

ISSUES IN INTEGRATIVE STUDIES
No. 30, pp. 128-154 (2012)

INTERDISCIPLINES AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY: Political Psychology and Psychohistory Compared

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Abstract: Interdisciplines are specialties that connect ideas, methods, and findings from existing disciplines. Political psychology and psychohistory are interdisciplines which should have much in common, but even where they clearly intersect, their approaches usually diverge. Part of the reason for their dissimilarity lies in what each takes and rejects from the parent fields. Political psychology and psychohistory both select certain approaches from the array of contending discourses within their respective disciplines; they favor congenial outlooks and methods, while underplaying or ignoring other pertinent perspectives. This results in an incomplete exploration of their own subject matter and little interaction between them. Ideally, interdisciplines should involve a bidirectional exchange between the main trends in each specialty, but that is not always the case. Many scholars in these two specialties function within a conceptual comfort zone uninterested in some relevant bodies of research. Their insularity indicates that diverging viewpoints may exist in almost parallel intellectual universes. To illustrate these and other issues, I discuss definitions of each field, describe the parent disciplines and how political psychology and psychohistory relate to them, explore the methodology, accomplishments, and dilemmas of both interdisciplines, and, finally, evaluate the significance of these findings for disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies.

Keywords: interdisciplines, disciplinarity, interdisciplinary studies, political psychology, psychohistory

Introduction

One strategy for researching real-world problems beyond the scope of one discipline is to integrate the findings and approaches of the pertinent

autonomous disciplines into a more comprehensive understanding. Another strategy is to combine elements from existing disciplines into a new specialty; these hybrid fields are called interdisciplines. Despite their growing proliferation, interdisciplines are understudied: There are 405 references to interdisciplines in the WorldCat catalog, compared to 269,774 for interdisciplinary.¹ This article examines interdisciplines through case studies of two thematically related such fields: political psychology and psychohistory. It then uses similarities and differences between them to begin the process of sketching out the connections between interdisciplines and interdisciplinarity.

A reason for examining interdisciplines is that they are a prime example of how research is actually practiced when there are issues beyond the scope of one discipline and multiple fields intersect. How regularly, though, do interdisciplines reach a level of interdisciplinarity that includes formulating an integrative understanding that is more comprehensive? This article will look at that question through the two hybrid fields being appraised. While interdisciplines have been studied individually, there is an advantage to comparing these two related but different hybrid fields, as this may shed light on how issues are handled when one specialty is aligned with the social sciences and another has more allegiance to the humanities.

First, what is an interdiscipline? To Scott Frickel, interdisciplines are “hybridized knowledge fields situated between and within existing disciplines.” They “maintain themselves through interactions with other fields” and show more “epistemological variability than disciplines” (2004, pp. 268, 273). Julie Thompson Klein calls interdisciplines “institutionalized hybrid fields” and distinguishes them from informal “disciplinary exchanges that remain at the level of topics and cross-disciplinary contacts” (1993, p. 192). She later says that some of these hybrids “develop epistemological strength anchored by shared thematic principles, unifying core concepts, and a . . . common interlanguage” (2010, p. 22). In short, interdisciplines deal with subject matter that is beyond the competence of a single discipline by interconnecting aspects of at least two existing fields to form a specialized area of study.

Interdisciplines appear in a variety of forms. While some maintain that

¹ WorldCat catalog, retrieved from www.worldcat.org July 6, 2011. The WorldCat catalog is the source for this information on how many articles and books have been published on interdisciplines and interdisciplinary. This source describes itself as the world’s largest library catalog; it is helpful in showing how understudied interdisciplines have been.

interdisciplines are primarily subfields of existing disciplines, this is not true in all instances. Psychological anthropology is both an interdiscipline and a subfield; it is found in anthropology but not psychology departments, and it addresses subjects beyond the scope of one discipline. Cultural anthropology, on the other hand, is primarily a subdiscipline.

The complex relationships of interdisciplines to disciplines can be illustrated by exploring two of the more widely-known hybrid fields: biochemistry and social psychology. The first of these two specialties appears in a variety of locales; it can be a stand-alone major or a course within a biology or chemistry department. Julie Thompson Klein says that biochemistry “might have continued at the crossroads of chemistry and physiology,” but “by the 1930s . . . the field had coalesced into a well-defined discipline with its own domain at its own level of inquiry . . . its own theoretical schemes . . . and its own research problems and techniques” (1996, pp. 81-82). While biochemistry can be within or between disciplines, no matter where it is located it has developed a distinctive subject matter that is recognized by practitioners no matter what their departmental affiliations. It cannot accurately be categorized as primarily a subfield.

