American social psychology: Examining the contours of the 1970s crisis

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, social psychologists diagnosed their field as suffering a state of disciplinary crisis. The crisis was a multifaceted one, but issues of methodology, social relevance, and disciplinary, philosophical, and theoretical orientation were the primary areas of concern. Given that these issues have been prominent ones throughout the history of the social and behavioral sciences, it becomes necessary to look to the immediate context of the 1970s crisis to understand how and why a disciplinary crisis came to be diagnosed. The present analysis suggests that the crisis reflected the larger crisis in American society and also drew on the language of crisis prevalent at the time. Employing this language may have offered the field a method of making sense of, reframing, and redirecting internal and external critiques of the discipline.

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1. Introduction

As the 1970s drew to a close, American social psychologist Carl Backman (1980) reflected on the history of social psychology in North America, noting that it was characterized by faddism. During the 1920s, research on social facilitation was key. In the '30s, prejudice took center stage, only to be replaced by a focus on leadership in the '40s. The 1950s produced mass amounts of research on conformity, while social psychologists of the '60s examined conflict. The history of the 1970s, Backman stated, was yet to be written, but he predicted that it would likely be deemed the decade of attribution theory.

More than three decades later, it seems that for social psychologists, the 1970s are not recalled as the "decade of attribution" but rather "the decade of crisis" (Jackson, 1988). Throughout the latter half of the 1960s and continuing throughout the 1970s, several social psychologists voiced their concerns regarding the current and future state of their discipline (see Collier, Minton, & Reynolds, 1991, for a review). Many of them compared their condition with that of post World War II psychology, and concluded that social psychology had become frivolous (Ring, 1967), directionless (Elms, 1975), and socially irrelevant (Silverman, 1971). With one author's somber diagnosis of a "crisis of confidence" (Elms, 1975), social

psychologists began offering a variety of views regarding the cause of the ailment, along with corresponding cures.

This paper aims to reexamine the 1970s crisis in social psychology by exploring the central issues involved. An analysis of the 1970s crisis fills a gap in the historical record of social psychology and perhaps more importantly, also contributes to an understanding of how and why disciplinary crises are internally perceived and diagnosed. Many of the issues that arose in the course of the crisis were similar to those that had been points of contention throughout the discipline's history: the theoretical orientation of social psychology (Ayres, 1918; Pepitone, 1981), the relationship between psychology and sociology (Ellwood, 1919; Tosti, 1898), the appropriate methodological approach for studying social phenomena (Allport, 1919; Blumer, 1940; Pepitone, 1981), and the relevance of social science findings (Britt, 1937; Cantril, 1934). These issues were not new ones for the discipline. Nonetheless, early debates on these issues had lacked the force, visibility, and divisiveness of the crisis that occurred in 1970s American social psychology and had never been internally perceived as constituting a crisis. An analysis of the immediate context of the crisis suggests that external demands on the discipline, combined with the pervasiveness of crisis language in 1970s America contributed to the diagnosis of an acute disciplinary crisis in which persistent theoretical issues surfaced with unprecedented force.

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2. The 1970s crisis: the core debates

At the start of the 1960s, American social psychology was a thriving and active field of study. The discipline was still a relatively new one, but it had prospered during and after World War II, contributing to and directing wartime work on a variety of topics including attitudes, morale, rumor, propaganda, prejudice, leadership, and intergroup conflict (Capshew, 1999; Faye, 2007, 2011; Herman, 1995). Social psychology, which had maintained a rather marginal existence since the early 1900s, therefore grew significantly in the immediate postwar period: from 1948 to 1960, membership in the Social and Personality Psychology division of the American Psychological Association grew by 297%, a number exceeded only by the growth of the division of School Psychology (Tryon, 1963).

The period immediately following the War has been described by some as the "golden age" of social psychology (House, 2008; Sewell, 1989), characterized by interdisciplinary teams of researchers working on socially relevant issues with substantial federal support (House, 2008). It was a period when many of the classic and well-known studies were done, including Leon Festinger's (1957) work on cognitive dissonance, Solomon Asch's (1951) conformity research, and Stanley Milgram's (1963) work on obedience to authority. These classic studies seemed to demonstrate the possibilities of social psychology in uncovering repeatable, robust effects and in addressing significant, real-world phenomena ranging from seemingly irrational cult behavior to the role of obedience in the Holocaust. Furthermore, these years were strikingly productive ones for social psychology, as judged by the sheer number of studies conducted, the growth in methodological approaches, and the amount of data collected (Cartwright, 1979). The field also began to acquire the markings of an established discipline in the postwar period, including the founding of two societies: the Society for Experimental Psychology in 1965 and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology in 1974. A number of different journals were also established, including the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* both founded in 1965.

