-rational, the emotional and the unconscious.

An additional connotation of the term affect, following from the collective reference noted above, is that it can be used to refer to the transmission of feelings in some manner which is, again, extra-rational and even 'uncanny'. In this further elaboration, affect, unlike emotion, does not originate within the individual body but is assumed to be an unbounded and transpersonal flow, moving between bodies. The contribution of this rather difficult conceptualisation can be shown through a relatively early example from the work of the cultural theorist, Sarah Ahmed (2004). Ahmed is interested in how emotions move or flow between people and also how they become temporarily attached to different objects or signs; she cites the example of fear becoming attached to an asylum seeker or a burglar. She suggests that

the sideways movement between objects, which works to stick objects together as signs of threat, is shaped by multiple histories. The movement between signs does not have its origin in the psyche, but is a trace of how histories remain alive in the present. (p. 126)

This is therefore an attempt to understand powerful feelings like fear and hate as social phenomena, beginning not with an individual psyche, as in a psychoanalytic account, but a sociohistoric context in which, by implication, the affects already exist and circulate, with the potential to become attached to new objects. To understand where they become attached or how they 'stick' different words together, like 'terrorist' and 'Islam', it is necessary to investigate 'past histories of association' (p.127). Ahmed refers to an 'affective economy' but an alternative metaphor for her account might be a weather system in which global movements and changes produce local conditions of wind, temperature and rainfall. Her work indicates the potential implications of this conceptualisation of 'affect' as different to 'emotion', although in work of many writers on the psychosocial the terms are still used almost synonymously.

Somewhat differently, Margaret Wetherell (2012) uses the term 'affect' while retaining the focus on the emotions and the extra-rational (although not inevitably irrational) but rejecting a psychoanalytic or psychodynamic account. Instead, developing Ian Burkitt's argument (Burkitt, 2014) that emotion must always be understood in relational terms, Wetherell proposes the concept of 'affective practice' which, she suggests, incorporates notions of 'ongoingness' and 'patterns in process' (p. 23). The concept builds on the discursive psychological and ethnomethodological notions of ongoing practice as interactional and constitutive of the contexts and order of social life. Wetherell discusses affect as situated activity based on acquired practices, both social and personal: 'affective practice is based on a semiotic hinterland organised by personal biography' (p. 153) and the ways that past practice results in an accumulation of 'affective habits and associations' (p. 155) which are 'carried forward into new relational fields' (p. 155). For Wetherell, transmission can also be understood in terms of interactions and relational practices. She criticises accounts of the spread of affect as irrational, for example in the behaviour of protesting crowds. She suggests that in such accounts, an us/them distinction may operate:

We conclude that the affect of those we disagree with spreads by contagion, we decide that our own affect, on the other hand, when we protest, is simply caused by events and is a justifiable reaction. (p. 148)

Yet another conception of affect is that associated with 'process' psychology (Brown & Stenner, 2009).<sup>1</sup> An example is offered by Brown and Tucker (2010) who argue that the term 'provides a way of engaging with "experience" shorn of some of its humanist garb' (p. 232) while also capturing some of its non-rational aspects. This position is presented in part as another critique of discursive psychology which Brown and Tucker regard as static, erasing 'flow and transformation' (p. 234). They suggest that the account which they offer recaptures a 'dynamism' absent in discursive psychology (although, as with some previous critiques, their claims about discursive psychology can be disputed, e.g. Taylor, 2015). Brown and Tucker develop their account of affect from the work of Henri Bergson, adopting his notion of experience as doubly partial. Perception is 'a dynamic, adaptive process', selective and inevitably incomplete, which 'carves out' aspects of 'a mobile, ever changing reality' that can never be wholly captured (p. 235). A paraphrase of their account might be that experience is a glimpse, from a limited viewpoint, of a fast-moving ever-changing scene, like the view from a dirty train window! From Brian Massumi, Brown and Tucker take the further points that this perception is a form of potential engagement with reality, shaped by the 'current needs ... situated concerns' and 'ability to act' of the perceiver (p. 236) and producing, out of these relationships, the perceiver's sense of her/himself as an individual.

Brown and Tucker's work is an example of a different psychosocial approach in a Deleuzian tradition. Their account draws attention to experience as inevitably situated and shifting, linked to unstated (and unstateable) possibilities, so involving more than can be pinned down in rational accounts, and also as non-generalisable, since the possibilities or potentialities will be given by the particularities of both the immediate situation and the experiencing body. The difficulty, as they acknowledge, is to import concepts from philosophy into the social sciences, including social psychology. Brown and Tucker conclude that 'intermediary concepts' are needed to move from the general concerns of philosophy to the specificities of research in order to engage with participants' accounts of their situated experience and to illuminate potentialities.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this form of psychosocial research is its orientation to futures and possibilities. This contrasts with the 'thick description' of what is or was which has characterised most research in the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Stenner notes (personal communication) that affect is often concerned with accommodating modes of being and reasons for action that are important but might fall short of the conventional definitions of rationality; arguably, affectivity has its own 'logic' or version of 'rationality', and it is too crass to characterise that as simply 'irrational' (as in the classic modernist split between reason and emotion). This is another reason for adopting the term 'extra-rational'.



qualitative tradition, including in social and discursive psychology. The difficulty, of course, is to ground a forward analysis into the future, including potentials and possibilities, so that it is not reduced to free speculation. This is not a novel problem but Brown and Tucker's work suggests that a new challenge for psychosocial researchers is to address it by developing an empirical approach to the formulation of more grounded claims of this kind. The next section of the chapter outlines some examples of psychosocial research into 'real life' situations, including one article which attempts to address the issue of forward analysis set out by Brown and Tucker.

## Applied Psychosocial Research

The previous sections have outlined the development of psychosocial research and introduced three concepts which characterise it: an interface or site of betweenness which links the problems of subjectivities and societies investigated by psychosocial researchers; the extra-rational as an aspect (or aspects) of these problems and affect as one version of the extra-rational. This section will present some examples of psychosocial research into 'real life' situations to illustrate the variety of problems, forms of data and analytic approaches associated with the field.

An early and influential example of research described as 'psychosocial' was a project of Helen Lucey, June Melody and Valerie Walkerdine, 'Transitions to Womenhood', which investigated the difficulties faced by girls growing up in the UK. The research was presented in their highly influential book *Growing Up Girl* (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001) and also in a 2003 article which I discuss here (Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003). One of the aims of this research was to investigate social class by going beyond 'rational' accounts to investigate 'conscious and unconscious psychological processes ... not only in the research process but in the very constitution of contemporary gendered and classed subjectivities' (p. 279). (There is an obvious similarity here to Clarke's account, above.) This aim followed on from the researchers' conceptualisation of a subject as 'not entirely rational' but defended (as in Hollway and Jefferson's work, also discussed above). A further premise was that 'class' is not a straightforwardly objective category, for instance, as defined economically, but rather, a sociocultural position involving 'identifications', 'dis-identifications ...disavowals and desires'.

The researchers on 'Transitions to Womenhood' conducted a longitudinal interview study and analysed their data in a three-part procedure. The first part, common to most qualitative research projects, involved taking

the interview data at 'face value', for example, as evidence of the events of participants' lives. The second part involved looking at 'words, images and metaphors', as in a discursive analysis of language data, but the main purpose here was to look for evidence of 'unconscious processes'. To do this, the researchers looked at the talk itself, for instance, 'Inconsistencies and contradictions, beginnings, fade-outs, connections, absences and silences', and also considered their own responses to the interview encounter, recorded in their fieldnotes. These included points in the interview when the researcher had felt bored or irritated or anxious; in psychoanalysis, these feelings can be evidence of unconscious communications or transferences. In a third stage of analysis, the researchers worked together to uncover further unconscious communications which may not have been recognised by the researcher herself in her role as the interviewer, talking to the families. Relevant evidence here could be a response or interjection from the researcher which changed the direction of the talk.

The example discussed in the article (Lucey et al., 2003) comes from a family's discussion of whether their daughter would eventually move away from her parents' home. Part of the analytic interpretation was that the researcher's contributions created tension in the interview situation and also followed from her own experiences of leaving home. The detail of the encounter was interpreted as evidence for a more general claim based on the whole data set, that it has been far less common and acceptable for working class than middle-class young women to move some distance from their families, for example, to go to university or advance their careers. The analysis therefore included an interpretation of the extra-rational, specifically the unexpressed and unrecognised anxieties around girls leaving home and, more broadly, the meanings of home and stability for working-class people, at a time in the UK when there was a major political policy of selling council houses, creating pressure for former tenants to move on as part of a trajectory of upward mobility. As this account of the article indicates, the research exemplifies many of the features of psychosocial research noted in the previous sections, including the use of psychoanalytic theory in an account of the extra-rational as part of an investigation of subjectivities and contemporary social problems.

A more recent example of psychosocial gender and family research is presented by Ann Phoenix and Bruna Seu (Phoenix and Seu 2013). This article discusses the effects of serial migration, a common phenomenon in non-affluent countries which results in members of the same family having to live apart for long periods. The research the article presents investigates daughter-mother relationships in which the mothers migrated to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s, leaving their daughters with other family members in the Caribbean, in most cases for a

number of years. Drawing on a data set of interviews with 39 women and 14 men who were child serial migrants, the article focuses on interviews with four of the women, analysing their stories of their childhoods, including their reunions with their mothers. According to the authors,

The women's experiences of serial migration were psychosocial in that they were produced in particular sociocultural contexts and were central to their subjectivities as well as to their daughtering. (p. 312)

The analytic approach which is adopted in this article combines narrative analysis (which is not defined in detail as a separate approach) with 'a psychoanalytically informed reading that is sensitive to the conflictual and dilemmatic nature of the psychodynamics involved in the reunion' (p. 304). This is similar to the first and second stage of Lucey et al.'s analysis, except that Phoenix and Seu do not attempt to analyse the relationship with the researcher/interviewer or her responses. The analysis refers to Object Relations Theory and argues that

A psychoanalytically informed reading of the women's narratives enabled a 'thicker', dynamic understanding of the women's stories and captured the complex and conflictual nature of the reunion with their mothers. (p. 313)

This analysis uses as evidence both the participants' (reported) feelings and actions in situations which they describe, and the ways in which their accounts are structured, for example, with gaps, or juxtaposing references to past and present time. As one instance of this, the authors note that

The timelessness and switching back and forwards in the narrative hints at the multilayered, deeply disorienting nature of the reunion as not just being traumatic itself, but reactivating the old trauma of the separation (p. 307)

Phoenix and Seu's article therefore conforms to the general description of psychosocial research offered in this chapter, investigating a larger social phenomenon (the effects of serial migration on family relationships) through an analysis of subjectivities and attachments. The analysis refers (briefly) to affect. It refers to the extra-rational in psychoanalytic terms (e.g. 'unconscious' and 'repressed') although the analytic approach differs from that of Lucey et al. (2003).

A third study is presented in an article by Mark Finn and Karen Henwood (Finn & Henwood, 2009), published in a social psychology journal. This

research investigated contemporary fatherhood through a longitudinal interview study with 30 UK first-time fathers, with additional data from focus groups. The researchers analyse the men's accounts to investigate their 'identificatory imaginings' (p. 549) of fatherhood. These are understood to be shaped by both social meanings, including discourses of hegemonic masculinity and new fatherhood, and personal meanings, following from participants' aspirations and biographical trajectories. This is therefore another version of interface or betweenness, played out in the talk of the participants. Subjectivity and the social are here conceptualised in discursive terms. The authors discuss at some length their interpretation of psychosocial research, suggesting it involves

a concern for what holds discourse and interiority/externality in place at the level of the subject, and what it means to be a person with a particular version of self and the world while not reproducing social/individual dualism or individualistic discourse (p. 550).

This article is therefore relatively unusual in that it defines the psychosocial with reference to discursive, and narrative, but not psychoanalytic concepts (although see also McAvoy, 2015; Scully, 2015; Taylor, 2015). Referring to critiques of Hollway and Jefferson's work and related approaches, Finn and Henwood specifically reject the use of psychoanalytic theorising, stating

we want to maintain a concern for internal life that is not separate from the social world and discursive repertoires that shape it, but nor do we want to essentialize this interiority in psychoanalytic and truth-testifying terms (p. 550).

The fourth example of psychosocial research to be discussed in this section addresses a problem more usually associated with geography or environmental studies than psychology. The research project, Energy Biographies, was conducted by an interdisciplinary group of researchers, including psychologists, to investigate socioenvironmental sustainability by looking at people's energy-use practices and their decisions (not) to adopt more sustainable practices, like cycling. In a 2016 article, Christopher Groves, Karen Henwood, Fiona Shirani, Catherine Butler, Karen Parkhill and Nick Pidgeon propose that life practices must be understood in their social settings and in relation to biographical experiences. The analysis presented in the article focuses on 'transformative moments' (Groves et al. 2016, p. 9) in the formation of attachments to particular practices. The authors argue that these moments are linked to emotional meanings or investments and to valued identities.

Like Phoenix and Seu, Groves et al. refer to Object Relations Theory but without attempting the analysis of transference utilised by Lucey et al. The psychosocial approach of Groves et al. uses interview material as evidence of people's practices, memories, experiences and feelings, treating it as reliable reportage without exploring the narrative or discursive features referred to by Phoenix and Seu. This article presents its approach as a challenge to the use of multi-factor modules to explain decision-making and behaviours, challenging 'models of social change that assume individuals can be treated as rational choosers of behaviours'. In this respect, it can be seen to challenge mainstream social psychology. An additional notable feature of the study is that, although working in a different theoretical tradition to Brown and Tucker, it engages with the problem they considered, that is, a future-oriented analysis which produces findings concerning possibility of change. In this case, the concern is for changes to more environmentally sustainable practices. Groves et al. recognise how attachments to current practices are linked to identity. They argue, however, that individual and shared patterns of attachment do not inevitably produce resistance to change but, equally, can 'encourage participation in more sustainable practices, as part of an identity' (p. 25). They therefore suggest that the analytic framework they present 'opens up the possibility of connecting practice-theoretical approaches to psychosocial work relating to lifecourse transitions' (p. 26).

## Current Trends in Psychosocial Research

The relationship between (social) psychology and the field of psychosocial studies or psychosocial research remains complex. Psychosocial research utilises concepts and whole areas of theory which are strongly associated with psychology, while rejecting most of the discipline's established approaches, sometimes in caricatured terms. In this respect, psychosocial studies might appear to be the successor to the tradition of social constructionism, discourse analysis and discursive psychology, or even to be the latest 'turn' in that tradition, taking up a critical and innovative position in relation to mainstream psychology. An important difference is that so many psychosocial academics locate themselves outside psychology, either defining psychosocial studies as a new discipline or retaining their previous association with other disciplines in the social sciences or humanities. In addition, their theoretical and methodological allegiances remain extremely varied (psychoanalytic, Deleuzian, narrative, discursive, etc.). At the time of writing, psychosocial research continues to have a strong institutional presence in the UK through named departments,

research groups, research projects and journals which are associated with a number of universities. However, there is so little agreement on the reference of the psychosocial (or even the spelling of the term: 'psychosocial' or 'psycho-social') that the field seems less likely to cohere further than to divide again, perhaps into social psychoanalysis, transdisciplinary psychology and the (existing and already varied field of) narrative. The psychosocial label could be retained as a reference for a common concern, that is, the investigation of the interconnectedness of society and subjectivities, utilising methods which admit of some capture of the extra-rational, however, conceived.

## Summary

This chapter has discussed the field of psychosocial research or psychosocial studies as it relates to social psychology. Critiques of the conceptualisations of the social and psychological subject associated with the discursive tradition in social psychology led to the introduction into academic research of concepts and methods (such as the analysis of transference) associated with psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Following these initial developments in psychosocial research, academics in a range of disciplines have drawn on varied theories and methodological approaches to explore problems of society and subjectivities, conceptualised as inextricably interconnected and not reducible to different 'levels' of explanation or interpretation or to rational relationships of causality or influence. The chapter has proposed that three key concepts characterise the field of psychosocial studies: the extra-rational, affect and an interface or betweenness which is neither psychological (nor psychic) nor social. A review of different sources was presented to illustrate these, then four published studies which their authors categorised as 'psychosocial' were discussed to show the range of psychosocial research and its applications to different 'real life' situations. A review of current trends acknowledged the continuing variety within psychosocial studies despite the common purpose and concepts identified here and the possibility that the 'psychosocial' (or 'psycho-social') label will not be sufficient to contain this variety in the future.

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# 13

## Innovations in Qualitative Methods

Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke, and Debra Gray

The ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies and methods—primarily qualitative—not to mention politics, associated with critical psychologies have shaken the foundations of the discipline. Critical (social) psychology is, for many (but not all), synonymous with qualitative research, research which has focused on (participant) meaning, understood knowledge as contextual, valued the subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher and (often) treated language as a productive force, rather than a neutral medium for communication. For many, it brought sweet relief from the tight corsets of positivist empiricism and quantitative experimentation. From the early days, the richness and flexibility of interviews dominated the qualitative research scene; discourse analysis (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987) became de rigueur in certain circles. Then, discursive psychology challenged the value and validity of interview-generated data (e.g. Potter & Hepburn, 2008), but many of us clung to the comfort and possibility of the interview; when focus groups offered a way to focus on topics *and* social-meaning-making (Wilkinson, 1998), we rapidly incorporated those into our methodological tool kit.

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The field of qualitative research—most particularly in critical (social) psychology—appears marked by both an established tradition and exciting innovation. We're sure others share our slight sense of despair at seeing *yet another* interview study—or another 'discourse analysis', 'grounded theory' or (now) even 'thematic analysis' of qualitative data—where some thinking outside of these now *traditional* approaches could have resulted in a far more exciting project—new and different results, answers to different questions, different possibilities for participant engagement and/or local or broader socio-political change. Don't get us wrong: we love interviews, discourse analysis and even thematic analysis! But we believe critical social psychology needs to remain cutting edge in its thinking around the ways and whys of our data collection and our data analysis, the potentialities and purposes of our research. It's a vital, reflexive project for the discipline. With this challenge in mind, we offer a chapter that signals moments of innovation and development but locates these within the contexts and traditions of qualitative researching familiar to many of us. The chapter aims to serve a practical purpose: signalling and illustrating the use of 'innovation' in accessible ways.

Innovation *is* a fraught term—always inviting a 'call that innovation?' critique or a competitive claim of 'my innovation is better than yours'. Innovation in qualitative researching happens in diverse ways—some innovations offer seismic shifts that radically change the research landscape, while others offer gentle waves that imperceptibly, but inevitably, shift the contours of the shoreline. Over the decades, innovation has developed across the whole domain of qualitative research, and although psychology hasn't always been *the* innovator, or even an early adopter, it has been fostered and flourished in psychology in a range of ways.

The rapid expansion of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fundamentally shifted how many of us *do research* (Hine, 2005). For some, this has led us to look at new forms of data (e.g. blogs [e.g. Hookway, 2008] and online forums [e.g. Giles & Newbold, 2010; Jowett, 2015]) that provide important insight into the production (and consumption) of everyday social life. Researchers within discursive traditions (including conversation analysis) have theorised and opened up the value of (such) 'naturalistic' data—data where the researcher's influence is minimised or entirely absent—which also include talk data. In a wide range of ways, *visual* elements have been incorporated into data *generation* (Reavey, 2011); increasingly, they've shifted from secondary to the text, to an integral aspect of the analysis itself. Scholars seeking different forms of knowledge, and *social engagement*, have pushed beyond the traditional 'ivory tower' modes of dissemination (and researching), and disciplinary silos, with developments like *performative* social

science that connect with, draw on and develop tools from the creative and performing arts (e.g. Guiney Yallop, Lopez de Vallejo, & Wright, 2008; Jones, 2015). Indigenous research frameworks have challenged westernised modes of ethics and researcher relationships, and knowledge production and, in some cases, introduced quite radically different knowledge frameworks (e.g. Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008 ; Smith, 2012). We have been challenged to move from reporting ‘what is’ to engaging in ‘future forming’ actions (e.g. Gergen, 2015).

In the sections below, we explore four particular ways in which change has pushed qualitative researching beyond the familiar. We have chosen these both for their practicality *and* because they are tools and techniques we have used ourselves; as committed qualitative researchers, we can attest to their value. First, we identify the way innovation has occurred in response to rapidly changing socio-technological contexts: adaptations and expansions of traditional modes of researching, such as interviewing and focus groups, to utilise the potential of the connected, online worlds we increasingly live in. Second, concurrent with, but not synonymous with, theoretical shifts that have argued against a focus just on ‘the text’ (Chamberlain, 2012), we discuss the blossoming of pluralistic or multi-modal forms of interviewing and focus group research. These two offer examples of how traditionally *qualitative* methods have expanded beyond their origins; the next two offer examples of techniques which have been released from their *quantitative* moorings: qualitative surveys offer researchers access to familiar forms of data—personal accounts, perspectives and so on—often conceptualised as ‘representing the self’, somehow; story completion tasks, in contrast, provide something radically different: a window into the *social meaning worlds* of our participants. Read on—we hope you are inspired!

## Key Concepts: Out with the Old...

Here, we explore developments in what are usually conceived of as the ‘core’ methods of qualitative data collection: interviews and focus groups. These two methods have dominated qualitative research for decades, including in critical social psychology—although critique has increasingly questioned their taken-for-granted status as *the* essential methods (e.g. see Chamberlain, 2012). We argue that no method should be static, and these are no exception. We now consider some ways these have begun to be *reimagined* within psychological research, in particular in relation to (1) the growth in online forms of data collection and (2) the move towards multi-modal forms of data collection.

## Interviews and Focus Groups as Online Methods

The rapid expansion of ICT noted above has led to opportunities for researchers to critically examine how more traditional research methods like interviews and focus groups can be reworked in online environments—and not just as ‘second-best’ options. This has led to a variety of exciting possibilities for interactive data collection online, including online focus groups (OFGs), email interviewing, Instant Messaging (IM) interviewing and the use of Internet-based video calling (e.g. *Skype*<sup>™</sup> or *FaceTime*<sup>™</sup>)—and it’s not stopping. Advances in computer-mediated communication technologies *continue to open up* new ways of collecting interactive data online.

Online approaches offer more or less radical alternatives to traditional (often in-person) interviews and focus groups. *Skype* interviews closely mimic the interactive features of the more traditional face-to-face spoken interview, in that they provide real-time interaction between the researcher and participants, and also include visual interaction. They thus retain features of interviews that are seen as essential to building rapport with participants—for example, cues such as body language (Silverman, 2013). Recent developments in video- and web-conference technologies allow researchers to conduct group discussions effectively ‘face-to-face’ (e.g. Tuttas, 2015). In contrast, OFGs, email interviews and IM interviews typically require participants to respond to questions in *written* format, and the participants and the researcher will usually never meet face-to-face (or even over the telephone). OFGs and email interviews also offer the possibility of including a temporal dimension to data collection, as they can be synchronous or asynchronous: data collection can involve the participants and researcher interacting in ‘real time’ (e.g. in a chat room or over email at a scheduled time—synchronous) or researchers posting questions that participants respond to in their own time (e.g. via a discussion board or email over the period of a week or more—asynchronous). These elements move us further away from traditional conceptions of what a focus group or interview is (and is for!). An asynchronous OFG, for instance, could never replicate the kinds of interactional dynamics of a real-time offline focus group or indeed, the ‘fast, furious, and chaotic’ (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p.102) nature of a ‘real-time’ OFG. However, what they offer are *different* possibilities for the collection of data—gains rather than losses. For example, Gibson (2010a, 2010b) argued that the detailed and considered nature of asynchronous email interviews allows participants to reflect on, and construct a narrative around, their experiences—something that’s particularly

useful for research which focuses on understanding people's past experiences and memories.

For critical researchers, a key advantage of OFGs and online interviews is the ability to (more easily) recruit beyond the 'usual suspects' (i.e. white, middle class, heterosexual, etc.) of psychological—even *qualitative* psychological—research. The Internet means that researchers can involve people from across the globe without incurring significantly added cost—although they do require participants to have access to, and a degree of comfort with, the Internet or email. Online methods can also be more inclusive for people who are reluctant to, or unable to, participate in research due to health, mobility or time constraints (Gibson, 2007; Horrell, Stephens, & Breheny, 2015; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). Young people, for example, often find it difficult to participate in more traditional focus groups as they are often reliant on others for transportation; participating online might be easier (see Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007a; Nicholas, Lach, King, Scott, Boydell, et al., 2010), and the format is typically familiar. Likewise, the written format of OFGs and email interviews can be advantageous for people who find it difficult to express themselves verbally, such as people with cognitive disabilities, or speech or hearing difficulties (Tanis, 2007). Finally, the *disembodied* nature of these methods can encourage participation by those who lack the social confidence to participate in face-to-face groups, such as individuals with appearance concerns (Fox, Rumsey, & Morris, 2007b). Thus, OFGs and online interviews can reach people that traditional interviews and focus groups cannot, and for this reason they hold appeal for critical scholars.

The anonymity offered by methods like OFGs and email interviews means that participants can choose how much of themselves to disclose (including their identities), an aspect particularly useful for participants who may value anonymity highly. For example, we used online discussion groups to research people's experiences of abortion services, precisely because we anticipated anonymity would be valued; the high rates of participation suggest it was. This is echoed by other researchers who have used OFGs or online interviews to effectively facilitate discussion across a range of potentially sensitive topics that participants might be reticent to discuss in-person, including suicide and deliberate self-harm (Adams, Rodham, & Gavin, 2005), drug consumption (Gibson, 2010a, 2010b), sexual health (Ybarra, DuBois, Parsons, Prescott, & Mustanski, 2014) and cancer (Thomas, Wootten, & Robinson, 2013). It would appear that the disembodied nature of these methods can mean that participants feel able to respond more openly without fear of judgement, embarrassment or discomfort (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Nicholas et al., 2010). And OFGs and online interviews can offer participants a great degree

of control over the research environment (for instance, around how, when and where they participate), which may also contribute to a willingness to disclose sensitive information.

It is becoming increasingly clear that these tools are not simply a way of replicating existing face-to-face methods in an online environment—doing ‘information gathering’ in a more convenient (i.e. cheaper and less time-consuming) way (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2015). Instead, there are possibilities for different kinds of interactions online, and for the collection of different kinds of data *and* from different kinds of people. This presents entirely new considerations for researchers: the ways in which online and offline social practices are entwined, for instance; the specific interactional dynamics of online contexts and how to critically engage with online spaces as both *contexts of interaction* and *spaces of being* (Giles et al., 2015; Markham, 2004). In the future, this may require an even more radical (and more critical) ‘reimagining’ of methods like focus groups and interviews!

### ‘Pluralism’ in Qualitative Data Collection

Alongside these online advances, developments in how interviews and focus groups are conducted offline have shifted the ‘nature’ of these methods and the data they produce. As part of a move away from interviews and focus groups as *monomodal* forms of data collection, and concerned only with the generation of talk, these developments are based in the recognition that human experience is complexly and completely *multi-modal*—including visual, spatial, temporal and ‘the body’ elements (Reavey, 2011). Calls for more ‘pluralism’ in qualitative psychological research have resulted in working with participants in different ways, in different places and at different times to understand their perspectives and practices (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, & Dupuis, 2011). Researchers have sought new and creative ways to bring different modalities to interviews and focus groups, including projective techniques (such as vignettes, e.g. Gray, Royall, & Malson, 2017), visual methods (such as photography, art and drawing, e.g. Silver & Reavey, 2010) and/or spatial methods (such as the use of maps or mobile methodologies or walking interviews, e.g. Gray & Manning, 2014). Many of these approaches have been around for some time, albeit not always formally in research, and particularly not in psychological research, and as more systematically applied methods, they offer exciting opportunities for new insights into a variety of topics that are of interest to social psychologists, such as emotion (Silver & Reavey, 2010), social memories (Brookfield, Brown, & Reavey, 2008), identities and belong-



ing (e.g. Gleeson & Frith, 2006; Gray & Manning, 2014) and embodiment (e.g. Brown, Cromby, Harper, Johnson, Reavey, 2011).

Most commonly, researchers have sought to bring the visual into traditionally verbal methods—for example, through photo-elicitation methods, where participants are asked to bring photographs to an interview or focus group to discuss (e.g. Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008), or, as in our research on young people's experiences in public spaces (see below; Gray & Manning, 2014), through the use of drawn maps produced and discussed during an interview or focus group. Researchers identify that including visual elements provides greater access to constructions of self, highlighting aspects of identity (e.g. emotional, embodied or emplaced) that might have been difficult to produce through solely verbal means in more traditional interviews or focus groups. Moreover, they are useful for 'bringing the outside in'—in our case, locating participant's experiences within the places and spaces that they occur. We also found that they were helpful in giving more control to participants—allowing them to set the agenda for what they considered to be important, through choosing what types of places they put (or did not put) on their maps—the same would apply to photo techniques. As with others using these methods (Gillies et al., 2005; Silver & Reavey, 2010), we found this can disrupt taken-for-granted narratives about a topic, at times making the familiar surprising and leading to new and enlightening data.

A second, and far less common, approach has sought to take interviews and focus groups out into the world—for example, 'walking and talking' interviews where the researcher is 'walked through' people's lived experiences of a particular locality or neighbourhood (e.g. Bridger, 2013; Carpiano, 2009), or methods that try to capture participants in the places and/or situations pertinent to the topic being studied (e.g. Durrheim & Dixon, 2004). Such methods are seen to have the capacity to generate richer data about both place and self (Solnit, 2001), as participants are more intimately connected with their environment as they are in it and/or move through it. In addition, it allows for exploration of a range of practices beyond narrative, including embodied practices (e.g. 'being in place'), social practices (e.g. the construction of group categories and processes) and ideological practices (e.g. moral arguments about 'who belongs where'). As with the incorporation of visual elements, walking interviews can also allow participants greater control, as, for instance, they decide *where* to take the researcher (Emmel & Clark, 2009). They also allow room for the unexpected: when we conducted walking interviews with community police officers, we were surprised by the degree to which their talk about places revealed a strong *insider* and *connected* identity

to local spaces they were responsible for policing. We believe the salience of this may have been lost had we conducted these interviews in a room. There are, naturally, limitations to this technique: to be methodologically relevant, 'place' needs to be central in the research question and the act of walking will exclude certain participants and interviewing techniques.

As with online developments, these 'multi-modal' approaches expand traditional conceptions of the interview or focus group, creating new and exciting possibilities for researchers to work with participants. However, such approaches should not be used uncritically. They can require much more reflexive engagement with questions of epistemology and ontology, as different types of data are brought together and analysed. For example, it is easy to see visual data brought into (or produced within) the research environment as 'windows' to participant's concerns, rather than images and their interpretation as a (co)-constructed as part of the research process. It is also typically the case that where researchers use visual methods, the verbal data still form the sole focus of the analysis (an exception being Van Ommen & Painter, 2005). This is often because it is easier to account for such data and because robust tools for analysing such data already exist. However, in this process, the intimate relationship between, for instance, the identity work done visually and that done verbally can be lost (see Croghan et al., 2011). Overall, however, such methods have the ability to open up critical spaces for dialogue about multiple methods and interdisciplinarity, about existing forms of knowledge production and about the need for complex and *practice-oriented* forms of research (cf. Yanchar, Gantt, & Clay, 2005).

## Key Concepts: From Quantitative to Qualitative

Here we discuss traditionally *quantitative* methods that researchers are developing for use in *qualitative* research. These offer an innovative alternative to the collection of small samples of self-report data, which are characteristic of much qualitative research in psychology. Although a number of methods exemplify this alternative, we focus on the qualitative survey (sometimes also called an open-ended questionnaire)—an adaptation of a familiar and popular tool—and story completion (SC), a technique which offers exciting potential for producing quite *different* data.

## Reclaiming the Survey as a Qualitative Research Tool

Surveys have traditionally been used by psychologists to examine the attitudes and opinions of groups of participants to particular phenomena or other groups of people. At first sight, they may seem ill-suited to qualitative research, which traditionally prioritises face-to-face interaction with small groups of participants, rather than anonymous data collection from large groups. However, qualitative researchers, including ourselves, have been using surveys to explore a number of different concerns, from social norms around body hair removal (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) to the experience of being a donor off-spring (Turner & Coyle, 2000). We argue they provide a useful method for qualitative researching, allowing us to address many of the different types of research questions that interest us as qualitative and critical psychologists, and fitting comfortably within both experiential and critical approaches to qualitative research.

Qualitative surveys typically consist of a series of open-ended questions about a topic: as few as four questions (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) to as many as 25 (see Braun, Tricklebank, & Clarke, 2013) have been used. However, qualitative surveys are not limited to a question/answer format—participants can be set drawing tasks (see Braun et al., 2013), or, if using online software to construct and distribute the survey, shown video or audio clips. Indeed, the range of qualitative possibilities that surveys offer has yet to be fully explored. In addition, qualitative-led surveys provide a handy way to combine qualitative and quantitative data collection (Terry & Braun, *in press*). Although the inclusion of open-ended questions in otherwise quantitative surveys is not unusual (sometimes called ‘mixed-method’ surveys), the resulting qualitative data are often analysed in a limited way (e.g. coded into categories and reported as category names with frequency counts). In contrast, qualitative-led surveys prioritise the *qualitative* data, and collect and analyse them in a way in keeping with the assumptions of a qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Terry & Braun, *in press*).

Qualitative surveys suit research questions exploring people’s views and opinions—for instance, how they perceive and make sense of particular matters such as pubic hair (Braun et al., 2013) or media representations of BDSM (Barrett, 2007). As participants respond *in their own words* to open questions, rather than ticking pre-determined response categories as they would in quantitative surveys, researchers capture what’s important to the participants—as well as to the researcher—and access participants’ own language and terminology, an oft-claimed key benefit of qualitative methods (Frith,

2000). Qualitative surveys have also been used to address concerns unique to qualitative research, including around the *lived* experience of particular groups—such as lesbian and bisexual women’s experience of pregnancy loss (Peel, 2010), young adults’ experience of orgasm (Opperman, Braun, Clarke, & Rogers, 2014) and Jewish gay men’s experiences of identity and growing up ‘different’ (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000). These demonstrate the value of qualitative surveys for topics typically addressed in face-to-face interviews. In addition to ‘giving voice’ to participant’s experiential ‘realities’, qualitative surveys can be used to interrogate the discursive construction and negotiation of meaning. For example, we have used qualitative surveys to explore how lesbian and bisexual women (Clarke & Spence, 2013), and gay and bisexual men (Clarke & Smith, 2015), discursively negotiate their visual identities in ways that are responsive both to dominant norms around authenticity and individuality and to a ‘coming out imperative’ in queer communities.

Qualitative surveys are sometimes used as a substitute for interviews (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000) or to extend their geographic reach (Clarke & Demetriou, 2016), but this is not the limit of their usefulness. Rather, they offer *particular benefits* to qualitative researchers. The (various levels of) anonymity they offer mean they are ideally suited to research on sensitive topics (like experiences of pregnancy loss, and orgasm, or views on pubic hair, as discussed above). Some participants may feel more comfortable disclosing information they consider embarrassing or socially undesirable without a researcher sitting opposite them or probing for more information. Furthermore, precisely because of the lack of direct contact between researcher and participant, surveys side-step some of the ethical concerns associated with neophyte researchers discussing sensitive topics face-to-face with participants. They thus expand the range of research topics open to student researchers: the ‘experiences of orgasm and sexual pleasure’ survey mentioned above was conducted for Cassandra Rogers’ undergraduate project. Ethical questions would likely be asked if an inexperienced undergraduate student proposed studying this topic using interviews or focus groups.

Like the online methods discussed above, surveys, particularly if delivered electronically (online or emailed), can also circumvent the constraints of physical geography and allow researchers to collect data from people across a country or, indeed, across the globe. For example, Peel’s (2010) online delivery allowed her to collect data from lesbian and bisexual women who had experienced pregnancy loss from four different countries. Another advantage is potential speed of data collection: for their research on chronic health experiences of non-straight individuals, Jowett and Peel (2009) collected 364 responses to their online survey in only eight weeks, with minimal effort

(recruiting via email lists, social networking sites and personal contacts snowballing). It would require a very large research team to collect a similar number of interviews in eight weeks! Terry and Braun's (2013) data collection was even faster—they collected most of their nearly 600 completed surveys about body hair over just *one weekend* following a media story. Qualitative research is often perceived—rightly—as labour-intensive and time-consuming, which makes it challenging in contexts in which time and resources are limited (e.g. student research). These examples highlight a practical and pragmatic advantage of surveys: taking some of the labour intensity out of data collection, freeing up researcher time for data analysis.

Survey samples sizes *can* be similar to interview samples (e.g. 16 participants in Turner & Coyle, 2007) but more often tend to be larger than is typical in qualitative research; samples of 60 (Peel, 2010), 99 (Clarke, 2016), 119 (Opperman et al., 2014) and even 678 (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) have been reported. Bigger is not necessarily better, but the facility of surveys to collect large samples opens up new possibilities for qualitative research, allowing a 'wide-angle' lens (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) on the topic of interest. This is particularly useful when seeking to understand social norms—such as those around body hair removal (Braun et al., 2013; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) or clothing (Frith & Gleeson, 2004, 2008)—or to capture a broad range and diversity of experience or perspectives. Smaller samples can produce homogeneity and larger samples allow researchers to practise sampling strategies such as 'maximum variation' (Sandelowski, 1995) or 'maximum heterogeneity' (Fassinger, 2005), which emphasise diversity, rather than typicality.

A large sample, and greater breadth of response, can also 'compensate' for shallower/shorter responses that are sometimes apparent in qualitative survey research (see Terry & Braun, 2017). Without the presence of a researcher to prompt, probe and in other ways gently encourage greater detail and disclosure, survey responses can be perfunctory—though participants do tend to stay 'on topic'; one-line 'zingers' characteristic of social media, and flippant answers, can also feature (Terry & Braun, 2017). Moreover, the absence of a researcher can encourage participants to 'answer back', sometimes rudely, challenging the wording of a question or the assumptions perceived to underlie it (norms of politeness means this rarely happens in face-to-face encounters). This points to another key characteristic of qualitative surveys—despite the researcher pre-determining the questions asked, participants have more control over the research process. Much like virtual asynchronous interviews or focus groups, survey participants determine when and where they complete the research and how long they spend doing so; the 'tone' of their engagement is something they also have total control over. Opportunities for

follow-up are limited or non-existent, which can be frustrating when, after reading the data, you want to ask a participant to clarify a response or provide more detail.

*All* methods of data collection have limits—they provide access to certain things and obscure others. Despite their limits, we are excited by the possibilities surveys offer us as qualitative researchers! The opportunity to hear from participants all over the country (and the world) without significant time and expense, to gain a ‘wide’—and hence different—angle on social norms and to engage a diversity of participants in our research, is highly attractive. This is *especially* the case if, like us, you conduct research on sensitive topics and/or social groups that are socially marginalised and hence ‘hidden’ or geographically dispersed.

## The Exciting Qualitative Potential of Story Completion

What surveys have in common with traditional qualitative methods is the collection of self-report data. SC offers something completely different—the collection of *stories* written by participants in response to a hypothetical scenario presented by the researcher. Whereas in vignette research, participants are presented with a *full* scenario and asked questions *about* it (see Gray, Royall, Malson, 2017), in SC research, participants are provided with the *opening* sentence(s) of a story (the story ‘stem’ or ‘cue’) and asked to complete it. SC was first developed as a ‘projective test’ (see Rabin, 1981). Projectives are tests developed by psychoanalytically oriented clinicians and researchers with the aim of accessing the *unconscious* or people’s *hidden* feelings and motivations (Rorschach’s ‘inkblot’ is the most famous; Rorschach, Lemkau, & Kronenberg, 1921/1998); ‘hidden’ either because of barriers to awareness (people not ‘in touch’ with certain feelings) or admissibility (people don’t want to admit to having these feelings because, for instance, they are embarrassing or shameful). The theory of projective tests is that the ambiguous stimulus—an inkblot, the opening sentences of a story and so on—compels people to ‘fill in the blanks’ to make sense of it, and in so doing, they unwittingly reveal their hidden feelings. Until recently, SC was primarily used in clinical practice and in *quantitative* research on attachment (e.g. George & West, 2012). In such SC research, qualitative data are transformed into numerical data using standardised coding systems and subject to statistical analysis; as in clinical use, the analytic focus is on the *psychological* meanings presumed to lie behind the stories rather than the stories per se.

In qualitative SC research, the focus *is* on the stories, and researchers have used SC to explore how participants *make sense of* a variety of topics such as infidelity (Clarke, Braun, & Wooles, 2015; Kitzinger & Powell, 1995; Whitty, 2005), child sex offenders (Gavin, 2005) and anorexia (Walsh & Malson, 2010). Like qualitative surveys, SC is ideally suited to questions about participants' understandings and perceptions. However, unlike surveys, SC is limited for researching '*lived experiences*'—because the data consist of *stories* written in response to a hypothetical scenario, rather than direct reports of personal experience. Researchers would need to make an interpretative leap to claim that stories reflect participants' *real* thoughts and feelings about the topic (or ask them if they did), something qualitative SC researchers have generally not been eager to do to date (but see Livingston & Testa, 2000). What, then, is the theory of SC research, according to qualitative researchers? What are the data presumed to represent? Most see SC as useful for exploring *social* meanings, rather than individual psychological ones, claiming SC gives access to socio-culturally dominant ways of making sense of a particular topic (Frith, 2013; Kitzinger & Powell, 1995; Walsh & Malson, 2010). Qualitative SC researchers have retained the (clinical) use of *ambiguous* stimuli, designing deliberate ambiguity into their story stems. For example, the story stem often *hints at* the scenario of interest, rather than describing it explicitly, and various other details are left unstated, inviting participants to 'fill in the blanks'. Instead of assuming that the way participants 'fill in the blanks' reveals something about their unconscious feelings, however, qualitative SC researchers theorise that this reveals something about socially normative or dominant assumptions; that participants draw on the social meanings they have access to make sense of the scenario and tell a story about it (Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, Tischner, & the Story Completion Research Group, 2017).

Kitzinger and Powell (1995) were the first to develop SC as a fully *qualitative* method, in research on infidelity. Participants were presented with a story stem that described the main characters Claire and John as 'going out', and Claire *or* John as 'seeing someone else'. Most participants interpreted 'going out' as implying a sexual relationship and 'seeing someone else' as implying sexual infidelity. Moreover, reflecting dominant norms around heterosexuality, most understood the 'someone else' to be an opposite-sex partner. Another innovative aspect SC offers the qualitative researcher is a *designed comparison framework*. Kitzinger and Powell used two different versions of the stem so they could compare the responses of different groups of participants (male/female) and the responses of participants to slight variations in the story stem (e.g. to Claire vs. John's infidelity). Such designs have often revealed strong gendered differences—both in terms of the responses *of* male and female participants, and in terms of responses *to* male and female characters, and this



sits uncomfortably for some (especially as comparison itself is not part of the qualitative tradition). However, rather than interpreting such differences as something implying *essential* (e.g. gendered difference), SC researchers tend to interpret these as demonstrating differences in social ‘scripts’ for women and men (Kitzinger & Powell, 1995).

SC, through the use of *hypothetical* scenarios, written in the *third person*, can also facilitate access to socially undesirable, and thus a wider range of, responses. For example, Moller, Tischner, and Clarke’s ([forthcoming](#)) research on perceptions of fat therapists generated lots of viscerally negative descriptions of the therapist’s body and eating behaviours, and related adverse assessments of the therapist’s character, mental health and professional competence. It’s highly unlikely such accounts would have been generated using ‘self-report’ techniques. Thus, SC provides an excellent opportunity for researching sensitive topics because the use of hypothetical scenarios and third-person responding creates distance between the participant and the topic of interest. Furthermore, because SC, like qualitative surveys, tends to be administered without the physical presence of a researcher, anonymity is enhanced. Despite its exciting, innovative potential as a method, and one which asks us to re-imagine *what* qualitative data can represent, there is, to date, relatively little published using SC. This leaves the horizon for exploring and expanding SC research wide open!

## Key Research: Methods in Practice

Drawing on three of our own projects, we briefly provide examples of some of these innovations in qualitative research in practice.

### Using Visual-Spatial Methods in Focus Groups to Understand Youth Experience of Regulated Public Spaces

Debra, in collaboration with Rachel Manning, has used a variety of visual-spatial methods to explore the ways young people understand and negotiate various forms of spatial restriction in their everyday use of place (see Gray & Manning, 2014). They recruited participants from areas in the South of England with a high level of spatial regulation, because they were close to sites that had been subject to an anti-social behaviour (ASB) dispersal zone in the preceding two years or had been identified by the police as an ‘ASB

Hotspot'. The multi-method project included interviews with 20 police officers and police community support officers about their policing of young people, a qualitative survey of young people in schools and focus groups with 89 young people aged 11–16 years. The focus groups were conducted with already-existing friendship groups. We asked participants to collectively construct spatial maps of the places in their local area that were important to them; these maps then formed the basis of the focus group discussions. Data were analysed discursively, using Dixon and Durrheim's (2004) reworking of the concept of place identity. Using (visual) mapping methods grounded the analysis in important ways—allowing participants' constructions of places, identity and belonging to be concretely located within specific contexts and spatial practices. Moreover, it facilitated discussion based around participants' *own concerns*—discussion focused on the spaces and places that were important to them and why. Overall, this produced some counter-intuitive findings—for instance, about the ways young people construct the regulation of their own and others' behaviour *as appropriate*. It also highlighted the *complexity* of young people's experiences in, and negotiation of, public spaces. Indeed, our findings highlighted a variety of challenging and often contradictory issues regarding young people's use of public space in the context of restrictive forms of institutional practice, including the problematic nature of childhood, participants' own positioning on its boundaries with adulthood and how this was embedded in competing notions of appropriate space use and socio-spatial relationships.

### Using Qualitative Surveys for Sensitive Sex Research

Victoria and Virginia, in collaboration with students Emily Opperman and Cassandra Rogers, used a qualitative survey to examine experiences around, and meanings related to, orgasm—a topic that is, perhaps surprisingly, given its centrality to sexual activity, rarely researched. The text-based survey contained 16 open-ended questions related to the meaning of orgasm, meanings and experiences around orgasm frequency, self-versus partner-orgasm, orgasm timing, faking orgasm, pleasures associated with sex, and descriptions and evaluations of participants' own typical (or last) orgasm experience (the full survey is published in Opperman et al., 2014). Our convenience sample consisted of 119 young adults (18–26). Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and five main themes identified:

- (1) Orgasm was described as the goal, and end-point, of sex; people were understood to engage in sexual activity in pursuit of an orgasm, and orgasm was the marker of success for sexual activity. The achievement of male orgasm in particular signalled the end of ‘sex’.
- (2) Participants prioritised their *partner’s* experience of orgasm over their own, often reporting feeling responsible for whether or not their partner achieved orgasm and frequently framing orgasm as something ‘given’. Negative feelings were associated with a failure to ‘give’ an orgasm and implied poor ‘sexual performance’.
- (3) Participants described orgasm as the *ultimate* sexual pleasure and this ‘peak’ experience was felt to enhance feelings of intimacy when having sex in the context of an on-going, ‘committed’ relationship. Despite this, sexual pleasure and feelings of increased intimacy were also noted in the absence of orgasm.
- (4) Orgasm was described as a *contextualised* physical response, facilitated or inhibited by a variety of physical, relational and psychological factors such as a feeling of psychological ‘comfort’ with one’s partner.
- (5) Faking orgasm was common: more than half the participants reported doing it, most often for the benefit of their partner—to create feelings of pleasure and satisfaction or to avoid their partner feeling upset.

These meanings attributed to orgasm and sexual pleasure resonated with the scant existing literature, evidencing the way young adults, fairly early in their sexual lives, already have strongly socially patterned sexual meanings, underpinned by dominant assumptions about sexuality.

## Using Story Completion to Understand the Contextual Nuances of Imagined Infidelity

Victoria and Virginia, in collaboration with a student Kate Wooles, used SC to explore people’s understandings of same-sex infidelity. Little is known about this topic as infidelity research—including that using SC methods—focuses overwhelmingly on *heterosexual* relationships. We employed a comparative four-stem design that allowed us to explore differences and similarities between depictions of same-versus different-sex infidelity and, following Whitty (2005), between *emotional* and *sexual* infidelity (see design matrix) (Fig. 13.1).

The A1 stem, *same-sex emotional* infidelity, read: *Sarah wakes up early on Tuesday morning and follows the usual routine of getting out of bed while John,*

Scenario	Infidelity with a man (1)	Infidelity with a woman (2)
Emotional infidelity (A)	Stem A1	Stem A2
Sexual infidelity (B)	Stem B1	Stem B2

Fig. 13.1 Infidelity SCT design matrix

*her husband of four years, remains sleeping. On her lunch break Sarah decided to try out a new café that a work colleague has recommended. As she walks towards the café, much to her surprise she notices John sitting at one of the tables outside with a man she has never seen before. As she gets closer she notices that John is holding hands with the man and he is smiling and gazing into the man's eyes ...*

In contrast, the B1 stem, *same-sex sexual infidelity*, read: *Sarah wakes up early on Tuesday morning and follows her usual routine of getting ready for work while John, her husband of four years, remains sleeping. Later that day Sarah returns home early from work. As she enters the house, she notices John's coat and work shoes in the hall way. Thinking he must have come home from work sick she walks upstairs to their bedroom. When she opens the door she is confronted with John in bed with another man ...*

A convenience sample of 57 women and men were each given one of the four stems to complete. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the story data identified revealing differences in the portrayal of same- and different-sex infidelity. John's same-sex infidelity was typically explained by 'unrealised homosexuality'; he was portrayed as essentially gay. Some participants framed John's same-sex infidelity as (therefore) an understandable expression of his *true self*; others positioned this as a *double* betrayal, with same-sex infidelity effectively 'even worse' than different-sex infidelity. Heterosexual infidelity, in contrast, was primarily explained in terms of *relational deficits*, with these being Sarah's 'fault'. Different-sex *sexual* infidelity was depicted as involving *casual* sex; John's *same-sex* infidelity was framed as involving a committed relationship, regardless of whether it related to an emotional or sexual infidelity. Monogamy was assumed: Sarah typically reacted to the discovery of infidelity with upset, sometimes aggression, and her discovery always resulted in the dissolution of the relationship. The separation was only amicable in a few same-sex scenarios—because infidelity was presented as an *authentic expression* of John's true (gay) self. (Straight) people who are accepting of homosexuality are more likely to view it as something fixed and unchanging (an *essential state* rather than a *chosen behaviour*, Hegarty, 2002). John's positioning in stories as essentially gay suggests this liberal account is currently the dominant one.

## Conclusion

As we hope we have captured, innovation offers exciting new horizons and opportunities to do qualitative research in not only familiar-but-new but also radically unfamiliar ways. We end, however, on a note of caution—or perhaps cautious optimism. We need to remember to think deeply about the theoretical (and other) bases of our research, and indeed the *purpose* of what we're doing, to ensure coherence and fitness for purpose. This requires us to engage in thorough methodological and disciplinary reflexivity, so that we don't just end up throwing innovative shapes at a methodological disco, because innovation is assumed to be inherently good, but instead work to grow a richer, more diverse, more socially inclusive and, crucially, *critical* social psychology.

## Summary

- Innovation in qualitative researching extends our research scope with multiple potentialities. We have considered some of these in more depth.
- Online research offers new possibilities for using traditional qualitative techniques with different modes of data collection and increased inclusivity.
- Multi-modal developments around the incorporation of visuospatial elements into interviews and focus groups create opportunities for deeper, located—and hence potentially new—forms of knowledge, with increased engagement (and control) by participants over their stories and the telling of those.
- SC likewise offers us quite *different* data from many self-report techniques, requiring us to *think carefully* about what we understand our data to give us access to.
- Finally, adapting survey methods for qualitative research allows us to access breadth and a 'wide-angle' view of topics of interest.

## Key References

- For an accessible and practical introduction to using many of the methods discussed in this chapter, including surveys and story completion, see: Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage. The book also has a resource-rich companion website: [www.sagepub.co.uk/braunclarke](http://www.sagepub.co.uk/braunclarke).
- For a good introduction to *online* researching from a critical psychology perspective, see the special issue of *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2015, Vol 13(2)), and the associated editorial which ‘sets the scene’: Morison, T., Gibson, A. F., Wigginton, B., & Crabb, S. (2015). Online research methods in psychology: Methodological opportunities for critical qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(3), 223–232.
- More details of the three example study *methods*—and the studies themselves—can be found here: Clarke, V., Braun, V. & Wooles, K. (2015) Thou shalt not covet another man? Exploring constructions of same-sex and different-sex infidelity using story completion. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 25(2), 153–166.
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# Part IV

## Rethinking Social Cognition

# 14

## Attitudes and Attributions

Chris McVittie and Andy McKinlay

The study of attitudes has long been a central concern of social psychology. For example, Gordon Allport, writing in the mid-twentieth century, argued that the concept of attitudes was ‘probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology’ (Allport, 1954, p. 43). Interest in attitudes has continued unabated since that time, and in many respects has gathered pace, as social psychologists have sought to understand the social psychological concept that perhaps more than any other permeates much of our everyday lives. In our conversations with other people, we talk about our feelings and stances towards others, towards events in which we have been or will be involved, or towards other aspects of everyday life including the weather. And, at the same time, traditional and newer media routinely report publicly on attitudes that appear to be widely shared across social groups, such as people’s attitudes towards specific political parties and policies, or towards issues such as the acceptance or non-acceptance of immigrants, the UK’s continuing membership of the European Union, climate change, and so on. Discussion of attitudes, then, comprises a recurring part of social life.

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A fundamental element of attitudes is the process of evaluation: when someone states an attitude, he or she is providing an evaluation, whether positive or negative, strong or weak, of what is being described. From the attitudes that a person expresses towards a range of social phenomena and issues, it can appear that we know much about how that person evaluates the world around them. Understanding people's attitudes, however, is only part of the picture. Ordinarily, we expect that people will act in a manner that is consistent with the attitudes that they state. We would not, for instance, expect that someone who states that refugees should be accepted into and made welcome in the UK would subsequently argue in favour of strict border controls that are designed to keep out those who seek refuge here. Thus, in addition to providing information about the inner person, attitudes appear to offer some sort of guide as to ways in which that person might behave across a range of situations.

Attributions also offer insights into how the individual makes sense of the world. Here, however, the focus is on how individuals explain events that occur around them. By attributing social actions and events to particular causes, we provide explanations as to why these occur as they do. Potentially, we might explain outcomes as resulting from contexts that influence what people (ourselves included) do or as resulting from inner dispositions that lead people to act in certain ways. As we shall see, it is the latter type of explanation that is more common. Explaining outcomes in terms of other people of course has consequences for how we describe others; this type of explanation usually relies on the attribution not just of causality but also of features that render that causality more likely or plausible. People commonly therefore attribute to others characteristics that allow for inferences that those people will act in particular ways, leading to certain outcomes. Attribution, therefore, is a core part of how we in everyday life make sense of the social world.

The study of attitudes and attributions, then, potentially offers a wealth of information about how we all make sense of the world in which we live through our evaluations of all that is around us and our explanations of social events and the actions of others. It is unsurprising that social psychologists have for long viewed attitudes and attributions as offering fertile ground for research. Yet, the very importance and centrality of attitudes and attributions has led to wide divergences between mainstream and critical social psychologists as to how they should be understood, what they tell us about individuals, and how they relate to the social world. It is these issues that we take up below.



# Mainstream Approaches to Attitudes and Attributions

## Attitudes and Problems

For mainstream approaches, much of the appeal of attitudes stemmed from two particular features. First, attitudes were considered to represent essential parts of the individual: when people stated their attitudes towards target descriptions of others or of social phenomena, they were taken to be revealing deep-rooted and consistent aspects of their inner selves. Thus, the study of people's attitudes offered a way of finding out what they *really* felt about elements of their social worlds. Furthermore, given the fundamental nature of attitudes, it was expected that these could usefully predict how people would behave across a range of social situations. Second, and relatedly, the process of discovering the attitudes that people held was regarded as relatively straightforward. People could be provided with a description of a social group, action, or issue and asked to indicate their attitude towards that target on a fixed-point scale, otherwise known as a *Likert* scale. Thus, for instance, individuals could be presented with a question such as 'Do you have any negative feelings about global warming?' and asked to indicate how negatively they felt about global warming on a scale running from  $-1$  (slightly negative) to  $-5$  (very negative) (Leiserowitz, 2006). Using such methods, the collection of data about attitudes appeared to be a simple process, allowing uncomplicated access to people's inner mental worlds and future behaviour.

This perspective, implicitly at least, underpinned much of mainstream social psychological research into attitudes over a period of decades. Yet, even before Allport's (1954) claim for the distinctiveness and indispensability of the concept of attitudes, it had become evident that this approach had run into difficulties. In short, it was by then becoming increasingly evident that attitudes did not straightforwardly predict behaviour. In a classic study, conducted at a point when there was considerable racism in the United States towards members of minority groups, Richard LaPiere (1934) spent considerable time touring the United States with a young 'personable and charming' Chinese couple. Observed by LaPiere, the couple visited 251 hotels and restaurants and were welcomed in almost all of these establishments. Indeed, they were refused service only once. Some months subsequent to these visits, LaPiere sent a questionnaire to the hotels and restaurants that they had visited, asking if these establishments would be willing 'to accept members of the Chinese race as guests'. Of the 128 responses received, 92% answered 'no'

and only one answered 'yes'. It does not take much examination of these figures to see that the attitudes expressed by people in these establishments were widely inconsistent with how they had behaved several months previously. Moreover, the inconsistencies between the attitudes that people express and how they behave occurred repeatedly in subsequent studies of attitudes. Some years later, in reviewing numerous studies that reported measures of attitudes and behaviours, Wicker (1969) found that across these studies the mean correlation between attitudes and behaviour was extremely weak, amounting to 0.15. In the light of these findings, it is difficult to argue that attitudes usefully tell us much about how people will behave: in Wicker's (1969, p. 64) words 'taken as a whole [it] is considerably more likely that attitudes will be unrelated or only slightly related to overt behaviours than that attitudes will be closely related to actions'.

In response to this problem, and following Wicker's call for social psychology to abandon the concept of attitudes altogether, mainstream approaches have moved away from the previous traditional notion of attitudes. Subsequent efforts to rescue the concept have attempted to redefine attitudes in different ways. One response has argued that attitudes are not unidimensional evaluations but rather reflect different factors (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For example, in terms of the ABC model, attitudes are reconceptualised as having three components, an *affective-emotional* component, a *behavioural* one, and a *cognitive* one. Thus, attitudes are treated as comprising elements of feeling, doing, and thinking. An alternative response has argued that attitudes do not solely determine individual behaviour but rather are part of a set of factors that ultimately lead to behaviour. Thus, according to the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), people's behaviour depends not only on their attitudes but also on subjective norms, that is, how they think others will regard the behaviour in question and the extent to which such opinions are important to the individual. In the TRA's successor, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), these factors are supplemented by the inclusion of perceived behavioural control, that is, the extent to which individuals experience themselves as able to act as they might choose to do. In these ways, attitudes come to be part of a configuration of factors that predict behavioural intention that in turn can lead to behaviour.

To some extent, the move from unidimensional attitudes to more complex models has potentially led to greater consistency between what people say they feel and how they say they will behave (for a discussion, see Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014). This however has come at a cost to the utility of the concept of attitude in three main respects. First, the move away from studying people's behaviour to the study of how they state they intend to behave has largely

severed the theoretical link between attitudes and behaviour. Even assuming that an intention is honestly stated, there is a considerable gap between intention to behave in a particular way and actual behaviour. Second, the study of attitudes and intentions becomes effectively circular; often people are being asked to state much the same thing at two separate times. It should therefore come as no surprise that these statements are found to be reasonably consistent. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in adopting this focus social psychology has moved a long way from the original concept of attitude as something intrinsic to the person that could be ascertained relatively easily. The breadth and appeal of the concept of attitudes have given way to narrower concerns with the application of models that at best tell us little about people and social behaviour.

## Attributions and Biases

The study of attributions also has a long history in social psychology. Heider (1958) argued that the process of attribution results from an individual's fundamental desire for predictability in order to have some sense of control over events in the external world. On this view, by providing explanations for events that happen around us, attributions allow us to understand those events and thereby render social life orderly and predictable. A major influence on mainstream approaches to attribution was the work of Kelley (1967) and his covariation model of attribution. Kelley argued that, in order to derive explanations, people collect and organise information about others' behaviour according to three principles of consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. Analysing information in this way allows us to examine whether another's actions are similar to those of other people, whether the person in question acts similarly across diverse contexts, and whether the person being considered always behaves similarly in context such as that being considered. The outcome of this analysis enables us to attribute causality for the behaviour under consideration either to the person involved or to features of the context in which it occurs.

Models such as Kelley's (1967) covariation model offer a view of the social individual as a meticulous information-processor who will sift all relevant information before arriving at an explanation in any single case. Much of the available evidence, however, indicates that people simply do not act in these ways. The explanations that people produce do not appear to be based on systematic organisation of information, in that they fail accurately to reflect the details of the information available. As a result, according to mainstream

approaches, the attributions that people make are often flawed rather than soundly based on social reality. Assuming that we can differentiate between social actors and the contexts in which they act, individuals routinely attribute outcomes to the social actors involved and not to features of the context in which the action occurs. According to the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967; Ross, 1977), individuals attribute outcomes to inner dispositions of the people who perform these actions even if told that the social actor had no personal choice and that anyone else would have acted similarly. Research has also identified actor-observer differences (Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek, 1973) whereby those who perform actions will commonly attribute outcomes to the contexts in which they were located while people observing these outcomes usually attribute them to the actors involved. This tendency, however, does not apply in all cases and depends at least in part on whether the outcomes that are to be explained are positively or negatively evaluated. Where outcomes fail to be evaluated positively, people (perhaps unsurprisingly) are more likely to take personal credit for having achieved them, whereas negatively evaluated outcomes are more likely to be explained in terms of the context in which they occurred. For example, politicians who succeed in winning elections have been found to claim individual credit for that success based on their own hard work or personal reputation, while those who fail to win attribute their failure to external factors such as lack of financial support or general voting trends (Kingdon, 1967). The attributions that individuals make thus display a self-serving bias instead of a careful search for accurate explanations.

From a mainstream social psychological perspective, then, the attributions that people make in everyday life are often flawed in favouring some forms of explanation over others and failing to take account of all relevant information. Nonetheless, it is argued that attributions allow individuals to derive a sense of predictability, even if that predictability is biased towards explanations that are not necessarily accurate. For mainstream approaches to social psychology, the study of attributions and biases offers an understanding of how individuals cognitively explain actions and events in the external social world.

## **Assumptions in Mainstream Approaches**

What mainstream approaches to researching attitudes and attributions share is a focus on inner mental activity as the topic of study. In each case, the emphasis lies on the individual and how he or she evaluates or explains phenomena in the external social world. In doing so, mainstream approaches proceed

on the basis of two assumptions that underpin their attempts to understand attitudes and attributions. A first assumption relates to language and how it works. Within these approaches, language is treated as a means of representing what occurs elsewhere and communicating those representations to others. Thus, in evaluating the targets of their attitudes, individuals are (merely) reporting what is going on for them internally. Similarly, the presentations of phenomena to which they are responding are viewed as unproblematic descriptions of groups, social issues or other targets. Research into attributions proceeds similarly. On this view, the events that people are required to explain are simply descriptions of external phenomena. Indeed, the very idea of bias assumes that there is some veridical external reality that people can be required to explain. Their explanations might deviate from what is accurate, but nonetheless, there is an objective reality that is amenable to explanation and that is represented in the language used to describe it. The second assumption found in these approaches is that the individual and the social world are separate and separable realms of activity. Social phenomena are treated as existing independently of the individual and the individual's task is to evaluate them or explain them in making sense of their lives. Social stimuli might well differ in a number of respects from other stimuli (e.g. sensory stimuli) but how the individual approaches and deals with them is seen as analogous to responding to other stimuli through the application of intrinsic cognitive processes. For mainstream social psychology, then, the focus lies on how individuals process information and communicate their understandings and interest in how people live their lives in social worlds disappears from consideration.

## Critical Approaches to Attitudes and Attributions

For critical approaches, a first point of departure from mainstream approaches to attitudes and attributions is reconsideration of how language functions in everyday life. In contrast to approaches that treat language as a means of representation and study discourse primarily in order to access what is going on in individuals' inner mental worlds or as a way of reflecting an external social world, critical approaches take discourse to be the main topic of study. From this perspective, when people talk about how they think or feel about social phenomena, they are constructing versions of those phenomena.

To take one example, at the time of writing the European Union is said to be facing a 'migrant crisis' with thousands of people displaced by war and danger elsewhere arriving on its shores (e.g. BBC NEWS, 2015). To describe these

events as a 'crisis' is to depict them in a certain way; they could be described as an 'opportunity', an 'arrival' or otherwise. Similarly, those involved could be described as 'refugees' or 'asylum-seekers' instead of 'migrants'. By describing these events as a 'migrant crisis', therefore, the arrival of those from elsewhere is presented in terms that do not reflect any single 'reality' but which construct one version of these events (for a discussion, see Kirkwood, Goodman, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2015). At the same time, descriptions such as these also make available inferences as to the motivations of those who arrive and possible explanations as to why they seek to settle in the European Union. Different constructions of those involved that are linked to their motivations and actions are likely to have different consequences for how others evaluate and explain these events. Discourse, then, is not a neutral medium for representing what is happening elsewhere but instead is an active medium through which people construct versions of social reality.

Related to this is the question of how the discourse that individuals use is related to social life. Whereas for mainstream approaches individuals and social contexts are regarded as separate and distinct, with the emphasis on inner mental processing and external reality, respectively, for critical approaches they are inseparably joined together. From a critical perspective, the versions of people, actions, and events that individuals construct are always produced in local discursive contexts and tailored to the demands of those contexts. People might well express their views towards a 'migrant crisis' in one context and views towards the 'arrival of refugees' in another context. The constructions that people deploy at any particular time will be tailored to meet the requirements of the local talk, whether defending or criticising politicians' responses, arguing for or against the recognition of rights under international law, or otherwise. The actions that such constructions are designed to accomplish are thus situated in the social contexts in which they are produced.

## Evaluations Reconsidered

Adopting a focus on discourse as construction and action leads to the study of what people are doing when they provide evaluations. In their landmark text, *Discourse and Social Psychology*, Potter and Wetherell (1987) draw attention to the action-oriented nature of the evaluations that people provide at different times. One example that they give is seen in data collected in a study of how New Zealand residents talked about Polynesian immigrants. In the course of one interview, we see the speaker arguing at one point that immigrants should be trained in skills and thereafter encouraged to return to Polynesia and later

arguing that if immigrants were skilled it would be better for them to remain in New Zealand. Were we to apply a mainstream approach that treats attitudes as core, stable entities, it becomes extremely challenging to discern any consistent attitude towards immigration of Polynesian immigrants, with the speaker providing directly contradicting evaluations within a short space of time. As Potter and Wetherell point out, however, these inconsistent evaluations make rather better sense if we examine them in their local contexts, the first argument being produced in response to a question about immigration and the second in a description of the need to fill specific jobs in New Zealand to address economic difficulties. What this demonstrates is that the attitudes that speakers express are not the (mere) outcomes of cognitive processing but rather are tailored to the requirements of the local social contexts in which these evaluations are located. Individual evaluations and social contexts are thus inextricably linked, rendering meaningless any attempt to separate them out into two separate realms.

A further property of the evaluations that speakers produce in these and other contexts is that of rhetoric. Billig (1987, 1991) notes that the discourse that speakers use to produce evaluations and other constructions is always, at least in principle, argumentative. What this means is that the evaluations that people produce are designed to orient to other possible versions that might be available. Thus, in proposing one evaluation, speakers are at the same time undermining arguments that might run counter to their own. In this way, evaluations are necessarily rhetorical, seeking to persuade recipients of the evaluation that is given.

## Attributions and Actions

Critical approaches to the study of attributions also emphasise the constructive, action-oriented and rhetorical properties of discourse. In contrast to mainstream approaches that treat discourse as a means to study the explanations that people provide for actions elsewhere, critical approaches view attributions as actions in themselves. Thus, the explanations that speakers produce of others' actions are themselves designed to accomplish certain outcomes, whether blaming or criticising others, justifying their own actions, refusing requests, or performing other actions. As Edwards and Potter (1992, 1993) noted, the explanatory accounts that speakers produce can be seen to be oriented towards the local contexts in which the attributions are being made. Accordingly, the issue of whether an outcome is attributed to a person's inner dispositions or to contextual features will depend not



on the outcomes of internal cognitive processing but on what the speaker is seeking to accomplish.

Of course, recipients of talk who hear the attributions that others make are aware of the action-oriented nature of such explanations, in particular, that people explain outcomes in ways that justify or legitimise their own actions and stances and blame or criticise others for what might be regarded as culpable. People are therefore regarded as having an interest or 'stake' (Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993) in the explanations that they produce, and their claims consequently might be challenged on the grounds that 'they would say that, wouldn't they'. Attributions thus have to be managed carefully in order to be heard as grounded in reality or in clearly evident properties of other people, rather than being motivated by the personal interests of the person making the attribution and open to challenge or undermining on that basis.

## Attitudes and Attributions in Action

Within a critical approach, then, attention is focused on how individuals produce and use evaluations and attributions in everyday life. We begin by examining how speakers manage evaluations.

### Evaluations in Context

In order to examine how evaluations function in context, we begin with an example taken from a study of family mealtime conversations (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). This extract comes from a conversation involving Beth (aged 11 years), her mother (Laura), and her uncle (Bill).

1. Beth: can I try some ↑wi:ne
2. Laura: °oh::: (0.2) (↑ mm-hm) °
3. (2.0)
4. Beth: don't [↑ like red really
5. Laura: [its very nice:
6. (1.0)
7. Laura ↑well=
8. Bill: =how d'you know (0.8) have you ↑ever tried it

9. Beth: I've tried it about a ↑million times  
 10. I hate all red (.) it's too strong<sup>1</sup>

(Wiggins & Potter, 2003, p. 520)

As we see this extract begins with Beth, the daughter, making a request to 'try some ↑wi:ne'. Her mother Laura, after some initial hesitation, agrees to this request. In the subsequent silence at line 3, Laura begins to pour Beth some wine. However, at line 4, Beth then refuses Laura's offer by producing a negative evaluation of red wine which functions as a refusal of the wine. This

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[ ]	Overlapping talk is shown by square brackets, with '[' indicating where the overlap begins and ']' indicating where the overlapped utterance (or part of an utterance) stops.
=	An 'equal to' sign '=' at the end of one line and another at the end of the succeeding line indicates that there is no gap between the two lines.
(.) (dot)	A dot in parentheses '(.)' indicates a very slight gap.
: (colon)	A colon ':' indicates that the sound immediately preceding the colon has been elongated, with the lengthening of the sound indicated by the number of colons.
↑	An upwards pointing arrow '↑' indicates that the speaker is raising pitch.
↓	A downwards pointing arrow '↓' indicates the speaker is lowering pitch.
Numbers	Numbers in parentheses, for example, (0.3) indicate time elapsed in tenths of a second.
Underlining	Underlining of letters or words (e.g. <u>ah</u> ) indicates that the speaker is stressing that part of the speech by increasing volume or raising or lowering pitch.
Upper case	Upper case indicates that the speaker's utterance is produced with a particularly high volume (e.g. 'AH').
Punctuation	Punctuation markers indicate the speaker's intonation. For example, the question mark '?' indicates a 'questioning' intonation.
° (degree sign)	The superscripted degree sign '°' indicates unvoiced production.
< (left caret)	Placed before a word, a left caret '<' indicates a hurried start. Placed after a word it, indicates that the word stopped suddenly.
> < (right/left carets)	Right/left carets '>' '<' surrounding an utterance (or part of an utterance) indicate the speech is speeding up.
< > (left/right carets)	Left/right carets '<' '>' surrounding an utterance (or part of an utterance) indicate the speech is slowing down.
- (dash)	A dash '-' indicates that an utterance is 'cut off'.
hhh	A row of instances of the letter 'h' 'hhh' indicates an out-breath.
.hhh	A row of instances of the letter 'h' prefixed by a dot, '.hhh' indicates an in-breath.
( )	Empty parentheses ( ) indicate that the transcriber could not make out what was said or, alternatively, who was speaking.
(ah) (word in parenthesis)	Placing parentheses around a word indicates that the transcription is uncertain.

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<sup>1</sup>Note on transcription notation

The transcription symbols included in extracts in this chapter form part of a system devised by Gail Jefferson (2004) for transcribing talk. The aim of transcribing talk in this way is to make available to the reader information about how the speaker delivered the talk, by, for example, indicating points of emphasis, pitch and intonation, and length of pauses between utterances. This level of transcription is designed to reproduce the talk in a form that reasonably reflects actual speech. Details of the transcription symbols found in these extracts are given below.

negative evaluation is countered by alternative, positive evaluation at line 5 where Laura argues that 'its very nice'. Following a pause, Laura's '↑well' at line 7 suggests that Laura is attempting to persuade Beth to have some wine. This indicates the topic of how the wine is to be evaluated is not concluded and is still a matter of negotiation. Thereafter, at line 8, Beth's uncle, Bill, takes up the topic of the evaluation in challenging Beth's earlier evaluation and asking for the grounds for her claim. In response, at lines 9 and 10, Beth provides an extreme formulation of her previous experience in stating that she has tried red wine about 'a ↑million times'. She follows this at line 10 with an even stronger negative evaluation to justify her refusal of the wine.

This exchange shows how evaluations can in themselves become topics of negotiation, challenge, and counter-argument. We see also how evaluations such as these perform specific actions in conversational contexts, involving issues of refusal, justification, and attempted persuasion. We can also note, however, that these actions are bound up with the particular ways in which the evaluations are constructed. In this extract, Beth's evaluations have a subjective character, in that Beth refers to her own personal preferences, in particular, her dislike of red wine. This stands in contrast to Laura's evaluation 'its very nice' which is an objective evaluation in referring to a property of the wine and not her own preferences. The difference in the construction of these evaluations allows Beth to evaluate the wine negatively but without suggesting that her mother's evaluation is incorrect. Her subjective evaluation of the wine, therefore, functions as a justification for refusal but one that does not invite challenge on grounds of accuracy.