“Social psychology,” Roger Smith writes, has “existed as two separate specialties, one in psychology and the other in sociology.” They have “the same name but . . . different personnel, institutional support, methods and content.” In psychology, social psychology “explains outward social relations by reference to inner states” while in sociology, the field focuses on how “collective entities like culture or class” shape society (1997, p. 748). In a section of *Crossing Boundaries* entitled “Interdisciplines,” Julie Thompson Klein notes that by the 1970s “social psychology was segmented along three lines: *psychological social psychology* . . . *symbolic interactionism* . . . and *psychological sociology*” (1996, p. 80, italics in original). Widely recognized as an interdiscipline, social psychology is internally fragmented, and functions as both an interdiscipline and a subdiscipline. It is an example of what Clifford Geertz has called “blurred genres” (1983, p. 19). Its subject matter is between disciplines, though in practice the shape it takes depends on which discipline is dominant.

Interdisciplines can be so divided that there are rival forms of the same interdiscipline. Like disciplines, interdisciplines can contain competing and complementary research programs. Interdisciplines embody both sides of the distinction historians Bender and Schorske make between “pluralized disciplines” and “more tightly unified ones” (1997, p. 5). Academic disciplines and interdisciplines range from unity to disunity. Interdisciplines can be

unidirectional or bidirectional. If unidirectional the flow in an interdiscipline goes from one parent discipline to the other, but not generally back to the first; if bidirectional the flow goes both ways.

How integrative are these hybrid fields? Cognitive science combines research from a plurality of disciplines into its own specialty. Rogers, Scaife, and Rizzo note that though it aims to “integrate disciplines . . . cognitive science has been predominantly a multi-disciplinary activity.” Much of this is because “the worldviews, backgrounds, research traditions, perspectives . . . of the contributing disciplines are simply not commensurable with each other” (2005, pp. 266, 274).

Then there is the case in which competing interdisciplines are subfields within a single discipline, as in the case of cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology within psychology. Many cross-cultural psychologists are interested in formulating verifiable generalizations about human universals; cultural psychologists are usually relativists who emphasize human diversity and doubt many universals exist separate from culture. There have been attempts to bridge the divide between the universalism of the cross-culturalists and the relativism of the culturalists. John Berry and his colleagues find that in “the available literature, it appears to us that most theoretical attempts at integration . . . ultimately maintain a relativist position.” Instead of common ground being found, a one-sided partisanship is maintained. Berry and associates see this as part of “the tendency in interdisciplinary debate to reduce the phenomena of one discipline to the level of explanation commonly employed in the next ‘more basic’ discipline” (2002, p. 5). The authors recognize “that the two perspectives are incompatible and, at least for the time being, will remain so” (2002, pp. 336-337).

There are at least four variations of being an interdiscipline: (1) The two fields are integrated into a coherent specialty with consensus on concepts and methods; (2) They take one form in one of the parent disciplines and a different form in the other; (3) Respective disciplines maintain their own boundaries rather than interconnect findings and methods; (4) Rival interdisciplines develop within a particular academic discipline. As with disciplines, interdisciplines do not appear in one form; some have found common ground, and others, such as social psychology and cognitive science, have not. In other words, when in interdisciplines, there are research problems beyond the competency of an existing discipline, sometimes there are integration and comprehensive understanding and at other times there are fragmentation and ideological divergence. The comparison of political psychology and psychohistory will bring out additional variations.

Political Psychology and Psychohistory

Political psychology and psychohistory are interdisciplines which should have much in common, but even where they clearly intersect, their approaches usually diverge. Part of the reason for their dissimilarity lies in what each takes and rejects from the parent fields. Political psychology and psychohistory both select certain approaches from the array of contending discourses within their respective disciplines; they favor congenial outlooks and methods, while underplaying or ignoring other pertinent perspectives. This results in an incomplete exploration of their own subject matter and little interaction between them. Ideally, interdisciplines should involve a bidirectional exchange between the main trends in each specialty, but that is not always the case. Many scholars in these two specialties function within a conceptual comfort zone uninterested in some relevant bodies of research. Their insularity indicates that diverging viewpoints may exist in almost parallel intellectual universes.

To illustrate these and other issues, I discuss definitions of each field, describe the parent disciplines and how political psychology and psychohistory relate to them, explore the methodology, accomplishments, and dilemmas of both interdisciplines, and, finally, evaluate the significance of these findings for disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies.

Political Psychology

The International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP), which was established in 1979, states this is “an interdisciplinary” field “exploring the relationships between political and psychological processes.”² The editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* say the specialty is “an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics” (Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003, p. 3). To Martha Cottam and colleagues, this interdiscipline “uses psychology to explain political behavior” ranging “from voting behavior to nuclear deterrence, from the politics of race to the politics of genocide” (2010, p. ix).

Psychohistory

² International Society of Political Psychology (2010), “About ISPP,” retrieved from <http://ispp.org/about.html> January 11, 2011. The ISPP is the official organization of and for political psychologists. They hold an annual conference and publish the journal *Political Psychology*.