The golden age, however, was rather short-lived. The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed a noticeable decline in the optimism and self-assuredness of social-psychological writings and internal criticisms began to pepper the literature (Allport, 1954; Asch, 1952; Sears, 1951). Furthermore, the post-war pronouncements of the vast promise and potential of social psychology are noticeably absent during this period (Collier et al., 1991). In 1948, social psychologist Dorwin Cartwright had noted that the war had brought the field to maturity and a year later, he spoke of the "growing prestige of social psychology" (Cartwright, 1949, p. 199). By 1979, however, he noted a distinct change: "the general level of excitement that characterized social psychology immediately after the war has all but disappeared" (Cartwright, 1979, p. 87). Otto Klineberg similarly noted that the self-confidence of the postwar period "has yielded in recent years to growing doubts and the search for new directions" (Klineberg, 1976, p. 156). Indeed by the 1960s and 1970s, social psychology appeared in the literature as a field that had once had excellent prospects for a bright and productive future but had somehow failed to live up to these early expectations.

This waning optimism and expression of nostalgia for the postwar period eventually gave way to more pointed discussions of exactly what was wrong with social psychology and why it had failed to live up to its postwar potential. The literature was rife with questions and critiques regarding the methods, subject matter, theoretical approach, real-world significance, and future directions of the field. Such criticisms of practices and approaches

were plentiful in the late 1960s and, by the 1970s, this building body of criticism was interpreted by some as signaling a state of disciplinary crisis (Elms, 1975; Silverman, 1971).

2.1. Problems of method

The 1970s crisis was a multifaceted one, involving several inter-related and contentious issues. Not everyone felt a crisis was at hand, and those that did could not agree on the central problems of the field or the causes of those problems. Nonetheless, the first and perhaps most visible concern leading up to a declaration of crisis was a dissatisfaction with the dominance of laboratory experimentation. Psychologists, modeling their approach on that of the natural sciences and particularly German physiology and psychology, had adopted experimentation in the late nineteenth century and by the start of the twentieth century, more than 40 psychological laboratories had been established (Benjamin, 2000; Danziger, 1990). Social psychology soon followed suit and experimentation gained prominence in the 1920s and '30s, when social psychology had begun moving towards disciplinary status as a subfield of general psychology (Danziger, 2002). In 1937, psychologist Stuart Henderson Britt aptly summed up the approach that would come to dominate social psychology throughout the twentieth century:

> Social psychology of the "present" can be typified by one word: *empirical.* The empirical method may be characterized by three important techniques: the experimental method; the use of first-hand observation; and the employment of statistics (Britt, 1937, p. 464).

Britt went on to note that the empirical method, and particularly experimentation, was the primary method of distinguishing social psychology from social philosophy. With increased sophistication in statistical techniques, the adoption of operationism, and the incorporation of the language of variables (Danziger, 1997), experimentation gained an even stronger foothold and by the 1960s, it had become the distinguishing mark of a scientific social psychology. In 1949, approximately 30 percent of studies in the leading social psychology journal involved some form of experimental manipulation; by 1969, this number had risen to 87 percent (Higbee & Wells, 1972).

In the early 1960s, however, the experimental method came under considerable scrutiny in the social-psychological literature. Several scholars began publishing results that questioned the validity of such experiments (Orne, 1962; Rosenthal, 1966; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969). These authors demonstrated that experimental results may be strongly influenced by the artificial mechanics of the experiment. Martin Orne, for example, argued that research subjects are not passive receivers of experimental stimuli; instead, they actively interpret and give meaning to the experimental situation, seek out cues regarding researchers' hypothesis, and frequently attempt to act as "good subjects," trying to help confirm hypotheses. The experimental situation, Orne (1959, 1962) argued, contains cues or "demand characteristics" that participants use to try to ascertain the purpose, meaning, or goal of the situations in which they find themselves. These cues become strong stimuli for participant behavior. In this way, the experiment becomes a social problem-solving situation for participants and resulting behaviors may be due in large part to demand characteristics rather than to the variables that are of direct interest to the researcher.