In the next extract, we see the speaker producing evaluations that instead of being based on personal preferences are based on properties of what is being evaluated. This extract comes from a study of myalgic encephalomyelitis (MS)/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) sufferers' descriptions of their experiences of interacting with medical professionals. Prior to this description, Lesley, an ME sufferer, had been highly critical of her own interactions with medical professionals and she is now describing her sister-in-law's experiences.

Lesley

- 17 My sister-in-law who also has me in [city name] has had far worse  
 18 treatment and when she moved house had to go through no less than 9 GPs  
 19 before she found one who was sympathetic to ME. She also had a  
 horrendous  
 20 time with an ENT\* consultant she was referred to when she had bad  
 earache  
 21 for several months. Below is what I wrote to the list about the

- 22 consultant's letter recently in case you missed it. He wrote to her GP  
 23 who also did not believe in ME and wrote in her referral letter to the  
 24 consultant 'she claims to have ME'.

\*Ear, Nose and Throat

(Guise, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2010, pp. 430–431)

Here, we see Lesley describing her sister-in-law's experiences of consulting GPs and an ENT consultant. Lesley evaluates all of these experiences very negatively, describing the treatment overall as 'far worse' (than her own negatively evaluated treatment) and as 'horrendous'. What is interesting to note here is that these evaluations are described not in terms of her own views or her sister-in-law's views of the experiences but instead by reference to the experiences themselves. Thus, we see at lines 18 to 19 and 22 to 24 Lesley offer warrants for these evaluations, grounded, respectively, in the unsympathetic dispositions of GPs and in the actions of the consultant. Thus, the negative evaluations that Lesley provides comprise criticisms of the medical professionals involved.

Lesley's evaluations here are provided in objective terms not subjective terms as seen in Beth's descriptions in the first extract. This functions to indicate that what she is describing constitutes a complainable matter. Were Lesley to provide these evaluations in subjective terms, then she would be treated as accountable for these complaints and thereby run the risk of either being heard as 'whingeing' (Edwards, 2005) or having them challenged on the grounds that she has a personal stake in criticising the treatment provided to ME sufferers such as herself. Providing objective evaluations, by contrast, suggests that these evaluations are not based simply on personal views or preferences but instead reflect properties of the treatment that was provided which falls to be evaluated in highly negative terms.

In these extracts, we see how evaluations are produced and used towards accomplishing certain actions within local discursive contexts. At the same time, we see how those who produce evaluations orient to the issue that they can be treated as accountable for the evaluations that they produce. In the first extract, Beth's subjective evaluations allow her to refuse the wine without challenging counter-evaluations, while in the second extract Lesley's objective evaluations of her sister-in-law's treatment allow her to criticise that treatment without being held as accountable for unreasonably whingeing. Accountability is a recurring concern in talk, with speakers commonly managing subjective and objective evaluations to deal with their accountability. There are however some forms of evaluation that are extremely difficult to

bring off either through subjective or through objective formulations. For example, people who make negative evaluations of members of social groups run the risk of challenge on grounds of prejudice, regardless of whether they frame their evaluations subjectively or objectively (Billig, 1988). Certain instances, however, suggest that individuals are unconcerned with accountability for the views they express, no matter how negative those views might be. We return to such instances below.

## Explaining Actions

Accountability equally is a central element in attributions. Here too individuals construct attributions that orient to the potential of being held as accountable for negative claims or outcomes. Below, we see, Tim, an international rower, being asked about a race in which his team was unsuccessful.

- 1 Int: um (.) how accountable did you personally  
 2 feel for the result in the race  
 3 Tim: U:m (1.2) I was made to feel as though >it was um<  
 4 (1.8) as though I was quite accountable but u-  
 5 (0.2) no: I don't think >I was< (1.0) I think us  
 6 ones (0.2) >y'know are just< (0.8) being that age I  
 7 can't (1.0) compete in- in that (1.0) arena (0.8)  
 8 as well as I'd be able to in a few years time but  
 9 (1.6)  
 10 it wasn't down to me (1.2) °that we didn't do so  
 11 well (.) but<sup>o1</sup>

(Locke, 2004, p. 315)

As we see above, the main topic of this exchange is the issue of explaining an unsuccessful 'result'. Following the interviewer's initial question which potentially might lead to this outcome being attributed partly to him, Tim provides a response that denies personal accountability for this outcome. He distinguishes between being 'made to feel accountable' and actually being accountable. In denying being accountable, he identifies himself with a group 'us ones' who, due to their age, cannot reasonably be expected at this time to be successful in such races or to 'compete in- in that (1.0) arena'. On these grounds, Tim concludes that 'it wasn't down to me' and thereby refutes any attribution to him of blame for the team's lack of success in the race.

In the extract above, we see also how Tim's denial of accountability is interwoven with his constructions of other people, here those who sought to make him feel accountable and others who on ground of age are not yet ready to compete successfully. Below, we see another example of how accountability is bound up with other descriptions, in this case constructions of all of those involved, the actions to be explained, and how those actions should appropriately be evaluated. This extract comes from an interview conducted by Tim Marshall, Foreign Affairs editor of Sky News, with Khaled Meshaal (Marshall, 2008). Khaled Meshaal is President of Hamas (Harkat Al Mokwama Al Islamia), a Palestinian Islamic organisation that was elected to power in Palestinian in parliamentary elections in 2006 but which is designated by many states as a terrorist group. In particular, Hamas is frequently accused of perpetrating violence against Israel in the context of the Middle East conflict. Issues of explaining their and others' actions, of evaluating those actions, and of describing the different parties to the conflict are all combined as seen in this exchange.

- |    |          |   |
|----|----------|---|
| 1  | Marshall | Nothing is left to them and there'll be even less left to them if |
| 2  |          | you keep sending what many people believe are brainwashed         |
| 3  |          | people to blow themselves up. Killing small children and then     |
| 4  |          | invited the retribution that then comes.                          |
| 5  | Meshaal  | First of all we do not brainwash anyone. Every Palestinian        |
| 6  |          | spontaneously feels that his land is occupied. That Israel is     |
| 7  |          | killing children and women, demolishing their homes, taking       |
| 8  |          | their land, building the wall, the settlements, that journalism   |
| 9  |          | favours Israel, and digging under the al Aqsa mosque. So the      |
| 10 |          | Palestinian finds himself going directly to fight for the resis-  |
| 11 |          | tance. This is his duty. As the French fought the Nazis, and in   |
| 12 |          | the American revolution, as the Vietnamese people fought, as      |
| 13 |          | did the South African. This is ordinary behaviour it doesn't      |
|    |          | need brainwashing.  |

(adapted from McKinlay,  
McVittie, & Sambaraju, 2012, p. 543)

Marshall's turn at lines 1 to 4 functions to construct actions occurring in the conflict in the Middle East in specific ways. The actions of Hamas, for which Meshaal is required to account, are presented as comprising 'sending what

many people believe are brainwashed people to blow themselves up', resulting in 'killing small children' and leading to 'retribution'. These descriptions however are not only constructions of actions but also function as explanations for the causes of the actions. Marshall's description of social actors as 'brainwashed' can be heard as negating responsibility on their part while attributing responsibility to those who have rendered them incapable of making rational decisions. The description of what ensues as 'retribution' presents it as an understandable response to the underlying cause. On both counts, Hamas are treated as accountable for this set of outcomes.

In responding, Meshaal recharacterises the events being described and in so doing directs accountability for these events elsewhere. His denials at line 5 and line 13 of being involved in 'brainwashing' refute accountability for rendering others incapable of making decisions as to how to act. The remainder of his response, as we see, is taken up with a construction of events that attributes to Israel accountability for the actions that are listed. This construction of events occurring in the course of the conflict provides the grounds for an alternative explanation for acts of violence conducted by Palestinians, that is, they fall to be viewed as understandable responses to a particular context for which Israel is responsible. We thus see Meshaal at 12 conclude that the actions that he has described comprise 'ordinary behaviour'. In this way, the explanation for why Palestinians act in the ways they do are explained as resulting from a certain context for which Israel is culpable and therefore do not fall to be attributed to the actions of Hamas in depriving others of their agency and thereby arranging for them to act in extreme ways.

Of course, how actions are to be constructed in situations such as this and the explanations that are to be applied remain highly contentious issues that are inextricably linked to discussions of the conflict and responsibility for what occurs. For present purposes, however, that is precisely the point. Descriptions such as those seen above are by no means neutral presentations of social actions: as well as constructing specific versions of the actions being discussed, they are inextricably bound up with explanations for those events, with questions of culpability, and so on. By attributing responsibility in the ways they do, speakers are not reporting the outcomes of extensive cognitive searching for likely causes. Instead, they are involved in constructing what is being described in ways that support their explanations and undermine other explanations, and that thereby are more likely to persuade recipients of the explanations that they provide.



## Current Trends

How individuals describe other people, social groups, and target items, then, is closely tied to how they will evaluate these and how they will explain them. These are not separate processes, nor can they meaningfully be treated as inner mental processes that somehow are distinguishable from the rest of social life. In discussing above the evaluations that individuals make of others, we noted that speakers are commonly treated as accountable for how they evaluate members of other social groups: negative evaluations might well be taken to indicate prejudice against members of those groups solely on the basis of that membership. As Billig (1988) notes, speakers are in such cases alive to the possibility of being heard as prejudiced and will more commonly argue against members of other social groups on grounds that are ostensibly unrelated to the group. For example, speakers arguing against the inclusion of those from other racial groups will rarely do so on the basis of race and will instead offer up other grounds such as external factors. This work has led to two recent developments, each of which has implications for how social psychologists might usefully approach issues of prejudice and attitudes.

First, recent work has pointed to ways in which speakers avoid expressing attitudes or making attributions that otherwise could be heard as racist. Thus, in making arguments against the inclusion of asylum-seekers, speakers often avoid references to race and any expression of attitudes towards the potential target of these attitudes. Instead, speakers can deploy arguments based on other grounds such as economic conditions or social integration. In these ways, the issue of race can become 'deracialized' without explicit reference to attitudes or the attribution of features or explanation that relies upon talk relating to other racial groups (Goodman & Burke, 2011; Goodman, this volume).

Second, other recent work has identified instances where speakers make evaluations and attributions that do not appear to orient to accountability for prejudice. The extract below comes from a study of how people talk about gypsies in an online discussion forum. The discussion follows the broadcasting on the BBC of a documentary that examined activities of Romanian gypsy children.

foreignersinuk.co.uk. Daniel, 2010-01-23 12:32:5

- (1) It doesn't take watching this programme to see what this degenerate culture gets
- (2) up to. On one stretch of road about 300 meters there can be anything up to 8 Roma

- (3) forcing a big issue into ones face begging for money. In europe in Paris in London
  - (4) in Rome tourists are warning that they will be stolen from by Roma. This is a stinking
  - (5) filthy race of people and inbred with criminality.
- (Rowe & Goodman, 2014, p. 35; punctuation as in original)

Above, we see the contributor ‘Daniel’ provides highly negative evaluations of gypsies, describing them at line 3 as ‘degenerate’ and at lines 4 to 5 as ‘is a stinking filthy race of people and inbred with criminality’. He also directly attributes to them certain forms of behaviour, namely that they can be seen ‘forcing a big issue into one’s face begging for money’ and that people will be ‘stolen from’ by them. All of this talk clearly presents a highly negative construction of gypsies. Yet it is equally evident that the contributor does not attempt to distance himself from the description, instead of leaving it to speak as an instance of attitudes that are treated as not requiring sensitive handling but which can be expressed in terms that might be open to challenge.

Notwithstanding that the evaluations are presented in objective terms, describing properties of gypsies and not individual preferences, they are so critical of gypsies and their behaviour that they can be heard as personal evaluations. If made elsewhere, they might indeed be challenged on grounds of prejudice or similar. The constructions found here thus might well tell us as much about the forum in which they are expressed as they do about Daniel or about gypsies. Obviously, the anonymity afforded by the internet renders the possibility of challenge less likely as perhaps also does the anticipated audience, comprising others who express similar views. What all of this suggests is that the attitudes and attributions found in internet forums might well differ from those found elsewhere, where recipients are more likely to treat speakers as holding attitudes that are consistent with their evaluations and with producing explanations that reveal something of their inner selves. One particular focus for further work will be the study of how and when people express attitudes and attributions without orienting to the issues of accountability that are commonly found elsewhere.

## Summary

Mainstream social psychological approaches to attitudes and attributions have sought to study these as inner mental phenomena of the individual, representing how he or she evaluates and explains what is happening externally in the

social realm. Within such approaches, language is treated as representational in straightforwardly describing the outcomes of inner processing or a veridical social reality as the case may be. At the same time, such work proceeds on the basis that individuals and social life are separate and distinct realms of activity. In this chapter, we have seen how critical approaches, that treat discourse as constructive, action-oriented and rhetorical, and that view individuals and society as inextricably woven together, offer a very different understanding of what people are doing when they evaluate and explain social phenomena. From a critical perspective, speakers produce evaluations and explanations in the course of other discourse that functions not to describe but rather to construct versions of the social world. In these discursive constructions, evaluations and explanations are always tailored to the local contexts within individuals find themselves and what they are seeking to accomplish. Furthermore, evaluations and explanations are also bound up with questions of accountability for what is said. Far from being the mere reporting of the outcomes of cognitive processes, evaluations and attributions are central features of the negotiation of everyday life in interaction with others.

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# 15

## Social Influence

Stephen Gibson and Cordet Smart

### Introduction

Traditionally, social influence has been defined as the ‘process whereby attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people’ (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011, p. 236). Social psychologists have distinguished between three forms of social influence: compliance, conformity and obedience. Compliance has been defined as ‘a particular kind of response—acquiescence—to a particular kind of communication—a request’ (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 592); conformity as ‘the act of changing one’s behaviour to match the responses of others’ (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 606) and obedience as ‘[b]ehavior change produced by the commands of an authority’ (Brehm & Kassin, 1996, p. 355). There has been a wealth of work on social influence, and in the present chapter, we can do little more than scratch the surface of the variety of research that has sought to address compliance, conformity and obedience. For this reason, we will focus on some of the most influential studies, before moving on to consider critical reactions to this area of research, and alternatives proposed by critical social psychologists.

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In particular, we will suggest that by looking at how people use language we can recast what we understand by social influence.

## Compliance

There is a vast literature exploring the effectiveness of various techniques at eliciting compliance. Some of the most influential studies in this area have addressed what are known as the foot-in-the-door technique and the door-in-the-face technique. Freedman and Fraser (1966) showed that prefacing a request with an initial, more modest request increases compliance with the subsequent bigger request. In their study, people were more likely to agree to take part in a lengthy consumer survey involving a home visit if they had first taken part in a much shorter telephone survey. As such, the requester can be said to be getting their 'foot in the door'. Theoretical explanations of this effect have suggested that we like to see ourselves as consistent, and having agreed to one request, we don't want to disrupt an image of ourselves as being the sort of helpful person who agrees to such requests (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Dolinski, 2000).

In contrast, Cialdini et al. (1975) showed that an initial larger request can also function effectively to elicit compliance with a subsequent more modest request. When the initial request is rejected, this makes it more likely that participants will perceive a follow-up request as a concession and so agree to it. Cialdini et al. asked if participants would give up two hours of their time for a one-off trip to the zoo with a group of young offenders and found that fewer than 20% of participants agreed. However, when the request followed a previous, and much more onerous, request to spend two hours a week for two years working with young offenders, compliance with the more modest request rose to 50%.

Classic studies like these have given rise to a tradition of research examining the variables that affect compliance. Findings from these studies have been applied to a range of contexts, from business (e.g. Cialdini, 2009) to the military (e.g. King, 2011).

## Conformity

Interest in conformity is often traced to Sherif's (1966/1936) studies of group norm formation, although it is interesting to note that Sherif (1966) himself rejected the tendency to see his studies as having demonstrated conformity,



instead suggesting that they tell us something about how people come to a consensus in the face of ambiguous information. Sherif used a visual illusion called the autokinetic effect, in which a point of light appears to move in a darkened room, despite the fact that the light remains stationary. He asked people to estimate the distance that the light had moved and found that when people were tested individually their estimates differed quite substantially. However, when subsequently tested in a group, the same individuals' estimates converged around a group norm. Similarly, when people were tested in groups first, their estimate converged from early on in the series of trials, and the consensus remained when they were subsequently tested individually.

In contrast to Sherif, who deliberately set out to create an ambiguous situation to see how people would respond, Asch (1956) created a situation in which it was clear that there was a right and a wrong answer. He used simple perceptual stimuli consisting of drawings of three lines of different lengths (see Fig. 15.1).

The participants' apparently simple task was to identify which of lines A, B and C was the same length as the target line, and indeed, Asch ran control conditions in which people completed the task alone and found that virtually no one ever made a mistake. However, Asch's experimental conditions featured groups of confederates who were instructed to give the wrong answer. When naïve participants were required to provide their answers after several confederates had given an obviously wrong answer, many conformed and also gave the wrong answer. However, things are a little more complicated than they seem—the standard story of the Asch experiments in which people go along with the group is actually not quite correct. It was certainly the case

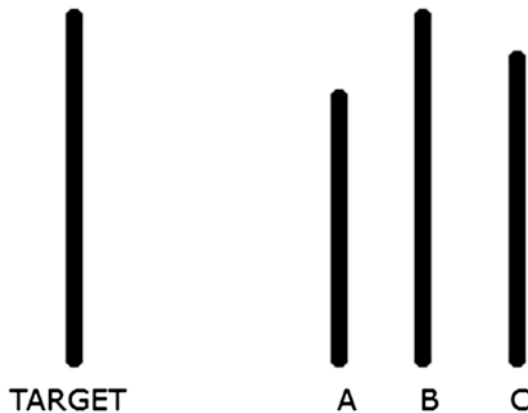


Fig. 15.1 Asch's stimuli (based on Asch, 1956, Fig. 2)

that a majority of participants conformed at least once *over a series of trials*, but over *all* trials, the most frequent response was to remain independent and provide the correct answer. Things are clearly more complex than they are sometimes made to appear, and it has been suggested that giving wrong answers was a way of building up solidarity with the group so that when they did come to disagree, participants were doing so from a base layer of agreement (Hodges & Geyer, 2006). Indeed, Asch himself saw his studies as telling us as much about resistance as they did about conformity: 'It is ... unduly narrowing to emphasize submission, to the neglect of the not inconsiderable powers persons demonstrate on occasion for acting according to conviction and rising above group passion' (Asch, 1956, p. 2).

## Obedience

Obedience is most closely associated with the influential but controversial series of studies conducted by Stanley Milgram in the early 1960s (Milgram, 1963, 1965, 1974). Probably the most well-known variant of Milgram's experiments involved a naïve participant playing the role of 'teacher' to a confederate playing the role of 'learner' in what the participant believed to be a memory experiment. Each time the learner, who was in an adjacent room, answered a question incorrectly, the participant's task was to administer an electric shock. The shocks increased in 15-volt increments with each wrong answer, up to a maximum of 450 volts. As the shocks increased in severity, the learner could be heard yelping, and then protesting, demanding to be let out, screaming in apparent agony and finally becoming ominously silent. Each time the participant hesitated or refused to continue, the experimenter could use one of four pre-prepared prods (to be used in order and begun anew for each separate attempt at defiance) designed to elicit obedience:

Prod 1: Please continue, *or*, Please go on.

Prod 2: The experiment requires that you continue.

Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Prod 4: You have no other choice, you *must* go on.

(Milgram, 1974, p. 21, italics in original)

The experimenter also had two special prods at his disposal that could be used as required by the situation: 'Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on' (ibid.) and 'Whether the learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs

correctly. So please go on' (ibid., p. 22). In versions of the experiment using this procedure, obedience levels of between 47.5% and 65% were found, where obedience was operationalised as administering the final shock on the scale. Milgram's experiments have been subject to continued criticism in relation to the ethical problems inherent in deceiving someone into participating in a potentially very stressful experiment (e.g. Baumrind, 1964, 2013; Mixon, 1989), and their findings have been subject to methodological critique on a number of grounds (e.g. Orne & Holland, 1968; see Miller, 1986, for a summary and review). However, the experiments have been hugely influential—perhaps more so than any other social psychological study—and continue to be cited in discussions concerning phenomena as varied as business ethics (Pina e Cunha, Rego, & Clegg, 2010; Sheppard & Young, 2007), the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuses (Fiske, Harris, & Cuddy, 2004; Lankford, 2009) and the Holocaust (Miller, 2004). Recent years have also seen renewed attempts to engage empirically with the phenomena Milgram sought to explore, whether in the form of replications (Burger, 2009), simulations (Dambrun & Vatiné, 2010; Slater et al., 2006) or variations on Milgram's experimental paradigm (Beauvois, Courbet, & Oberlé, 2012; Zeigler-Hill, Southard, Archer, & Donohoe, 2013).

## Criticisms

For present purposes, the criticisms of work on social influence can be said to concern three broad issues: conformity bias, individualistic bias and the limitations of experimentation. It should, however, be noted that these three areas of critique overlap with one another in many respects.

### Conformity Bias

One of the earliest critics of social influence research was Serge Moscovici (1976). Moscovici was concerned to explore how minorities can serve as the catalyst for social change, and he challenged previous work on the grounds that it displayed what he termed *conformity bias*. Because of this bias, Moscovici argued, researchers had concentrated on identifying how individuals could be made to conform to social norms at the expense of the study of how social change occurs. This critique can be understood as part of the broader critique of social psychology which emerged in Europe in the 1970s and which sought to re-establish the meaningfulness of social action (e.g. Israel & Tajfel, 1972).

In order to explore minority influence empirically, Moscovici and his colleagues (e.g. Moscovici & Lage, 1976; Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969) used an experimental paradigm every bit as elegantly simple as Asch's. Participants were asked to identify the colour of slides projected onto a screen. Whereas Asch had employed confederates to take on the role of a majority who gave incorrect answers on a perceptual task, in Moscovici's studies, the confederates were in the minority. The results suggested that when the minority maintained a consistent position, it was able to have a modest effect on the responses of the majority.

Moscovici's arguments also highlight the extent to which bias can be built into the design of studies. The 'heroes' of many classic experiments are lone individuals who withstand social pressures from a group or an authority figure. In such experiments, the social world is by definition a dangerous source of irrational error and immoral behaviour. In designing such experiments, researchers appear not to have entertained the possibility that groups might conceivably have *positive* effects. In this respect, social influence research can be seen to be biased in favour of individualism.

## Individualistic Bias

As Reicher and Haslam (2006) have argued, much classic work on groups in social psychology has assumed that individual-level behaviour has the potential to be rational and moral but that individuals are in danger of being led astray by the irrationality and immorality of the group. This assumption is particularly apparent in the concept of deindividuation, defined by Festinger et al. (1952, p. 382) as a state arising when 'individuals are not seen or paid attention to as individuals. The [group] members do not feel that they stand out as individuals. Others are not singling a person out for attention nor is the person singling out others'. Most famously, the concept was elaborated by Zimbardo (1969, p. 249), who, in something of a rhetorical flourish, explained it thus:

Mythically, deindividuation is the ageless life force, the cycle of nature, the blood ties, the tribe, the female principle, the irrational, the impulsive, the anonymous chorus, the vengeful furies. To be singular, to stand apart from other men, to aspire to Godhead, to honor social contracts and man-made commitments above family bonds, is to be individuated.

However, the assumption that the individual was by definition more rational and moral than the collective was challenged by the influential work of Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) who, in developing what became known as Social Identity Theory, argued that group behaviour should be theorised as meaningful and rational. The implications of the social identity perspective for social influence have been worked out most fully by John Turner (1991). Importantly, for social identity and self-categorisation theorists, our identity is not lost in the group, but rather we shift from personal to social identity. In situations where we see ourselves in terms of a social identity, we are more likely to behave in a way that is consonant with the norms of that group. If the norms of the group are antisocial, then our behaviour would be more likely to be antisocial too. If the norms are prosocial, however, then we would be more likely to behave prosocially (Postmes & Spears, 1998). The influence of the group is thus not by definition negative but can be positive too.

Many studies have demonstrated these processes, but for present purposes, a single example must suffice. In many respects, crowd behaviour has for a long time served as a canonical instance of the deleterious effects of the collective on individual behaviour. From LeBon's (1895) classic treatise on the crowd to more recent moral panics about violent football crowds and the 'riots' in several English cities in the summer of 2011 (Reicher & Stott, 2011), popular and academic common-sense is replete with scare stories of the irrationality and danger of the crowd. Indeed, even the liberal *Observer* newspaper sought to explain the 2011 'riots' by inviting an epidemiologist to elucidate how disorderly behaviour spreads like a contagious disease through a crowd (Slutkin, 2011). However, research on crowd behaviour in the social identity tradition has consistently challenged this 'contagion' model of crowd behaviour. In his classic study of a 'riot' in the St Paul's area of Bristol in 1980, Reicher (1984) showed that crowd behaviour in fact involved adherence to social norms, rather than mindless chaos. For instance, Reicher noted how the targets of the crowd's anger were symbols of financial power and state authority, such as banks and the police. When one crowd member threw a brick at a bus—a public service and symbol of shared resource—other crowd members did *not* follow suit, behaviour which clearly contradicts the idea of behavioural contagion. Reicher argued that crowd behaviour only makes sense as intergroup behaviour and in relation to the wider social context in which it occurs.

So why the individualistic bias in much of the classic work? Many authors have argued that, in its north American heartlands, social psychology has tended to work with a rather narrow conception of 'the social' (e.g. Moscovici & Marková, 2006). One of the key figures in early twentieth-century social

psychology, Floyd Allport, summed this up in his arguments against what he termed *the group fallacy*—a tendency to conceive of groups as having an existence over and above their individual members. Allport argued that ‘all theories which partake of the group fallacy have the unfortunate consequence of diverting attention from the true locus of cause and effect, namely the behavior mechanism of the individual’ (Allport, 1924, p. 9). As Danziger (1992, p. 316) notes, Allport ‘was a man with a distinctly ideological mission; for in pushing the claims for psychology he saw himself as defending the truth of individualism against the dangerous illusions of collectivism’. In this respect, the individualism embodied in early social psychology can be understood in the context of the wider individualistic ethos of US culture. By the 1950s, the advent of the Cold War with the communist Soviet Union led to further implicit pressures to highlight the dangers of ‘the social’ (Samelson, 1986), and it is against this backdrop that the classic work on social influence from the 1950s to the 1970s needs to be understood. Rather than dispassionately applying experimental methodology to uncover universal truths, researchers were producing findings that were very much in keeping with the tenor of their cultural and historical location. This leads onto a third and final area of critique concerned with the limitations of experimentation.

## The Limits of Experimentation

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, social psychology entered a period where many of its leading figures publicly questioned the nature of their discipline (see Faye, 2012, for a recent historical overview). In one early critique, Kenneth Ring (1967) criticised what he saw as social psychology’s ‘fun and games’ approach to experimentation, with clever experimental designs seeming to trump theory development and engagement with real-world issues. Milgram’s work is a good example of this, with even those who tend to defend his experiments to this day acknowledging that he was no great theorist (e.g. Blass, 2004; Miller, 1986). It might appear to be more problematic to suggest that Milgram was not concerned with real-world issues given that his explicit aim was to understand what had led to the Holocaust. However, the troubling implications of this are only now beginning to be appreciated: in the absence of compelling theory, using experimental findings—however striking they may be—to try and understand something as complex as the Holocaust is extremely difficult. Recent work suggests that an over-reliance on Milgram’s experiments may actually have held back our understanding of the Holocaust through the over-simplified suggestion that it was the result of ‘ordinary’ people

either obeying orders or fulfilling a small and seemingly insignificant role in the administrative machinery of Nazi Germany (Haslam & Reicher, 2007).

In his subsequent highly influential critique, Kenneth Gergen (1973) went even further than Ring (1967) and suggested abandoning the goal of discovering universal laws of social psychology altogether. Gergen argued that social psychology was much more like history than like the natural sciences and as such should be concerned with the waxing and waning of social psychological phenomena over time. Other critiques focused on the neglected social context of experimentation (e.g. Tajfel, 1972), and while many social psychologists continued (and continue) to see experimentation as the gold standard method for knowledge generation, others began to develop alternative methodological approaches (e.g. Gergen, 1985; Harré & Secord, 1972), many of which emphasised, to a greater or lesser extent, the role of language.

Of particular importance were the initial attempts to incorporate the ideas of post-structuralism into social psychology. In emphasising the discursive production of truth, post-structuralism offered both a set of conceptual resources to make sense of how psychology as a discipline functioned as a means of knowledge production (Rose, 1999), and an alternative perspective on how the areas of concern (e.g. prejudice, personality, identity), that had typically constituted the focal points of the discipline, could be reformulated in non-individualised terms (see the seminal work by Henriques, Hollway, Unwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). In relation to social influence, post-structuralism provided a new approach to the operation of power, most clearly exemplified in the way in which the work of Michel Foucault was used within psychology. Gough, McFadden, and McDonald (2013) provide a particularly clear outline of the implications of Foucault's work for our understanding of social influence. Gough et al. use the example of a university lecture to make the point that the interpersonal and group-based situations which are the focus of so much of the classic work on social influence are only part (and perhaps only a small part) of the way in which influence is exercised. A lecturer hoping to ensure that students attend class may attempt to elicit compliance through requesting that students attend, or may issue more direct instructions to attend, in an attempt to elicit obedience. Or perhaps the lecturer will hope to rely on conformity—individual students will be influenced by the behaviour of their fellow students. However, none of this makes sense without the broader institutional context of university life. If students don't attend, they may be sent a letter reminding them of the importance of attendance; if they miss multiple sessions, they may be called in for a formal meeting with a tutor and issued with a warning concerning their engagement with the course. Missed lectures may result in fellow students reacting negatively, especially if



there is an expectation that students work in groups and there is a perception that some students are not pulling their weight. Ultimately, students may be unable to do well in assessed work if they do not attend lectures, meaning that their participation in higher education itself may be in jeopardy. If this happens to too many students the lecturer will be likely to find her/himself the subject of increased scrutiny from university management; if such a situation continues for too long, then ‘capability assessments’ may be undertaken to ascertain if the lecturer is doing a good-enough job. Ultimately, if we understand behaviour in such situations purely in terms of processes of individual or group influence, then we miss the arguably more important institutional context in which it takes place.

Other researchers appropriated related ideas and developed them in slightly different ways. Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) landmark text developed a perspective on the analysis of discourse that paid more attention to the empirical study of discourse in action than is the case in many Foucauldian accounts. At around the same time, Billig (Billig, 1987; Billig et al., 1988) was developing a perspective on ideology which was critical of approaches (including post-structuralism) which seemed to imply that social actors were passive recipients of broad cultural discourses or, in Billig et al.’s (1988) memorable term, ‘ideological dupes’. Billig noted that, rather than being a monolithic entity that dictated people’s thought, ideology actually furnishes us with contrary themes which enable us to engage in arguing and thinking. In the rest of this chapter, we focus on critical social psychological approaches to social influence that have sought to develop the implications of the discursive and rhetorical critiques.

## Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Influence

The research agenda of discursive psychology (DP) has been shaped by two broad aims: the exploration of ‘the psychological thesaurus’ and the re-specification of core psychological concepts (Edwards, 2005). Exploration of the practical use of ‘the psychological thesaurus’ has involved analysing what speakers achieve through the use of psychological terms. For example, researchers can look for emotional words and consider how terms such as ‘grief’ or ‘jealousy’ are used within interactions (e.g. Edwards, 1999).

Re-specification, on the other hand, involves a critical assessment of the traditional meaning of a psychological concept with reference to the way in which it is manifested in discourse. For example, an attitude might traditionally be defined as a singular evaluative position on a particular issue

(see McVittie & McKinlay, this volume). A researcher can look for descriptions of evaluative positions in discourse to see whether these are done in talk as they are described in theory—and it appears not, as attitudes are often ‘hedged’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Strauss, 2004) which frequently involves an acknowledgement of an alternative position. Even more problematically, the variability of evaluative statements in discourse highlights the difficulty of sustaining the notion of a consistent, enduring attitude (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Indeed, other social actions seem to be more important than consistency in talk, such as saving face (Goffman, 1967) or being polite (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

However, in terms of social influence, a unique challenge is presented. In contrast to topics such as attitudes, scripts or emotions, the topic of social influence reflects a process. That is, in traditional social psychology, it is conceptualised as a change of state—one person’s beliefs and/or behaviours are somehow changed by an intervention from another person or people. This is further complicated when we attempt to differentiate social influence from other forms of communication. When we use discourse, we are engaged in the creation of meaning, and it is therefore arguable that everything involves social influence. This problem is unique for social influence and arguably has meant that discursive re-specification of social influence has been less developed than other core psychological concepts. However, some researchers have started to take up this challenge, and we will now explore the progress made in re-specifying social influence from a discursive perspective.

In line with the research agenda of DP, two main areas of research can be identified. First, some studies have considered how people construct forms of influence in other people and the functions that such constructions perform. For example, Horton-Salway (2007) examined how people reporting symptoms of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) have been described as ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ in seeking a diagnosis of ME. Such a description shows how discourses of influence might be used to cast doubt on someone’s account and how the construction of ‘influenced’ behaviour can be used to bring a person’s identity into question. Thus, the status of a belief or behaviour as being the product of influence is likely to be contentious and subject to contestation (see also Figgou, 2013).

A second group of studies have focused on the actual practices of social influence. For example, Arber (2008) analyses how different questions used in organisational team meetings can be influential in enabling people to ‘get their point over’. However, much of this work does not engage directly with mainstream social psychological research on social influence. A notable exception to this is Hepburn and Potter (2011), who explored how parents used threats

in an effort to get their reluctant children to eat during family mealtimes. From their corpus, they suggested that a threat follows an ‘if x then y’ structure. For example, ‘if you carry on whinging and whining during breakfast time I’ll send you to the bottom step’ (Hepburn & Potter, 2011, p. 105). Hepburn and Potter suggested that traditional approaches to social influence research have not explored what researchers actually mean by concepts such as threats (in addition to overlooking the interactional context). They argue that through the study of naturalistic interactions such as family mealtimes it becomes possible to explore these concepts in more detail.

Hepburn and Potter make it clear that their research is not intended as a comprehensive discursive re-specification of social influence but rather as an attempt to sketch out some of the conceptual and analytic issues with which social influence research will need to engage as it comes into contact with the discursive perspective. In the next section of this chapter, we explore two recent attempts to take this process of re-specification further. First, we consider an attempt to use Billig’s rhetorical perspective to reinterpret one of the classics of the social influence literature; second, we outline a study which develops Hepburn and Potter’s arguments for exploring social influence in ‘real life’ settings.

## **A Rhetorical Approach to Milgram’s ‘Obedience’ Experiments**

In recent years, researchers have begun to make increasing use of the wealth of materials held in the Yale University archives relating to the ‘obedience’ experiments (e.g. Haslam, Reicher, Millard, & McDonald, 2015; Hollander, 2015; Millard, 2014; Nicholson, 2011; Perry, 2012; Russell, 2011, 2014). Of particular note, the archives hold audio recordings of many of Milgram’s experimental sessions. Gibson (2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015, 2016) has used a selection of these recordings in order to explore the way in which the experimental encounters can be analysed as occasions for rhetoric: participants seek to mobilise arguments to try and extricate themselves from the experiment and the experimenter does the same in an attempt to persuade the participant to continue administering electric shocks. Indeed, once we begin to pay attention to the rhetorical aspects of the interactions, other aspects of the received wisdom surrounding the experiments can also be called into question. As an example, consider the following extract from the ‘voice-feedback’ condition (Milgram, 1965, 1974) which follows the same basic procedure as the best-known variants of Milgram’s experiment described above. The extract

begins with the naïve participant, in the role of teacher (T), about to administer a shock to the learner (L), under the watchful eye of the experimenter (E)<sup>1</sup>:

Extract 1

- 1 T: I'm going to administer a hundred and twenty  
 2 volts.  
 3 ((SHOCK))  
 4 L: URGH! Hey these really hurt.  
 5 (3)  
 6 T: I don't think I wanna, be a part of this anymore.  
 7 (2)  
 8 E: Please continue.  
 9 T: No.  
 10 (11)  
 11 E: It's absolutely essential that you go on.  
 12 (2)  
 13 T: Well if he says it's all right it's all right with me  
 14 will you ask him if he wants to go on?  
 15 (3)  
 16 E: Whether the learner likes it or not er, we must  
 17 continue.  
 18 T: I wouldn't contin-  
 19 E: ((inaudible))-  
 20 T: I wouldn't continue without asking him.  
 21 (2)  
 22 E: As I explained to both er, er to him when you were  
 23 there, er although the shocks may be extremely  
 24 painful there is no permanent tissue damage.  
 25 T: Well I still th- I still don't want to go on unless he  
 26 says all right.  
 27 (52) ((During this time period movement can be  
 28 heard, and what sounds like a door shutting.  
 29 From what follows it seems reasonable to  
 30 presume that E went out of the room, ostensibly  
 31 to ask L if he wished to continue))  
 32 E: He seems willing enough to go on so please  
 33 continue.  
 34 (8)  
 35 T: Wet, night, grass, duck, cloth.

<sup>1</sup> In the transcripts of Milgram's 'obedience' experiments, numbers in parentheses indicate timed silences; comments in double parentheses are transcribers' notes.

For present purposes, two things are worthy of note about this exchange. First, it is clear that there is a major departure from standardisation here. Nowhere in his published accounts of the experiments does Milgram mention this tactic of leaving the room, ostensibly to speak to the learner, in order to reassure the participant that all is well. Second, the experimenter's leaving the room is occasioned by the participant arguing that his own continued participation in the experiment is conditional upon establishing that the learner also wishes to continue (line 13: 'if he says it's all right it's all right with me'). The experimenter's actions can thus be understood as produced in the context of a rhetorical struggle over whether the experiment is to continue or not.

The experimenter's strategy of leaving the room is successful in eliciting two further shocks from the participant, but following the 150-volt shock, the learner withdraws consent and the participant again begins to defy the experimenter:

Extract 2

- 59 L: Experimenter! Get me out of here! I won't be in  
 60 the experiment any more. I refuse to go on, let  
 61 me out!
- 62 E: Please continue.
- 63 T: Not under those conditions. Not with him  
 64 hollering.
- 65 E: I just checked on him, and he er, seemed pretty  
 66 willing to continue so please continue.
- 67 T: No not unless I think, you see he's hollering in  
 68 there it's just er  
 69 (16)
- 70 E: It's absolutely essential that you continue.
- 71 T: Well I'm not gonna continue with the man  
 72 hollering that he wants to get out of there I mean  
 73 er (2) it might be essential to you but it's not that  
 74 essential for me.  
 75 (3)
- 76 E: I was just in there and he seemed willing enough  
 77 to continue.
- 78 T: Well, that's what he says but you know it's not  
 79 er  
 80 (14)
- 81 E: ((inaudible))

- 82 T: I mean i- I'd be glad to walk in there if he says to  
83 me go on I'll go on but I'm not going to go on  
84 with the man hollering in there to stop.  
85 E: You have no other choice you must go on.  
86 T: Well I don't say that I mean I'm just not gonna go on  
87 unless he says to go on.  
88 E: Well we'll have to discontinue the experiment then.

Here we see further departures from standardisation as the experimenter draws on the visit to the learner in order to try and persuade the participant that the learner's apparent withdrawal of consent stands in stark contrast to the fact that 'I was just in there and he seemed willing enough to continue' (lines 76–77). The participant, however, remains steadfast and provides new arguments against continuing, such as the fact that the learner is 'hollering' (lines 63–64), and the relative unimportance of the experiment to him (lines 73–74), before ultimately setting a new condition that he will continue if he can personally receive an assurance from the learner that he is willing to go on (lines 82–84). The experimenter does make use of the scripted prods (e.g. lines 70 & 85), but these are to no avail and the experiment is finally discontinued.

What does this tell us about the experiments? First, it suggests that the experimenter seems to have gone to great lengths to get people to continue administering electric shocks. The received view of a cold, calculating experimenter whose interjections were minimal save for the standardised prods is simply not sustainable in the face of this and similar examples. Second, it highlights the fact that the experimenter did not typically issue orders but rather was engaged in an exercise of persuasion. Indeed, it appears that when the experimenter did issue orders, these were only rarely obeyed (Gibson, 2013a), a finding confirmed by convergent lines of evidence from quite different theoretical perspectives (Burger, Girgis, & Manning, 2011; Haslam, Reicher, & Birney, 2014). We are thus faced with the possibility that, after more than 50 years of thinking that the obedience experiments show us that humans have a propensity to obey orders, they actually show us precisely the opposite: orders were much less effective than more subtle attempts at persuading participants to remain in the experiment. To the extent that obedience is defined as social influence elicited in response to a direct order, it appears that this is *not* what is going on in these experiments.

## Social Influence in a Livery Yard

Smart (2014) explored social influence in a livery yard (a place where people keep their horses). As organisations designed to accomplish a particular form of business (i.e. looking after horses) and featuring people with different institutionally relevant roles (e.g. those paying to keep their horses at the yard, staffing the yard and running the yard), they are characterised by processes of negotiation over what is best for particular horses. This setting is a relatively closed community of people and thus provides an ideal opportunity to explore social influence practices within people's everyday lives.

A detailed ethnographic approach was taken to obtain data from the livery yard in a variety of forms (photographs, observational notes and 210 hours of audio and visual recordings of interactions). Analysis was informed by a synthetic approach to DP (Wetherell, 2007). For present purposes, two major findings are worth noting: the problems of identifying 'influence' and the temporal context of influence.

### Identifying Social Influence in Talk: The Conversational Context

The first challenge was to identify episodes of social influence within the recorded conversations. In traditional approaches where influence strategies such as the foot-in-the-door technique have been identified, there is an implicit assumption that influence 'happens' at a definable moment after the influence strategy has been used. In the livery yard conversations, however, it was not possible to identify specific occasions where influence could be said to have occurred. In fact, in line with Horton-Salway (2007), influence appeared to be something that was orientated to, rather than being evidenced in talk. As an example, consider the following extract in which Josephine and Karen, in the presence of the researcher (Cordet), are discussing what might be wrong with a particular horse (see Appendix for transcription conventions):

#### Extract 3

- 1 Karen: we are a bit unsu:re about him at
- 2 the moment °he sort of<sup>o</sup> displayed
- 3 em .hh some discomfort in his .hh
- 4 side
- 5 Cordet: ↑mmm
- 6 Karen: (um b) swishy tail
- 7 (.2)
- 8 Karen e[mm



- 9 Josephine: [I thought he'd been bitten cos  
 10 he kept sort of s:swinging round  
 11 tohi↓ >I dnnow<  
 12 Karen ↑↑mnyea↓

This is a small portion of an extended discussion in which the horse's owner, Karen, raises the possibility that her horse may be suffering from colic. In contrast, Josephine, a deputy manager at the yard, repeatedly suggests that an insect bite may be a better explanation for the horse's symptoms. Ultimately, then, we can understand this exchange as one in which matters of social influence are at stake, with each party seeking to convince the other of the validity of their explanation and with each position having different implications for the course of action to be taken. In her initial explanation of the situation to Cordet, Karen frames the problem as a shared one marked by collective uncertainty (l. 1: '*we* are a bit unsure'). In line 9, Josephine suggests that she had 'thought' that the horse had been bitten. By hedging her position in this way it might be suggested that Josephine is engaging in a relatively weak attempt at influence. Not only does she construct her position as subjectively based in her own 'thought[s]', rather than as a statement of fact, she also presents her position in the past tense, which leaves open the possibility that she no longer thinks this. Nevertheless, she goes on to provide a basis for her position (i.e. 'cos he kept sort of s:swinging round'), thereby beginning the process of grounding her 'thought' in externally observable information.

Ultimately, Josephine does initiate treatment for colic but does so in a way which positions her as still not having been persuaded that colic is the most likely explanation for the symptoms:

#### Extract 4

- 1 Josephine: where's Zara  
 2 Pat: indoors  
 3 Josephine: I wonder if she's got liquid paraffin  
 4 Karen: so you think  
 5 Josephine: [I mean that won't harm  
 6 Karen: [just do do that first  
 7 Josephine: [If he's playing up even if it's not  
 8 colicky or anything that won't harm  
 9 him will him you just got to get  
 10 it out really

In suggesting that they seek some liquid paraffin (a treatment for colic), Josephine frames this as something 'that won't harm ... even if it's not colicky'

(ll. 5-8). She thus takes up a position in which she is taking the action that has been subtly advocated by Karen but without conceding that Karen has convinced her that colic is the most likely explanation. In the language of traditional social influence research, we might say that she enables herself to perform compliance (i.e. acceding to a request) but without having been demonstrably persuaded of Karen's view. However, from Josephine's actions within this conversation, it is very difficult to identify a precise moment of influence.

### The Temporal Context of Influence

Moscovici (1976) showed how minorities can influence majorities if they are consistent over time. However, subsequent work has not necessarily engaged in a systematic fashion with the temporal aspects of social influence. The livery yard study revealed the importance of considering longer time periods in understanding social influence and problem solving within groups. Indeed, the repeated presentation of the same problems became part of the central practices that potentially constituted the group identity of the livery yard. Problems were presented through a particular conversational sequence that included repetition of an assessment of an issue, presentation of a problem, a solution slot and then an acceptance or avoidance of the solution. The trajectory of these repeated conversations could only be altered by key members of the yard, such as the yard owner, and therefore appeared to constitute an 'influence order' within the livery yard. For example, consider the 'Gem puzzle'. Gem was a horse with recurrent lameness over a nine-month period, owned by Sandra. In extract 5, we can see how changing the trajectory of the conversation from problematic to unproblematic was resisted when a solution was offered by a fellow horse owner:

#### Extract 5

- 1 Eliza: are you having a lesson tomorrow?
- 2 Sandra: I don't know I think (.) he wasn't as uneven as he was
- 3 in the week,
- 4 Eliza: aha
- 5 Sandra: just a slight slight slight so I don't know.
- 6 I don't know whether to give it another couple of days
- 7 Eliza: aha
- 8 Sandra: or whether to push it the trouble is if I if I push it
- 9 and I make it worse then I shall blame myself
- 10 Eliza: put a (boot) on the feet
- 11 or we just do the half private session each cause
- 12 I am worried about Charlie's saddle so if you want it to
- 13 we could both do 20 minutes

- 14 Sandra: let me br let me brood on that and I'll em  
 15 and I'll think about it

Extract 5 illustrates the typical pattern of how the 'Gem puzzle' was presented. The puzzle is initiated in line 1 as an account for why Sandra might not have a lesson the next day. Sandra repeats her assessment of the problem—that he was uneven—in lines 2 and 5. She identifies a problem in line 8: 'the trouble is...'. A solution is offered by Eliza in line 10 ('put a boot on the feet'), but this is not taken up by Sandra in lines 14 and 15 where she states that she will 'think about it'. Eliza, a fellow horse owner, is not privileged to change the trajectory of the puzzle to be unproblematic.

The repetition, or rehearsal, of these problems appears to limit both the solutions that yard members will accept and entitlement to provide solutions. Many other instances were identified where a person might attempt to offer a solution to a problem but was resisted through statements such as 'but he does have a problem with lameness, doesn't he'. However, the yard owner was given entitlement to revise puzzles into new puzzles, and to offer solutions, as illustrated in Extract 6, a follow-up to the Gem Puzzle:

#### Extract 6

- 1 Zara: >we are going to have another one joining us soon<  
 2 aren't we  
 3 Sandra: well hopefully yea, hopefully  
 4 Cordet: another,  
 5 Sandra: me e:m  
 6 Zara: [a horse that wants to do what she wants to do  
 7 Cordet: [you've found one have you  
 8 Sandra: n:o I haven't found one yet but  
 9 Zara: >she knows what she wants to do<  
 10 Sandra: I think we're coming to the decision that,  
 11 we've got as far as we can with, big man  
 12 Zara: °Yes°  
 13 Sandra: cause we just keep hitting all brick walls,  
 14 unfortunately (.) °which is a shame but you know°  
 15 Zara: he's lovely but  
 16 Sandra: but [yea,  
 17 Zara: [you you've °got to get another°

Extract 6 is initiated by Zara, the yard owner, who provides an assessment of a new event by stating that a new horse will be arriving soon in line 1. Somewhat less certainly, Sandra acknowledges this in line 3, but as with other puzzles that are other-initiated, she does this in a more hesitant fashion than

when introducing her own material. In line 4, the redoing is started by Cordet (the researcher) and expanded by Zara in line 6, who provides a repeated assessment of the new puzzle—‘a horse that wants to do what she wants to do’. This appears to rhetorically respond to the previous repeated puzzle around Gem’s lameness, where Sandra was unable to take part in lessons, go galloping and so on. In this puzzle, we see that Zara’s solution is allowed and accepted, as opposed to the solutions offered in extract 5, and Zara’s final position in line 17 (‘you’ve got to get another’) is not contested.

This temporal development of puzzles provides a new insight into understanding social influence. First, it highlights how influence occurs in a complex environment that includes a very particular construction of problems and who is entitled to offer solutions. Second, problems might not always be presented for a solution—they might be accounts for other behaviours, such as not riding. Third, their repeated nature seems also to constitute a particular yard identity—knowing these problems and discussing them as yard problems with the same language appears to be a demonstration of yard membership.

This study suggests that within everyday social contexts, social influence is very much context dependent—interactionally, longitudinally and organisationally. Its prominence or meaning becomes interactionally defined as problematic, for example, when people appear to be attempting to influence others, and this is out of line with the social order of a situation but might be made less problematic through simultaneous social actions of face saving or politeness.

## Conclusion

Current trends in critical work on social influence point to a fundamental re-evaluation of key concepts. For example, work on Milgram’s experiments has suggested that they are *not* demonstrations of obedience as typically understood—that is, as behavioural change elicited in response to a direct order. This inevitably raises questions regarding what, exactly, we mean by obedience. When we talk about, for example, ‘obeying’ the law, we generally don’t assume that direct orders are needed. Rather, we are referring to a set of social rules, formalised in the institutions of law and order, that people orient their conduct around.

Even more fundamentally, the very concept of social influence itself can be shown to be problematic. The idea of one agent influencing another involves what has been described as *the conduit metaphor* (Reddy, 1979), in which individual thought influences individual action, and this action is directed

towards getting another individual to ‘receive’ that thought and act accordingly. Such a view of language and communication is unsustainable when we are faced with the subtle complexities of everyday interactions, in which it is often difficult—if not impossible—to pin down exactly where and when ‘influence’ occurs. To the extent that influence involves the assumption of thoughts and actions as being the property of discrete individuals, the concept itself presupposes a set of *a priori* individualistic assumptions of the kind that have been challenged by critical approaches. Instead, future research on the area traditionally known as ‘social influence’ might be well-advised to adopt the term ‘joint action’ (e.g. Shotter, 1993), which highlights the extent to which any social practice will always and inevitably be the outcome of shared activity. The topic of influence thus becomes more interesting to the extent that social actors can be seen to *orient to* influence insofar as the conduit metaphor is itself something that is woven into the fabric of contemporary (western) assumptions about proper personhood and communication.

Indeed, in this respect, we are able to extend the critique of psychology’s individualism by highlighting the problematic status of ‘social influence’ per se. This also enables discursively oriented researchers to respond to critiques from within critical social psychology that DP is insufficiently critical in a political sense (e.g. Hayter & Hegarty, 2015; and see some of the responses to the survey of UK critical psychologists reported in Cromby & Willis, 2011). As should be clear from the above discussion of individualistic bias within traditional social influence research, social psychology’s foundational assumptions about the nature of its subject matter are bound up with deeply political assumptions about the nature of morality (i.e. moral individuals vs. corrupting collectives). In seeking to work through an epistemological, methodological and analytic warrant for a fundamentally anti-individualistic psychology, DP is an inherently critical project. To date, direct engagement with the re-specification of social influence has been minimal, but we would suggest that further developments in this respect will be at the heart of the critical project of DP in years to come.

## Appendix

The transcripts from the livery yard study are presented in an abbreviated form of Gail Jefferson’s conventions, which are widely used in conversation analysis and discursive psychology. The conventions described below are amalgamated and adapted from descriptions provided in Atkinson and Heritage (1984), Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008, pp. x–xi) and Wooffitt (2005, pp. 211–212):

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(.2)	Number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in brackets indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.
[see]	Square brackets are used to show where talk overlaps, these are aligned to show where overlap starts and finishes.
.hhh	In-breath.
:	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter.
(boot)	Indicates speech that is difficult to make out.
,	A comma indicates a slight fall in tone.
↑↓	Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
° °	Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
< >	'Less than' and 'more than' signs are used to enclose talk that is slower than the surrounding talk. Where these face the other way, they denote faster talk.

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# 16

## Prejudice

Keith Tuffin

The enduring disciplinary interest in prejudice, discrimination, and racism (Reicher, 2012) stems from associations with some of our more inhumane treatments of others, with prejudicial assumptions underpinning the abominations of slavery, genocide, and the pernicious effects of colonisation (Tuffin, 2008). Social psychological knowledge already extends to the unquestioned complexity involved in making negative judgements about others, and we know prejudice can rest on matters that are deep seated and are resistant to change. The most well-known prejudices target people of different colour, culture, gender, or age and correspond to the key ‘isms’: racism, sexism, and ageism. Prejudice can also be organised on the basis of dislike or mistrust of characteristics like height, weight, disability, religion, education, political affiliation, and occupation. The list also includes more trivial bases such as looks, clothing, hair colour, tattoos, and body piercings, what we drink, what we eat, and who we associate with.

The vast range of characteristics on which negative judgements can be based is impressive; however, the gravity of these judgements and their history is even more impressive. The sheer depth of ill feeling towards others argues for the importance of this topic as a site for intellectual enquiry. While prejudices range from the trivial to the profound, they are pervasive in society, and for this reason, the importance of studying these matters cannot be overstated. McKinlay and McVitie (2008) suggest prejudice constitutes one of society’s

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greatest problems, and it is much studied since it represents a major challenge for contemporary society. Similarly, Blackwell, Smith, and Sorenson (2008) argue that one of the most important tasks for social researchers is to expose the bases on which the culture of prejudice is founded. Understanding the complex dynamics of prejudice is one of the most difficult and yet important challenges. Reicher (2001) also talks about the importance of this when suggesting that doing this well will contribute to the fight against racism (as an illustrative prejudice), and not doing this well means we may fail our academic, social, and moral responsibilities.

## History

Contemporary concerns are underpinned by the long-standing and inextricable involvement of prejudice throughout the course of human history involving countless narratives of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups setting out to dominate and exploit others. European imperialism and colonisation have provided a dominant foundation for the culture of prejudice over the last 500 years (Fredrickson, 2002). The history of prejudice is intertwined with the practices of colonisation, and the domination and subjugation of indigenous peoples whose culture and traditions yielded to the 'pioneering' spirit of 'new' settlers. The colonisers imposed new systems of religion, politics, law, language, and technology. Native customs and practices, previously honoured across the generations, were displaced and marginalised (Tuffin, 2013). Land occupied for thousands of years by indigenous peoples was seized by newly established authorities who, in the worst cases, implemented policies of genocide and enslavement which resulted in political decimation, humiliation, and marginalisation (Power, 2003). This bleak history is not simply something to be documented in the annals of prejudice, but as Tileagă (2015) urges, it is also important to appreciate that without understanding this history, attempts to understand prejudice become almost unintelligible.

The USA was founded on the genocide of the indigenous people, oppression of the Black population, and international imperialism. When European imperial forces first came into contact with people of different appearance, they were most worried about religious differences. However, it was not long before they became increasingly concerned with colour and the idea of 'race', grounded in a form of crude physical anthropology, developed. European expansion into Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific introduced what Fredrickson (2015) refers to as the 'color-coded racism' of the nineteenth century. The



highly contested notion of 'race' is based on biological definitions and the claim that differing frequencies of genes exist within populations. Andersen (1994) argues that 'race' amounts to a sociobiological belief which has been transformed into a pseudo-biological concept which lacks scientific validity and is best abandoned. Races are unable to be sharply defined, and while physical differences exist, these are not the same as race. Richards (1997) also discusses the discredited notion of race and acknowledges the difficulty in relinquishing this idea.

While 'races' do not exist, the ideology of racism continues to sanction domination and exclusion of one ethnic group by another (Fredrickson, 2015). Racism involves grouping people based on phenotypical characteristics and attributing negative characteristics to members of these groups (Miles, 1989). Thus, racism involves the belief that external characteristics (skin colour or facial features) serve as a proxy for negative characteristics which members of the dominant group do not possess. Fredrickson argues that racism peaked during the twentieth century with racial segregation in the American South and in South Africa, and in the genocide of European Jews. The human horror of the 'holocaust' in the 1930s and 1940s gave witness to the mass extermination of six million Jews, and five million Poles, communists, homosexuals, political opponents, and other 'undesirables' in Nazi Germany (Power, 2003). Adolf Hitler sought scientific support for the ideology of racial superiority with White races regarded as the highest point in the racial hierarchy (Proctor, 1988). The 'science' of eugenics was manufactured to boost acceptance of Hitler's 'master race' and the highly conspicuous form of racism: Aryan superiority, which claimed power relations were both natural and inevitable.

A further prejudicial stain against humanity was the business of trading in human lives and labour. In the USA, slave trading lasted about 200 years and did not end until the 1860s. Fredrickson (2002) suggests slavery was justified on the grounds of religion and race. It was widely understood that trading Christians was wrong, but the enslavement of heathens was justified since their souls could be saved if they had contact with true believers. Operating powerfully during this time were strong presumptions regarding White supremacy/Black inferiority which legitimised the oppressive conditions under which slavery flourished. Wetherell (1996) notes that the idea of Black inferiority was widely embraced in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time when the science of 'racial types' was also in its heyday. Such prejudicial notions were used to support British slavers in a trade which, amazingly, Fryer (1984) estimates involved up to 60 million people crossing the Atlantic to be sold as human livestock.

As this brief history reminds us, prejudice and racism flourish with legal and institutional support. However, even without such encouragement prejudice and racism can survive pretty well. While the highly publicised and politicised examples of human slavery, Nazi eugenics and the injustices and hardships imposed by apartheid are all too familiar, it is important not to forget everyday occurrences of prejudice. Indeed, not all prejudices are the same and variation in intensity and diversity means they range from subtle to blatant. The language of racism has, arguably, become increasingly subtle (Tuffin, 2013), a trend consistent with claims about the deniability of prejudice. Anderson (2010) maps the move towards covert prejudice and suggests the indirectness of contemporary bigotry can be encapsulated within the term ‘benign bigotry’. Of course the insidiousness of indirect prejudice can be equally poisonous and its consequences just as destructive in a world where cyber-bullying prospers, racist comments have moved into the world of sport, insulting graffiti is in no short supply on the walls of public buildings, and racist jibes are directed towards those from ‘other’ groups. The prevalence of such incidents gives rise to questions about how social psychology has traditionally dealt with the study of prejudice and racism.

## Traditional Approaches

Social psychology has advanced a number of theoretical accounts seeking to explain prejudice. These explanations reflect the historical period and the zeitgeist which gave rise to them, along with the currency afforded various paradigmatic frameworks which social psychology has offered over the course of the last century. Critical scholars (see, e.g. Augoustinos & Every, 2015; Gough, McFadden, & McDonald, 2013; Tuffin, 2005) have critiqued traditional theories of prejudice which are loosely based around social cognition, personality, and group membership.

## Prejudice as Faulty Thinking

Dominant within social psychology since the 1970s, social cognition promotes the idea that prejudice stems from the limitations of the human mind. Drawing on the metaphor of the mind as a computer, this view suggests we have limited capacity to process the vast amount of perceptual information available. In order to manage and make sense of this overwhelming amount of stimuli we chunk information into categories and stereotypes based on

dimensions such as gender, colour, or age. The problem of prejudice arises from these generalisations. Allport's (1954) seminal text regards prejudice as an unwarranted dislike of others based on errors in thinking which are too broad, too rigid, or simply wrong. These errors stem from a failure to view people as individuals, but rather as prototypical group members. This is the business of stereotyping which is only one step away from prejudice (Augoustinos & Every, 2015). Thus, the theoretical contribution of social cognition is in explicating the tight relationship between social categorisation, stereotyping, and prejudice.

Problematically our faulty thinking means the formation of stereotypes slant and preselect information in ways that are more likely to confirm negative biases. Attempts to avoid cognitive overload result in the development of stereotypes, overgeneralisations, and prejudgements. While this makes intuitive sense, there is evidence suggesting that we are not simply caught in a trap with overwhelming stimuli inevitably producing cognitive frugality. Indeed, Locke and Johnston (2001) suggest cognitive efforts may not be as automatic and unconscious as previously assumed, and we can be much more strategic and tactical in the management of our cognitions. Another concern with this approach (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) is with the image of the person as an individualistic information processor, which fails to adequately explain why only some folk become prejudiced. This can seem especially odd, given that we all possess similar cognitive machinery and similar ways of processing information. This view also offers no explanation as to why some groups have become victims of prejudice and others not. A third critique suggests cognitive models are simplistic and reductionistic (Gough et al., 2013). This concern stems from the view that it is too simplistic to assume we perceive the same stimuli, independently of social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. Finally, there is concern that when prejudice and bigotry are regarded as the 'natural' effects of information processing, these actions become unalterable and thereby excused. We must be wary of claims the prejudice is inevitable since this leads to greater acceptance of the view that hatred and dislike of others is simply part of our nature and it makes little sense to try and change this or punish transgressions (Reicher, 2001). Prejudice involves social actions which are unacceptable, and we should strenuously resist claims that this is normal, acceptable, and simply the way the world is.

## Prejudice as a Personality Trait

Originally based on the psychodynamic work of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950), this approach seeks to explain both the social and emotional dimensions of prejudice. Under this view it was assumed prejudice was a function of personality characteristics formed in childhood where parental interactions were harsh, punitive, and obedience oriented (Heaven, 2001). The argument is that severe parental discipline is likely to result in children with an authoritarian personality, characterised by rigid adherence to social conventions, unquestioning subservience to superiors, and hostile rejection of those who violate conventional social values. Parental demands for deference produce emotional reactions (anger and hostility) which are not able to be directed at authority figures and become displaced onto politically weaker targets such as ethnic minorities. It is important to note that Adorno et al. are not claiming child-rearing practices cause authoritarianism and prejudice but simply that there becomes a close alignment between individual personality and political ideology (Wetherell, 1996).

This orientation has been espoused by Frosh (2002), who has criticised attempts to locate prejudice within the mind of the individual and argued for the importance of emotional aspects of prejudice. Frosh has also noted the extent to which prejudice can be unconscious, linked closely to emotions, such as fear of 'others', and influenced by socio-political circumstances. This approach to understanding prejudice has received praise for attempting to deal with a broader range of factors compared with the narrow focus implied by social cognition. Indeed, the theory has received acclaim for its bold attempt to incorporate ideology, socio-cultural circumstances, and individual psychology (Gough et al., 2013). Further, it has attempted to consider emotional aspects of prejudice by showing how racism (through the denigration of others) can be affirming for the identity of the transgressor (Hook, 2008).

While this approach has offered insight into individual prejudice, it has been criticised for its inability to explain wider socio-political movements like the popularity of fascism in Europe in the last century. The failure to account for historical specificity (Tileagă, 2015) suggests the explanatory power of personality is limited by its focus on individual psychology. Another weakness rests on the implication that challenges to prejudice require changing individual personality. Thus, a requirement for changing prejudicial views would be to somehow disentangle childhood socialisation from contemporary political affiliations. With prejudice located largely in the unconscious, such accounts underplay the impact of situational influences and interactions

between individuals and the environment (Billig, 1976). While there is recognition among personality theorists of the importance of social factors, the interaction between individual psychology and structural factors (economic, historical, political, institutional, and social) remains largely overlooked (Augoustinos & Every, 2015).

## Prejudice and Group Membership

The two theories which have spearheaded the drive to have group psychology recognised as important in understanding prejudice are the *realistic group conflict theory* (Sherif & Sherif, 1969) and *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Both theories assume prejudice is as much a group as an individual phenomenon, and in the case of the realistic group conflict theory, it is further assumed that prejudice may be understood by considering the conflicts that exist between groups in competition for limited resources.

Sherif and Sherif's (1969) famous field experiments at a boy's summer camp helped develop the idea that group membership involves psychological complexity and power over individuals. The camps were run over a two-week period, and the boys (aged 11 or 12) were unaware of their involvement in the experiments. They had been selected for their 'normality' and were white, middle class, and previously unacquainted with each other. The experimental procedure involved groups in three distinct stages: formation, competition, and cooperation. Prior to the formation phase, the boys mixed freely and developed spontaneous friendships, after which they were assigned to one of two groups which were separated and given tasks which required group members to work closely together. Group identity was strengthened with group names (*Bull Dogs* and *Red Devils*), flags, jargon, jokes, and ways of operating. The group names were stencilled onto clothing and caps and other group norms, such as leadership patterns and friendships, emerged.

The next experimental phase saw the groups competing against each other in various games and competitions. However, even prior to these contests intergroup hostilities were noted (Platow & Hunter, 2001). Out-group hostilities and strong in-group identification and loyalties were evident following the organised contests (Wetherell, 1996). Having successfully developed a culture of competition and hostility, the experimenters next set about to reduce antagonism and prejudice. Initial attempts included a preacher talking to the boys about tolerance and cooperation, and communal activities including a meal which ended with food being thrown at members of opposing groups. These unsuccessful attempts to reverse prejudice say something about

the stubbornness of prejudice once it has been set. Finally, the two groups were forced to take up superordinate goals which meant they had to work cooperatively in order to achieve goals. When the situation demanded cooperation the boys complied and worked towards mutual goals which diminished intergroup hostility.

In evaluating these studies it is important to note that Sherif and Sherif (1969) have shown that prejudice is not exclusively the preserve of the mal-adjusted, since the boys involved were selected for their stability and normality. And while the researchers were able to successfully induce and then reduce prejudice, there are criticisms about the limitations of the theory of realistic group conflict. One limitation is that while intergroup competition may lead to prejudice, this is not necessarily so. Indeed, research (Brewer & Brown, 1998) suggesting competition fails to stimulate prejudice when group cohesion and identification are weak places significant qualifications on this relationship. Another limitation is that if prejudice is a natural consequence of competition for resources, this eliminates personal accountability for prejudice (Wetherell, 1996). Also there is the issue of the artificial and contrived nature of these studies which raises concern about the relevance of this work for understanding the complexity of real conflicts which are typically steeped in historical contingencies involving political inequalities and power differentials. Finally, this theory fails to explain variation in prejudicial actions and why some groups attract more prejudice than others (Gough et al., 2013).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) privileges social groups with the claim that group membership provides another dimension to the psychology of people. A core aspect of this is the importance of group identification for the individual which Tajfel (1981) examined through a series of studies known as the minimal group experiments. Tajfel aimed to establish groups with such minimal psychological meaning attached to the group that members would not discriminate between in-group members and out-group members. As it turned out, such a minimally involving baseline proved difficult to establish. Group formation was on the most symbolic and abstract of levels with assignment to groups being, effectively, random and group members never engaging in any physical interaction. Individuals were subsequently asked to divide points between members of the two groups with the evidence suggesting participants favoured members of their own group and discriminated against members of the out-group. The astonishing aspect of this was that such in-group favour occurred in spite of attempts to minimise the meaningfulness and significance of group membership.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain these results in terms of changes to personal identity resulting from group membership. When people see themselves

as members of groups (Black, Muslim, woman, etc.), they come to categorise themselves according to the groups characteristics and beliefs. Social Identity Theory involves three stages (categorisation, identification, and comparison) which connect the desire for a positive self-image with the negativities of stereotyping and discrimination. Social categorisation involves the deployment of cognitive categories, based on salient group features, which structure our views of the world and assist in making sense of the world by organising perceptions of self and others. Within group similarities are accentuated and differences with other groups become salient. Such categorisation leads to identification whereby knowledge of belonging to particular categories, along with the emotional significance of group membership, becomes highlighted. Knowledge of group membership increasingly defines self in terms of social identities and this leads to social comparisons where groups an individual identifies with are compared with other groups. Thus, positive self-esteem is linked with feeling good about the groups one identifies with. This assumes people seek positivity and wish to feel good about themselves and that group evaluations occur comparatively (Reynolds & Turner, 2001).

Social Identity Theory provides a highly social account of the causes of prejudice. Prejudice is cast as a group phenomenon where social context is important and prejudice against others intimately linked to their particular group memberships. There are a number of concerns with this approach. Firstly, there is a similarity with the social cognition approach in seeing prejudice as something that occurs due to the way was process perceptual information (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Secondly, there is some doubt about the universality of the mechanisms posited to operate under this system. Different social, cultural, and historical backgrounds may work differently, and Wetherell (1982) reports cross-cultural research showing that participants in the minimal group experimental paradigm who have different cultural background do not respond in the same way as their North American or British counterparts. Thus, the cultural framework which people fit within will have important implications for the development of social identities. Cultural frameworks play themselves out through language and the study of the language of prejudice is considered next.

## Critical Approaches

Critical scholars studying prejudice and discrimination frequently employ a social constructionist epistemology which challenges the taken-for-granted aspects of traditional approaches and theories (Burr, 2015). Social



constructionism rejects the dualism between the individual and the social (Gough et al., 2013). Rather than viewing identity as unitary and stable social constructionists view identity as indexical to the different situations which give rise to it. Thus, identity becomes fluid, fragmented, and constructed through language, which argues for studying prejudice through careful examination of everyday talk and text. For critical social psychologists, language is not regarded as a route to interior cognitions. Rather, such interiority and its inferential epistemology is replaced by a social epistemology which holds that prejudice can be usefully examined as something occurring between people, in talk and interaction.

Discursive psychology posits language as active and constructive (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Thus, we do prejudice in the ways we talk about people who are different from ourselves. Prejudice is not regarded as something which stems from personality, cognitions, or the social groups we identify with, but as something irrevocably and pervasively embedded in language. Wooffitt (2008) suggests inequalities are manifest and reproduced in everyday conversation. Indeed, the primary role of language in prejudice has seen the rhetorical and discursive reproduction of discrimination become increasingly established within the social psychology literature (Collins & Clement, 2012). The action orientation of discursive psychology suggests the categories, groupings, identities, and evaluations involved in prejudice occur in and through language. The task for the critical scholar is to identify the key resources which enable prejudice and to discursively examine the dynamics of how this happens. The promise of this approach is that it offers powerful ways of investigating the very resources which structure our understandings of prejudice.

The changing face of prejudice (Tuffin, 2013) provides another argument for the involvement of constructionist approaches. The change reflects a trajectory from blatant to symbolic and explicit claims, for example, of White supremacy and personal racism are denied and replaced with more sustainable arguments about egalitarianism based on the values of individualism and self-reliance (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2006). Thus overt racism is increasingly replaced by a version which is marked as more subtle, symbolic, and ultimately more sayable. Liu and Mills (2006) suggest that critique of minority group members becomes cloaked in 'plausible deniability' which makes available inferential alternatives to attributions of prejudice. More abstract versions of prejudice are enabled by implicit shared understandings (Durheim, Hook, & Riggs, 2009) and language, whereby reference to prejudice become evident without being explicit. With direct prejudicial talk obscured through innuendo, irony, and implication (Durheim, 2012),

arguments have been made for studying prejudice in ways commensurate with the level of abstraction and deniability involved (Tuffin, 2008). In the case of modern racism, talk has effectively been deracialised (Obeng, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The ambivalence and variability in race talk has shown traditional methods lack the finesse to capture the nuances, subtleties, and contextual variability associated with modern race talk (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Constructionist approaches, however, place language at centre stage as a way of understanding prejudicial social practices and this has the advantage of being intensely contextualised, highly localised, and sensitive to the changing socio-politics of prejudice.

## Leading Edge Research

The remainder of this chapter considers two areas of research which illustrate some of the above points, build on the history of critical engagement, and point towards future directions in prejudice research. The first looks at race talk by acting on the suggestion of Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos (2011) that the language of the targets of racism be considered rather than the current emphasis on the talk of perpetrators. Pack, Tuffin, and Lyons (2015a, 2015b, 2016) looked at Maori as the targets of racism in New Zealand and considered their analyses of why racism takes place, how they manage racism, and suggestions for reducing racism. The second area is more controversial and considers studies (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016) which recalibrate prejudice and discrimination and provide an insider's view of the psychology of these matters. Located within the broad social psychology of living with others and preferred housemates, this work offers a reframing of discrimination as not necessarily involving negative judgements. In asking 'who would you share a home with?' these studies encouraged talk about the intimacies of domestic sharing and the preferences, prejudices, and *necessary* discriminations that take place when considering that question.

## The Targets of Racism

The language of the targets of racism research was conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, based on interviews with 19 Maori and five Pakeha partners (Pack et al., 2015a, 2015b, *in press*). Within the racism literature, the views of ethnic minorities have been largely overlooked (Swim & Stangor, 1998). Brondolo et al. (Brondolo, Brady, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009) have

reviewed studies focusing on targets, and one example is Mellor's (2003) study of indigenous Aboriginal Australians, who acknowledged being victimised by both subtle racism and overt interpersonal racism.

The imbalance in considering perpetrators more thoroughly than targets has, arguably, resulted in lost opportunity with targets views and their strong motivation to provide useful analysis of racism being under-researched. The unique perspective and sensitivity victims offer contrasts vividly with perpetrators who can be comparatively unaware of the presence of racism and its pernicious effects. Indeed, within New Zealand there is evidence of Pakeha disbelief in the existence and importance of racism against Maori (Human Rights Commission, 2007). Regarding investment and stake, perpetrators may be disinterested and deny responsibility, while targets are acutely aware of the psychological impacts of racism and are, accordingly, more invested in understanding and explaining racism. It is this rationale which provides the backbone of the argument for investigating targets' perspectives. The research by Pack, Tuffin, and Lyons consisted of a three pronged approach to racism experienced by Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Firstly, the question of targets understanding of *why* racism takes place was considered. This study looked at Maori explanations and accounts of why others treat them negatively. The second study considered the question of how Maori manage racism. The question of coping with the negativities of human relationships was particularly salient and the third study considered how racism might be minimised. Each of these studies will be briefly reviewed below.

## Accounting for Racism

Maori targets of racism provided detailed analyses of the 'why' of racism (Pack et al., 2015a). They provided extensive background to their experiences of racism in both its blatant and subtle versions. Their answers to the question of why this occurs drew on four key discourses: ignorance, superiority, the media, and institutional racism. Multidimensional Pakeha ignorance included ignorance of Maori people, Maori culture, and ignorance of racism itself. Pakeha were constructed as simply unaware of the subtle daily actions which might be seen as racist such as expecting to be served at a shop counter first or Pakeha men expecting to go through a door after a Pakeha woman but before a Maori woman. This lack of awareness enables racism to go unchecked. Being unaware of racism was exacerbated by what participants referred to as a sense of superiority, constructed implicitly in terms of unspoken Pakeha assumptions that Maori were inferior in terms of intellect, culture, and morality.