Obtaining a clear definition of psychohistory is a challenge. “Psychohistory,” William McKinley Runyan writes, “can be defined as the explicit use of formal or systemic psychology in historical interpretation.” Runyan hastens to add that “the use of psychology . . . may or may not be psychoanalytic” (1993, p. 36). Jacques Szaluta sees psychohistory as the “interdisciplinary . . . application of psychology, in its broadest sense, or psychoanalysis in a specific sense, to the study of the past” (2001, p. 1). Peter Loewenberg describes psychohistory as “a dual discipline” whose “method is an amalgam of psychoanalytic clinical technique with humanistic historical analysis” (1995, p. 3). As the relationship of academic psychology to psychoanalysis has been problematic, the methodologies employed in psychohistory have been subject to much dispute. The direction is primarily one way, with psychology applied to history while historical methods and standards are not often integrated into experimental or psychoanalytic endeavors.

The parent disciplines will now be discussed.

Psychology

Understanding what both political psychology and psychohistory entail gets more complicated when defining psychology is attempted. Duane and Sydney Schultz write, “there is no single . . . definition of psychology on which all psychologists agree” (2000, p. 2). C. James Goodwin comments that “some observers . . . believe that a single field of psychology no longer exists, that a neuroscientist . . . has virtually nothing in common with the industrial psychologist” (1999, p. 6). The Schultzes note, “Modern psychology includes many subject areas that seem to have little in common beyond a broad interest in human nature and conduct and an approach that attempts in some general way to be scientific” (2000, p. 2). Sigmund Koch, in *A Century of Psychology as Science*, says, “When the details of psychology’s one-hundred year history are consulted, the patent tendency is toward theoretical and substantive fractionation (and increasing insularity among the ‘specialties’), not integration” (1992, pp. 92-93).

A prime example of the divisions within psychology involves the American Psychological Association (APA), the 150,000-member official organization for the field. For decades, the APA has welcomed both clinicians and experimental researchers. In 1988, a group of academics broke away from the APA to form a more scientifically oriented organization, the American Psychological Society. Under its newer name, the Association

for Psychological Science (APS) has attracted more than 22,000 members.³ Reviewing this history, C. James Goodwin writes, “psychology at the close of the twentieth century seems to be characterized more by disunity than unity. . . . psychology today is really a plurality of subdisciplines, each a specialty in its own right,” for “psychology is not a single discipline but a collection of them” (1999, pp. 438- 439). William Todd Schultz concurs. “Psychology’s disorder,” he writes, “is multiple personality (or, as it’s now called, dissociative identity). We speak in a cacophony of voices.” To Schultz, psychology “is less a discipline than a farrago of sub-disciplines,” each of which has “a lexicon sure to discourage intrepid party crashers” (2005, p. 5). Psychology is surely a prime example of a pluralized discipline.

These descriptions of psychology do not address the relationship of psychoanalysis and psychology. The APA does have a division of psychoanalysis with more than 3,000 members.⁴ Many academic psychologists, though, do not consider psychoanalysis to be scientific, and therefore exclude it from mainstream psychology. Psychoanalysis, as the study of the unconscious, cannot be considered a unified specialty. Robert Wallerstein describes “theoretical diversity” and “psychoanalytic pluralism” (1992, p. 5). Less politely, George Makari observes that the fragmenting of “psychoanalysis into many schools” has produced a “raucous chorus” that cannot be harmonized (2008, p. 263). Paul Stepansky notes that psychoanalysis has become subject to “internal fractionation” with “rivalrous . . . even sect-like groupings” (2009, p. xvii).

Within this sea of disunity, those seeking to apply experimental psychology or psychoanalysis to either the past or to politics have significant challenges and opportunities. This dissonance within psychology is an indication of how academic specialties often function. According to Tony Becher and Paul Trowler, “There is no single method of inquiry, no standard verification procedure, no definitive set of concepts that uniquely characterize each

³ Association for Psychological Science, “Membership,” retrieved from www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/about, July 10, 2011. This group consists primarily of academic psychologists who want to emphasize the scientific more than the clinical approach to their discipline. The group’s website lists the number of members in their organization.

⁴ American Psychological Association, “Division of Psychoanalysis,” retrieved from <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-39/about/index.aspx> June 26, 2011. The APA has multiple divisions, one of which is for psychoanalysts, and the number of those that are part of that division is listed in the section of the APA’s website for those interested in psychoanalysis.

particular discipline.” One is more likely to find “coherent properties of subsidiary areas within one disciplinary domain or another” (2001, p. 65). Given the big tent of psychology, there is ample room for our two derivative specialties to select psychological outlooks for which they have an affinity, and discount others for which they have less sympathy. Political psychology, for instance, has identified itself as an empirical field upholding scientific standards, and so has allegiance to academic psychology, but little interest in clinical perspectives, while psychohistory derives most of its inspiration from clinical traditions and gives shorter shrift to findings from experimental psychology. At the crossroads, political psychology has followed one path and psychohistory another. Each of these fields has another parent discipline, and how each relates to that specialty helps us understand why these two thematically related hybrids are so different.

