

# The Structure of Psychology and the Social Sciences

This chapter presents a very brief overview of the fields of psychology, the social sciences, and their important relationships. It is meant to orient Psychology majors to the intellectual matrix of which they are (gradually) becoming a part. Books and courses on the history of psychology and of each of the social sciences provide a better understanding of where each of these areas came from; here we are mainly concerned with their current status.

## Psychology

The chapter Psychology as Science introduced some of the important divisions within modern psychology and pointed out the diversity of approaches to scientific psychology found in the discipline. Psychology is indeed large and diverse, arguably more so than each of the social sciences. Psychology divides in about three ways: (1) according to subject matter; (2) based on what psychologists do; and (3) along the science fault line discussed in Psychology as Science.

The fields (or “subfields”) of psychology generally refer to the first of these divisions, and you can see it in a variety of ways. Introductory Psychology courses usually follow this scheme in introducing the field for the first time, and most undergraduate curricula include at least one course that corresponds to each of the fields. Doctoral degrees can be pursued in each of these areas. The American Psychological Association is composed of divisions that correspond roughly to each field and also to the occupational interests of psychologists (or both).

The primary fields of modern American psychology are listed in the sidebar. You are undoubtedly already familiar with these fields in a general sense. Each of these areas includes specialty interests ranging from a dozen psychologists who are interested in the same research program (e.g., social psychologists who study altruism) to very large interest areas (e.g., clinical psychologists who study personality disorders). Psychology also includes several minor fields. The minor fields are often embedded in one or more of the major fields (or in a social science; see later section) and doctoral degree programs in these areas are fairly rare. Some of these fields are presented in the second sidebar.

### Primary Fields of Psychology

**Social:** interpersonal behavior; attitudes; group interaction; social judgment and cognition

**Personality:** individual differences; motivation; development and change

**Developmental:** development of the person through the life span from prenatal to old age.

**Clinical:** psychopathology; psychotherapy

**Counseling:** problems of living; interventions to improve quality of life

**Biological/ Physiological:** nature of the brain and brain functions; biological bases of normal and abnormal behavior

**Cognitive:** memory and decision processes; neural bases of thought

**Comparative:** animal behavior

**Learning:** processes of learning and behavior

**Human Factors/ Ergonomics:** interaction of humans with machines; safety; decision processes in human-machine systems

**Quantitative:** statistics; mathematical modeling of behavior

**Industrial/ Organizational:** job selection and performance appraisal; organizational behavior

The fields of psychology are convenient, artificial distinctions that serve political purposes as much as any intellectual or scientific end. Within each large doctoral-granting psychology department in the United States one can find graduate programs representing most of these fields. Smaller departments might offer graduate degrees in just a few of these areas. In the United States, a graduate degree program is often called a “training program.” Each training program includes a chair and several faculty who are focused on that program. The training programs compete among themselves for value and for resources. “Value” means that they compete to be an important or central program in the department on the basis of their relative quality and the purported importance of their field. A program that is too deviant from the central values of psychology will suffer lower value. (The minor fields are often in this predicament.) Resources are usually more important than value, but having high value helps in fighting for resources. Within the larger training programs in the most prestigious universities, famous faculty establish their own divisions, often referred to as “labs.” A graduate student usually works closely with one of these faculty members in his or her lab and the student’s tuition and living expenses are paid for by research grants awarded to the faculty person. Some pundits have compared this system to medieval serfdom, but it is an intellectually exciting experience for the student.

### **Minor Fields of Psychology (incomplete list)**

**Cross-Cultural:** comparison of psychological processes across cultures; effect of culture on psychology

**Political:** personality and political behavior; voting behavior; public opinion

**Forensic:** psychological causes and consequences of crime

**Environmental:** effect of situations on human thought and behavior

**Multicultural:** ethnic differences in psychological variables; promotion of ethnic concerns within psychology

**Behavior Analysis:** use of Skinnerian learning principles to improve behavior of individuals and organizations

Psychologists who have research specialties outside one of the graduate programs in their department will have a difficult time competing for value and resources and often must choose between the specialty and their careers. The implication of this problem for social science is discussed in a later section.