There was talk of being categorised on the basis of skin colour and thereby regarded as less deserving. A notable feature of this superiority was cultural imperialism stemming historically from the forces of colonisation and the construction of indigenous people as needing Europeanisation (Te Hiwi, 2008). The discourse of superiority legitimates marginalisation by individuals working within social structures and institutions which are considered next.

Media reports were said to be slanted towards presenting negative news about Maori, overuse of the word 'Maori' in association with crime reporting, and a lack of focus on positive achievement. Examples included an imbalance with over bloated reporting of legal offences involving Maori while under reporting of successful Maori role models. This bias renders Maori achievement invisible within mainstream media and contributes to the perpetuation of negativity, stereotypes, and prejudice. Furthermore, similar negativities are apparent on social media (Johns & McCosker, 2014). Cultural imperialism is strongly implicated in the final discourse: institutional racism. Colonisation includes the hallmarks of a 'superior' civilisation, for example, new technology, language, customs, and practices being imposed on the colonised (Robertson, 2004). Among the customs and practices are institutional practices which span critical areas such as health, education, housing, and jobs. Such a colonial hierarchy disempowers Maori aspirations and reflects on a country in which the dominant culture maintains colonial structures.

The two discourses which are most surprising are ignorance and superiority with the combination being particularly powerful. Pakeha ignorance is fuelled by media accounts which feed into negative stereotypes of Maori. An analysis of Pakeha racism as being caused by ignorance and misinformation holds the promise of racism being reduced through education and more balanced reporting. Collectively, these discourses construct negative positionality for Maori. Media continue to highlight negative stereotypes, the institutions managing health, education, housing, jobs, and justice work in the shadows of hierarchical colonisation, and Pakeha assume their privilege and superiority are deserved and remain blithely unaware of the lived realities of racism. Most negatively, Pack et al. (2015a) suggest this may work towards the sustained constriction of Maori aspirations and a reluctant acceptance of poor outcomes in employment, health, and justice, along with a counter-productive suspicion of Pakeha. More positively, there is the hope afforded by educational interventions and greater visibility of positive reporting of Maori achievement.

## Resisting Racism

The second paper by Pack et al. (2015b) considered the broad question of how the targets of racism manage and resist racism. Three themes were identified: difficulty in verbal resistance, silent resistance, and vocalised resistance. The difficulty in expressing resistance to racism was attributed to aversion to confrontation, sensitivity to power imbalances (e.g. in the workplace), and unwillingness to invite negative political labels. While Maori construct themselves as the undeserving targets of racism, such positioning did not facilitate successful verbal responses to racism. Avoidance of the stress associated with confrontation and an unwillingness to confront for fear of losing emotional control and becoming angry were also noted. Power imbalances were often evident in hierarchical situations where authority figures might make resistance difficult, and verbally resisting racial slurs could cost the target their job. Further, harassment procedures for dealing with racism in the workplace were regarded as ineffective. Participants also documented the difficulty in managing racism compounded by wanting to avoid labels such as 'activist' and 'protester' which carry negative ideological loadings and were avoided.

Non-vocalised resistance took two forms. Firstly, a form of psychological fortification was outlined involving building self-strength and confidence in positioning the perpetrator as lessor. Secondly, the use of either body language to indicate disapproval, or actions which defied racist stereotypes. The effects of racism were countered through drawing on personal ethnic pride which contributed to the inner strength necessary to resist racial disparagement. Confidence was similarly constructed as empowering and participants talked about 'psyching' themselves up and this was achieved by constructing the perpetrator as lessor in terms of knowledge and ethics. The second form of non-vocalised resistance saw participants silently demonstrating their disapproval of racist stereotypes. Silence can be a powerful force in showing the need for change and resistance (Wagner, 2012), and it offers a safe demonstration of non-confrontational resistance. Ignoring racist comments and treating these as unworthy of attention rendered them ineffective. Participants mentioned the unique problems around subtle racism, often framed so as to be deniable in which case there was no useful verbal response.

The third theme of vocalised resistance was constructed as a skilful verbal challenge and something to be learned gradually with experience and maturity. The strategies were varied, creative, and sometimes humorous. A key here was resistance through transfer of control of racism from the perpetrator to the target. Participants talked about the importance of assertiveness and not

backing down. There was also a claim that vocalised resistance was easier if the target did not mention the word racism and was able to inject humour into the situation. Other successful strategies included asking people to explain their racism ('what do you mean by that?'). This request for clarification invariably silenced perpetrators who were unwilling to unravel the innuendo and inference involved in their racist comments.

In documenting differing levels of resistance to racism, this research has highlighted the difficulties involved in managing these situations. Silence was chosen to suggest resistance without engaging in confrontation. Verbal resistance was constructed as potentially risky but if well managed could result in successful resistance to racist stereotyping. Resistance requires considerable psychological resources in order to exercise control over an understandably bad situation (Mallett & Swim, 2009). The strength of such interpersonal resistance is that it can reduce the escalation of racism and shift social norms in the direction of intolerance of racism (Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011). The study of resisting racism can, at best, inform researchers and targets about strategies for confronting and silencing interpersonal racism.

## Reducing Racism

Linked to targets' analyses of why racism occurs and strategies for resistance is the issue of how racism may be reduced. This is the basis of the third study by Pack et al. (in press) which highlights four key suggestions for the reducing racism: reducing structural racism, educational intervention, positive interactions between Maori and Pakeha, and a single *Kiwi* identity.

Structural racism defied ineffective anti-racism laws in the workplace, the justice system and the health system. The targets suggested significant power imbalances operate within these institutions, and in the case of the justice system, there were claims Maori were over-policed and received harsher sentences from judges who suffered from preconceived ideas of racial culpability. Indeed, the literature (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2003; Workman, 2011) suggests the disproportionately high number of incarcerated Maori is linked to racism in sentencing. To counter this, participants suggested including more Maori within the justice system—more Maori police, lawyers, and judges. Interestingly, the notion of a parallel Maori justice system was not discussed, even though this has been proposed by the Green party and has been the subject of ongoing discussion (Perrett, 2013). Participants talked of negative discrimination in the workplace, being overlooked when it

came to promotion, and needing to excel beyond their Pakeha peers in order to be promoted.

Educational interventions were recommended as increased understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi would ensure the principle of equal partnership was honoured more compellingly. Historically, it is important to understand the 1840 signing of the Treaty, by Maori and the British Crown, signalled the beginning of a bicultural nation as this foundational document spelt out the principles guiding two peoples as equal partners in a single country. Some participants suggested Treaty education become mandatory, since greater understanding of history and heritage would minimise racism. There were also suggestions about a revised version of history, teaching respect for cultural difference and the importance of teachers as positive role models. Participants argued that the history curriculum should ideally challenge understandings of Pakeha as honourable winners of a fair fight with Maori characterised as rightfully subdued savages. Teaching respect for cultural differences was seen as critical as was open discussion of racial stereotypes. The success of teaching anti-racism (Husband, 2012; Santas, 2000) can lay a foundation for greater cultural appreciation, empathy, and understanding. Attention to such cultural norms has relevance not only for those in education but also, importantly, those working in the human services.

Suggestions about successful interactions between Maori and Pakeha included talk about notions of integration, working together, and the importance of relationships. Much talk centred around the view that segregated communities contributed to racial divides, misunderstandings, and racism. Working together towards common goals (e.g. a community or church project) was seen as important as a collective identity tended to minimise individual racist views. The issue of commonalities was also evident in the final recommendations which were about highlighting similarities between Pakeha and Maori. In suggesting intermarriage, mutual bicultural respect, and emphasis on being Kiwis, this theme sought to stress the interdependence of New Zealanders of different ethnicity and culture uniting as one tribe, without prejudice. Recalibrating a bicultural country as one group would, on the one hand, be consistent with Dovidio and Gaertner's (2007) common in-group identity model which stresses the advantages of inclusiveness and promises to eliminate negative positioning of Maori as 'other' (Hokowhitu, 2004). One concern with such unification is the question of whether biculturalism can survive the increasingly diverse multicultural society that Aotearoa New Zealand has become. One quarter of residents were born elsewhere and the growing Asian population adds a dynamic dimension to the changing population demographics. Participants were optimistic about this and



consistent with Ward and Liu (2012), who suggested bicultural partnerships can be maintained if all cultures are respected and encouraged to contribute to wider society. Racial separatism was strongly denounced by participants with Pakeha partners, a common occurrence with roughly half of Maori having Pakeha partners (Callister, Didham, & Potter, 2007). The metaphor of the 'melting pot' was deployed to stress the importance of intermarriage in establishing hybridity and breaking down racial barriers. Participants were wary of adopting *Kiwi* as a single unifying tribe since this could lead to the marginalisation of Maori culture. This would be a retrograde step for biculturalism and a country where people enjoy mutual respect and cultural sharing: a country in which non-Maori acquire Maori tattoos, perform the haka, and commonly use Maori words.

Finally, these studies offer a view of the future where the targets remain undaunted in their optimism about the demise of racism. Participants were aware of a bleak history where Maori language was forbidden in schools; Maori were denied entrance to hotels, buses, or movies; they were not selected for jobs; and they were invisible in anything other than negative news stories. However, they were also aware of a more positive cultural trajectory based on the assumption that most Pakeha want to get on with Maori and the bicultural climate will continue to improve. This optimism meant Maori and Pakeha should continue to learn to live together harmoniously and racism rather than the targets would become marginalised.

## **Forced Discrimination: Selecting Housemates and Intimate Prejudice**

This work is based on two studies that examined the explanations and justifications offered by those required to select housemates (Clark & Tuffin, 2015; Tuffin & Clark, 2016). In response to changing population demographics with increasing numbers of young adults sharing prior to purchasing their own home, this research set out to add to the limited literature looking at how we chose whom to live with. The economic and social advantages of living with others make this an attractive option but when sharing there is always the possibility of things going wrong. The possibility of interpersonal dispute and hostility means the introduction of new flat members warrants careful consideration and makes the question 'with whom should I share a household?' of critical importance.

In addition to addressing this important question, the research also aimed to add to understandings of the workings of prejudice and discrimination within

the context of moral sanctions against openly discussing prejudice. However, finding the right flatmate requires discrimination, and this pragmatic necessity is protected by law. New Zealand Legislation (2008) and the 1993 Human Rights Act prevents discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, psychiatric illness, and psychological impairment. However, shared residential accommodation is a notable exception to this act, thereby situating the topic of housemate selection in the psychological space between the legal right to discriminate and the social sanctions against openly expressing prejudice. This makes the issue of how people explain their selection preferences of potential housemates a valuable site for the investigation of human prejudice. The usual wariness associated with disclosure of prejudice and the moral pressure to avoid the appearance of being discriminatory does not apply in this situation. Selecting house mates is unique in that discrimination is not only legal but also required, with the overlay that choosing the right person is vitally important given the domestic proximity involved.

Ten participants, average age 27, who had recently been searching for new housemates were engaged in face-to-face or Skype interviews. In detailing the reasons people gave for preferences, a number of key discourses were evident (Clark & Tuffin, 2015). Regarding the criterion of age, there was marked rigidity with strong preference for age-similar others. Gender was seen as less important, aside from the desirability of maintaining a gender balance. Ethnicity was approached with caution, especially with respect to cultural differences and language barriers. In all cases, previous bad experiences were cited to support and justify the unsuitability and rejection of unwelcome applicants. Similarly, prejudice was based around the personal shortcomings of the rejected.

The second study (Tuffin & Clark, 2016) went beyond the question of selection of ideal housemates and invoked common stereotypes suggesting substance abusers and the mentally ill would not be the most desirable people to live with. In particular, the acceptability of social groups usually afforded great social distance was considered (those with mental illness and alcohol and drug use). Stier and Hinshaw (2007) have clearly demonstrated a preference of increased social distance for those suffering from mental problems. And, it is useful to bear in mind that Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, and Pescosolido (1999) assessed social distance by looking at respondents willingness to live next door, become friendly with, work with, or have a mentally ill person marry into the family—all scenarios requiring less intimate contact than the minimal social distance involved in sharing a house.

The rhetorical resources drawn on to justify discrimination against mental illness included discourses of naivety, irresponsibility, controllability, and

dangerousness. The rationale for rejection was framed in terms of safety, economic imperatives, and the much cited but little understood notion of the 'social dynamics' of the house. These dynamics are commonly understood to be complex and centred around the expectation that housemates make a contribution to the life of the house, not be an emotional drain or economic liability and, most importantly, that the safety and harmony of living with others not be compromised. Acceptance was conditional and subject to invisibility and controllability of problems. Recreational substance abuse was acceptable and talked about as an important facet of normal socialising. Problematic usage was indexed to frequency, type of drug, discretion, and the appropriate social context. Rejection criteria were associated with inferences of dangerousness, unpredictability, and both social and chemical dependency. In such cases, rejection was unambiguous and bolstered by the rhetorical absolute of needing to be safe and trusting those one shared with.

This analysis suggests firstly that discriminatory accounts and justifications were not denied but either clarified by invoking specific contextual criteria or provided highly qualified acceptance. This lack of deniability in the accounts of prejudice and discrimination makes this study unique in terms of openness, transparency, and frankness. Secondly, in the case of forced discrimination, highly specific reasons were provided to justify rejection. These highly contextualised criteria place this work in a space which goes beyond abstract judgements regarding 'others' and offers intensely psychological and pragmatic accounts of who one might be willing to live with.

## Conclusion

Prejudice includes but also extends beyond the key 'isms' and is argued as a vitally important topic of study due to the impressive range of characteristics which can form the basis of negative judgements and the pervasiveness and gravity of such judgements. For social researchers, examining the culture of prejudice is a challenge which is both difficult and important.

Social psychology's enduring interest in prejudice has been contextualised against a backdrop of history of groups attempting to dominate and exploit others. Contemporary understandings of prejudice become almost meaningless without a full appreciation of the history of prejudice. This bleak history owes much to the colour-coded racism of the nineteenth century and is inextricably interwoven with the abominable practices of colonisation, slavery, genocide, eugenics, and political marginalisation. Of course, not all prejudice is as conspicuous, and in the case of race talk, there are suggestions of

increasing subtlety, sayability, and deniability. However, the effects of benign bigotry can be just as poisonous and destructive.

Three traditions for accounting for prejudice have been reviewed and these are based on social cognition, personality, and group membership. The theoretical perspective of social cognition casts prejudice as being a function of the constraints of the human mind. Categorisations and stereotypes work towards simplifying the vast amounts of stimuli and information available; however, these generalisations let us down when prejudice and dislike of others is based on thinking which is too rigid or simply wrong. Thus, we fail to see people as unique individuals and prejudice them on the basis of prototypical group membership. The second theoretical perspective is based on the assumption that prejudice stems from personality characteristics formed in childhood and based on punitive, obedience-oriented parental interactions. The claim is that such parents are more likely to produce children who rigidly follow social convention, subserviently follow the wishes of those in authority, and reject those who violate conventional social values. Such authoritarian personalities displace their emotional responses from deference-demanding parents to politically weaker targets. The third theoretical perspective involves prejudice being regarded as less of an individual characteristic and more a function of group membership.

Critical approaches to understanding and studying prejudice often employ a social constructionist epistemology which rejects the dualism between the individual and the social. Identity is recalibrated, not as unitary and stable but fluid, indexical, and constructed through language. Thus prejudice is no longer regarded as stemming from personality, cognition, or the social groups we identify with, but as something irrevocably embedded within language. Inferences regarding the interiority as posited by social cognition are replaced with a quintessentially social epistemology which locates prejudice as occurring between people in talk and interaction. Claims that prejudice talk has become increasingly obscured through innuendo, irony, and implication have also been matched by arguments that traditional methods lack the finesse to capture the nuanced and contextual variability associated with modern prejudice. Constructionist approaches seek to understand prejudicial social practices through the study of language which has the advantage of providing a theoretical approach which is intensely contextualised, highly localised, and sensitive to the socio-politics of prejudice.

Finally, this chapter considered two areas of prejudice research which stand outside the mainstream: firstly, the study of racism as documented from the perspective of the targets of racism rather than from the perspective of the perpetrators of racism. This work has considered the views of Maori in New

Zealand and examined their analyses of why racism occurs, how they manage the psychology of being targeted by racism, and strategies which may contribute to the demise of racism. Secondly, the study of prejudice and discrimination was considered from the perspective of those looking for housemates. This approach considers the study of prejudice not as something masked by the social taboos of not wanting to appear discriminatory towards other, but rather as a pragmatic necessity when faced with the requirement to choose between a range of people who may present themselves as seeking a place in an existing house, flat, or apartment. Something which can be regarded as a social evil has been reframed as a social requirement, resulting in some frank comments in response to the question of who would one be willing to share with. The promise of this approach is that it has the potential to 'lift the lid' on a topic which participants have formerly been guarded about.

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# 17

## Prosocial Behaviour

Irene Bruna Seu

The literature on prosocial behaviour is vast (see Stürmer & Snyder, 2010; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005 and Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995 for recent reviews) and nearly impossible to review comprehensively in one chapter. The critical review offered here does not claim to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but aims to highlight the constraints and limitations of current knowledge of prosocial behaviour resulting from the overall laboratory-based, quantitative and allegedly neutral experimental approach of mainstream social psychology.

I will focus on one particular aspect of prosocial behaviour, helping in response to humanitarian communications, including giving to charity, as a case study. This is because, first, research in this field has potential applicability to real-life situations. Although this is a very recent and new direction in prosocial research, the findings are potentially of great value to society's well-being in general and humanitarian agencies' communications with the public. Second, donating to charity presents a real challenge to current directions in prosocial research as many of its key theories, focusing on a conceptualisation of the individual as distinct from society, cannot be applied to this form of prosocial behaviour. Because humanitarianism is deeply ensconced in historical and geopolitical factors (Calhoun, 2010) and often involves or is reduced to monetary transactions, focusing on humanitarian and charitable behaviour is particularly useful in highlighting the constraints

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and limitations of mainstream social psychological theorisation of prosocial behaviour. In particular, I aim to show how social psychology's conceptualisation of the individual as self-contained and separate from their socio-historical context, its neglect of ideological and societal factors, and the restrictive impact of cognitive-experimental methods lead to a problematic neglect of crucial aspects of complex, conflicted and ambivalent prosocial behaviour in humanitarian contexts. Arguably, these characteristics contribute to the lack of utility of research on helping behaviour (Manning et al., 2007; Latane & Nida, 1981) and the perception that current insights from mainstream social psychology are difficult to apply outside the laboratory (Meier, 2006). The chapter will conclude with the presentation of a critical psychological alternative based on several studies on public responses to humanitarian and human rights communications.

## Limitations of Mainstream Social Psychological Theories of Prosocial Behaviour

Prosocial behaviour is broadly defined as behaviour that generally benefits other people (Penner et al., 2005; Dovidio & Penner, 2004) and covers a range of behaviours, such as helping, cooperating and donating to charity. Authors tend to consider *altruism* and *helping* as subcategories of prosocial behaviour. Studies on helping focus on intentional acts that have the outcome of benefiting another person, whilst research on *altruism* studies the motivation underlying the behaviour (Dovidio & Penner, 2004).

Some of the key theories of mainstream prosocial research carry no explanatory power when applied to humanitarian helping. Evolutionary theories of prosocial behaviour are a good example (e.g. Buss, 2004). The principle of kin selection as a motivator for prosocial behaviour is regularly contradicted by people willingly donating to total strangers. Similarly, reciprocity, another key aspect of evolutionary theories, is equally inapplicable as it is highly unlikely that, for example, victims of an earthquake in Nepal will ever be in a position to reciprocate the kindness of anonymous donors. Indeed, throwing doubts on the possibility that donors might be motivated by such expectations, the UK response has been overwhelmingly generous.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the principle of group selection—for example, in a situation of competition between two groups, the one with more altruistic members willing to sacrifice themselves

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<sup>1</sup>DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee) alone has raised £83 million so far. <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeal/nepal-earthquake-appeal>

for the group stands a better chance of survival—is hardly relevant to helping distant strangers as it, by definition, benefits ‘the other’ to one’s genetic group.

Similarly inadequate is the cost-reward analysis of helping (Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). This theory takes an economic view of human behaviour. It assumes that people, primarily motivated by self-interest, tend to maximise their rewards and minimise their costs. Whilst this theory is a good predictor in some situations—for example, returning a stranded pet carries potentially more reward and less danger than intervening in a fight, thus making the former a more likely choice—it is not informative when it comes to deciding to volunteer or sign up for a standing order to a charity like Oxfam, even if we were to consider this action as a type of emergency helping. Helping distant others through donations has relatively little cost and arguably great psychological rewards (e.g. self-esteem), yet the number, scale and severity of humanitarian crises are outstripping resources (Stirk, 2015a) and the humanitarian financing gap is growing (Stirk, 2015b).

For similar reasons, the arguably most famous strand of research, which studies bystander passivity, also cannot be applied to humanitarian helping. Even though there have been attempts to apply the Latané and Darley’s (Latané & Darley, 1970; Latané & Nida, 1981) five-step model of bystander intervention to non-emergency situations (e.g. Borgida, Conner, & Manteufel, 1992; Rabow, Newcomb, Monto, & Hernandez, 1990), overall this theory is fundamentally concerned with understanding how people respond in emergencies that require immediate assistance. Importantly for our purposes, studies of bystander phenomena tend to be carried out under controlled laboratory-based conditions with the purpose of isolating individual variables, rather than embracing the complexity of interactions.

Motivated by a widespread concern about audiences’ moral apathy and unresponsiveness (e.g. Geras, 1999; Singer, 2009), other theories of prosocial behaviour have been proposed to explain public responses to news of genocide or mass atrocities, or to charity and humanitarian appeals. Some have suggested that differences in responses are due to donors’ decision-making styles (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001), whilst others have argued that humanitarian appeals provoke ‘psychophysical numbing’, where the human ability to appreciate loss of life reduces as the loss becomes greater (Slovic, 2007b). Others have focused on the ‘identifiable victim effect’, that is, a higher likelihood of response when the appeal identifies an individual victim (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a) or specific family (Small & Loewenstein, 2003; Warren & Walker, 1991) and whether this could be attributed to smaller numbers evoking more compassion (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a) or because it enabled the respondents to feel more competent (Warren & Walker, 1991).

Mixed results have emerged from the application of the 'theory of planned behaviour' (Smith & McSweeney, 2007) or the 'dual processing theory' (Epstein, 1994) to audience apathy. Slovic (2007) and Epstein (1994) have blamed the failure of System 2 (rational, normative analysis) to inform and direct System 1 processing of information (experiential, intuitive and affect-based response). Loewenstein and Small (2007) have focused on the interaction between 'sympathy' and 'deliberation' and how the two are affected by proximity, similarity, vividness and one's past and vicarious experiences.

What emerges from this brief review is that, with few exceptions, the field is dominated by an experimental, deductive mode of research and the vast majority of studies are theory driven. As a result, not only are research findings contradictory and/or inconsistent, they also tend to primarily engage with a particular theory. Research efforts are therefore channelled into testing that theory under various conditions, rather than the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. Researchers have expressed a need for expansion, integration and synthesis in prosocial research (Penner et al., 2005; Levine & Thompson, 2004) and have also criticised attempts to isolate individual or similar sets of emotions empirically or theoretically, arguing that audiences' multiple emotional reactions to altruistic requests should be studied more holistically (Bartolini, 2005).

Arguably, the problem runs deeper than that and can be traced back to the very foundations of mainstream social psychology: its pseudo-scientific epistemological foundations, quantitative and deductive methods, and the individualistic and decontextualised conceptualisation of the 'helping subject' underpinning its enquiry. Mainstream social psychology appears to be trapped by its own self-defined epistemological and methodological rigid boundaries, thus foreclosing the exploration and understanding of crucial and exciting facets of human prosocial behaviour. The impact of these characteristics on the boundaries of current mainstream research and what can be understood of prosocial behaviour will be illustrated through a discussion of strategically selected individual studies. It is important to stress at this point that when focusing on specific studies the aim is to critique rather than criticise, in order to foreground and illustrate such trends.



## The Perils of De-Contextualisation, Essentialism and Reductionism

Studies exploring audiences' (un)responsiveness in terms of immediacy of, or identification with, the victim are a good illustration of the problems inherent in decontextualised accounts of prosocial behaviour. For example, Kogut and Ritov (2005a) found that, in experimental situations, the group given details about a specific victim gave significantly more than the group that had received only general information. These results were replicated in a similar study by the same researchers (2005b). It has thus been claimed that 'the identifiable victim effect' leads to the 'rule of rescue' (Singer, 2009: p. 47). Similarly, the recognition of similarity or common fate which gives rise to a sense of 'we-ness'—a sense of belonging to the same group—increases the likelihood of helping the in-group (Penner et al., 2005). This process has been explained in terms of a favouritism bias towards members of one's own group as opposed to members of other groups (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). On similar lines, Levine and Thompson (2004) found that social category relations, rather than geographical proximity or emotional reactions, were the most important factors in increasing responsiveness to humanitarian appeals. One of the strongest examples of this is the behaviour of the Swiss population in response to similar appeals from different parts of the world. The first appeal followed a landslide in the Swiss canton of Wallis in 2000; the second an earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam in 2003. Large amounts of money were donated by individuals in Switzerland to aid the victims of both natural disasters. But the difference in amount is remarkable: the Iranian victims received 9 million Swiss Francs, whilst the Swiss received 74 million Swiss Francs (Meier, 2006). This difference is made even more significant by the disparity in wealth of the victim groups. Even taking into consideration factors such as the increased potential for reciprocity from the receivers of the higher donations due to geographical proximity, it is apparent that social categorisation played a crucial role.

This important conclusion is not disputed here; rather, the issue is what kind of explanation mainstream social psychology can provide for this phenomenon. There seems to be a widespread and essentialist assumption that this is how humans operate; a matter of fact, self-evident, but often unspoken, idea that it is all down to human nature. Singer (2009), in reviewing current prosocial research, explains the phenomenon in terms of 'parochialism' and claims that 'it is easy to understand why we are like this'; that is, that 'our concern for the welfare of others tends to be limited to our kin, and to those

with whom we are in cooperative relationships, and perhaps to members of our own small tribal group' (p. 51). This is because, for several millions of years, parents who did not care for their children were unlikely to pass on their genes.

To corroborate his claim, Singer (2009) cites three disasters: the tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004 (220,000 were killed and donations reached \$1.54 billion from US citizens), Hurricane Katarina in 2005 (1600 died and Americans gave \$6.5 billion) and the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005 (73,000 were killed, but it elicited only \$150 million in US donations). However, one of the factors neglected by this explanation is that the earthquake was the only one of these tragic events that was not caught on video and so did not result in dramatic and oft-repeated television coverage. This, according to Media and Communications experts, is of crucial importance. For example, Chouliaraki (2006) argues that humanitarian tragedies in distant parts of the world that do not involve westerners are presented from the start as less important, the victims as a faceless mass, rather than people we can identify with. This suggests that how members of the public arrive at perceiving some victims as more 'worthy' of support than others might have very little to do with hard-wired evolutionary processes, and instead being negotiated through specific geopolitical and ideological practices. Yet, even in the studies which explore the power of social categorisation, the link with socio-historical and geopolitical factors is not made.

The impact of mainstream social psychology's preference for insular, reductionist and deterministic answers is further exemplified by a series of studies by Slovic and his colleagues (Slovic & Slovic, 2004; Slovic, 2007a, 2007b; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). Slovic is concerned with the ongoing moral apathy that characterises audiences' responses to news of genocide or mass atrocities. Why—Slovic asks—do these massive crimes against humanity not spark us into action? His answer is to blame what he terms 'psychophysical numbing', which determines that the emotional reaction to a group is much less than to a single individual. He argues that this psychophysical numbing seems to follow the same sort of psychophysical function that characterises our diminished sensitivity to a wide range of perceptual and cognitive entities as their underlying magnitude increases. Constant increases in the magnitude of a stimulus typically evoke smaller and smaller changes in response: 'Applying this principle to the valuing of human life suggests that a form of psychophysical numbing may result from our inability to appreciate losses of life as they become larger' (p. 2).

Slovic concludes that the problem is in our congenital difficulties with numbers which, all too often, represent dry statistics: 'human beings with the

tears dried off' that lack feeling and fail to motivate action (Slovic & Slovic, 2004). When it comes to compassion, he claims, using an identified individual victim is the best way of eliciting it. This has indeed been confirmed in practice. Charities such as Save the Children have long recognised that it is better to present a donor with a single named child to support than to ask for contributions to the bigger cause. However, when attempting to explain why this might be the case, Slovic rapidly shies away from the socio-cultural dimensions and turns instead to behavioural research according to which a single individual, unlike a group, is viewed as a psychologically coherent unit. This leads to more extensive processing of information and stronger impressions about individuals than about groups.

Slovic's rendering of prosocial reactions is an example of mainstream social psychological mechanism and reductionism. Members of the public are portrayed as inert and unsophisticated, and the engagement with humanitarian issues purely a matter of a 'stimulus—emotional arousal—action' dynamic. Resorting to evolution is particularly problematic when there is so much history and ideology underpinning these phenomena. Indeed, the problem with the alleged 'scientific neutrality' is that it blinds us to crucial differences. Slovic's outrage at the West's indifference and apathy to the plight of distant others is passionate and commendable. Many of his conclusions are valid and interesting, but his insights are crippled by the epistemology and methodology he uses. For example, he seamlessly moves from applying results using a victim of famine in Malawi to the genocide in Darfur or to natural disasters in South Asia or the victims of 9/11 and so on. From a scientific point of view, these are simply 'neutral' stimuli to study what ostensibly might appear to be the same phenomenon of prosocial behaviour, but to anybody outside the insularity of mainstream social psychology, it would be obvious that these humanitarian disasters are historically, socially and politically profoundly different from one another. Equally, their meaning will impact in a specific way on members of the public according to their beliefs and relative positioning in regard to each specific phenomenon. It is this meaningful intersection that could throw important light on audiences' reactions to humanitarian crises. Yet, when it comes to humanitarian emergencies, overall what current mainstream psychological research offers are quantitative experimental data, disconnected from their political, historical and social meaning and from members of the public's accounts of their reactions which might illuminate such meanings. It seems that the insularity of mainstream psychology and its allegiance to natural rather than social science means that the more credible, obvious and interesting explanations for prosocial behaviour, or its absence, are neglected. This could explain why, although 'for decades results

in laboratory experiments have offered insight about motivations for prosocial behaviour, it is still unclear how these results can be applied outside the laboratory' (Meier, 2006:4)

Additionally, in the majority of the experiments relating to prosocial behaviour, the participants often appear one-dimensional and flat. Even when we are provided with demographic information about them, it is difficult to gain a sense of their subjectivity, of who they are. There is rarely attribution of agency, moral or otherwise, to the participants in the experiment. Their responses appear pre-determined, the outcome predictable as, however responsive and caring participants might be to begin with, an understanding of the scope and complexity of their possible moral response is foreclosed by the studies' epistemological and methodological constraints. Korobov and Bamberg (2004), for example, criticise questionnaire studies and argue that expressing a forced choice or Likert-scale attitude is entirely different from expressing an attitude in daily social interaction. First, questionnaire questions tend to reify the issue under scrutiny by stabilising the item in the form of relatively stereotypical and arguably facile descriptions. Second, the forced-choice format systematically strips off the interactive subtleties and rhetorical finessing that are part of the daily expression of attitudes, evaluations and assessments (Korobov & Bamberg, 2004:473).

Who has not experienced those moments of conflict and uncertainty when faced with an outstretched hand or an appeal for money? And yet, mainstream social psychological research has paid little attention to those battles between social responsibility and self-interest—at least not in their complex interplay and constant changeability—and the everyday internal moral squabbles. As has been repeatedly argued (e.g. Parker, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wetherell & Edley's, 1999; Billig et al., 1988), and experienced daily, embracing contradiction and inconsistency is probably what we do best as humans as part of the fabric of everyday, moral and immoral, reasoning (Billig et al., 1988). Yet, inconsistencies are seen in mainstream psychological experiments as a sign that something has gone wrong with the design, in other words, is a problem.

We live in a global society, where moral boundaries shift continuously in line with the forever-changing identity of who is friend or foe. We experience the daily tensions in our social responsibility between ever stronger pulls towards individualism and global compassion. With such unstable global, political and socially determined norms, the glaring inconsistencies in findings could be embraced and recognised as significant and worthy of investigation. However, mainstream research on prosocial behaviour consistently

moves away from complexity and contradiction, favouring neutrality, predictability and replicability instead.

Such neutrality, much cherished by mainstream social psychology, has itself been object of interrogation by critical psychologists who have instead highlighted the covert and unrecognised ideological operations informing research directions and the shaping of important theories, for example, in studying bystander intervention. Frances Cherry (1994), for example, argued that by moving in as closely as possible to the behavioural phenomena and casting the event in terms of independent variables (e.g. group size that affects dependent variables such as intervening behaviour), these researchers *chose* to 'veer away' from a socio-cultural analysis of the event. She concluded that the use of a 'scientific' approach, at the core of psychology's claim for neutrality and objectivity, is in fact in antithesis to a socio-cultural analysis (Cherry 1994:40). She highlights the deleterious effects of this epistemological standpoint on the way in which the Kitty Genovese case, which marked the beginning of prosocial research in social psychology, was understood and theorised. The refusal to engage and acknowledge the role of societal and ideological forces meant that gender and violence, in her view key factors in the brutal attack and the behaviour of the bystanders, were empirically neglected and were not translated into empirical paradigm. This move shaped bystander research for decades.

On similar lines, Manning et al. (2007) convincingly argue that the way the Kitty Genovese story has become institutionalised in textbooks has 'served to curtail the imaginative space of helping research in social psychology' (p:555) and has contributed to 'defining the phenomenon of helping in emergencies in terms of the pathology of the group' (p:559). These two critiques are good illustrations of how the de-contextualisation of social phenomena and, in particular, the problematic neglect of ideological and socio-historical factors lead to a very narrow focus and a disregard of alternative, more complex understandings of prosocial behaviour. Furthermore, these important critiques suggest not only that ideology and socio-historical factors are inextricably imbedded in prosocial phenomena but that they also inform and shape the very contours and understandings of the discipline itself.

Far from seeing it as neutral, Sober (2002) repositions psychology as an ideologically and socially embedded discipline and wonders whether the popularity of a purely egoistic image of the human self is determined by a culture of individualism and competition, rather than it being due to the compelling force of the findings. Wyschogrod (2002), on the other hand, criticises mainstream social psychology for portraying altruism as a content of one's consciousness because this does not allow for a moral understanding of

prosocial behaviour. Influenced by Levinas, she argues instead that altruism is contingent on relating to others as a moral demand on the self to engage in other-regarding acts. To attribute either altruism or selfishness to genes is to see them as moral agents rather than transmitters of information.

Stürmer and Snyder (2010), in their collection on prosocial research, have pointed out that 'the traditional focus of social psychological research has been on 'the *interpersonal* context of helping [...]. Thus, in this tradition, explanations of why people help one another and why they fail to help one another typically have revolved around the role of *individual* dispositions, *individual* decision-making processes, *individual* emotions, and the norms that govern the interpersonal relationship between *individual* helpers and *individual* recipients of help' (p. 4) The authors problematise the individualistic focus and argue for the necessity of research that can explain how 'social, structural, political or epidemiological factors translate into concrete experiences, motives and action at the individual level' and how 'structural factors derive their subjective meaning through social and political framing processes in the context of the groups or communities to which individuals belong' (pp. 5–6). Kegan (2002) also comments on the ideological content of psychological theories. He argues that in a society in which a large number of strangers must compete for a small number of positions of dignity, status and economic security, it is adaptive to be self-interested and disadvantageous to be too cooperative, too loyal, too altruistic or too reluctant to protest unjust advantage taken by another 'but rather than acknowledge that the structure of our society has forced each of us to adopt self-interest as the first rule, many Americans find it more attractive to believe that this mood is an inevitable remnant of our animal heritage and, therefore, one must learn to accept it' (Kegan, 2002: 48–49).

If there is truth in these claims, then it is hardly surprising that the integration of hard-wired factors with a more socially informed understanding of prosocial behaviour is avoided from the start and perpetuated through a very specific and narrow choice of methodologies. The danger in such in-built denial of the omnipresence of ideology and a myopic individualistic focus is indirectly identified through the work of Ervine Staub (1989, 1993, 2003). Staub, although fully embracing a mainstream psychological approach, repeatedly draws attention to what he calls the 'societal tilt' shared by perpetrators and bystanders. Bystanders, therefore, are in danger of also becoming perpetrators or supporting perpetrators through inaction, thus suggesting that it is urgent that social psychology actively engages in studying the socio-cultural and ideological context in which prosocial behaviour takes place (or not). As virtual bystanders to humanitarian crises, we struggle to make sense of an

increasingly complex reality and our moral boundaries are drawn and redrawn in line with shifting social and global realities. The ideological, cultural and intersubjective ramifications constantly affect us and are always influential in our choices. There is no such thing as a 'neutral' stimulus when it portrays, for example, a dark-skinned child in Africa or a White businessman in New York. These are highly charged images that can never be decoded neutrally. Social psychology urgently needs to change and address such complexities to be able to make a useful contribution to the understanding of prosocial behaviour.

A critical approach can begin to remedy these problems by looking at the interrelatedness of factors, rather than studying them in isolation; by approaching reason and emotion not as separate and differentially valued but as they interact in the conscious and unconscious negotiations and fluctuations of subjectivity; by valuing conflict as a crucial and unavoidable factor in everyday morality; by contextualising prosocial behaviour socially, ideologically and biographically.

## Towards a Critical Prosocial Research Project

Critical applications to the study of prosocial behaviour have so far been limited. This final session briefly looks at two notable examples before focusing on a case study based on a series of studies investigating public responses to information about human rights violations and humanitarian crises. These studies illustrate the different understandings of prosocial behaviour that can result from the application of a critical psychosocial approach.

Reicher, Hopkins, and Levine (2006) looked at public documents to identify arguments used to mobilise Bulgarians against the deportation of the Jews in World War II. They identified three arguments—category inclusion, category norms and category interest. Through these arguments, Bulgarian Jewish citizens were presented as in-group members, deserving of help, and that the in-group would be harmed if Jews were persecuted. As a result, the authors argue, ordinary bystanders were mobilised and actively prevented the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. The importance of Reicher et al.'s work is two-fold. First, they move away from explanations based on individual notions of personality traits and heroic behaviour, a strongly represented strand in mainstream psychological research (e.g. Oliner & Oliner, 1998; Monroe, 1986). Second, they provide a striking example of the power of rhetoric and its material impact on prosocial behaviour. Indeed, their work illustrates the intrinsic flexibility and instability of ideologically charged constructs, in this case of 'nation', rhetorically evoked to include and thus save Jews, rather than exclude



and persecute them as was happening in the rest of Nazi Europe at the time. They thus stress the importance of context, specific histories and ideologies of nationhood in providing powerful rhetorical resources that can be mobilised to promote prosocial behaviour.

A similar conclusion is reached by Stevenson and Manning (2010) who conducted discursive analyses of focus groups with Irish university students on charitable giving. The authors found that national identity was used as a rhetorical resource to account for giving or withholding charity. They too paid attention to the role of socio-historical context on prosocial behaviour to illustrate how Irish national identity was flexibly and strategically used to manage participants' moral identity in the light of Ireland's changing international relations. The study's participants strategically constructed the boundaries of Irishness to include and exclude those in need of help, thus enabling them to negotiate a range of competing moral injunctions. In this way, they managed, on the one hand, to present themselves as generous and not xenophobic. On the other hand, they also warranted their claim that, by prioritising the most deserving, they could better support the most effective appeals. As a critical alternative to mainstream social psychology, Stevenson and Manning move away from individualistic explanations based on personality traits to illustrate how the possibility and desirability of helping behaviour is negotiated 'by invoking different aspects of the broader historical and economic national context' (Stevenson & Manning, 2010:255).

Recent studies on public responses to information about human rights violations and humanitarian crises (Seu, 2013, Seu, Flanagan, & Orgad, 2015; Seu, 2015; Seu 2016; Seu and Orgad, 2017) were inductive qualitative investigations of how the fabled 'ordinary person' understands, cognitively and emotionally reacts, and responds to information about distant suffering. Because of the paucity of qualitative research on this type of prosocial behaviour, the studies aimed to generate, rather than test, theory. They also embraced complexity and contradiction. The studies showed that information about human rights and humanitarian issues present members of the public with moral and ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) to be resolved through multilayered, complex responses characterised by contradiction and ambivalence. Of particular relevance is the role played by the socio-cultural landscape in which people operate. For example, individuals' empathy towards the sufferers was counteracted and sometimes blocked by racist constructions of the 'Other', who were at times portrayed as barbaric, uncivilised and intractable, as the next extract from a participant illustrates. The focus group participants were discussing Britain's moral responsibility for producing and exporting electric

batons in the knowledge that they will be used as instruments of torture. Richard is arguing in favour of Britain continuing to do so:

Richard: *Yeah, but if they can't buy them anywhere at all, alright, that's what you're saying, they'll find something else. They'll go back to sticks, or anything.*

The negative Other representation is essential in exonerating Britain for selling instruments of torture by suggesting that Britain is only supplying these belligerent countries with more sophisticated means of fighting each other. The statement '*they'll find something else*' suggests an intrinsic quality in the other as actively spoiling for a fight. The spatial metaphor '*they'll go back to sticks*' means they'll revert to what they were using before Britain supplied them with better means, but also implies an original sense of backwardness. The powerful image of someone fighting with sticks in the digital era thus adds to the construction of the Other as primitive (Seu, 2013: 118).

Postcolonial discourse also informed some participants' responses in positioning the western helpers as getting the allegedly underdeveloped sufferers 'out of the dark ages' in which they lived. Karen, a participant from a different focus group, is arguing against donating money to Amnesty International through the frequently used account that 'money won't help':

Karen: *Money is not going to help. We need people, professional people from overseas, like trained teachers, trained doctors, you know people going there, basically educating those people. Getting it out of them from the dark ages. And then educate them, educating them about the daily, day-to-day life. You know those little things which can sort of bring them out.*

Karen's approach seems altogether benign and helpful, but at closer scrutiny, it reveals powerful postcolonial undertones. The implied 'we' is what 'those people' need. Thus, 'those people'—citizens of the countries where human rights are violated—are constructed as living in the '*dark ages*', whilst we are the '*professional people from overseas*'. The phrase '*people from overseas*' is particularly poignant as it evokes the iconic image of Colombo's ships arriving on the shores of the new world. '*Getting it out of them from the dark ages*' is equally powerful and leaves no doubt as to how countries where abuses of human rights are committed are constructed. The Other's position as backward is further elaborated and refined through the infantilising claim that 'they' need to be taught by us about '*the daily, day-to-day life*'.

These two examples illustrate the negotiated and dilemmatic nature of pro-social behaviour and its embeddedness in culture, exemplified starkly by the processes through which people decide who is deserving (or not) of humanitarian help (Seu, 2016). Neoliberalism, consumerism and material considerations seem to mediate particularly strongly people's decision-making and attitudes. See, for example, the next two extracts from two participants in the same group:

- Nelson: *I mean everyone always wants something more. Like, there's always something you want so I mean I was thinking like before, to be honest, I was looking at eBay and some stuff I want and I was thinking, 'I wish I could just have it', like not have to think about (it) [...] and I mean it's all well and good saying 'donate £2 a month' but I'd rather save that little bit just so I can go and get something I want and even when I get that there's something else I want. There's always going to be something everyone wants. [...] it all boils down to money at the end of the day.*
- Neville: *If that's what you've earned your money for, you've gone out and worked hard enough and that's something that you've set your mind on, a goal, you've given yourself a goal, I want to get an iPod, it costs £200 I will work and save my money to get what I desire. If you can do that then you should do it happily. It's not someone else's choice to say, 'no, with that money that you've just raised you should go and give it to somebody else'.*

Nelson starts by constructing human being as intrinsically greedy and acquisitive. Presenting these as universally applicable and acceptable truths about human beings obscures the ideological nature of Nelson's position and normalises it. The neoliberal principle underpinning this storyline is spelled out by Nelson in his counter-argumentation with me: it is OK to want things but one has to work hard for them and, conversely, it's wrong to get something for nothing. Neoliberalism has been broadly defined as the generalisation of the market logic beyond the sphere of commercial exchange (Chouliaraki, 2013), through which the moral primacy of 'public good' is replaced by the prioritising of the individual and its gratification. A neoliberal discourse is also active in Neville's contribution which praises individual enterprise and values personal gratification, mixed with the therapeutic regime of self-management, self-governance, 'responsibilisation' and agency. Thus, Neville's account mixes principles of work ethics with psychological ideas of 'self-realisation', through which working hard, saving and buying an i-pod are construed as self-enhancing 'goal setting'. Through this both Nelson

and Neville can resist the moral demand from humanitarian agencies to give their money to needy others. The liberal principle of the individual right to choose is pivotal in this counterargument.

The same materialistic motives are, perhaps unsurprisingly, attributed to NGOs and rhetorically used to resist their appeals. The next two extracts come from one of the studies on human rights, from two different focus groups:

Trudy: *I don't see... anywhere here does it say 'if anyone wants to go out there and help the needy people; if you want to send donations of old clothes' or anything like that. No, it's hard cash. That's what they want.*

Neil: *Sometimes in fact I actually keep these (appeals), I actually put them in files somewhere... I get ten or twelve everyday from a variety of organisations or people asking for credit cards or pizzas or whatever, it goes in the same thing though, it's junk mail you didn't ask for. (Seu, 2011:153–154)*

The same principle, that 'it all boils down to money', perhaps in a seemingly contradictory way, seems to fuel a backlash and resentment towards NGOs when they are perceived to be primarily interested in extracting money from people (Seu, 2011) and to operate as a business, rather than as 'good Samaritans' (Seu et al., 2015). The main characteristic of the *good Samaritan* model of humanitarian workers is that they are perceived to be selfless, quintessentially altruist and with no ulterior or materialistic motive—just wanting to help suffering others because they are 'good people'. In opposition to this, considered by the British public as the 'true spirit' or humanitarian and charitable behaviour, people expressed passionate animosity against NGOs when they were perceived to operate as business:

Keith: *They (NGOs) are advertising to get your money. It's like a car, or something. They're advertising for you to go and buy that car. I think they're advertising for money, really. That's it.*

Bruna: *So it's like a business?*

UM: *I think so personally. It is a business. I think it is a business.*

Furthermore, the studies show the importance of socio-cultural factors in relation to the wider context of media saturation and information fatigue. For example, although people still respond empathetically to images of suffering children, they also feel resentment and resistance to what is perceived as a manipulative use of children in NGO communications and appeals (Seu, 2015).

These examples illustrate the importance of local and geopolitical contexts, of contradiction and ambivalence, and the plasticity and instability of prosocial behaviour. It suggests that prosocial behaviour is always discursively mediated by ideology and constructed through available cultural resources.

Similar to Stevenson and Manning (2010), these studies also employed discursive analyses to identify rhetorical resources used by members of the public to justify their own inaction or their proactive responses. The studies identified patterns of explanations operating as a 'web of passivity' (Seu, 2013). The strands of this discursive web were made of socially and culturally accepted justifications of non-action which varied from banal lamentations of lack of time and resources (*'We don't have time, if we had the time we could sit down, think about it and come to a conclusion, but in the Western world time is becoming more and more a precious resource'*), to sophisticated accounts of participants' cognitive-emotional reactions informed by specialist bodies of knowledge, including psychology and psychoanalysis (*'I read it but you just feel like it's kind of shield I've got up...it's like a defence mechanism'*).

The explanations give a flavour of what is the current 'societal tilt' (Staub, 1989, 1993, 2003) towards human rights and humanitarian issues and are a demonstration of the urgent need for social psychology to engage more actively with the messiness of moral dilemmas and to counteract the culturally embedded discourses justifying passivity. Ignoring the complexities of prosocial behaviour can give only partial and potentially myopic insights into how people decide when, whom and how to help others in need. On the other hand, a critical engagement that takes into account cultural and ideological factors is more likely to make social psychological insights into prosocial behaviour applicable and relevant to real-life situations.

## Summary

This chapter has highlighted the constraints and limitations of current knowledge of prosocial behaviour resulting from the overall laboratory-based, quantitative and allegedly neutral experimental approach of mainstream social psychology. I have argued that a critical approach can contribute to making psychological insights into prosocial behaviour more applicable to the complexities of real-life behaviour and dilemmas in a modern globalised world.

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# 18

## Relationships: From Social Cognition to Critical Social

Simon Watts

Any good dictionary will contain two basic definitions of the word *relationship*. It means ‘the way in which two things are connected’ and, from a more human aspect, ‘the way in which two or more people feel and behave toward each other’. In a textbook of social psychology, coverage would typically be expected along the lines of the latter definition. The same will happen here. Yet the main aim of this chapter is not to provide detailed or extensive coverage of the literature on human relationships but rather to demonstrate how the assumptions of social psychology have both *shaped* that literature and our wider cultural understanding of relationships. The intention is also to challenge and rethink these assumptions and, in so doing, to demonstrate the process of criticality at work.

In order to achieve these aims, considerable attention will be paid to the connection or relationship between two things: the *social* and the *psychological*. This relationship manifests itself in several forms within social psychology—the social is sometimes contrasted with the personal, sometimes with the individual, interpersonal with intrapersonal processes, and so on—and its perceived nature has always been fundamental to the character of the discipline. As we shall see, mainstream or cognitive social psychology has made assumptions about the relationship between the social and the psychological which are, at the same time, both radical in form and unacceptable to most critical social psychologists. These assumptions, the critical social psychologist

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would argue, have for many years led the discipline in a generally unproductive direction (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson, & Stainton Rogers, 1995). They have also encouraged a disciplinary and cultural misconception of human relationships which has obscured both their defining role in people's lives and their potential importance as a subject matter for social psychology.

From the start of the discipline, the relationship between the social and the psychological has been a matter for debate. Ross (1908), for example, argued that social psychology should be *socio-centred* and hence that it must focus on the products, structure, and role of the socio-cultural context and their determining function in the psychological processes of individual persons. Conversely, McDougall (1908) supported a *psychological-centred* approach which considered psychological processes to be the primary phenomenon and the means by which social contexts were created and made explainable.

Despite their obvious differences, both these approaches share a *hierarchical* conception of the relationship between the social and the psychological. One partner is rendered dominant and the submissive partner is then conceived as a by-product or derivative of its action. In fact, the hierarchy is constructed so radically in this shared formulation, the social and the psychological are so obviously divided and treated as separate things (one as the cause, the other its effect) that the urgent disciplinary need to resolve this debate is almost tangible. It follows that social psychology did resolve the debate, very decisively indeed, by expressing an almost absolute preference for the *psychological-centred* approach.

This appeared to be a very sensible decision. Focusing on intrapersonal processes and making the individual person primary helped to align social psychology with the wider discipline. In the early years of the twentieth century, psychology had already committed itself to the study of intrapersonal processes as a first priority and to the use of experimental methods, along the lines of those employed within the natural sciences, as a means of facilitating that study. In following this path, psychology hoped to style itself as a 'natural science of the mental' (Watts & Banyard, 2014; Windelband, 1894/1998). To prioritise the *psychology* in social psychology was, as such, entirely logical from a strategic perspective and it remains a central feature of cognitive social psychology to this day.

The making of this decision (and, indeed, any belief in its correctness) nonetheless required considerable faith to be placed in, what Harré (1989, p. 34) has called, the 'two unexamined pre-assumptions' of social psychology. These are the pre-assumptions of *individualism* and *scientism*. Leaving assumptions unexamined is always a poor idea from a critical perspective, but this may be particularly true here, for wherever individualism and scientism

are accepted in tandem the impression is created that people are irredeemably separate both from the social world and from each other. This is a radical and potentially damaging conclusion which, at the very least, demands further examination rather than blind acceptance. Such examination duly begins in the next section and will drive the remainder of this chapter.

## **A Critique of Mainstream Approaches (1): The Unexamined Pre-Assumptions of Cognitive Social Psychology**

Psychology has long operated on the basis that people are *self-contained* (Sampson, 1989). This is the assumption of individualism. The implication is that an individual person can be considered personally and psychologically complete, and hence their essential qualities can only be revealed and understood, when they are isolated from the influence of other people and social groups. This unusual image, which effectively casts relationships as a contaminating influence, is very apparent throughout the history of social psychology, from Le Bon's (1895) work on crowd psychology, to Asch's (1952, 1956) seminal studies about conformity, and onto Milgram's (1963) infamous treatment of obedience.

This same assumption has led social psychology to prioritise approaches and methods which study people in isolation, typically using experimental designs and employing a laboratory setting. It has also led personal and social relationships to be characterised as a secondary subject matter of peripheral importance and interest. It is symptomatic, for example, that the British Psychological Society only added relationships to its core curriculum around the turn of the millennium. The assumption of individualism has also wielded considerable influence outside the discipline. As Burkitt (1993, p. 1) confirms:

The view of human beings as unitary individuals who carry their uniqueness deep inside themselves...is one that is ingrained in the Western tradition of thought. It is the vision of the person as a monad...a self-contained being whose social bonds are not primary in its existence.

At this point, it is very tempting to conclude that individualism and its associated monadic or atomistic view of the person would never have become so widespread and ingrained if they were incorrect. That's a good point. Social psychology's adoption of individualism as a grounding assumption was indeed

strongly supported by the scientific evidence of the time and by a related disciplinary and cultural commitment to *scientism*. Scientism assumes the universal applicability of the scientific method and a belief that science, and only science and its findings, can ultimately deliver an authoritative, reliable, and correct view of the world. As Danziger (1990) reports, psychology's attempts to style itself as a 'natural science of the mental' were heavily influenced by the triumphal progress of the science disciplines and everything revealed by this progress, at the moment social psychology committed to the assumption of individualism, had suggested that the atomistic world view was correct.

David Bohm (1998, p. 98), an eminent theoretical physicist, describes this world view and its primary implications for psychology below. It begins with the assertion that

...the world is constituted out of a tremendous number of separately existent things. Some of these things are inanimate objects, some are alive, [and] some are human beings. And to each person there is a certain special one of these things, which is *himself[sic]*. This 'self' is viewed, in the first instance, as a physical body, sharply bounded by the surface of the skin, and then as a 'mental entity'...which is 'within' this physical body and which is taken to be the very essence of the individual human being. The notion of a separately existent 'self' thus follows as an aspect of the generally accepted metaphysics, which implies that *everything* is of this nature.

Once this atomistic vision was accepted across psychology, which the prevailing scientism quickly ensured, the idea of a self-contained and psychologically separate individual simply followed as an aspect of the generally accepted metaphysics. Individualism and scientism duly came to the discipline hand in hand. As Harré (1989, p. 34) describes below, these twinned assumptions have subsequently had a tremendous influence on the practice of social psychology and the explanations it has sought:

Everything relevant to the actions of a person must, it seems, [be]...found a place 'within'...the envelope of the individual...The idea of 'within' is dominated by a certain model of explanation. So instead of describing human customs and practices, psychologists have looked for (or imagined) mechanisms... Instead of ascribing to people the skills necessary for performing correctly, they have assigned hidden states.

This short extract provides an excellent critical depiction of the *psychological-centred* approach to social psychology. Where this approach has wielded its influence, the importance of the socio-cultural context, human customs and

practices have been all but ignored as a potential means of explaining human behaviour and action. To put it bluntly, the social context has been rendered *meaningless*. This has occurred because, as we described earlier, the psychologically centred approach necessarily considers such social or interpersonal processes to be secondary effects. They are derivative phenomena which have been created or *caused* by a series of intrapersonal and psychological mechanisms (entities, representations, or hidden states) hypothesised to exist ‘within the envelope’ of the individual person. Attitudes, traits, schema, personalities, emotions, and so on are all examples of the psychological mechanisms that cognitive psychologists have imagined and/or reified into being to serve this explanatory function and to account for people’s actions (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995).

The above arguments demonstrate why mainstream social psychology is now also known by the names *cognitive* social psychology and/or social *cognition*. It is because the psychological-centred approach is characterised by a self-confessed and ‘unabashed mentalism’ (Fiske & Taylor, 2013, p. 16). This mentalism has led cognitive social psychologists to prioritise the domain of mental representations and structures it has imagined—through which individual people are assumed to ‘make sense of other people and themselves in order to coordinate with their social world’ (Fiske & Taylor, 2013, p. 16)—and to see this cognitive domain, rather than the *coordination itself*, as the primary focus of social-psychological study. As Fiske and Taylor (2013, p. 18) confirm, in the eyes of social cognition, ‘social psychology has always been cognitive’.

## **A Critique of Mainstream Approaches (2): The Cognitive Social Psychology of Love and Relationships**

The opening section of this chapter implied that the study of human (personal, intimate, or close) relationships has not, until quite recently, been considered a necessary topic for the discipline of social psychology or its students. Neither has it become an important or central topic in the meantime. The study of relationships is instead diffused across many of psychology’s sub-disciplines, including social, but also physiological, clinical, developmental, counselling, evolutionary, and cognitive psychology. Outside psychology, the collective endeavour known as ‘relationship science’ encompasses an equally wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to, sociology, communication studies, gender studies, anthropology, history, and so on (Fletcher, 2002).



This diversity reflects the enormous breadth of topics which can legitimately be studied under the relationships umbrella, which include attraction, communication, self-disclosure, relationship maintenance and dynamics, friendship, love, marriage, jealousy, sexual behaviour, sexuality, relational conflict and violence, relationship dissolution, divorce, and loneliness. All these topics are also subject to further consideration relative to issues of gender and from both cross-cultural and historical perspectives (Berscheid & Regan, 2004; Goodwin, 1999; Miller, 2012).

It would be impossible, therefore, to provide comprehensive coverage of this literature in the current context, although some excellent relationship textbooks (which attempt the task) are listed at the end of the chapter. Attention here will simply fall on two example topics—exchange theories of relationship dynamics and love—which have been selected as a means of demonstrating the impact that individualism, scientism, and a broader disciplinary concern with intrapersonal processes, have had on our cultural understanding and expectations of relationships.

Social exchange theory (Homans, 1961/1974)—our first theory of relationship dynamics—suggests that the relationships people choose to create, and then to commit to and maintain, are the ones which best maximise their rewards for the least amount of effort expended. As a consequence, people continually judge their relationships by applying all kinds of cost-benefit analyses, which compare the ratio of rewards to costs, a relationship's productivity relative to past relationships, to the relationships of others, to potential alternative relationships, and so on. All relationships must 'measure up' favourably if they are to have long-term prospects.

Other complementary theories of relationships dynamics, like interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and equity theory (Adams, 1965), add a further caveat to this relational rationale. Since two individuals are necessarily involved in a relationship, they point out, cost-benefit analyses and comparisons will always be conducted by *both* parties, which means benefits must accrue on either an equal or an equitable basis if their relationship is to succeed. In other words, costs and benefits in a social exchange relationship must be *balanced* if one of the individuals is not to make an unfavourable comparison which threatens the relationship. As Hinde (1997, p. 337) puts it, for 'A to maximise her outcomes she must consider not only the rewards and costs to her that are consequent upon her actions, but also the consequences for B: A must try to maximise B's profits as well as her own, or B may opt out of the relationship'.

This all makes sense given the assumption of individualism. All the A's, B's, rewards, costs, balances, and consequences also add up to a neat scientific

description. The problem, however, is that exchange relationships tend to be far less neat or sensible in practice. In fact, relationships are typically quite fragile and unstable where this rationale is applied, because anybody and everybody can easily find a host of completely justifiable reasons to opt out (at any time in the relational life cycle). This instability is further compounded by the insistence of both individualism and cognitive social psychology that relationships are, in any case, unnecessary to the life of the self-contained individual. As McNamee and Gergen (1999, p. 9) put it, where:

...the central unit in society is the individual self, then relationships are by definition artificial contrivances, unnatural and alien. By implication, they must be constructed, nurtured, or 'worked' at. And if such effort proves arduous or disagreeable, then one is invited to abandon them and return to the native state of private agency.

The relationships literature confirms that the degree of individualism exhibited by a person is negatively correlated with the levels of caring, needing, and trusting they are prepared to offer within a relationship (Dion & Dion, 1993). The more someone considers themselves to be self-contained, the less likely they are to describe their relationships as rewarding, deep, and tender, and the less positive they become about marriage and their own marital prospects. It follows that a *sixfold* increase in incidences of divorce was observed in Britain between 1961 and 1991, a period in which individualism increasingly took hold, and the popularity of marriage simultaneously dropped to a 50-year low (Wilkinson & Mulgan, 1995).

Be they correct or incorrect, therefore, the twin assumptions of individualism and scientism could never be accused of engendering a relationship-friendly context. One might also be forgiven for thinking that social exchange relationships seem rather lacking in terms of love and romance and this is certainly true where love is understood along traditional and/or biblical lines, as an essentially selfless and unconditional mode of relationship. Viewed in this way, love is effectively an orientation of *openness*, a relationship 'going out from one person toward another person or...thing' (Watts, 2001; Morgan, 1964, p. 113). The expectation that love will be open and unconditional is no doubt why maternal love, which is typically considered to be constant and forever enduring, is still recognised by modern audiences as the prototypical love (Fehr & Russell, 1991). Love also has a biblical association with the concept of *charity*, which combines both the quality of being kind to people with a concomitant refusal to subject them to harsh judgement.

Compare these qualities with the aforementioned social exchange relationships, which are primarily self-centred, insistent that a range of conditions be satisfied, and tend also to be characterised by the prioritisation of *capitalist* rather than charitable principles, and the opposition becomes very apparent. Harsh judgements are to be found everywhere in these relationships. The opposition is, in fact, so fundamental that many commentators have found it ‘impossible to specify how selflessness and an orientation to the other person [i.e. love] could become embedded as a dominant motif in a broader and deeper understanding of exchange’ (Luhmann, 1998, p. 162). As Bohm (1999, p. 205) confirms below, exchange relationships and love tend to be incompatible, because the former are typically:

...directed primarily at the self, which obtains satisfaction through relationships with the so-called ‘loved one’. But love in its purity does not depend on any satisfactions...If it does, it cannot be love, but is a kind of exchange. Such an exchange can lead to hate and frustration when the expected satisfactions are not forthcoming. Thus, we come to the mystery of the ‘love-hate’ relationship as suggested by Freud. But...there is no mystery. It wasn’t love in the first place, so that it was only natural that it could turn into hate.

As love has seemingly disappeared from our relationships, however, cognitive social psychologists have been pleased to rediscover it ‘within the envelope of the individual’, as a hypothesised psychological mechanism of various kinds. Rubin (1973), for example, proposed that love was an *attitude* which would predispose us to think, feel, and act in certain ways towards a loved one. This attitude involved three components: (1) a need for affiliation and dependence, (2) a concern to help and prioritise the loved one, and (3) a desire for exclusiveness and absorption into a relationship.

Lasswell and Lasswell (1976), using an alternative psychological mechanism to shape their explanation, defined love as an affect or *emotion*. Emotions had already been understood by cognitive social psychologists as a combination of physiological arousal and associated cognition, or simply as *cognitively labelled arousals* (Schachter & Singer, 1962). They had also been ‘deemed negative in their implications and effects’, since physiological and affective arousal appeared as potential barriers to the kind of rational cognition preferred by science. As a consequence, the social cognitive tradition has typically approached emotions ‘in such a way as to discourage their expression, and to provide the lay person with techniques for “working on” these “feelings” in order to “deal with” them better’ (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995, p. 178).

Love has not escaped this negative treatment. Tennov (1979), for example, defined love as a distinct and involuntary *psychological state* involving intrusive and compulsive cognitive activity, feelings and behaviours, as well as acute and fluctuating bodily sensations occurring in response to the loved one (and their perceived emotional reciprocation). This involuntary and perturbed state of mind, which Tennov called *limerence*, is clearly designed to capture the at once contaminating and debilitating effects which romantic attraction, love, and relationships are assumed to generate within the self-contained individual.

The prototype theory of love treats love as a *mental representation* or *schema*. Fehr (1988, p. 558) proposed that love could be grasped in terms of its prototypical structure, that is, the clearest case or best examples of the concept, and that other exemplars of love would then 'be ordered [in people's minds] in terms of their degree of resemblance to the prototypical case'. Once established, a person's coordination with the world is effectively filtered through this schema, with the result that love is only seen and experienced where relationships, feelings, actions, and so on conform to the mental representation and the expectations it creates.

Perhaps the most popular current theory of love, however, at least in terms of the research activity it has stimulated, is the *attachment theory of adult love* (Shaver & Hazan, 1988). Inspired by Bowlby's (1969) work in developmental psychology, attachment theory originated as a means of accounting for the relationship between an infant and their primary caregiver. Bowlby nonetheless suggested that the nature of this initial attachment would be characteristic of a person's relational behaviour throughout their lifetime. The proposal followed, therefore, that love could be understood as 'a biological process designed by evolution to facilitate attachment between adult sexual partners who, at the time love evolved, were likely to become parents of an infant who would need their reliable care' (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 523). The theory describes three major attachment styles: *secure*, *anxious/ambivalent*, and *avoidant* (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Walls, 1978; Bartholemew, 1990).

Attachment theory proposes once again, therefore, that love is to be found somewhere within the individual person, this time as a hardwired and permanent *physiological state* crafted by evolution. Shaver & Hazan (1988: 491) even argue that the theory's capacity to explain the evolutionary origins or antecedents of love 'is one of its major virtues'. This claim is nonetheless very difficult to substantiate. The attachment styles were originally identified through the observation and description of infant/primary caregiver relationships. In short, they *are relationships*. To subsequently infer otherwise, therefore, to suggest they are actually a set of physiological states which underlie and cause the

observed relationships, seems both problematic and dependent on an enormous leap of theoretical faith (Watts, 2001).

Of more concern, however, is the realisation that this leap of faith is being repeated, in a variety of alternative ways, by *all* the theories featured in this section. Taken together, therefore, they provide an excellent demonstration of a widespread tendency—exhibited by cognitive social psychologists and by people of the west in general—to observe so-called interpersonal processes like love and relationships and to see only the residual effects of intrapersonal mechanisms. Where individualism and scientism prevail, love can be seen as an attitude, an emotion, a schema, a physiological state, the cause of particular relationships, and so on, but it can never, not ever, be understood to constitute the *relationship itself*.

## Critical Approaches (1): The Assumptions of a Critical Social Psychology

Cognitive social psychology is clearly a social *psychology*. It would be easy to assume, therefore, that critical social psychology must be a *social* psychology, a socio-centred discipline of the type prescribed by Ross (1908) at the outset of the chapter. Not so however. This kind of approach has, in fact, found its home in the social psychology carried out by *sociologists* (e.g. Crawford & Novak, 2014).

Having made this claim, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that critical social psychology has always exhibited a tendency to emphasise (and perhaps even to overemphasise) the importance and influence of social processes, primarily as a means of redressing a perceived imbalance within the discipline. Where a person, a particular approach, or indeed almost anything, has effectively been ignored or derided as irrelevant, the motivation to give it attention, and to defend it, can be very strong indeed. The feeling of a *social* psychology is further encouraged by the longstanding association of critical social psychology with various versions of *social* constructionism (Burr, 2003). The name social constructionism is nonetheless rather misleading inasmuch as the approach never focuses exclusively on social processes to the exclusion of personal ones, but rather explores the manner of their relatedness. Watts (2008) reinvents social constructionism as *human selectionism* in order to emphasise this point.

It follows that where critical social psychology has aligned itself with social constructionism, it has done so in order to pursue a more complex and challenging argument. The idea that the social and psychological can ever

be conceived as a hierarchical relationship with causal power flowing in one direction or the other is actually being abandoned. This kind of relationship is impossible, the argument continues, because the social and the psychological were *never separate things in the first place*. Critical social psychology is instead conceiving them as identifiable, but nonetheless indivisible aspects, of a single and fundamentally *social-psychological* system of human life and meaning. If social psychology has always been cognitive, one is tempted to add, that is only because cognitive psychology has always been social. Brown and Stenner (2009) is an excellent text which provides wide-ranging philosophical examples of this general rationale in action.

Having briefly sketched the nature of the argument, however, the attentive reader might immediately raise a challenge. It was established earlier, via the natural scientific world view, that the world was constituted out of a tremendous number of separately existent things. The notion of a self-contained and psychologically separate individual followed logically as an accepted aspect of this metaphysics. To collapse the social into the psychological and vice versa, therefore, to suggest that they are one thing and not two, appears to contradict the science. There is, as such, every reason to dismiss the claim as incorrect.

Notwithstanding the scientism inherent in this counterargument, the challenge it raises is potentially powerful. The problem for the imaginary challenger, however, is that the natural sciences actually abandoned their atomistic world view nearly 100 years ago. The discipline of psychology has just been exceptional in its failure to notice (Harré, 1998, 2004). The alternative world view adopted by the natural sciences, inspired largely by the quantum and relativity theories in the first instance but supported by every major scientific development since, is very different indeed. The main implications of this world view for psychology are summarised by David Bohm as follows:

So it can be seen that, ultimately, all that man [*sic*] is, both physically and mentally, arises in his overall contacts with the whole world in which he lives. It is clear, then, that one cannot actually observe a 'self' that can be sharply distinguished from the total environment. Rather, in every aspect of his being, the boundary of an individual man is to be compared with that of a city—in the sense that it can be at times a useful abstraction, but that it is not a description of a real break or division in 'what is'. And, ultimately, the same is true of the boundary of anything (Bohm, 1998, p. 99).

This short extract reflects the position and beliefs of many critical social psychologists. In doing critical work, no break or division is observed between the social and the psychological, person and world, atomism is replaced by holism, dualism by monism, and what all humans are, both physically and

mentally, is defined by their overall contacts or *relatedness* with the world around them. Not by their *separation* from it. We shall return to these points shortly.

Before that happens, however, it's important to recognise that the current world view of the natural sciences leaves social cognition, not critical social psychology, in an uncomfortable position. To focus attention almost exclusively on intrapersonal mechanisms and to promote an unabashed mentalism in such circumstances makes very little sense. It might be possible, of course, for purposes of useful abstraction and analysis, to study psychological processes in isolation, but this does not reflect a real break or division in 'what is' and one should never be fooled into seeing or studying a supposedly separate mental domain. Intrapersonal and interpersonal processes—the psychological and the social—are always contemporaneous, inextricably correlated and simultaneously part of any human action and its explanation. People think and feel as they go about their daily business, this is obvious, but the idea that these thoughts and feelings are *separate* from the world or that they (and our overt actions) are caused by a range of underlying mental mechanisms and entities is both unproven and highly problematic. In fact, the critical social psychologist would argue that such entities don't exist at all. As Harré (1998, p. 15) confirms:

From the point of view of a science of psychology, the basis entities are persons. People, for the purposes of psychology, are not internally complex. They have no parts ... There are no mental states other than the private thoughts and feelings people are aware of from time to time. There are no mental mechanisms by which a person's powers and skills are implemented, except the occasional private rehearsals for action in which we sometimes engage. The whole top heavy apparatus of ...cognitive psychology is at worst a fantasy and at best a metaphor ... Of course, our individual powers, skills and abilities are grounded in something continuing, and their implementation requires the working of causal mechanisms. But none of this is psychological. The instruments of personal and collective action are bodies and their organs, especially brains and nervous systems.

Given these somewhat damning conclusions, it is no surprise to find that many cognitive social psychologists are now turning to neuroscience as a means of sustaining the ambitions of social cognition (Lieberman, 2007). The arrival of *social cognitive neuroscience* signals a clear shift away from psychological entities and mechanisms as a source of causation and explanation and towards a reliance on neural mechanisms. Yet the basic premise and argu-



ments of this new approach—that interpersonal processes are just residual effects caused by a domain of underlying mechanisms—remain unchanged (cf. Blakemore, Winston, & Frith, 2004).

For the critical social psychologist, however, bodies, brains, nervous systems, and so on (the mere existence of which renders them an improvement on the language of mental mechanisms) should still not be conceived as *underlying*. All are parts of the action; the instruments through which each person's skills, abilities, and overall contacts with the world are implemented. These overall contacts—the actual coordination of person and world as it was described earlier—are what defines and explains humans and all human action. The coordination is also the proper subject matter of social psychology.

In attending to the nature and extent of this coordination, Bohm (1996, p. 51) asks us to recognise, clearly and explicitly, that people's thoughts and feelings are not separate from the world. He wants us to abandon one of the primary assumptions of individualism, namely:

*...that our thought is our own individual thought. Now, to some extent it is. We have some independence. But...I'm trying to say that most of our thought in its general form is not individual. It originates in the whole culture and it pervades us. We pick it up as children from parents, from friends, from school, from newspapers, from books, and so on. We make small changes in it; we select certain parts of it which we like, and we may reject other parts. But still, it all comes from that [general] pool [of information]. (Bohm, 1996, p. 51)*

None of this represents a prioritisation of the social, however, because the social and the psychological are no longer being conceived as separate entities. There are no distinct intrapersonal or interpersonal processes on this world view, just a variety of *human* processes through which the coordination of person and world are made possible. Bohm is simply reminding us, in a context where our own general pool of information actively encourages us to forget, that the social context is always already *meaningful* and that this meaning will ultimately become manifest, in one crucial way or another, in the thoughts and actions of individual people (Stenner, 1998). Far from being ignored or displaced, however, the individual person remains fundamental to this process through the selections they make, their preferences and rejections, and hence through their adoption of specific relationships with specific aspects of the world (be they events, practices, concepts, people, etc.).

This nonetheless leads us to a very different view of the person. A person can no longer be understood as a self-contained atom or unit, separate from its environment, and defined by a host of underlying and unchanging psycho-

logical traits, processes, mental representations, and so on, but must instead be appreciated and defined as the *sum total of their many relationships* to that environment, to other people, and ultimately to him or herself (Luhmann, 1998). In saying this, let's remind ourselves again that such relationships can no longer be conceived as purely interpersonal or intrapersonal processes, but must instead be grasped as *activities of the whole person*. What previously passed for inner experience is probably better understood, following Bohm's arguments above, as the *experience of our own selectivity* (Luhmann, 1998). It is simply an aspect of the overall relational experience, characterised by our attempts to *conceptualise* the general nature of our coordination with the world and, in so doing, to understand and settle on the type of person that we are, appear, or want to be.