Political Science

Political science is the empirical and theoretical study of politics and government; it is a social science and includes such subdivisions as public policy, international relations, comparative politics, national politics, and political theory. Is it a unified or pluralized discipline?

“Political science,” Robert Lane writes, does not have “a body of phenomena analyzed by a coherent set of theories, or even competing coherent theories, like physics.” It has “a set of problems for which many approaches and theories are relevant” (2003, p. 755). Rogers M. Smith contends that political science “remains highly fragmented, with members sitting at ‘separate tables’” (1997, p. 287). He does assert that “quasi-experimental empirical research” utilizing “multiple-regression equations” is “the most ‘sciencey’” part of political science (1997, p. 271). Then there has been “the meteoric ascendancy of formal rational-choice theories.” Rational choice theorists in political science, Smith says, “emulate” rational-choice economists, who see individuals as rationally balancing costs and benefits in making decisions that will most enhance them (1997, p. 288).

Within political science, political psychology functions as an alternative perspective to an economic theory of motivation. Both the rational choice and political psychology perspectives within political science base their claims, in part, on empirical standards; it is the reliance on scientific methodology that gives them credence within the discipline. The upholding of these research traditions makes for a greater degree of consensus within political science than is found in psychology.

History

While political science is firmly entrenched within the social sciences, the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 puts history within the humanities. Historians emphasize interpretation. “Every piece of historical writing,” Green and Troup write, “has a theoretical basis on which evidence is selected, filtered and understood” (1999, p. vii). Each historical account, Howell and Prevenier declare, “not only privileges certain events, certain kinds of information; each tends to ignore other events and to suppress other data” (2001, p. 85). As much as history has roots in social sciences, the stress on interpretation makes it more like the humanities. It is the divide between the social sciences and humanities that contributes to the lack of dialogue between political psychology and psychohistory.

How each hybrid field deals with the contending discourses in its parent disciplines will indicate the directions each of these interdisciplines takes.

The Fine Mismatching: Psychology and Political Science

Political psychology is highly selective as to what elements of psychology it employs. Political psychology had psychoanalytic roots, but has moved more towards empirical psychology. The interest in Freudian-derived thought did not extend much beyond the 1960s.

Some might claim that political psychology is bidirectional, in that there is a mutual interaction between psychology and political science concerning political issues. They each influence the other, thus making political psychology a comprehensive, integrated interdiscipline. Others dispute this characterization claiming that political psychology is oriented towards one field rather than both. James Kuklinski says, “psychologists ignore political science. Political science departments hire psychologists, but almost never does a psychology department hire a political scientist” (2002, p. 12). Krosnick and McGraw go so far as to proclaim that “political psychology is a subtype of political science.” Published political psychology articles in major journals are overwhelmingly within political science, and the Summer Institute in Political Psychology for a number of years had only a quarter of its attendees from psychology. In practice, it is accurate, they say, to call the field “*psychological political science*” (Krosnick & McGraw, 2002, p. 84).

Two relatively recent political psychology readers make clear the political science orientation of this interdiscipline. *Oxford Handbook*

of Political Psychology contains five groupings: theory, international relations, mass political behavior, intergroup relations, and political change (Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003, pp. vii-viii). Jost and Sidanius’s anthology is more expansive, listing personality and politics, mass media and candidate perception, ideology and public opinion, decision making, prejudice and diversity, conflict, violence, and political transformation as its topics (2004, pp. vii-viii). As can be seen, these are primarily political science categories.

Attempts to apply psychological concepts to political science have run into difficulties. In the 1950s, psychologists and political scientists each studied attitude change and came up with incompatible results. Both disciplines were employing the accepted scientific methodology of their individual specialties. Psychologists were relying on laboratory experiments, and the survey was the chief research tool in political science. Political science research showed attitudes were relatively stable, and psychological investigations reported they were not. By the early 1990s experiments were still more prevalent in psychology journals and not much evident in political science publications (Iyengar, 1993, pp. 4-5).

The problems with integrating political science and psychology have not withered away since the 1990s. Martha Cottam and colleagues write, “one cannot use many of the experimental techniques in psychology to study politics. . . . The patterns of behavior observed in the laboratory, therefore, are not likely to be observed in such pristine quality in the real world.” Applying psychological research to the rough-and-tumble world of politics “is one of the most difficult aspects of the development of the field of political psychology” (2010, pp. 4-5).

Krosnick and McGraw concur. Applying psychological laboratory research designed to be context free to practical politics often means that psychological findings need “modifications, elaborations, and extensions” (2002, pp. 84-85). In their own research, they found that sometimes there were variables psychological research had not anticipated. This interaction between psychology and politics in political psychology then “uncovered mediators and moderators of effects that had not yet been incorporated in psychological theory” (2002, p. 85).