## **Social Science**

The social sciences, sometimes referred to as the “institutional social sciences,” are disciplines concerned with social processes that transcend the individual, although all include a consideration of the thought and behavior of the individual. The social sciences include sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and sometimes history and geography. As is true of psychology, each of these disciplines includes fields and other types of divisions. Our interest here is the relationship of the social sciences to psychology, so I will highlight the psychology-oriented fields of each of these disciplines.

### **Sociology**

Sociology is at the center of social science (a statement one should never make in the pre sense of an anthropologist). Sociologists mainly study modern societies, asking questions such as “where does society come from?” “what is the place of the individual in society?” “how are societies divided internally?” “how does the social system work?” Some of the main divisions within sociology include social theory, demography (population composition and change), social psychology, and development (of underdeveloped nations). Specialties include social stratification, social organization, ethnicity, urban studies, educational systems, criminology, gerontology (aging), the medical system, modernization, social change, industrial

relations, queer studies (deviance and gay/lesbian issues), gender, and more.

Sociology's main problem historically has been defending its core subject matter from psychology. This is both an intellectual and a material struggle. Intellectually, the ongoing problem for sociology has been the proposition coming from psychology that, after all, the individual is the basis for all aspects of society so we should think of societal processes as nothing more than the sum of individual efforts. This approach is termed "psychological reductionism" or "psychologizing." Sociologists have reacted strongly against this idea, arguing that society is more than the sum of the parts (individuals); it is transcendent of individuals, or "emergent." In other words, there is something about societies that transcends individuals, that preceded them and survives beyond them, and can't be explained by understanding only them. August Comte's difficult question, discussed in the Philosophy of Science chapter, troubles sociology just as it does psychology, but from the other direction. The material problem for sociology is that it can't exist if it can't carve out a distinctive subject matter from which it can argue for value and resources. However, the basic argument—psychology or sociology, individual or society—was settled practically about 100 years ago when psychology and sociology evolved into separate departments in American and European universities.

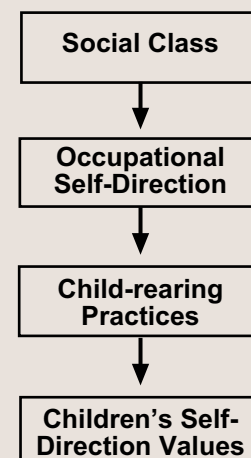
Sociology includes two important but low-status fields jointly termed "social psychology": "symbolic interactionism" and "social structure and personality" (also called "psychological sociology"). Symbolic interactionism (SI) has most of the features of the social constructionist approach to philosophy of science described in the Philosophy of Science chapter: a relativist, active-subject, qualitative research orientation, etc. Sociologists who take an SI approach look at how the society and the person shape each other. The society (or the person's primary group affiliations such as family, friends, co-workers, etc.) impart a "perspective" on the individual through which he/she perceives the world and acts within it. The perspective is continually changing due to social influence and feedback from the consequences of actions. At the same time, the person is influencing the group, changing its values and behaviors. Because the person is always "in a state of becoming" (SI term) and is free, the Physics Model cannot be used. Traditionally, great battles have raged between this type of social psychology and psychological social psychology. Because these two types of social psychologists have different philosophies of science, they talk past each other.

The social structure and personality (SSP) side of sociological social psychology is completely different from symbolic interactionism. SSP sees society divided by social structural variables that define the life experiences and psychology of people in different parts of the structure. These variables include role positions, social classes, job titles, gender, age, race, ethnicity, regional residence, and so on. Role Theory and social stratification studies are subfields within this field.

Role Theory thinks of all of us as living in multiple social positions that constrain our behavior and affect our values and beliefs. For ex-

### **Kohn's Social Class Research**

A classic example of the SSP approach to social psychology is Melvin Kohn's 30-year research program on the relationships among social class, child-rearing techniques, and children's values. Kohn found that middle class parents impart self-direction values on their children while working class parents impart conformity values. Self-direction means valuing internal control, personal responsibility, rational judgment, and responsibility. Conformity refers to obeying rules, taking direction from others, and being motivated at work by external rewards (\$\$\$). In studies conducted in the USA, Japan, Taiwan, and Europe, Kohn found that the key link between the social structural variable—social class—and the psychological variable—children's values—was the occupational experiences of the parents at work. Parents whose jobs required self-direction (complex thought, self-regulation, long-term planning, etc.) valued self-direction and passed this value along to their children.