Considered in this general fashion, it is clear that critical social psychology is dragging relationships from the peripheries of the discipline. Their study is instead rendered fundamental to social psychology and to the ways in which it both understands people and its many subject matters. It is symptomatic, in this sense, that concepts like attitudes and emotions, which cognitive social psychologists long ago forced 'inside' the individual person, have now been thoroughly reconceptualised by critical social psychologists in terms of relationships.

Attitudes, for example, have been redefined as *subject positions*, the latter indicating the strategic and meaningful positioning of a person relative to some aspect of their environment, rather than an enduring mental state (Davies & Harré, 1990). Stainton Rogers et al. (1995, p. 183) have also recast emotions as distinct *ways-of-being*. They represent, in other words, distinct and accepted ways of being a person, which are simultaneously implicated in our "outlook" (what we perceive, what we don't notice, what seems important and what doesn't matter)...our 'in-look' (how we 'feel', how we understand our selves), and the way in which we...look to others'. Instead of talking about emotions as internal entities, processes, or feelings, therefore, we are able to consider them as activities of the whole person and to 'talk about the particular "way-of-being" of a given emotion...and...the particular circumstances that conventionally prompt that way' (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995, p. 184). In summary, the critical social psychologist sees attitudes and emotions as very fine indicators, not just or primarily about our thoughts and feelings, but rather about our current mode of engagement, coordination, or *state of relationship* with some particular, meaningful, and currently relevant aspect of the world.

## Critical Approaches (2): The Critical Social Psychology of Love and Relationships

The image painted in the previous section, of a socio-cultural pool of meaning and information, of individual or personal selectivity relative to that pool, and of action being established on the basis of the relatedness of person and world, is highly characteristic of all critical studies of love. Such studies do not (and cannot) consider love to be an entity existing within the person, but instead appreciate that different societies, cultures, groups, and so on, have their own, often rather unique, definitions of love and that these definitions (or pools of relevant information) come to serve as a kind of interpretative blueprint for people interacting within a given context (Averill, 1985). As Beall and Sternberg (1995, p. 419) put it, 'part of the experience of love is its definition and that when cultures have different definitions of love, they [i.e. people within that culture] experience love differently'.

Yet the cultural definition of love is only *part* of the experience. The individual person, their preferences and selections, still have a major role to play. Lee's (1977) famous work on *love styles* demonstrates these principles nicely. Lee approached love as a problem of competing ideologies about the optimum arrangement for intimate adult partnering and identified six central ideologies or love styles extant within western cultures, which variously promoted love as passionate/erotic, as game playing, as friendship, as practical and calculating, as altruistic, and as an obsession. Lee (1988) nonetheless recognised the function and importance of *selectivity* at the level of the individual person, suggesting that people would simply 'buy into' one or more of these styles at different times and relative to different contexts and/or relationships. From the perspective of the experiencing person, therefore, the variability of love is markedly more pronounced, to the extent that it might even be 'pointless to attempt to say how many love styles there are' (Lee, 1988, p. 45).

Sternberg's (1995, 1996) *theory of love as a story* follows the same path. It proposes that each person's experience of love is gathered and conceptualised in the form of a story. Although this story is both personal and individual on one level of analysis, it is always derived through the coordination or relatedness of a person with their environment. A person's socio-cultural context, Sternberg suggests, places them under 'continual, although usually subtle, pressure to create only those stories which are socio-culturally acceptable' (Sternberg, 1995, p. 544). This subtle pressure nonetheless allows the individual person considerable room for manoeuvre. So much so, in fact, that Sternberg shares Lee's conviction that love might ultimately be experienced

in an almost infinite number of ways. Focusing on the most common experiences (or types of relatedness), Sternberg (1996) was able to reveal a preliminary taxonomy of 24 love stories, including the 'love as science' story (which proposes a rational approach to love), the 'love as art' story (which emphasises the physical attractiveness and appearance of a partner), and the 'love as war' story (which sees and conducts love relationships as a series of battles).

Watts and Stenner (2005) developed these ideas in a study which employed Q methodology as a means of ascertaining the currently dominant definitions of love extant within British culture. The central definition revealed by this study stressed the need for the continual effort of both partners, the importance of *mutual* trust and support, and emphasised that the individuality of both partners must be explicitly recognised within the relationship. It also argued that love should serve to *maximise the life potential* of both individuals and hence that relationships should be dissolved if they failed to deliver the promised benefits. A follow-up study, focused exclusively on British women, produced a similar dominant definition, which played up the importance of attraction, passion, and romance rather more, but was nonetheless equally quick to advocate the termination of any relationship which failed to deliver the expected satisfactions or which otherwise became 'boring' (Watts & Stenner, 2014).

Reported in this way, these findings appear to support the efficacy of social exchange theories of relationships and the model of the self-contained individual. Watts and Stenner (2014) even reports a definition of love which conceives of relationships as 'two separate people leading separate lives'. A more extreme manifestation of individualism is hard to imagine! Yet when these studies (and the 15 definitions of love they reveal) are considered in their entirety and, more importantly, from a critical perspective, it becomes clear that whilst many people really do think about themselves and relationships in terms of individualism and exchange, there are also a very considerable number of people who *do not*.

Look more closely at these studies, for example, and you will find that love also gets viewed as the ultimate connection between two people, as a worthwhile end in itself, and hence as something that must be experienced if a person's life is to be fulfilled, as something which should endure whatever happens, as something that should be given without demand or expectation, and so on. Other definitions prioritise the relationship or dyad above the individual person and/or regret the advance of individualism and the climate of relational instability it has created. What these critical studies indicate, in other words, is that the assumption of individualism and the manner of exchange relationships are actually being challenged, not just here, by a criti-

cal social psychologist in the pages of a book, but by the experiences and selections of a growing number of people.

## Conclusion and Summary: 'Real-Life' Implications

One of the main goals of a critical social psychology is to examine previously unexamined assumptions, to consider the alternatives, and to show how easily things might be different if creative imagination were so directed. This chapter has endeavoured to show this process at work. Cognitive social psychology has persisted in constructing relationships as peripheral to people's lives and as basically unnecessary to a properly self-contained individual. They should, as such, only be countenanced where personal benefits can be maximised and effort minimised.

Yet the practical or 'real-life' evidence suggests that these assumptions are having profound and very damaging repercussions. For example, a report commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation in, 2010 (entitled *The Lonely Society*) clearly indicates that loneliness, a form of isolation which ought not to concern any truly self-contained individual, is actually having very negative psychological and physical impacts across Britain and beyond. These impacts include increased incidences of depression and stress, lower subjective well-being, raised blood pressure, lower levels of immunity to disease, and the list goes on. Lonely people are nearly twice as likely to die prematurely as people with a satisfactory history of relationships. Fact.

This is evidently upsetting in itself, but the particular shame for social psychology is that the report also asserts a clear and direct link between the assumption of individualism and a steady and pronounced rise in mental health disorders over the last 50 years. Arguing that people should consider themselves self-contained, therefore, as cognitive social psychology has so often done, and continuing to study people in isolation and along fundamentally asocial lines is, at the very least, morally wrong. What this chapter has added to this argument, however, is some preliminary evidence to suggest that it is also factually and scientifically wrong. It is the manifestation of one particular construction of personhood and relationships which has proved itself to be particularly damaging from a psychological perspective. The embarrassment is that cognitive social psychology has been so complicit and persistent in this construction. As Stainton Rogers et al. (1995, p. 93) argue:

This sense in which our personal relationships are ongoing constructions...has been...avoided or downplayed within mainstream literature...This is largely

because such social-psychological literature (and the professional practice it supports) is itself...involved in these constructions. Nowadays when we have problems with our relationships it is likely to be to psychology that we turn for help and advice, whether directly (through psychotherapy, counselling, marriage guidance or some other psychologically informed practice) or indirectly (through magazine articles and problem pages...‘self-help’ pop psychology books, talk-back radio programmes, and so on).

Not only, therefore, has cognitive social psychology helped to create the psychological problems and relational frailties described above; the discipline as a whole has actually come to *profit* from their resolution. It’s an embarrassing state of affairs and it’s precisely the sort of issue which critical social psychology should bring to light. Relationships are not peripheral to people; they are ‘the foundation and theme of the human condition’ (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983, p. 19), they are the means by which people are defined and define themselves, and they are essential to a proper understanding of social psychology and its many subject matters. And the quicker we all start to assume as much, the better it will be.

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# Part V

**Social Identities/Relations/Conflicts**

# 19

## The Self

Chris McVittie and Andy McKinlay

### Introduction

The idea of self in many ways appears both central to our lives and specific to each of us in identifying us as a unique person. It is therefore unsurprising that the self has for long provided a topic of study for philosophers and other scholars. In Western thought, interest in the self can be traced back to the writings of Plato (ca. 428–348 BCE), subsequently taken up in the work of Aristotle (ca. 384–322 BCE), in discussions of what might comprise the essential core of a human being. Evidence, however, suggests that in Eastern writings enquiry into the self goes back even further to the Upanishads, texts dating from the sixth century BCE that contain the earliest central concepts of Hinduism and some other Eastern religions. Believed to contain revealed truths about the nature of ultimate reality, the Upanishads provide discussion of the self as part of that reality of the nature and organisation of life. More recently, the topic of the self provided a major focus for the philosophers of the Enlightenment: Descartes, Locke, Hume, Leibnitz, Berkeley, and Kant all

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wrote on and discussed the self as part of their philosophical enquiries. The study of the self, then, has a long history.

Mainstream psychological interest in the self stems in particular from the writings of William James in his classic text *The Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890). James provided what became a highly influential and enduring conceptualisation of the self as comprising two separate but necessarily related aspects. One aspect, termed the *I*, was for James the person as the centre of introspection and reflection on experience, the person who made sense of past, present, and future encounters with the world in a form that rendered these encounters coherent and thereby allowed for continuity of being. James' second aspect, termed the *me*, comprised the self as known through his/her interactions with others. The *me* was thus a social self, or more accurately for James, a collection of social selves that were based in and known through the person as a social being. In James' words, 'a man [sic] has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind' (Vol.1, p. 294). The *I* and the *me* thus reflected two different elements of self that together comprised the person as an essential being, distinct from others, and capable of introspecting and reflecting on participation in the social world.

James' conceptualisation in various respects takes up and reflects what we might consider to be a fairly common sense view of the self as an essential and distinct person, as we each seek to work out who we are and to make sense of our interactions with others. Yet, however persuasive and apparently obvious this view might be, this understanding of the self has proved problematic for social psychology as it seeks to study how people do in everyday life make sense of who they are in relation to others and negotiate the meanings of their experiences in a social world. As we shall see in this chapter, to understand usefully how the self is reflected in and bound up with social actions, we need a very different approach than that found in the writings of James, no matter how obvious his descriptions of self might otherwise appear. It is for such reasons that we need to use critical approaches if we are to understand what the self does mean in each of our lives.

## The Self and Mainstream Social Psychology

Following James' (1890) writings, other writers, most notably Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), took up the question of how an individual develops a social self by making sense of his/her interactions with others. It was not however until some decades later that the self fully emerged as a topic in social psychol-

ogy. Writing in the mid-1950s, Gordon Allport observed that over the two preceding decades, there had been a noticeable uptake of interest in the self as reflected in a considerable volume of writing on the topic. Markedly, however, little if any of this work aimed to develop understanding of the self as *self*. Instead newly introduced constructs such as self-image, self-actualisation, self-affirmation, and so on had been proposed, taken up in subsequent theories and in turn led to the emergence of further constructs. What this work had in common was that the constructs ostensibly related to the self in offering a description of some related element, such as self-esteem, or related process, such as self-actualisation. Seldom if ever, however, did writers make explicit the proposed relationship between what was being denoted and a broader idea of self. Rather the idea of self was left largely implicit and superseded by a range of ‘hyphenated elaborations’ (Allport, 1995, p. 37), many of which potentially bore little relation to the self at all.

## A Proliferation of Self-Related Constructs

Looking back, it is clear that these developments marked the beginning of a line of work that continues to this day. Regardless of Allport’s (1955) concerns, the production of self-related constructs continued apace over the years to come. Thus, if we now pick up any major text on social psychology, we will find included within it a diverse range of constructs that explicitly claim some relation to the self. For example, one leading current text (a typical example) includes index entries for in excess of 40 self-related terms ranging from ‘self-actualized personalities’ to ‘self-worth’ (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014). And, at the same time, we find indexed instances too numerous to count of apparent manifestations of the self in individual and social actions. All of these efforts point to social psychology’s continuing interest in the self, albeit one that is focused on specific constructs and not the self as a whole.

What remains clear, however, is that little has changed since Allport’s (1955) concerns about the production of self-related constructs. Apart from a common reliance on the term ‘self’, there is often little discernible similarity among many of the constructs on offer. From a review of uses of self-related constructs across the behavioural and social sciences, Leary and Tangney (2003) identified at least five different common uses of the term ‘self’ that had little or no overlap between them. The result of the emergence and use of a proliferation of constructs that claim to describe different parts or orientations of the self has been a lack of any consensus as to how the self might usefully be understood or indeed what all of these self-related constructs involve:

‘not only have we lacked a single, universally accepted definition of “self”, but also many definitions clearly refer to distinctly different phenomena, and some uses of the term are difficult to grasp no matter what definition one applies’ (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 6). Thus, the term self, instead of denoting a specific topic of study, has been used in a multiplicity of ways that serve different purposes, with the production of an ever-increasing range of self-related constructs leading not to any more useful understanding of the self but to research into the self becoming ‘a conceptual morass’ (2003, pp. 7–8).

## The Self as Social Categoriser

In contrast to the work considered above, a second approach to study of the self has proceeded from a more defined theoretical position. And, in doing so, it has in many ways adopted James’ (1890) distinction between the person as the centre of experience and reflection and the person as known through social interaction with others. Here the most influential approach here has been that of Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) as subsequently taken up in self-categorisation theory (SCT; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For SIT, the primary focus lies on how people are identified socially in terms of the social identities that they adopt at various times. These identities encompass readily recognisable features of a social landscape, for example, memberships of social groups defined by gender, age, nationality, or other characteristics. By taking up membership of specific groups through the psychological processes of (1) social categorisation, (2) social identification, and (3) social comparison, individuals acquire social identities that locate them within a recognisable social world. In this way, the focus lies more on what people have in common with others than on what might make them distinctive.

Although SIT seeks to examine social identity rather than self, and commonality through group memberships rather than distinctiveness, self nonetheless is important here for two reasons. First, SIT argues that the processes that lead to adoption of social identities are primarily motivated by an individual’s need to maximise self-esteem: taking up social identities that allow for favourable comparisons of that group with others will enhance self-esteem and thus people will seek advantageous comparisons and identities whenever they are available. Second, the role for self incorporated into SIT is developed further in SCT which aims to specify how and when individuals will identify themselves in terms of social identities instead of personal identities or selves. According to SCT, the shift away from personal identity or self occurs when



people have accessible to them a relevant social identity and this identity is made salient by the context in which the person is at a given time. In these instances, it is argued, people come to see themselves more as exemplar members of a social group than as unique individuals and this process of depersonalisation leads them to identify as group members instead of as individual selves.

SIT and SCT have been highly influential in generating social psychological research into the processes by which people take up and switch social identities at different times and the consequences for intra-group and inter-group relations. Given the emphasis on the processes that lead to social identity and the consequences of adopting social identities, it is perhaps unsurprising that in this approach, the self plays a less prominent role in social life. Instead of being a major topic of interest, the self comes in effect to be viewed as a default position that is taken up when no social identities are immediately salient for the individual. At the same time, the self is also little more than an indistinguishable information processor that is scanning the social horizon for perceptual clues before applying the most salient self-categorisation. Little room is left for a self as a unique social being who interacts with others.

## Dualist and Essentialist Theories of the Self

The two approaches discussed above provide different accounts of the self. On the first view the self is a combination of (some) self-related dispositions and potential actions, whereas on the second view the self is a whole but one that plays a minor role when compared with social groups and social identities. Notwithstanding the differences between those approaches, these and other mainstream social psychological approaches to the self share two central elements. First there is the dualist quality of the explanations provided. In mainstream approaches, individuals and society fall to be treated as separate and distinguishable entities. Certainly, each impinges on the other; the individual has to derive beliefs about others or perceive the available social categories in order to arrive at a point of identifying where he/she stands in relation to social life. But in each case, social phenomena are regarded as separable from the individual as self. Second, the accounts provided are essentialist in treating the psychological processes and properties involved as essential features of the individual. Views that others might have of the self are treated as individually located beliefs or as the outcomes of cognitive processes. And, for SCT/SIT social categories that allow for identification and comparison are situated in a recognisable social landscape. In these ways, whether comprising sets of

beliefs or perceptual and cognitive processes, self becomes an essential property of the individual.

In these respects, much of social psychology's focus on the self over the course of the twentieth century follows James' (1890) early writings. The self continues to be viewed as comprising two elements, individual and social, and the emphasis lies on the individual as the site of encounters with the social world. These two core assumptions, introduced by James and taken up widely since then, mark the point of departure for critical approaches to understanding the self. For critical theorists, the dualist and essentialist elements of mainstream theorising are neither sustainable nor borne out by careful examination of how people act in social life: what we need is an entirely different approach to the study of self.

## Critical Approaches to the Self

From a critical perspective, the focus of social psychological work lies not in the study of individuals and society as separate entities each with its own properties but instead on how people live their lives in a social world (Gergen, 2009; Sampson, 1993). The aim is to understand people in social life instead of attempting to separate and then somehow recombine the two. At the same time, the topics of interest to social psychology are viewed not as properties either of individuals or of society but instead as products that emerge when people live and act socially. In adopting this perspective, the emphasis is on social interaction, in particular how people use language to negotiate and construct the meanings of everyday life as they engage as social beings. Discursive research has demonstrated how the central concerns of social psychology such as attitudes, cognitions, group relations, and so on can be usefully understood as issues that individuals work out in social interaction instead of being properties of either individuals or a pre-existing social world (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). In this respect, the self is no different to other social psychological interests: selves can be understood as outcomes that people accomplish in talk as they interact with each other. Taking discourse as the site of investigation, discursive researchers have however pursued rather different approaches to examining how the self is constructed in language. A review of all such approaches is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Here we confine ourselves to outlining two main approaches that discursive researchers have adopted in relation to the self: macro approaches and micro approaches.

Macro approaches are primarily concerned with the study of how broader patterns of social structures and practices shape and are enacted in the interac-

tions that people have with each other. Thus, for example, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001) examines how people's talk instantiates forms of social or political inequality. A main part of this work seeks to examine how dominant ideologies are produced and reproduced in language, and is designed to expose the inequalities that are sustained through social practices in order to effect change. In this way, critical discourse analysis is usually bound up with aims of emancipation. Other macro approaches draw on the perspective of post-structuralism, particularly the work of Michel Foucault (1980, 2002) as taken up in Foucauldian discourse analysis (Parker, 1992, 2014). In such cases, the emphasis is less on how language reproduces social inequalities and more on how it reflects the social and ideological practices of particular historical periods. According to this argument, the discourses circulating within any specific period of time make available certain forms of being or subject positions that individuals take up and occupy. Certainly these subject positions are open to individual resistance: the more dominant and entrenched the discourse, however, the more difficult it becomes for individuals to challenge what are recognised as readily available forms of selves. Discourses thus reflect power and ideology at a broader level, but provide ways of understanding the world that appear to make everyday sense and with which individuals can identify. On this view, the self or more accurately selves can be understood as outcomes of prevailing discourses and patterns of social relations.

Micro approaches are less concerned with the study of how language (re) produces ideology and inequality than with examining how people themselves use language to accomplish particular outcomes. These approaches have their roots in the traditions of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) and conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and include subsequent forms such as discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2005; Potter, 2003). Ethnomethodology is the study of how people make sense of their everyday lives through processes of practical reasoning. Conversation analysis focuses on the study of how speakers organise their turns in everyday talk, how they use particular lexical items and forms, and how these are demonstrably and sequentially relevant for the ensuing interaction. Discursive psychological is concerned with how individuals construct and negotiate psychological concepts in everyday interaction. Taking these interests together, micro forms of analysis examine how individuals in talk-in-interaction deploy and work up discursive versions of people, events, and social phenomena. At the same time, micro approaches emphasise the action orientation of discourse: discourse does not (merely) reflect what might be considered to be occurring elsewhere but instead is an active medium that

people use to do things. From this perspective, discourse is never neutral; it is always being used to achieve certain outcomes, such as justifying one's actions, accounting for events, complaining, blaming or criticising others, and so on.

The application of micro approaches is of particular relevance here in that they build, at least to some extent, upon previous work that specifically considered the idea of self. Shortly after the time that Allport (1955) was expressing his concerns, there came the publication of Erving Goffman's (1959) classic text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in which Goffman proposed a view of self that was radically different to the one then gaining prominence in mainstream social psychology. For Goffman, self was not a property of the individual but rather something that the individual performed in interaction with others. According to his argument, people in interactions seek to present themselves in ways that will guide the impressions that others form of them. At the same time, those with whom an individual is interacting attempt to gain information about and form an impression of the individual. All performances of the self therefore carry risks: any individual might not bring off a performance successfully or a performance might be taken up in a way that was not anticipated. Regardless, self is the outcome of the performance in accomplishing who others take the self to be.

What has been especially attractive to researchers who use micro approaches is Goffman's emphasis on social interaction and on the outcomes that flow from it. What this means is that instead of attempting to theorise what happens inside people's heads and thereafter attempting to reconnect it with the social world, we can instead examine social life as it unfolds and see how people make sense of it. In this, work that built upon the importance of studying social interaction and its effects has been especially influential. Taking self to be a product of social interaction instead of a precursor for social action, attention focuses on how individuals understand their own and others' performances, how these are achieved in everyday talk and the functions that selves fulfil in local contexts of production.

## Constructing the Self

To examine what critical approaches can contribute to understanding the self, we turn to consider some examples of how people do construct and utilise selves in everyday talk. In these examples, we see speakers construct versions of self intrinsic to them, versions that draw also upon perceptions of them held by other people, and an instance of divergence between the two. We start by considering instances in which the speakers are presenting versions of the self based on inner dispositions and reflections.

## Constructing an Inner Self

The extract below comes from a study conducted with older (aged 50 years+) non-employed people who were signing on at jobcentres as looking for employment (McVittie, McKinlay, & Widdicombe, 2008). The study aimed to examine possible age discrimination against jobseekers and how jobseekers constructed their identities in that context. This extract begins with a question to one interviewee, FV, about the possible consequences of age for gaining employment.

- 1 INT Have you found age to be a factor in looking for employment?  
 2 FV I think it really depends what uh what kind of brain you've got (.)  
 (Int: mm  
 3 hm) There are two kin- kinds of brains, there there are the (.) eh work is  
 4 separated from life (.) and you've already found out life is separated from  
 5 work and there's the attitude that the damn thing is the bit that you fill in  
 6 from being born to die (.) E::h personally I can split the two, (.) I know  
 7 what I like I know what I don't like, if I find I don't like something in work  
 8 (.) I create a situation where I'm out of it (.) If I find there's something I  
 9 like in work I create a situation where I'm even further into it<sup>1</sup>  
 (McVittie et al., 2008, p. 252)

Here, the question put to FV introduces the possibility that perceptions of age might be operating against his efforts to find employment. As seen, though, FV does not take up the question in this way. Instead of referring to age, or to his efforts to find employment, FV develops a description of two kinds of people based upon different 'kinds of brains'. He also sets out the relevance of each kind of brain for its orientation to work, either by splitting work and life or by working 'from being born to die'. This description thereby depicts two different kinds of self: rooted in biology and associated inner disposition to work. Having constructed these possibilities, FV continues by claiming that he has the kind of brain that 'can split the two'. This claim is then linked to his reflexive actions towards work, in seeking to be 'out of it' or 'further into it' depending on whether or not there is 'something I like'.

In these terms, FV's descriptions construct for him a self that is rooted within his brain and in an accompanying disposition towards work. This self however is not the end of the matter. To see what action this self is performing,

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the transcription notation used in extracts in this chapter, see Chapter 15 p. 397.

we need to examine his description in this specific context. And here, for FV, what it achieves is to account for his current status as being non-employed. Whereas the question put to him invited a response involving age as a work-related factor, FV responds by producing an account for being out of work on the basis of his inner self.

In the extract below, we see self being deployed to similar effect. This extract comes from an analysis of interviews conducted on evangelical television programmes (Xanthopoulou, 2010). A main focus for these interviews was that of ‘defectiveness’, with interviewees being invited to discuss personal shortcomings or failings in not living up to the standards required by allegiance to a higher entity (God). One interviewee, Jessie, describes how she ceased singing in the church choir to form a band and pursue a musical career. Elsewhere the ability to write and perform songs, and choice of career based on this ability, might be evaluated positively. In this instance, however, that is less likely to be the case: withdrawal from the church choir to pursue individual desires and financial reward might be criticised for being just the sort of failing that the programme is discussing. Here we see how Jessie describes her actions:

Jessie: >I had wr↑itten< (.) a whole album worth of  
so:ngs (0.4) e:rm (.) ↑non Christian songs but just  
kinda like out of my own experience and they were  
just s↑itting in (0.2) in a- (.) a b:oo:k (0.4)  
a:nd ↑God really said to me J↑essie? you’ve been  
that wicked lazy ((pointing with hands)) servant  
(0.3) who: is just playing it safe ↓a:nd I’m: I’m  
not having it (.) ↑so I guess right then I had a  
dec↑ision (0.3) whether (0.2) to: (0.2) ↑stay  
c↑omfortable and keep singing in the church (0.2)  
and you know doing the ou and a:r (.) o:r (0.2)  
↑push myself forward (.) as a singer song wri:ter<sup>i</sup>

(adapted from Xanthopoulou, 2010, p. 686)

Above we see Jessie describing actions that she took previously in writing songs and more recently in deciding to leave the church choir and ‘get a band together and start rec[o:rding]’. This action might well be criticisable in any case but is rendered more so by her description of the songs as ‘non Christian’ which sharpens the contrast between previous church-related activities and subsequent non-church-based career choices. What we also see in this extract, however, is how Jessie accounts for her actions. To do so, she constructs her former self in highly negative terms, describing herself as a ‘wicked lazy ... servant’ who was ‘just playing it safe’. The attribution of negative qualities makes this

previous self highly criticisable. Moreover, the effect of this construction is emphasised through Jessie's attribution of criticism to God as the source.

The effect of this construction of previous self is that Jessie's current self becomes laudable in that she has attended to what was previously criticisable. It is this contrast and the resulting current self that works to justify her actions in leaving the church to pursue a musical career.

In these examples, we see how speakers construct versions of self based upon references to inner dispositions, qualities, and reflection. FV's and Jessie's selves are, at the same time, intrinsically bound up with social actions, in seeking or not seeking employment and in making music, respectively. These selves, therefore, are not mere descriptions of what is going on internally for FV and Jessie but rather are discursive constructions that are used to accomplish specific outcomes, here accounting for and justifying to others the actions of the individual in each case.

## Constructing a Self as Known

Constructing an inner self, then, allows a speaker to describe his/her inner world or experiences in accounting for one's actions. One difficulty for speakers, though, is that claims based on an inner self invoke knowledge that is available only to the speaker. Any such claims therefore run the risk of being challenged by those to whom the self is being told, on the grounds that whatever is being described is motivated by the interests of the speaker in portraying themselves in a certain light: speakers can be heard as having a 'stake' in how they describe themselves (Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993). For example, Jessie's description of her actions as resulting from God's criticism of her previous self might be challenged on the grounds that she has a stake in describing herself in that way: in the oft-quoted phrase, 'she would say that, wouldn't she'. One way that speakers seek to attend to the possibility of challenge is by constructing versions of self that describe not just internal states but also elements that are known to others.

Below, we see an example of how a speaker constructs a self that is ostensibly known by others. This extract comes from a study of the narratives of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) sufferers (Horton-Salway, 2001). ME is a condition without an established aetiology, and sufferers' claims to be experiencing symptoms are often treated sceptically, especially by medical practitioners. Here we see part of a narrative from Angela, who identifies as an ME sufferer:

189. I think my mother was around at one of these times when that was  
 190. mentioned too (.) my mother said 'I know my daughter' (.) I can always



191. remember my mother saying that (.) ‘I know my daughter’(.) because I  
 192. was always so active heh heh hyperactive in some respects  
 193. actually (.) because my Mum used to say to me ‘for goodness sake  
 194. Angela sit down’ (.) this was before I went down with ME (.) I never  
 195. wanted to sit down (.) I wanted to be on the go all the while (.) I was  
 196. happy that way (.) but er (.) things change (.) you’re forced to sit  
 197. down =<sup>1</sup>

(Horton-Salway, 2001, pp. 253–254)

Angela, at lines 194 to 197, describes her desires to be active rather than being ‘forced to sit down’. This description constructs for Angela a self that cannot function in the ways that she would wish to due to the symptoms that she experiences. It is however a version of self that is common in accounts from individuals claiming to suffer from ME and one that is open to challenge by those to whom it is presented. The risk then for Angela is that to rely on this construction of self alone is to risk non-acceptance and criticism.

Angela’s construction of self though does not rely solely on description of inner experiences. Instead at lines 189 to 194, we see repeated references to her mother and to what her mother knows about Angela. The ‘active voicing’ (Wooffitt, 1992) of words that Angela attributes to her mother strengthens the sense that this report is coming from another person who is qualified to talk about who Angela is and what she is ‘really’ like. Thus, we see a self that is presented as based both on individual experience and on the knowledge of others.

In the next example, we see another instance of how speakers can refer to the self as known in accounting for their actions. This extract comes from a study of the drinking habits of undergraduate students in Australia and their experiences of social pressure to drink while at University (Hepworth et al., 2016). Here we see Chloe talking about herself as someone who often does not drink alcohol at parties.

- 1 Chloe: I know that guys, the guys that I know are really  
 2 different in terms of whether the other people  
 3 around them are drinking, like if I am at a party  
 4 and a guy goes; “Oh, aren’t you drinking?” and if  
 5 I say; “No”, they will be like; “Oh, cool”, and  
 6 that will be it. But with a girl my girlfriends are  
 7 all like; “Oh, why aren’t you drinking?” “Oh  
 8 come on”, you know; “Get into the spirit”, you  
 9 know, they will have as many lines in the book,  
 10 whereas guys are more willing to accept OK  
 11 yeah you have your own reasons not to drink.

(Hepworth et al., 2016)

Above, Chloe describes herself as someone who does not drink for her 'own reasons'. She does not expand on what these are but the available inference are that these reasons are part of her inner self. The remainder of the extract is given over to how this self is presented to others on occasions when drinking might be expected behaviour and how those whom she is with respond to her.

Chloe describes in gender-specific terms two types of response that she receives to her presentation of self. Thus, 'a guy' will accept her as being 'cool', whereas her 'girlfriends' will seek to exert pressure on her by using 'as many lines in the book'. Despite differences in their responses, Chloe presents both groups as knowing her to be someone who does not drink on these occasions. Chloe thereby constructs a self that does not conform to what is expected but risky student behaviour in the form of heavy drinking.

Both Angela and Chloe, then, present selves that are based both in their internal experience and in how other people know and recognise them in social situations. In each case, the introduction of how the self is known by others functions to bolster the speaker's claim to be a certain type of person and to behave in particular ways.

## Criticising Others

The versions of the self seen so far offer speakers ways of warranting their claims and accounting for actions that are potentially problematic. There is however no reason why descriptions of the self should necessarily relate to warranting claims of the speaker to be a certain kind of person. As with any other discourse, discourse of the self is available for use in a wide range of ways according to what the speaker seeks to accomplish. In the final example, we see the speaker deploy versions of his inner self and self as known to rather different effect. This extract is taken from a study of residents of an island (identified by the imaginary name Norisle) off the northern coast of Scotland (McKinlay & McVittie, 2007). Here we see an excerpt from an interview conducted with two people who had been born and lived on the UK mainland and had subsequently moved to take up residence on the island. Ron had lived on the island for 15 years and Jill for 18 months:

- 1 Ron Amongst my my circle of friends there isn't actually many local guys  
and the
- 2 ones that are are actually very (.) eh sort of, you know, and there's  
always the
- 3 racist thing that is is rife here as you said you know, do I consider myself a

- 4           Norisle man I mean it doesn't matter what I consider, everybody else on  
 5           Norisle would never ever consider me a Norisle man. I mean I=  
 6 Jill       =They just hear the accent I suppose  
 7 Ron       I came to Norisle originally eh British, I mean I've never been English  
             as far  
 8           as I've been concerned until I came to Norisle and em you know without a  
 9           doubt I'm English and I've been here fifteen years<sup>1</sup>

(McKinlay & McVittie, 2007, p. 183)

Above, Ron refers to two different versions of self. One version, at lines 7 to 8, refers to his experience of being British and having 'never been English'. The other version, at lines 4 to 5 and at lines 8 to 9, sets out how other Norisle residents know him, as someone who is not considered 'a Norisle man' and who 'without a doubt' is English. These versions of self are not just different, but clearly inconsistent in portraying Ron in mutually incompatible ways.

But Ron's description here is not simply about establishing who he is and which version of self is to be treated as correct. Rather it is the inconsistency between these versions of self that provides the main focus. These constructions are situated within a response to a question as to whether Ron considered himself to a local resident. And, what Ron formulates here is a complaint about other Norisle residents. Although it is not pursued, he at line 3 introduces the suggestion of racism on the island ('the racist thing that is is rife here') and this can be heard as an explanation as to why Ron's version of himself is not accepted. The constructions of self found here, and the inconsistency between them, thus provide the basis for Ron's criticisms of the local residents on ground of possible racism.

## The Self in Discourse

The examples above show some ways in which speakers construct selves in the moment-to-moment of discourse. The self can be constructed on the basis of inner preferences, inner states or experiences, or as some combination of these and how the self is known and recognised by others. We have seen also how such selves are found across a range of discursive contexts, including issues, relating to employment, religion and career, illness, student behaviour, and the very question of belonging or not belonging in relation to others. These selves are not, however, completed products that will endure into the next interaction and beyond that. Nor do they pick out and represent properties that are essential features of the individuals

involved or the social contexts that are described. Rather these selves, as with any other selves, are constructed to accomplish specific interactional business, whether accounting for and justifying actions, criticising those with whom the speakers interact, or otherwise. Future interactions will call for and allow the construction of other selves that in turn will be oriented to the local contexts in which they are produced.

The extent to which the selves that individuals construct in talk reflect continuing features of the individual is a matter of debate in current social psychology, with some critical theorists arguing for greater attention to be paid to how selves are organised over time. For example, it is suggested that an individual's constructions of self over multiple situations produce what can be viewed as a 'personal history' of self (Taylor & Littleton, 2012) or alternatively that individuals become psychologically 'invested' in specific forms of self that recur across social contexts (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Theorists within micro analytic perspectives, by contrast, remain sceptical that such approaches have sufficient regard for the moment-to-moment construction of selves in interaction and argue that the primary focus must remain on the detailed analysis of discourse to understand fully the selves that individuals negotiate and what they accomplish (Potter, 2012).

## Current Trends

One focus of much recent work in critical social psychology has been the study of how selves are produced across the contexts found in virtual media. Writing two decades ago, Sherry Turkle (1995) argued that even by then the interactions made available by new forms of media opened up numerous opportunities for different presentations of the self: 'the Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create' (Turkle, 1995, p. 180). Interactions in virtual contexts do not involve the expectations found in face-to-face interactions and the claims that people make for themselves are thereby often not open to the challenges that might result from such constructions of self in everyday life.

The outcomes of this experimentation with versions of self can be positive or negative. On the positive side, interactions that do not involve face-to-face contact allow individuals to conceal or at least not to reveal aspects of self that might be negatively evaluated. For example, Goffman (1963) noted that, for individuals who risk facing social devaluation, one way of avoiding

negative evaluation is by 'passing' or concealing from others features of the self that might indicate stigma. Thus, for those who face prejudice or discrimination in face-to-face interactions, the construction of different selves in virtual media can allow them to avoid such risks and to negotiate more favourable experiences. But on the negative side, virtual media equally afford to other possibilities to construct themselves in ways that are not open to challenge as elsewhere and that are designed to lead to less desirable outcomes. Of course, many users of virtual media are well aware that these media allow possibilities for producing selves that bear little relationship to other versions of selves and treat claims accordingly. Experimentation with selves in virtual media, then, can be relatively easy; having these selves accepted by others is however another matter.

Opportunities for individuals to construct positive selves are often found in online communities in which users seek support from and provide support to others who report having similar experiences. Thus, for example, those who claim to suffer from ME can construct themselves in ways that are likely to be met with support from fellow sufferers rather than the scepticism they might face in other contexts (Guise, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2010). And, as seen elsewhere, the constructions seen in contexts such as these can often involve a contrast with previous selves in order to bolster the claims being made for current selves. Victims of domestic violence can contrast their past experiences of suffering in abusive relationships with current experiences after leaving these relationships and thereby present themselves as survivors (Hurley, Sullivan, & McCarthy, 2007). There remains the risk, however, that those with whom an individual is interacting will treat claims to be a particular self as not being authentic and consequently will not accept these claims. One such example is seen in the interactions of users of an internet chat room for 'suicidal thoughts' (Horne & Wiggins, 2009), in which established users of the forum respond only to postings that indicate the user is genuinely suicidal. Postings which, by contrast, suggest that an individual is someone who knows about the problems rather than having experienced them can easily lead to the individual's claims to be suicidal not being accepted and the poster being ignored by other users.

On the negative side, certain descriptions of self are found in emails that describe what would appear to be difficult and harrowing circumstances and which solicit help from the recipient. These emails are commonly known as '419' emails, '419' being the term for online financial fraud in terms of the penal code of Nigeria where many of these emails originate. Recipients who do accept the claims on offer and respond to them are likely to find themselves victims of financial fraud with no hope of recompense. Routinely though we

do treat these constructions of selves, whether struggling widows, financial intermediaries, or others, as inauthentic and do not accept or respond to them (Blommaert, 2005; Chiluja, 2009). Perhaps more worryingly, virtual media also provide opportunities for individuals to construct selves that not only might be damaging to others but also potentially highly damaging to themselves. Various health-related forums found in virtual media go beyond providing users with support to actually encouraging behaviours that can be very detrimental to health and well-being. One such instance is that of ‘pro-ana’ sites that promote disordered eating behaviours as desirable and as lifestyle choices instead of health issues. The metaphors found in such contexts can suggest that users’ constructions are far from harmless experimentation with different ways of being (Bates, 2015). The availability of such websites, along with the recurring presence of unlikely claims made by others, does however function to remind us of the many and diverse possibilities for experimentation in the constructions of self that are made available in virtual media. In such instances, as elsewhere, the selves that people present and create are accomplishments, designed towards some social outcomes.

## Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, critical approaches argue that in order to understand selves in social life, we have to look at how selves are constructed and negotiated through discourse in interaction with others. These approaches to understanding the self stand in contrast to the approach to the self proposed by James (1890) as taken up and reflected in mainstream social psychology since then. That view, rooted in dualist and essentialist assumptions, leads to an understanding of the self that ultimately is internally inconsistent and/or unsustainable. As we have seen, however, the self is neither an enduring individual product nor an individual endeavour that is conducted separately from the society in which we live. Adopting a critical approach allows us to see how people construct themselves in everyday life and how the versions of self that they propose are oriented to accomplishing social outcomes. The selves that people make, and how they are taken up by others, are ongoing projects, to be developed, reworked, or otherwise dealt with as we live our lives as social beings.

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# 20

## Gender

Sarah Riley and Adrienne Evans

In 2009, middle-distance South African runner Caster Semenya underwent gender testing by the International Association of Athletics Federations. The extensive media coverage of this issue and subsequent change in how the Olympic committee measured gender (from DNA to ‘functional’ testosterone levels, a policy dropped in 2015 after a ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport) highlights some important issues for critical psychologists interested in gender: it shows us how much we normally take gender and sex categorisations for granted, how fascinating we find those that we can’t easily categorise as male or female, and how complex and changeable these categorisations are when we try to define them.

To think through these complexities, we draw on social constructionist and poststructuralist theoretical frameworks. We employ these frameworks to think about gender in two related bodies of research, on ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘postfeminism’. In the process, we consider contemporary gender relations in the globalised West, including issues of equality, sexism, and new consumer-oriented ways of thinking about masculinity and femininity.

Critical gender research is often interdisciplinary and this chapter is no exception. Our focus is on sharing with you research by critical social psychologists or which has informed critical social psychology, and that means

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drawing on work outside of psychology, including sociology, cultural, and media studies. We also use YouTube videos to help you think through these ideas and make the link between theory and practice.

## Gender as Something We Are: Critiques of Mainstream Social Psychology

Historically psychology can be thought of as employing a 'male as norm' framework, conducting 'male-stream' psychology in which research was (in general) conducted by men, on men, for men, and from a male perspective (these men were usually middle class and White). The male-as-norm framework set the scene in the development of early psychometric testing. For example, the Attitude Interest Analysis Survey gave a positive score if you were more likely to agree to items endorsed by men than women, while the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory developed its measure of femininity through testing homosexual-identified men (Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 2001).

Trying to address these biases, feminist psychologists re-evaluated female traits. For example, Gilligan (1982) rejected Kohlberg's finding that women were less likely to reach the highest level of moral thinking by arguing that men and women had different but equal moral reasoning. This 'equal but different' approach reproduced the idea that men and women were essentially different and that these differences were related to biology, in particular that women gave birth and were normally the subsequent primary carers. In contrast, other analysts made a distinction between sex (biologically determined) and gender (socially determined). The distinction between gender and sex was a useful tool in the battle against sexism. For example, Sandra Bem (1974) argued against work that devalued traits considered feminine by arguing that psychologically healthy people had a balance of both masculinity and femininity.

But the gender/sex distinction came with its own problems. It is assumed there were essential, objective truths of maleness and femaleness to be discovered in men and women's bodies. Despite Bem's work, this standpoint facilitated an understanding that masculinity and femininity should map onto male and female bodies, creating prescriptive expectations that men should articulate masculine behaviours and women feminine ones. We see this logic in the way men who seek gender reassignment surgery must demonstrate their commitment to being a woman through maintaining a highly feminine appearance (Speer & Green, 2007).

Another problem with the gender/sex distinction is that it allows arguments that uphold social inequalities. For example, essentialist arguments about women's biology were used historically to deny women access to education (increased blood flow to the brain would deprive the womb of blood, making women infertile and therefore less 'womanly' [Theriot, 1993]), while more recently the argument that men's natural aggressiveness makes them likely to be higher earners has been used to position legislation for equal pay as discriminatory (Fausto-Stirling, 2003).

The gender/sex distinction also masks variation in how we might think about biological sex differences. The idea of two biological sex categories is questionable given that estimates of live births that cannot clearly be categorised as male or female vary from 1.7 to 10% (Blackless et al., 2000; Butler, 1990). There are also different ways of making sense of our biological bodies; for example, before the eighteenth century, males and females were considered as having the same genitals (just on the inside or outside) (Laqueur, 1990).

Conceptualising two sexes and two genders is a form of dichotomous thinking, and in dichotomous thinking, one side of a dichotomy (e.g. white/black, good/bad, male/female) is usually more valued (see Hepburn, 2003 discussion of Derrida). We can see this thinking in the way traits traditionally associated with masculinity (e.g. agentic, strong, independent) are considered better than those associated with femininity (passive, weak, dependent, etc.). This thinking has real-world implications. For example, Rosalind Gill's (1993) interviews with the 1990s' radio DJs showed how male broadcasters constructed women's voices as problematic (e.g. too shrill), and thus differences in men's and women's voice quality (and not the implicit sexism of the 'liberal' media industry) justified the lack of women employed in radio broadcasting. Gill's research described a form of sexism that incorporated cultural changes that value equality. In 'new sexism', people claim an egalitarian identity while arguing in ways that legitimised prejudice and discrimination against women (also see Gough [1998] and Riley [2001]). Other examples of contemporary sexism include idolising femininity. For example, female criminals may receive harsher judgements because their participation in crime is understood as unfeminine (Vicki, Massey, & Masser, 2005).

Thinking through the lens of gender can mean we treat gender as a universally shared experience and miss the very different gendered experiences for people of different ethnicities, sexualities, classes, and with different levels of able-bodiedness or incomes. From this perspective, intersectional researchers challenged sex/gender research for failing to see how issues other than gender

impact on people's lives (for more on intersectionality, see Bowleg, this volume). For example, while Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963) highlighted the limitations of a suburban housewife's life, her ideas were developed from the experiences of White middle-class women, ignoring the experience of many women, often less wealthy and non-White, who were in paid employment. McCall (2005) showed the importance of an intersectional perspective when she demonstrated how different patterns of inequality occur between men and women depending on education, ethnicity, geography, and underlying local historical economic structures. Her work suggests that to successfully reduce inequality, specific policies are needed for different geo-socio-historical contexts.

Critical social psychologists are also concerned with the way mainstream social psychology conceptualises the individual and society as separate entities that then interact. This framework has at times been useful for gender researchers with a critical agenda. For example, by showing that children mimic behaviours that they see are rewarded, Bandura's (1965) Bobo doll experiments provided a theory of gender socialisation. But conceptualising the individual as separate (if affected by) society ties in with the problematisation of the gender/sex dichotomy outlined above, since gender is constructed as something we are, located in individuals of a specific sex who have measurable 'levels' of masculinity and femininity within them. Critical social psychologists instead use a different framework, conceptualising gender as something that we *treat* as real, and people, not as separate entities that interact with their culture, but as produced *through* their culture.

So, where mainstream socialisation theories of gender imply that we start off as individuals who are then moulded by our culture, social constructionist theorists argue that we are born into a world that exists before us and already has concepts for making sense of the world. We draw on these concepts to make sense of ourselves, so how we develop as individuals is profoundly interconnected with the sense making of our cultures. For example, we may come to understand ourselves as having attitudes because we have the concept and word 'attitude' in our culture, but not every culture does because the concept of attitudes requires an individualistic framework. To explain using a clothing metaphor: socialisation is when your mother puts out your clothes to wear until you learn what is stylish, while social constructionism is when you choose what you like from the wardrobe; you just don't notice that everything in it is a shade of blue. Taking this standpoint means that gender is not understood as something we are, rather it is something done in context.

## Doing Gender: Alternative Critical Perspectives

The importance of conceptualising the person-in-context is central to critical social psychology and a key tenant of social constructionism. Burr (2003), drawing on Gergen (1985), argues that social constructionists share a critical standpoint towards taken for granted knowledge and an understanding of knowledge as socio-historically located, produced in interaction, and with interactional and material effects, so that knowledge and action go together (see also Burr, this volume). Applying this approach to gender, social constructionists might consider the idea that ‘girls love pink’ as a culturally accepted idea that can be interrogated by looking at the genealogy of where this idea came from, the discursive, institutional and material conditions that allow it to make sense to us now, how these are reproduced in social interaction and to what effect. In doing so, they could show that in Victorian times, pink was considered a boy’s colour (pink being linked to a nexus of meanings around red, the planet Mars, war, and masculinity). Looking at contemporary sense-making, social constructionists might examine gendered marketing including the rise in ‘pinking’ products to develop female markets, so that contemporary children and adults must take up, resist or otherwise negotiate an understanding that genders are coloured (see for example, Amazon customer reviews for the pink biro <http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/B004FTGJUW>).

Social constructionism underpins West and Zimmerman’s (1987) argument that gender is something we do rather than something we are. ‘Doing gender’ is the idea that people are categorised by their sex and learn to act in ways that can be interpreted through cultural understandings of what is appropriate for their sex category. Within Western cultures, people are divided into males and females, and in interaction at any time our behaviour may be held to account in terms of how congruent it is with normative conceptions of masculinity or femininity. These concepts are not natural, essential, or biological but are often treated as if they were, and in most contexts, we are required to be read as congruent with our sex category or if not, to be accountable for our incongruity in an understandable way. For example, wearing a suit with a tie remains normatively masculine; a man in this outfit would be congruent with a certain kind of (perhaps professional/conservative) masculinity—a woman wearing it might be read as subversive, playing with masculinity, perhaps to signify her as sexy, lesbian, or making a claim to authority. Both are ‘doing gender’, engaging in an activity (in this case, their clothing choices) that can be read through the lens of gender.



Gender is not just a behaviour, because to be gendered it needs to be intelligible as a gendered behaviour. Gender is therefore something that we 'do' because it is a practice that reflects or expresses gender which also requires another to make sense of it as gendered. Judith Butler gives an example that we can use to help this make more sense: a young man who 'swished' when he walked was thrown off a bridge and killed because other young men read this walk through the lenses of gender and sexuality. The hip-swishing walk was interpreted as a sign that the young man was gay, and thus in their eyes failing to do gender appropriately (see Butler talk about this at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLnv322X4tY>).

How gender is 'done' is socio-historically specific, since it changes over time and is different across cultures. This suggests that our understanding of gender is not necessarily natural or true, but stems from a cultural agreement of what is true. From this perspective, critical social psychologists may ask how some ideas but not others become culturally agreed as true. This is a question of power. And to theorise power we turn to poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism is a theoretical framework for thinking about language, power, and truth. At any one time, there are multiple ways of understanding an issue and these understandings circulate within communities, particularly through language. In the process, some of these understandings are accorded greater veracity than others, so that within a culture, they are understood by most people as representing reality. Power is therefore in the process of ideas about the world being accepted as truths about the world.

At certain socio-historic moments, ways of understanding the world emerge that structure our understanding in relatively coherent ways. These 'discursive regimes' produce the ways we understand gender, for example, that femininity is associated with emotion and masculinity with rationality. Discursive regimes are often enabled by institutional support (e.g. medicine holds significant power in how we understand sex; see Foucault, 1978). In turn, these understandings produce 'subject positions', concepts of the kinds of people who can exist, such as the nurturing mother or the rational male scientist. People may take up and interpret themselves through subject positions, perhaps turning to experts to facilitate this process, for example, psychologists who write parenting books on how to be more nurturing.

However dominant a discursive regime might appear, there are always other ways of making sense of the world, in part because introducing an idea suggests its alternative. Alternative concepts may run in parallel with or directly contest more dominant understandings (Billig et al., 1988). For example, conceptualising anorexia as symptomatic of out-of-control femininity opens

up the possibility of constructing anorexia as an exemplar of female self-discipline and control (Malson, 1998).

How we experience our gendered subjectivities is thus a complex interaction between the multiple discourses of gender available in our milieu (some of which will have greater cultural credibility and/or institutional support) and how these discourses circulate through the communication and interactions that we experience in our day to day lives. Gender may be something that we do in interaction, but it is multiple, fluid, and dynamic as we and others shift between competing discourses of gender. Conceptualising gender in this way offers a more complex and nuanced theoretical framework than the sex/gender distinction of mainstream psychology. In the sections below, we show its application.

## One of the Boys

<https://youtu.be/EJVt8kUAm9Q>

In the music video link above, a young man is told off for being concerned about his male friends showing affection for each other. He should not consider a hug an unwanted homosexual overture, as men in the past may have done. Rather, it's a way men interact with each other called 'bromance', the song explains: 'Bromance, nothing really gay about it, not that there's anything wrong with being gay. Bromance, you shouldn't be ashamed or hide it. I love you, in the most heterosexual way'. To explain the concept, we're shown a range of activities that represent bromance, including playing on swings in the park, looking after each other through traditional heterosexual tribulations (girls not liking you, men wanting to hit you), play fighting and partying together. Practices that might once have symbolised romance and sexual attraction are reconstituted as simple, apparently non-sexual pleasures of heterosexual men who are bonded by friendship. Yet alternative readings run through the video: sexual gyrations, phallic symbols, the suggestion in the lyrics that the love is something else, repetitions of the word 'gay' and a final homophobic moment work to subvert any clear cut interpretation of an inclusive 'bromance' masculinity characterised as heterosexual and non-homophobic. The bromance video is intentionally amusing and a useful way to highlight critical thinking about masculinity that include theories of hegemonic, orthodox, inclusive, and multiple masculinities.

In Connell's (1995) influential work on hegemonic masculinity, she argued that masculinity was defined as not-female and not-gay and in hierarchical ways in relation to ethnicity, class, and professional status. Thus the most

valued forms of masculinity tend to be associated with being heterosexual, white, middle or upper class, able bodied, and employed as elites in professions, politics, sports, or business. It was these men who were constituted as most associated with positive masculinity such as leadership, heroism, strength, rationality, and aggression (when directed in culturally appropriate ways). Hegemonic masculinity is a subject position, but one in dialogue with wider social structures. This also means that hegemonic masculinity is not only about individual men: the father might be the head of the household, but the patriarchal institution of the family places him there, similarly, a businessman may lead a finance sector, but it's a capitalist system that puts men in top positions (Stasi & Evans, 2013).

Connell (1995) and others argued that men learn to do gender so as to be constructed as close to hegemonic masculinity as possible (e.g. Bird, 1996; Budgeon, 2014; Flood, 2008). Boys, for example, learn not to cry because displays of emotion are feminine, and femininity associated with homosexuality. The bromance video plays with this concept: the man who finds it inappropriate that his friends try to hug him is making sense of their behaviour within a hegemonic masculinity discourse, where men do not touch each other affectionately for fear of being labelled homosexual. Hegemonic masculinity can therefore be understood as form of socialisation that was damaging to men, denying them, for example, full emotional lives.

Hegemonic masculinity theory challenged taken-for-granted understandings of the essential characteristics of men. The theory emerged during a shift in discursive regimes enabled in part by the discontent of young people at the time with what they saw as repressive social norms. This discontent is evident in the gay, feminist, and civil rights movements which in turn framed a developing men's rights movement (Weeks, 2007). These movements were linked to wider discourses around freedom and individualism, and what may be called the psy-complex, a way of thinking psychologically about our lives that made being in touch with your emotions culturally valued (Illouz, 2007).

The challenge to hegemonic masculinity opened up new ways of being. As in the bromance video, behaviours once considered problematically female/gay could become part of a straight man's repertoire. This enabled new subject positions, but ones that were often complex and contradictory. For example, the 'new man' emerged as a media discourse of a man in touch with his emotions, able to take on childcare responsibilities, but ultimately a bit of a wimp. Like 'new sexism', the 'new man' could be read as both incorporating and resisting changes in social values (Gill, 2003).

By the 1980s competing discourses around masculinity, increases in women's employment and decreases in working-class male employment through deindustrialisation produced a discourse of concern for men's place in the

world known as the ‘crisis in masculinity’. Against this backdrop, a further important player emerged: consumerism.

Although consumerism had an earlier history, in the 1970s it became central to ‘neoliberalism’ a political way of managing people that came to dominate how we make sense of ourselves. Neoliberalism originated in economic theory, but developed to redefine citizenship by associating citizenship with a person’s right to consume and to use consumption to produce themselves into their desired selves (for a detailed discussion in relation to gender, see Evans & Riley, 2014). Successive neoliberal governments in the UK and elsewhere championed consumer culture which opportunistically engaged with challenges to traditional masculinity by associating consumption with new masculinities. Products were rebranded to associate masculinity with commodity items previously considered ‘feminine’. See, for example, Kiehl’s ‘Face Fuel’ male product range. Through these changes, new subject positions emerged such as the metrosexual: a heterosexual, urban man who takes care of his appearance through the consumption of grooming products.

In analysing the outcomes of these cultural shifts in masculinity, researchers have highlighted complex and contradictory requirements for men. For example, that men must be appearance-conscious but also not vain (Gill, 2008). Or how men distance themselves from the fashionista ‘metrosexual’ male, but look favourably on the fashion-oriented performances of gangsta rappers, because they are seen as successfully attracting women (Pompper, 2010).

Researchers too are unresolved as to the impact of new masculinities. Some argue that homophobia has significantly declined since boys and men are less concerned about performing masculinities in line with Connell’s (1995) description of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2009). For Anderson, a shift occurred from traditional, ‘orthodox’ masculinities (what might be read as Connell’s hegemonic masculinity) to ‘inclusive’ masculinities, which, like those represented in the bromance video, involve the social inclusion of gay peers, emotional intimacy, physical tactility, and the take-up of practices that had previously been problematically associated with femininity/homosexuality, such as care of appearance.

Other academics have argued that rather than seeing a clear transition from orthodox to inclusive masculinities, men may only partially take up inclusive masculinities or shift between masculinities so that both inclusive and orthodox masculinities are part of a repertoire of available discourses that contemporary men take up in a fluid and dynamic way. For example, Gough, Hall, and Seymour-Smith (2014) found that young men who engaged in beauty work undertook only partial engagement with inclusive masculinity: ‘engag[ing] positively with once feminized practices while being careful not

to appear too soft, effeminate or gay' (p.110). Similarly, Owen, Riley and Griffin's (in prep) work with men in dance classes showed how participants shifted across a range of masculinities including those associated with orthodox/hegemonic masculinities (evidenced in dancing to meet girls, taking up a subject position of 'English gentleman', and homophobic banter) and inclusive masculinities (wearing tight fitting clothes, sexualised hip movements, dancing with other men for fun).

Stasi and Evans' (2013) research with a gay football team in Iceland showed that despite the Scandinavian cultural valuing of gender equality and an associated decline in homophobia, these footballers shored up masculine capital through, for example, misogynistic comments about 'those women' in government. Furthermore, a cultural acceptance of gender equality (and by extension, of sexual orientation) meant that these men were unable to critically reflect on social and structural homophobia, and so individualised it as something requiring mental health and counselling services.

Thus although it is clear that cultural change has created an expanded range of masculinities, there is concern over the celebratory nature of inclusive masculinity theory. Hegemonic masculinity theory assumes what is dominant is likely to change, since it is dependent on history, society, and context, and in the same way analysts identified 'new sexism' in apparently egalitarian talk, so O'Neill (2015), for example, has critiqued inclusive masculinity theory as being too enthusiastic about some of the indicators of changing masculinities. For example, in the way inclusivity is measured by a new equity in consumer items such as the man-bag and pink clothing for men.

Similarly, the twist in the story of the bromance video highlights the limits to inclusivity, with homophobia structuring the way men are able to hug (you'll have to watch to the end to see what we're talking about). As with critiques of inclusive masculinity that fail to recognise inequalities in gender relations, in the video we see how within contemporary masculinities heteronormativity and homophobia still need to be negotiated, and homosexual love denied, echoing a supposedly bygone era of a love that dare not speak its name (see Lord Alfred Douglas' 1894 poem *Two Loves*).

## Girl Power: Running the World

Run the world (Girls): [https://youtu.be/VBmMU\\_iwe6U](https://youtu.be/VBmMU_iwe6U)

Ways of understanding girls and women have also changed dramatically in the last few decades. Where women were once expected to have a trajectory of marriage, children, and domestic responsibilities, today women experience

new expectations and aspirations. Young women especially are expected to do well in school, have a career, and take an active role in public life (Harris, Harris, 2004a, Harris, 2004b). Women have greater choice regarding motherhood, they have an expanded choice of careers and opportunities for success, and they are permitted into spaces, such as pubs and other public spaces in the evening that would previously have made them 'questionable' (see Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013). These new-found freedoms would at first, like 'inclusive' masculinity, seem to be something to celebrate. Women appear to have gained a new mobility and a range of choices in how they live their lives, many of which have been the result of feminist activity. But when interrogated, these freedoms are more problematic than they first seem and are as closely tied to consumerism as they are to feminism. To think about these issues, we start by looking at recent representations of sexiness in the media.

In Beyonce's music video for *Run the World (Girls)*, we have a representation of femininity that on the surface appears to appeal to feminism. Women are presented as a tribal force and are collectively responsible for running the world. In the video, Beyonce and her 'girl' gang face off with a police force of men in riot gear. With Beyonce at the helm, these women are able to march on their male counterparts.

Beyonce's *Run the World* video is derivative of 'girl power' discourses. Girl power was a key gear change in thinking about femininity, emerging in the 1990s as a popular call for a new generation of women. Girl power borrowed from riot grrrl, a punk movement that blended feminist concerns with rape culture, abortion, and ownership of the body with an aesthetic that was both feminine or 'girly' and 'tomboy-ish' in appearance (e.g. lacy dresses and Doc Martin boots). But where the riot grrrl movement attempted to reappropriate sexist language, for example, in claiming ownership of the term 'slut', girl power tied femininity to particular consumer practices, girlfriend cultures and heterosexuality (Attwood, 2007; Gillis & Munford, 2004).

Girl power was a key trope for the popular Spice Girls pop group. In 1996, the Spice Girls released their first single *Wannabe*. The sentiment of *Wannabe* was heteronormative, in that it can be assumed that the women singers were addressing a male who might 'wanna be my lover'. It also demanded that any potential relationship was predicated on the man 'get[ting] with my friends', so emphasising forms of female friendship and camaraderie that borrowed from feminist notions of sisterhood between women (Winch, 2013).

Critiques saw girl power as an appropriation of feminism that sold the ideals of feminism back to girls in middle class, heterosexual, and feminine ways that did not challenge gender relations (Driscoll, 1999; Goldman, Heath, &

Smith, 1991; Reay, 2010). In particular, it reasserted traditional femininity by tying these new emerging femininities to appearance-related consumerism. The Spice Girls, for example, had their own merchandise catalogue, to account for the full range of products that could be bought under the rubric of girl power.

The emergence of girl power discourse occurred alongside a wave of pro-women government policy that sought to address women's inclusion in, for example, health and education. A contemporary instance of this is the 2012 EU Commission campaign 'Science, It's a Girl Thing'. Intended to increase young women studying sciences in schools, the campaign came with a promotional video that incorporated the main tenets of girl power discourses. The video associates science with girls, girl friendships, makeup, consumption (e.g. chemistry goggles as just one of many glasses accessories) and attracting handsome men's attention (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zj--FFzngUk>).

While the video itself was removed due to complaints from the scientific community and beyond<sup>1</sup>, the website maintains elements of girl power. A camera phone takes a picture of three female friends, which is turned, in the camera phone's screen, into three women in lab coats (see <http://science-girl-thing.eu/en>). Like the Spice Girls' notions of sisterhood, this promotion of women to the sciences draws on the idea that female friendship is at the heart of women's entry into previously male-dominated professions (Winch, 2013). Moreover, the campaign represents women's barriers to educational and employment successes not in terms of institutional or structural sexism but in the girl's own perceived lack of feminine roles in the sciences. By shining a light on femininity, and tying femininity to science, the 'Science, It's a Girl Thing' campaign effectively deals with gender inequality by enlightening its viewer to the already feminine components of science, such as in the associations of makeup with chemistry and the possibility to snag a handsome professional man.

Critical and feminist psychologists have recently turned to the concept of a postfeminist sensibility to help make sense of these shifts in femininity that emphasises independence, agency, and free choice, while at the same time remaining reassuringly feminine. The term 'postfeminism' has been heavily debated (e.g. as an anti-feminist backlash, theoretical feminist position, or an era after feminism), but here we draw on the work of McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007).

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<sup>1</sup> A similar debate took place in 2015, when the scientist Tim Hunt made a series of comments around the problems of women in the laboratory, including the claim that they too often fell in love or cried. Female scientists responded with the #distractinglysexy hashtag.



Gill's (2007) concept of a postfeminist sensibility denotes a set of ideas that produce a contemporary way of thinking about gender: a discursive regime, evident in both the media and people's sense making. Gill's postfeminist sensibility includes 'the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of the makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference' (p. 149). This means that a woman produces herself as a feminine subject through surveying, identifying and then completing work on the body often through consumption practices (e.g. use of hair removal products) so that she can transform her body into a culturally ideal, while understanding this work as something natural (e.g. hairiness is inherently unattractive) and done for herself, as an act of an autonomous, empowered woman unconcerned with men's appreciation.

A postfeminist sensibility is a contradictory one (Gill & Elias, 2014). For example, it is shored up by a normalisation of heterosexuality within wider discourses of inclusivity and equality that might otherwise open up greater experimentation with sexual identities. This 'compulsory heterosexuality' provides the conditions of possibility of, for example, girls and women kissing each other for men's voyeuristic pleasure rather than their own pleasure (Diamond, 2005; Evans & Riley, 2014).

Within a postfeminist sensibility, feminism is taken into account as a valuable standpoint. For example, feminist language of empowerment, choice, and individualism evidenced in second-wave feminist arguments that women should be economically active and be sexually agentic remain part of a postfeminist sensibility. But within postfeminism, tying these arguments to feminism as a political movement for social change are absent or actively rejected, either as no longer relevant or because feminism is constructed as having damaging effects on contemporary gender relations, as in an example we gave earlier on equality employment legislation being constructed as discriminatory (Fausto-Stirling, 2003).

Another key component of postfeminist sensibility is its shift from objectification to sexual self-subjectification. In Laqueur's (1990) history of sex, he argues that before the eighteenth century, it was not believed that women could conceive without orgasm. However, by the end of the Enlightenment it was known that women could conceive even when unconscious, creating the possibility that, for women, conception and passion could be separated and thus female sexuality was potentially passionless. This set the scene for new understandings of ideal femininity that came to dominate notions of female sexuality for the following centuries, where women's sexuality was constructed

as passive and an object for the pleasures of men (see also McFadden, this volume). Part of the second-wave feminist movement was to challenge these notions of passive female sexuality, arguing that women should not be objects of men's desire but subjects who could enjoy an active sexuality. These arguments were subsequently taken up within postfeminist sensibility, creating new subject positions such as being sexually savvy and 'up for it'.

But analysts of postfeminist sensibility have several concerns. First, the always up for it hyper-sexuality of postfeminism reproduces a male heterosexual fantasy but through a discourse of autonomy: that women are doing it for themselves (Harvey & Gill, 2011; Evans & Riley, 2014). Second, although postfeminism celebrates diversity and individualism through its girl power standpoint (that women can do anything they set their minds to), how women take up new sexual subjectivities is radically shaped by class, sexuality, and ethnicity that privileges White, middle-class women. We can see this in the media and wider public treatment of women on the reality television programme 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding'. While being 'up for it' might now be an acceptable performance of femininity for middle-class women, the 'not-quite-white' gypsy becomes a national symbol of disgust and excess (Jensen & Ringrose, 2014). Similarly, Skeggs (2005) notes that discussions of vibrator ownership may be evidence of sexual liberation for the middle-class Sex and the City characters, but the same talk by working-class women on a hen night holds a different cultural value (for more discussion on class and new femininities, see Storr (2003) on Ann Summers parties; Bailey, Griffin, and Shankar (2015) on the night-time economy; and Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) in relation to makeover programmes).

We can see how privileging of White, middle-class aesthetic is maintained by considering Beyonce, Kylie Minogue and Pippa Middleton. In 2012, the media presented Kate Middleton and Prince William's wedding as a moment of national pride and evidence of the meaningfulness of love and romance. But the backside of Kate's sister, Pippa Middleton, also took up a significant amount of media and public discussion, including the creation of the Facebook group 'Pippa Middleton ass appreciation society'. In the context of a traditional, if highly mediated, 'white' wedding, the fetishisation and sexualisation of Pippa Middleton's bottom was largely unremarkable: indeed, its location as a sexy object at the intersection of upper-middle-class whiteness remained invisible. As McCabe argued, in her 'buttermilk body-skimming gown', Kate Middleton's sister 'seductively embodie[d] a type of feminine empowerment that is completely digestible' (McCabe, 2011, pp. 355–356). In contrast to celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Jennifer Lopez, Pippa's whiteness meant she was not asked to extol her own pride in her body or her

ethnicity, neither was it suggested that her curvy backside had any relationship to her sexual appetite.

A similar observation of celebrity's 'sexy bums' is suggested in Railton and Watson's (2005) comparisons of Kylie Minogue, Beyonce and Rihanna. Railton and Watson (2005) suggest that Beyonce's video for Baby Boy (see [https://youtu.be/8ucz\\_pm3LX8](https://youtu.be/8ucz_pm3LX8)) is exemplary of the representation of sexy Black female celebrity through associations with an excessive and dangerous sexuality. Various locations in the jungle, by the sea, on the beach (we can make similar observations in relation to her more recent music videos for Drunk in Love), her body is affected and moved by the environment, with her body, backside and hair shown in constant, often uncontrollable, movement. In contrast, Minogue's video for Can't Get You Out of My Head is clinical, clean, light, and white. Her sexiness is controlled through the use of slow motion techniques that work to manage the body's movement: this body does not writhe, roll, crawl, or get covered in sand or water in the same way that Beyonce's does. Comparing the two celebrities' use of the body in performance allows for an analysis of the way a postfeminist sensibility is imbricated with older, colonial discourses of Black women's sexuality. Indeed, analysis of postfeminism suggests that a range of traditional sexist and racist discourses run in parallel with postfeminism, so that in taking up postfeminist subject positions women are vulnerable to symbolic and physical violence of being read through more traditional gendered discourses.

## Applying Critical Perspectives

Critical approaches to gender allow researchers to offer more nuanced analyses that engage with the complexities of contemporary gender identities (e.g. Evans & Riley, 2014; Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010; Dobson & Harris, 2015; Spencer & Doull, 2015; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). These complexities inform new practices and more ethical (and sometimes more difficult) ways of thinking and behaving. Taking up and making these critical approaches to gender your own might even mean becoming like Sara Ahmed's 'wilful subjects'. In her empirical research on the wilful subject, Ahmed's (2014) interviews with diversity practitioners provides evidence of the silencing effects of regular eye rolls and other's exasperation when raising important issues about gender inequality, racism, or harassment. In her discussion of the 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010), she shows how identifying as a feminist is often understood as getting in the way of other people's enjoyment or happiness (see more on her blog at <http://feministkilljoys.com>).

In our own teaching practice, supporting student's research and thinking about critical gender approaches has allowed us to question their (and our) place in the world. For example, we've had students reflecting deeply on where their ideas about using porn or wearing makeup come from. Such approaches in the classroom draw on feminist practices, such as consciousness-raising. In another instance, one dissertation student who identified as feminist spent a year making self-reflexive field notes on other student's reactions to her feminist sentiments, identifying a deep mistrust and trivialisation of her views. And in Fahs' (2012) classroom practice, she asked her female students to grow out their body hair and male students to shave it all. The kind of self-awareness created by such tasks is important as it allows people to think deeply about and act on issues of equality, inclusion, liberation, empowerment, and appearance-related concerns. The National Union of Students has been particularly keen to take on these issues at a campus level, especially in reaction to the repercussions of 'lad culture' (Phipps & Young, 2015, see also <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/lifestyle/lad-culture-a-gender-issue/>).

Critical approaches to gender also allow us to explore where activism may be most useful, as well as the limits to activism. For example, Edell, Brown, and Tolman's (2013) work with SPARK (Sexualisation Protest: Action, Resistance, Knowledge) explored some of the contradictions of activism (e.g. young women engaging in appearance-related activism in heels) and the need for more intergenerational and intersectional activism to help challenge whose voices get heard. For more examples, see Michael Conroy's A Call to Men programme supporting boys and men to critically evaluate Lad Culture ([www.acalltomenuk.org.uk](http://www.acalltomenuk.org.uk)) and Ringrose and Renold's (2012) work on the potential conscious raising and limitations of the SlutWalks.

## Current Trends

New and exciting emerging areas include work on the impact of postfeminism on masculinities, the role of social media and globalisation, and aesthetic labour. Each of these demonstrates the complexity of new gendered subjectivities, and the creative ways that researchers are making sense of them.

In earlier sections, we described how a 'crisis of masculinity' discourse emerged in part as a response to second-wave feminism. But there is limited work on how postfeminism, with its simultaneous drawing on and refuting of feminism, impacts on men and masculinities. Work on how a postfeminist sensibility shapes the kinds of subjectivities that men can take up, and how these fall in line with current social, political, economic, and cultural structures is relatively absent, as O'Neill (2015, p.18) argues 'it is a

struggle to identify any work within this field [of masculinity studies] that examines postfeminism as a social and cultural context that shapes masculinity formations, relations, and practices'. Evan's blog about TubeCrush (a site where straight women and gay men upload non-consented pictures they've taken of attractive men on public transport) highlights some relevant directions that an analysis of the impact of postfeminism on men might take. This includes consideration of the complexities of power and gender relations and the way intimacies and desires orient around particular male bodies and the entrepreneurial citizen-worker <http://www.cost-of-living.net/tubecrush-privacy-sexism-and-consent-in-the-digital-age/>.

As Adrienne's TubeCrush example shows, one of the spaces where we might expect to see emerging work on masculinity is online, in the new forms of communities and relationships emerging from a digital context and in the way that online communication creates new forms of embodiment (see for example Mowlabocus (2010) and Dowsett et al.'s (Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Dieiguez, 2008) research on masculinity and 'hook up' apps). These spaces also contain new and exciting trends in terms of the changing nature of femininity.

In our own research, we explored ways that digital spaces inform the performance of transnational femininities that are influenced by a postfeminist sensibility. We looked at the living doll movement in which women achieve the appearance of being a doll through various techniques such as wide-rimmed contact lenses, hair extensions, corsetry, and possibly photo-editing technologies and/or surgery (Evans & Riley, 2016). In analysing the online performance of one particular doll, Anastasiya Shpagina, we explored some of the complexities of postfeminism as it reiterates itself at the intersections of Post-Soviet, East Asian and Western constructs of femininity, allowing us to see how the postfeminist tropes with which we are familiar (e.g. the body as a project, the representation of traditional femininity to signify choice, freedom and empowerment, makeover culture) become reiterated in new forms (e.g. sexual sassiness is replaced by cuteness). Shpagina's transformations which provide her with a living (e.g. through make up endorsements) highlight components of emerging themes in gender research: new global economies, shifts in available discourses for gendered subjectivity, and new forms of workplace and aesthetic labour, that turn the self into a commodity.

'Aesthetic labour' means more than simply looking attractive as a form of paid labour, but a form of surveillance and self-discipline that is required of all women (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2016; Gill & Elias, 2014). Through aesthetic labour, we are encouraged to work on ourselves as an expression of our psychological well-being. We can see elements of aesthetic labour in the emergence of 'love your body' discourses. In these mediated discourses,

various companies (largely from the beauty and diet industries) demand that women give up on a previous set of ideals that were unattainable, but instead should feel confident about themselves. For example, the recent advertising campaign from Weightwatchers extols women to 'feel incredible':

You refused to give up trying; you survived school; you did not run from your first kiss; you sought out adventure; you fell out of love, bravely back into it; you said yes to always being there; you stood up for what you believed in; you conquered the impossible daily; you won unwinnable battles [...] these are your stories. Never forget how incredible you are. (cited in Gill & Elias, 2014 p. 181)

Campaigns such as these appear on the surface to be informed by a range of literature that suggested more feminist-inspired notions of the self, in contrast to a 'media ideal'. However, on closer inspection, we could question why companies would want to suggest that their products are irrelevant. If you love your body regardless of its shape or size, why would you diet?