Other authors were concurrently examining what came to be known as the "social psychology of the psychological experiment" (see Adair, 1973, for a review). Throughout the 1960s, psychologist Robert Rosenthal published a number of articles on the complex nature of the relationship between experimenters and participants

or "subjects" (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969). In a series of clever experiments, Rosenthal demonstrated the ways in which the experimenter affects the outcome of psychological experiments through a variety of variables including: experimenter expectancies of study outcomes; participant perceptions of experimenters; the experimenter's sex, age, race, and personality type; and other individual difference variables, such as the experimenter's research experience, anxiety levels, or general warmth toward participants (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969).

Rosenthal argued that the intricate nature of the experimenter-subject relationship was important even in cases where nonhuman subjects were employed. In one study, Rosenthal and his colleagues assigned randomly chosen groups of rats to different experimenters. Half of the experimenters were told their rats were "maze-bright," and the other half were told their rats were "maze-dull." The rats were in fact randomly chosen. At the end of five days, however, the rats who were believed to be better performers in fact became better performers, learning mazes more quickly than their supposedly less intelligent counterparts. Rosenthal suggested that experimenter expectancies of the subjects resulted in different treatment of the two groups of rats, which in turn led to better performance among the rats labeled as "maze-bright" (Rosenthal & Fode, 1963). Such findings called into question the validity of decades of research on animal learning (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969).

Rosenthal and Orne were just two among many researchers who began to critically examine the social nature of the experimental situation and by the 1970s, an entire research field had opened up devoted to the topic (see Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969, for a review). In addition to demand characteristics on the part of participants and biases on the part of experimenters, other effects were explored. Rosenberg (1965) suggested that "evaluation apprehension," referring to participants' desires to hide their weaknesses and present a socially desirable self, also contaminated research results. Others examined the propensity of frustrated participants to act in such a manner as to disturb the experiment or provide data that disconfirmed the experimenter's hypothesis (Orne, 1962; Silverman & Kleinman, 1967). The reliance on volunteer participants and undergraduate students as the primary pools of study participants also came under critique. Authors began to examine the distinct characteristics of these groups, the effects of their knowledge of psychology and experimentation, and their desire to conform to experimenter expectations (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969).

While some authors began examining methods of controlling these intrusive variables (McGuigan, 1963), others examined the larger import of these findings for the field of psychology. This included the reexamination of some of social psychology's most robust and classic findings. Rosenberg's (1965) reinterpretation of cognitive dissonance findings serves as an apt example. In the 1950s, several researchers conducted studies demonstrating that when individuals are required to behave in a manner inconsistent with their cognitions or attitudes, they take actions to reduce these cognitive inconsistencies and return to a state of cognitive balance or attitudinal consistency (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Rosenberg (1965), however, conducted an experiment demonstrating that these effects may have been due to participants' desire to confirm or disconfirm the experimenter's hypotheses. Other researchers agreed with Rosenthal and argued that once the "contaminants" were removed from these classic studies, the demonstrated effects also disappeared (Chapanis & Chapanis, 1964; Page, 1969; Silverman, Shulman, & Wiesenthal, 1970).

With classic findings being reevaluated and the validity of experimentation being questioned, some scholars began to consider the larger import of these concerns for the field. For some, it signaled the need for a major reconsideration of methods. In 1971, Frank Kessel noted that findings from these studies shone

a bright light on the faults inherent in "the view of man implicit in classical methodology" (p. 123). For Kessel, these findings signaled a need to reconsider the philosophy of science that guided the field:

> If the experimental situation is the site of a complex interpersonal interaction, with an active search for meaning on the part of the subject and a conveying of expectancies by the experimenter, then the classical model does not match with reality (Kessel, 1971, p. 123).

For Kessel and others, research on the experimental situation indicated that the nearly century-old view of the experimental subject as passive object, capable of being studied in the same manner as the subject matter of the natural sciences, was no longer tenable. The rising trend of humanistic and phenomenological psychology, both of which characterized the individual as an active, experiencing organism seemed to some to provide a more satisfactory framework (Giorgi, 1967).