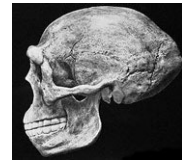
ample, families have a position set that includes (traditionally) father, mother, sons, daughters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and so on. Each family member must conform to the social expectations of the social position: mothers must be “motherly.” The experience of being a mother is completely different than the experience of being a daughter, and these different experiences affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. But the mother is also likely to be an employee within an organization that imparts role expectations; a member of a church; a citizen of a nation, and many more, each of which affects her psychological characteristics in a complicated, cross-cutting way. This is why life is so complicated.

A critical subfield within SSP is the study of the psychological effects of social stratification. Social stratification refers to dividing society into levels according to some variable involving social status and/or power, such as social class. Membership in a social class (underclass, working class, middle class, upper class, and some finer distinctions) provides a distinct day-to-day experience at work, at home in a neighborhood, in the economic system, in the family, and at church. Social relations are usually with members of the same class, people with whom one shares similar social opinions, expectations, stresses, problems of living, and political goals. People’s attitudes, values, and behaviors correspond in part to their position in the stratified society. Marxism incorporates this social psychological effect into its theory. The philosophy of science of SSP is nearly identical to that of psychology and it is easy for psychologists to understand it. (However, real Marxists reject the Physics Model as a bourgeois invention designed to maintain the power of the Western upper classes.)

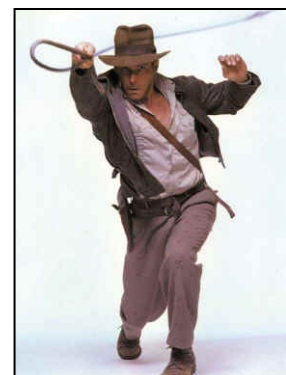
## **Anthropology**

Anthropology developed out of the European explorations of the New World and their colonizing efforts throughout the world. The discoveries that came back to Europe were eventually systemized into an academic field of study. Anthropology has four principal divisions: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. Cultural anthropologists seek to understand the development, functioning, and change of cultures, emphasizing primitive and non-industrial societies (although more recently they have begun to study modern societies using field research methods discussed in a later chapter). Cultural anthropologists employ ethnography, and ethnology to understand cultures. Ethnography is the ideographic description of cultures through field research performed inside the cultures. A typical dissertation study performed by a doctoral student involves performing field work—living in another society for up to a year in order to learn the natives’ customs first hand. Out of this powerful and sometimes frightening experience comes a dissertation and a book that describes what was learned. and Ethnology is the nomothetic comparison of cultures on measurable dimensions. For example, the books produced by ethnographic field work may be used to find dimensions or variables on which cultures and differ and to examine how these variables are related to each other (see sidebar). Important subfields of cultural anthropology include psychological anthropology (discussed later), cultural psychiatry, and cognitive anthropology.

Physical anthropologists study human evolution. These are the folks who dig for skeletons and argue about the human evolutionary family tree. Psychology had little interest in this area until the recent development of a new field called evo-



**1,000,000  
years old**



**Indiana Jones.** All archaeologists carry pistols and bullwhips.

lutionary psychology. Archaeology studies ancient cultures by excavating their physical remains. They also like to dig, but they look for artifacts—physical remains of human-made objects—along with the bones of modern humans. Linguistics studies language and the relationships between language and thought and language and cultural characteristics.

Cultural anthropology's challenge has come from sociology: how are they different? Traditionally, cultural anthropology confined its domain to primitive societies, but as opportunities for studying such societies have dwindled, they have begun to look at communities within modern societies. The difficult question has been, why can't the theories and tools of sociology be used to study everything that cultural anthropology studies? This conflict continues, but its primary resolution at this time is that sociology and cultural anthropology use different methods and different metatheoretical approaches to culture and society. Anthropology is characterized by a strong postmodern, social constructionist orientation that is alien to much of sociology. (See the Philosophy of Science chapter for discussion of social constructionism.) The methods of anthropology are designed to be feasible with preliterate peoples, whereas sociological methods often (but not exclusively) rely on literate subjects.