I have three comments. First, the merging of two existing fields into a new interdiscipline contains the potential for enduring problems. Some areas will overlap and intersect, otherwise an interdiscipline would not have been formed, but different outlooks and methodologies may remain, and need to be recognized and worked through. Second, each discipline may

not always rely on the full spectrum of approaches within the partnering field, but may select those parts that are most compatible with its own disciplinary orientation. In the intersection of psychology and political science, there is not a marriage in which two souls become one; it more resembles a relationship in which one partner uses the other for his own needs. Third, it is not infrequent, when there is tension between the two disciplines, that political psychologists tend to adhere to political science more than psychological standards and methods.

Although there is tension between the parent fields, this should not obscure their common ground, which is empirical research. “The field of political psychology,” Deutsch and Kinnvall write, “is defined not only by its subject-matter . . . but by its approach to its subject matter,” which “has historically been in the scientific tradition.” By this, they mean that political psychology develops hypotheses that can be “genuinely testable,” that is, “subject to the possibility of rejection through empirically verifiable and scientifically competent evidence.” For a “scientifically oriented political psychology must, by necessity, be concerned with ‘methodology’” (2002, p. 17).

It is evident, though, that empirical research can mean one thing in psychology and another in political science. Deutsch and Kinnvall recognize that developing a scientifically reliable methodology raises issues: “many scientists . . . ignore how their theoretical and empirical work . . . are influenced by their implicit assumptions,” their “value positions” and “ideological orientations” (2002, p. 18). If these assumptions often create complications within a specific scientific discipline, there can be greater complexity when two specialties with their divergent methods and approaches intersect. In political psychology, psychological approaches sometimes conflict with political realities, and the research of psychologists and political scientists has resulted in incompatible findings. It is not only in these two parent fields that the brands of empiricism vary. Within the social sciences as a whole, according to Alexander Rosenberg, “there is no consensus . . . on the methods to be employed. This is true both between the disciplines and even within some of them” (1995, p. 4).

The dilemmas of epistemological pluralism even among empiricists are noteworthy, if not always confronted. Most political psychologists practice “the well-trying art of ‘methodological opportunism,’” meaning they adopt whatever designs and procedures appear “appropriate to the problem they are investigating” (Deutsch & Kinnvall, 2002, pp. 18-19). What is appropriate may appear the same to all researchers, but it may

not. There can be consensus of ideas and methods, and there may also be contending discourses and methodologies within and between disciplines and interdisciplines.

Comprehensive integrations are not always sought or found within political psychology. The search for scientifically valid and reliable research occurs within selected paradigms in often fragmented, methodologically and ideologically divided research areas. What is likely to happen in political psychology is that selected perspectives are utilized and tested and other scientifically plausible hypotheses are not. The art of methodological opportunism is a way to remain within compatible methodologies while avoiding a full confrontation with divergent research procedures and skirting around the ambiguities within empiricism.

Then there is the fact that within political psychology certain psychologies are incorporated into investigations, and other approaches are less utilized. Cognitive and social psychology are prominent, while clinical approaches are referred to in passing. Daniel Bar-Tal categorized articles that appeared in the first 19 volumes of *Political Psychology* from 1979 to 1998. He found that 62.6% of the articles were within social psychology and 6.2% were from clinical psychology. Bar-Tal also found 16 distinct subfields within the publication; these included political beliefs, prejudice, alienation, international relations, conflict, and conflict resolution. Of the articles, 63.9% clustered into the four specialties of political beliefs and attitudes, leaders and leadership, political behavior, and decision making (2002, p. 176). Using Bar-Tal’s classification, my own tally of *Political Psychology* from 1999 to 2009 has 59.7% of the articles in the same four areas. Political psychological research has clustered around a minority of the categories within the specialty and privileges social/cognitive psychologies over others.

Should the field be called social/cognitive psychological political science? As prominent as social psychology is within political psychology, among the 150,000 members of the American Psychological Association, 6,000 of them belong to the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, the APA Division for social psychologists.⁵ Social psychology is more prominent within political psychology than it is within the psychological profession, and this may be an additional reason why political psychology has little

⁵J. Crocker, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, retrieved from <http://www.spsp.org> July 5, 2010. This group is a division within the American Psychological Association.

impact within academic psychology. Furthermore, political psychologists borrow from the psychological variation of social psychology, and not the sociological one.

Within the pages of *Political Psychology* there has been less emphasis on topics outside cognitive/social psychology. Since the end of World War II, there has been much attention paid to the horrors of genocidal campaigns and to post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans, while another topic, terrorism, became seared into political consciousness after the 2001 attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center. In the years between 1999 and 2009, I found that 7% of the full articles in *Political Psychology* were on war, genocide or terrorism. In the same period, 38% of the articles were in the broad category of political beliefs and attitudes. Research published in *Political Psychology*, by and large, shies away from the more severe manifestations of political life in favor of research that is more easily quantifiable.