2.2. Problems of relevance

Related to discussions of method was the debate regarding the social relevance of social-psychological findings. In a 1974 survey of graduate students and faculty members in psychology, half of the respondents indicated that psychology's lack of relevance to real-world social problems was one of its gravest difficulties (Lipsey, 1974). In this same vein, the first public diagnosis of a disciplinary crisis came in an article titled "Crisis in social psychology: The relevance of relevance" (Silverman, 1971). In this article, Irwin Silverman noted that despite serious external pressures to produce results relevant to pressing social problems, "social psychologists have not provided much data that are relevant to social ills" (p. 583). Silverman went on to argue that the problem of relevance was in fact a direct result of problems of method: data from social psychology gathered in artificial laboratory experiments "may relate very much to the motives and feelings and thoughts of subjects about their role in the experiment and very little to their lives outside of it" (p. 584). Others concurred with this assessment, noting that the experimental situation was a highly artificial one, involving groups of strangers rather than individuals embedded in social situations and social relationships. Because of this, social psychology did not reflect reality and therefore had little to say about real-world phenomena (Gergen, 1973). Other aspects of experimentation, including the use of college students as participants, were also pinpointed as the reason behind social psychology's lack of relevance in the world outside the laboratory (Weber & Cook, 1972).

Even classic studies in the field that seemed to be highly socially relevant were not immune to such critiques. In fact, they became exemplars of the irrelevance of the field. This was the case with Milgram's obedience research. In what is perhaps the most well-known set of studies in the history of psychology, Stanley Milgram (1963) demonstrated that research participants will administer increasingly strong and potentially harmful electrical shocks to another individual when ordered to do so by an authority figure. Milgram and others interpreted his robust and dramatic results as shedding significant light on the Holocaust by showing how ordinary individuals come to commit seemingly unthinkable and cruel acts (Milgram, 1964). Milgram's work, however, became the target of much criticism. A significant portion of this criticism focused on how relevant the findings really were to understanding something as complicated as the actions of perpetrators in the Holocaust. Some suggested that the participants' obedience towards the experimenter resulted from the trust they placed in science and the academy. They also argued that the experimental situation was simply too unbelievable; participants likely did not truly

believe they were hurting anyone (Mixon, 1979; Orne & Holland, 1968). As Diana Baumrind explained, the experimental situation was perhaps too contrived to have anything much to say about Nazi Germany:

> far from illuminating real life, as he claimed, Milgram in fact appeared to have constructed a set of conditions so internally inconsistent that they could not occur in real life. His application of his results to destructive obedience in military settings or Nazi Germany…is metaphoric rather than scientific (Baumrind, 1985, p. 171).

The classic obedience experiments, and their import for understanding critical, highly significant real-world events, were therefore called into question, further fueling doubts about the social relevance of social-psychological findings (Baumrind, 1964; Wenglinsky, 1975).

2.3. Problems of theory and approach

As the crisis wore on, many authors began to argue that problems of method and relevance were simply symptoms of a set of much larger and far more substantive issues, including the theoretical approach of the field, the disciplinary orientation, and, according to some, the inadequacy of the entire philosophy on which social psychology had been founded. Some discussions of theoretical orientation were focused on the simplicity of social-psychological theory. It was believed that social psychology had become too consumed with theories built on small, repeatable effects, resulting in theories with a very limited scope. This focus had resulted in a lack of integrative theories that could unite social-psychological findings and capture the complexity of social individuals in complex social systems (Back, 1963; McGuire, 1969, 1976; Pepitone, 1976). Social psychologists were therefore left with what one author described as "miniature theories" (Back, 1963) and "simple *a*-affects-*b*" hypotheses (McGuire, 1976). The most prominent theories—cognitive dissonance theory, the risky shift paradigm, and social learning theory—were considered by many to be isolated from one another, exploring small corners of social cognition, emotion, and behavior without any linkage to other theories or experimental findings.

Others argued that the field's theoretical problems stemmed from the individualistic and reductionist approach of social psychologists. It was held that social-psychological studies and theories—focused on individual motivation, interpersonal processes, and social cognition—had failed to account for the role of macrosocial phenomena such as social structure, class, political systems, and culture (Back, 1963; Backman, 1980; Pepitone, 1976; Sherif, 1977; Smith, 1978). Pepitone (1976), for example, identified the cause of the crisis as a "misplaced theoretical unit of analysis" (p. 641). He argued that social psychologists automatically attribute research findings to individual motivation and psychological processes without considering the normative social world on a larger scale as a possible determinant of individual behavior. As an example, Pepitone referred to the often observed phenomenon where the perceived payoff of a goal increases as the suffering required to obtain it also increases. Dissonance theorists would attribute the finding to an individual's desire to decrease discomfort caused by sustaining two inconsistent cognitions. Pepitone argued that the finding may just as well be the result of shared cultural norms revealed by adages such as "no pain, no gain".