Cultural anthropology has two subfields that are close to psychology: psychological anthropology and cognitive anthropology. Psychological anthropology (PA) tries to use psychological processes to understand cultural phenomena, and to a lesser extent seeks to understand how cultural phenomena affect the psychological characteristics of people within the cultures they study. Traditionally, much of PA was psychoanalytic, employing the ideas of Freud to understand cultural customs such as the incest taboo, totemic rites, family structure, and weird social practices. This tradition continues, even as psychology has abandoned most Freudian thinking.

A strong ecological approach has also been important in PA. This ecological approach is not too different from the social structure and personality subfield described previously: look at where people live and what they have to do to survive, then establish how this all-encompassing experience affects child-rearing behaviors, adult personality, adult psychological problems, and cultural beliefs and customs designed to deal with the psychological problems of living. For example, agriculturalists must train their children to be very conforming and responsible so that they do the right things at the right times of the year; else the crop fails and they starve. If land is passed down to just one son (primogeniture), there will be sibling jealousies and dangerous strife, so the society must have an ideology (probably religious) that justifies this practice and shows that no other way is possible. (Maybe this ideology would be called something like "Confucianism").

Cognitive anthropology investigates how people in non-Western, often non-liter-

### ***Sanday's Rape Research***

Peggy Sanday performed an important study of rape that provides a good example of one type of psychological anthropology research. Sanday asked, "what is it about cultures that makes men more or less prone to rape women?" In this sort of research, the starting point is cultural characteristics, not individual personality. The culture shapes the individual, whose behavior reflects his personality. Sanday collected information concerning rape and other cultural traits from ethnographic field studies of over 100 cultures worldwide. She also determined the extent to which these cultures could be considered male dominant, prone to internal violence and external warfare, how close fathers were psychologically to their daughters, and how old males were before they were allowed to have sexual intercourse.

A sexual explanation of the rape suggests that men who don't have legitimate access to sex will be rapists, so cultures that restrict men in this way will be more rape prone. However, Sanday found that the best predictors across cultures of rape were violence and male dominance. The USA was high in rape and in these two characteristics. Personality research conducted in just one culture, the USA, has found a similar relationship: it is dominant, violent men who are most apt to be rapists.

ate, societies think, remember, make decisions, and categorize things and ideas. It looks at native ways of representing the world in a lexicon (set of words), such as how people divide up and categorize plants, animals, numbers, and heavenly bodies. What is the relationship between language and math? Do cultural characteristics affect color terms? Do the color terms affect color perception?

Psychological anthropology is a close cousin to cross-cultural psychology, just as psychology and sociology each have versions of social psychology. Cross-cultural psychologists use culture to explain psychology; PA uses psychology to explain culture (mainly).

## **Political Science**

Political science, or “polisci” as it is usually called, studies government, political behavior, the relationships among nations, and political thought. Political scientists are interested in how governments work in a theoretical sense and what is happening in particular governments here and abroad. They focus on the political, military, economic, and legal relationships among nations. Some are interested in the careers of living and historical political figures. Political science is closely linked to sociology and to history.

Political scientists’ interest in electoral politics, political leaders, and political opinions requires them to incorporate some psychological ideas. A small field has developed within political science termed “political psychology.” Psychology also has a small field by this name, and in many universities the undergraduate course titled Political Psychology is cross listed in the two departments (i.e., the same course has two different numbers, e.g., PSY345 and POL345). Political psychology (PA) is often thought of as a subfield within social psychology because they share similar interests and research methods. PA studies political socialization (the origin of political philosophies, attitudes, and opinions), change in political attitudes, social attitudes that affect political events (e.g., prejudice), the personalities of political leaders, voting decisions, social movements, and the relationship between leadership qualities and historical events. Political psychologists are often involved in political campaigns and may have the skills required to perform professional political polling. (The author originally set out to be a political psychologist but got sidetracked into cross-cultural psychology.)