What new trends in gender research suggest is 'an ever deeper and more pernicious regulation of women, that has shifted from *body* as image/project to *psychic life*' (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 185). Such research suggests a new set of expectations being created in discourses that encourage positive self-conceptions. For example, encouragement to talk about the self as confident, as having high self-esteem and 'being happy', creates another normative feminine 'ideal'. Health becomes equated to psychological life, so that women are expected to work on both their bodies and their minds in order to live a culturally constructed 'good life', which paradoxically is nearly impossible to attain (Gill, 2007; Riley, Evans, & Robson, *forthcoming*; Thompson & Donaghue, 2014). Linking this to social media, the emergence of the #fitblr community, for example, encourages the project of self-transformation. These narratives of transformation are however inherently contradictory: one slogan, for instance, calls to the reader 'I don't want another girl's body. I want my body, but leaner, stronger and healthier!'

What becomes difficult with these evolving discourses of postfeminism is that they are emotionally charged, so that they are able to latch onto our subjective experience of the world. Who wouldn't want to have body confidence and self-esteem? To feel like a better, more open minded or fashionable man? Or even perhaps, who doesn't want to be a *good person*?

New gender constructs equate terminology that once held out possibilities for social change (such as empowerment, agency, freedom) to the wider power structures of consumerism, neoliberal individualism, sexual difference, and sexism. In one sense, this slipperiness could leave us feeling unable to

provide critique. Indeed, current terms for making sense of this context reflect an ambivalent and difficult terrain: ‘impossible spaces’, ‘cruel optimism’, and ‘double stagnation’ are terms used to describe contemporary gender theorising and subject positions (Evans & Riley, 2014; Griffin et al., 2013; McRobbie, 2015). But complexity and contradictions allow for exciting research. The field of gender is wide open for new research and new ways of sense making, so that we can continue to question our taken-for-granted ideas of what gender means.

## Summary

Traditionally psychologists conceptualised gender as something that we are a measurable aspect of identity produced by the different biology of male and female bodies, the way the different sexes are socialised, or a combination of both. This thinking is useful for challenging some aspects of sexism, but enables other aspects and doesn’t provide a framework for making sense of the complexities of contemporary gender relations that are produced within a consumerism that simultaneously borrows from and undermines social movements like feminism. Drawing on a range of social constructionist and poststructuralist thinkers, we instead suggest a way of thinking about gender as a kind of performance, one that draws on practices of gender that are part of our socio-historic culture, repeating these practices until they come to feel our own. From this perspective gender is something we do: a practice that is interpreted by others. Applying this framework to ideas of hegemonic masculinity and postfeminism, we explored the complexities of contemporary gender analyses and highlighted future directions looking at the impact of postfeminism on masculinities, social media, and aesthetic labour.

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# 21

## Sexual Identities and Practices

Majella McFadden

Traditionally, psychology has preferred biological explanations of sexuality that have presented men and women as fundamentally different in their sexual orientation and practices, explaining these differences in terms of biological processes and substances (evolution, hormones, anatomy, etc.). Heterosexuality as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ is entwined within these accounts featuring male dominance and female submission, while homosexuality has been treated as unnatural, deviant and abnormal—a condition requiring psycho-medical intervention.

Since the latter half of the last century, social accounts of sexuality have gained currency and notions of personal choice and individuality have flourished. For example, sexual orientation and practices can be viewed as lifestyle choices informed by one’s parents, peers and the mass media rather than determined by genes, hormones or brain regions. However, such ‘social’ accounts often neglect the influence of cultural values, power relations and expectations which may constrain ‘choice’—and while heterosexism and homophobia may not be so visible in the twenty-first century, such prejudice continues to be expressed in more subtle ways. Critical perspectives, largely drawing from sociological, feminist and ‘queer’ theory perspectives, emphasise the social construction of sexuality, highlighting issues of power, discourse and resistance, as well as complexity and fluidity in sexed identities and relationships.

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This chapter will summarise key ideas around sexuality which have been prominent in mainstream (social) psychology before presenting alternative critical perspectives.

## **The Big Three: *Neuroanatomy, Hormones and Genes***

For over 60 years, biological understandings of sexuality have been located within studies that invoke neuroanatomical and physiological factors as markers of differences in sexual orientation and practices. These explanations can, as Mustanski, Chivers, Bailey, and Michael (2002) suggest, be placed into three main categories: sex hormones, genetics and brain lateralisation. Before providing a summary of the evidence underlying ‘the big three’, it is interesting to note that they share common elements, including highlighting ‘biological’ differences between men and women, and between heterosexuals and homosexuals and emphasising the corresponding sexual orientations and practices as largely natural and immutable (Woodson, 2012).

This first strand of studies views sexual orientation and practices as primarily the result of the presence or absence of sex hormones during sexual development. For example, in their study of women with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (results in higher levels of the male sex hormone), Hines, Brook, and Conway (2004) link higher-than-expected rates of same-sex attraction among these women to the male sex hormone. Similarly, studies with genetic males who do not have a penis (at birth or due to an accident) and are re-assigned as female but who, in adulthood, are typically attracted to females provide further evidence for a biological basis to sexual orientation. Furthermore, studies such as Hines, Alsum, Goy, Gorski & Roy (1987) that illustrate lower levels of circulating testosterone in gay men than their heterosexual counterparts reinforce the hormonal basis for sexual orientation.

The second strand of the big three presents sexual orientation and practices as a result of differences in brain structure and brain hemisphere specialisation. Such thinking is exemplified in LeVay’s (LeVay, 1991) study, where he indicates differences in the cellular make-up of the anterior hypothalamus of heterosexual men compared with heterosexual women and homosexual men, suggesting a biological substrate for sexual orientation. The role of brain differences is further developed in studies such as Hiscock, Inch, Jacek, Hiscock-Kalil, and Kalil (1994), who conclude that heterosexual women and homosexual men show similar decreased brain hemisphere specialisation when compared with heterosexual men.

Finally, genes as potential mediators of differences in sexual orientation and practices constitutes the third strand of biological explanations and is one that continues to be popular with sections of scientific, academic, media and gay communities. Perhaps the most well-known study is Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu & Pattituccia (1993), who proposed the X chromosome as important in the development of male homosexual orientation, reporting that out of 40 pairs of gay brothers tested, 33 pairs shared the Xq28 chromosomal region. Whilst there have been less-convincing replications of these findings, debates relating to a 'gay gene' were fuelled again recently by Sanders, Martin, Beecham & Guo (2015) study of 409 pairs of gay brothers that further highlighted the role of chromosome Xq28, as well as chromosome 8.

However, accounts of biology as the primary source of sexual orientation have not existed unchallenged. With regard to neuro-hormonal theories, there has been much reliance on animal studies (an area of research known as 'comparative psychology'), making generalisations to humans problematic. Such research has tended to find a correlation between testosterone levels (which are higher in males) and male sexual behaviours (such as mounting); however, as Beach and Ford (1951) note, such behaviours fail to capture the full complexity of human sexual practices. In addition, Meyer-Bahlburg, Ehrhardt, Rosen, Feldman, Veridiano, Zimmerman & Mc Ewen (1984) observe that hormonal manipulations in the laboratory tend to cause alterations in the animal's genitals, which is not something that is evident in 'normal' homosexual populations.

## Sociobiological Accounts: Reproduction and Investment

Whilst still couched in biological terminology, sociobiological theories attempt to widen the scope of influential factors on sexual activities through a consideration of genetics, reproductive investment and environmental considerations (Wilson, 2000). Based on Darwinian ideas of natural selection, differences in genetic investment and its survival into future offspring underpin distinctly different sexual strategies and activities for male and female species. Sociobiologists (Hutt, 1972) argue that differences in the size of the ova and male sperm mean that females contribute substantially greater genetic material to each offspring than their male partners and that it is therefore in their interest to behave in ways that maximise their investment. Thus being selective about the quality of males that they mate with and also investing in the care and thus survival of said offspring are depicted as optimal reproductive strategies for females. For males, sociobiologists state that



their relative lack of genetic investment in offspring produces different optimal reproductive strategies—ones based on competing for and reproducing with as many females as possible. Depending on the environmental contexts in which species are situated, male polygamy or promiscuity is proposed as the most effective biological means of ensuring the survival of male genetic material. These differential reproductive and parenting strategies are further naturalised within sociobiological tradition through the linking of sex-specific hormones to adaptive social and sexual development in males and females. Behaviours such as sexual promiscuity, ambition and drive are depicted as the result of the male hormones whilst the female hormone is inextricably geared towards reproduction and the behaviours this incorporates (e.g. Campbell, 2008; Taylor et al., 2000).

Although popular and a much-respected theoretical perspective for understanding sexual behaviour across the animal kingdom, criticisms relating to the utility of this paradigm for understanding the scope and diversity of human sexuality continue to be voiced. For example, Diamond & Wallen (2011) challenges the link between genetic investment and male sexual promiscuity, highlighting that such practices are culturally encouraged and admired in men but perceived as deviant in women. Other theorists have questioned the primary assumption within this perspective that the sole function of sex is the production of offspring and that males and females have different forces driving them to this end (McFadden & Sneddon, 1998).

## The Discipline of Sexology

Seismic intellectual, social and political shifts during the late 1800s in Europe, America and beyond resulted in new understandings of human sexuality emerging from the discipline of sexology. Predominant among this tradition is the work of psychologists such as Freud (1933) and Ellis (1936) who provided sophisticated psychosocial insights into human sexual orientations and practices. In his extensive collection of writings on sexuality, Freud intertwined the influence of psychic (unconscious drives), biological and social factors on sexual development. Based on a series of age- and sex-related experiences, Freud presented a developmental journey towards sexual maturation that although initially shared by female and males in infancy, takes different directions in childhood and results in two separate and differential adult sexual destinations. Undoubtedly, the key experience underpinning the accomplishment of distinct male and female sexualities is the differential resolution of the Oedipus complex experienced during the phallic phase. This complex

is perceived as occurring when the child becomes aware of others (especially the father) and how they impinge upon her/his exclusive relationship with the mother (who is, according to Freud, the primary object of the child's love). By founding the Oedipal complex on the child's growing awareness of the presence or absence of the anatomical penis, Freud establishes sexuality and biology as inextricably linked. Furthermore, the differential resolution of this awareness for the young boy and girl is not only depicted as the basis for two natural and complementary sexualities (male and female) but also articulated by Freud as justification for differences in the subsequent social positioning and status of females and males (for a fuller discussion of the Oedipal Complex see Gough, McFadden & McDonald, 2013).

Male and female sexualities as biologically determined, complementary identities and practices are further consolidated in the work of Ellis (1936). Couched in the language of survival and reproduction, sex is described as being like a biologically orchestrated dance, with the dance partners occupying distinct biologically based positions. The sexually interested but modest female takes centre stage as the 'natural' catalyst for male sexual arousal and desire. Indeed for Ellis women's modesty or reluctance to have sex is the key mechanism shaping men's sexual expression with the inflicting of pain and use of force by men presented as necessary acts to conquer women's natural inhibition towards sex. The pain/pleasure couplet that threads through Ellis writing on female sexuality is further consolidated in his suggestion that women have masochistic tendencies and enjoy both the force and associated pain experienced. For Ellis, then pain, force and pleasure are the by-products of different instinctive impulses characterising female and male sexualities. Finally, the complementary essence of male and female sexualities is further consolidated by Ellis who, like Freud, suggests that different social positions and practices for men and women are the natural outcome of sexual desires and practices. Ellis refers to motherhood as a woman's supreme function and something that required all her energies: 'The task of creating a man needs the whole of a woman's best energies' (Ellis, 1936: 7).

The biological basis of these different but complementary male and female sexualities is developed further in Freud and Ellis consideration of homosexuality. Cloaked in the scientific language of fixation and inversion, both theorists pathologised homosexuality defining it as a developmental or genetic abnormality and as something that needed to be cured. Indeed the cure was not only viewed as vital for the psychological and social well-being of the individual but also to counter the danger that such individuals present to the moral fabric of society. For example, Ellis linked lesbianism

to various forms of social instability, including feminism and the demise of heterosexual marriage, and in particular through his explicit reference to the 'pseudo-homosexual'. This phrase denoted instances when a 'naturally' heterosexual woman was temporarily seduced into an immoral lesbian lifestyle by a real lesbian woman.

However, both theories' contribution to understandings of sexuality remains a highly contested issue. For many psychologists, both theorists were trailblazers, laying the foundations of modern sexuality and generating powerful insights into gender inequality. In supporting the account offered by psychoanalysis, Juliet Mitchell (1974) argued that Freud's account of sexual difference should be read as a critique of the psychic roots of patriarchy in modern society, not as a justification for it. However for other critical feminist social psychologists, the conceptualisations of sexuality in the work of Ellis and Freud are viewed as pseudo-scientific discourses that naturalised the existing status quo of male supremacy, sexual inequality and violence against women that many women were attempting to challenge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Faderman, 1991; Penelope, 1992).

## Non-Biological Accounts of Sexuality

Within (social) psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, understandings of sexualities as the product of unconscious/biological, unobservable forces were displaced by Social Learning theory and its focus on sexual orientations and practices as things that are learned through a combination of observation, imitation and reinforcement by multiple socialising agents. Also drawing on psychoanalytic principles, this perspective emphasises the importance of encouragement to behave in 'sex-appropriate' ways through identifying with significant others of the same sex (parent, athlete, cartoon character, etc.). A popular theory within both academic and general populations' Social Learning theory has been used to evidence a range of socialising figures who reinforce normative sexual identities and practices. For example, Downie and Coates (1999) found that in their communication with pre-adolescents about sex, mothers and fathers typically reinforced normative heterosexual sexual identities and practices. More specifically, the authors noted that both mothers and father talked to boys in terms of sexual exploration and adventure while emphasising reproductive and protective issues with girls. Similarly, many studies indicate peers as a pervasive influence shaping sexual orienta-

tion and practices through their multiple roles as information providers and sexual partners (Andersen & Taylor, 2007).

Essentialist understandings of homosexuality were also challenged by psychology in the 1960s and 1970s. Situated within liberal humanistic paradigms, understandings of gay and lesbian people as normal individuals who had made a personal choice that was as healthy and natural as that made by their heterosexual counterparts emerged. In addition, representations of such individuals as a danger to moral and social instability were contested through the emphasis on their 'personal choice' and 'private lifestyle'. However, whilst such representations were embraced by many who had lived within biological and socially stigmatising discourses of homosexuality, for other gay people and theorists liberal humanistic definitions were also viewed as problematic. More specifically, notions of homosexuality as a matter of personal choice were perceived as rendering invisible social, political and economic injustices experienced by gay people (Kitzinger, 1987). Furthermore some theorists argued that presenting homosexual people as 'just like' heterosexual people, opportunities for gay people to construct differential sexual and social identities (e.g. lesbianism as a source of pleasure Dancey, 1994) were restricted. The lives of lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexuals are now being researched from a position of respect for diversity (see Clark, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010; Clarke & Peel, 2007).

## Constructing a Critical/Feminist/Queer Social Psychology of Sexualities

An important legacy sown by non-biological accounts is the dismissal of sexuality as something that is innate or biologically determined. Indeed this critique provides the foundation on which contemporary definitions of sexuality as socially constructed and negotiated have emerged from within (critical) social psychology. Gagnon and Simon's (1973) classic text *Sexual Conduct* and, more specifically, Sexual Script Theory provides a fitting starting point to explore social and constructed aspects of sexuality. Central to this theory is an understanding of sexuality as a dynamic and diverse collection of identities and practices; the product of a complex interplay between cultural, interpersonal and intra-psychic representations and lived experiences of 'sex'. In a similar vein, the alternative reading of sexuality theorised in Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 further denaturalises and demystifies constructions of sexuality as the product of an inner essence.

Rather sexuality is presented as an historical concept, constructed through a number of discourses within legal, religious, medical and scientific contexts. The crux of Foucault's theoretical argument was the rejection of sexual identities and practices as resulting from an inner essence (anatomical, psychological or biological): 'sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries to uncover' (Foucault, 1978: 105). Indeed in Foucault's thesis, the social meanings and functions of sexualities are made explicit through his assertion that sexuality provided a means of controlling the body through legislation on birth control and homosexuality, as well as a means of policing the population as a whole with campaigns against immorality, prostitution and venereal disease. He argued that from the eighteenth century onwards, sexuality increasingly provided the central focus around which social bodies, relationships, positions and practices were organised (for a fuller discussion of Foucault's work, see Gough et al., 2013).

1980 saw the production of psychologist Adrienne Rich's now classic text *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Within this work, Rich (1980) presents a robust challenge to essentialist representations of male and female heterosexuality as complementary identities and of penetrative sex and marriage as the most natural expression of sexuality for women (and by implication men). Rich dismantles the naturalness of heterosexuality for women through two interrelated arguments: the first relating to her exploration of the socially manufactured and coercive nature of heterosexuality, and second, through her dismissal of restrictive clinical definitions of lesbianism in favour of a broader understanding based on the notions of lesbian continuum and lesbian existence. Like Foucault (1978), a key consideration for Rich (1980) was the sexual and social policing of women that essentialist definitions of sexualities promoted and enforced.

More recently, the naturalness of heterosexual orientations and activities has been further challenged by contemporary writings that emphasis the fluidity of sexual identities, orientations and practices across the lifespan of many individuals (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2008; Dickinson, Paul, & Herbison, 2003). Studies by Mock and Eibach (2012) and Peplau (2001) document varying rates of sexual fluidity among sexual minority women and men as well as heterosexual women with changing patterns of sexual identity (homo/hetero/bisexual, unlabelled, etc.) attraction and behaviours linked to a specific relationship, person or life stage. Whilst current evidence suggests greater sexuality stability among heterosexual and homosexual men than their

bisexual counterparts, the absence of specific research on male sexual fluidity prevents a more detailed discussion.

Detailed analysis of the relationship between sexuality, language and social practice remains a key tenet for many scholars researching contemporary male and female sexualities within critical social psychology. Explicitly adopting the view that sexuality is the product of social, cultural and historical discourses, many feminist scholars have analysed the complex and at times, contradictory impact of these linguistically based representations on contemporary female and male sexual orientations, identities and practices. Feminist such as Lees (1993), Thomson and Scott (1991) and Fine (1988) have continued to critique the operation of traditional discourses in shaping female sexualities, noting that within the context of school and home, sexuality for many young women has been discussed largely in relation to their bodies as objects of male sexual desires and fears, with (married) heterosexuality presented as the most natural type of sexuality. Indeed more recently, feminist analysis has turned its attention to what is sometimes described as 'postfeminist' culture, where since the late 1990s, largely mediated constructions of female sexuality have changed to include the celebration of difference, individual choice, the exploration of sexual subjectivity and agency (Gill, 2007, 2008b, 2012). There is an assumption that the goals of feminism have been achieved, and that it is legitimate, indeed desirable, for women to embrace and celebrate sexualised practices previously (and to some extent still) rejected by feminism (McRobbie, 2009). However, many scholars note the irony in the consumption of such identities and practices, as some women and men depart from the goals of feminism and rather (re)produce fragmented, unsafe and unattainable sexual identities and practices that are governed by often contradictory and conflicting discourses. These include traditional hegemonic discourses that emphasis male sexual agency and female vulnerability, knowing and empowered sexy woman discourses as well as the ever present regulatory spectre of 'the slut' (Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2013; Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley & Mistral, 2012; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 2004; Tolman, 2002). More specifically, the illusory nature of postfeminist sexual empowerment and freedom was explored in Griffin et al. (2012) study of young women's alcohol consumption within the UK's increasingly sexualised recreational cultures. A discourse analysis of focus group data obtained from participants aged 18–25 participating in 'The Young People and Alcohol' study highlighted a number of contradictory discourses emerging from their talk. On the one hand, as illustrated below,

postfeminist constructions of alcohol consumption as a normative non-gendered cultural practice that provided a social space within which young women could throw off the shackles of respectable sexuality/femininity and be sassy sexual agents was presented:

### **It's just fantastically fun: Getting drunk and the joys of losing all your inhibitions**

- Laura: you just lose your inhibitions (.) you're confident (.) it's fun (.) you just have fun and you're not bothered what anyone else thinks of you
- Maria: you don't have to be completely drunk to be like that
- Laura: oh I do
- Sara: yeah I do [...]
- Laura: no but you can say things that you wouldn't say walking down the street to some random guy when you're drunk [...]cos you can blame it on the fact that you were drunk (.) if you needed to (laughter)

However, the authors note that these aspects were counterbalanced with discourses of (sexual) respectability that were used by young female participants to distance their activities from negative perceptions of 'sluttish' behaviour or being perceived as loose or easy:

#### *Holding the figure of the 'drunken slut' at bay: Claiming respectability*

- DC: Do you ever (.) or would you ever consider going out on your own?
- Caz: I wouldn't consider going anywhere on my own (.) I spose it's because it's (yeah) like umm well (.) one cos I'm a lady (yeah) and like you've obviously gotta be careful about going out on ya own (.)

The use of the term 'lady', Griffin et al. (2012) suggest, allows Caz to present herself as a responsible, respectable consumer of alcohol and in doing so to distance herself from traditional negative images of lone female drinkers as loose and/or prostitutes.

To conclude, the authors noted that whilst these young women managed to negotiate the dilemmas and contradictions associated with drinking within sexualised UK social spaces, this was far from a straightforward task. Rather, representations of sexiness that offered empowerment and the ability to subvert gender norms were simultaneously regulated by anxieties relating to



reputation and respectability. Similar depictions of postfeminist female sexuality as empowering and at the same time fragile and insecure are reproduced within studies exploring the negotiation of female sexuality within diverse aspects of neoliberal sexualised cultures, including pole dancing (Donaghue, Whitehead, & Kurz, 2011), digitalised sexual identity (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011) and slut shaming (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

The last two decades have seen an increased critique of discourses of male sexuality that construct it as hedonistic, misogynist and homophobic, with the plural, contested and contradictory nature of male sexual identity and practices explored (McCormack & Anderson, 2014; McCormack, 2013; Anderson, 2013; Hall & Gough, 2011). Research in both the USA and UK suggests that while continuity persists in relation to the dominance of a 'heterosexual machismo' discourse (Measor et al., 1996), changing social and economic climates are providing some men with new opportunities for 'doing' sexuality. These new ways of being a man include the use of grooming techniques (traditionally associated with women) to enhance their (hetero) sexual success as well as the opportunities for emotional and physical closeness with male peers without fear of being labelled 'gay'.

In his recent book *The Declining Significance of Homophobia*, McCormack (2013) argues that some male teenagers in the UK and USA are challenging understandings of male gender and sexuality as fixed and oppositional to that of gay men and women. Rather, these young men are actively redefining male sexuality as fluid, emotionally involved and not exclusively heterosexual. Set against the backdrop of increasingly positive attitudes to homosexuality in parts of the USA, this author presents evidence of young men challenging once strong codes of (hetero) sexuality built on the 'othering' of gay men and feminine attributes/practices, and replacing these with homosocial relationships that enable them to understand and express their sexual identity and desires differently. More specifically, McCormack describes young heterosexual men expanding the boundaries of heterosexuality to include friendships with gay peers, the adoption of appearance-related activities such as waxing, wearing make-up, and enjoying increased emotional intimacy and physical tactility with same-sex peers. In addition, for some young men, same-gender sexual acts are not socially perceived as indicators of homosexuality or non-heterosexuality.

Whilst the author notes that lived experiences may be mediated by social factors such as class, ethnicity and geographical location, other scholars researching sexuality do not replicate such representations of 'inclusive masculinities' (Anderson, 2013) and rather highlight the ways in which rebranded versions of traditional misogynistic masculinities mediate the sexual politics and practices of some men. For example, in their recent work on female student's social

and sexual experiences with some male counterparts within higher education, Phipps and Young (2015) depict the dominance of a particular brand of 'traditional' masculinity—'laddism'—enacted through misogynistic 'banter', the objectification/sexual availability of women and pressure/competition around sexual prowess and status. Similar homosocial bonding over drinking, football and sex by male university students is also depicted in research by Dempster (2011) and Gough and Edwards (1998).

However, this is not to suggest that within critical social psychology, individuals are perceived as passive recipients of social practices. On the contrary, individuals are understood as actively working towards various social positions and representations. For example, many of the female students in the Phipps and Young (2015) study critically engaged with the 'lad culture' on campus by refusing to 'flirt on demand', and verbally challenged sexist remarks. Indeed, the diverse strategies that women use to resist dominant representations of female sexuality are well documented within critical social psychology literature. For example, studies by McFadden (1995), Holland et al. (1994), Fine (1988) highlight a range of resistances among young heterosexual women, including choosing to be celibate, delaying marriage and motherhood until they have 'had some fun', as well as reclaiming terms such as 'slut' and 'slag' to represent sexual empowerment and agency. More recently, the complex and fluid ways in which young women from different classes and ethnic backgrounds negotiated and disrupted contemporary discourses of sexual knowingness and sexual innocence (e.g. the rap-king-girl woman or slut-child) is illustrated in Renold and Ringrose's (2011) concept of 'schizoid subjectivities'. Furthermore, in their work with lesbian women, Ussher (2005) and Dancy (1994) noted similar resistance among the women interviewed to what they perceived as negative representations of lesbianism. These strategies included emphasising the positive benefits associated with a lesbian lifestyle, including the removal of the perceived necessity to conform to role expectations and the solidarity and companionship they experienced living as lesbian women (for a fuller discussion, see Clark, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010; Clarke & Peel, 2007).

## Summary

Feminist, queer and critical social psychology scholars have led the way in criticising mainstream psychobiological accounts of sexuality. This critical work has become more important than ever as biologically determined accounts of sexual orientations and practices have made a popular comeback due to advances in neuroscience and its enthusiastic reporting by the mass media. Naturalising accounts of heterosexuality within (social) psychology

and wider culture has been thoroughly questioned, as have constructions of homosexuality as deviant, and critical work seeks to explore sexed identities and relationships in diverse contexts. In recent years, explorations have focused on the subtle manipulation of feminism by the mass media, marketing and advertising industries, which have co-opted women's desire for greater sexual expression and assertiveness as a way of mainstreaming hypersexualisation and pornography. Critical engagement with classic theories such as psychoanalysis and post-structuralism along with critical social psychology research (e.g. Jackson et. al., 2013 and Diamond et. al., 2011) seeks to challenge the increasingly subtle manipulation of sexed identities by producing sophisticated socially embedded understandings of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, trans and bisexual lives. Finally, on a personal note, the importance such theorising on sexuality was brought to life for me in a recent conversation with my 13-year-old son about how his peers talked about their own and others' sexuality. It was heartening that they talked about multiple understandings of the 'sexual self', using a range of terms such as pansexuality, heterosexuality, skoliosexuality, homosexuality, genderqueer and neutrois, and whilst recognising that there is not absolute free choice, that sexual identity is much less rigid than in the 'dark ages' when I [MMcF] was growing up!!

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# 22

## Critical Approaches to Race

Simon Goodman

It is standard practice for social psychology textbooks to contain a definition of racism (e.g. ‘Prejudice and Discrimination against people based on their ethnicity or race’, Hogg & Vaughan, 2008: 360; ‘*an individual’s prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards people of a given race*’, Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014: 525, emphasis in original). However, what is unusual is to provide a definition of ‘race’ alongside this. This perhaps reflects the taken-for-granted nature of race, which is something that is so well understood that it doesn’t require description. This chapter will begin with exactly such a description, charting the origins of the term race from its eighteenth-century religious beginnings that have persisted to modern scientific definitions. It will later be shown that while biology is thought to underpin definitions of race, the human genome programme, which mapped the genome of a diverse range of humans, concluded that race was not scientifically valid.

The chapter will address the ways that psychology has been involved in problematic research involving race, including eugenics and controversial work, some of which is current, which seeks to address the relationship between race and intelligence, usually concluding that ‘whites’ are more intelligent than ‘blacks’. The chapter then considers the ways in which race is used uncritically in the current social psychological research as a meaningful category. This position has been heavily criticised, and it is these criticisms, based on the

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idea that an uncritical use of race as a category can mean that psychologists are unintentionally complicit in supporting racist ideology, that will be addressed in the following section. After that, alternatives to uncritically using race are outlined. Here it will be shown that, increasingly, critical social psychologists are paying attention to how race is understood and spoken about by speakers and what talk about race can be used to do.

## Defining Race

As argued above, social psychologists tend to focus their attention on defining racism, rather than race, on which this racism is deemed to be based. Instead, race tends to work as a common-sense notion, with everyone knowing broadly what race refers to, so it does not need any further comment (McCann-Mortimer, Augoustinos, & Lecouteur, 2004). In fact, Montagu (1964) traced the term race to Georges Le Clerc Buffon, who used it in his six classifications of humans in 1749. While his classification was based on geographical origins of the 'races', it was also heavily rooted in the religious thinking of the time, so it was inferred that each race was created by God. In 1785, Karl von Linné updated these groupings and added temperament to geographical location. At this point, the different (and supposedly unique) temperaments of the races were considered to be set by differing levels of the four humours (black bile, etc.). A hierarchy of these races was first proposed by Johann Blumenbach in 1795 based upon the closeness of these races to the biblical Garden of Eden. Indeed, the term Caucasian comes from the Caucasus Mountains, where in 1795, the Garden of Eden was thought to have been. Tate and Audette (2001) show how these explanations fell out of favour due to the lack of supporting evidence, and that while the explanations were unsupported by scientists, the terminology nevertheless persisted. What this means is that when people are referred to as Caucasian, they are being noted as originating geographically from near the Garden of Eden.

These ideas based on racial differences spread, coinciding with European imperialism and colonisation over non-'Caucasian' indigenous people, where it was convenient to refer to these people as inferior to their rulers. Later, the work of Darwin (1859) on evolution was adapted in Social Darwinism, which attempted to explain differences among humans using evolutionary principles (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004). This led to controversial work on eugenics which, in turn, underpinned Nazi ideology (Newby & Newby,

1995) that ultimately led to the systematic attempted genocide of 'inferior' groups such as Jewish, Romani, Homosexual and disabled people. It was the Holocaust that ended the credibility of eugenics.

While these 'dubious premises' (Tate & Audette, 2001: 498) may appear far-fetched today, the association with race and geographic locations is understood as reasonable and logical and has persisted into current psychological thinking. Tate and Audette argue that despite these problematic origins, race remains viewed by many as a 'natural kind variable' (Tate & Audette, 2001: 495) in psychology. By natural kind variable, they mean race is (mistakenly) understood as having 'the qualities of mutual exclusivity and inalterability or graduated differences *independent from human perception*' (Tate & Audette, 2001: 496, emphasis in original), meaning that race is conceptualised as essentialist, objective and unaffected by any socially constructed understanding of race. Key figures who address race as a natural variable include Rushton (1990) and Jensen (1995), who maintain that there are differences in intelligence that are explained by variations in (the natural variable) race, with Herrnstein and Murray (1994) claiming that White people are more intelligent than Black. The linking of race and intelligence is seen by many as continuing psychology's troubling history of 'scientific racism' (Newby & Newby, 1995: 14).

It has now been demonstrated that 'race' tends to be used uncritically as a scientific natural variable, despite the origins of the concept 'race' lying in religious, imperialistic and Social Darwinism-inspired ideology. Nevertheless, for some, race is maintained as a useful and essentialist variable that can be applied to areas such as racial differences in intelligence. In the next section, it will be shown that this use of race has come under sustained criticism for a range of reasons which all point to the conclusion that race is not an essential natural variable at all and that its use in social psychology can be deeply problematic.

## **Critique of the Mainstream Use of 'Race' in Social Psychology**

Criticisms of the use of race take a number of forms, including (i) a lack of a biological basis for race as a variable, (ii) problems associated with category use in social psychology and (iii) the damage that can be caused by reproducing existing, problematic social categories. Each of these will now be addressed.

## A Lack of a Biological Basis for Race as a Variable

As demonstrated above, the notion of race representing distinctly different categorical types of humans can be traced back to 1749, through nineteenth-century colonialism, Social Darwinism and eugenics up to present-day psychological research. However, geneticists challenged the notion of 'race' as a natural variable as early as the 1930s (Richards, 1997), and in 1950, shortly after the eugenic atrocities of the Second World War, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated that:

The biological fact of race and the myth of 'race' should be distinguished. For all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth of 'race' has created an enormous amount of human and social damage. (UNESCO, 1950: 8)

This means that well before critical social psychologists embraced the concept of the social construct, UNESCO had inferred that race was one such social construct. In support of this idea that race is a myth, Lewontin (1972) demonstrated that there is more genetic diversity within so-called racial groups than between them.

More recently, biologists have developed a greater understanding of genetics that led to the mapping of a complete human genome by 2000. Alongside this human genome project was an additional endeavour: the human genome diversity project which mapped the genome of diverse groups of people living in the United States. On completion of this study, Craig Venter, the Head of Celera Genomics that was instrumental in the human genome project, addressed the President of the United States of America at the White House and made the following statement:

We have sequenced from the genomes of three females and two males who have identified themselves as Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian, or African American. We did this initial sampling, not in an exclusionary way, but out of respect for the diversity that is America, and to help illustrate that *the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis*. In the five Celera genomes there is no way to tell one ethnicity from another. (Venter, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2000 [https://www.celera.com/celera/pr\\_1056647999](https://www.celera.com/celera/pr_1056647999), my emphasis)

This is a clear statement. Venter is claiming that on the basis of mapping the complete genetic sequences of five ethnically diverse people that race is not a meaningful category because by looking at a genome (a complete set of genes)

it is not possible to identify the 'race' of an individual. This would seem to be conclusive evidence that fully supports the geneticists of the 1930s and the UNESCO statement of 1950, which claimed that race is not a meaningful variable. While this would seem to strongly suggest that race should not be used, as demonstrated below, this was not enough to end the popularity of the use of race as a category (Hunt & Megyesi, 2008).

## Problems Associated with Category Use in Social Psychology

It has now been demonstrated that the use of race as a variable has been strongly criticised for its lack of a biological basis, most notably in the form of the statement from the human genome project that different races cannot be identified when looking at complete diverse genomes. However, this evidence alone has not ended the use of race as a variable. Nevertheless, on top of the criticism of race for its lack of a biological basis, social psychologists have also criticised the use of any social categories—including race—for being problematic.

Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish (2012) point to four key problems with using social categories, all of which could be applied to the category 'race'. Their first claim is that social categories are 'perspectival', which they go on to say 'means that there is no independent way of assigning a person to their "true" category, but that the process of categorization always stems from a social position, a historical way of seeing and particular interests' (Gillespie et al., 2012: 392). It has already been demonstrated above that according to geneticists there is no way of independently verifying someone's true 'race' by looking at their genome and that differences within 'races' are larger than those between them.

Their second criticism of the use of social categories is connected to the first point as next they claim that 'social categories are historical' (Gillespie et al., 2012: 393). The concept of race is based on a historical way of understanding different people (i.e. proximity to the Garden of Eden) and gained credibility during the Western colonisation of indigenous people throughout the world, where there was a political motivation to assume a hierarchy of races so as to justify the ill treatment of indigenous people.

Their third criticism is that 'people move between social categories' (Gillespie et al., 2012: 394). At first it may seem impossible that people can move between racial categories: someone is either one race or another. However, this assumes 'race' to be a natural variable, a notion that has been

disproved above (e.g. Tate & Audette, 2001). The existence of 'mixed-race' and immigrant communities further challenges the idea of race being fixed. For example, Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, and Sammut (2014) demonstrated that teenagers of mixed Black and White parents would identify as black or white in different contexts, thereby moving between two seemingly polar categories. Hunt and Megysei (2008) demonstrated that researchers focusing on human genetics do not often clearly define the racial variables that are so relevant to their work, with skin colour, religion, language, continental origin and geographic region all being used, leading to them concluding that 'such vaguely and inconsistently conceived categories do not begin to meet the basic standards for a classificatory system' (Hunt & Megysei, 2008: 355). Together this evidence suggests that even racial categories are not fixed and that people can indeed move between them.

Their final criticism is that 'social categories interfere with their phenomenon' (Gillespie et al., 2012: 396). This means that by using social categories, those categories can come to be viewed as legitimate. They cite Reicher who argues that 'models that serve to reify social categories in theory may also help to reify categories in practice' (Reicher, 2004: 942) and point to the difficulties associated with assuming 'the importance of social categories *before* they have explored the ways they are made meaningful, developed or contested in different contexts' (Gillespie et al., 2012: 396, emphasis in original). This is a potentially very serious problem when applied to race, and this is addressed in the next section.

## Reproducing Existing, Problematic Categories of Race

So far, these criticisms of the use of social categories, along with the strong suggestion that race does not have a biological basis, point to race being a social construct and that the use of race as a category or a variable is problematic. However, it will now be shown that this may not just be a methodological problem, but as Reicher (2004) and Gillespie et al. (2012) suggested above, social psychologists may have been doing serious harm in their uncritical use of race as a category and variable. It has been argued that this uncritical use of race may mean that social psychologists have been unwittingly reifying (giving credibility to and therefore making 'real') 'race' and maintaining the use of a social construct that can lead to racism.

Condor (1988) criticised the social psychological approach to race and prejudice because of its failure to recognise and address the social construction of racial categories. She argued that psychologists who uncritically use race

categories 'take the existence and significance of 'race' categories for granted' (Condor, 1988: 72) and in doing so, are adding to racism themselves by giving credibility to these problematic categories. She went on to argue that the very concept of 'racial stereotypes' is itself a social construct and that its construction could be investigated in further detail too.

Hopkins, Reicher and Levine argue that social psychological theories can 'reflect or even legitimate the 'new racism'' (Hopkins, Reicher, & Levine, 1997: 308). By new racism, they refer to the idea that overt and obvious (old) racism is in decline but that instead a new form of racism has emerged where people are obliged to appear not racist (Billig, 1988) but still hold views that different races are not equal. In addition, they believe that people from the same races like to stay together and that people from different races are unlikely to get on well (McConahay, 1986). Hopkins, Reicher and Levine argue that by failing to effectively critique categories of 'new racism', social psychologists can reproduce the common sense of new racism and therefore legitimise it. To support their argument, they cite Miles (1993), who claimed that this process serves to hide the socially constructed nature of race (something demonstrated earlier in this chapter) and makes it appear real, rather than constructed. However, they maintain that social categories, including race, are indeed constructed through language. They conclude that social psychological theory (and the social cognition perspective in particular) 'reflects common sense, so too academic theory participates in its reproduction' (Hopkins et al., 1997: 326) and warn against the dangers of social psychology doing this when it should be critiquing common-sense ideas, especially when these common-sense ideas can lead to the acceptance of 'race' as something real, rather than socially constructed.

It has therefore been demonstrated that there are a number of serious problems with using race as a category or variable in social psychological research. While race has been presented as a scientific, biological reality, it has been shown that the original conceptualisation of race was far from scientific in a way that would be recognisable today. Instead, the concept of race provided a useful justification for colonialism and eugenics, which has been referred to as scientific racism. The biological basis of race has been challenged for almost a century, culminating in the human genome project concluding that race has no biological (genetic) basis. Critical social psychologists have pointed to a range of problems associated with using social categories, not least because of the way that their use can help to reify the socially constructed category. As Wetherell and Potter argue 'Social categorizations become, particularly in experimental investigations, *a priori* givens, not the object of study' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 146, emphasis in original). Despite this, Condor (1988) and

Hopkins et al. (1997) have offered perhaps the most important challenge to the use of race as a meaningful category in social psychology, which is that treating race as real (rather than constructed) can help to give it scientific credibility when the role of social psychologists should be to critique, challenge and better understand the way that race is used. It is these alternatives that will be addressed next.

## Alternatives to Treating Race as a Category

It has now been shown that the use of race as a category has been challenged. However, as Howarth and Hook note, there is a paradox because while race is socially constructed, its reification nevertheless means that it has a very real impact on people's lives: 'What we do need to do is recognise the *contradictory but necessary* aims in presenting a critical analysis of racism ... so while we have to acknowledge the continuing psychic hold and the materiality of racism ... we as critical psychologists need to take up and challenge racialized practices' (Howarth & Hook, 2005: 429, emphasis in original). What this means is that while critical social psychologists have identified the many problems associated with using 'race', it remains necessary to address it, precisely because of the way it is generally (wrongly) treated as a legitimate category or variable.

The way that critical social psychologists have dealt with this potential paradox is to turn, largely, to qualitative methods that allow social psychologists to address the ways in which race is used in talk and to what ends. The two main areas in which the function of talk about race has been investigated are Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) and Discursive Psychology (DP). These will now be addressed in turn.

### Self-Categorisation Theory and the Function of Race Talk

A seminal paper in the criticism of the use of race in social psychology comes from within SCT (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), which emphasises the importance of social categories on cognition and behaviour. This differs from the discursive approach, which will be discussed next, however, where there is an agreement with the discursive approach is that these categories are 'always constructed in and through language' (Hopkins et al., 1997: 325). In their paper, *On the parallels between social cognition and the 'new racism'*, Hopkins et al. (1997) argue against the use of race as a category



on the grounds that doing so legitimises the use of race as ‘real’, rather than socially constructed.

To illustrate this point, they conducted an analysis of an interview with a Police-Schools Liaison officer (PSLO) and how he talked about race specifically in the context of accusations that the police force could be racist. PLSOs are police officers who attend British schools to meet with pupils and to talk about the work of the police. The background for Hopkins et al.’s (1997) study was one in which the officer was attending an inner-city school with a large number of Black pupils after a time of local controversy caused by a recent ‘stop and search’ operation (where members of the public can be stopped by the police) of the kind that has been shown to disproportionately affect Black people (Reicher & Stott, 2011), which had resulted in some collective action by local Black people, in addition to a recent comment by a PSLO who had been accused of being racist.

In their analysis, they show that the PSLO is concerned throughout with resisting and challenging any potential accusations of racism. Of particular relevance, they demonstrate that his use of racial categories varies, depending on the specific context of the interview. Hopkins, Reicher and Levine highlighted three important points. First ‘people are not consistently represented in terms of ‘racial’ categories’ (Hopkins et al., 1997: 324). People may sometimes be described in terms of their racial categories, but not always, which means that when a racial category is used there will be a specific reason for it. Second ‘various category constructions can only be understood through considering the work that they perform in relation to the alternative category constructions that were potentially available’ (1997: 324) which means that we must always ask why a specific category (racial or otherwise) has been used rather than another. Third ‘the racialization of collective protest functioned to undermine alternative accounts which could have construed Black people’s protests and the absence of consent in police-Black relations as responses to police racism’ (Hopkins et al., 1997: 324). What this means is that the use of racialised categories in this specific case was designed to achieve specific aims: resisting accusations of racism levelled at the police and to suggest that the Black people had brought their problems on themselves.

## **Discursive Psychology and the Function of Race Talk**

What this important criticism of taking ‘race’ categories at face values clearly demonstrates is that social categories are employed flexibly to perform social actions. Hopkins, Reicher and Levine highlight the necessity

of focusing on language use because 'race', like all social categories, is constituted through the use of language. This view is shared with discursive psychologists. Where discursive psychologists diverge from SCT's understanding of language use is that in DP, there is no additional cognitive or behavioural element because the talk *is* the behaviour. DP (Edwards & Potter, 1992) is an approach that argues that talk (and texts) performs social actions. Discursive psychologists have argued for the application of discourse analysis to talk about race to identify exactly what constitutes race talk and what race talk is used to do.

A key study applying discourse analysis to race is Wetherell and Potter's (1992) *Mapping the language or racism*, in which they addressed the ways in which White New Zealanders talked about the Maori indigenous people, which constitute different 'racial' groups according to the traditional understanding of race. Wetherell and Potter (1992) demonstrated the varying ways in which White New Zealanders talked about race, stating that instead of focusing on a realist notion of race (such as that used in the traditional explanations of race discussed earlier), 'our concern is with how a particular discourse produces the world and how it involves a realm which for the participants is real' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 120). They show how implicitly racialised categorisations of Maori people are presented as based on race, which in turn is based on biology, often through references to physical origins, genes or 'blood'. Further, they argue that there 'is an inevitability about race summed up in the notion of instincts and inheritance. Race is not something that can be easily shrugged off' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 122). This means that race talk is used to present group differences as biologically based and therefore unable to be changed, which has the implications of meaning that people from particular backgrounds will always be expected to act in the same ways. They also show that descriptions of other 'races' are not always negative, with some examples of praise of Maori people in their data. However, even when the race talk can be positive, it nevertheless reifies race as real and gives further credibility to the wider idea that races are inherently different and that some are better than others, which, it can be argued, is racist.

A consistent finding within discursive research on race talk is that it is overwhelmingly used to present speakers as not racist. Billig identified a 'cultural norm against "prejudice"' (Billig, 1988: 94) in which appearing to be prejudicial (including racist) can bring about negative connotations for speakers, most likely due to the association of prejudice with irrationality (Edwards, 2003) and also Nazis (see Burke & Goodman, 2012), the

most extreme example of what happens when prejudice remains unchecked. Indeed, in Hopkins et al.'s (1997) analysis of the police officer above, the police officer was dealing with potential accusations of racism in such a way as to deny that he, and the police force more generally, are racist. As a direct result of this norm against prejudice, disclaimers have been shown to be an extremely common feature of race talk. Disclaimers are ways that speakers attempt to deny that what they are about to say (or may have already said) is racist. Billig et al. show that the most common type of disclaimer takes the simple form 'I'm not prejudiced, but...' (Billig et al., 1988: 112) which works to deny that what follows is an example of prejudice. For example, in Goodman and Rowe's analysis of race talk about Gypsies, they identified clear examples of disclaimers, albeit amongst some overtly prejudicial talk: 'there is no racism here' (Goodman & Rowe, 2014: 39) and 'But it is NOT racism' (Goodman & Rowe, 2014: 41).

While disclaimers such as these can work to deny that racism is at play, they also create something of a paradox because they simultaneously highlight that what is about to be said may be understood as prejudicial (van Dijk, 2000), otherwise there would be no need to make a denial in the first place. A more effective way to deny that any talk about race is in anyway prejudicial is through what Augoustinos and Every describe as 'discursive deracialisation' (Augoustinos & Every, 2007: 133), in which the potentially racial element of the talk is removed and replaced with a non-racial explanation. Augoustinos and Every (2007) and Wetherell and Potter both point to the move away from talk about race towards talk about culture and nationality instead: 'whereas once race seemed to be the most effective and prevalent legitimating tool, the ideological baton has now been handed to culture and nation' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 119).

Goodman and Burke (2011) focused on the process of discursive deracialisation in talk about asylum seekers and identified race being removed as a possible explanation for opposition to asylum seeking in favour of explanations based on financial arguments, religion and a lack of integration on the part of the asylum seekers. While financial concerns sit outside of cultural and national explanations (and are particularly pertinent, given common talk about asylum seekers and immigrants more generally), religion (which was always assumed to be Islam) and issues of integration certainly fit the cultural explanation that, as Augoustinos and Every and Wetherell and Potter claim, has replaced race as a common way of opposing people from different groups. However, as will be seen shortly, this certainly does not mean that the concept of race has been abandoned altogether; instead, it means that race can be a

particularly unpalatable reason for opposing outgroups and so when the context requires it, non-racial arguments can be made regarding a topic that may appear to have a racial element.

Discursive psychological studies of race talk have not just shown how race can be denied or removed from such talk, they have also shown how talk can be presented so that it 'sustains and legitimates social inequalities and ... injustices' (Wetherell, 2003: 21), including those between groups of different backgrounds. Wetherell and Potter (1992) ultimately showed how the talk about Maori people in New Zealand justifies and explains away the inequalities between the dominant 'white' and the indigenous Maori New Zealanders in ways that ignored the ongoing impact of the European colonisation of the country.

Goodman and Rowe (2014) addressed debates about Gypsies in internet discussions and found that while many of the comments contained clearly prejudicial arguments (indeed, some of the posts were explicit that they *were* prejudicial), the contributors to the forum were careful to make a clear distinction between what counted as racist and what was prejudicial. In doing so, some of the posters were clear that Gypsies do not constitute a 'race' so that any opposition to them could not be attributed to racism. This provides further evidence of the ways in which talk about race (including what race is and is not) can be used to further prejudicial ideas about minority groups, once again sustaining social inequalities (Wetherell, 2003).

The discursive approach to race, however, is not without its critiques. Verkuyten (Verkuyten, 1998) makes three specific criticisms. First, he claims that the discursive approach is in fact realist because 'The existence of racism and dominance are treated as a priori ... whereas other assumptions are deconstructed' (Verkuyten, 1998: 149). Second, Verkuyten claims that in this approach, speakers are viewed as passively recreating society-wide arguments, rather than having personal agency, and third, he claims that identifying race talk does not allow for an analysis of the effectiveness of such talk. Others, however, would disagree with this, claiming instead that discursive psychologists cannot make claims about whether particular views are 'necessarily "racist"' (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Every, 2005: 318) but instead how such arguments can be made in ways that present the speaker as reasonable and not racist. This suggests that speakers are creative and flexible users of language (and of society-wide ideas around race and other ideas) who manage their agency so as to bring about very specific outcomes (such as denying their own racism and/or holding Maori people to account for their own low social status). Further examples of the possible outcomes and effectiveness of race talk are addressed in the following section.

## Applications to Real Life

### Race and the Human Genome Project

The concept of 'race' is often understood as a scientifically credible, biologically based variable. However, a number of challenges have been made to this claim, not least that made by Craig Venter of the human genome project who claimed, following the mapping of diverse genomes, that race has no genetic basis. This claim, however, did not end the argument but itself can be seen as an important part of the ongoing debate over what 'race' actually means. McCann-Mortimer et al. (2004) applied a critical, discursive psychological approach to the fallout of Venter's controversial claim. Using publicly available data in the two years following Venter's announcement, they aimed to investigate how the term 'race' was used in these texts, how this talk was organised so as to make it appear factually accurate and the broader impact of this talk.

McCann-Mortimer et al. (2004) identified two main ways in which race was conceptualised: as a social and a biological construct. They show that when race is presented as a social construct, group differences are minimised. They present an example from the journal *Science* that exemplifies the minimisation of group differences:

1. Fortunately, from the few studies of nuclear DNA sequences, it is clear
2. that what is called 'race,' although culturally important, reflects just
3. few continuous traits determined by a tiny fraction of our genes.
4. Thus, from the perspective of nuclear genes, it is often the case that
5. two persons from the same part of the world who look superficially
6. alike are less related to each other than they are to persons from other
7. parts of the world who may look very different.

(McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004: 423)

This example clearly illustrates how race (which is presented in quotation marks) is deemed problematic and lacking appropriate biological and genetic support. McCann-Mortimer et al. point out the authoritative nature of the writing, such as 'it is clear' (line one) and the positive contrasting of 'real' genetic similarities over 'superficial' differences in appearances. They claim that examples such as this one emphasise 'the genetic unity of all human beings' (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004: 423), which is why they argue that talk stating 'race' has no biological basis works to minimise group differences.

Despite claims about the lack of a biological and genetic basis for race, McCann-Mortimer et al. (2004) nevertheless identified numerous examples of texts where race continued to be described as a biological and scientific construct, which work to emphasise differences between groups. Here is one such example they presented from the monthly journal *The World and I*:

1. The fact that 99.8 percent of the population shares the same genes does
2. not 'prove' or even necessarily suggest that there are no population or
3. 'racial' differences. The percentage of overall differences is a far less
4. important issue than which genes are different. Even minute
5. differences in DNA can have profound effects on how an animal or
6. human looks and acts ...

(McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004: 424)

McCann-Mortimer et al. (2004) demonstrate how articles such as these are designed to counter the argument put forward in the previous examples. They show how in this case an alternative scientific argument is based on the function, rather than the quantity of genes that may differ. By claiming that small differences in DNA can have large differences in behaviour, the claims about small differences in DNA can be undermined and a genetic explanation for group differences remains. What this finding means is that while it has been challenged, a biological basis for racial differences has remained as a credible explanation that will remain in use. This led to McCann-Mortimer et al. concluding that 'Regardless of how 'groups' are defined, and no matter how small the reported differences between groups, such group differences can always be (mis)appropriated to legitimate racist and discriminatory practices. It will take much more than the rhetorical power of scientific 'truth' to eradicate racism' (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004: 429). This study therefore demonstrates the ways in which texts that exist in the public domain contribute to the ongoing debate about what counts as 'race', that in many ways reflects the arguments within social psychology.

## Race and the British National Party

In addition to being able to analyse the ways in which talk about race can be used to construct and debate what 'race' means, talk about race can also be used to perform a range of social actions. In the following real-world example, it will be shown how the far-right British National Party's (BNP) former

leader Nick Griffin used talk about race to perform a number of actions in support of his party and its agenda. The BNP was the most electorally successful far-right party in the history of British politics (although by the 2015 British general election, it collapsed), resulting in some high-profile appearances of its then leader Griffin on mainstream British political debate television programmes. While these appearances were controversial, and arguably contributed to the collapse of the party, they were also a matter of intense public interest at the time. As a far-right party, the BNP always has to deal with the possibility of being branded racist; however, as the literature on race discussed above would suggest, this is something that the party sought to deny. The following example from Johnson and Goodman's (2013) analysis sees Griffin taking part in a televised discussion programme called *Question Time*. Griffin can be seen making an argument grounded in race in an attempt to argue against immigration to the UK on the grounds that it is damaging to 'indigenous' British people:

65. D.D. can the success of the BNP be explained by the misguided
  66. immigration (.) policy which er the immigration policy you call the
  67. greatest act of genocide against the British people in history according to
  68. your website 'the immigration invasion an act of deliberate (.)
  69. calculated (.) genocide (.) against our ancient race and nation' so (.)
  70. successive governments(.) are committing genocide against their own
  71. people is that your theory?
  72. N.G. I'm afraid that's the case yeah that's certainly how it looks]
- (Johnson & Goodman, 2013: 161)

Much of what Griffin says here is quoted by the chair of the discussion programme who points to a statement from the BNP's website in which the BNP claims that immigration represents genocide towards the British race. Here 'race' is used by the BNP to refer to British people. Elsewhere in their analysis, Johnson and Goodman (2013) show how Griffin argues that these are the indigenous people of Britain who can trace their ancestry back to 'time immemorial' and draw parallels with other indigenous groups such as 'Maori' and 'Red Indians'. Johnson and Goodman (2013) demonstrate that race is referred to in this way specifically to present White British people as victims of racism (in this case, the most serious type of racism possible: genocide). By presenting White British people as the victims of racism, Griffin attempts two fetes, the denial of racism on his part (using the logic that victims of racism cannot be perpetrators) and importantly to make a clear argument against



immigration, which is here presented as extremely harmful. What this example shows is that talk about race can function to oppose racism and to claim a victim status. As with McCann-Mortimer et al.'s (2004) analysis, discussed above, this tells us nothing about the true meaning of 'race' but demonstrates yet more ways that talk about race can perform actions, including those that could be argued to constitute racism themselves. This highlights the benefits of addressing talk about race, rather than treating race as a (biological) variable that can be measured.

## Current Trends—Criticisms of Accusations of Racism

Much of the critical social psychological research on race has come from the discursive psychological perspective. The growing body of work in this area has demonstrated that a major feature of talk about race is the denial of racism (e.g. Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Billig, 1988; Goodman, 2014; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; and from a non-discursive perspective Hopkins et al., 1997). Because of the problems associated with racism, racism has been described as a taboo (Billig, 1988) which has meant that accusations of racism can be damaging (as seen in Johnson and Goodman's (2013) analysis of a far-right leader in the UK). However, there is now a growing body of work demonstrating that making accusations of racism is also increasingly problematic (Goodman, 2014). Every and Augoustinos (2007) demonstrated how an opponent of anti-immigration laws denied that he was talking about race not so that he could avoid accusations of racism (as seen in many of the above examples) but so that he could avoid being seen as making an *accusation* of racism. Goodman (2010) showed how the taboo against prejudice (and racism) is presented as unfair on the grounds of censorship and preventing freedom of speech, which explains why accusations of racism now tend to be avoided, leading to what can be described as a new taboo on making accusations of racism. This may lead to new problems for those attempting to challenge racism. As Capdevila and Callaghan argue 'The effect of this anxious silence around matters of race in British politics means that it is quite possible for politicians to produce rhetoric that marginalises and denigrates entire groups of people, without risk' (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008: 12). It therefore seems essential for critical social psychologists to focus on how a taboo against accusations of racism may work and what impact this is having on race talk.

## Summary

In this chapter it has been argued that while ‘race’ may be understood as a real biological and genetic variable, the historical roots of the concept suggest that this is not the case; instead, race proved a useful concept to help justify European colonial expansion. The scientific basis of race as a biological category was challenged as early as the 1930s, with further support from the United Nations in 1950; however, arguably the biggest challenge to race as a category came from the human genome diversity project which claimed that racial differences cannot be identified by looking at different genomes. Social psychologists have also pointed to the problems of using any social categories, including race of which reifying—making ‘real’ a social construction—and giving legitimacy to race is potentially the most damaging.

Critical social psychologists have shown that instead of taking the category of ‘race’ at face value and potentially making it appear real, understanding the ways in which talk about race is used (and so how the category ‘race’ comes to be understood) can be much more beneficial. To this end, critical social psychologists have done precisely this and have highlighted various features of talk about race, most notably that because appearing to be racist is something to be avoiding, such talk is predominantly designed to present speakers as not racist, while also supporting ideas that may support inequality between groups. In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that the use of ‘race’ as a category in social psychological studies and in everyday talk can be used to do harm, so its use needs to be understood and challenged.

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# 23

## Towards a Critical Social Psychology of Social Class

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Social psychologists have paid relatively little attention to social class in comparison to scholars from other disciplines such as sociology, where class has occupied a central position (see Holt & Griffin, 2005). This is a concern, as we will go on to argue, since social class impinges on nearly every aspect of human life (Bullock & Limbert, 2009) and has a profoundly psychological dimension (Holt & Griffin, 2005). More worryingly, a social psychological study of social class is perhaps the most pertinent it has been for some time since social and economic inequalities have increased dramatically in Britain in the last 30 years (Businelle et al., 2010) and there has been a pronounced rise in wage inequality in the United States since the 1980s (Autor, Katz, & Kearney, 2008). When we look worldwide, we can now see a near-universal trend towards greater inequality based on income (For Whosoever Hath, 2007). Given this, the impact of social class on people's lives is likely to be more, not less, pronounced.

Traditional Marxist notions of 'social classes' see these as historically formed groups with specific roles and conflicting interests that occupy particular positions in the economic system of production in capitalist societies (see Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015; see also Arfken, this volume). Conversely, other popular (e.g., Bourdieusian) class analyses in the social sciences transcend this structural and materialist approach to draw further attention to the relational, symbolic and psychological dimensions

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of ‘classmaking’ (e.g., Bourdieu, 1987, p. 7). How we define and measure social class is the subject of debate within the social sciences (Bullock & Limbert, 2009). It is beyond the scope of the current chapter to provide a comprehensive review of these debates and issues (for fuller discussions, see Bullock & Limbert, 2009; Phoenix & Tizard, 1996; Rubin et al., 2014). In brief, we agree with Walkerdine (1996) that more holistic conceptualisations of social class beyond traditional (perhaps simplistic) notions are now warranted. For example, Holt and Griffin (2005) argue that in contemporary Western societies, a person’s social class cannot necessarily be read from their position in the labour market or education system, and often represents a complex interplay of a person’s life experiences, family background, the social networks that they are part of, their language and speech style, lifestyle, mode of appearance and so on (Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Reid, 1989)—and people are often acutely aware of the hierarchical nature of these distinctions (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). In addition, people’s ‘subjective’ sense of which social class they belong to is often at odds with more formalised, objective measures (Argyle, 1994). Social class is therefore a complex and sometimes messy social and psychological matter (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). As will be illustrated, within this complexity structural power inequalities are discursively reproduced in a variety of everyday settings and contexts, impacting (often negatively) upon our subjectivities, everyday experiences and how we relate to one another.

In this chapter, first, we critically review mainstream social psychological theory and research that has attempted to examine the impact of social class (or socio-economic status: SES) on intellectual capacities, attitudes, social behaviours and social relationships. We highlight the ways in which this work has not only produced impoverished accounts of social class but further how this has failed to problematise the class system in countries such as Britain and the United States. Indeed, through an upholding and often substantiation of current political ideals such as meritocracy and the notion of ‘choice’, this body of work may unwittingly help maintain and justify inequalities for working-class people. We then move on to discuss critical social psychological work on social class which has afforded a central role to experience, discourse, power relations and subjectivities. We examine the progress that this scholarly activity has made in highlighting the (often problematic) impact that class has on people’s practices, identities and social relations, as well as the practices that people engage in in terms of resisting the ways in which they (and others) are positioned by class discourse. We consider what critical social psychological accounts of social class have to offer those seeking to alleviate the problems and suffering caused by social



and economic inequalities and/or those seeking to challenge and dismantle the class system. Finally, we review the current 'state of play' for critical social psychological work in this area and consider positive and necessary future directions for this field of study.

## Mainstream Social Psychological Accounts of Social Class

Mainstream social psychological work has often focused on difference between the abilities, motivations and cognitions of people according to the social class position (or SES) that they occupy. However, similar to feminist criticisms of 'sex difference' research (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), this work often implicitly assumes a particular standard (in this case a middle-class standard) that positions middle-class (and upper-class) abilities, values and social and economic worlds as the reference point—with working-class people compared unfavourably against such a 'standard', rendered 'deficient', 'less than' or problematic and in need of regulation and care.

The first example of such work is the body of research that seeks to examine, first, whether persons of a working-class (or 'lower' class) background have lower levels of intelligence than their middle- (or upper-) class counterparts, and second, whether these lower levels can explain their social and economic hierarchical positioning in work and life. A highly cited review of the literature (Gottfredson, 2004) argues for a replacement of the notion of unequal social class hierarchies with an IQ continuum which reflects graded, intellectual capabilities to achieve and succeed in life, and where 'differences' are attributed to the heritability to succeed and survive through the conferment of intelligence. Similarly, Nettle's (2003) work posits that intelligence is causal in processes of social mobility by its link with occupational attainment. This research looks at longitudinal data from the British National Child Development Study. Despite results indicating a strong correlation between fathers' 'social class' (occupation) and attained 'social class' (occupation), the author argues that the most significant results show that intelligence test scores at 11 years old predict class mobility in adulthood uniformly across all social classes, therefore revealing a high level of social mobility and meritocracy in contemporary Britain.

In sum, this body of research locates the problem of a lack of social mobility within working-class people by reproducing the meritocratic premise that all people are exposed to the same level, quality and type of educational

environment, therefore an (in)ability to achieve success within this 'level playground' is due in something inside the person (e.g., Gottfredson, 2004). However, the 'level playground' can be regarded as an illusion, since working-class children are repeatedly exposed to lower quality education and socio-economic disadvantage (e.g., Stansfeld, Clark, Rodgers, Caldwell, & Power, 2011). As Lott (2012) argues, even when working-class children do access well-resourced education they are routinely short-changed; expectations are much lower for them and social class can be a dominant force in the classroom whereby the working-class are 'othered' from the 'ideal' (middle-class) student. This may leave working-class children less likely to profit from education than their middle-class counterparts (Lott, 2012). Littler (2013) also argues that this elitist, essentialist and individualist 'myth of difference' (p. 54) has led to apartheid education that, in turn, led to a disproportionate amount of resources being spent on children measured to be 'clever'. In addition, this notion of more 'intelligent' working-class people moving up the occupational ladder to 'escape' constructs working-class cultures as 'other' and spaces to avoid or 'get out of' (Tyler, 2013). Lastly, meritocracy as an ideal obscures economic and social inequities, dissolving them in gradients of talent, effort and inherent abilities and thereby legitimising power and privilege.

However, there is a nice example of social cognitive work that does attempt to disturb the taken-for-granted myth of meritocracy (Spencer & Castano, 2007). Here it is argued that negative stereotypes associated with working-class children result in 'stereotype threat' which produces poor performance on IQ tests as a result of students fearing confirmation of such stereotypes. Using a revised general intelligence test, coupled with a demographic form asking for parents' income and occupation (presented either before or after completing the test), results showed that working-class children underperformed if class was made salient before the test while performing equal to the middle-class counterparts when class was made salient after the test. Worryingly, provision of such demographic information is commonplace before such tests and working-class children who apply for financial support for the costs of tests (common in the United States) often experience 'humiliating' (p. 428) levels of attention to these demographics to prove they are poor enough to be eligible.

The second main trend in social psychological research on social class typically pathologises the practices of people from 'lower down' the socio-economic scale as deficient in their 'motivations' to live a successful, healthy life (see Day, Rickett, & Woolhouse, 2014). For example, Kasser, Ryan, Zax and Sameroff (1995) reportedly found that adolescents whose mothers had low

educational attainment and income were more materially oriented, valuing financial success more than self-acceptance (e.g., hopes for autonomy), affiliation (e.g., hopes for positive relations with family/friends) and community feeling (desires to improve the world through activism). The authors argued that these young people value conformity more than self-direction, paying less attention to their own desires and preferring to seek rewards from external sources. Further, the authors argue that young people growing up in 'high-crime, low income environments' (Kasser et al., 1995, p. 912) see conformity as a requirement for securing a job and financial success as a way of escape, therefore placing too much emphasis on money 'relative to other more prosocial and growth-oriented values' (Kasser et al., 1995, p. 912).

Thus, in this body of research, personal growth, self-expression and self-directed behaviour are standards which individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds fail to match up to. That those from middle-class backgrounds may have already acquired a level of financial security and material resources that enables them to direct their attention away from meeting basic needs towards 'growth and self-expression' is not acknowledged (Kasser et al., 1995, p. 907). In sum, poor and working-class people are positioned as subscribing to a value system which is not only different to socio-economically privileged groups but also inferior, superficial and detrimental to 'self-development'. In addition, this justifies social inequality by implying that working-class value systems are faulty while also obscuring an examination of structural and ideological barriers to social change.

Lastly, we look at the social-cognitive analyses of health outcomes which are understood and defined in terms of SES (see Day, 2012 for more in-depth analyses). Research into inequalities in health has tended to focus on those of 'lower SES' and has sought to identify the biological, behavioural and psychological factors that contribute to disparities in health outcomes. For example, being from a 'disadvantaged background' has been associated with 'negative cognitive-emotional factors' such as hostility, anxiety and depression, which have all been found to impact negatively on health (e.g., Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007). The predominant focus though has been on 'health-risk behaviours', defined as 'habits or practices that increase an individual's likelihood of poor health outcomes' (Goy, Dodds, Rosenberg, & King, 2008, p. 314). For example, lower SES has been linked to a range of health-risk behaviours such as smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity and heavy drinking (e.g., Wardle & Steptoe, 2003). Here, inequalities in health status are conceptualised in terms of differentials in individual health behaviours and lifestyle patterns (e.g., Richter et al., 2006). It is argued that working-class people tend to be unhealthier because they do not take adequate care of their

health and make poor choices. Indeed, a research paper by Lynch, Kaplan and Salonen (1997) is actually entitled 'Why do poor people behave poorly?' Unsurprisingly then, current health-risk reduction and health promotion interventions target the health behaviours of those from lower SES groups and the beliefs and attitudes believed to underpin these behaviours (e.g., Myers, 2009). Once again, working-class people have been characterised as problematic, with the failure of such interventions being blamed on the targets who, it has been claimed, are more resistant (presumably than middle-class people) to behaviour change (Lynch et al., 1997).

Walkerline (2002) argues that psychology has played a special role in promoting the neo-liberalist notion (which she contends is a fiction) of choice. Neo-liberalist discourses (Rose, 1999) are said to be widespread in late capitalist societies and emphasise individualism, agency and the possibility of personal transformation. As discussed, mainstream research presents choice as located within the individual in the form of cognitions, with the assumption that these (along with the behaviours that they unpin) can be altered or modified (although such interventions are often unsuccessful). As with research on intelligence and motivations, notions of poverty, inequality and class oppression become an 'absent present' (Ringrose & Walkerline, 2008). There is some acknowledgement in the mainstream literature that class-related stressors (e.g., poverty) and discrimination may play an important role in health disparities. However, such factors have to date been under-researched, and when acknowledged, often treated as 'bolt on' variables in an overall conceptual model rather than pervasive and central issues that need to be tackled in social and political ways (see Myers, 2009).

Overall, mainstream social psychological work on social class conceptualises working-class people as having lower levels of intelligence and 'key' motivations, or as making the wrong choices (possibly as a result of these 'deficits') to live a successful and healthy life. The causes for such 'deficits' or the enactment of such 'poor' reasoning are seen as residing within the individual either in a modifiable manner (as in social cognitions) or in an inherent, essentialist, unmodifiable manner (as in level of intelligence). The reproduction of such meritocratic and neo-liberalist discourses around class leaves working-class people to be regarded as either a drain on or waste of public resources or as deserving of their social and economic positioning. This, along with notions of individualism and agency, bolsters classism, or what Tyler (2008) calls 'class disgust'. Mainstream social psychology has played a pivotal role. It is unclear, and perhaps uncharitable to conclude that social psychologists have intentionally set out to blame vulnerable people and place sole responsibility for social, economic or health outcomes on to individuals (see Lee, Lemyre,

Turner, Orpana, & Krewski, 2008). However, as Day previously concludes in her analysis of health psychology and class (2012) ‘critical psychologists are concerned with the outcomes or consequences of theorising, empirical claims and actions (for example, interventions) rather than the intentions of individual psychologists’ (pp. 65).

## Critical Social Psychological Approaches to Social Class

Gender, ethnicity and race have received more comprehensive treatment from critical psychologists than social class (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). This neglect has been recognised and addressed in some quarters, and feminist psychologists, notably, have produced some excellent work examining intersections between class and gender and the impact of social class on women’s lives (e.g., Wakerdine, 1991, 1996), with the journal *Feminism & Psychology* publishing special issues focused explicitly on this issue.

‘Critical social psychology’ encompasses a complex set of theoretical frameworks and approaches to analysis which make it difficult to ‘pin down’ and define precisely (see Wetherell, 1999). Indeed, those such as Parker (2009) have argued that critical psychology must provide resources to transform psychology without ‘getting stuck in any model, ethos or worldview’ (p. 84). That said, there are a number of different ‘streams’ of theorising and research on social class that could be described as ‘critical social psychological’. These typically utilise qualitative research methods to achieve a number of common aims: Firstly, to produce contextualised accounts of social class which avoid the sort of individualism that often characterises mainstream work (see Bullock & Limbert, 2009). Secondly, a commitment to place poverty, inequality and oppression as central and to produce accounts that problematise class inequality, class relations and class discourse. Thirdly, to examine how class intersects with gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness, geography and so forth to produce diverse experiences and social identities (Griffin, 1993), and to acknowledge that class cannot simply be ‘separated out’ from other social categories or treated as a discrete variable. A final aim is to provide marginalised groups whose experiences have often been neglected by mainstream psychology, such as poor and working-class people, with a voice in research (e.g., Wakerdine, 1991, 1996) rather than treating them as the sum of a number of variables (low SES and problematic cognitions), or speaking for them.

One tradition of feminist psychological work on social class has examined lived experiences of class and what class membership ‘feels’ like (e.g., Reay, 1999, 2005). An area of research of interest here has been class transitions—

moving from one social class to another—and the psychological impact which ensues (e.g., Reay, 2002; Wakerdine, 2003). Such research has demonstrated that (perhaps contrary to popular belief) moving from working-class to middle-class status (e.g., via higher educational achievements) is fraught with difficulties. For example, Reay (2002) conducted interviews with working-class higher education students and uncovered struggles around feelings of belonging (e.g., many of the participants said that they felt like an ‘imposter’), identity and authenticity (i.e., maintaining an authentic and coherent sense of self). This is perhaps unsurprising given research evidence that classism is often rife at universities (Langhout, Drake, & Rosselli, 2009). For Reay’s participants, working-class identity increasingly lacked authenticity, whilst the veneer of ‘middle-classness’ felt like a façade, therefore the person finds themselves frozen in limbo between one class and another. This work is important, not only for highlighting complex emotional and identity issues associated with social class but also for challenging popular Western understandings of ‘upward mobility’ as unproblematic and highlighting the barriers experienced by working-class students who enter into higher education.

The emotional distress that can accompany classed experiences has been addressed more directly by psychologists employing more critical perspectives for a number of years. For example, psychologists have highlighted strong links between insufficient or dwindling economic resources, classism and experiences of working-class life in general and psychological distress and deterioration (e.g., Jahoda, 1987). This often includes those who have moved from the working class into the middle class. For example, in a special issue of *Feminism & Psychology* devoted to social class, Palmer (1996) connects this distress to feelings of shame and fear and lowered self-confidence that are often experienced by working-class people and argues that an important challenge for mental health practitioners is to assist clients in conceiving of their problems as resulting from limitations in other people’s perspectives rather than from personal inadequacy. More recently, a group called *Psychologists Against Austerity* has mobilised on the Internet (<https://psychagainstausterity.wordpress.com/>). This is a group of psychologists who are actively campaigning against the implementation of austerity policies by the British government, pointing to psychological evidence that these policies have damaging psychological costs. In the United States, psychologists such as Bernice Lott and Heather Bullock have similarly advocated for policy changes that address economic injustice. They critique cultural constructions of the ‘welfare problem’, arguing that it is poverty that is the problem (Lott & Bullock, 2007). This work is crucial in highlighting how individual suffering often results from wider historical developments and political and

structural conditions like inequality, exploitation and alienation (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015).

Another stream of critical social psychological work on social class has afforded a central role to language and discourse (e.g., Holt & Griffin, 2005; Phoenix & Tizard, 1996; Willott & Griffin, 1999). This body of work employs discourse analysis to scrutinise the functions of class discourse, such as legitimising class inequalities by making these appear natural or inevitable or the result of merit rather than structural inequalities. It also considers how such discourse places people within unequal relations of power and the forms of subjectivity that this discourse makes available. For example, Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) examined classed and gendered discourse on so-called lifestyle and self-improvement programmes on British television and found that such shows often depict a spectre of 'working-class failure'. Moreover, a central character within such programmes is often a working-class woman who is the focus of transformation and correction and positioned as insufficiently self-monitoring. They argue that this 'failed' subjectivity is depicted as uninhabitable and 'Other' to the neo-liberal ideals that are promoted, whilst a discourse of poverty and oppression is largely absent. This and similar studies (e.g., Tyler, 2008) are important in that they highlight the media as a powerful institution where problematic discourses around class and associated subjectivities are reproduced. Further, as highlighted by Ringrose and Walkerdine, these mediated discourses function in ways that render invisible the wider socio-cultural, economic and political conditions that contribute to problems often associated with poverty such as poor diet, constructing these instead as the result of personal failing.