The debate regarding the relative roles of macro- and microsocial phenomena in social psychology was also reflected in ongoing discussions about the relationship, or lack thereof, between psychological and sociological forms of social psychology (Archibald, 1976; Boutilier, Roed, & Svendsen, 1980; House, 1977; Moscovici, 1972; Stryker, 1977). By 1960, social psychology was primarily a subdiscipline of general psychology; that is, it was practiced primarily by psychologists, in psychology departments, following the principles and methods of general psychology (Collier et al., 1991). Its focus was, for the most part, on individual cognition, emotion, and behavior in relation to various social stimuli, such as the presence of another individual, the judgments of group members, or the presentation of a persuasive message (Farr, 1996; Greenwood, 2004). Despite the dominance of such psychological forms of social psychology, sociologists had also maintained traditions of social psychology within their own discipline. Sociological variants of social psychology frequently used non-experimental, observational studies to examine face-to-face interactions between individuals, as was the case for symbolic interactionists who examined the meaning created in these interactions (House, 1977). Sociological social psychologists also employed survey methods to examine the relationships between psychological processes and attributes, such as personality or self-image, and macrosocial phenomena, such as social class and race (House, 1977). James House (1977) argued that the crisis in social psychology reflected the lack of interchange between these various forms of social psychology and a resultant inability to formulate theories that incorporate variables operating at an individual or psychological level as well as a societal or sociological level. Some scholars argued that an integration of these approaches was necessary in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the individual and the social. Such integration, they held, would also assist in the creation of social-psychological models that more accurately reflected reality (Archibald, 1976; Back, 1963; Stryker, 1977).

Perhaps one of the strongest and most radical critiques of the theoretical approach of social psychology came from Kenneth Gergen, who questioned the basic philosophical foundations and assumptions upon which American social psychology had been built. In his controversial article, "Social psychology as history," Gergen (1973) argued that since social psychology "deals with facts that are largely nonrepeatable and which fluctuate markedly over time," it is "primarily an historical inquiry" (p. 16). He stated that social psychologists deal with constructs that are subject to both temporal and societal factors; what is true at one time in one place may not be true in another. Thus, the formulation of scientific principles and general laws was deemed an impossibility for the discipline. According to Gergen, social psychology would progress when its practitioners began examining their concepts both historically and cross-culturally. Increased sensitivity to these contextual conditions would entail collaboration between social psychology and other disciplines such as history, sociology, political science, and economics. Gergen's prescriptions for the field mirrored those of other scholars promoting a postmodern social psychology to replace the standard experimental psychology that had flourished after World War II (Armistead, 1974; Harré & Secord, 1972).

3. Diagnosing disciplinary crisis

The 1970s crisis in American social psychology provides an interesting case study of a discipline in the midst of a self-diagnosed crisis and raises interesting questions regarding how and why such crises are diagnosed. During and after the crisis, some scholars suggested that the issues raised in the context of the crisis were not new issues at all: They noted that the controversies of the crisis were in fact the same philosophical problems that had plagued the social sciences since their inception, including issues of determinism, mechanistic causality, individualism versus holism, and nomothetic versus idiographic approaches (Rosnow, 1983;

Shaw, 1974). This evaluation is supported by Fay Berger Karpf's (1932) monograph reviewing the field. Karpf noted that two of the central problems in the newly developing field were controversies over how psychologically or sociologically-oriented the field should be and what methods would be most appropriate for the field (Karpf, 1932). Similarly, as early in 1933, Saul Rosenzweig had outlined the social-psychological aspects of the subject-experimenter relationship and noted that it was already "a well-known fact that experimentation in human psychology presents serious difficulties" (Rosenzweig, 1933, p. 337). Contemporary scholarship on the history of social psychology likewise demonstrates that many of the same issues that were debated during the crisis had been contentious ones throughout the discipline's history. Greenwood (2004) and Farr (1996) demonstrate that dueling conceptions of individualism and holism have been a mainstay in social psychology since the 1800s and James Good (2002) also note that debates about sociological and psychological forms of social psychology, along with debates regarding methodology, were prominent as early as the 1920s and 1930s, when disciplinary boundaries began to solidify. Indeed, the history of social psychology is rife with prolonged periods of debate regarding methods, relevance, and theoretical orientation (Smith, 1997).