## **Economics**

Some say economics is the most difficult of the social sciences because people expect it to solve important problems that really matter in a material way. Economics has two branches: microeconomics and macroeconomics. Microeconomics focuses on individuals and businesses: how they make economic decisions such as purchasing and investing, how their confidence in the economy rises and falls,

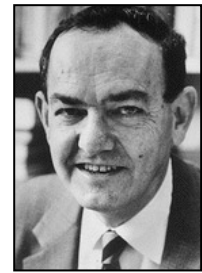
### **Symbolic Politics**

Do people vote for ideas or for material benefits? This question is at the core of an area of political psychology termed “symbolic politics” or “symbolic racism.” One side of this debate claims that people vote their values: they support political decisions that give resources to those who deserve them, and deny benefits to those who don’t deserve them. “Deserve” means “you are doing the right things, according to my values.” Symbolic politics is used to explain, for example, the way white people vote in the South. Southern white voters support conservative Republicans because they oppose political decisions that give benefits to “undeserving people,” people who these voters feel are deficient in their own values: hard working and conscientious. African Americans and other minorities are often viewed by these voters in this manner.

The other side of the debate claims that people vote their pocketbooks: they support political decisions that benefit themselves economically or materially. For example, do people vote against public housing projects because the projects may lower adjacent property values or make the neighborhood more dangerous (material cost), or because the people who would take advantage of this housing don’t deserve the benefit (symbolic cost)?

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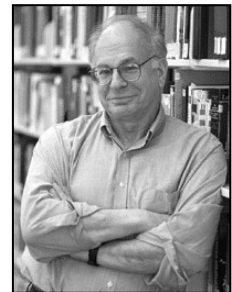
production and productive capacity, the distribution of wealth, how markets work, welfare systems, etc. This part of economics is very close to cognitive psychology, and two Nobel Prize Winners in economics, Herbert Simon (1978) and Daniel Kahneman (2002), were actually psychologists. (There is no Nobel Prize in psychology.) Macroeconomics looks at the big picture: nation- and world-level economic systems; international monetary policy; how interest rates and taxes affect economies, the business cycle, banking systems, what makes economies grow, etc.



**Herbert Simon**

### **The Fish Scale Problem**

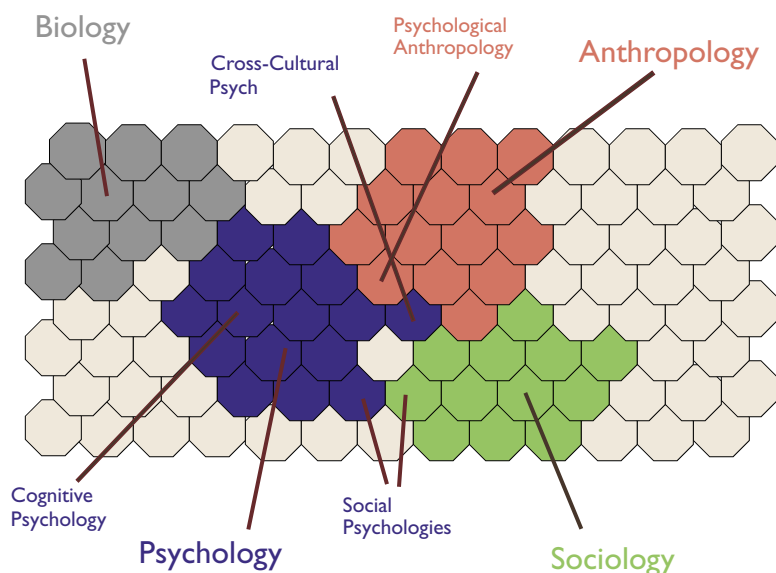
The problem with social and behavioral science, many argue, is that it should be one discipline, not many. In the previous sections I pointed out the significant presence of psychological fields or subfields within the social sciences. Why do all these disciplines have psychology subfields? Why can't they leave this work to psychologists? Why must psychology have social psychology, shouldn't it be left to sociology?