These studies are important in highlighting the role of discourse in justifying social structures based on class difference. This work arguably builds upon Marxist literature on the role of 'dominant bourgeois ideology' and how this serves to obscure exploitation and injustice in capitalist societies (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978), excluding the possibility of social change (see Gramsci, 1971). However, one limitation of these studies is that these fail to examine how people *engage* with such patterns of meaning in their everyday lives and how class discourse constitutes people's subjectivities. Some critical social psychological studies have examined people's talk around class and other, intersecting social identities with illuminating results. For example, Phoenix and Tizard (1996) interviewed a diverse sample of 248, 14–18-year-old Londoners in order to explore their social identities. The authors found that the working-class participants were less likely to articulate a conscious identity position with regard to social class than the middle-class participants (see also Gorz, 1982); for instance, they were more likely to report that they



did not know which social class they belonged to or what was meant by social class. Further, there was a general tendency for the participants to describe themselves as 'middle-class', a tendency, particularly amongst White people, that is well documented (see Bullock & Limbert, 2009). In addition, some accounts provided by the middle-class participants positioned working-class people as inferior and figures from popular culture (e.g., television shows) were drawn upon as typifying working-class lifestyles which were derided (see also Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). This demonstrates the impact of class 'stereotypes' identified in popular culture by those such as Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) and Tyler (2008) can have on everyday understandings and class relations. In general, the participants distinguished between 'us' and 'them' on the basis of commodities, practices and lifestyles that have strong class connotations (e.g., housing, dress, behaviour and economic resources), and most of the participants lacked familiarity with people from other social class groups; therefore class relations were largely imagined rather than 'lived'. As argued by Walkerdine (1995), such constructions of working-class people probably reveal more about the 'middle-class imagination' with its fears and desires than they do about what working-class people are actually like.

In another study which has examined the relational construction of class identities, Holt and Griffin (2005) examined the talk of young, middle-class participants (who again, were diverse in terms of gender, ethnic and sexual groupings) in the context of leisure spaces such as pubs and clubs, and found that they referred to social class in highly coded ways. This typically involved referring to 'types' of people and places that were clearly 'classed', for example, referring to working-class people as 'townies' or 'locals', and it was assumed that these understandings were socially shared ones that would be readily understood. The authors argue that explicit talk around class has become taboo in contemporary British society where an ideal of 'classlessness' is promoted (Bradley, 1996) and indeed, talk around class was often accompanied by nervous laughter or an apology. Interestingly, Holt and Griffin (2005) also describe how the class prejudice identified in their study was also shot through with ambivalent desire for the (exotic) working-class Other and certain aspects of (more authentic) working-class culture. This kind of complexity cannot be adequately theorised by employing more mainstream social psychological approaches to identity such as Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978, 1981) (for more extended discussions of the limitations of SIT in theorising social class, see Argyle, 1994; Day et al., 2014; Holt & Griffin, 2005).

This work provides more nuanced and sophisticated accounts of social identities and social relations and the important role that social class plays in these. It would seem that the contemporary discursive landscape in the

Western world is instructive here in a number of ways. Firstly, this has been characterised by a cultural suppression of the acknowledgement of class and class inequalities (Skeggs, 2005), whereby for example, political and economic interests and conflicts have been reified as individual differences in terms of character, personality or lifestyle (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). This is illustrated in the Holt and Griffin (2005) study, where although the participants drew upon notions of class difference, this was largely in relation to commodities, lifestyles, leisure activities and so on. A discourse of *power* differentials was largely absent. Secondly, there are the kinds of stigmatising and pathologising discourses around the working class that are highly visible in the media (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Tyler, 2008). This discursive landscape may have resulted in what Bradley (1996) describes as ‘submerged identities’ (p. 72) in relation to class. In other words, talk around class and identification with a class group (particularly the working class) has become difficult, in some instances embarrassing or anxiety-provoking, and so may be avoided altogether (Holt & Griffin, 2005). This marked decline of ‘class consciousness’ in the Western world (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015) should concern Marxists who believe that this is a prerequisite for class conflict and collective political action on the part of the working class (e.g., Marx, 1970), or at the very least a questioning of what is often ‘passed off’ as the natural order of things (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999).

So far, we have provided a fairly disheartening overview of the ways in which class privilege is discursively reproduced whilst at the same time obscured, and some of the consequences of this for everyday discursive practices, social identities and social relations. However, that is not to say that people always buy into such discourses in straightforward and unproblematic ways. Further, although it has been highlighted that there is a lack of positively loaded positions for working-class women in the UK context (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015), a number of recent critical social psychological studies have highlighted examples of resistance on the part of British working-class girls and women. For example, Woolhouse, Day, Rickett and Milnes (2012) conducted a study which involved focus group discussions with working-class adolescent girls from South Yorkshire in the UK to examine the discourses that they drew upon around femininity, food and eating. We found that many culturally sanctioned and promoted ideals and practices, such as eating small amounts of ‘healthy’ food, displaying little enthusiasm for food and being concerned with weight and appearance were understood by the participants as classed (e.g., something that ‘posh’ women do) and were often explicitly derided and rejected. Similarly, recent critical studies in the field of organisational psychology have examined how working-class women who work in police work (e.g.,

Rickett, 2014) and door supervision or ‘bouncing’ (e.g., Rickett & Roman, 2013) have also identified constructions of the ideal female worker as imbued with gendered and classed ideals around being safe, risk-averse, ‘feminine’ and ‘ladylike’. Scholars such as Skeggs (1997) have argued that such bourgeois models of passive and ‘frail’ femininity have been promoted by privileged groups and have often been inaccessible to working-class women because, for example, of the physical labour that they have traditionally been engaged in. Although fewer people now work in industries characterised by heavy physical labour due to deindustrialisation (Budgeon, 2014), the work that the women in these studies perform still involves a physical (and occasionally violent) element. Consequently, these constructions of the ideal female worker were rejected by the participants in these studies as uncondusive to the type of work that they do, oppressive and exclusionary. In contrast, they positioned themselves as courageous and wily women who were ‘not afraid to get stuck in’ (Rickett, 2014). Similarly, Day, Gough and McFadden (2003), who (like Holt & Griffin, 2005) also examined discourse in the context of leisure spaces and ‘night outs’, found that the working-class women in their study also challenged classed ideals of frail and passive femininity by positioning themselves as women who ‘could look after themselves’ on a night out. In addition, middle-class women were often ridiculed by them as inauthentic and pretentious. These studies demonstrate that working-class, feminine identities can be negotiated, despite the negative discursive landscape previously discussed, in ways that are imbued with power (albeit ones that arguably draw upon normative discourses around the ‘tough’ and unpretentious working-class women who is unaffected by body image ideals etc.).

## Applying Critical Perspectives on Class

Critical social psychological research, theorising and related methodologies have important implications for ‘real world’ settings and have been drawn upon in attempts to raise awareness around, and directly challenge, the oppressive effects of classism and practices which serve to reproduce and reinforce class boundaries. Such critical work is most notable in the domains of education and health, and perhaps to a lesser extent, employment, leisure and media representations. Given this predominance of applied research in the areas of education and health, and following on from earlier criticism of mainstream social psychological research in these areas, we provide an overview of some of this important and illuminating work in these two respective fields.

As noted, it appears to be the field of education that has attracted most attention in relation to psychology, social class and the effects of classism (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). This is perhaps unsurprising given the cultural value placed on education and arguments that ‘Sites of education ... are a rich laboratory in which to study the experiences of class’ (Ostrove & Cole, 2003, p. 678). In an intriguing ethnographic study, and with the ultimate goal of providing the foundations for school reform (in the United States), Langhout and Mitchell (2008) examined the ‘hidden curriculum’ (defined as ‘the values, norms and beliefs transmitted via the structure of schooling’ *ibid.*, p. 593) in a second-grade classroom (aged seven to eight years). Part of the ‘hidden curriculum’, built around White middle-class values and assumptions, was a requirement for children to demonstrate their enthusiasm, interest and learning in ways that corresponded to the school’s behavioural and disciplinary code; if they failed to do this (e.g., responding to the teacher’s question without raising their hand), they were reprimanded. These ‘offenders’ consequently began to show signs of despondency and disengagement. The authors noted that this occurred far more frequently among Black and Latino boys and argued that, ‘The hidden curriculum, therefore, reinforces institutionalized racism and classism with the meta-communication that working-class and poor racial and ethnic minority students, especially boys, do not belong in school’ (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 596).

In higher education, similar processes appear to be in operation. Langhout et al. (2009) found that not only are students from poor and working-class backgrounds more likely to experience classism but also being subjected to classism was found to be associated with a host of negative outcomes and experiences, such as a decreased sense of belonging (to their place of study), poorer psychosocial outcomes and intentions to drop out of college (Langhout et al., 2009). Based on their findings, the authors recommended an array of policies and structural changes that may help to address the classed inequalities faced by poor and working-class students (and the privileges afforded to upper- and middle-class students). These include implementing transition programmes aimed at helping students navigate what might be an unfamiliar system; introducing poor/working-class students to staff members who identify with being from a similar background in order to develop social support networks and, at the level of infrastructure, critically scrutinising university policies and procedures that may unwittingly facilitate classism (Langhout et al., 2009). Importantly however, they also advocate the incorporation of critical studies on social class into the curriculum to raise awareness of class-based issues amongst all students, but particularly those whose class privilege may be hidden or taken for granted. We concur strongly with this latter recommendation

and at our own institution include course components which provide students with a language to talk (critically) about class; we commonly have a number of students who choose a critical focus on class in their final-year undergraduate projects.

Acknowledging the paucity of research examining the practices of privileged groups which serve to perpetuate inequalities, Stephens and Gillies (2012) explored the talk and practices of affluent and disadvantaged parents (in New Zealand) in relation to choosing a school for their child/ren and the advantages or constraints conferred upon each of these groups in respect to this 'choice'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found that the 'affluent group' were more able to draw upon the necessary resources (e.g., income, housing location and social networks) to secure advantage for their child in terms of schooling. In contrast, parents from the poorer neighbourhood were restricted by work commitments, family circumstances and the need for support in their attempts to access 'good' schools and be involved in the school community (Stephens & Gillies, 2012). Notably however, one mother from the lower-income group had succeeded in sending her daughters to a 'prestigious' school but talked of the predominant White middle-class culture of the school to which she felt a lack of belonging and 'of being stopped on the street by a woman who suggested that her daughters should not be at the school' (ibid., p. 154). This example not only undermines prevailing neo-liberal rhetoric around notions of 'choice' and upward social mobility as being achievable and unproblematic, but also highlights how 'the actions of those of higher status ... work against the development of poor communities' (ibid., p. 146). The authors conclude by arguing for a shift away from interventions aimed at developing disadvantaged communities solely from *within*, to attending to the detrimental effects resulting from inequalities *between* social groups (Stephens & Gillies, 2012).

Moving on to a discussion of critical applied work in the area of health and social class, Melluish and Bulmer (1999) reported on a truly inspiring men's health action project (in the UK) which was developed in an attempt to challenge and move away from dominant understandings of men's psychological distress as resulting from (in part) 'male socialization' (ibid., p. 93) and constructions of masculinity. The authors argued that this type of understanding overlooks the ways in which social class shapes men's experiences and articulations of distress, might misrepresent working-class men's experiences in particular and, importantly, may lead to therapeutic interventions focused on the 'intrapsychic' and 'men's "inner worlds"' (ibid., p. 93) when these may not be helpful or appropriate. Further, they argued that working-class men who experience unemployment are subject to a range of negative consequences

such as social isolation and feelings of powerlessness resulting from a loss of social solidarity, valued identity and structure to their daily lives. Given this, the authors helped set up a project for unemployed working-class men who were experiencing psychological distress with the aim of providing a forum for them to share experiences and offer mutual support and solidarity.

Although there was initial input from professional practitioners, their involvement became more peripheral as the men began to take more control (e.g., by establishing a management committee—Melluish & Bulmer, 1999). Gradually, the men's articulations of their distress and experiences shifted from individualised accounts to more collective understandings linked to socio-political issues impacting at the local and societal levels. The men began to frame their experiences through a lens of class, and mental distress as a social rather than personal issue. The authors conclude by calling for a re-conceptualisation of how we make sense of mental distress, what are considered as appropriate forms of support and the necessity of taking social class into account when formulating these understandings.

Finally in this section, we turn our attention to the valuable contributions of William Ming Liu (e.g., Liu et al., 2004; Liu, Stinson, Hernandez, Shepard, & Haag, 2009) to the area of social class (and classism), counselling and therapeutic practices. First, Liu et al. (2009) along with others (e.g., Marecek & Hare-Mustin, 2009) argue that therapeutic models and practices are underpinned by middle-class values and assumptions yet, as is widely documented, poor and working-class people are more likely to experience psychological distress (e.g., Liu, 2011). This raises questions around the suitability of therapeutic practices to meet the needs of poor and working-class service users (Liu et al., 2004; Melluish & Bulmer, 1999). In recognition of this, and the salience of class and classism in shaping psychologies and identities (along with other intersecting dimensions of difference—Liu et al., 2004), Liu et al. (2004) argue that as a starting point, counsellors need to reflect on and interrogate their own class positionings, classism and personal experiences of classism and consider how these may play out in their work with clients. Following on from this, counsellors should explore the client's mental suffering through a 'class lens', for example, by gaining an understanding of their current and historical class (and economic) positionings, the client's own understanding of class, and their current or historic experiences of classism (Liu et al., 2004). In a nutshell, Liu (2011) argues that class (and experiences of classism) are absolutely central to people's sense of self and well-being and therefore the exploration of class-related experiences are essential for more meaningful understandings of distress and effective interventions.

## Current Trends

Three key areas of interest can be identified in recent and current critical social psychological literature related to class. As argued previously, increasing attention has been given to the ways in which class and classed identities intersect with other dimensions of difference such as gender (e.g., Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Lotus Seeley, 2014), sexuality, (e.g., Rickett, Craig, & Thompson, 2013), dis/ability (e.g., Goodley, 2011), 'race' (e.g., Langhout & Mitchell, 2008) and so forth. A further area of enquiry seeks to examine how class is constituted through talk, social interaction and practices, and the ways in which classed discourse is produced and reproduced to reinforce class boundaries, for example, through processes of Othering (e.g., Holt & Griffin, 2005). Finally, as introduced earlier, interest has grown into exploring the emotional and subjective experiences of occupying particular classed positions and being subjected to classism (e.g., Charlesworth, 2005). In the current climate of the imposition of punitive austerity measures (in the UK and in many other countries), we would argue that it is even more incumbent on researchers to further engage in research which exposes the pernicious effects of inequality at the level of the individual, groups and wider society.

## Summary

To date, social class has been insufficiently theorised and researched within psychology. Mainstream social psychological research on the impact of social class standing or SES has tended to obscure structural inequalities and power differentials. Instead, problems associated with poverty and lack of opportunity have been located at the level of the individual, and often there has been a suggestion that these are relatively 'fixed' or at least the result of psychologised shortcomings. In contrast, critical social psychological work in this area has afforded a central position to everyday experiences of class and classism, class discourse, power relations and subjectivities, with a view to disrupting dominant narratives which justify the status quo (e.g., around meritocracy). This work has in turn informed applied efforts to raise awareness around and challenge classism and practices which disadvantage working-class people in a variety of settings including educational, health and therapeutic contexts, and to agitate for social policy changes (e.g., around austerity).



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# 24

## Critical Disability Studies

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### Introduction: Definitions and Signposting

This is a chapter concerned with disability politics, interested in the possible offerings of critical psychology and engaged with a project questioning what it means to be a human being. We start by acknowledging the contributions of critical psychologists. Their retreat away from mainstream, traditional, positivistic and conservative psychologies is a form of mobility also desired by critical disability studies scholars and activists. Quite simply, psychology has damaged disabled people, and this human collateral continues to this day. When disability is defined as a problem and when that problem is located in an individual's body or mind, then there is only really one way we can go with disability and that is pathologisation. We know from our critical psychology colleagues—many of who are represented in this volume of work—that a discipline that individualises human diversity as human trouble will only ever exist as an antithetical community to that of disability activism. The latter, a community in which we locate ourselves, seeks not only to challenge pathologising accounts of disability but also to open up a discussion about the possibilities for human capital offered by disability. Our starting assumptions are twofold: disability is normatively understood in late capitalist societies as a

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deficient problem with(in) the person but, as we will develop in this chapter, disability might be better conceptualised as *the* place for reconfiguring our relationships with one another. And we need to find ways of relating with one another, especially in times of increased competition for labour and resources, rapid individualisation and rampant modes of economic production that stretch the gap ever wider between rich and poor.

But why might disability be the place for such potentially transformative thinking, especially in such desperate times? This question is one that we are very much familiar with. The absence of disability studies in much of the critical psychology work that we have surveyed suggests that questions abound around the relative worth of disability to add anything of political potency to counter-hegemonic theorising. Disability and disabled people are often excluded from critical work in scholarship and, to many extents, in activism. One reason for this is that the heart of radical thinking around and against psychology is an implicit assumption that the human being is physically able and mentally capable of emancipation once we have broken down class barriers, heteronormative discourses and racialised cultural imaginaries. This solitary freedom fighter is inherently an able-bodied (or as we would term ableist) soldier: a guerrilla fighter physiologically and psychologically tooled up for action. One might, for example, recall the agentic learner-activist of critical pedagogy so cherished by Paulo Friere (1970), who, when released from the limiting practices of apolitical curricula and hierarchical models of teacher-learner, will emerge triumphant. No one is saying that disabled people cannot fulfil such ambitions. And no one is knocking Paulo. What we *are* saying is that disability takes a more complicated view of the individual whilst also problematising commonsensical ideas around human autonomy and capacity. The politics of disabled people have always contested those forms of dependency that risk placing disabled people in positions of passivity. Disability politics have also demanded more nuanced reactions to dependence. The independent living movement, which grew in the States in the 1960s and now enjoys global reach, sought to galvanise physical and personable forms of support in order to ensure that disabled people remained outside of asylums and, in contrast, very much part of their local communities. Since those times, disabled people have created different kinds of inter-dependent support networks that have destabilised individualised constructions of independence and dependency. These networks have natural alliances with feminist ethics of care that celebrate mutuality, vulnerability and reliance as key characteristics of what it means to be human. It is okay to ask for support (e.g., Kittay, 2007). It is actually necessary to survive. And supporters, equally, should also recognise that without a request



for support they would not be there. In engaging with critical psychology, then, we come with one explicit mandate: to enhance the theory and politics of disability. And we do so very much of the opinion that disability brings a lot to the arena of critical psychology. First, though, let us begin by thinking about the subject of our interests.

## The Human Subject of Psychology and Disability Studies

In Couse Venn's now classic contribution to one of the first critical psychology pieces in the UK—Henriques et al.'s (1984) *Changing the Subject*—he asks: what is the subject of psychology. The short answer to this brilliant question, of course, is the human subject. Such a subject is of interest to those of us in disability studies too. The human subject remains, for many disabled people, an object of disavowal: it is rejected and desired in equal measure. Those of us working in disability politics often find ourselves baulking at the sight of the human. The reason is that the human so often idealised and represented in popular culture (and academia for that matter) is too often counter-posed to the ontological experience of being disabled. To *live as a disabled person* is to live with impairment in a contemporary society that is unquestionably hostile to disabled people. To *live a good life* as a human subject in an advanced capitalist society means reaching high standards of economic performance, attaining top-end educational or professional qualifications and exhibiting (vulgar) demonstrative acts of consumption. To live life as a disabled person means a life that is in many ways opposite to—or at least far from—standards associated with living the life as a valued human being. Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be out of work, physically excluded by barriers to external environments and denied access to educational opportunities due to questions and problems of access (Oliver, 1990; Titchkosky, 2011). Disabled people and the human subject appear, at times, to live different lives, in different worlds, as distinct untouchable entities. Not surprisingly, the category of human subject is one from which some disabled people actively disassociate themselves. This is evident, for example, in the writings of crip theorists and practices of crip artists, who seek to articulate new ways of life and living (Guter & Killacky, 2004). Crip life and crip subjects are less enshrined in the discourses of able-bodied and minded human achievement associated with work and shopping. Crip subjects desire and demand new ways of living life. Crip theory seeks new ways of thinking. And these new

ways of living and thinking resonate with a post-human condition: a self that is extended by associations with other selves, technologies and the wider environment (Braidotti, 2013). Crip selves seek to dissolve the human subject—as we normatively understand it—and expound new ways of being and becoming. Crip seeks to disrupt and destabilise the normative workings of human life: a normative life predicated on taken-for-granted kinds of human worth. Crip lives celebrate what Robert McRuer (2006) has termed being and becoming profoundly disabled. Disability is profound in the kinds of questions it asks of the human subject. Similar contestations of the human subject, while not described in the language of disability politics, can be found, of course, in critical psychology. Here we are thinking of the post-structuralist turn that radically destabilised the human being so loved by mainstream psychology in the late twentieth century. Foundational work such as that found in Burman and Parker's (1993) edited collection *Discourse Analytic Research* and exemplified by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology* encouraged us to imagine a human subject not bound within a body nor mind but an extended and distributed phenomenon. This was a human subject that could be voiced, spoken of and realised in language. And this was a human subject with a deep history of association with some of the big modernist ideas of capital, sexuality, truth and psychology. At the more radical end of these entanglements with language was relativism: that even death and furniture (never mind the human subject) were discursive complexities, rich with history, touched by politics and made in culture (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995). The human subject becomes a more dispersed thing: across time and space and always through the production of culture.

At the same time, curiously, the human subject remains a very desirable phenomenon. Let's be honest: who would not want to be recognised as human? There is something very desirable about the category of human, especially when to be human is to be normal, and to be normal is to be human. The disability theorist Rod Michalko (2015) has argued that the normal world is never really disrupted, disturbed nor decentred by the presence of disability (or crip for that matter). Normative practices—especially of neo-liberal advanced capitalist societies—are incredibly good at maintaining their modes of production, their character and their everyday practices. One of these normative practices relates to the human subject. The human subject is *the hub* around which all civilising practices are maintained: law, education, health and citizenship. The human subject is, as Nicolas Rose (2001) has put it, the politics of life itself. And this human category is a humanistic one: a self-governing, autonomous and self-sufficient subject (Braidotti, 2013). In order to be recognised as a human being, one needs to demonstrate one's

humanity. One way of doing this is by appealing to human rights legislation: a supranational discourse through which global citizens can appeal for recognition. To work, love and shop is to be human. And to be 100 % human, one needs to *really* consume, love and labour. To be superhuman—to be transhuman—of course is to achieve such standards of graft, sex and ingestion one can only imagine! And indeed transhuman organisations such as humanity + and other advocates of human enhancement have dared to imagine (<http://humanityplus.org/>).

On more mundane and ordinary levels, some critical psychological interventions have kept the human subject at the centre of their interventions. When one thinks, for example, of community psychology, one finds interventions into psychology and the social world that seek to honour the human subject. This is a subject that has been stripped of worth, well-being and self-respect by economic and cultural inequalities. Community psychologists such as Carolyn Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom and Siddiquee (2011) desire a time when the human subject is released from oppression and recast as an agent of social and political change. Their politics is not an anti-humanist one. Their politics is one firmly enshrined with a protection of the human. A major problem of knowledge production around the human subject can be found in the history and philosophy of psychology. A discipline that started with an interest in the human and quickly reduced itself to the study of the isolated individual in the scientist's laboratory; measured through the tools of natural science and subjected to the obsessive musings of the statistician. The critical psychology of community psychologists sought to rehabilitate the human subject—not through psychological discourse—but through a depsychologisation of the very processes that had reduced the human being to that of the subject of psychological research. Perhaps this is one reason why psycho-social debates have abounded in critical psychology in recent years (see Taylor, this volume). At the epicentre of these debates is a simple and profound question: should we not hold on to a sense of the human subject when years of deconstruction appear to have left us with very little more than relativist text?

Disability studies and critical psychology feel the impact of these debates and, as a consequence, find themselves caught up in a strange paradox. Perhaps this was ever thus. As Marx taught us: capitalist times are always contradictory ones. We desire *and* detest the human subject. We thrash out at its normalising humanistic tendencies whilst appealing to the human subject's existence when we denounce dehumanising practices. Our subjectivities and our sense of self are always constituted in social, political and cultural spaces. With this knowledge, we will want to critique any narrow humanistic sense of the human; to seek more expanded, crip, relational forms of the human. We will

also keep in mind the attraction of the human being to those people who have been excluded from this category. With our crip theories, deconstructionist tendencies and community psychological commitments to those dehumanised by society, where could this leave us?

## A DisHuman Perspective: A Resource for Critical Psychology

One possible answer to the question left hanging above is offered by an approach that we term DisHuman. This is a split positionality that acknowledges and celebrates a disavowal of the human described above. It begins from the following statement: what we describe below pertains exactly to how disabled people have been living their lives for many years. Our DisHuman manifesto (outlined at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/our-work/marginalised-humans/dishuman>):

- Unpacks and troubles dominant notions of what it means to be human;
- Celebrates the disruptive potential of disability to trouble these dominant notions;
- Acknowledges that being recognised as a regular normal human being is desirable, especially for those people who have been denied access to the category of the human;
- Recognises disability's intersectional relationship with other identities that have been considered less than human (associated with class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age);
- Aims to develop theory, research, art and activism that push at the boundaries of what it means to be human and disabled;
- Keeps in mind the pernicious and stifling impacts of ableism, which we define as discriminatory processes that idealise a narrow version of humanness and reject more diverse forms of humanity;
- Seeks to promote transdisciplinary forms of empirical and theoretical enquiry that breaks disciplinary orthodoxies, dominances and boundaries;
- Foregrounds disability as *the* space for interrogating oppression and furthering a post-human politics of affirmation.

While we do not have the space to develop all of these points, we understand this manifesto as fitting well with the disavowal of the human subject. This bifurcated position recognises that the human subject remains a category evoking recognition and identification but, simultaneously, is a

category necessarily troubled and disrupted by the presence of disability. The human subject at the epicentre of the human category is a humanistic one. This subject is the cherished sovereign self-governing and autonomous self that emerged through modernism to become the subject of psychology (Venn, 1984). Unlike some post-structuralist critical psychologists, our sense is that we can never totally do away with this category. This sense is not simply an intellectual one; it is a viewpoint developed through our engagement with disability politics, research and our own lived experiences of disability and crip community. Many disabled people continue to be marginalised in societal spaces as monstrous and distant others to the human subject. A key aim of disability politics relates to being recognised not as other but as human. But even as we make these statements, we feel uneasy. Why would anyone want to be given access to a human subject when this ontology brings with a whole host of normalising tendencies? Our unease is reduced by the presence of disability; precisely because disability politics has always deconstructed the humanistic epicentre of what it means to be human. Disability evokes connection, inter-dependence, expansion through the use of prosthetics and novel forms of support. And these extensions of the human—whilst seemingly pulling people in line with the demands of the humanistic subject—actually expand the narrow confines of the subject. This contradictory work upon the subject keeps a disavowal of the subject in what Puar (2012) terms a frictional tension: of crip and normative; dis and human; collective and individual.

Our DisHuman approach connects with a number of recent developments across critical disability studies. We consider this recent work to be responsive to ideas from critical psychology. Jenny Slater's (2015) work on disability and youth manages to circumnavigate the normative desires of disabled young people, alongside a celebration of their crip potential. For example, she shows the ways in which young disabled young women extoll the virtues of dressing in ways that might be deemed highly normative (make up and gendered dress) and indicators of the worth of performing as a self-contained female subject. At the same time, these very same young women draw upon (and employ) personal assistants in order to enable their access to places occupied by non-disabled young people; thus troubling the social capital at play and offer different versions of femininity and ways of performing the female subject. Anat Greenstein's (2015) work similarly combines a valuing and destabilisation of the human subject. Her work with disabled young people in segregated settings of schools illuminates the desires the young people have to be recognised as people in their own right (as valued students and learners) whilst

disrupting educational spaces in ways that open up new forms of pedagogy. Greenstein contests the able humanistic subject at the heart of much socially just and critical pedagogy and shows—through reference to her participatory research work with young disabled people—that student subjects demand expansive forms of connection and alliance with other students and teachers. Paradoxically, these alliances might permit learners as subjects to be recognised as autonomous in their own right, albeit with a shift in perspective and the culture of schooling. Our third example relates to the work of one of our authors—Liddiard (2012, 2013, 2014)—in which she revisits sexual desire in the company of disability. Whilst many of the disabled people she spoke to expressed their desires for sex and intimacy that might be deemed as illustrative of a typically sexually functioning and normatively gendered human subject, the input of prosthetics, personal assistants, technologies, and sometimes, sex workers, as well as the opening up of the totality of the body and impairment as sites of polymorphous pleasure, reconfigures how we think of and enact sex, desire and intimacy. All three of these examples showcase the possibilities for thinking about the humanist human subject and alternatives that might expand how we might think of the subject. They are, we would argue, quintessentially DisHuman.

## **Applying the DisHuman: A Community Psychology Project**

Whilst we have provided some examples from the critical disability studies literature about the ways in which we envisage the workings of the DisHuman, let us now turn to an area of critical psychology ripe for analysis: community psychology. As we indicated above, we already think that this sub-discipline of critical psychology invites a disavowal of the human subject. Below we draw briefly on a research project to consider the ways in which disability, community and the human subject interact.

From June 2013 to September 2015, a collaborative partnership of universities, and organisations of and for disabled people engaged in a research project “Big Society? Disabled people with learning disabilities and civil society” funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK. In a time of severe cuts to public services, the project was concerned with how people with learning disabilities were faring in the context of austerity. How, we wondered, were people with learning disabilities experiencing opportunities for work, self-advocacy and community inclusion?

The three strands of the project—work, self-advocacy and community inclusion—were drawn from these questions. In terms of community inclusion, we were particularly interested in people's experiences of circles of support. Circles of support come together to work with people who feel isolated or marginalised within their communities (for more details, visit [http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/home.asp?slevel=0z&parent\\_id=1](http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/home.asp?slevel=0z&parent_id=1)). During the project, we worked alongside five people with a circle of support and their circle members. Katherine, the full-time researcher on the project, attended each participant's circle meeting over an 18-month period. The number of times each circle met varied from four to nine times. This longitudinal ethnographic approach meant that Katherine became embedded in the circle first as a member. As part of the ethnography, Katherine attended some training for circle facilitators and then, when a circle facilitator became unexpectedly unwell, Katherine took over the facilitation of one of the circles and also acted as a facilitator for another circle when needed. Our work on this project has allowed us to connect critical disability studies and critical community psychology in a number of analytical moments.

## An Enlarged Voice

Circles work in split ways to foreground the voice of a person with intellectual disabilities. Working collaboratively, members of the circle centre the voice of an individual, and work to get members to honour, address and respond to the wishes of that person. In this way, then, a humanistic encounter is provoked: to take seriously the desires and ambitions of the individual at the centre of the circle. The provocative work of the circle does not end there, however. Instead, the voices around an individual become polyvocal: in that circle, members display and vocalise their views and commitments to the individual. Here, then, voice becomes extended beyond one individual and becomes part of a wider conversation between different members. Inevitably, this will prompt debate and disagreement at times and it is therefore crucial to keep in mind the focus of the discourse: the human subject at the centre of the circle.

At Matt's circle meeting, we began to discuss Matt's annual learning disability health check (in England people with learning disabilities are supposed to be offered an annual health check with their General Practitioner, in order to try and challenge the long-standing issue of health inequality in the lives of people so labelled). All the while we were talking, Matt sat contentedly on the sofa next



to his support worker, playing on his iPad. Occasionally, he looks up, makes a sound, and members of the circle stop and respond to his vocalisation: “Are you enjoying your game?” “Oh, you’re ready for your lunch!” Penny, Matt’s mother, is worried about the health check, they will want to take a blood sample. Matt hates that, really, really hates it! He will become distressed. A discussion follows among the circle members about whether it is necessary to take blood—there is no reason to think that Matt is ill, eventually everyone agrees that it would better not to have a blood test at this time. The facilitator agrees to draft a letter that all the circle members will sign, asking that the GP does not take blood from Matt at the health check.

Typical individualised psychological solutions often begin and end at the individual, who is often typically needing an intervention; permission is sought (sometimes in conjunction with others) and then the individual is worked with and often *on*. The assumption that the professional knows best, that a blood sample is a useful diagnostic is embedded in medical discourse, more commonly known as “doctor knows best”. The circle works differently by acknowledging that knowledge can come from different places. In appreciating assets that are distributed across the group, the issue is discussed and solutions posed based on strengths and capacity. Matt’s articulation through his mum results in a collective decision and a letter. The example above documents a scene of comfort, a circle meeting where Matt is present and seemingly comfortable being in and acknowledged within the circle. Part of this comfort is located precisely in the natural setting, the domestic. In community psychology, there is a commitment to work in natural settings, and here the circle takes place in Matt’s house where all circle members are invited. In contrast, the medical examination and potential blood test occurs in a surgery, a professionalised space where power is enshrined in roles (doctor, patient) and rules (consent and choice). Working with, not on people in natural settings are tenets of community psychology that distance it from the professional forms of psychology, awash with competencies and titles. Community psychology could be seen as a DisHuman form of psychology, enlarging notions of personhood and humanity.

## Expanding Autonomy

Circles will often seek to develop opportunities for people with learning disabilities to have access to leisure, work, education and their wider communities. Central to these concerns is the notion of fulfilling a humanistic self with opportunities to live aspects of life often denied to people in disabling

communities. At the same time, though, the responsibilities that come with experiencing community life are not left solely with an individual. Instead, the circle expands notions of autonomy, making this a joint enterprise of the circle members and others who might be brought in to assist with community involvement.

Henry is eighteen. His circle came together to focus on Henry's transition from school to life beyond school. In England, as in many other global North countries, access to employment is often denied to people with learning disabilities and transition services have traditionally had little success in supporting young people into employment. Henry's circle members, including his parents and friends, set out to support Henry's aspirations. Through a person centred review, drawing on all the circle members' voices as well as Henry's, it emerged that Henry wanted to work as a gardener, and through their local contacts and networks they were able to find a work experience opportunity for Henry.

In community psychology where the adage "giving psychology away" is taken seriously, psychological expertise may be offered alongside other experiences, viewpoints and expertise—all of which are considered valid. The action takes place through dialogue and collaboration, based on conscientisation (Freire, 1970) where awareness and action are enmeshed. In the example above, critical consciousness is brought to bear on Henry's employment opportunities. By radically decentring what is normally offered or assumed to be meaningful engagement for people labelled as having learning difficulties, circle members explore and enact change from the bottom up. This occurs in a literal sense, the process of gardening as well as in the metaphorical sense. We can imagine what Henry's presence contributes to the garden centre, the public and the workers, creating more potential conscientisation in ripples. Henry in the garden centre is the critical pedagogue problematising and transforming consciousness. The example also shows systems in action; systems thinking is drawn upon in community psychology to highlight the embeddedness of people, behaviours and places (Kagan et al., 2011). Circle members have their own circles of support (less formalised and articulated as such) but circles nonetheless. These networks are drawn upon to secure a setting for Henry where his skills and desires contribute. Prilleltensky, a well-known community psychologist, points out that to promote well-being, we need an understanding of sites, signs, sources and strategies. In this call for paradigm shift (2005), he notes that well-being is simultaneously personal, relational and collective, each with diverse signs, determinants and strategies. To promote

well-being, we also need to understand the process in four domains: temporal, ecological, participation and capabilities. The complex shift in human services advocated by Prilleltensky is circles in action—whereby humanity, strengths and community orientation are natural allies to promote well-being at all levels. Patienthood and services which are reactive, deficit based and alienating are medicalised services that are neither humane nor DisHuman.

## Distributing Competence

Circles contest the commonly held idea that people with learning disabilities are not capable of living a life as well or as efficiently as non-disabled people. This starting assumption re-sites people so labelled in the category of competent humanistic subject. But it does not stop there. Instead, in ways commensurate with a community psychology approach, the circle seeks to identify significant others who not only recognise people with learning disabilities as human subjects but also often that subject support in ways that extend competence beyond an individual self. The human subject at the heart of a circles enjoys a distributed relationship with others: embedded within a community of other subjects who work towards common goals and ambitions.

Marie is in her seventies. She lives in a small group home in a town in the north of England. When her circle began, Marie had no one in her life who was not paid to be there—her only networks were with paid support workers. Cate, her circle facilitator, formed a circle with Marie's support workers with the aim of extending Marie's social networks. Marie had previously been a churchgoer and Cate took Marie back to church where she began to build relationships with other members of the church community. After a short while members of the church began to visit Marie for a coffee and a chat, and a little while later, Cate asked two people if they would like to attend the circle meetings—they agreed. Marie has been knitting and baking for the church fete and enjoying the company of her fellow churchgoers.

The ideas of capacity building inherent in community psychology literature see individuals as inherently resourceful and as bringing something to the table. Marie has strengths that make her a valuable member of the community, but somewhere along the road, networks have been severed. Community as social ties, sometimes framed as “capital” (Putnam, 1995), allows a focus on support as being about the material, the emotional, self-esteem and social integration. This lens on the wider community that Marie lives in engages with the more distal factors for potential change rather than the proximal ones. Kagan et al.

(2011) posit six principles that should guide the practice of critical community psychology-respecting diversity, innovation in practice, liberation, commitment, critical reflection and humility. We see with Marie that circle engagement works very much along these lines. The circle is there to work with Marie and not to function purely as a social community or as paid support/friendship—the aim is to enable Marie to be a community member. Circle members work with diversity through inclusion in their church, showing innovative practice by in the first instance drawing on support workers and then engaging fellow churchgoers in the circle. This commitment enables a long-term and sustainable outcome whereby Marie is accepted and contributes to the church community through being there, knitting and baking. At the heart of a circle is critical reflection, a space to place common sense theorising and practice and donate time to the agenda (again a collaborative endeavour). Finally *humility*, which builds on Kelly's (1971) principle in which we “give away the by-line” and includes the acknowledgement that we may get things wrong, we may not have all of the answers, and with this, we must be reflexive in detecting problems, correcting course, and preventing harm to others through our work. Circle members enact this humility by revisiting, reviewing and to use Martin Baro's (1994) notion of accompaniment. Accompaniment is the practice of solidarity through walking side by side with others on a common journey. It presumes not uncritical deference to one person or another, but equality, with the expectation that differences in experience, formal and informal education, skills and more will allow each participant to contribute significantly and uniquely to the struggle (Lynd & Grobacic, 2008). Accompaniers can play an important role in listening to and amplifying the stories of those voices that might not otherwise be heard. Circle members act as accompaniers and can encourage others also to be accompaniers—here the churchgoers become circle members, and crucially, friends. The Big Society project espoused by the Conservative government in the UK was always of course occurring naturally and circles of support showcases this. At the epicentre of this philosophy is a human endeavour of people working together in a socially just way. It works as a community of practice, where learning, relating and doing shifts as people participate in it (Lawthom, 2011).

## Conclusion

This chapter weaves together the potential allies of critical psychology with community psychology and the DisHuman from critical disability studies. Whilst being critical is very much admired in terms of thinking and praxis, it also works to destabilise, indeed in very much the same way that disability

does. Disability then is at the heart of being critical, although, as the body is a problematic metaphor, is disability the rhizome that should be cherished? In the examples above of Henry, Marie and Matt, we see what circles as rhizomatic communities entail. We demonstrate the possible shifts in thinking and action that disability brings to the party in the form of the DisHuman and its manifesto. Using circles of support as exemplars of radical practice forces us to hold in frictional tension what Puar (2012) positions as of crip and normative; dis and human; collective and individual. During increasingly neo-liberal and austere times, there is a need to be critical but that critical lens should not be ableist. As one of the founders of the Frankfurt School of critical theory Max Horkheimer (1972) reminds us, “the future of humanity depends on the existence today of the critical attitude” (p. 242). The critical attitude must be one that holds in tension the dis and human, the collective and individual, in order for a critical psychology that is meaningful.

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# 25

## Intersectionality: An Underutilized but Essential Theoretical Framework for Social Psychology

Lisa Bowleg

### Police Brutality in the News: An Introduction to Intersectionality

*F.B.I. Investigating Police Accounts of Black Woman's Death in Custody.* (Rogers, 2015a)

*Questions After Unarmed Ohio Man Is Killed in Traffic Stop.* (Rogers, 2015b)

*Jarring Image of Police's Use of Force at Texas Pool Party.* (Cole-Frowe & Fausset, 2015)

*Texas Police Fatally Shoot Unarmed College Football Player* (The Associated Press, 2015)

These grim US newspaper headlines—from July and August 2015 alone!—reveal the disturbing frequency of excessive police force against Black people in the USA. Three common threads link these cases: White male law enforcement officers as perpetrators, unarmed Black people as victims, and cell phone or dashboard camera images of the violence. The focus on Sandra Bland, the woman who died in police custody in Texas (Rogers, 2015a), and the “jarring” image of a White male police officer violently tackling a young Black woman in a bathing suit at a pool party in Texas (Cole-Frowe & Fausset, 2015) notwithstanding, the media and policymakers have framed excessive police force against Black people primarily as a

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Black male problem (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). Consequently, critical gaps exist in the public's consciousness about police brutality against Black girls and women and, in turn, in the ability to develop empirical and policy responses to the problem.

Social psychology, “the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another” (Myers, 2010, p. 5), has substantially advanced understanding about social issues and problems such as racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, and how they influence social problems such as the police brutality captured in the aforementioned headlines. Prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination are forms of biases against members of other social groups. Prejudice involves (mostly) negative emotional attitudes toward a group, stereotypes involve cognitive attributions or generalizations about groups, and discrimination is negative behavior toward a group or its members (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010; Fiske, 2015). Social psychologists use systematic and rigorous research methods to examine social psychological phenomena such as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. For example, a rich body of social psychological research on social categorization explains why people tend to perceive and categorize police brutality as a Black male problem—people tend to pay more attention to individual members of groups that they deem to be prototypes of the entire group (see, e.g., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; Zarate & Smith, 1990). Thus, most people see men as exemplars of human groups. Cue the group Black people, and most people will think Black *men*. Cue White people, and most people will think White *men*. But as is often the case in mainstream social psychology, where the individual is the primary unit of analysis, social-structural factors—social, political, and economic factors, beyond the individual level, that influence and constrain the health of individuals, communities, and societies (Blankenship, Bray, & Merson, 2000)—are often neglected as explanations. Instead, mainstream social psychological research often presents results about social categorization as natural and neutral, neglecting the role of power and social inequality. Critical social psychology counteracts this mainstream stance with an emphasis on “challenge[ing] social institutions, practices and power relations—including the discipline of psychology—that contribute to forms of inequality and oppression” (Gough, MacFadden, & McDonald, 2013, p. 4), making critical social psychology and intersectionality natural allies.

Intersectionality is a critical, theoretical, and analytical framework that highlights how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (SES), and disability (to name a few)

intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reveal interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality represents a radical departure from “single-axis” thinking—race or gender primarily or only—toward a “matrix” perspective (Crenshaw, 1989) that renders the notion that social identities or oppressions could be merely added or ranked, nonsensical. Social identities and the social inequality based on them are interlocking and mutually constituted such that experiences based on one identity (e.g., race) cannot be fully understood without its intersection with other key social identities (e.g., gender, class) (Collins, 1991).

Thus, whereas mainstream social psychologists perceive the tendency for people to think of Black males when they think of police violence against Black people primarily in terms of cognitive processing—social categorization—a social psychologist using an intersectionality-informed perspective would also emphasize the role of social power. Social psychologists Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), for example, highlight how ideologies such as androcentrism—the notion that men are or should be the norm for humans; ethnocentrism—the ideology that one’s own group and its norms are universal; and heterosexism—the ideology that heterosexuality is or should be the prototypical norm of human sexuality—function to erase the experiences of people with multiple and intersecting subordinate social identities. *Intersectional invisibility* is the term that Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach coined to describe the failure to recognize people with multiple subordinate and/or stigmatized social identities (e.g., Black girls and women, Latino gay and bisexual men) as core members of their constituent groups.

This invisibility has real-world implications for interventions, public policy, and social justice because you can’t research or develop solutions to social problems that you can’t see. This is the impetus behind #SayHerName, a recent US campaign that aims to end the intersectional invisibility surrounding Black girls’ and women’s experiences with police violence (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015). The campaign aims to expand understanding about the structural context and impact of law enforcement in Black US communities with a gender-inclusive focus on girls, women, and transgender people. This is also the aim of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement (2015), which was created in the USA in 2012 after a volunteer patrol officer was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager on his way home from a convenience store. #BlackLivesMatter describes itself as a movement that “affirms the lives of Black queer and

trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.”

But whereas intersectionality has been central to the work of social justice activists and disciplines such as women’s and gender studies and critical legal studies, social psychology has been relatively slow to adopt intersectionality as a critical analytical lens. This slowness is puzzling because social psychology has long been in the vanguard with theory and research about the cognitive and social processes that undergird stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Moreover, social psychology is applied; the field has a long history of applying social psychological theory and research to everyday real-world problems. Gordon Allport’s (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*, for example, remains one of the most influential works on prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination within social psychology. This remains the case despite criticism of several of Allport’s key posits: namely, that prejudice is rooted in cognitive factors such as erroneous generalizations and that prejudice can be reduced through intergroup contact under favorable conditions (see, e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000); that racism is universal to human psychology rather than grounded in the historical exploitation of groups of people (Gaines & Reed, 1995); and that difference rather than prejudice explains intergroup conflict (see, e.g., Yueh-Ting, 1996). Nonetheless, social psychologists remain at the forefront of some of the most pioneering work in this area. For example, in 2014, Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt, a social psychologist at Stanford University in the USA, earned a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship—often called a “genius grant”—for her research on how racial stereotypes about Black men as criminals influence visual processing in ways that prompt people to more quickly associate Black men’s faces with objects such as guns and basketballs (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004). Dr. Eberhardt and colleagues have also conducted research that demonstrates that more stereotypically Black male defendants are more likely to be sentenced to death than their less stereotypical counterparts (Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006). Philip Atiba Goff, another social psychologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, is co-founder and president of the Center for Policing Equity (CAPE), an institute that facilitates research partnerships between social scientists and law enforcement agencies to improve racial and gender equity in policing (Center for Policing Equity, 2015).

These exemplars notwithstanding, intersectionality remains within its infancy within social psychology. But this is changing as a small but growing number of social psychologists have begun to advocate for intersectionality as a critical framework for social psychology (see, e.g., Bowleg, 2008; Earnshaw,

Smith, Cunningham, & Copenhaver, 2013; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Goff & Kahn, 2013; Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Zucker, Fitz, & Bay-Cheng, 2015). They join the ranks of multidisciplinary intersectionality scholars who have posited intersectionality as vital analytical lens for “identifying paradoxical outcomes (as meaningful and not just as anomalous or accidental)” (May, 2015, p. 5), “challeng[ing] fundamental assumptions about psychological processes, and methodology” ... and [providing] “different interpretations of the same facts” (Clarke & McCall, 2013, p. 350). Intersectionality is thus an essential theoretical framework for social psychology because it offers a more nuanced, complex, complete, and critical understanding of historically marginalized or understudied groups and experiences, such as policy brutality against Black girls and women.

Contemporary intersectionality scholars have begun to transcend discussions of defining intersectionality in favor of an emphasis on what intersectionality “does or can do” (May, 2015, p. 19). Intersectionality invites “both/and” thinking; identifies hidden gaps in theoretical, empirical, and everyday knowledge; challenges conventional thinking; and spotlights power, privilege, and social structure. I’ll use another set of recent US newspaper headlines as an example. It involves one of my pet peeves, the conventional and ubiquitously used phrase, “women and minorities.” Recently, a spate of World Wide Web, newspaper, and radio stories described the diversity initiatives and employee demographics at large technology companies such as Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Intel. The main finding was (surprise!): White men represent the vast majority of employees at these companies despite the companies’ well-touted intentions to increase diversity. Article after article reported the news relevant to “women and minorities” as if these were two mutually exclusive groups. Here’s a flavor of some of the reporting: “Intel Pledges \$125 Million for Start-ups that Back Women, Minorities” (McBride, 2015) and, “The numbers confirmed the doubters’ worst suspicions: Minorities accounted for just a tiny fraction of most of the companies’ workforces and no company could say that women made up 50% of its employees” (Jones & Trop, 2015). Other reports discussed the tech companies’ racial/ethnic data separately from the gender data, which presumably replicated how the tech companies presented the demographic data in their reports. *The Wall Street Journal’s* website posted a nifty interactive graphic that allows viewers to sort companies’ leadership or technology jobs by “Women vs. Men” or “Minority vs. White” (Molla & Lightner, 2015). All of the reporting perpetuated the invisibility of racial/ethnic minority women employees, and neglected to mention the role of power in maintaining the intersectional invisibility status quo.

I'll show how intersectionality illuminates this subject beyond the conventional presentation of single-axis demographics with a series of intersectionality-informed questions: What demographic data exists for racial/ethnic minority women at these companies? Why was that information not presented? Why is intersectional data mentioned for White men, but no other group, and what does orienting the story around that demographic reveal about power and privilege? What social-structural factors explain these disparities (e.g., historical legacies of institutionalized discrimination in education and employment, in-group biases where employers are more likely to hire within their own social networks, workplace climate, presence or absence of formal and informal mentorship opportunities). Who benefits from the stark disparity? Critical questions such as these form the crux of intersectionality.

Nuances, complications, and complexities abound in the real world. Intersectionality actively embraces these with an analytical framework that "without doubt, complicates everything" (Hankivsky & Christoffersen, 2008, p. 279). Intersectionality uses a matrix—versus single-axis—perspective to investigate "how power and privilege operate on several levels at once (experiential, epistemological, political, and structural) and across (and within) categories of experience and personhood (including race, gender, sexuality, disability, social class, and citizenship)" (May, 2015, p. 23). Intersectionality is thus vital to social psychology's ability to empirically address many of the grave and understudied social issues and problems that disproportionately buffet people from historically marginalized groups. The failure to think intersectionally has important and substantial implications for all aspects of the social psychological research process including but not limited to: what social groups and/or issues are deemed important to study, how research problems are framed (or not), the types of research questions posed and/or hypotheses tested, research methods and analyses used, interpretations made, conclusions drawn, and the types of applied solutions, interventions, or public policies developed to address social psychological issues and problems.

To this end, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate why intersectionality is such an essential analytical framework for social psychology. I have organized the chapter into four sections. In the first section, I provide a historical overview of intersectionality. In the second section, using some of intersectionality's core tenets as a foundation, I critique some traditional assumptions of mainstream social psychological theory and research. In the third section, I highlight some current trends in intersectional social psychological research. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion about why social psychology has been so slow to embrace intersectionality, summarize the advantages of a more intersectional social psychology, and recommend some key references for further reading.

## Intersectionality 101: A Brief Historical Overview

“And ain’t I a woman?” Freed slave, Sojourner Truth (1851) posed this question in her famous speech to the 1851 (US) Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio. The core of Truth’s insightful and stinging question, was her awareness of how the intersection of her race and gender as a Black woman was mutually constituted—her experience as a woman could not be understood without its intersection with her race (Collins, 1991, 2015)—and the social inequality based on this intersection compared with that of White women:

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman?

Fast forward to the Memphis Sanitation Worker’s Strike in 1968 where sanitation workers—mostly Black men—went on strike to protest dangerous (a trash compactor had accidentally crushed two workers to death) and discriminatory work conditions (Black sewer workers were sent home without pay during inclement weather; White supervisors stayed on the job with pay), and advocate for fairer pay, benefits, and safer working conditions (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2015). In the iconic photographs from the protests, Black men carry signs that assert: “I am a man” (see images at Google, 2015), a visual depiction of intersectionality. The intersectional issue here: their race was mutually intertwined with their gender, denying them the gender privilege that most White men enjoyed. In the 1970s, the Combahee River Collective (1977), a group of Black feminists released a statement that eloquently articulated their commitment to “struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and ... develop[ing an] integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (p. 272). It is noteworthy that each of these intersectional statements—Truth’s, the sanitation workers’ signs, and the Collective’s—emanate from lived experience, not abstract academic theory.

Indeed, intersectionality is not a theory in the tradition of many of the key theories with which students of social psychology may be familiar. Intersectionality is not an empirical or testable theory in that sense; it was not designed to be (Syed, 2010). Because the title of Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1991 *Stanford Law Review* article was the first to explicitly include the word *intersectionality*, many intersectionality scholars credit Crenshaw as having coined it. This coinage credit however elides the histori-



cal legacy of scores of everyday people (see, e.g., Truth, 1851), Black feminist activists (see, e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1977) and scholars (see, e.g., Collins, 1991; Lorde, 1984) who, despite not explicitly using the word *intersectionality*, nonetheless aptly described and mobilized against White feminist discourses about gender inequality that often excluded Black women, and anti-racist discourses that often focused primarily on Black men. Moreover, Collins (2015) has criticized the notion of Crenshaw's coinage of intersectionality as "resembling colonial discoveries" (p. 10), and argues that doing so undermines Crenshaw's substantial contribution of advancing intersectionality as a critical framework for addressing violence against women of color, empowering women of color through identity politics, and fostering social justice and community mobilization. This focus on coinage also obscures the fact that Crenshaw's article was the first to "name" and integrate the ideas of social movement politics relevant to intersectionality into the academy (Collins, 2015).

Indeed, since its academic debut, intersectionality has traveled far from its academic moorings in women's and gender studies (Collins, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Smith, 1983) and feminist legal studies (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 1995a, 1995b) to flourish within fields of psychology focused on gender (Shields, 2008), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Intersectionality has also made recent inroads within social science disciplines such as public health (Bowleg, 2012) and mainstream psychology (Cole, 2009).

This multidisciplinary travel has engendered numerous discussions, debates, and criticism about topics such as the definition of intersectionality (Collins, 2015; Davis, 2008), which works and scholars should be cited (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013), the best methods and practices for studying intersectionality (Bowleg, 2008; Syed, 2010; Warner, 2008), intersectionality as critical praxis (Collins, 2015), and host of other criticisms that are beyond the scope of this chapter (for more information, see May, 2015). These tensions notwithstanding, contemporary intersectionality scholars offer novel ways of thinking about intersectionality as action. For intersectionality scholars Cho et al. (2013), intersectionality is:

An analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses[. T]hen what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term "intersectionality," nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional—whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline—is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. (p. 795)



Pursuant to this notion of intersectionality as an analytical stance, I discuss in the next section how intersectionality can enhance social psychology.

## Thinking About Social Psychology Intersectionally

In line with contemporary posits that frame intersectionality as an analytical way of thinking (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2015; May, 2015), I highlight in this section what intersectionality can do for social psychology in terms of embracing the real-world complexities relevant to multiple interlocking social identities and the social-structural context of power and privilege. I focus on three tacit assumptions of social psychology: (1) the individual as the primary unit of analysis; (2) the notion that social identity is singular rather than multidimensional; and (3) the notion that White, middle-class Westerners—college students in particular—are normative.

*Individual as the Unit of Analysis.* As with the discipline of psychology as a whole, individuals are the primary units of analysis in social psychology—“the individual is the starting point of theory, the unit of analysis in research, and the target for intervention” (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003, p. 189). Social psychological theories applied to HIV prevention exemplify the limitations of an exclusively individualistic approach. Many of psychosocial health theories highlight the role of social cognitive factors such as risk perception, attitudes toward condoms, and self-efficacy in determining whether or not people will take steps to protect themselves from sexual HIV risk (for a review of these theories, see Noar, 2005). However, an examination of the populations that are most disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS globally—Black people in sub Saharan Africa, followed by the Caribbean, and in the USA, Black women and men, particularly Black men who have sex with men (MSM)—yields a far more complex understanding of the nexus between HIV risk and individual level and social-structural factors such as poverty (Denning, DiNenno, & Wiegand, 2011), incarceration (Harawa & Adimora, 2008), gender imbalances in heterosexual relationships (Amaro, 1995), gender ideologies and discourses (Bowleg, Heckert, Brown, & Massie, 2015; Bowleg et al., 2011), and heterosexism (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001; Jeffries, Marks, Lauby, Murrill, & Millett, 2012).

In the USA, for example, there is evidence of a generalized HIV/AIDS epidemic (i.e., > 1%) in impoverished Black urban communities (Denning & DiNenno, 2010; Denning et al., 2011). The fact that this elevated risk for HIV persists even when the sexual and drug use behaviors of young Black adults are lower than their White counterparts who engage in riskier sexual

and drug use underscores the limitations of examining HIV risk through a primarily individual lens (Cochran & Mays, 1993; Hallfors, Iritani, Miller, & Bauer, 2007). Intersectionality counters this individual as unit of analysis limitation with an explicit focus on the role of power and structure. Indeed, a central tenet of intersectionality is how multiple interlocking social identities at the individual level of experience intersect with social inequalities at the macro structural level. Let's use the example of the disproportionate incidence of HIV among young Black MSM (ages 13–24), who in 2010 were twice as likely as their White and Latino peers to be diagnosed with HIV infection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Whereas a traditional social psychological lens would frame this disparity in terms of individual-level factors such as lack of knowledge about how to reduce HIV risk or unfavorable attitudes about condom use, an intersectionality-informed lens—as with other social ecological approaches (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Krieger, 2012; Latkin & Knowlton, 2005)—frames the disparity beyond just the individual level. This framing is critically important because it informs the development of interventions (e.g., multilevel interventions that include individual and social-structural components) that can more effectively address the “fundamental causes” of social disparity and inequality (see, e.g., Link & Phelan, 1995).

*Social Identity as Singular.* The notion that people have multiple social identities and not just a single identity (e.g., racial identity, *or* ethnic identity, *or* gender identity, *or* sexual identity as gay, lesbian, or bisexual) remains rare in social psychology (Howard, 2000). Key social identity theories such as well, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), posit that people categorize themselves in terms of their group memberships (e.g., race, gender), and in turn identify with groups with whom they share a sense of belonging or common identity (i.e., in-groups). The theory also notes that people also tend to perceive other non-group members as distinctively different (i.e., out-groups). These social identities are associated with prejudice and discrimination because people, an abundant body of social psychological research demonstrates, tend to favor their own groups (often called in-group bias or favoritism).

Intersectionality problematizes this conventional view of social identity with another core tenet: social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are not uni-dimensional and independent, but multidimensional and interlocking. They cannot be separated and added. Intersectionality thus complicates Social Identity Theory's view that a single or primary group exists with which to identify. The Combahee River Collective's (1977) statement eloquently encapsulates the notion of multiple group membership linked to multiple oppression: “We also find it difficult to separate race from class from

sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously” (p. 275). The vast majority of Social Identity Theory research has focused on single social identities raising multiple questions about how people with multiple social identities—Latina lesbians, say—conceptualize their in-groups and out-groups, and the extent to which the prevailing single identity assumptions found in conventional social identity research holds for diverse subordinate groups.

Another issue with conventional social psychology’s focus on identities is the presumption that social identities are stable and fixed, rather than dynamic. Social identities are socially constructed, meaning that they vary historically, geographically, politically, culturally, and by context. Take a Kikuyu man for example, a member of the largest ethnic group in Kenya, who immigrates to the USA and is thereafter considered to be Black or African American regardless of his own social identification. An intersectional lens highlights the role of power in how people identify and how they are perceived. Slavery and other institutionalized systems of oppression and discrimination allowed White people to retain their ethnicity; not so subordinated racial groups from whom ethnic identities were stripped in favor of a racial homogenization (Guthrie, 1998; Waters, 2003). Or, take a woman who once identified as heterosexual, but now identifies as lesbian or bisexual. The role of context on social identity is also understudied within mainstream social psychology. Social psychologist Kay Deaux’s (1993) research has demonstrated how shifting contexts (e.g., being a racial/ethnic minority student on a predominantly White college campus) can shape identity, prompting Deaux to advocate for a reconstruction of Social Identity Theory to accommodate realities such as this. To be fair, it must be noted that some intersectionality scholars have also criticized intersectionality for presuming that social identities are fixed (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Nash, 2008).

The tendency of social psychology to neglect the role and historical legacy of power and privilege, and how social structures bolster social identification and categorization processes in the first place, obscures the institutionalization of in-group and out-group biases. Think back to the example of racial/ethnic minority and gender diversity at technological companies that I mentioned earlier. The fact that these companies are majority White and male is neither random nor accidental; it reflects an institutionalized form of in-group favoritism designed to privilege and safeguard resources for White men. But whereas social psychology seeks to explain social phenomena such as in-group bias objectively and neutrally; “intersectionality is not (and does not aim to be) neutral” (May, 2015, p. 28). Social justice is a primary goal of intersectionality. Thus, an intersectional perspective on demographic dis-

parities in employment provides “a different interpretation of the same facts” (Clarke & McCall, 2013, p. 350), another key benefit to social psychology.

*White Western College Students as the Norm.* Social psychology is replete with assumptions that White people—White Western college students in particular—are (or should be) the norm, and that social psychological theories and research are universally generalizable (Cauce, 2011; Graham, 1992; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Henry, 2008; Sears, 1986). Henrich et al. (2010) coined the acronym WEIRD—Westernized educated people from industrialized, rich democracies—to describe the group that constitutes the majority of research participants in psychology studies. Curiously, with the notable exception of Graham’s (1992) article, “Most of the subjects were White and middle class,” race—Whiteness specifically—is often absent from most of the critiques of the college student bias and the tendency to generalize social phenomena based on their experiences. The failure to mention the race of White participants in these and many other articles within social psychology underscores the role of power in social psychology; a privilege that is omnipresent but rarely acknowledged in terms of its influence on social psychology as a whole.

Intersectionality, by contrast, flips the traditional script of White people as the norm and takes as its vantage point the experiences of people from multiple historically oppressed and marginalized groups (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). With this starting point in mind, the experiences of underrepresented people in social psychology, and not the extent to which they may deviate from the norms of White Western middle-class people, becomes the point from which to pose new research questions and develop effective interventions.

## Current Trends in Intersectionality Research in Social Psychology

Although intersectionality is relatively inchoate within social psychology, current trends portend an exciting future for the discipline as more social psychologists begin to incorporate intersectionality in their work. In this section, I review some current trends in intersectional research on social categorization, stereotypes, and discrimination. Collectively, these studies prompt new insights and challenge many conventional social psychological assumptions.

*Social categorization.* An abundant body of social psychology research documents that people rely on three salient categories—race, sex, and age—to encode information about the category to which an observed person belongs

(see, e.g., Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Traditionally, an implicit assumption of the encoding process has been that people encode each of these categories uni-dimensionally; that is, people see race, or age, or sex as independent and discrete categories. Using an intersectionality perspective, new social categorization research shows the complexity of encoding. In one study, a predominantly White sample of undergraduates viewed photos of Black and White women and men between the ages of 18 and 29 (to limit age categorizations) (Goff et al., 2008). The researchers wanted to assess how the undergraduates' categorization of the race of the face in the photo would influence judgments about the accuracy of gender, particularly when looking at Black women. The study found that research participants categorized the faces multidimensionally—in terms of race *and* gender not just by a single category such as race *or* gender. But the study uncovered a complication: participants made substantial errors when processing race and gender simultaneously. Specifically, participants made significantly more errors when categorizing the gender of Black women, than any other group, supporting the finding that perceivers associate Blackness with maleness.

*Stereotypes.* Social psychologists are also posing novel intersectional questions about stereotyping. Traditionally, social psychologists have examined stereotyping as a single-axis phenomenon. In one of the first studies to examine cultural stereotypes at the intersection of gender *and* ethnicity, social psychologists Ghavami and Peplau (2013) asked undergraduates to describe ten stereotypes for 1 of 17 groups (e.g., Asian Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Middle Eastern Americans, or Whites; men or women) or generate ten attributes of gender-by-ethnic groups (e.g., Latina men, Black women). In support of intersectionality's assertion that social identities are mutually constituted, the study found that gender and ethnic stereotypes included distinct elements (e.g., Latina women, but not men, were seen as feisty or curvy; Asian American men but not women, were perceived as physically small or studious) (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013) that did not represent the mere addition of gender and ethnic stereotypes.

*Discrimination.* Historically, most of the research on racial discrimination has aggregated people's experiences primarily or exclusively by race (e.g., Brown et al., 2000; Krieger, Kosheleva, Waterman, Chen, & Koenen, 2011; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Although a small body of literature on *gendered racism* (Jackson, Phillips, Hogue, & Curry-Owens, 2001; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008; Wingfield, 2007) or *gender-specific racism* (Krieger, Rowley, Herman, Avery, & Phillips, 1993) exists to describe Black girls' and women's—and to a lesser extent Black men's (see Schwing, Wong, & Fann, 2013)—experiences of discrimination

at the intersection of race, gender, and class, in general, historically, most research on discrimination has focused primarily on race, and not the intersection of race with other key social identities such as sexual identity or gender. This is changing however. Current trends in intersectionality-informed research include the development of new measures to assess intersectional discrimination among groups that have not traditionally been the focus of intersectionality such as racial/ethnic minority LGBTs (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Bowleg, 2013) or Black young and adult men (Bowleg, English, et al., 2015; Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche, & Tschann, 2013; Schwing et al., 2013; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2010). For instance, to address the specific types of experiences at the intersection of race *and* gender that Black heterosexual men recounted in the qualitative phase of one of my HIV prevention studies—having people lock car doors when Black men passed, cabs refusing to stop to pick up Black men—my research team found that traditional discrimination measures did not represent these experiences and developed a quantitative measure to do so (Bowleg, English, et al., 2015). Similarly, clinical psychologist Kimberly Balsam and her colleagues (2011) developed the LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale to assess microaggressions—mundane, subtle, and interpersonal manifestations of discrimination (Sue et al., 2007)—that racial/ethnic minority LGBTs in the USA experienced at the intersection of race/ethnicity and sexual identity.

## Toward a More Intersectional Social Psychology

Throughout this chapter, I have asserted that intersectionality is an essential analytical framework for mainstream social psychology. This argument raises an obvious question: if intersectionality is so indispensable to enhancing social psychology's ability to address some of the most complicated and complex real-world social psychological issues and problems, why has social psychology been so slow to embrace intersectionality? At least three answers apply. First, the lack of guidelines about how to conduct intersectionality research means that even social psychologists who want to integrate intersectionality into their research may find themselves baffled about how to do intersectionality research, particularly using quantitative methods (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; Warner, 2008). Second, many quantitative research designs have inherent limitations that violate key tenets of intersectionality such as assumptions about the independence of variables (Bowleg, 2008) or  $2 \times 2$  factorial designs that limit the number of identities that researchers can explore beyond two (Warner, 2008). Third, despite a greater emphasis on inter- or

multidisciplinary perspectives within the academy, most psychological theory and research is *intra*-disciplinary (e.g., between clinical and counseling psychologists) rather than interdisciplinary (e.g., between historians, social psychologists, sociologists) (Grzanka, 2015). The dearth of intersectionality work across the disciplines is important because “in the context of intersectionality research, training, practice, and advocacy, ... synergizing diverse and seemingly unrelated perspectives is often the key to understanding and addressing complex inequalities” (Grzanka, 2015). Consequently, unless students or social psychologists venture beyond psychology’s disciplinary boundaries to other disciplines such as women’s or gender studies, they might never have an opportunity to learn about intersectionality. With the notable exception of Cole’s (2009) insightful article on intersectionality published in the *American Psychologist*, the signature journal of the American Psychological Association, it is worth noting that most of the contemporary work on intersectionality in psychology stems from *Sex Roles*, an “interdisciplinary behavioral science journal offering a feminist perspective” (Springer, 2015) that published two special issues on intersectionality, one in 2008 (Shields, 2008), and the other in 2013 (Parent et al., 2013).

This disciplinary lag notwithstanding, intersectionality will likely continue to flourish within social psychology (and mainstream psychology as well). Intersectionality’s successful travel across an ever growing number of academic disciplines, national borders, and historical time periods bolsters this view (see also Davis, 2008). For social psychology, intersectionality’s indispensability lies in its ability to:

- promote complex critical thinking about the matrix of social identities and social inequality, rather than simplistic single-axis thinking (May, 2015);
- prompt novel research questions about understudied and “intersectionally invisible” populations and experiences (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008);
- center the experiences of subordinate understudied groups to challenge conventional assumptions about social psychological phenomena based on the experiences of predominantly White Western middle-class college students (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003);
- challenge conventional psychological phenomena and methods (Clarke & McCall, 2013);
- offer “different interpretations of the same facts” (Clarke & McCall, 2013, p. 350);
- challenge psychologists to ask novel quantitative methodological questions (see, e.g., Reisen, Brooks, Zea, Poppen, & Bianchi, 2013; Stirratt, Meyer, Ouellette, & Gara, 2008) and/or use unconventional (at least for main-



stream psychology) methodological approaches—such as qualitative or mixed methods research—to address intersectionality’s inherent complexities (Bowleg, 2008; Syed, 2010); and

- bridge social psychology’s historic focus on the individual with an emphasis on power, privilege, and social structure to provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of social psychological phenomena.

Grim newspaper headlines such as those that I highlighted at the start of this chapter affirm the need for a social psychology that can research and provide solutions to everyday real-world problems such as police brutality. Intersectionality provides social psychology with an essential analytical tool to address how people think about, influence, and relate to each other in a complex, complicated, and dynamic world.

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# Part VI

## Critical Applications

# 26

## Critical Health Psychology

Antonia C. Lyons and Kerry Chamberlain

### The Development of Health Psychology

Health psychology is a broad field that is concerned with the application of psychological knowledge to all aspects of physical health and illness. It now encompasses a wide range of approaches, areas of study and applications that inform theory and practice. Health psychology is diverse, covering issues ranging from health promotion (staying healthy and well) to biomedical issues (psychological and social factors affecting our biological systems), and from behavioural medicine to cultural diversity in health and medical practices. It developed at a time when there were growing critiques of the dominant biomedical framework of health and disease by people working across a range of social sciences, including medical sociology, medical anthropology and health economics. Through the 1960s and 1970s, psychologists also turned their attention to health and health care, and health psychology developed as a perceptible sub-discipline of psychology in North America and Europe during the 1970s.

Health psychology was formally established as a sub-discipline in the late 1970s, culminating in the creation of Division 38 of the American Psychological Association in 1980. Matarazzo's (1980) definition of health psychology was foundational for this division and is still widely used today. This definition stated that health psychology was concerned with integrating

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“the specific educational, scientific, and professional contributions of the discipline of psychology” (Matarazzo, 1980, p. 815) to four key health-related areas, namely (1) promoting and maintaining health, (2) preventing and treating illness, (3) identifying causal and diagnostic correlates of health and illness, and (4) improving the health-care system and health policy formation. Health psychologists have historically focused their attention more on individuals’ attitudes and behaviours (and changing these) than on changing health-care systems or developing policy. In fact, Matarazzo (1980) promoted this individual orientation from the beginning in his foundational paper, citing earlier work by Knowles (1977), a physician and social philosopher, who had argued:

[O]ver 99 per cent of us are born healthy and made sick as a result of personal misbehavior and environmental conditions. The solution to the problems of ill health in modern American society involves individual responsibility, in the first instance, and social responsibility through public legislative and private volunteer efforts, in the second instance. ... Most individuals do not worry about their health until they lose it ... I believe the idea of a “right” to health (guaranteed by government) should be replaced by the idea of an individual moral obligation to preserve one’s own health—a public duty if you will. (Knowles, 1977, pp. 58–59)

The field of health psychology was quickly dominated by the positivist approaches employed in mainstream psychology, and the ‘scientific’ nature of the field was emphasised. This functioned to establish the credibility of health psychology within the broader array of biomedical and health disciplines (Murray, 2014a), as did the enthusiastic adoption of Engel’s (1977) biopsychosocial model of health and illness, a model positing that health is the interplay of three specific areas of life: the biological, the psychological and the social.

Health psychology has grown rapidly since its inception. The rise in the application of psychological knowledge to health, disease and illness has been attributed to a number of factors, particularly a growing awareness of the role that a person’s behaviour plays in the development of many chronic diseases. For example, many epidemiological studies have demonstrated evidence linking ‘lifestyle’ factors (simple everyday behaviours such as diet, exercise and social connections) to health, disease and mortality rates in longitudinal studies with large samples and across a range of Western countries (e.g., Belloc & Breslow, 1972; Haveman-Nies, Burema, Cruz, Osler, & van Staveren, 2002; Wiley & Camacho, 1980). Such findings led to a great deal

of research time and money being spent on identifying those behaviours associated with poorer health outcomes and on interventions to get people to change such behaviours. Psychology's focus on the individual and individual behaviour fits very neatly within neo-liberal societies with their increasing ideology of health as the responsibility of the autonomous individual (Crawford, 2006; Horrocks & Johnson, 2014; Marchman Andersen, Oksbjerg Dalton, Lynch, Johansen, & Holtug, 2013; Minkler, 1999). Health psychology has also grown rapidly because of an increasing disenchantment with traditional, biomedical health care and the escalating costs of health-care services with little improvement in basic health indicators (Kaplan, 2000).

As health psychology developed as a discipline, so too did different views and approaches to the field. In 2002, Marks outlined four different forms of health psychology, namely clinical, public, community and critical. Clinical health psychology has remained the dominant approach, with a focus on the individual, illness, health care and health services. It is heavily research-based and draws on positivist notions of science and knowledge production. Public health psychology works towards promoting health and preventing illness, rather than focusing on treating illness. It emphasises social, economic and political aspects of health and illness to improve population health. Community health psychology aims to promote positive well-being in communities through empowerment, social action and praxis. Critical health psychology is somewhat less demarcated, but is concerned with power and macro-social processes in health and illness. These four forms of health psychology have many areas of overlap and are not as independent as this framework suggests. A traditional, biomedical approach views ill-health as the result of biological or physiological processes; however, public, community and critical health psychology all share the much broader perspective that social, cultural, political and economic influences (among other factors) are all important in keeping people healthy, influencing health outcomes, accessing health care and experiencing illness. Thus a critical approach is implicated within much of public and community health psychology.