If the issues involved in the crisis were in fact not new ones for the field, the question arises as to how these persistent issues gained enough traction in the 1970s to be considered as constituting a disciplinary crisis. An examination of the immediate context suggests that there were several factors that likely contributed to a call of crisis in the 1970s. The most influential factor seems to have been the general state of crisis in American society in the 1960s and 1970s. Woods (2005) describes the end of the 1950s as a period of "profound malaise" when a "renewed longing for direction and purpose emerged" in American society. Due in part to anxieties brought to light from the Cold War and a growing sense of chaos and conflict in American society, America began to question itself. In 1969, Arthur Schlesinger announced a "crisis of confidence" in American culture, arising from various factions of and frictions within society:

> At home we see our cities in travail and revolt; rising mistrust and bitterness on the part of minorities; unraveling ties of social civility; a contagion of violence; a multiplication of fanaticisms on both far right and far left; a spreading impulse especially among the intellectuals, the young and the blacks, to secede from the established order; and three terrible murders in five years of men who, through their ability to mobilize American idealism, might have held the country together" (Schlesinger, 1969, p. x).

Following the publication of Schlesinger's volume, a number of book-length works were published outlining "crises of confidence" in various sectors of American culture (Dressel, Johnson, & Marcus, 1970; Graham, Mahinka, & Rudoy, 1971; Silk & Vogel, 1976), and at the end of the decade, President Jimmy Carter also publicly acknowledged a crisis of confidence infiltrating the nation.

Academics were not immune to this spreading sense of crisis. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, scholars in various corners of academia began to identify crises in their respective fields. There was a crisis in African Studies (Resnick, 1969), the classics (Connor, 1970), the humanities (Ong, 1969), psychoanalysis (Gitelson, 1964), and sociology (Gouldner, 1970). These various crises were undoubtedly part and parcel of what one scholar saw as a larger crisis of academic authority (Metzger, 1970), characterized by student revolt and persistent questioning of the power structures and professed neutrality of the ivory tower.

It is not surprising that the social sciences and humanities were under particular pressure during this time frame; these fields should have been capable of making the greatest contributions to ameliorating social ills and dealing with turbulent social change. Many critics felt, however, that these disciplines had failed to provide useful knowledge and some felt that their work had done little more than sustain societal injustices. This was the case for social psychologists who felt such pressures from government and funding agencies, criticism from minorities, and the large-scale need for social research as a potential means of ameliorating the calamities of mid-twentieth-century American society.

External critiques of the utility of social science research arose in the context of a controversy regarding the potential place of the social sciences in the National Science Foundation. In order to discern what type of funding structure should be instituted for the social sciences, several surveys were conducted during the 1960s by both psychologists and the government assessing the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences to government policy and social problems. In 1967, a House Subcommittee released a 4-volume report prepared by Harold Orlans of the Brookings Institution. Orlans (1967) reviewed the federal government's involvement in social science research and concluded that much of that research was trivial and irrelevant. This report was accompanied by many others, searching to define the ways in which social science could contribute to amelioration of domestic and international social problems (see McGuire, 1969). It had become clear that many were beginning to question the returns of the considerable amount of funding that had been invested in the social and behavioral sciences. As one author explained: "A society will not long nurture a science that does not nurture society" (Deutsch, 1969, p. 1081).

Outside pressures, however, came not just from the government and funding agencies, but also from the student protest movement and minority groups. Both graduate and undergraduate students began to question the import of social psychology for larger social problems (Elms, 1975; Jahoda, 1972; Silverman, 1971). Critiques of psychology also came from within the ranks. Charles Thomas, an African-American psychologist who served as the Director of the Center for the Study of Racial and Social Issues in Los Angeles and was also the founding chairman of the Association of Black Psychologists, accused his fellow scholars of failing to contribute in a substantial way to an understanding of the problems faced by marginalized groups. Their research, he argued, had ignored the systemic nature of racial injustices, focusing instead on individual socialization processes. Thomas went on to argue that social psychology had not only failed to assuage racism; it had in fact sustained and contributed to it, and in the process, alienated minority groups: "It is not entirely by accident that ghettoized people are saying, more and more, words to the effect, 'Psychologists, take your psychology and go home'" (Thomas, 1970, p. 259). It became increasingly clear to social psychologists and to academics more generally (Metzger, 1970), that they were being accused not just of failing to account for the diverse experiences of oppressed groups, but also of purposefully maintaining the structures responsible for that oppression.