**Daniel Kahneman**

Two answers: First, the ways that these disciplines treat psychology are not the same; they have each transformed psychology to some degree to meet their needs. Second and most importantly, these disciplines must all deal with the fact that their subject matters require understanding the actions of individuals, not just of higher-level processes like social systems. Every social science discipline must in some way account for what people choose to do and what social/ political/ economic systems do to individuals. Likewise, in psychology it is meaningless to think of the person as existing outside of society; it must have a social psychology. Actually, the situation is even more complicated than this, because each of the social sciences needs parts of the others to understand its own main subject of study. Hence, sociology has fields termed "political sociology" and "economic sociology"; there is "political history" and "social history," "political economy" and "social geography." Social and individual processes simply don't stay inside the neat divisions of university academic departments.

Donald Campbell, the brilliant psychologist known for his work in research methods, cross-cultural psychology, sociobiology, and social psychology, proposed the "fish scale model" to explain this problem (1969). Campbell pointed out that the real intellectual unit in the sciences is the "specialty." A specialty is a specific area of research interest, such as gender roles, cognitive development, hypnosis, cultural differences in child-rearing methods, leadership traits, modernization, and purchasing decisions. Campbell thought of these specialties as fish scales: small things that overlap (see graphic). Groups of these specialties (or ones like them) came together a long time ago to form disciplines such as psychology and sociology.



**The Fish Scale Model.** Each scale is a specialty. The figure is simplified by including only a few scales.

The specialties that coalesced into a particu-

lar discipline have a sort of “structure” based on their content, methods, and relations to each other that placed some right in the center of the discipline—the core specialties—and some at the periphery. Early in the development of psychology, the core included learning theory and personality and the periphery included areas like social psychology. The peripheral specialties had as much in common with specialties in adjacent disciplines as they had with those in the one they fell into. For example, the individualist specialties of social psychology (e.g., attitude measurement, persuasion) were incorporated into psychology while the more collectivist specialties (crowd behavior, social movements) found themselves in sociology. Although the border around the specialties that divided them into disciplines was somewhat arbitrary, once a specialty found itself in a discipline, it had to conform to the core values of its discipline in order to compete effectively for value and resources (discussed early in this chapter). So psychological social psychology has become more and more rigorously experimental and quantitative while sociological social psychology (symbolic interactionism) has become increasingly focused on qualitative field studies of natural behavior.

The separation of adjacent specialties into separate disciplines was artificial and harmful because the adjacent specialties need to communicate with each other. A psychologist studying the effect of talk-TV on political opinions needs to be able to interact easily with a political scientist studying the effect of political opinions on election results. Despite this need for cross-discipline relationships, the dynamics of disciplines (allocation of value, competition for resources, a little arrogance) pulls them farther and farther apart.

This is Campbell’s answer to the question of why the social and behavioral science disciplines each have a little part of the others. Not only did this situation originate in the manner in which similar specialties were chopped apart and brought into disciplines, but it also reflects a reaction to this situation: having cut themselves off from adjacent disciplines, the disciplines must reinvent something like each of these walled off specialties within themselves. It is a Yin and Yang process: the Yin must have some Yang and the Yang must have some Yin.

### ***Whither Social Sciences?***

In 1969, the social sciences were immensely popular. The Viet Nam war, social change in the USA, the entry of the Boomer generation into adulthood, the effects of the wealth generated by winning WWII, optimism about the ability of science (including social science) to solve problems all contributed to the growth of sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and economics. However, by the 1980s, psychology overtook the social sciences and it is now one of the most popular undergrad majors with about 75,000 degrees granted each year, plus thousands of doctoral degrees. (How’s that for competition?)

Why psychology? Some argue that by the 1980s Americans turned inwards in a couple of ways, becoming self-centered and narcissistic on the one hand, and disinterested in larger questions of the common good of the nation on the other. The 1980s were often referred to as the “greed decade”—but that was before anyone saw the blowout at the end of the 1990s. Americans may now be returning to a concern with larger social issues, and perhaps the social sciences will regain their preeminence.

One of the most interesting trends in recent decades has been a breakdown of the disciplinary walls that Campbell was complaining about. More and more individual researchers are finding ways to interact with colleagues in adjacent specialties, jumping over the wall. These researchers are working at the margins, often in a sort of ambiguous buffer area in between the disciplines. As is true of cities, this is where the action is: at intersection of cultures (think: California) or of disciplines (try: Cultural Psychology).