## A Critical Approach

A growing dissatisfaction with the dominance of the positivist paradigm within mainstream psychology soon extended into health psychology (see Chamberlain & Murray, 2009). The 'crisis' in social psychology highlighted the assumptions being made within the positivist paradigm about how best to obtain knowledge, and questioned the basis of what was taken

as knowledge (Gergen, 1985). The focus on the individual to the exclusion of broader social and political issues was particularly pertinent for some health psychology scholars. Reductionist theories and methods occluded the view that social contexts and social structures played a role in health and disease (Stainton Rogers, 1991). The emphasis on generalisability, standardised measurement, large samples and identifying 'universal' knowledge also did not allow for investigations into the health beliefs, understandings, outcomes and responses of specific sub-groups of people (e.g., those who were marginalised through being poor, in an ethnic minority, gay or lesbian, and so on). The concern with quantification (and reification) prevented insight into and understanding of people's experiences of health, illness and disease.

The 'turn to language' that was occurring at this time across the social sciences also provided critical ideas that were being taken up in psychology (e.g., feminism, social constructionism, postmodernism), alongside the development of qualitative and participatory research methods (Murray & Chamberlain, 2014). Critical psychologists argued for the importance of evaluating psychological theories and practices, and for taking a reflexive view of particular sub-disciplines of psychology, because in this way it is possible to identify how they may maintain an unjust and unsatisfying status quo (Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky, 1997). Health psychology has been criticised for reinforcing particular inequalities in health and well-being by focusing on the individual and individual behaviour to the exclusion of broader social and cultural factors that shape that behaviour (Murray & Campbell, 2003). A critical approach to health takes a particular stance that is concerned with context, power and social justice. As Marks (2002) has argued, it includes an analysis of how "power, economics and macrosocial processes influence and/or structure health, health care, health psychology, and society at large" (p. 15). Power is an essential concept here, examined in terms of how it functions to facilitate or prevent the achievement of health. Stark inequalities in health and illness exist across different social and cultural groups (e.g., Williams, 2013) while our understandings of health and illness vary across time and place (e.g., Jutel, 2006).

Power is highly relevant to the way in which health psychology has aligned itself with medicine, one of the most powerful institutions in contemporary times. Medicine, as a science, works within a positivist, scientific paradigm which is ideal for identifying pathogens, viruses, bacteria, genes and other biological and physiological factors that play a role in disease. However, its effectiveness does not extend to identifying causes of behaviour and lifestyle choices

which are embedded within social, complex, diverse and meaning-laden lives. Furthermore, health psychology is founded on the biopsychosocial model, highlighting the importance of the biological, psychological and social factors in any consideration of health and illness. Yet this model has been heavily critiqued, with scholars arguing that it remains essentially biomedical (Armstrong, 1987), is not a model at all (McLaren, 1998), is more detrimental than valuable due to its limited theorising and assumptions (Stam, 2000) and that links between the three conceptual areas have not been effectively theorised (Spicer & Chamberlain, 1996). Overall it seems the biopsychosocial model has functioned more as a form of rhetoric than theory (Ogden, 1997) ensuring health psychology remains within the medical agenda (Suls & Rothman, 2004). The biological aspect of the model remains the most powerful culturally; research funding, status and prestige are attached to the quest for cures for illness and pharmacological treatments that work at this level. However, as others have cogently argued, this obscures the more socially oriented approaches that could achieve major improvements in health outcomes through public health and advancing social equality (Horrocks & Johnson, 2014).

Unease with the state of health psychology knowledge based on mainstream, positivist theories and methods grew particularly around the heavy emphasis placed on models of 'health behaviour'. These models were developed from social cognition theories in social psychology, and were employed to examine attitudes, beliefs and cognitions as predictors of health-related behaviours. Positive health behaviours are conceptualised as behaviours that are health-enhancing (or health protective, such as using sunscreen, getting regular exercise), while negative behaviours are those that are detrimental to health (such as binge drinking, smoking tobacco, getting sunburnt). Much attention and research effort has focused on two particular models of health behaviour, the Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; see also Conner & Norman, 2005). Despite their popularity with researchers since the 1980s, these models have been heavily critiqued on both theoretical and methodological grounds. Critical researchers have argued that these social cognition models are problematic for a number of reasons. They rely on self-reports, are mechanistic and asocial, and limited in their ability to capture the complexity of behaviours that are related to health (Mielewczyk & Willig, 2007; Ogden, 2003). Health behaviours are not abstract notions but social practices that people engage in within their own everyday social worlds; they are embedded in context (Lyons, 2009; Mielewczyk & Willig, 2007). Accumulated



critiques and reviews of the Theory of Planned Behaviour have recently led mainstream health psychology researchers to question its validity and call for its retirement (Sniehotta, Presseau, & Araújo-Soares, 2014). As Marks (2013) put it, “the focus on social cognition models has been a cul-de-sac to nowhere” (p. 22).

More broadly, the whole attempt to alter people’s behaviour—and to frame these as individual ‘choices’—is situated within a victim-blaming ideology that has strong moralistic overtones. The stigmatisation of fat provides one obvious example (Gronning, Scambler, & Tjora, 2013). For this reason, it has been argued that interventions focusing on ‘educating’ people to make ‘correct’ choices to ensure that they do not succumb to disease and become a burden on the health system are similar to religious moral instruction; telling people how to behave in order to be morally upstanding citizens (Marks, 2013). They stress self-control and regulation of the self through responsible behaviour (Bunton, 2006). As Marks (2013) argues, assigning responsibility for illness to individual lifestyle choices also ensures that the focus remains firmly on the individual person; individual ‘choice’ is emphasised over (and obscures) causes of ill-health that are “an inevitable facet of a social, corporate, economic environment designed to maximise shareholder profits” (p. 6). In contrast, critical approaches emphasise the ways in which behaviours, health and illness are embedded within social relationships, cultures and political structures (Santiago-Delfosse & Chamberlain, 2008). These approaches also emphasise strategies for emancipation rather than strategies for surveillance and control (Murray & Chamberlain, 2014).

## Critical Health Psychology

Critical approaches to health psychology are united “by a desire to develop a psychological understanding of health and illness that is socially, culturally, politically and historically situated and that contributes to the development of a range of participatory and emancipatory approaches to enhancing health and wellbeing” (Murray & Chamberlain, 2014, p. 845). Such approaches became more apparent as a particular shared orientation to the field throughout the 1990s (e.g., Marks, 1996; Murray & Chamberlain, 1999; Yardley, 1997). The first conference on critical health psychology was held in 1999, in Newfoundland, Canada, and this led to the creation of the International Society for Critical Health Psychology in 2001 and subsequent biennial international conferences. The shared criti-

cal orientation to health psychology has also been formalised with the publication of a number of key textbooks, driven by the need to teach health psychology with a broader, more inclusive agenda (e.g., Crossley, 2000; Horrocks & Johnson, 2012; Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006; Marks, Murray, Evans, & Estacio, 2011; Murray, 2014b; Murray & Chamberlain, 2015; Rohleder, 2012; Stephens, 2008). Currently critical health psychology is a diverse field with ongoing debates and dialogues about where researchers, scholars and practitioners should focus their efforts, how they are best to undertake research and develop knowledge, and how to ensure the impact of their efforts. As in other critical fields, there are debates about ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Researchers taking a critical approach to health and illness have tended to employ interpretive, qualitative methodologies. They often work from a social constructionist standpoint, acknowledging that all knowledge is historically, socially and culturally located and therefore provisional. However, there have been debates about the usefulness of a social constructionist approach, particularly for a field that is concerned with physical health and material bodies (e.g., Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). The almost exclusive focus on language has been critiqued for its exclusion of materiality as an important realm (e.g., Yardley, 1996, 1997). We all have material bodies, and we experience our world through those bodies (fat, thin, large, small, male, female, short-sighted, far-sighted, black, white, with disabilities, without disabilities, young, old, fit, toned etc.). For this reason, many critical health psychologists draw upon a critical realist standpoint, acknowledging that a physical material world exists but that how we understand it and come to make sense of it depends on our social and cultural meaning-making systems, including language (e.g., Ussher, 2002). Others have argued that pragmatism provides critical health researchers a way to view knowledge as a tool for action (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009).

Currently we are witnessing increased diversity with regard to research approaches and methods. The kinds of questions being asked in critical health psychology have led towards the development and use of a range of qualitative methodologies, to capture people's broader social contexts and to contribute to transformation and change. All research rests on epistemological assumptions and it is important researchers are aware of and can reflect on these (Chamberlain, 2015). As a philosophy of science, positivism is monolithic, not accepting or acknowledging alternate ways of knowing (Corcoran, 2014), which are so important to critical approaches seeking to revision understanding and move beyond individual reductionism. The methods employed are

also increasingly diverse. Although interviews and focus groups remain the primary qualitative data collection methods, researchers are increasingly using visual-based methods (such as photo-elicitation), multimodal approaches, objects and artefacts, the Internet, social networking, and digital technologies in their research theorising, planning and data gathering processes (see Lyons, 2015).

Theoretical breadth is also important, and developing sophisticated critical psychosocial theory remains essential. This work develops ideas in ways that enable psychological phenomena to be re-evaluated and theorised differently. For example, with regard to health education, Corcoran (2014) argues that by re-evaluating psychological phenomena “as jointly constituted via embodied, discursive and relational means ... a prospective kind of psychosocial theory is elucidated capable of promoting and sustaining health inclusive education” (p. 281). Health education based on reductionist psychological theories and practices are insufficient, and critical work moves us towards understanding “health in ways that reconsider relationships to context and the forms of life within which everyday living takes place” (Corcoran, 2014, p. 281).

Researchers continue to theorise the age-old issue of how to combine the material, biological, physiological body with the ‘social’ body that includes mind, social context and environment. Alongside this objective/subjective divide are a range of different research approaches, assumptions and practices. Einstein and Shildrick (2009) make a strong case for re-theorising women’s health towards a more dynamic paradigm and a “theoretical fluidity that allows for the real messiness of lived bodies” (p. 293). The challenge for critical health psychologists lies in conceptualising corporeal bodies and theorising their interconnectedness with body systems, other bodies and the social world. Researchers have re-evaluated ongoing cardiovascular system changes (such as blood pressure, heart rate) away from traditional stress frameworks and along more social and relational lines (Lyons & Cromby, 2011; see also Newton, 2003). The focus on the ‘affective turn’ within the humanities and social sciences has also been applied to critical health psychology (e.g., see Cromby, 2010, 2012a, 2015). Here “affect, emotion and feeling are being investigated as hybrid phenomena jointly constituted from both biological and social influences” (Cromby, 2012b, p. 145).

It is important for critical theorising to challenge specific forms of dominant psychological discourse that restrict our ways of thinking and inhibit repositioning (Corcoran, 2014). Power and power relations shape practices,

including theorising. While positivist scientific research is viewed as the only approach to gain knowledge in clinical and biological medicine, critical health researchers are aware of the need for a range of epistemologies to fully understand health and illness. Theoretical and methodological pluralism are key strengths of critical health psychology and continue to be promoted as such (Hepworth, 2006). In this way, critical health psychologists can work towards challenging “unhealthy conditions while remaining sensitive to issues of power, advantage and benefit” (Murray & Chamberlain, 2014, p. 848).

## Trends and Applications

Work within critical health psychology is apparent across a wide diversity of topic areas, operating in a range of geographic locations, and having an impact at different levels. Below we outline some of the areas in which critical health psychology researchers and practitioners have made an impact, highlighting the extensive breadth of approaches, theories, methods and practices and how they are making a difference.

### Experiences of Health and Illness

Much work conducted in critical health psychology has been concerned with exploring people’s unique experiences of health and illness (illness particularly). Critical researchers have drawn on a wide variety of qualitative approaches in this research. Phenomenological approaches have been widely utilised to investigate the lived experience of illness, and the ways in which our social and cultural worlds shape that experience. Phenomenological methodologies (such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 1996)) have been popular ways to explore the intersubjective, contextual and embodied aspects of health and illness (e.g., Larkin, 2015). Narrative research has also been used widely in critical health psychology, emphasising the storied nature of our social world. Narrative analyses have generated much knowledge on the character of health and illness experiences and health-care encounters (e.g., Murray & Sools, 2015). Discursive approaches have also been employed to examine the way illnesses are constructed and understood, and to examine how people are positioned by illness (e.g., Bowleg, Heckert, Brown, & Massie, 2015). Ethnographically inspired approaches have also

started to be used to explore the social and lived contexts of health and illness (e.g., Mutchler, McKay, McDavitt, & Gordon, 2013). Other qualitative research methods have been employed to explore people's experiences of different aspects of health and illness, such as grounded theory and thematic analysis (see Rohleder & Lyons, 2015). This work has challenged understandings gained from mainstream health psychology, for instance around issues such as adherence to medications (e.g., Chamberlain, Madden, Gabe, Dew, & Norris, 2011). This body of qualitative research has generated understandings and insights into individuals' experiences of acute and chronic illnesses, interventions, health care, recovery, care-giving and so on, and has been able to highlight the variability of experiences across different individuals and groups of people. Such understanding can be used to support, assist and provide more effective and targeted care for specific people, groups and communities, and lead to the revision of health policies and health-care practices.

## Marginalised and Vulnerable Populations

One of the key contributions of critical health psychology has been to explore, work with, give voice to and increase awareness of the health experiences, illness and outcomes of people who are in marginalised or vulnerable groups. These people are frequently stigmatised by virtue of their appearance, situation in society, ethnicity, sexuality or health status (e.g., being HIV positive), to name but a few examples. Critical health psychologists have been crucial in highlighting these situations and promoting positive change. For example, Rohleder, Braathen, Swartz and Eide (2009) have highlighted how people with disabilities (visual, hearing, physical and learning) in southern Africa may be at more risk for HIV than others. Their review of the research outlines a number of reasons why this may be, including that disabled people are poorer than others, less educated, less likely to be employed, lack access to relevant sex education, lack knowledge about safe sex, are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, and are more likely to be socially isolated and stigmatised. Rohleder and Swartz's (2009) research in South Africa identified the importance of sex education for people with learning disabilities, and sex educators' views on the challenges in providing such education in an effective way.

Critical work with marginalised populations has also focused on sexuality, and challenging the continuing stigmatisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ; Rohleder, 2012). This work highlights

the implicit heteronormative basis of much of the research in health psychology and heterosexism in health and social care (Fish, 2006). It seeks to extend health knowledge to include the experiences and accounts of LGBTQ individuals (e.g., Adams, McCreanor, & Braun, 2013; Jowett, Peel, & Shaw, 2012) in ways that do not reinscribe pathology (Fish, 2009) and argues for sexual identity to be a mainstream part of health policy (Fish, 2006). Other work has focused on marginalised groups such as working class people, particularly in understanding behaviours related to health (e.g., Day, 2012). Scholars have recently argued that class is often conceptualised straightforwardly as ‘socio-economic status’, which neglects more sophisticated, critical understandings of class involving complexity and identities (Day, Rickett, & Woolhouse, 2014; see also Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015). Such critical insights are particularly valuable in critical health psychology where health inequalities are starkly apparent across social class groupings. Issues of gender, ethnicity, discrimination and racism are also key areas that have received much attention within critical health psychology (e.g., see Brondolo, Gallo, & Myers, 2009).

## Community Health Psychology and Interventions

There is a strong sense of social justice and activism within critical health psychology. This is particularly evident among those working within community health psychology, where participatory research methods and action research are widely utilised. These approaches seek to effect change, and ensure that the people who are affected by the topic or issue being studied are collaborators in the research process, being actively involved in the knowledge produced (Vaughan, 2015). Community health psychologists look to interventions at the community level, and critical researchers and practitioners in this field aim to challenge “exploitative economic and political relationships and dominant systems of knowledge production” (Campbell & Murray, 2004, p. 190).

Participatory action research has been used with disadvantaged communities to improve health and well-being outcomes. For example, in India, Cornish (2006) undertook a collaborative project with sex workers which sought to identify and challenge the stigma of prostitution and make change in workers’ lives. It achieved this through raising awareness with sex workers’ about their rights, highlighting their similarity to other oppressed groups which were politically successful, and sharing evidence of the positive achievements of other sex workers. In Cambodia, Lubek et al. (2002, 2014) have drawn on the concepts of empowerment and action research to undertake ‘grass-roots’

community-based interventions with marginalised women beer-sellers. Their ongoing work in Siem Reap has involved community immersion, advocacy, education, fundraising, networking and cultural collaboration, including “cultural anchoring and adaptation’ of health practices and research measures” (Lubek et al., 2014, p. 111). Strategies that have been employed during this project include building critical consciousness by using peer education, empowering women to change their lives, challenging social, global and corporate structures and disseminating the results of the programme widely and in various forums.

Community health psychology has developed into a thriving field that engages with the growing complex forms of local and global inequalities, as a recent special issue devoted to this field in the *Journal of Health Psychology* demonstrates (Campbell & Cornish, 2014). Throughout this special issue, the critical nature of community health psychology is evident, and the range of work highlights conceptual and methodological developments as well as new directions for activism to tackle social inequalities (Campbell & Cornish, 2014).

## The Arts in Health Psychology

Critical health psychologists have also taken up the call to engage more with art-based approaches to researching health and illness. These approaches use art-based methods—performance (theatre, reader’s theatre, etc.), image generation (drawing, painting, film, video, etc.) and creative writing (poetry, flash fiction, graphic novels, etc.)—to engage participants, interpret findings and disseminate research outcomes. Camic (2008) provides a review of arts and health interventions in the areas of health promotion and prevention, illness management, clinical assessment and improvement of health-care systems, and offers a range of suggestions for incorporating the arts in health care across a wide range of clinical and community settings. Denzin (2010) has argued for a performance studies paradigm that takes a performative approach to social science research and dissemination, and “understands performance simultaneously as a form of inquiry and as a form of activism, as critique, as critical citizenship” (Denzin, 2010, p. 18). An example of this approach is presented by Gray and Sinding (2002), who reworked their data from focus groups discussion with breast cancer patients and interviews with oncologists into a dramatic theatrical performance about people with metastasised breast cancer. The performance was presented to audiences—hospital staff, cancer patients, their family members and the public—in several locations,



and provoked debate and discussion about the nature of health care. Projects like these illustrate how health psychologists can move from interpreters of a situation to participating in its transformation.

Murray and Tilley (2006) have also explored the use of the arts as a means of community engagement. Their research aimed to raise awareness of occupational health and safety within community groups in the fishing industry in Canada. They worked with community groups to develop a range of artistic productions including drama, song and visual arts as a means of exploring the issue of safety. Art therapy and dance therapy have also been found to be beneficial in helping people deal with illness (see, e.g., Bradt, Shim, & Goodill, 2015; Collie, Bottorff, & Long, 2006). Art has also been used in the service of data representation. For example, Owton (2013) explores how creative analytical processes, using narrative poetry and visual art, written and drawn respectively from interview transcripts, can interact to provide new ways of knowing about asthma in sport. Creative writing has also been used to illustrate and give insight into illness, such as 55-word flash fiction stories depicting moments of medical diagnosis (Various Authors, 2015) and the value of novels for health education and insight into illness (Kaptein & Lyons, 2009). Although not widespread, the value of arts-based research in health psychology has considerable potential. As Murray and Gray (2008) have noted, arts-based approaches can enhance the depth and scope of data collected, allow participants to express illness and disability issues that are not easily verbalised, provide new forms for interpretative work, and provide enhanced ways to communicate research findings. Such approaches lend themselves well to critical work, where epistemological bases, researcher positioning, and the questioning of who benefits from research come to the forefront. Arts-based approaches can promote this kind of critical engagement in research practices.

## **Dominant Cultural Meanings of Health and Illness: The Media and New Technologies**

Critical researchers have also been interested in the ways in which health itself is understood as a concept, how it is used in everyday life, and how dominant meanings and understandings of health affect not just how we live, but how we take notice of our bodies, recognise bodily changes, interpret bodily signs as symptoms and engage with health professionals. It is at the mundane, routine and ordinary everyday level that we gain our understandings about what it is to be healthy or ill, male or female, a little unwell or seriously sick. The biomedical view assumes that most physical symptoms are caused by some

kind of pathology within the body, and people can perceive symptoms of this pathology directly and clearly. However, how we make sense of physical changes in our bodies, and interpret them as symptoms, depends heavily on the psychological, social and cultural meanings we bring to them (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006). Meanings about health, illness, medicine and health care are (re)created and circulated pervasively throughout mass media and popular culture.

Media representations of health and illness circulate expert and lay accounts to the public, define and shape societal attitudes, influence agenda-setting and are widely influential at the individual level through attention, framing, perception and creating meaning (Lyons, 2000). Hether and Murphy's (2010) research into gender and health storylines in fictional television demonstrates that characters can have a major impact on what viewers attend to in their bodies, what they learn about disease, and what they mimic, all in gendered ways. This may in turn affect recognising bodily sensations, interpreting them as symptoms, and seeking help. Media frame health topics in particular ways, privilege dominant ways of viewing health, and restrict attention to the social determinants of health such as poverty, homelessness and housing (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2006).

New digital media also play a major role in many aspects of health and well-being. Social media and networking technologies (such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter) are now a key part of social life for many people. For many young people, social media are a ubiquitous part of their everyday lives, increasingly accessed on mobile technologies and used to enact social identities and maintain valued social relationships (Boyd, 2007; Livingstone, 2008). Yet social media are commercial platforms which profit heavily from the social media practices of their users (Fuchs, 2012). This includes selling data to third parties and enabling sophisticated marketing of many products related to (ill) health and well-being, including alcohol, which raises new issues and concerns (McCreanor et al., 2013). For example, recent research suggests the pervasiveness of digital alcohol marketing on Facebook and other social media sites has exponentially increased youth exposure to pro-alcohol consumption messages (Mart, 2011; Moraes, Michaelidou, & Meneses, 2014) and may pose "even greater risks for promoting alcohol abuse than traditional marketing" (Hoffman, Pinkleton, Weintraub Austin, & Reyes-Velázquez, 2014, p. 333). Furthermore, alcohol marketing content on social media is shared by young people through their social networks which functions to normalise alcohol consumption (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2014) and directly influence consumption behaviour (Moraes et al., 2014). Thus these more recent forms of media raise new issues related to health and well-being that require sustained critical attention.

## Key Social Processes and Institutional Forces in Health and Illness

Health policy is starting to acknowledge the complex nature of health and the power of the market in shaping social practices related to health and well-being (Marks, 2013). The physical, psychosocial and economic environments in which we live dramatically influence our health. These environments include dominant institutions and industries which shape particular understandings of health, illness, disease, health care and treatment processes. Biomedicine and the pharmaceutical industry are powerful domains that require critical examination. Researchers across a number of disciplines have investigated processes around medicalisation, the way in which the jurisdiction of medicine has extended into everyday life and converted human issues into medical conditions (Conrad, 2007). Researchers have also examined pharmaceuticalisation, the processes involved in transforming human conditions into possibilities for pharmaceutical interventions and 'producing' diseases overtly for profit-making (Gabe, Williams, Martin, & Coveney, 2015; Moynihan & Cassels, 2005). This is highly gendered and targets women more than men. For example, Moynihan (2003) uses 'female sexual dysfunction' to demonstrate how corporations (drug companies) create a phenomenon, turn it into a dysfunction, then into a disorder, and finally have it categorised as a disease. Cacchioni (2015) also recently highlighted the increasing medicalisation of female sexuality as part of the profit-driven motives of pharmaceutical companies. Along with other scholars (e.g., Tiefer, see <http://newviewcampaign.org/>) she has strongly argued against flibanserin, a drug popularly called 'pink viagra', claimed to treat low sexual desire in women. More generally, researchers highlight how pharmaceuticals in everyday life symbolise specific forms of governance and are tied to particular identities, roles and responsibilities (e.g., Dew, Norris, Gabe, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2015).

Crawford (2006) argues that health has become central in our everyday lives, and the pursuit of health is one of the most salient features of contemporary living in Western societies. This has led to expansive professional and commercial spheres with associated products, services and knowledge commodified and offered to people as they pursue personal health. This "new health consciousness" (Crawford, 2006, p. 408) is linked to consumerism and the highly developed contemporary ideology that health is the responsibility of the individual. Pursuing and sustaining health thus becomes an indispensable aspect of being a good citizen. 'Healthism' is mobilised pervasively for commercial gain. Race (2012) provides an excellent example using

the contemporary marketing of bottled water. His analysis demonstrates how companies “appeal to scientifically framed principles and ideas of health in order to position the product as an essential component in self-health and healthy lifestyles” (p. 72). The biomedical discourses drawn on in marketing bottled water are linked to “broader ways of conceiving and acting upon the self that have become prevalent in contemporary society” (p. 72), reinforcing ideologies of consumption and personal control. A similar process is apparent with personal digital devices (e.g., see Millington, 2014). Many hundreds of thousands of people in wealthy societies are now using wearable digital devices to self-monitor and self-track their daily biometric data and physiological functioning (Fox, 2015). Health professionals have also positively seized the opportunity such devices may provide for ‘mHealth’ (mobile health) promotion. However, as Lupton (2013) has cogently argued, such detailed self-monitoring has major consequences for our broader understandings of health, embodiment and identity, as well as reinforcing healthist and enhancement discourses.

These kinds of critical analyses of key social processes have traditionally been given limited attention in health psychology. However, critical health psychology aims to situate all research, scholarship and practice within its broader social and cultural contexts, and therefore theorising these contexts is essential. Theoretical contributions from many other disciplines (such as sociology, anthropology, human geography) are extremely valuable for critical health psychology work. Scholarship that strengthens critical approaches to health and illness needs to work across disciplines (Hepworth, 2006) and benefits from paying particular attention to social and cultural commentary and theory.

## Summary

Although the concept of health has traditionally been conceptualised within mainstream health psychology as an individual-level phenomenon, it is a cultural concept, and strongly linked to neo-liberal ideas of individualism, personal responsibility and social class (Crawford, 2006). The approach to health taken by critical health psychology enables researchers to take a wider, more inclusive view on health, illness and disease, as well as on the sub-field itself (MacLachlan, 2014). As Corcoran (2014) has eloquently argued, taking a critical approach to health psychology, or educational psychology, or any other form of psychology, is about opening one’s eyes to different ways of viewing the world. By seeing things differently, we are able

to identify the assumptions we are making, reflect back on the implications of current ways of conceptualising health and illness, and question whether they are the best way forward to facilitate healthy individuals, communities and populations.

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# 27

## Critical Clinical Psychology

Steven Coles and Aisling Mannion

*“Critical, or questioning perspectives encourage us to consider whose agenda and interests are being served ... and who has access and influence over the wielding of power”.*

(Diamond, 2008, p. 174)

### Introduction and Definitions

The British Psychological Society’s (BPS) Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) is 50 years old in 2016 (Hall, Pilgrim, & Turpin, 2015), though the profession itself is older. It is a profession which grew up within the context of the National Health Service (NHS) and has altered as the NHS and the politics surrounding it have changed. A precise definition of clinical psychology is difficult as there are a diversity of models, opinions and approaches from within the profession. Clinical psychology can appear to be insecure in its position and status, perhaps due to its relatively young age and working in the context of more established professions, particularly medicine, in the NHS (Boyle, 2011). One consequence of this anxiety is ambivalence towards issues such as power and social context, areas central to critical psychology. This chapter will consider the key aspects of clinical psychology and critical psychology, critique the claims of clinical psychology and reflect on alternative perspectives and practices for the profession. It will focus mainly on

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British clinical psychology within adult mental health services (see Latchford & Melliush, 2010, for an international perspective on clinical psychology; and Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007, for a global overview of community/critical psychology).

## What Is Clinical Psychology?

Clinical psychology is a diverse profession; however, we believe the themes below are currently key to how the profession presents itself. The key assertions are that the profession:

- Is scientific
- Offers evidence-based psychological therapies (alongside a range of other roles)
- Believes psychiatric diagnosis is problematic
- Incorporates social context, particularly through the use of formulation

Clinical psychology claims to “apply scientific knowledge about human behaviour to ameliorate psychological problems” (DCP, 1996, p. 3) and advocates a scientist–practitioner model. This model expects clinical psychologists to have knowledge both in terms of academic research and also of clinical work with clients, in which they are expected to work as scientists, forming and testing hypotheses, undertaking interventions and evaluating progress. Whilst the reflective practitioner has become an important component of clinical psychology (see Lavender, 2003), the idea of science is a key claim in its bid for legitimacy.

Clinical psychologists state that they can perform a wide range of roles and functions, such as therapy to individuals (and to a lesser extent families), supervising, training, research, consultation and advising on organisations and systems, and in general, they note their ability to offer a range of input to various levels of an organisation (DCP, 2014). There has been significant investment in psychological therapies by government, and whilst many working in such services are not clinical psychologists, the profession has been keen to demonstrate that clinical psychologists can offer “effective psychological interventions and therapies”, which “can contribute not only by improving the health and well-being of individuals but also the health of the nation through employability, productivity and social inclusion” (DCP, 2014, p. 2). There are a vast number of forms of therapy, though cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is the most widely promoted. Competence in

CBT and one other therapy is now an essential criterion for clinical training. The emphasis placed on therapy is intertwined with the profession's assertion of being scientific.

Clinical psychology has highlighted the need to ensure that the social context is an area of focus in clinical practice and has criticised psychiatric diagnosis for reducing people to individual problems (DCP, 2013). The profession has advocated the use of formulation as an alternative to diagnosis, and good practice guidelines emphasise the need to integrate societal factors, such as social inequality and power, into formulations (DCP, 2011). Furthermore, accreditation criteria for clinical psychology doctorate programmes require trainees to include social and cultural factors in their formulations (BPS, 2010).

## What Is a Critical Clinical Psychologist?

Before turning a critical lens to the above claims made by clinical psychology, it is important to consider what a critical clinical psychologist is. There is not a profession called a critical clinical psychologist; however, there are contrasts between the values and assumptions of a clinical psychologist who works critically with that of mainstream psychology assumptions; for example, conventional psychology has often unquestioningly adopted cultural and discriminatory beliefs as the “norm” (Coles & Fairbank, 2009; Daiches & Smith, 2012; Howitt & Owusu-Bemphah, 1994; Owusu-Bemphah & Howitt, 2000; Patel et al., 2000). Critical psychology is explicit in acknowledging that it is value based and wishes to see alteration in psychology and society (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). Whilst there is diversity, some of the key assumptions and values within critical psychology are these: the importance of power and working alongside those who are marginalised; problems are not seen as arising within individuals but from the wider historical, environmental and social-material contexts people live within; the promotion of equality and social justice; an analysis and practice of the world which includes the personal, interpersonal and social, but emphasises the importance of the social context to all our lives; that we are interdependent rather than self-contained and separate; and cannot step to one side of politics (Orford, 2008; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Critical psychology centrally questions and critically reflects upon not only the world around it but also itself.

A common theme conceptually within critical psychology is power, and the salience of working with, alongside and in solidarity with those oppressed and



marginalised in society. Power can be defined as the ability of a social group or individual to influence others in accordance with their interests (Smail, 2001). Power can often be obscured, particularly when dominant groups harm and cause distress to people marginalised in society, such as governments implementing social policies that harm those with the least; men sexually abusing women; employers exploiting employees (Boyle, 2011; Coles, 2010). Power can be seen as a complex web of actions and influence between people and organisations (Foucault, 1980). Critical psychologists consider several levels of power, including how oppression causes and maintains psychological distress, how to support people marginalised in society to gain access to resources and avoid contributing to oppression. It should be emphasised that power in and of itself is not necessarily negative and can be utilised in the interests of addressing inequalities. What is important is considering whose interests are being served by the use of power.

## Critique of Mainstream Clinical Psychology

The descriptions of critical versus clinical psychology suggest clear differences in emphasis; however, there are potential areas of overlap, such as the importance attached to the social context, and scientific practice could be used to highlight the effects of oppression. A critique is offered below of the main claims made by clinical psychology in terms of science, evidence based therapies, moving beyond diagnosis and incorporating social context. The analysis of the profession's assertions will draw on themes from critical psychology, in particular issues of power and how it is used or misused.

### Science

Science is a central claim of the profession and clinical psychologists are expected to contribute to the evidence base through conducting their own research trials. Ironically, however, much analysis has shown that following doctoral training, the majority of clinical psychologists working in the NHS fail to conduct research or author publications (Eke, Holttum, & Hayward, 2012). This begs the question as to why are clinical psychologists being trained at great expense to a doctorate level and in research skills, if they are rarely used in practice. There are many possible answers, but one answer is that claims to science raise the status and power of the profession (Boyle, 2011).

There have been criticisms that clinical psychologists at times adopt oversimplistic models of science, are not modest enough in their knowledge claims and generate much data with little meaning (Smail, 2006). A key example of the adoption of the uncritical production of data is the use of Randomised Control Trials (RCTs). RCTs are considered the “gold standard” of research methodology. These types of studies require groups of patients who are randomised to one of two or more treatments or control conditions. The assumption of RCTs is that by controlling for all possible variables except for the treatment condition, any differences found between groups can be attributed to the treatment itself. However, there are significant criticisms of RCTs. Outside of psychological therapy, in areas such as drug trials, the power of placebo effects (people improving simply by thinking they are receiving the real treatment) and people realising they are in a control group rather than the real treatment, has been noted to have substantially undermined the results of RCTs (Kirsch, 2009). Placebo effects are hard to control in drug trials, and they are almost impossible to control for in psychotherapy research (Jopling, 2008). Who conducts or sponsors the trial also significantly biases the results (Perlis et al., 2005). There are many other critiques of RCTs in terms of inadequate control groups, not recording how many people declined to enter the trial, cherry picking of clients, or samples which are not representative of people seen in services, and basing research on diagnostic categories which lack validity (e.g., Lewis & Warlow, 2004; Rothwell, 2005). The flaws and complexities are often numerous and potentially devastating to the usefulness of the data. However, such data (particularly meta-analyses—combination of data from different studies) are often presented with little critical reflection, and go on to shape clinical practice and services.

The focus on RCTs is an example of professionals, including clinical psychologists, being too narrow in what constitutes knowledge, and such knowledge has not always been subjected to adequate scrutiny (Edge, Kagan, & Stewart, 2004; Ingleby, 1981; Morgan, 2008; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Rogers & Pilgrim, 2005). An unquestioning approach to professional expertise and scientific evidence often marginalises other forms of knowledge. This has occurred significantly in mental health services where lived experience is not given any or limited tokenistic credit or status (Beresford, 2013; Wallcraft, 2013). This is unfortunate as lived experience is often rich in detail of people’s lives in comparison to the abstract and sterile data of quantitative research papers. Though some clinical psychologists have acknowledged this and used qualitative methods, such methods are often seen as having less merit and status, including within the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Overall, the description “scientist practitioner” contributes to the status of the profession; however, there are concerns that such claims are erroneous and do not serve the people clinical psychologists are meant to help. Clinical psychology, at times, sees itself as objective, value free and neutral, whilst actually holding values and assumptions that maintain the status quo in society (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). Such a stance to research is likely to be oppressive, and there is a need for the profession to be clearer in its values, and reflect on whose interests are being served by research they are either conducting, or using in their theories and practice.

## Therapy

Before the 1930s, the field of clinical psychology was largely academic, with an emphasis on assessment. Following World War II, the demand for clinical psychologists to offer clinical interventions to veterans meant that the professional role expanded to include an applied focus (Plante, 2011). Some of the early and leading advocates of clinical psychology were initially strongly opposed to the idea of the profession turning to therapy (Eysenck, 1949). Such stark opposition to therapy from a leading and mainstream advocate of the profession is very different to what has occurred in the last decade or so, with massive investment by successive UK governments in improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT). Whilst many clinical psychologists advocate for a role beyond therapy, it has become a core part of the profession’s identity and position.

Clinical psychologist David Clark and economist Richard Layard have been influential advocates of the IAPT (predominately CBT) programme in the UK (Layard & Clark, 2014a). Despite claims about the “power of psychological therapies” (Layard & Clark, 2014a) to cure mental illness, the evidence base for psychological therapies, and IAPT in particular, is highly contested (Epstein, 2006; Moloney, 2013; MPG, 2007, 2008). Despite promotion of technique and brand of therapy, the most robust and consistent finding in the research literature is that the most important factor *within* therapy for helping people is the relationship between the therapist and the person attending for help (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010). Technique or the brand of therapy used accounts for little in the way of what is helpful to the person in therapy (Duncan et al., 2010). Research comparing professionals and amateurs suggest few actual differences between them (Berman & Norton, 1985; Moloney, 2013). The promotion of technique and CBT would appear to have little basis in evidence, but does promote the status and interest of professionals.

Clinical psychology's claim to focus on social context would appear to be in conflict with how IAPT obscures real-world problems that are not amenable to change through psychological interventions. The key proponents of IAPT have expressed, in terms of mental health, that "we have tackled the external problems but not the one inside ... the evil of mental illness" (Layard & Clark, 2014b). They argue that key external factors such as income, education and housing have been dealt with, and we need to alter the "inner person" via psychological therapies, despite the evidence of the powerful impact of social factors. They emphasise "the huge social cost of mental illness" (Layard & Clark, 2014c), rather than how social problems cause distress. Layard and Clark (2014a) clearly undermine the importance of people's social-material world and the effects of inequality and oppression, despite the vast evidence contrary to their thesis (e.g., Friedli, 2009; Marmot, 2010, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

When IAPT does consider a social factor such as employment, it appears to do so in an uncritical manner. Getting people into employment is a key aim of IAPT, which is politically driven to decrease social security benefits (Fryer & Stambe, 2014). There is a significant risk that the interests of those receiving therapy are not served in the face of government pressures and targets. Such therapy could lead people into work roles with little control and low income, and actually be detrimental to their well-being. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) appear keen to increase IAPT's role in promoting employment (DWP, 2013). However, there are claims that psychology has been used to address employment in a highly unethical manner within DWP schemes to get people into work (Cromby & Willis, 2014; Friedli & Stearn, 2015).

Overall, clinical psychology advocates roles beyond therapy; however, IAPT has been the most significant driver in the world of applied psychology. There are real risks that this economic agenda pushes the profession away from developing a critical orientation, towards one where social context is minimised and oppressive practices become the norm.

## Beyond Diagnosis and Social Context

Psychiatric diagnosis has been contested for decades. Pilgrim (2007) has highlighted that the important question for social scientists is not the replaying of arguments for and against diagnosis, but instead to ask why it has survived. He argues that a key factor is the interest of professional groups in helping the practice to persist. Clinical psychology as a profession has been ambivalent about diagnosis, with both critics and defenders amongst its ranks, and with those who move between positions. However, in May 2013, after nearly

two years of debate, the DCP issued a short document arguing for the need to move beyond diagnosis. This paper attracted significant media coverage. However, it is interesting to note that just over a year later, clinical psychology's professional magazine, *Clinical Psychology Forum*, felt the need to release a special edition "Psychology and Psychiatry: Bridging the Gap" (Weatherhead, 2014), in which many of the psychologists writing in the publication appeared keen to seek accommodation with psychiatric practices, including diagnosis. Debates for and against diagnosis continue in the letters pages of subsequent additions of *Forum*, which perhaps reflects the ambivalence and anxiety the profession has in holding its publically stated position.

Clinical psychology has criticised psychiatric diagnosis for minimising the importance of social context (DCP, 2013); however, a scan of the profession's main journal, *The British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, shows that in the past five years there have been a very small number of studies published that have considered factors outside of the individual. Formulation has been advocated as a progressive alternative to diagnosis, and formulation would appear to have the potential to focus on the meaning of people's experiences in the context of their lives. However, the formulation guidelines highlight that social context "...is often poorly integrated into practice" (DCP, 2011, p. 20). IAPT services are also diagnostically based, and formulations are problem based and focus on internal factors such as cognitions. Harper and Moss (2003), whilst advocating for the progressive potential for formulation, note that its rise "is perhaps testament to our profession's ability to regularly reconstruct its identity that formulation, barely heard of a decade ago, is now seen as a central defining characteristic" (p. 6).

Clinical psychology has an ambivalent relationship with social context. Boyle (2011) discusses how clinical psychology colludes with other professional groups (e.g., psychiatry) to minimise or avoid the role of social contextual factors in mental distress. Boyle suggests that this collusion occurs because the profession wants to be regarded and accepted as a science, much like disciplines such as physics and biology, and as such has moved away from disciplines that focus more on social factors, such as social psychology and sociology, and also because the profession does not want to be seen as political or socially biased. Hence, minimising contextual factors allows the profession to maintain its own interests of being in a position of power and not upsetting those that are perhaps more powerful. In doing so, however, those in our society who often have the least power continue to be given messages that the problem resides within themselves whilst obscuring the actions of powerful groups in society. Unlike critical psychology, clinical psychology has not adequately reflected upon, and conceptualised, how power functions in society and psychology (Coles, 2010; Smail, 2002).

## Summary

Clinical psychology claims to be scientific but is not always critical enough of its own research base, or reflective enough of what constitutes knowledge. The claims to science have been important to the profession, aiding its status and power. The profession is ambivalent about therapy and sees broader roles for itself. However, significant governmental investment in IAPT has pulled it towards individualistic models and potentially oppressive practices, whilst neglecting the flaws in its evidence base. Clinical psychology has an anxious relationship with diagnosis, both criticising it and trying to accommodate it. The same can be said of social context, with a partial recognition of the role this plays in mental distress, but an eagerness not to upset powerful others. Overall, there are elements of the profession trying to push a progressive, critical agenda; however, this often conflicts with what clinical psychology sees as being in its own best interests.

## Critical Alternatives

Within adult mental health, there have been two main philosophical alternatives to mainstream individualistic models (either psychological or biological): social constructionism/dialogism and social-materialism. We will reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of each before exploring practical applications of some of these ideas.

## Social Constructionism and Dialogism

Social constructionism focuses on how meaning is constructed between people, with a particular focus on language and the power of language to shape how we see ourselves and others (see Burr & Dick, this volume). These theories allow consideration of how social narratives can position people as weak and dysfunctional (and others as worthy and strong). Approaches grounded in social constructionism, such as narrative therapy, shift the focus from the individual and encourage us to reflect on power and challenge how language is used within teams, families and by individuals. Therapists working with families or individuals will look to question disempowering and oppressive messages about people, such as in terms of their ethnicity, sexuality, gender and as someone who is mentally ill. A perspective related to social constructionism is the Open Dialogue (OD) approach developed in the 1980s in Western Lapland in Finland as part

of a review of the Finish psychiatric services. Its theoretical underpinning emphasises the importance of social networks and draws upon the philosophical roots of dialogism (Bahktin, 1984, 1986; Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006) and, in particular, the notion that ideas and meaning do not arise within individuals' heads but emerge in dialogue between people. OD, broadly, sits within a social constructionist framework. There are many aspects of OD that share values and assumptions that resonate with critical psychology, such as not pathologising individuals, a focus on social factors (at least at an interpersonal level), and for a degree of modesty shown regarding professional "expertise" and respect given for the experience and knowledge of others.

There have been criticisms of social constructionism for paying too much attention to language. For example, Cromby (2007, 2015) has argued for the importance of the body and how power leaves marks on people's biology, in particular in terms of feelings. Cromby does not dispute the importance of socially constructed meanings; however, he describes how we know the world through our bodies and not just through words. From this perspective, oppression and our position in the world shapes our very being through our feelings, reflexes and unconscious perceptions (Bourdieu, 1984; Cromby, 2007, 2015). Overcoming disempowerment is therefore not just the feat of altering the stories we and others tell of us, as oppression has been written upon our bodies. Similarly, Kelly and Moloney (2006), whilst acknowledging the potential advantages of a more politicised form of therapy, criticise a lack of acknowledgment of how the material/physical world disempowers people. They argue that it is simply not just the negative stories that are told about people that needs to alter, but access to real-world resources such as housing, money and supportive social relationships.

## Social-Materialism

The Midlands Psychology Group (2012) published a social-materialist manifesto that contrasts itself to mainstream psychology. Social materialism shares concerns with social constructionism in terms of the importance of social context and power but also incorporates the biological and physical aspects of the world. It emphasises how social-material forces shape individuals, including their biology, and note that: "Distress is enabled by biology but not primarily caused by it" (MPG, 2012, p. 97). This latter point could be compared to walking—we need legs to walk, but our legs do not decide



where we walk to (where we walk will be depend on a wide range of factors and influences)! The manifesto does not give a specific approach to addressing distress as it sees suffering as arising from the complex social-material fabric of the world. It does, however, highlight the limits of traditional psychological and psychiatric approaches and notes that when therapy is helpful, it is not by technique but due to relationships, listening and affording respect.

The social-materialist manifesto is an attempt (one they leave open to development) for a consistent and encompassing framework to ground psychology upon. The manifesto does carry the risk that people feel unable to make positive change, or as one person responded to the manifesto, “It can be difficult to know how to intervene at a social material level” (Methley, 2014, p. 39). Alternatively it can motivate us to think creatively about how psychologists can help to reduce inequality (Harper, 2014) and also prevent us from offering individualistic solutions to problems that require answers in the form of social change (EMCCP, 2014).

## Summary of Critical Alternatives

There are similarities in the above perspectives, all having a focus on social interplay and dynamics of power, though there are also distinct differences. Social-materialism theorises the body and physical world, as well as the importance of language. Whilst our roots stem from a social-materialist perspective, social constructionism and the approaches stemming from them offer much in the way of challenging oppressive constructions of people.

## Application of Critical Perspectives/Methods

### Context

A critical approach to clinical psychology needs to be contextual:

- Conceptually, in the ideas it is grounded in and those it shares with others
- Reflectively on its own position, in terms of what access to resources the psychologist has in a particular context—and the restrictions imposed upon them
- Practically in supporting people, so moving from working with individuals, to groups, neighbourhoods and communities

In whatever context a clinical psychologist works within, there is always a risk that clinical psychology acts in a dominating and controlling manner, rather than one that facilitates and lends a hand. To help avoid being oppressive, practitioners need to continue to reflect on their own knowledge and practice. It is also important that the lived experience and knowledge of the people psychologists are working with is given weight and significance. A critical clinical psychologist needs to consider their limits and to avoid offering simplistic solutions to complex problems.

Below are examples of approaches taken by critically oriented clinical psychologists (for further examples, see Coles, Keenan & Diamond, 2013; Diamond, 2008; Holmes, 2010; Newnes, Holmes, & Dunn, 1999, 2001). The examples below have arisen in the context of mental health work that is dominated by either a biomedical model (a model where people's problems are seen as resulting through faults in their biology to be rectified by medication) or cognitive models (where the fault lies in the individual's pattern of thinking, to be rectified by CBT). The social context and issues of power are rarely topics of discussion in mental health team meetings, and the work is predominately oriented towards individuals. Other aspects of the context are the increasing business-like nature of the NHS and increasing importance of IAPT and individual contacts.

## **Working Critically at an Individual Level**

When working with people individually, a psychologist needs to ensure that clients understand the effects of inequality and oppression on their well-being and so issues such as money, housing and access to education need to be central when attempting to understand people's problems (see power mapping by Hagan & Smail, 1997). If people are to have any chance of sustaining reasonable mental well-being, they will need support with practical and social issues, such as housing, access to education and seeking legal advice around benefits. Psychologists and mental health services can try to help people practically, and we could develop new ways of working with communities; however, we need to be aware of the limits of what we can do so that we do not offer solutions that conceal bigger issues. For example, it is not in our power to build new and decent housing, design neighbourhoods and spaces that are conducive to positive well-being, or to create supportive and positive job opportunities. We can, however, raise awareness of these issues so to encourage progressive social policies.

Support and supervision individually to staff and collectively to teams can be a useful way of drawing attention to issues of power and social context. The

idea of formulation has entered the mainstream in mental health services and can be a way of sharing critical ideas; though, formulation has the potential to be blaming and pathologising. Within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust a summary sheet of two pages, including a social, historical and psychological formulation form, was introduced in supervision as a means of encouraging discussion beyond individual and psychiatric factors (Coles, Diamond & Keenan, 2013). These formulations with care coordinators (mainly nurses) opens up space to ask questions and hold conversations that highlight the importance of a person's history and social circumstances, and minimises the usual obscuring focus on symptoms, distorted cognitions and diagnosis. These discussions can also help create space to consider broader salient factors such as economics, inequality and poor housing.

## Opening Up Space for Dissenting Ideas

Within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, a mechanism for promoting a more critical awareness and the importance of social context and power has been the publication of *Clinical Psychology Bite-Size*, which is received by all members of staff in adult mental health services in the Trust. *Bite-Size* is a two-page readable summary of psychological and social topics highlighting key research, theory and implications for practice. At the time of writing, there are 45 *Bite-Size* articles, starting in 2008 (see Coles, Diamond & Keenan, 2013 for further details). Topics have included: social inequality; OD; deconstruction of CBT and alternatives to challenging beliefs; criticism of diagnosis; service user involvement; making sense of unusual experiences; and sharing alternatives models of psychiatric drugs. Such articles try to remove the technical mystique of psychological and psychiatric approaches used in mental health services and highlight the social-material nature of distress and dynamics of power to all staff and anyone else who is interested.

Organising the provision of conferences and training is another legitimate form of practice for a clinical psychologist and can be used to bring together dissenting voices, to share critical ideas and to challenge dominant practices and ideas. Notable examples of such conferences are the two "Psychosis in Context" events within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (Coles, Keenan & Diamond, 2013). The conferences were arranged with the belief that people "wield greater power and resistance if we stand together" (p. viii) and looked to explore the relationship between power and the problematic term "psychosis" and to consider practical ways to resist domination by restrictive ideas and practices. Acting collectively was a core aspect of the ethos of the events, alongside embracing a range of perspectives and forms of knowledge.

Running public debates is one way to highlight the power imbalances and damaging practices within the psychiatric system. Clinical psychologists within Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust held a series of debates on topics such as CBT, risk, community treatment orders/coercion, diagnosis and survivor knowledge (Keenan & Coles, 2012). The debates created a space where different ideas could be shared, discussed and critiqued. The debates were popular, attracting a range of staff, survivors and service users as debaters and audience members. This was partially achieved by having a range of people as debaters, including psychiatrists and CBT therapists, and motions that would divide opinion and were often controversial, such as “CBT is Fool’s Gold”. By having debaters provide polarised perspectives on a topic, a space was created for the audience to consider a diversity of ideas and opinions. The act of debating itself aids critical practice by creating space for questioning ideas to form between people.

## Group Work

Facilitating group work with people who use services is seen as a legitimate mainstream role of a clinical psychologist. Such group work can obviously perpetuate problems, such as individualising people’s problems or imposing a limiting and repressive form of knowledge onto the people attending (see Terkelsen, 2009). However, groups also have the potential for oppressed individuals to share experiences, to hear alternative critical accounts of their experiences and to come together to create a sense of solidarity, which has the potential to lead to collective action. Although there are risks to psychologists initiating and supporting such groups, there are positive examples of psychologists encouraging people with experiences of using services to be more vocal and active within and beyond mental health services (Diamond, 1998; Diamond, Parkin, Morris, Bettinis, & Bettsworth, 2003; Houghton, Shaw, Hayward, & West, 2006).

The work of clinical psychologist Guy Holmes (2010) summarised in “Psychology in the Real World: Community-based groupwork” is a good example of using groups in a critical manner, where the boundaries of professionalism are broken down and radical content helps shape the group. Courses such as the one on “toxic mental environments” were specifically designed to support those attending not only to collectively analyse the people and environments they inhabit but to also encourage them to alter aspects of the environment they felt were unhealthy. Other groups directly challenged accepted expert accounts of human distress and help, such as ill-

ness and medication, including the Nottingham Mind Medication Group (2013) and Leicester Living with Psychiatric Medication Group (2013). Each group opened up space for a range of views on psychiatric drugs, as well as the opportunity for group members to support each other in their interactions with services, to contest dominant practices imposed upon them, and social action in the form of a drug mug amnesty and redecoration to highlight the influence of drug companies on services. Each group had a thread that endorsed lived experience as an important form of knowledge, which could be usefully combined with a modest and questioning approach to professional knowledge.

### Community Projects, Social Action and Politics

Innovative psychological practice was developed in the 1980s (Holland, 1991, 1995) in a deprived multiethnic population in London. It was grounded in the principles of empowerment and liberation. The work involved supporting people to move through different stages, from seeing themselves as passive recipients of services, “patients on pills”, to actively reflecting on life experiences and the meaning of distress, to a growing consciousness through talking in groups of the shared experiences of oppression and exploitation, through to taking action to change the social causes of marginalisation. Holland (1995) notes such projects are difficult for practitioners, as the work “challenges the vested, and anxiously protected, interests of the many distinct professional groups” (p. 142) and questions the very notion that professional intervention is more effective than lay action. Bostock (2004) also describes attempts to bring together different groups with shared interests to address debt and financial problems. The work led to people moving from being isolated individuals to active, vocal and with a clear cause.

In the same way that people who use/survive mental health services have more power and influence collectively, so too do psychologists. This power can be used to help maintain the status quo either actively (such as through the IAPT programme) or through silent collusion by not speaking out against oppression. The Psychologists Against Austerity (PAA, 2015) campaign is an interesting example of psychologists using professional knowledge collectively to challenge oppression (it includes but is not restricted to clinical psychology). The briefing paper highlights how austerity policies work through several psychological mechanisms—humiliation and shame; fear and distrust; instability and insecurity; isolation and loneliness; being trapped and powerless—to cause individual and community distress (PAA, 2015). The PAA

website ([www.psychagainstausterity.wordpress.com/](http://www.psychagainstausterity.wordpress.com/)) gives several suggestions for taking action under headings such as learn, talk and share knowledge; contribute to public debate; share and reflect on personal experiences; make a demand for political change; and organise and act for change. PAA directly challenges government policy and has encouraged the BPS to take a similar stance, though at the time of writing this does not appear to be the case. When psychologists are involved in advocating for others it is important to “articulate how our interests are bound up in our representation of others’ interests and the risks of well-meaning misrepresentation and oppression” (Bostock, 2004, p. 26).

## Current Trends

There are a number of current trends that restrict and support critical practice:

- Restrictive
  - Within mental health services an ever-increasing business culture and drive for targets is restricting the freedom of critically oriented practitioners to initiate innovative ideas. It is also tending to push people towards individual contacts, and bureaucratic overload is squeezing out space and time for additional projects.
  - IAPT models: the IAPT model of psychological provision has significant government backing and likewise supports their agendas. There is a diversity of models in clinical psychology, but IAPT has advanced a diagnostic, individualistic form of psychology. Whilst this has been restricted to primary care services, it is likely to spread further.
- Mixed
  - Social media: social media has allowed critical practitioners to connect and share ideas more easily between themselves and with the public. On the other hand, social media has also allowed individualistic models of psychology to flourish and spread quicker and further into society.
- Supportive
  - Collective critical statements: in mental health, there have been a number of groups who have issued critical statements on topics such as mental health practice (Bracken et al., 2012; DCP, 2013), austerity (PAA, 2015) and social foundations for psychology (MPG, 2012).

These statements have had a greater impact and power than if the ideas had been written by an individual.

- OD: within adult mental health services, OD has gained some traction and remains a useful source for challenging accepted assumptions and for promoting the importance of social networks and the meaning of people's experiences. Whilst many biologically oriented practitioners are critical, the approach has managed to reach a wider audience than many critical ideas.

## Summary

Clinical psychology is in a state of flux: on the one hand, there is potential for a more critically oriented profession—this stems from its claims to work beyond the individual, its criticism of diagnostic models, advocating for the importance of social context, and how some members in the profession have taken a critical interest in austerity. On the other hand, a significant number of the profession are critical of the above, and advance a simplistic form of science and promotion of individual therapy, which appears at least partially driven by status anxiety. There are many ways a critical clinical psychologist can practice, either individually, with groups, challenging dominant ideas, working with communities and promoting progressive social policies. We need to continue to highlight social problems and be helpful where possible; however, we also need to continue to reflect on the limits of the solutions we can offer to complex social problems.

There appears to be some renewed interest and energy in critical approaches in clinical psychology, however, there are also likely to be challenging times ahead to put such ideas into practice. The most significant driver in the NHS for psychology is investment in IAPT, which is individualistic, diagnostically driven and closely aligned to political powers. There is also a growing business agenda and privatisation in the NHS. The twin drivers of IAPT and privatisation of the NHS will tempt psychology to pursue its own interests even if it is of detriment to those marginalised in society.

Clinical psychology has the potential to be more critical, but it needs greater clarity and commitment to critical values and assumptions if it is to resist the weight of social and political forces. The form and function of the NHS that the profession has grown up in is changing rapidly, and there are serious questions as to whether critically oriented practitioners can continue to operate inside it or will need to step outside the NHS.



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# 28

## Educational Psychology in (Times of) Crisis: Psycho-Politics and the Governance of Poverty

China Mills

Let me start with a disclaimer—I am not an educational psychology practitioner, never have been and unlikely ever will be. However, I work alongside, teach and supervise those who are practising or training to be educational psychologists (EPs). In my multiple daily encounters with EPs and trainees, I have noticed something. I have noticed that many EPs are acutely aware of the contexts in which they work. When probed as to the reasons that may lie behind a family's distress or a child's behaviour, many trainees speak in no uncertain terms about poverty, alongside multiple deprivations and discriminations that are often fuelled by, and in turn perpetuate pathways into, poverty. Many trainees make this observation in terms such as, 'well, obviously the real issue is poverty', and this is often followed by a 'but'. The 'but' that follows often signifies a sense of powerlessness or of a feeling of limited power within the trainees who speak of it: 'obviously its poverty but what am I supposed to do about that?' Or perhaps—'obviously poverty is the problem but I can't change that so I will try and do what I can using my training'. This makes me wonder what it would be like if, and what it would take for, EPs to speak of poverty and not feel overwhelmed and powerless, and not to follow it with a 'but'?

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## What is Educational Psychology?

Educational psychology is both an academic discipline and a practice. While in some parts of the world a distinction is made between the discipline of educational psychology and practitioners (school psychologists); in the UK, educational psychology tends to be linked to its practice: practitioners either employed by local authorities or privately working with children, schools and families deemed to be in need of support. Thus, written into the fabric of educational psychology are assumptions about what and who is ‘normal’.

Historically, educational psychology has been claimed as a scientific practice embedded within the therapeutic project of the modern liberal state (Williams, 2013), and marked by a desire to predict, cure and control those deemed to be non-normative learners (Bird, 1999). The role of educational psychology was seen to lie in ‘identification, diagnosis and treatment’ (Philips, 1971), establishing educational psychology as a governmental tool of assessment—a way of categorising minds and bodies, while itself also a body of knowledge that produces textbooks, qualifications, professional accreditations, training courses and ultimately practitioners (Williams, 2013). But what is educational psychology identifying, diagnosing and treating? As with psychology in many of its myriad forms, educational psychology has been critiqued for its tendency to conceptualise ‘problems’ as within child rather than as relational or organisational problems that may be manifested or enacted through children (Loxley, 1978). It is therefore important to note that educational psychology is not monolithic, and that there are numerous critical strands to this work (Billington, 2006; Bird, 1999; Corcoran, 2014; Williams, 2013).

The critique of educational psychology as individualising has a long history tied to its very beginnings. Cyril Burt (the UK’s first employed applied psychologist) was key to the shaping of UK educational psychology during industrialisation, with his Galtonian sympathies for eugenics and use of psychometrics for measurement and differentiation. EPs then came to apply this logic to what was conceptualised as a key ‘problem’ of the time—‘feeble-mindedness’—and the threat this was seen to pose to economic progress (Williams, 2013). Early conceptualisations of disability as an economic threat and a burden continue to haunt educational psychology and global disability discourse today (see Chap. 24, this volume). For example, much mainstream global disability (including mental health) advocacy as well as cuts to services and benefits for disabled people in the UK are justified on how much disability costs the economy (APPG, 2014; WHO, 2010).



While measurements of ‘burden’ and ‘cost’ are problematic for multiple reasons (Fox-Rushby, 2001), framing disability as an economic threat is also an issue because it obfuscates the role of economic systems in disabling and debilitating people, and furthermore, in making a profit from this debility. This global market in debility (Puar, 2011) is of particular concern for those professions both seeking to address the symptoms of disablement while simultaneously making a profit from these symptoms, and especially for those involved in the psy-disciplines. Bearing this in mind, in this chapter, I want to explore how some psychological conceptualisations of ‘problems’ as within children has always been of concern but may be especially so now given UK governmental responses to the financial recession of 2008, alongside growing advocacy to scale up mental health services globally. Firstly, I will outline the current political and economic context in which EPs work within the UK in which to embed discussions of educational psychology’s role in the psychologisation of poverty. Particular focus will then be given to the psychic life of austerity, and specifically to poverty-related stigma as a lived experience and a form of governance. Alternatives to psychologisation will then be considered, with a focus on the potential for a psycho-politics of educational psychology.

## **The Social and Political Context of Educational Psychology in the UK**

Decisions made by bankers and stockbrokers in the financial districts of large metropolises seem far away from the realities of children, families and schools. So too do debates and policies formulated and argued over in the House of Commons. Yet political economy saturates and shapes children’s lives in multiple ways—ways that are becoming increasingly apparent and increasingly harsh since the financial recession and subsequent governmental policy to address it.

Since the 2008 financial recession, the then Coalition, and now Conservative, governments have implemented a series of changes and cuts to welfare provisions and public services known as austerity (i.e. bedroom tax, cuts to disability benefits, cuts to social services and local government, increase in benefit sanctions, the introduction of Universal Credit, and more). Since 2008 (but with a marked increase from 2010 when austerity policies began to be introduced in earnest), households living below the minimum standard increased by a third, and families with children are the worst affected group

(Padley, Valadez, & Hirsch, 2015). This package of austerity measures has disproportionately affected those people who are already experiencing poverty and deprivation. A report of the UK Children's Commissioner (2015), for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, states that there are now 3.7 million children living in relative poverty in the UK (27%), which is expected to rise to 4.7 million children in 2020. This means that this is the first time since records started to be kept that absolute child poverty has not fallen.

With such dire circumstances and projections, it is important to try to understand how these policies and cuts impact on people's everyday lives and the areas in which they live. What does austerity mean for the children, families and communities that EPs have contact with?

Spending on early education, Sure Start and childcare have fallen, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit payments have been frozen in cash terms, and the income threshold for eligibility to claim the family element of Child Tax Credit has substantially decreased (Lupton & Thompson, 2015, p. 21). At a community level, over 400 Sure Start children's centres closed during the first two years of the Coalition government, following a cut of one-third in funding (4Children, 2012). There have been significant rises (of over 70%) in the number of children referred to social care since 2007, with no similar increase in number of social workers (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work, 2013). Similarly, funding for domestic violence shelters has massively decreased, meaning that hundreds of women and children cannot be accommodated, trapping them in violent and abusive relationships (Women's Aid, 2015). This is of concern for children because research suggests that the effects of abuse and related experiences have a 'dose response', meaning that severe impact is linked to sustained and repeated experiences throughout childhood (Anda et al., 2011).

The report 'Impoverishment in the UK' (2013), using survey data on living standards, estimated that around 4 million adults and children were not eating enough, 1.5 million children were living in homes without adequate or any heating, and 2.5 million in homes that are damp (Gordon et al., 2013). A recent All-Party Inquiry into Hunger in the UK details evidence of an increasing use of food banks by people on low incomes, and the Trussel Trust, the UK's leading provider of food banks has reported record numbers of over a million food packages (over 2014–2015) going to low-income families (Report of the UK Children's Commissioner, 2015).<sup>1</sup> All of

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://foodpovertyinquiry.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/food-poverty-feeding-britain-final.pdf>; and <http://www.trusselltrust.org/resources/documents/Press/Trussell-Trust-foodbank-use-tops-one-million.pdf>

this points to a significant impact of austerity on schools, some of which not only face cuts to budgets but also have increasing numbers of children arriving each day who are hungry and who cannot afford necessary materials such as uniforms, books and school trips (Lupton & Thomson, 2015; Smith, 2014).

Despite government rhetoric, many of the multiple cuts to benefits and services affect the same households, meaning that people may experience multiple deprivations simultaneously. Poverty rates are particularly high among families with three or more children, households who live in rented accommodation, families with young children, and within already marginalised groups, especially disabled people and/or racialised groups (Hannon, 2013; O'Hara, 2014). It is unsurprising given this evidence that Bradshaw and Main (2014) state that the burden of austerity has hit children the hardest. Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) document a decline in children's wellbeing since the recession, saying that 'children are suffering most, and will bear the consequences longest, in countries where the recession has hit hardest' (2014, p. 2).

In a report by the Children's Society (2015) 'Through young eyes', a project that interviewed 2000 young people aged 10–17 years old about experiences of poverty, children not only spoke about living in damp cold homes but also about the social and emotional costs of poverty and the stigma they experienced because of not being able to afford new clothes, claiming benefits, or living in social housing. These are the homes into which many EPs across the UK are walking into; these are the children and families that many practitioners meet every day. Many children go to school after a night in a cold damp home, after a night's sleep interrupted by worrying about money, and after not eating enough breakfast. Such children may well struggle to concentrate and be unable to sit still, they may feel anxious and frightened and take their fear out on other children. In behaving like this, they may well be interpreted from subjective assessments and blunt tools used by teachers and psychologists to meet diagnostic criteria for a range of behavioural problems and mental health issues, from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to Conduct Disorder. Living in poverty and in the reality of austerity may well be psychologically distressing but how useful is it to understand and act on this distress as the symptoms of behavioural or psychological disorders? In order to address this question, let us now turn to one of the key relationships often repeated within psychological research: the association between child poverty and mental health, and the associated politics of psychologisation.

## The Politics of Psychologisation

Much research has found a positive association between markers of poverty and children's poor mental health. Children from poor households in the UK are three times more likely to have a mental health diagnosis than children in richer households (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005) and certain diagnoses, such as conduct disorder and ADHD, tend to show links to family poverty, particularly for those facing persistent economic stress (Murali & Oyeboode, 2004). Higher social disadvantage increases likelihood of diagnosis of childhood behavioural and emotional issues, with poorer children experiencing higher rates of diagnosis of depression and with anti-social behaviour linked to poverty histories (McLeod & Shanahan, 1996). Crystal, Olfson, Huang, Pincus, and Gerhard (2009) in a comparative study of a number of US states found that children from low-income backgrounds in the USA are significantly more likely to be psychiatrically diagnosed and to be prescribed anti-psychotics than youth from high-income homes.

This empirical research is important, yet it leaves questions unanswered. For example, the majority of research into associations between poverty and poor mental health draws upon diagnostic categories. Thus, the research only shows a link between poverty and increased likelihood of receiving a diagnosis. While living in poverty may indeed lead to levels of distress that may appear to meet diagnostic criteria for mental health conditions, it remains questionable how helpful it is to frame this distress as symptoms of an individual disorder. Furthermore, diagnostic categories have been widely critiqued for individualising and depoliticising distress.

The explanatory frameworks employed when conceptualising the relationship between children's mental health and poverty tend to emphasise 'increased rates of parental and family characteristics associated with child psychiatric disorder, rather than the economic disadvantage itself' (Murali & Oyeboode, 2004, p. 220). Here poverty is not understood as directly related to mental ill health, but as mediated by other mechanisms, such as level of education and child-parent interactions and attachments (Murali and Oyeboode). In much of this work, conditions of poverty remain a 'trigger' for what are assumed to be underlying predispositions to mental illness. Much of the literature on poverty and child mental health focuses on the individual psyches and behaviour children and families living in poverty, rather than the politico-economic conditions that sustain poverty.

Here there is a shift in the labelling of poor people from culture of poverty to psychological disorder and medical pathology—where a mental health diagnosis and sometimes compliance with psychotropic drugs (despite sometimes harmful side-effects), as well as mental health screening, are requirements for

eligibility to receive welfare provisions (Schram, 2000). For example, Hansen, Bourgois, and Drucker (2014) discuss how the retraction of welfare provisions for low-income groups in the USA has led to a dramatic increase in medicalised support in the form of disability benefits justified by a psychiatric diagnosis (now the largest diagnostic category qualifying people for payments).

This is one instance of the ‘pathologization of poverty’ (and arguably also its psychologisation), whereby seeking psychological and pharmaceutical intervention has come to be one of the remaining survival strategies for poor people in the USA (Angell, 2011; Wen, 2002) in an ‘era of medicalized poverty’ (Hansen et al., 2014, p. 81). With increased rates of anti-depressant prescriptions written since the recession, this would also seem to be an issue for the UK (Barr et al., 2015). This could be read as an example of the psychologisation of poverty at work within educational psychology practice (Gordo Lopez & De Vos, 2010; Mills, 2015), where psy-expertise and classifications may serve to obfuscate the social relations and conditions in which both poverty and psychology’s classificatory systems are embedded.

This raises the question of whether we are witnessing the reconfiguration of poverty from ‘an economic problem to a medicalized [or psychological] one’ (Schram, 2000, p. 92), paving the way for increasingly clinical and therapeutic approaches to poverty, and resulting in psy interventions being positioned as ‘(technical and medical) solutions to (political) “problems”’ (Howell, 2011, p. 20). There may be huge socio-political ‘side-effects’ in promoting psychiatric and pharmaceutical understandings of and interventions into poverty: ‘Allopathic, individualized, medicalized, approaches to poverty reinforce the isolation, marginalization, and pacification of low-income persons and communities’ and subordinate people to expert discourse (Schram, 2000, p. 98). This is of particular concern as psychological discourse is proliferated through schools, where both nationally and internationally schools as seen as key sites to mainstream particular approaches to mental health (WHO, 2010). Taking seriously the politics of psychologisation in relation to poverty raises the question of whether there is a way for EPs to recognise and act on distress while conceptualising it as a symptom of austerity and poverty.

## The Psychopolitics of Educational Psychology

Williams (2013) suggests that alongside, and in resistance to, educational psychology as a therapeutic project, runs an emancipatory project. For Williams, this project is psychoanalytically imbued. But I wonder if one strand of this alternative educational psychology might also be psychopolitical. Cyril Burt’s work on the heritability of intelligence and on the typology of ‘backward’

children lay the foundations for what would become educational psychology in the UK (Bird, 1999). Included in his typology were the 'lazy' and the 'dull'. In his critique of the psychopathology of colonialism, Frantz Fanon, an anti-colonial revolutionary and psychiatrist from Martinique, who worked in French-colonised Algeria, critiques colonial psychiatry for seeing resistance to colonialism as biologically organised. Fanon (1963, p. 245) gives the example of how, during colonisation, 'the lay-out of the cerebral structures of the North African', were seen as responsible for their supposed laziness, inaptitude and impulsivity (Fanon, 1963, p. 245). When in fact, using Fanon's sociodiagnostics (Fanon, 1967), it is colonialism itself that is psychopathological, 'a disease that distorts human relations and renders everyone within it "sick"' (Loomba, 1998, p. 122). For Fanon (1963, p. 239), these signs, usually interpreted as caused by faulty brains, and interpreted by Cyril Burt to be the inherited characteristics of 'backward' children, may be symbols of resistance, where laziness marks 'the conscious sabotage of the colonial machine' by the colonised. He continues,

The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequences of the organization of his nervous system or of the characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation. (Fanon, 1963, p. 250)

Thus, Bulhan rejects the popular idea that Fanon abandoned psychiatry for politics, instead it was 'his ability to connect psychiatry to politics or private troubles to social problems and, having made the connection conceptually, to boldly act that made him a pioneer of radical psychiatry' and of psychopolitics (1985, p. 240). Psychopolitics, an anxious process (Lebeau, 1998), marks a constant shifting between the socio-political and the psychological, a continuous 'to-and fro-movement, whereby the political is continually brought into the register of the psychological, and the psychological into the political' (Hook, 2012, p. 17). Thus, importantly not dissolving the two or abandoning one register in favour of the other, but employing a 'psychology of critique' (Hook, 2012, p. 18). Hook (2004, 2012) further foregrounds a psychopolitical analysis as falling into three forms, the 'politicisation of the psychological' (Hook, 2004, p. 85), deploying psychological concepts in understandings the workings of power, and putting psychological concepts to work politically 'a means of consolidating resistances to power' (Hook, 2012, p. 18). How might educational psychology employ psycho-politics—always connecting private troubles to social problems?

Speaking of the 'psychic life of colonial power' (Hook, 2012, p. 18) both is a reference to the use of the psychological to explore workings of power

and hints at how the colonial shapes and makes possible psychic life. Thus, we might also speak of the psychic life of austerity as a way to understand the psychological impact of austerity policies (the way they make people feel) while never losing sight of the political landscape in which these feelings are embedded. This has always been a key strategy of the psychiatric survivor movement—to read what the psy-disciplines frame as ‘symptoms’ *psychopolitically*, meaning that they are not only personally meaningful but politically meaningful in that they may constitute ‘rational and resistant reactions to maladaptive environments’ (Goodley, 2001, p. 215), including maladaptive socio-economic politics of austerity. Such a sociodiagnosics is a move away from the critique of educational psychology as a form of psychologisation. Or perhaps it is a depsychologised psychological practice (Burman, 2012; Williams, 2013).

Psychopolitics links to other emancipatory projects within education, such as those of critical pedagogy, psychiatric survivor literature, critical disability studies, and feminist scholarship and activism. While disparate in some ways these projects share something in common—the linking of inner worlds to outer worlds, of psychologies to contexts. This would be to embed educational psychology in something like C. Wright Mills’ sociological imagination that is constantly able to shift from the psychological to the political, from individual biography to social history, and always see the connections between the two (1959/2000). Here educational psychology could be conceived of as a practice that could enable something like Paulo Freire’s (1970) conscientisation—the reformulation of problems within their total context leading to critical intervention into the way we exist in the world and with which and in which we make sense of ourselves and our lives (see Chap. 8, this volume). This would mark a move against and in the opposite direction to the politics of psychologisation that (re)configure social and economic crisis as individual crisis.

## The Psychic Life of Austerity

Looking to political economy as the root cause of many children and families’ struggles does not have to be a disempowering process for psychology practitioners. This is evident in the growing movement of psychologists within the UK calling attention to the psychological impact of austerity measures and impoverishment. The Walk the Talk campaign, a 100-mile walk raising awareness of the mental health consequences of austerity is a prime example. The campaign, led by Clinical Psychologist Stephen Weatherhead and



psychologists from the British Psychological Society (BPS) took part in the campaign because in their daily work, they can see the damaging effects that the increasingly punitive benefits system has on people's mental health. In an article in the Guardian, Weatherhead said,

It feels a bit crass trying to work with someone on their depression or anxiety, when that depression or anxiety is well-founded because they're at risk of losing their home, or not being able to feed their kids. (cited in Foster, 2015)

Weatherhead draws attention to the debilitating effects of deprivation and stress and the potential futility of combatting this through individualised forms of therapy because these do not address the underlying cause of distress: poverty and austerity.