Finally, it must also be noted that while the sense of crisis undoubtedly arose in large part from these outside pressures, Kuhn's (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* provided social psychologists with a language for interpreting their discipline. The word "paradigm" is prevalent in the crisis literature and some authors identified the beginnings of a revolution in the discipline (Palermo, 1971); others called specifically for that revolution (Sampson, 1978). Some authors argued that social psychology was perhaps too young to have gone through stages of paradigms and revolutions, but they nonetheless adopted the Kuhnian approach of viewing their discipline as a social system, directed as much by the properties of that system as it is by the internal logic of science (Cartwright, 1979). Some that were hesitant about applying Kuhn's

language to the social and behavioral sciences instead adopted a language of crisis quite similar to that found in Erik Erikson's (1968) work, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. Here, the crisis was not paradigmatic; instead, social psychology was suffering an identity crisis or a crisis of confidence (Cartwright, 1979; Elms, 1975).

As one author has noted, "the language of crisis imposes a certain narrative logic on an event" (Robinson, 2000, p. 11); in this vein, the language of Schlesinger, Kuhn, and Erikson may have provided social psychologists with a framework for understanding the state of their science and the critiques to which it had been subjected. It may also have provided them and their patrons with a perhaps paradoxical sense of reassurance. It is unclear as to whether Elms' (1975) adoption of the phrase "crisis of confidence" was rooted in a reading of Schlesinger (1969), but his use of the concept is similar. For Schlesinger, American citizens had lost faith in their social and political systems and had become uncertain about the future of these systems. Although the crisis in 1960s America was very real for Schlesinger, it represented a relatively natural cycle of history. Schlesinger frequently noted in his work that America had undergone several crises of confidence throughout its history, marked by periods where extremely high expectations could not be met by reality (Schlesinger, 1986).

Employing a similar framework, Elms (1975) argued that the crisis of confidence in social psychology was one in which social psychologists had expected too much of such a young and complicated field and had been confronted with the reality that such expectations could not be met. Framing the crisis in this way provides a portrayal of the crisis as less consequential and also quite temporary. Uncertainties and doubts are perhaps easier to contend with than major paradigm shifts and revolutions. One gets a sense from reading Elms that there were no deeply-rooted difficulties with social psychology as a science; instead, the crisis was a moment of insecurity: "social psychologists appear to have lost not only their enthusiasm but also their sense of direction and their faith in the discipline's future" (p. 967). What other authors would consider to be serious, fundamental problems with the field, Elms described as "sources of discomfort" (p. 968).

In the Kuhnian framework, social psychology could be seen as progressing through the usual stages of scientific inquiry. A crisis, therefore, was not necessarily the sign of a failed science; it might perhaps signal the beginnings of new theoretical frameworks and new discoveries. For authors like Dorwin Cartwright, the Kuhnian view of science seemed to imply that social psychology was simply too young to have received the benefits of scientific paradigm shifts; therefore, expectations for the discipline had been too exaggerated to have been met in such a short period (Cartwright, 1979). Progress indeed required change, but it also simply required time. Cartwright also suggested that the field had reached a point in its development where the movement towards an initial period of "normal science" was evident (p. 87). Erik Erikson's (1968) framework of crisis may have also provided a positive interpretation of the discipline's troubles. In Erikson's framework, crises are a necessary part of reaching maturity; they represent "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson, 1968). Employing the language of crisis may have therefore been a way not only of making sense of the divided nature of the discipline; it may also have been a way of portraying the discipline as one that was well on its way to a brighter future.