Ironically, the focus on the measurable has promoted political psychology within a parent discipline. Rational choice theory has gained a privileged place among political scientists, yet some political psychologists contest this economically based theory. There is a division between what Ansolabehere and Iyengar call Homo Economicus and Homo Psychologicus. “While economists assume that people are able to assess probabilities accurately, psychologists argue that individuals’ beliefs are subject to various biases and errors” (1993, p. 322). The relative place of these contrasting approaches is reflected in publications within the field. A study categorizing articles in three premier political science journals found that in the early 1980s 18.7% of articles were on rational choice, 17.1% on political psychology, 27.4% on political behavior, and 36.8% on other categories. By the end of the 1990s, results had altered; 31.4% were on rational choice, 20.8% on political psychology, 19.9% on political behavior, and 27.9% on other categories (Rahn, Sullivan, & Rudolph, 2002, p. 157). While rational choice theory dramatically ascended, political psychology was also on the upswing. Political psychology is an alternative to rational choice theory that is recognized within the parent discipline.

The empiricist allegiances of political psychologists have enabled them to achieve a certain influence within political science. Within political psychology itself, there is much consensus, but attempts at integration are not common; when they do occur, they may involve cognitive advances, yet they often exclude relevant perspectives. These integrations may bring new knowledge without being more comprehensive. This hybrid specialty is highly selective in the concepts and methods it employs, and does not fully explore its subject matter.

These last observations call to mind remarks made about academic psychology. Historian Roger Smith says, “psychology . . . defined itself by its method rather than by its subject matter” (1997, p. 639). Psychologist Uichol Kim writes that “psychologists have discarded many central concepts” that make “human beings human” with the result that “psychological understanding becomes distorted” (2001, p. 72). If the methodology of a parent discipline and the practices of a related interdiscipline are “distorted,” are not sufficiently inclusive, and do not adequately cover their own fields, when these methods and practices are applied to research questions, will the results also be partial and distorted? To what extent will some of the attempts at integration using the cognitive advances dominant within these fields also be partial and distorted?

The Odd Couple: Psychology and History

In the family of historical specialties, psychohistory is a black sheep, a disreputable child who is sometimes allowed to sit at the dinner table, but is more often made to stand in the corner. For whatever reasons, history as a profession is less welcoming to a psychological interdiscipline than are psychological social science subfields in anthropology, political science, economics, and sociology, let alone the humanities.

What could be the reason for such reticence about mixing psychology and history? Back in 1941, historian Sidney Ratner wrote, “the fierce controversies that have raged over the relative merits of behaviorism, psycho-analysis, organicism, Gestalt psychology, and other psychological systems made many historians unsure as to what psychological tools and concepts were sound and could be used safely in their work” (p. 96). As Peter Gay pointed out over 40 years later, “the disciplines to which modern historians resort—anthropology, sociology, economics—are mired in controversy; they all compel the historian to choose one school in preference to others” (1985, pp. 44-45). However, contending discourses in other fields cannot fully account for the distance historians keep from psychology and psychohistory, since adhering to one perspective over others is common in many disciplines, including history.

A major reason historians are not eager to bring psychohistory into the fold is the connection between psychohistory and psychoanalysis. Freud is not highly prized in the empirical social sciences, nor in many other corners of academia. As philosopher Patricia Kitcher reports, psychoanalysis “is widely regarded as the paradigm of bad science, a theory so obviously false

that its proponents must be deluded or devious or perhaps both” (1992, p. 153). While history is classified within the humanities, it still prizes scientific evaluation of evidence and by and large historians question the evidentiary foundation of Freud’s brainchild. Three decades ago, David Stannard’s *Shrinking History* saw the foundation of psychohistory in a discredited psychoanalysis, and then found little use for psychohistory (1980).

Even though Nobel Prize-winning scientists Gerald Edelman and Eric Kandel find Freud’s theories to be outstanding, it is not clear if many historians would value this assessment (Edelman, 1992, p. 145; Kandel, 2005, p. 64). American advocates for psychohistory do not cluster in the overarching professional organization. In 2006, four members of the American Historical Association selected psychohistory as their specialty; in 2007 it was three (Townsend, 2007). On the other end of the disciplinary spectrum, academic psychologists have not openly embraced history. William McKinley Runyan attributes the tension between experimental psychology and history to the contrast between their aims and methods. History interprets and describes particular events, while empirical psychology searches “for general theories about the mind, experience and behavior” by using “quantitative and experimental methods designed to test theoretical conjectures, and present their work in the form of empirical tests of explicit hypotheses” (1988, p. 43).