A similar stance on the toxicity of the cuts to people's wellbeing is taken by the group Psychologists Against Austerity (PAA). Their 2015 briefing paper on the psychological impact of austerity points out that the BPS code of ethics (2009) names sensitivity to developments in the social and political context as a key standard for competence as a practitioner. This makes the case that not only are many psychologists in a unique position to see the everyday psychological impact of austerity measures but furthermore, ethical practice demands that psychologists understand this psychological impact within the political economy in which it is embedded. The PAA briefing paper cites evidence that directly links psychological experiences to public policy and to macro social and economic shifts. Instead of outlining a series of individualised diagnostic criteria of the mental health consequences of austerity, PAA list five 'austerity ailments' which mark specific ways in which austerity has a damaging psychological impact. These are humiliation and shame; fear and mistrust; instability and insecurity; isolation and loneliness; and being trapped and powerless. In the next section, I will focus briefly on one of these 'ailments': humiliation and shame (in response to poverty-related stigma) and how this impacts upon the practice of educational psychology.

## **'It's a Council House Kid': Poverty-Related Stigmatisation**

The Children's Society (2015) 'Through young eyes' report documents the embarrassment and shame that many young people feel in relation to being seen as poor. Over half (55%) of the children who said that their family is 'not

well off at all' said they had felt embarrassed and 14% had experienced some form of bullying (Children's Society, 2015, p. 17). Alice and Kara cited in the report said that

In my own experience, through no fault of our own, my mum and me are in a place where we wear clothes and shoes that nobody else wants (charity shops), eat the left-over food that nobody else wants (supermarket markdowns) and have people judging us because we live on benefits in a council house. (Alice, *ibid.*, p. 16)

Some people say 'oh it's a council house kid' ... they judge on their appearance or how clean they are. It makes me feel quite angry, maybe their family hasn't got enough to buy them clothes straight away, maybe they can't afford the water bill. (Kara *ibid.*, p. 16)

Some of the young people interviewed felt ashamed about having to use food banks as they felt that it meant that they cannot look after themselves (*ibid.*, p. 16). The young people interviewed spoke of trying to protect their parents from seeing the social and emotional costs of poverty on the children's lives. Sometimes this took the form of self-withdrawal from social activities, and sometimes children regulated their needs more covertly.

While there are important social, cultural and historical nuances, shame has been associated with poverty across varied international contexts in both global South and North countries (ATD Fourth World, 2012; Leavy & Howard, 2013; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000; Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, & Koch-Schulte, 2000; Walker, Kyomuhendo, et al., 2013). In research by Walker et al. (across seven high-, middle- and low-income countries), 'a mutually reinforcing process of shame linked explicitly to poverty was evident', and shame was an essential factor in persistent poverty (Walker et al., 2013, p. 218). Walker et al. found the 'epitome of shame' was perceived as the inability to provide basic necessities for one's family, as well as not being able to meet normative social expectations (such as contributing food at social gatherings) (2013, p. 222). The inability to meet these normative expectations often leads to self-withdrawal from situations where poverty might be revealed. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) document the 'socially constituted agrophobia' [sic] enacted when people exclude themselves from activities that structurally exclude them (p. 74). They argue this degrades dignity and leads to extreme tension and stress—the inscription of exclusion into people's bodies. Social bonds are corroded as people are able to participate less, inhibiting relations with others who share similar patterns of meanings and daily rhythms (Summerfield, 2000).

While living in poverty and claiming welfare may be a symbol of oppression and or disempowerment in multiple ways, it arguably need not be inherently stigmatising. Thus, children's and families' experiences of shame need to be understood within the wider cultural production of poverty-related stigma. This production includes the derogatory and prejudiced depiction of people living in poverty in newspapers, TV programmes such as 'Benefits Street' and overall media discourse of 'skivers versus strivers' (O'Hara, 2014). It is common in the UK media to see so-called hard-working families pitted against those who claim benefits, despite the majority of children (61%) growing up in poverty in the UK coming from families where at least one parent is in paid employment. This reflects the reality of employment for many in the UK: low wages for insecure and part-time work and zero hours contracts (Children's Commissioner, 2015).

Poverty does not mean one thing and is increasingly understood as multidimensional. Wacquant (2008) documents how new forms of poverty are enabled through neoliberalism as it produces some populations as disposable and as waste. This is achieved through increasing labour precariousness (material deprivation, temporal uncertainty and personal anxiety); the relegation of people to deprived neighbourhoods where resources are scarce; and heightened stigmatisation in public discourse and daily life (Wacquant, 2008). For Tyler, such 'stigmatization operates a form of governance which legitimizes the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices' and garners public consent for punitive cuts and welfare reforms (2013, p. 8). Thus, the cultural production of the stigmatisation of poor people has material effects. In Sheffield where I live, like many other towns and cities across the UK, public telephone boxes and billboards display a satellite image of the city with the message 'know a cheat in your street?' and a hotline to call and report people suspected of fraudulently claiming benefits. In this context, it is unsurprising that the psychologists walking a 100 miles to raise awareness of austerity's psychological effects call 'to end the media stigmatisation of those in conditions of deprivation and poverty; and lead to welfare being considered a safety net for the most vulnerable in society rather than a weapon with which they can be coerced' (Foster, 2015).

The governance of poverty and the politics of psychologisation are important for EPs whose involvement with children and families may result from, and/or play a part in governmental intervention for a child. Some EPs are familiar with a feeling of playing the system: using diagnoses and classifications to divert financial and educational resources to a child and their family. This is a well-worn pathway of invoking potentially stigmatising categories and scripts as sometimes necessary secondary damage in the pursuit of

material forms of support. Here psychologisation, while sometimes deemed necessary, may also invoke stigmatisation, in a context where stigmatisation may be a form of the governance of poverty (Tyler, 2013). Like many of the psy-professions, educational psychology emerged in dependence on the stigmatisation of particular kinds of children and thus the institutionalisation of stigma within the education system. However, if as we have traced throughout this chapter, poverty-related stigma may produce ‘symptoms’ of distress, then using the potentially stigmatising categories of educational psychology to provide material support for this distress may do more than secondary damage and may not be best conceptualised as a ‘necessary evil’. This is to supplant a stigmatising poverty discourse with a stigmatising psy-discourse, both of which individualise and pathologise (or demonise) impoverishment. This is of particular concern for those professions both seeking to address the symptoms of disablement and stigma while simultaneously making a profit from these symptoms, and so especially for those involved in the psy-disciplines.

In this way, educational psychology can be understood as a form of governmentality—one of many institutions and professional discourses that supervise, classify, and intervene upon populations, and particularly those living in poverty (Foucault, 1979). As a practice, educational psychology further governs mentalities through focusing its gaze on the psyches and behaviours of people living in poverty, rather than on the political economy of impoverishment. Thus, through making available particular kinds of subjectivity and personhood for children and families, educational psychology enables governmental rationales ‘to be articulated through the ethical self-knowledge and self-practices of subjects’ (Hook, 2007, p. 2), including practitioners.

## Conclusion

In 1974, David Ingleby asked a question still relevant today: ‘for whom does the psychologist work?’ (Ingleby, 1974). And in this vein, today we might ask ‘for whom does educational psychology work?’ Does it work to obfuscate the political economy of children’s lives, to reconfigure the symptoms of poverty and austerity as individual disorders? Or might it work in the opposite direction—to make connections between inner worlds and the contexts in which they are constituted? So, what can educational psychology do? EPs can be, and are, part of groups such as PAA. In their daily work, services might think differently about what records they keep and what statistics they generate, recording indicators of poverty and ‘austerity ailments’, instead of solely indi-

vidualised diagnoses. Pathways for these records to travel to and be seen by local councillors and government should be established or consolidated. Links between EPs and activists, charities and campaigning groups may also be important—on an individual family level to help people access much needed food banks and childcare, but always linked to wider political campaigning for systemic change.

Thus, a core requirement is thinking through what educational psychology aims to achieve *and* the *mechanisms* to employ it, so that it does not construct impoverished children and families as passive or pathologised recipients. The architecture of this kind of practice and policy needs to foster agency, security, connectedness, meaning and trust (McGrath, Griffin, & Mundy, 2015); needs to constantly move between the psychological and the political; and needs not to stigmatise, individualise, pathologise and psychologise those living in poverty. This would be to recognise that not only are many EPs in a unique position to see the everyday psychological impact of austerity measures but also that, furthermore, ethical practice demands that psychologists understand this psychological impact, as well as psychological knowledge itself, within the political economy in which it is embedded.

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# 29

## Critical Organisational Psychology

Matthew McDonald and David Bubna-Litic

Social psychology has had a significant impact on the way we think about organisational life. Flick through any text book on organisational behaviour, introductory management or human resources and you will see, prominently featured, social psychology topics such as personality, attitudes, social identity, attribution, teams, leadership, decision-making, communication and conflict. These text books draw on a range of classic and contemporary social psychological conceptions such as the Big Five Factors, cognitive dissonance, social categorisation, social facilitation, persuasion, conformity and obedience, to name just a few.

Social psychologists can rightly feel a sense of achievement regarding their contribution to the scholarly understanding of organisational life. The impact of psychological theories applied at the social level stretches back to the early 1900s. Social psychological techniques were used in the recruitment and selection of men and women who served in World War I and II (Vinchur & Koppes, 2010). In the 1930s, the Australian social psychologist Elton Mayo conducted the now famous Hawthorn Studies, which instituted employee attitude surveys, and influenced the course of studies into motivation, job design and performance for decades to come. During World War II, the hugely popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test for example was

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developed to assist women to identify the kind of job for the war effort they would be most suited to (Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995). In the 1950s, social psychologists undertook a range of organisational studies investigating teamwork, decision-making and leadership (McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012).

However, many of the theories and research drawn from social psychology are often uncritically taught in universities and are accepted and employed by organisational practitioners, many of whom are unaware its contested nature (e.g., Erington & Bubna-Litic, 2015). Important historical events and ongoing debates in social psychology around philosophical issues concerning its ontology, such as its individual/social split, and epistemology, such as the use of laboratory experiments, continue to cause dissent and separatism (Elms, 1975; Pancer, 1997; Parker, 1989; Stainton-Rogers, 2011). These are among many issues that tend to go unexamined in mainstream organisational behaviour textbooks.

An example of this can be seen in the use and application of personality theories and the significant industry that promotes the use of scaled questionnaires used to measure it. Personality scales purport to measure what becomes taken at face value and seen by practitioners as the primary cause of an individual's behaviour. Similarly, the use of scaled questionnaires used to measure personality are viewed as largely unproblematic and seen as reliable and valid measures for use in employee recruitment, selection and career development (e.g., Robbins & Judge, 2011). Despite the many questions that hang over the use of personality scales in the workplace, the majority of organisational behaviour textbooks typically downplay interpretation problems, often only highlighting the potential for employees to cheat or fake their answers (Vecchio, 2006).

In keeping with the overall theme of this handbook, the aim of this chapter is three fold: (1) to review the existing critical social psychology literature applied to organisations, termed here 'critical organisational psychology'; (2) discuss theoretical perspectives that critical social psychologists can draw on that build on the existing literature; and (3) report on some current trends. Each of these sections will discuss existing studies and point out, where appropriate, how they might contribute to new lines of research in the area of critical social psychology generally.

## Critical Organisational Psychology

Although the body of literature in critical organisational psychology is modest in size there have been a number of key articles, chapters and books that provide insights into how different perspectives in critical social psychology

might be applied to the workplace. The critical perspective seeks to extend understanding by challenging core mainstream assumptions, and also by championing the ideas and views that do not fit within the current trajectory of mainstream research and thus is relegated to the periphery. In keeping with a focus on psychological processes, these critiques have sought to investigate assumptions about subjectivity in terms of the phenomenological experience of organisations and the way in which workers are positioned and subjected to power relations by governmental and scientific discourses—including those promoted by social psychology (Foucault, 1977; Willig, 2013; Wooffitt, 2005). In contrast to mainstream social psychological theory, the critical perspective seeks to link individual subjectivity with supra-individual organisational structures and societal institutions. These relationships are regarded as just as important to understanding what shapes and influences organisational behaviour as intra-psychic variables such as self-schemas, personality traits, attitudes and cognitive preferences.

## Subjectivity

Although classical social theorists (e.g., Marx, Weber) have written extensively on the links between political economy, degraded workplace conditions and psychological alienation, the first social psychologist of the modern era to investigate these issues was Erich Fromm. Inspired by a range of radical humanistic philosophies including Marxism, existentialism and psychoanalysis, Fromm (1956/1991) made a number of critical observations concerning modern day work and its various modes of exploitation. What set Fromm apart was that he wrote on the limitations of mainstream social psychology theories, arguing that theories outside the sub-disciplines boundaries had much to add to the understanding of social behaviour. Fromm also criticised social psychology's unconscious moral attitudes and its unwillingness to engage in social criticism (Ingleby, 1991/2002).

Like other existentialists, social theorists and poststructuralists, Fromm (1956/1991) argued that the dissolution of traditional institutions in the modern era such as religion, gender roles, extended family, community and lifelong occupations had led to a greater reflexive awareness and emphasis on self-identity. Under modern conditions, self-identity had become a project to be invested in and worked on (see also Giddens, 1991). Modern society has also become dominated by a complex set of market-based relationships which imbricate its values throughout society, as a consequence, Sandel (2013) and Bauman (2007) argue, individuals have internalised its logic, commodifying

themselves in order to compete with others in the labour market. For Fromm (1947/2003, 1956/1991), this led to the emergence of a 'marketing orientated' character strategy, where individuals cultivate personality traits such as being cheerful, dependable, enterprising, reliable and ambitious, because they are valued by the market. Fromm argued that this led to an individualised form of alienation (as opposed to Marx's collective concept) in which self-identity is experienced and judged based on occupational and materialistic criteria (Prasad & Prasad, 1993).

Despite its rhetoric on increasing individual freedoms, a number of authors argue the market economy (neoliberalism) only pretends to enhance individual freedoms and is instead, essentially exploitative (Bourdieu, 1999; Chomsky, 1999; Lemke, 2001; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). Writers such as Foucault (1988, 1991) and those he has influenced (e.g., Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1998) have attempted to examine how neoliberalism maintains control through 'technologies of the self', market rationalities and the governing of mental life, or what is conceptualised as 'governmentality'.

Critical scholars have found a place in organisation studies by investigating how these forms of domination and power operate in the workplace within the context of neoliberalism and the way this shapes subjectivity. These scholars are uncovering how, through a complex system of transactions, the market ultimately favours one set of personality attributes over another (McDonald & Wearing, 2013). The market for human resources is seen as not simply determined by the preferences of the buyer, but in the market for labour it is the buyers' preferences for certain attributes that will determine what the market values. The concern of critical scholars is how deeply these preferences become internalised and how such attributes may become dominant in the formation of self-identity. Their concern is not simply limited to the cultivation of performative attributes but also how market values encourage the development of both narcissistic and competitive personality traits (Blackler & Brown, 1978; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Cushman, 1995; Lasch, 1979; Manne, 2014). The effect of this on organisational life is that workers are often pitted against one another in what Lasch (1979, p. xv) describes as a war of competitive individualism and which Mandel and Novack (1970, p. 77) argue generates "unbridled individualism, egotism, and self-seeking. ... The members of this society, whatever their status, have to live in an atmosphere of mutual hostility rather than solidarity".

In spite of writing in the 1950s, Fromm's ideas provide a basis for understanding the commodification of self-identity in the contemporary workplace. It explains, for example, the commodification of emotional intelligence which distinguishes those job applicants and workers who are emotionally less

intelligent and thus less worthy (Fineman, 2000, 2004), setting up a blueprint for a character regime that workers are required to live up to (Hughes, 2005). The commodification of self-identity is also linked to 'work and spend lifestyles', which have shown to lead to increased levels of stress, addiction, depression and anxiety disorders (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2008; Schor, 1999). At this stage, there are still many unanswered questions surrounding the commodification of self-identity in the workplace. For example: What is the experience of a commodified self? How deeply it is internalised? How has this technology shifted the way people perceive others in organisations? What are its outcomes in terms of wider issues, such as, prejudice, health and wellbeing?

More direct critiques of organisational psychology began to appear in the 1990s. Hollway (1991, 1998) for example employed a Foucauldian genealogy to trace the historical development of organisational psychology and its discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, to its current day focus on psychometric testing, management coaching, enhancing motivation, leadership, organisational change and culture. Hollway argues that when organisational psychology is analysed from a broader historical perspective, it reveals how its status as a science is used as a power/knowledge to gain normative acceptance. Its operationalisation in the workplace effectively disciplines workers to think about their job roles and tasks in particular ways that align their subjectivities with owner/manager prerogatives. This has evolved through owner/managers selective appropriation of positivist scientific methods that promise efficiency and break jobs down into their smallest component parts, reconstruct them and then requires workers to fit into them. Workers must also submit to micromanagement and surveillance techniques in the measurement of quarterly or annual performance assessments where so-called objective measures are used that ignore the many factors that are outside the workers control but in which they are made to feel responsible for. Far from being an objective producer of cumulative knowledge, leading to the incremental improvement of organisational performance through enhanced people management, the application of many scientific psychological techniques to organisations are shaped and reshaped by dominant political and economic systems, scientific discourses and their power/knowledge.

In one of the first books on 'critical management studies', Steffy and Gimes (1992), like Hollway earlier, argued that personnel/organisational psychology seeks to produce normative accounts of organisational behaviour based on its theory which employs a neo-positivist epistemology and individualistic ontology. The authors argue that personnel/organisational psychology's adherence to this perspective restricts workplace democracy and participation by reducing the experience of organisational life down to simplistic analytical models that owner/managers use to control organisational behaviour



(e.g., happy versus productive). The result is delimited definitions of workplace motivation, stress and satisfaction because its inquiries are “confined only to those propositions that are empirically testable” (Steffy & Grimes, 1992, p. 184).

In the early 1980s, the term ‘personnel management’ was replaced with ‘human resource management’ (HRM). HRM seeks to provide a set of policies and practices for managing people that meet the needs of an organisations strategy. HRM and organisational psychology have become inextricably intertwined, with one influencing the other. Both are products of the current political zeitgeist that seeks increasingly centralised control, through the micro measurement of performance and selection, using personality and cognitive testing and behavioural grading systems, in order to rank individuals against each other (Steffy & Grimes, 1992). More recently, psychological techniques such as emotional intelligence and positive psychology have sought to capture and deploy people’s emotional energies and authentic-selves to elicit greater engagement, commitment and performance (Fineman, 2004, 2006a; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008). HRM and its focus on strategy furthers managerial goals, yet fails to call into question the goals themselves that may run counter to the needs of workers (Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Organisational psychologists, in conjunction with owner/managers, maintain strict hierarchies of authority that allow existing inequalities to define job descriptions and social relations (see also Parker, 2007).

McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012) conducted a review of the various critiques of mainstream social psychology’s application to organisations, finding that critical scholars typically focus on four main issues that undermine the potential liberating effects of organisational life. These include (1) social psychology’s valorisation of positivist (experimental) research methods; (2) its identification with owner/manager perspectives on workplace issues and problems; (3) its focus on intra-psycho variables or internal mental states when accounting for organisational problems, while overlooking external/macro societal factors; and (4) the absence of a clear moral and ethical framework for determining workplace research and practice. This approach ignores the imperatives of most workers who regard the measurement and facilitation of intra-psycho variables such as motivation, self-esteem and matching their personality traits with job characteristics as less important when compared with the more dynamic and influential issues of power, justice, equality, job security and employee relations with management (see also Steffy & Grimes, 1992). Mainstream social psychology’s lack of reflexivity has led to a lazy attitude towards key moral issues within its research and practice. As a consequence, there is little commitment to inform and critique industrial and employee relations policies that have led to the degrading

of workplace conditions in many industry sectors of the economy (see also Huszycz, Wiggins, & Currie, 1984; Steffy & Grimes, 1992; Zickar, 2001).

Organisational psychology is caught up in a web of power relations that privilege the views of owners/managers seeking to decrease costs and increase profits—regardless of whether they exploit workers in the process. Since the 1980s, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, working conditions have deteriorated as governments in both countries have allowed neoliberal assumptions to dictate industrial and employee relations policy. This has led to reduced rates of pay, the weakening of trade unions, increased job insecurity, longer and more intense working hours, greater casualisation based on short-and/or fixed-term contracts and reduced social security provision (Bourdieu, 1999, 2000; Gorz, 1999; Thompson, 2003). Organisational psychology is not responsible for these circumstances, however, its unwillingness to criticise the political and economic policies that have led to these conditions has meant it has become an apologist for them. As Hepburn (2003, p. 153) writes, traditional psychologists “believe that forays into the world of politics would only serve to puncture the illusion of a value-free approach towards its research”.

## Social Identity Theory

Given the highly social nature of organisations and the contemporary job design focus on project teams, it is no surprise that Social Identity Theory (SIT) has become a popular approach for understanding aspects of organisational behaviour. The number of books, chapters and journal articles on SIT applied to organisations attest to its popularity (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004; Haslam & van Dick, 2011; Haslam, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Ellemers, 2003; Hogg & Terry, 2003). Some of the findings from these studies suggest that higher levels of commitment and feelings of stress are both correlated to and mediated by positive group-based identifications within organisations.

SIT was introduced by Henri Tajfel who, along with his colleagues, sought to herald in a more ‘social’ European approach to social psychology, challenging the inherent individualism of US approaches (Wetherell, 1996). However, Tajfel’s radical beginnings have de-evolved back into an individualistic asocial approach whose focus is now predominately based on the theory and philosophy of social cognition (e.g., Dashtipour, 2012; Jenkins, 2014; Parker, 1997; Schiffmann & Wicklund, 1992; Wetherell, 1996).

An early critique of SIT applied to organisational behaviour was conducted by Marshall and Wetherell (1989), who investigated career and gender iden-

tity using discourse analytic methods. The aim of the study was to understand how “people construct their sense of self in different contexts in relation to their occupations” (Marshall & Wetherell, 1989, p. 112). Employing a discourse analytic method exposed a number of limitations of the SIT approach. The participant’s identification and conscious understanding of the social groups they belonged to lacked a unified set of characteristics. In other words, there was an absence of a “collectively shared stereotypic representation, image or consensus” of the legal profession they belonged to (Marshall & Wetherell, 1989, p. 114). SIT assumes the individual will seek to enhance their self-esteem by trying to gain membership to groups of a higher status; however, the stereotypic view of women as inferior legal professionals was accepted by the majority of the women in the study. The study concluded with the finding that when participants viewed themselves as members of a particular group, their perception of that membership was not stable over time and place (see also Condor, 1996).

The most recent addition to the critique of SIT applied to organisations is Dashtipour (2015), whose book chapter begins with a history of the conceptualisation of groups in social psychology. Dashtipour (2015) along with Wetherell (1996), agree that Tajfel’s initial leanings with SIT were towards social constructionism. SIT was initially regarded as having critical theoretical credentials due to its focus on “prejudice, oppression, conflict and social change” (Dashtipour, 2015, p. 186). SIT’s move towards a greater focus on social cognition led to a breakaway group of scholars who developed a discursive approach to social psychology underpinned by social constructionism and discourse theory. Despite its often trumpeted emphasis on groups as opposed to individuals, SIT’s application to organisations is still fraught with a number of problematic features. Dashtipour (2015, p. 192) argues that even when SIT is used to emphasise politics and the social nature of mind and behaviour, it is still based on an “instrumentally rational view of the organisation”. This is due to its positivist research agenda, which “takes part in the managerial mission to direct and control behaviour” (Dashtipour, 2015, p. 192).

## Critical Alternatives

Due to the burgeoning nature of critical organisational psychology, there is significant potential to conduct new lines of research. Some of these have already been discussed above. What follows is an outline of some additional topics and theoretical approaches for interested researchers (word limit only allows for a select few, however, there are many more).

## Labour Process Theory

Early labour process theory (LPT) evolved from a broad Marxist framework which sought to expose the hidden relationship between the ownership of capital and the social construction of workplace reality. From a Marxist viewpoint, the crux of labour relations is the ideological control of the process, by which labour relations are negotiated and become objectified into a seemingly limited set of choices. This contributes to the oppression of one class by another. Braverman's (1976) *Labor Monopoly Capital* sparked a stream of critical thinking and theorising about labour relations, which evolved over time, along with new forms of capitalist production and management. LPT contributes to critical organisational psychology in several ways.

Firstly, it opens up a more sociological focus to include analyses of the relationship of class and, more generally, market relationships within the general political economy on the workplace. The key import of studies on LPT has been to facilitate the recognition that managerial action either ignored or obscured the interrelationship between capital and labour. Research has highlighted how managers utilised a range of strategies to essentially maintain control over the potentially countervailing interests of labour. In particular, scientific management was identified as a conscious and systematic set of techniques that divided the conception and control of work (managerial function) from its execution (workers function), which reduced the worker to an "automaton and management became practically omnipotent through its abuse of science" (Tadajewski, Maclaran, Parsons, & Parker, 2011, p. 152). Under this regime, workers are controlled and disciplined in the name of efficiency and greater profits for shareholders.

Second, LPT has contributed to debates around the conception of labour as a factor of production, which must be negotiated with, suggesting that it leads to a series of efforts to mitigate the power of labour within the context of a rapidly globalising workplace. LPT seeks to expose the unequal social relationships where the power of the working population to control their working lives is limited. LPT has sought to expose how management thinking does not challenge the fundamental anti-pathetic relationship between capital and labour, but rather has sought to develop more sophisticated control techniques, which do not fundamentally challenge the power imbalance in the employment relationship. These can be seen in popular HRM practices that attempt to co-opt the hearts and minds of workers, variously labelled High Performance or High Involvement Work Systems. These technologies are designed to stimulate greater engagement, performance, creativity and

commitment. However, these systems have never been immune from rationalisations, closures, scaling down, low-cost competition and stock market pressures (Thompson, 2003). Despite the investments in time and money these HRM systems require, they have done little to improve the workers lot given that many continue to experience “increases in job dissatisfaction, work intensification, hours worked, job insecurity and social inequality” (Tadajewski et al., 2011, p. 77).

In the 1990s, labour process scholars steadily moved away from Marx’s theory of class conflict, yet maintained his focus on false consciousness by employing Foucaudian notions of subjectivity as the basis of their interpretations. Representative of this trend, Walsh and Bahnisch (2002) sought to question how workers liberate themselves from false consciousness. Mainstream social psychology is based on liberal modernist assumptions that people are free-thinking, free-acting agents who are cognizant of the ideologies that influence their thinking. In contrast, Engels believed that the acceptance of capitalist ideology had become unconscious and so pervasive that it was rarely questioned by the people affected by it (Fromm, 1962/2009). The degradation of workplace conditions is often falsely conceived of as a ‘natural law’ prescribing that the owners of capital and managers will always have a prerogative over job design that workers must accept and who are forced to compete with other workers for scarce resources (Augoustinos, 1999; Davies, 2014; Mandel & Novack, 1970). Further analysis on this topic is required in order to better understand the subjective features of false consciousness within the context of the individualistic and competitive ideology of neoliberalism (Walsh & Bahnisch, 2002; see also Davies, 2014). Augoustinos (1999, p. 295) argues that the concept of false consciousness has been misappropriated by mainstream social psychologists who have constructed it simply as a “psychological-cognitive phenomenon located in individuals’ heads, rather than as a socially emergent product of a capitalist society”.

## Global Workplace Technologies

Social theory offers a number of important insights into contemporary globalised work providing a rich source of perspectives for critical social psychologists to draw upon. Key social theorists include George Ritzer and Zygmunt Bauman. Max Weber (1922/1978) coined the term ‘iron cage’ to describe what he believed to be the increasing rationalisation of modern life through the growth of bureaucracies and their power to control many aspects of day-to-day life. Employing Weber’s conception of rationalisation, Ritzer (2014)

extends this view to modern forms of job design, which he convincingly argues (for many organisations) are based on the hugely successful fast-food chain McDonald's.

While many knowledge-based organisations in Western countries attempt to design jobs along neo-human relations lines by instituting various HRM policies and practices, there has been a parallel upsurge in the use of scientific management approaches (Taylorism), particularly in low-skilled service sector organisations. Ritzer (2014) coined the term 'McDonaldisation' to refer to these rational approaches where every aspect of a job task is prescribed right down to the greeting one receives when approaching a fast-food counter or telephoning a banking or insurance call-centre.

Ritzer (2014) examined the McDonald's job design template, finding that its basic principles and technologies have subsequently been applied to a range of other service sector industries such as supply chain management, retail and tourism. Working life in these service sectors is frequently routine, repetitive, temporary, low skilled and low paid. Ritzer (2014) contends that four key techniques characterise the McDonaldisation process: (1) Efficiency: the most optimal method to conduct a workplace task, (2) Calculability: every workplace task should be quantifiable, (3) Predictability: workers provide standardised uniform services, (4) Control: workers are trained to behave in standardised uniform ways.

McDonaldisation, like its scientific management predecessor, has been responsible for the deskilling of workers and similarly conceives of work as something that is controlled by owner/managers. Under McDonaldisation, workers are given little opportunity to adjust, amend or redesign their jobs, rather their role is predetermined and set out in a standardised manual. McDonaldisation has been shown to increase productivity, but more importantly reduce labour costs, because labour and labourers are made interchangeable, cheap to train, cheap to replace and easy to control. They are good at making 'homogenous products' for consumers who desire standardised products wherever they go (Grugulis, 2007, p. 5). McDonaldised jobs are usually devoid of career and other characteristics that make them meaningful, so that such jobs are referred to as McJobs, which are defined as "low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low benefit, no-future jobs in the service sector" (Coupland, 1991, p. 5).

Again the separation of conception and execution is based on the power/knowledge of elites, whose interests lie behind strategies of efficiency and labour saving technologies. Rather than fitting work around the needs of workers, the McDonald's approach to job design frames workers within capitalist relations, who think in terms of free market values, and where other

possibilities of human potential is not a consideration (Hollway, 1998; Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Job design presumes that both workers and organisational performance criteria are naturally aligned in the same way that economic rationalists believe market values are the ultimate expression of freedom. However, both are aligned with elite interests, the former on managerial assumptions about worker behaviour and the latter with the owners of capital.

The McJob phenomenon has been likened to the conditions of the 'precariat', that is, the group of low- and middle-income earners who now work at jobs that are insecure, project based, casual, flexible and short term. This idea fits with Bauman's (2000) contention that we are currently living in 'liquid modern' times where life is precarious and conditions of uncertainty are normal. The primary focus of Bauman's conception of liquid modernity assumes a shift away from a 'producer society' to a 'consumer society' (McDonald & Wearing, 2013). Yet the concept of liquid modernity provides a number of useful insights for a wider understanding of the relationship between organisations and subjectivity (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010, 2014; Wearing & Hughes, 2014). Like Fromm, Bauman (2007) believes that in order to survive workers are required to commodify their personalities in order to compete and succeed in a market-based economy. Here the values of enterprise, flexibility, extraversion and entrepreneurship are valued because they are consistent with corporate goals, but also require the application of positive emotional energies such as passion, a positive attitude and the display of one's authentic-self (Binkley, 2014).

Critical social psychologists are ideally placed to contribute to these areas of research by examining how workers adapt to social change, in this case changes in job design technologies and the ideologies that drive it. While McDonaldisation incorporates many scientific management principles, it is a quantum shift from the original because workers are required to conduct social interactions based on a predetermined approach, as well as undertake positive emotional labour to gain a competitive edge for the organisation and to demonstrate passion and commitment for the job. This is a substantial widening of the ambit of labour relations from the scientific management era of the early 1900s where workers were primarily confined to the factory floor and where social interaction were frowned upon as non-productive; now even social interactions are specified. Social change, changes in technology and their influence on subjectivity is an issue that mainstream social psychology has failed to properly grapple with. In the current era, we generally think of new technologies in the form of information devices; however, new technologies can be applied to human beings as well. As Rose (1996, p. 313) notes, the way in which we think about ourselves as "creatures of freedom, of liberty,



of personal powers, of self-realization” are a product of human technologies which are any “assembly structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal”.

## Critical Organisational Psychology: Workplace Applications

Arguably three main factors characterise critical social psychology: a focus on the social; an analysis of power relations; and the championing of oppressed disempowered groups such as the poor, unemployed, homeless, young people, indigenous, disabled, refugees, mentally ill, homosexuals and single mothers. C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) summed up oppression when he argued that social structures, institutions, discourses and ideologies are the cause of people’s marginalisation, as opposed to faulty thinking or defective personalities.

Understanding the workings of power relations in organisations is therefore key to successfully fighting oppression stemming from inequitable practices. However, resisting and challenging entrenched power relations and the oppression they exert is always going to be a challenging task, even when that task is confined to a single organisation. It is likely to come at a cost for the individual or the collective wishing to take this challenge on. One only needs to look at whistle blowers to see the sacrifices and great costs that come from upholding principles of justice, fairness and equity. High-profile examples include Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning pointing to both the sacrifice, but also the complex moral dilemmas of acting against the interests of the state.

Another example closer to home is Professor Ian Parker, one of the pioneers of critical psychology. Professor Parker became the focus of international media attention for being sanctioned by his employer Manchester Metropolitan University for questioning management and implicitly its power to make decisions. Parker contested their policy regarding academic workloads and the appointment process of academic staff in his department. Parker, a one-time official of the University and Colleges Union, was disciplined by the University for Gross Misconduct and asked to apologise for his actions. Parker ended up resigning, stating that he and his research programme had been undermined, no doubt as punishment because he was prepared to speak out on an important issue. The issue of academic workloads has become one of the most contentious currently facing academics all over the world who are being increasingly stretched by their university’s to ‘do more with less’, while

performance expectations continue to rise sharply. The Vice Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University was presented with a petition containing 3700 names supporting Professor Parker's stance and his commitment to scholarship, the names on the petition included other notable scholars, students and practitioners from around the world. On top of this, the university received negative worldwide press over the issue. Yet despite this pressure the Vice Chancellor remained unchanged in his position, Parker was wrong to act in the way he did and therefore needed to be punished. This example illustrates the difficulties in challenging power relations and the sacrifice that people are required to make when they take on organisational oppression. While most of us consider ourselves to be critical psychologists, would we be willing to make the same sacrifices as Professor Parker in order to stand by the principles we espouse to others in our writing?

While there are certainly many less dramatic methods and techniques that that can be employed to challenge organisational power and oppression, such as becoming active in a trade union, building grass roots political coalitions, questioning and resisting unfair decisions, conducting participatory action research, conducting go slows or withholding critical information, they may not always be particularly successful in truly challenging the power of capital (e.g., Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Geoffrey, 2002). As Thompson (2003) argues, it is difficult for employers to act with justice, fairness and equality when global political economic forces are designed to meet the needs of capital as opposed to the needs of the people. The title of Chomsky's (1999) book *Profits Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order* says it all. The struggle between capital and people in organisations is an age-old issue that stretches back hundreds of years. It preoccupied the life of Marx and Engels and more recently Pierre Bourdieu. Challenging these forces is really what is required if the needs of workers are to take priority over profits in the organisational equation.

## Current Trends

### Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is an American development that has transformed the orientation of the discipline as well as having a significant effect on a number of other allied fields such organisational behaviour (i.e., positive organisational behaviour and positive organisational scholarship) and practices such as organisational coaching. Broadly, positive psychology is a research framework that seeks to prioritise positive states, outcomes and processes at both

an individual and collective level. According to Roberts (2006, p. 292): “The over-arching emphasis of this work is on identifying individual and collective strengths (attributes and processes) and discovering how such strengths enable human flourishing (goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005)”. Positive psychology distinguishes itself from related areas, such as the positive thinking movement, by claiming to be scientific and evidence based. It uses its scientific credentials to compete with other organisation improvement technologies.

Critical perspectives on positive psychology pick up on several concerns. The first sits within the broad critique of the assumption that it is possible to isolate some essential universal elements of an individual from their social context. Second, the critical view is suspicious of the assumption that positive and negative are easily distinguished. The division of the world into good (positive) and evil (negative) has a long history in Christian cultures. Positive psychology sets itself up as a counter discourse to the historical focus on psychopathology. One of its key concepts is that a focus on the negative can be viewed as negative thinking and thus is a problem of human cognition. Critical psychologists doubt that human cognition can be managed separately from its inputs and their work highlights the tendency of positive psychologists to evaluate human behaviour as either positive or negative in terms of organisational goals. In this, critical psychologists are cautious about the tendency of research to seek performative justifications akin to the old human relations maxim that ‘happy workers are productive workers’. There is a danger that being happy or positive is regarded as an individual choice, irrelevant to context and in particular conditional on the acceptance of the status quo in terms of social and institutional structures. Obviously, unhappiness is a motivation for change but a motivation for change could be a counter discourse to that of management. The third is concerned about the way power is exercised in the context of social organisation where knowledge is regarded not as neutral but is tied into linguistic structures that favour certain forms of subjectivity and regimes of control (Fineman, 2006a, 2006b; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008). Thus, critical researchers concerns around positive psychology are with how it positions itself within the broader discourses of organisational knowledge, representing itself as having a positive research agenda that is evidence based.

Quantification of evidence is a form that has good currency in the contest for research funding; however, this approach to research comes with claims of an exclusive insight into the positive domain of life. In line with Foucault, we ask, what types of knowledge and experience do they wish to exclude? The concern is that positive psychology is an attempt to define an entire pro-

gramme dictating what is and is not first rate science, decided upon by a group of insiders certified by each other whose standards must be adopted (Taylor, 2001). This polarisation of human life and scientific research can be seen as a barely veiled agenda to privilege one set of choices over another, by setting out the consequences of such choices as being essentially generative (e.g., life-building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating) (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and the others as not. These invoke a narrowed view of organisational life which could be easily solved were everyone to focus their energy in the directions they point to. It seeks to exclude views that do not fit within its purview and which seem to fit more with an American cultural institutional agenda closely tied to the economic imperatives of neoliberalism, where, for example, politicians regularly judge research as not being valuable to society/economy (Binkley, 2014).

## Critical Management Studies

McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012) and Dashtipour's (2015) work embrace critical management studies (CMS) as both a source and basis for conducting research in critical organisational psychology. CMS includes a broad set of reflexive practices, both methodological and epistemological, in organisational and management studies. CMS developed out of a range of affinities between a broad spectrum of critical stances and provides a space for dialogue about radical alternatives that question established relations of power, control, domination and ideology under contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Arguably, CMS has been an outlet for a range of social scientists who found their home in business schools paralleling a long-term decline in funding to social science research and teaching programmes. In many ways, CMS mirrors the state of disarray in left-wing politics in the early twenty-first century, where a strong suspicion of totalising narratives has encouraged a lack of common ground necessary for a united opposition to the neoliberal agenda, even after the 2008 global financial crisis and the deep economic recession that followed (Couch, 2011). This can be seen in debates about the relevance and marginalisation of CMS, in particular the concern regarding the lack of influence that critical research has had on practice. Thus, CMS has become a broad umbrella to "challenge prevailing relations of domination" (Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2011, p. 1), including those who represent marginalised groups in society, such as low-income workers, women, sexual minorities and also those who see new avenues towards liberation, representation and empowerment through the documenting and understanding the mechanisms of power and oppression.

A strong element of the critical perspective is the view that knowledge is incomplete without openness to different perspectives that challenge mainstream ontologies and epistemologies. Thus, it embraces a radical doubt regarding the possibility of neutrality and universality. These two stances remain suspicious of taken-for-granted forms of thinking, particularly in organisation behaviour, which they identify as inescapably located within existing historical, economic, cultural, social and political contexts (Alvesson et al., 2011; Grey & Willmott, 2005; Tadjewski et al., 2011).

An important debate in CMS revolves around the concern that critical research has rather little influence on what managers do in practice. Conflicts emerge within CMS because the more activist groups see others as ‘armchair critics’ who have failed to embody their espoused critical stance. However, the same criticism is levelled at management studies in general (Augier & March, 2007; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Overall, CMS seeks to ‘denaturalise’ concepts and theories, reflexively surfacing hidden assumptions regarding value systems, which affect the meaning and interpretation of research. For example, a common interest is to reveal the power relations that structure and maintain inequality in the workplace.

Dashitour (2015, p. 193) suggests that CMS obliges social psychologists to take a systems wide perspective that “influence management logics, perceptions and cognitions in organisations”. That seeking to solve managerial problems by employing a perspective based on positivist approaches to prediction and control will only further reduce the freedoms of workers; instead, the focus for social psychologists should be on the politically charged and often contradictory nature of organisations under the political economy of neoliberalism. As we ourselves have previously argued, CMS has the potential to provide the basis for new research agendas for critical social psychologists to follow as well as potential collaborations (McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012), particularly where social psychological topics in organisations remain under researched by social theorists and CMS scholars. These include critical social psychology’s perspectives on prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, aggression, attitudes, conformity, group processes and helping behaviours.

## Summary

Critical social psychologists have so far made only infrequent forays into the world of organisations, critiquing mainstream social psychological theories and practices such as the micro measurement of workers through the process of recruitment, selection and performance management and the privileging

of certain personality traits and emotional behaviours in line with owner/manager prerogatives. There are two main established areas of study that analyse organisations, which share an affinity with the principles of critical social psychology. These include classic (Marx, Weber) and contemporary social theory (Braverman, Ritzer, Bauman) and CMS. The brief analysis of these two fields was designed to provide an understanding of how critical social psychology can contribute to a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of false consciousness, McDonaldisation and liquid modernity. In return, critical social psychology can bring new perspectives to these fields through its expertise in critiquing mainstream models of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and so on in organisations. Contributing new knowledge to these concepts is important given the long and continuing exploitation of workers by organisations and the way in which organisations shape social structures and institutions which influence social behaviour. In conclusion, the key question remains, how do we better translate an understanding of power relations in organisations into practical actions that do not come at such a cost to those willing to challenge them?

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# 30

## Environment: Critical Social Psychology in the Anthropocene

Matthew Adams

‘The environmental challenges that confront society are unprecedented and staggering in their scope, pace and complexity. Unless we reframe and examine them through a social lens, societal responses will be too little, too late and potentially blind to negative consequences’ (Hackmann, Moser and Asuncion, 2014, p. 653).

Although ‘environment’ can refer to the surroundings or conditions in which something exists, its more specific meaning, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (3rd edition, 2011), is widespread: ‘The natural world or physical surroundings in general, either as a whole or within a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity’. Critical social psychology has many potential points of entry into the issue of the ‘environment’. However, a contemporary approach to this notoriously broad and ill-defined topic cannot, in my opinion, escape the overarching context of the *relationship* between human beings and their ‘environment’ as one marked by *crisis*. Incorporating relationships into our understanding of environment leads us to the concept of ‘ecology’. This is defined, sticking with the OED, as the scientific study of ‘the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings’ and ‘the study of or concern for the effect of human activity on the environment ... (also) a political movement dedicated to this’. Ecology therefore incorporates the dispassionate observation of interrelatedness in general and a more focused analysis of, and *concern over*, what human activity brings

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to the party. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of contemporary understandings of ecological crisis. I then describe how psychology has been co-opted into addressing this crisis, particularly in terms of trying to understand what factors determine more ‘sustainable behaviour’. This is followed by what some may consider a surprising ‘social turn’ in literature concerned with climate change mitigation and adaptation hinted at in our opening quotation. Subsequent sections critically consider the conception of the social therein, before exploring critical currents that might be of interest to critical social psychologists.

## Ecological Crisis

Since the mid-twentieth century, the idea that human activity, taken cumulatively, might be having a significant impact on the Earth’s ecology has gained significant momentum. This is what is meant by the term anthropogenic (e.g., ‘anthropogenic climate change’)—caused by human activity. While the climate change imaginary currently dominates many public framings of ecological crisis (Luke, 2015), human influence more generally is now considered so evident and extensive that many geologists consider the planet to have entered a new epoch—the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). The term denotes a period during which human activity has become the dominant influence on the natural environment and is increasingly adopted by scientists and commentators as an appropriate framing of the broader impacts of human activity on planetary life (e.g., Lewis & Maslin, 2015; Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007). The Anthropocene consolidates the notion of human influence ‘on’ ecological systems, but it is also a way of amplifying the interrelationship and interdependence that defines the co-constitution of human and other forms of life. Evidence of significant anthropogenic influence has been supported and elaborated since the mid-twentieth century by increasingly sophisticated scientific observations and computer models (e.g., Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), particularly the periodic reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); academic scholarship (e.g., Carson, 1962; Commoner, 1971); direct experience and media coverage of ‘incidents’ such as oil spills and fires, nuclear disasters and extreme weather events; and the emergence of a vocal environmentalist movement. All of these developments point to a significant historical *change* in the ecological dynamics that make life possible on Earth, especially (though not exclusively) climate.

That the planet is warming is a claim now supported by an overwhelming majority of scientists in the field.<sup>1</sup> This warming is ‘unequivocally’ linked to the increasing emission of greenhouse gases ‘and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia’ (IPCC, 2013, p. 4). Much of the noted increase in emissions stems from human activity, primarily the extraction and burning of coal, gas and oil and deforestation (IPCC, 2013). Of course these practices are central to countless other activities integral to the everyday lives of billions of people—transportation, agriculture, household energy use, lighting, heating, streets, places of work and leisure, and to help produce an array of consumer goods. The IPCC’s summary of ‘high confidence’ predictions makes it clear that negative outcomes of climate change are considered to far outweigh positive ones (IPCC, 2014). They include the globally uneven distribution of risks of death, injury, severe ill-health, disrupted livelihoods stemming from a range of events that include storm surges, coastal flooding, sea-level rise, inland flooding, extreme heat, insufficient access to drinking and irrigation water, reduced agricultural productivity and ‘systemic risks’—the ‘breakdown of infrastructure networks and critical services such as electricity, water supply, and health and emergency services’ as a result of extreme weather events.

Risks are ‘amplified for those lacking essential infrastructure and services or living in exposed areas’ (IPCC, 2014, p. 16); ‘people who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise marginalized are often highly vulnerable to climate change’ (IPCC, 2014, p. 6). Injustice and inequality will not be flattened out by a changed climate; for the most part it will exacerbate them. This amounts to a ‘double injustice’ in that those communities that have the least responsibility for climate change are often most at risk. Many forms of nonhuman life are also under threat, already evident in the decimation of many plant and animal species, with many more predicted to go the same way, as ecological degradation and global warming threaten many aspects of habitat necessary for survival and flourishing on the land, in the air and in the oceans and rivers (e.g., Pearce-Higgins & Green, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup>While there is extensive debate about the details of the Anthropocene, scepticism about the fact that climate change is real and human made is commonly over-represented and amplified for various reasons, including strategic actions of vested-interests and more routinely, as a way of avoiding the difficulties of a profound collective problem. In fact, the focus on climate in itself can too readily detract from the broader reality of anthropogenic ecological degradation. I have attempted to explain the origins of my own understanding, oft at the end of this chapter.



## The Psychology of Ecological Crisis

It is already apparent from the above discussion that human activity is centrally implicated in ecological degradation; it follows that changes in human activity are a route to a more sustainable society. It is possible then, as Koger and Winter assert here, to understand ecological crisis as an issue for psychology:

It is critical to examine the psychological dimensions of planetary difficulties because ‘environmental problems’ are really behavioral problems. They are caused by the thoughts, beliefs, values and worldviews upon which human beings act. Human behavior is ultimately responsible for rapidly deteriorating natural systems on which the survival of all species depends. (Koger & Winter, 2010, p. 2)

We need not agree with their model of causation—‘thoughts, beliefs, values and worldviews’ might equally be retrospective justifications for the way ‘human beings act’, nor assume that these are ‘psychological’ or ‘behavioural’ problems as clearly distinct from ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ problems, to see their point—the problems we are addressing should really be located somewhere in relation to human activity and therefore, potentially, psychology, rather than ‘out there’ in the ‘environment’. As Klein would have it, ‘the solution to global warming is not to fix the world, it is to fix ourselves’ (2014, p. 279).

What counts as relevant human behaviour in this picture is uncertain. As Squarzoni, in his informative illustrated account of climate change, states here, much of what ‘we’ routinely do appears to be implicated:

Whether we like it or not our way of life and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are inextricably linked. Whether we like it or not ... there are greenhouse gas emissions in every part of our life, from our food, our cars, our homes, our pastimes. All our activities are part of the climate crisis, all our wants, every product we purchase, the way we eat, get around, keep warm, Eradicating so much CO<sub>2</sub> from our way of life won't be easy. What do we cut out first? (2014, pp. 215–218)

If the focus is individual activities, we can see why policy makers, campaign groups and environmentalist commentators might welcome a psychology that tries to address individual behaviour change. If the problem boils down to many individual acts of consumption, recycling, travel and switching things on or off, then it makes sense to target and change those behaviours. Some commentators continue to target ineffective science communication as the problem here, and this has become one entry point for social psychology.

Traditions in attitude, persuasion, marketing and social norms are called upon to massage the message, adapt the narrative and communicate more effectively (e.g., Spence & Pidgeon, 2010; Stern, 2011; Van de Velde, Verbeke, Popp, & Van Huylbroeck, 2010). At its simplest, this take is another version of an ‘information-deficit model’ (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). It explains apparent indifference and inaction from policy makers and/or the public in terms of ineffective communication and knowledge transfer. We are ready and waiting recipients but are not being informed of problems and solutions in the right way. Critics are sceptical of the hopes invested in the right information, effectively communicated (Fischhoff, 2011). Those of us living ‘high carbon’ or ‘high consumer’ lifestyles have long been invited to contemplate the consequences of our actions and ‘make a difference’, all, it seems, to little effect.

## Foregrounding ‘The Social’

As a necessary corrective to simplistic depictions of what motivates human (in)action to be more or less sustainable, there has been, to paraphrase Will Leggett, a noticeable foregrounding of human fallibility in the social sciences (Leggett, 2014). Psychologists are busy identifying the many variants of psychological ‘barriers’ that are raised to inhibit the rational processing of information and hoped-for behaviour change, despite (or because of) greater knowledge about anthropogenic ecological degradation. These include an ever-growing list of perceptual, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal and group processes (e.g., Gifford, 2011). There is also an increasing effort to assert the existence of social ‘barriers’ and ‘determinants’, again with the intention of understanding what gets in the way of, or facilitates, sustainable behaviour (e.g., Bamberg & Möser, 2007). The importance of ‘social context’ is in fact now firmly part of the conceptual framework of climate change ‘adaptation’ and ‘mitigation’ adopted by large organizations such as the IPCC and UNESCO (e.g., IPCC, 2014; UNESCO/ICSS, 2013). There is growing acknowledgement of the limits of an information-deficit model and even of the idea of an individual driven by identifiable attitudes, values, norms and behaviours:

The story emerging ... here is one of individuals richly and dynamically embedded in households, communities, sociotechnical systems, economies and cultures. It goes a long way toward explaining the paradox of how the social drivers

of global environmental change persist, or at least change only slowly, while environmental crises continue to unfold rapidly. (ICSS/UNESCO, 2013, p. 17)

Compare this statement to the one made by the American Psychological Association's 'climate taskforce' a few years earlier: 'Through behavioral-investigations employing experimental and non-experimental methodologies, psychologists can identify the actual determinants of energy consumptive behaviors, many of which are psychological in origin, and can highlight them in communication campaigns to encourage people to behave in more sustainable ways and to promote energy conservation' (Swim et al., 2009, p. 15). The simplistic logic here asserts the power of Psychology to identify discreet variables: 'actual determinants of energy consumptive behaviours'; that they are largely 'psychological in origin', that is, within the individual and that the interventionist goal is to 'highlight them' in communication campaigns, which will then, presumably, cause behaviour to change in the right direction, confirming their existence as discreet, manipulable variables against a largely inert backdrop—the 'environment'.<sup>2</sup>

## Why Critical Social Psychology?

The insight that social context is highly significant in determining behaviour is hardly surprising for social psychologists. That the course of our actions owes at least as much to the properties of the social situation we find ourselves in as the properties of the individual we find ourselves in is a tenet of much social psychological theory and research. A shift towards the social has meant that psychological perspectives accentuating social context are gaining more legitimacy, as they find their way into reports, policy documents and related commentary, as noted above. However, any tale of a general turn to the social inevitably masks the many different ways in which 'the social' is comprehended and utilized. Criticism queries the extent to which models of 'social sustainability' reflect established critical understandings of the interrelationship between social, cultural, material and psychological dynamics with adequate complexity and whether or not the implications of addressing social contexts are reflected in solutions, models of change, intervention designs and policy proposals (Uzzell & Rätzsch, 2009).

Castree, for example, has analysed the particular ways dominant scientific discussion engages with and promotes 'the social' (Castree, 2014; see also

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<sup>2</sup>In this chapter, 'Psychology' is capitalized when referred to as a social institution.

Leyshon, 2014). There is, he says, a notable tendency to parse ‘social’ phenomena as discreet empirically observable ‘objects’ and to invite social science explanations as useful adjuncts to a scientific worldview. This view masks the extent to which ‘behaviour’ is interrelated with the behaviour (talk, gestures and messages) of those around us and our representations of them, from the unconscious collective and cultural roots of what motivates us to act and binds us to each other, and from the wider material infrastructure that makes some activities possible, sayable and doable, and others inconvenient, unthinkable and unsayable. What is missing is a sufficient acknowledgement of the power and complexity of social context to shape individual ‘behaviour’; of the extent of the interrelationship of the ‘social’ and the ‘psychological’, and of how particular configurations of ‘the social’ can serve different interests and the potential for radical social change.

Even in work addressing ‘social’ barriers to sustainable behaviour, we find a deceptive consensus about which human activities in particular we are trying to address. It is deceptive because specifics are often left unsaid but implied to be individual acts of consumption. We consume too many goods or too much energy, or the wrong goods, and disregard and dispose of goods too easily. So Psychology must be utilized to understand the ‘barriers’ to, or enablers of, consuming less and/or differently. This is an unnecessarily narrow definition of relevant human activity, which encourages reductive and apolitical understandings of ‘the social’ as a backdrop of levers and pulleys that push and pull individual behaviour this way and that, rather than give any sense of interrelated social and psychological dynamics. Existing formulations of the social amount to an ‘anaemic conception’ of what the social sciences and the humanities have to offer according to Castree and ‘a clear unwillingness to unsettle the economic and political status quo’ (2014).

## Critical Alternatives

Castree’s subsequent description of what is ‘screened out’ that is important to a critical social science applies equally to critical social psychology, ‘a focus on power inequalities, violence, and struggle among different constituencies—and much of what preoccupies the humanities—such as the ideas of duty, care, respect, responsibility, rights, faith, cruelty, beauty, and so on’ (Castree, 2014, p. 11) and, we might add, the potential for radical social change (de la Sablonnière, Bourgeois, & Najih, 2013). For a straightforward perspective in which ‘the social’ is bolted on to individual variables, a goal might be to try to rearrange some of those variables, but the wider configuration of ‘the social’

is not itself in question. From a critical social psychological perspective, ‘if we aspire to build a sustainable society we have to transform social relations, instead of making the existing ones sustainable’ (Uzzell & Rätzzel, 2009, p. 345). There is clearly work to be done in highlighting existing scholarship that better fits the bill of critical social psychology and in pointing to the potential for further developments. One notable direction in a critical and social orientation to ecological degradation has been what might be broadly referred to as a ‘soft’ cultural emphasis: the role of conventions, narrative frames, discourses—that make what we say and do intelligible and legitimate (e.g., Kurz, Donaghue, Rapley, & Walker, 2005; Lakoff, 2010).<sup>3</sup> Hanson-Easey et al. (2015, p. 217) claim, for example, that there is still plenty of scope for communication research to ‘fruitfully examine the discursive building blocks underpinning taken-for-granted ways of talking about climate change’.

A number of studies integrate a discursive focus with attention to embodied, affective and interpersonal dynamics—another point of entry for a contemporary critical social psychological approach. Research inspired by psychoanalysis, for example, suggests that when we are confronted with information about anthropogenic ecological degradation, rather than developing a clear-cut ‘pro-environmental’ attitude and rationally deciding what action we can take on this basis, the uncomfortable emotional response triggers more complex psychological dynamics—referred to, following psychoanalysis, as defence mechanisms (Lertzman, 2012; Weintrobe, 2013). What is potentially fascinating for critical social psychology in this context is the apparent *social* character of defence mechanisms—internal and interpersonal conversations and silences and gestures that follow the contours of a cultural ‘stock’ of prescribed narratives and amount to shared denial strategies (Billig, 1999; Norgaard, 2011).

Qualitative empirical work built on this premise, still relatively scarce, has utilized psychoanalytic conceptualizations of defence mechanisms more or less explicitly in exploring how culturally contingent media discourses, public discussion and everyday talk are drawn upon to make sense of the idea of climate change (e.g., Becken, 2007; Dickinson, Robbins, & Lumsdon, 2010; Norgaard, 2011; Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan, & Jaeger, 2001; Whitmarsh, 2008). Suggested interventions here take the form of

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<sup>3</sup> Here, I follow Dougland Hine’s general distinction: ‘on the one hand ... people tend to be more focussed on the technical or ‘hard’ end, rather than cultural or ‘soft’ end, of the mess we are talking about’ (Hine & Graugaard, 2011). He rightly claimed, in 2011, that the ‘soft’ end is relatively neglected. While ‘techno-fix’ frames might still dominate research and policy agendas, as I argue here, there has been a shift to acknowledge the ‘softer’ end, noticeable since that date. The distinction is an explanatory device. I am not suggesting that the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ can be easily separated or even identified in practice.

the conditions in which denial might be challenged and/or in which alternative narratives might flourish—such as encouraging the development of supportive, conducive environments in which anxieties are collectively confronted as a basis for change (Macy, 2013; Randall, 2009; Rustin, 2013). A willingness to ask radical questions about the stories we tell ourselves is appealing to critical social psychology, and there is plenty of scope for more creative and constructive work here. However, it is perhaps to be expected in a context of ‘ideological occlusion’, to borrow Kidner’s term (2001), that alternative narrative formations might often seem provisional or opaque, a point we return to below. Nonetheless, there are numerous examples of creative and social engagement with these issues.<sup>4</sup>

Other work identifies ‘soft’ obstacles to change in the ‘regime resistance’ of key players in governments and corporations (Geels, 2014): ‘policymakers and incumbent firms can be conceptualized as often forming a core alliance at the regime level, oriented towards maintaining the status quo’ (2014, p. 26). These alliances are ‘soft’ in that they are facilitated by interpersonal networks and social and cultural capital. They are forged in shared spaces, regular proximity, mutual interests, worldviews and experiences. They are made possible by positions of authority, access to media and dissemination. Analysis of the promulgation of strategic ‘denialism’, which perpetually unsettles anthropogenic climate change as a ‘fact’ and/or a problem, and/or as a problem ‘we’ can do anything about, supports the notion of ‘regime resistance’ (e.g., McCright & Dunlap, 2011).

Regime resistance also relies on the ‘harder’ material configuration of financial and capital support, technology and personnel and, lest we forget, physical force and incarceration (Geels, 2014; Klein, 2014; Urry, 2013). Further analyses of the ‘hard’, material ‘barriers’ to change include the complex assemblages of extraction industries, production processes and transport infrastructure that make ‘individual’ activities such as household energy consumption possible (Røpke, 2009; Shove & Walker, 2014). Shove is a leading proponent of a social practice approach, which asserts that the basic unit of analysis in addressing human responses to ecological crisis is not individual behaviour but social practices (Shove, 2010). Social practices are reflected in individual behaviour (cycling, driving, showering etc.) but they are made possible only by the contemporaneous integration of material infrastructure, social conven-

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the RSA’s seven dimensions of climate change project <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/the-seven-dimensions-of-climate-change-introducing-a-new-way-to-think-talk-and-act/>; Carbon Conversations <http://www.carbonconversations.org>; the Dark Mountain Project <http://dark-mountain.net>; and Mediating Change <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchcentres/oscr/research/themes/mediating-change>.

tions and bodily competence (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). The latter are practical orientations to the world, embodied in learnt habits, which are derived from and maintained by a social and material web of what is possible, doable and sayable. For Shove and colleagues, social practices are the site of social reproduction and potential change and should, therefore, be the focus of analysis and intervention.

Geels' analysis addresses important social dynamics that even supposedly hybrid models often leave out—dynamics that are central to perpetuating the practices of elite minorities. For Geels, the source of inaction in the context of ecological crisis is not (primarily) reluctant or ambivalent citizen-consumers (though these are symptoms of the situation described) but the 'active resistance by incumbent regime actors' to fundamental change (Geels, 2014, p. 21). The approaches touched upon here are starting points for a radical departure from what are conventionally understood to be 'barriers' but also question the object they are supposedly obstructing—'sustainable behaviour'. These accounts do not focus on the individual actor or household, more or less willing and able to act sustainably, but an interconnected set of social practices in which everyday individual behaviour is enmeshed. The metaphor of 'barriers' is in fact stretched to breaking point—combinations of material infrastructure, convention and embodied competencies permit and make possible human activity as much as they block and obscure. The problem, in the context of ecological degradation, is that these assemblages create high carbon 'path dependency' (Shove & Walker, 2014) that recruits elites and the rest of us in different but complimentary ways. One future direction for critical social psychology is to contribute to this multi-layered analysis.

## Other Possibilities

The kind of detailed enquiry provided by Geels can assist in identifying the specifics of the political and economic alliances that contribute to promoting an unsustainable present, while Shove and colleagues point us to the interlocking dynamics of material and social processes more broadly. What is missing from both of these perspectives is an account of psychosocial engagement with these variously formulated obdurate realities—the nature of the embodied, affective, subjective and intersubjective dynamics involved. To do so takes us into more troublesome, less convenient territory. For example, how does it *feel* to accept that the major responsibility for ecological degradation lies with a core alliance made up for the most part of minority elites, with battle and war analogies that pit 'us' against them (Klein, 2014)? In partially addressing



this question, George Marshall (2014, p. 42) highlights a tendency to construct ‘enemy narratives’ in climate change debates:

The missing truth, deliberately avoided in these enemy narratives, is that in high carbon societies, everyone contributes to the emissions that cause the problem and everyone has a strong reason to ignore the problem or to write their own alibi. ... If our founding narratives are based around enemies, there is no reason to suppose that, as climate impacts build in intensity, new and far more vicious enemy narratives will not readily replace them, drawing on religious, generational, political, class and nationalistic divides. ... History has shown us too many times that enemy narratives soften us up for the violence, scapegoating or genocide that follows.

Samuels relatedly emphasizes Freud’s understanding of how ‘ideologies are driven by fantasies, and these fantasies are focused on scenes of victimization’ (2015, p. 88). Thus, the wealthy see themselves as victims of high taxes, state intervention, a welfare burden, left-wing media and a liberal elite. Samuels relays the Freudian assertion that people ‘enjoy’ entertaining these fantasies and that they depend on an ‘us’ and ‘them’ split, which conveys both innocence and power upon victims. ‘Liberals’, says Samuels, have their own victimization fantasies ‘blaming the evil conservatives for all of the world’s problems’:

On a fundamental level it does not matter if conservatives are to blame for climate change or our failure to fight it; what matters is how we all participate in this system of self-destruction and whether we can give up the fantasies that prevent us from fixing the problem. However, since liberals want to see conservatives as the perpetrators of all of our problems, liberals do not have to deal with their own role, and so liberals remain innocent victims of climate change. (2015, pp. 88–89)

Here then is another, less obvious, entry point for critical social psychology: elucidating the fantasy structures and perverse engagements and ‘tracking’ the unconscious dynamics that underpin how we respond to anthropogenic ecological degradation with unexpected outcomes (Rustin, 2010). Targeting the faults of others in isolation, however critical, is only likely to feed these fantasies—confirming what both sides ‘already know’. Samuels subsequently asserts that ‘we need a new investment in a shared system ... a political discourse that breaks this dance between two complementing fantasy structures’ (Samuels, 2015, p. 89).

To say that identifying what a 'shared system' might look like will be difficult is an understatement. There is no magical paradigm shift that will dissolve the material, social and cultural infrastructures and intersections through which everyday life is realized. Yet we have to start somewhere. In an age where human–nonhuman relationship is defined by crisis, critical social psychology might modestly contribute to new and emerging narratives, including those that explore different ways of relating to nonhuman others and in doing so, become a vehicle for asking radical questions about what it means to be human. Burrowing into insights that might include contemporary anthropology, feminist psychology and queer theory, we find explorations of a 'shared system' of sorts: value ascribed to expanded fields of reciprocity that embed us in our wider nature. On this point, I am drawn to an emerging pattern, as far as I can discern it, in voices across the biological and social sciences and more specifically in anthropology, biosemiotics, philosophy, political ecology, ethnobiology, sociology, posthumanities and trans-species psychology (e.g., Cassidy & Mullin, 2007; Haraway, 2008, 2016; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010; Latour, 2012, 2007; Nibert, 2013; Potts, 2010).

These voices do not amount to a coherent narrative, far from it, but they do all speak to a profound sense of relationship, interdependence and attachment that crosses established boundaries of human and nonhuman, well captured here by David Abram: 'we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human ... the complexity of human language is related to the complexity of earthly ecology—not to any complexity of our species considered apart from that matrix' (Abram, 1997, p. 22). Trans-species psychology, and emerging strands of sociologies of violence, challenges practices of 'speciesism'—the culturally entrenched differentiation of human beings from other species—the objectification of animals, the denial of their agency (Abell, 2013; Bradshaw & Watkins, 2006; Merskin, 2011) and the routinization of animal violence and killing (Cudworth, 2015). Challenging this varied, subtle, but far-reaching differentiation is difficult and uncertain, an attempted dismantling of otherness that 'unravels a primary cultural organizing principle. Human-animal differencing comprises much of what defines western human collective identity and an ego construct based on what animals are presumed to lack' (Bradshaw & Watkins, 2006, p. 7). Yet Kidner's assertion some time ago that 'discontinuity between the 'animal' and 'human' realms is beginning to come under fire' (2001, p. 94) has yet more resonance today.

Consider Henderson's remarkable contemporary version of a medieval bestiary (2012). He consistently illuminates the complexity of communication, relationality and interdependence—the relations between species, between

sentient beings and their Earthly surroundings and our relationship to them (Henderson, 2012). He narrates the lives of various species, embedded in and intertwined with the lives of others, and draws on insights from their close study. The forms of representation, communication and relationship discerned in fields such as biosemiotics are not always easy to articulate, but they indicate, for Henderson, how ‘we are beginning to see beyond the painted theatre-set where human language ostensibly directs meaning to a larger world in which human language is just one phenomenon in a web of meanings’ (2012, p. 64). This ‘larger world’ is also salient in anthropologist Eduard Kohn’s account of ‘capacious relationality’, developed via his ethnographic fieldwork among the Runa people of Ecuador’s Upper Amazon (Kohn, 2013). He draws on the Runa’s own understanding of their relationships with other beings, such as their habitual readiness to adopt the perspectives of nonhuman others and his own reading of the dense interrelationships of different species and life forms to explore an alternative ontological framework beyond an emphasis on the primacy of human language.

Kohn develops a complex account of representation, but the upshot is to articulate the value of making ‘visible a larger semiotic field beyond that which is exceptionally human’ (Kohn, 2013, p. 56). He stresses that pointing to the ways others can (and one assumes, ‘we’ potentially could) ‘relate to other kinds of beings can help think possibility and its realisation differently’. This is a kind of ‘alter-politics’ (Hage, 2015), which is not based on opposition to or critique of current systems but ‘grows from attention to another way of being, one here that involves other kinds of living being’ (Kohn, 2013, p. 14).<sup>5</sup> Although he offers a dense anthropogenic analysis, he is attempting to speak to a broader project in which lived examples of more capacious relationality are explored, as glimpses of embodied experience that break existing habit: ‘The world is revealed to us, not by the fact that we come to have habits, but in the moments when, forced to abandon our old habits, we come to take up new ones. This is where we can catch a glimpse—however mediated—of the emergent real to which we also contribute’ (Kohn, 2013, p. 66).

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<sup>5</sup>As Latour says in response to Kohn’s thesis, a true test of whether or not this kind of ‘alter-politics’ works is whether or not it can be converted into a meaningful advancement and defence of the kinds of attachment and relationship he is referring to: ‘But, naturally, to really evaluate Kohn’s attempt, the test is still to come: how could an ethnographer, or, for that matter, a Runa scholar, equipped with such a philosophical anthropology find ways to make his or her ontological claims understood in negotiating what a forest is made of, when faced with forestry engineers, loggers, tourists, NGOs, or state administrators? That’s where the so-called ontological turn finds its moment of truth. Not on the epistemological scene but on the bittersweet attempts at negotiating alternative ways to occupy a territory, being thrown in the world, designating who is friend and who is enemy’ (Latour, 2014, p. 266).

There are numerous other recent attempts to more explicitly incorporate both human and nonhuman into social theory and research. We might even locate attempts to articulate capacious relationality in the broader context of queer theory, a movement, as Berlant describes it, that seeks to ‘open up understanding the relation between conventional patterns of desire and the way they are managed by norms, *and to focus on patterns of attachment we hadn’t even yet known to notice* ... enacted in a broad field of social relations that anchor us to life’ (Berlant, 2012; emphasis added).

These are all, admittedly, largely hints and fragments—‘subordinated or shadow understandings’ (Webb, 2012, p. 122), occupying ‘the foothills of some dark and uncharted range’ (Kingsnorth & Hine, 2010, p. 3). Gestures towards alternative worldviews, relationships and social configurations are beset by the perverse and paradoxical nature of a culture that encourages artful avoidance and denial (Hoggett, 2013), while escalating routinized violence towards other species and polluting and extractivist activities to the extent that they may seem impossible (Cudworth, 2015; Klein, 2014). Kidner reminds us that any articulation of something akin to a capacious relationality is likely to be opaque, as it is not yet ‘materially realized’ by a supportive social structure and cultural framework (2001). This is a vital point, for it is essential to acknowledge that material, social and cultural contexts are essential in facilitating and legitimizing forms of relationship.

## Acknowledging Contingency

At this point, it feels necessary, as I have rhetorically positioned myself as a ‘critical social psychologist’, to say a little more about the basis for my claims in the broader context of relativism and more specific ‘scepticism’ regarding the reality of ecological crisis. We can acknowledge the difficulty, even the impossibility, of somehow reaching past this contingency, to articulate a ‘real’ nature that stands behind our symbolic constructions of it. I accept that any conception of ‘nature’, and its relationship to ‘the human’, is always a contingent production of the social, cultural and historical context in which it is produced, that it is ‘language itself that provides the structures and tools for constructing a reality beyond words’ (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995, p. 31). We are therefore permitted, of course, to try to speak of our understanding of ecology and crisis as something that involves but is beyond the human, however partial and fallible those attempts are (Weinberg, 2014, p. 18).

My membership of an academic culture, related commitments, beliefs and common sense shapes my defence of the overwhelming scientific consensus that anthropogenic global warming is materially evident and that other cumulative effects of human activity threaten the existence and flourishing of many forms of life. No doubt they also inform my desire to argue for ontological claims in the social sciences and elsewhere that prioritize the interrelationship and interdependency of life forms, to call for an expanded scope of justice that considers the inherent value of other species. I am also willingly recruited to a moral and political imperative derived from claims that the threats of the Anthropocene are distributed in profoundly unequal and unjust ways. Finally, in line with my background in particular psychological traditions, I believe we deal with knowledge of human influence in complex, unpredictable, affective ways that are inseparable from the emotional attachments we form with what we come to know as 'nature' in many guises.

Nonetheless, I am dogged by doubts and uncertainties regarding the realities of ecological degradation, my responsibilities and how to act. Where I live, in the UK, on the South coast, it is all too easy to reside, as Žižek suggests many of us do, in the ordinary 'unreliability' of our common sense, habituated to the imperturbability of everyday reality: 'I know very well (that global warming is a threat to the entire humanity), but nonetheless ... (I cannot really believe it). It is enough to see the natural world to which my mind is connected: green grass and trees, the sighing of the breeze, the rising of the sun ... can one really imagine that this will be disturbed?' (Žižek, 2009, p. 445). It is in this context that the reality of ecological crisis is another one of the 'very things to be argued for, questioned, defended, decided, without the comfort of just being, already and before thought, real and true' (Edwards et al., 1995, p. 36).

## Conclusion

For the work of critical social psychology to ask difficult and 'dangerous' questions, it must engage with how 'we' (who?) construct 'nature' and related terms such as sustainability and climate change (Castree, 2014). A 'crisis' imaginary can itself serve different ends, some of which we might consider problematic ethically, politically or pragmatically (e.g., that science and technology can 'fix' social problems) and others as more unpredictable and unintended. Although we might want to assert that anthropogenic ecological degradation is a reality, and that it is a result of human activity, there is space to interpret and engage with what it means, how to adapt, change, address the

issues involved; that this is an ongoing, unfinishable process; and that we need not, should not, claim any final coherence in defending and advocating a critical social psychological perspective. For ‘coherent narratives, prohibit learning—a narrative does not necessarily liberate a person, it can trap him or her and the more coherent and reasonable the narrative, the more likely it is to trap the person’ (Craib, 2000, p. 8). This, for me, is the most helpful and astute reading of human–nonhuman nature of relationships (Weinberg, 2014, p. 18), geared towards the practical purpose of openly engaging with ecological scientific work, environmentalist awareness and the various knowledge bases of groups for whom ecological degradation has become a ‘rationale for action’ (Callison, 2014).

Stasis and inaction in the face of anthropogenic ecological degradation is a psychological issue but only in as much as it intersects with the political, social, cultural, biological. Hopes for sustainability are enmeshed in a complex communicative environment, often yoked to the ‘scientisation’ of problems and solutions, inseparable from the widespread inequalities and injustices reinforced and exaggerated by ecological crisis to date; and routinely obscured by a ‘core alliance’ of powerful incumbent regime actors, the power of existing material and cultural infrastructure to ‘lock-in’ high carbon living, and our own complex social and personal responses. Addressing any of these issues is an entry point for critical social psychology as a vigilant beacon of critique. It is much harder to translate such understandings into contained and palatable interventions, as they demand far-reaching and uncertain reconfigurations of everyday life that are likely to be (and already are) actively resisted by many. Nonetheless, critical social psychology can also have a role in noticing and interpreting emerging and pre-figurative cultural forms, however uncertain, that point to different kinds of relationships between human beings and between human beings and the rest of nature (Haraway, 2016). To do so is to continue to hope—‘the key organizing principle’ of ecology movements’ (Mason, 2014, p. 154). Rebecca Solnit reminds us that radical hope ‘is not about what we expect. It is an embrace of the essential unknowability of the world, of the breaks with the present, the surprises’ (cited in Mason, 2014, p. 154).

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