4. Conclusion

As the 1970s drew to a close, crisis talk began to dissipate. As early as 1976, some scholars were referring to the field as being in a "post crisis" stage (Gross, 1976; Guttentag, 1976; Rosnow, 1983). Discussions became less frequent and also less concrete,

focusing more on the general philosophical foundations of the discipline, as had been the case prior to the crisis. Some researchers began taking stock of the crisis, employing numerical analyses to understand the issues discussed in the crisis. Nelson and Kannenberg (1976) for example, explored the prevalence of basic and applied research in the discipline and concluded that authors of the crisis literature had been incorrect in their complaints of the dominance of basic research. Others surveyed their colleagues to discern how prevalent the feeling of crisis had been in the discipline (Nederhoff & Zwier, 1983) and concluded that the seemingly ubiquitous sense of crisis might in fact be attributable to a small group of prolific, but dissatisfied, social psychologists, most of whom had Marxist leanings. During this time frame, many authors began to add quotation marks around the word "crisis" when it was used. Sometimes they referred to it as the "so-called 'crisis'" (Senn, 1988), and by the mid-1980s, the word began to disappear from the literature altogether. Writings from this post-crisis period are characterized by an implicit but evident sense that the 1970s "crisis" may not have been much of a crisis after all.

Because of the relative recency of the 1970s crisis, it is somewhat difficult to assess the outcome, resolution, or effects of the crisis on the field. Cognitive social psychology became quite dominant after the crisis, leading some to suggest that it provided a paradigm for the divided field (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Psychologist John Adair has argued convincingly that what started the crisis was in fact the same thing that helped to end it: findings regarding the social psychology of the psychological experiment (Adair, 1991). Findings regarding experimenter expectancies and demand characteristics shone a light on the individual as an interpreter of the situation. It drew attention to the ways in which individuals seek out environmental cues and use them to act as problem-solvers. This, Adair argues, resulted in a focus on social cognition and the self as a social problem-solver. Hales (1985) has also argued that artifact research on evaluation apprehension led to a rediscovery of the self in social psychology, infusing cognitive models with theories of self-management and self-esteem. In essence, the controversial findings on psychological experimentation eventually offered the field an exciting new theoretical approach—social cognition—to replace the highly-refuted theories of the 1950s and 1960s.

Other authors have argued, however, that the crisis simply dissipated, as psychologists returned to "business as usual," setting aside the epistemological problems raised in the context of the crisis and returning to a focus on the basic activities of science (Stam, 2006). The fact that many authors began to question the import of the "crisis" in the 1980s supports this assessment. By 1983, most mainstream psychologists agreed that while there had been significant problems raised in the 1970s, these problems could be addressed without major changes (Nederhoff & Zwier, 1983). Some authors conducted experiments to demonstrate that findings regarding contaminants in psychological experiments were either controllable (Brightman & Raymond, 1975) or perhaps nonexistent (Kennedy & Cormier, 1971). Others suggested that the lack of integration in social psychology could be addressed using advanced statistical methods; for example, meta-analytic techniques could be used to statistically combine the effects found in a large number of individual studies (Cooper, 1979). What some viewed as larger epistemological problems, others viewed as technical difficulties; the problems of the 1970s therefore came to be seen as manageable and large-scale changes were not deemed necessary in the mainstream literature. Calls for such large-scale changes, including new philosophical approaches, were relegated to the margins (Nederhoff & Zwier, 1983).

The social psychology literature continues to be peppered with discussions of the crisis. These discussions tend to use the crisis as

a way of framing arguments regarding current faults and shortcomings of the field. Interestingly, the disciplinary deficiencies frequently noted are the same as those expounded in the crisis: methodological difficulties, individualism and a focus on microsocial phenomena, a paucity of good theory, and a lack of generalizability (Hill, 2006; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Torregrosa, 2004). Authors employ the 1970s crisis to suggest new directions for the discipline, including new theoretical approaches (Hogg & Grieve, 1999) as well as new philosophies of science (Kim, 1999).

These contemporary writings on the crisis support the idea that the issues involved in the crisis have not only been a significant part of the discipline's history, but also continue to generate controversy in contemporary social psychology. The 1970s crisis provides a unique look at the conditions under which such debates become the basis of a sense of disciplinary crisis. In the case of social psychology, it seems that the disciplinary crisis was in part a reflection of the larger crisis evident in North American culture. The crisis was perhaps instigated by outside pressures that contributed to social psychologists' growing awareness of their discipline's inability to grapple with social systems and their failure to make significant contributions to society. It was further encouraged by theories of crisis prevalent in the academic literature of the time, which provided social psychologists with a framework for theorizing their difficulties. In addition, the diagnosis of disciplinary crisis may also be read as an attempt to make sense of a divided field by giving meaning to dissatisfaction within a field, naturalizing periods of discord and disagreement, and providing reassurance that such a state is temporary and perhaps even beneficial for the advance of the field.

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