Psychohistory, though, has not derived much of its inspiration from the psychology dominant in American universities. The intellectual homes for psychohistorians are in clinical traditions, and the findings of mainstream empirical psychology, outside of attachment and trauma research, are not often cited. Like political psychology, psychohistory is not an integrative field, as it omits much that is legitimately psychological; it is more accurate to say that this interdisciplinary studies aspects of history utilizing selective psychologies. The allegiance of many psychohistorians is to specific variations within psychoanalysis, as the unconscious, irrational, destructive, even the dire are stressed more than the measurable. While there remains a good deal of attention paid to the normative within psychohistory, there is much more of an emphasis on the ramifications of trauma and abuse than there is in the neighboring field of political psychology.

What, then, does psychohistory study? The subject matter of psychohistory for Lloyd deMause includes the history of childhood, psychobiography, and group psychohistory (1982 p. 53). To Paul Elovitz, this field includes psychobiography, “childhood, group dynamics, mechanisms of defense, dreams, and creativity” (2009, p. 2). The specialty of the history of childhood

focuses on neglect and abuse of children, and has a special affinity within the work of European psychologist Alice Miller, who traces adult neuroses to childhood traumas and parental maltreatment (deMause, 2010, p. 3).

A second specialty with psychohistory, psychobiography, also is present within political psychology. The tension between the psychohistorical and political psychological perspectives is evident. Political scientist David Houghton says psycho-biographers show how individual psychological character influences historical events by using “psychological theory . . . to make sense of a person’s life” (2009, p. 86).

The aim of psychobiography to William McKinley Runyan is to “integrate individuals into broader historical patterns” (1988, p. 40). How it can do so raises epistemological dilemmas that reflect, in part, on the tensions between a social science and a humanities approach to understanding. Empiricists critique psychoanalytic approaches to studying lives. Psychologist Allen Elms finds that too many psychoanalytic biographies are “little restrained by judgmental criteria or procedural rules of thumb” and that many psychobiographies are “much more often pathobiographic than eugraphic” (1994, p. 10). From a social scientific orientation, David Houghton criticizes psychobiography for being reductionist and making claims that cannot be falsified. Still, Houghton affirms that leaders’ actions cannot be explained without “analysis of their psychological characteristics, and this means that psychobiography or psychohistory is almost certainly with us to stay.” He just wants it to be more psychologically systematic and sophisticated (2009, pp. 99-100).

Psychobiography, then, has been criticized for not sufficiently following scientific standards. Elms, as an academic psychologist who veered off into psychobiography, is often accused by colleagues in his field of having “gone astray.” However, Elms says, “[f]ar from abandoning the field of psychology, I think I’ve found a route to its very center, to the understanding of human beings in their full complexity” (1994, p. 256). Elms embodies the tension in psychology between the empirical and clinical traditions, between seeking the fullness of being human and upholding scientific standards. Psychobiography is the specialty where political psychology and psychohistory most converge, yet the division between these two interdisciplines is evident. Here is present the division between those seeking reliable and valid knowledge and those who find that aspects of human complexity are beyond what empirical research often explores.

Another subset of psychohistory, group psychohistory, is often drawn to the dire, and seeks to capture the elusive emotional life of groups and

nations. Psychiatrist Robert Lifton's pathbreaking *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1968) shows how the guilt-ridden survivors of a nuclear attack are immersed in death, how the residues of apocalyptic violence are seared into their very being; hence the title. Other studies of group psychohistory examine the reverberations of trauma. A prominent theory that bridges the gap between the individual and the collective is Rudolph Binion's conception that many "unknowingly . . . repeat an especially painful experience in disguise." This is "a pattern of human behavior sufficiently distinct to deserve a technical name: episodic traumatic reliving" (2010, p. 66). As Binion says these memories of trauma "are *agonizing*." They induce "shame, distress, anguish, fear, horror" (2003, p. 248). If not processed through, they can re-enact themselves in disguised forms. The unconscious reliving does not defuse the actual trauma, and so the memories are frequently replayed. Binion's theory revises the psychoanalytic theories of trauma and repetition compulsion, then applies them to individuals and groups. Binion's stature is a reflection of how psychohistory often retains Freudian roots.

Some psychohistorians show how internal conflicts are externalized. Richard Hofstadter sought to illuminate "the non-rational side of politics," how "politics can be a projective arena for feelings and impulses that are only marginally related to the manifest issues" (1965, p. ix). Partisan political strife can awaken strong passions, and be a vehicle through which individual emotional dramas are enacted in the public sphere. Hofstadter noticed how "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" were often present in political rhetoric; he labeled it "the paranoid style." This use "of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people . . . makes the phenomenon significant." Decision-making in electoral politics is not just weighing alternatives, and choosing to vote for those candidates with values and programs attuned to those of the voter. "American political life...has served again and again as an arena for uncommonly angry minds" (1965, pp. 3-4). A history informed by psychological conceptions of the irrational can focus on the underside of political dynamics.

Just as political psychology favors certain psychologies over others, psychohistory does not cover the full range of psychologies, even within the clinical domain. Neither cognitive/behavioral nor marriage and family systems approaches, for example, are often found within psychohistory; in psychoanalytic psychohistory it is uncommon to find references to Klein or Lacan. While psychohistory is about the application of selected psychologies to history, it is not about applying history to academic psychology. It is not bidirectional, but more unidirectional; it does not utilize the full spectrum

of concepts or subjects in either history or psychology. It is marginal to the historical profession and not on the radar screen in college psychology departments.

With its emphasis on irrationality and trauma, psychohistory is at the opposite end of the intellectual spectrum from rational choice theory. What psychohistorians usually study is descriptive and interpretive, but not easily measured. It is difficult to conceive psychohistory making the inroads within a social science department that political psychology has within political science. Yet as so much of history, politics, and psychology involves irrational action, the marginality of psychohistory often leaves great gaps in historical explanations. Similarly, the gaps present in political psychology mean that political violence, destruction, and illusion are significantly understudied.

These two fields are mirrors to each other, revealing the strengths and limits of each approach. The empiricism of political psychology shows up the frequent lack of testability within psychohistory, and the clinical roots of psychohistory reveal what limited scope prevails in political psychology. Political psychologists may claim that psychohistory is unscientific, while psychohistorians say political psychology frequently lacks depth and avoids confronting the full complexity of human beings. Psychohistory and political psychology could complement, enhance, and enrich each other, but so far have not.

Conclusion

There remains little interconnection between these two hybrid fields. Being comprehensive and finding common ground are part of being interdisciplinary, yet the comparison of political psychology and psychohistory shows that each covers different aspects of the entire canvas, with little attempt to present the whole picture. As well, within each of these two interdisciplines, there is a scarcity of mutually enriching interaction between the parent fields. Instead of being bidirectional, both political psychology and psychohistory are more unidirectional. Some brands of psychology have influenced them, but they have little impact on psychology. Then again, the psychologies prevailing in political psychology have little in common with those dominant in psychohistory. In interdisciplines, there ought to be a cross-disciplinary dialogue, a meeting of the minds, to try to work out discrepancies. This can happen, but often does not. For example, the experimental method prevalent in academic psychology does not transfer well to the study of history, and the historical methods of interpretation are not usually welcomed by

experimental psychologists. When political psychologists found problems in applying experimental psychology to political practices, they pointed out the problems, but no real interdisciplinary dialogue ensued.

As many in psychology and political science claim these are scientific enterprises, they need to examine competing claims. Empirical research may utilize different methods on the same topic, i.e., the use of experiments or surveys to measure political attitudes. If one research methodology, say experiments, is favored in psychology, whereas surveys are favored in a neighboring discipline, when the same phenomenon is measured, the findings may contradict each other. Empiricism, then, is not a singular concept with consistent applications across social science disciplines. This lack of compatible results raises questions about the meaning of empiricism, and indicates that epistemological pluralism can include empirical pluralism.

Political psychologists have not seemed interested in reconciling the diverging empirical methods found in the parent disciplines. Instead, they may rely on methodological opportunism to avoid confronting difficult epistemological issues. When empirical criteria that are at cross-purposes are not integrated, the result cannot be good science. An aim of interdisciplinary studies is to seek such integration. As both political psychology and psychohistory favor certain disciplinary approaches and downplay others, there are obstacles on the road to a more comprehensive perspective. Not entertaining certain pertinent concepts and/or methods means that neither psychohistory nor political psychology adequately covers the full range of its own subject matter, nor reconciles conflicting methodologies and outlooks. Cherry-picking characterizes psychohistory and political psychology.

Once it is recognized that the pertinent fields have not included relevant outlooks, and may have conflicting research methods, a question arises: How can the empirical holes be filled when the relevant disciplines are often not sufficiently comprehensive, and have not developed rigorous methods of confronting conflicts? If the findings within specialties do not fully cover the subject and do not reconcile their methodologies, attempts at a synthesis that relies primarily on favored methodology could end up being incomplete and incompatible. The partiality within disciplines can limit the validity of findings.

What is absent can be as significant as what is present. In Plato's *Symposium*, there is the myth that humans were originally one, then divided into the two sexes; being incomplete they long for reunion. In what transpires between and within psychohistory and political psychology, the splitting into half has

occurred, but the desire for reunion has faded, and walking around as only half a person seems perfectly fine and almost completely comfortable.

Imre Lakatos ties the history of scientific "*progress*" to the exchanges between "*competing research programmes*" (1978, p. 69). The challenges overlapping perspectives and findings present to each other can often stimulate research and ideas that advance knowledge. What happens, though, when advocates of paradigms that are in conflict are not interested in engaging with the opposition? Interdisciplinary studies are designed to integrate findings and perspectives from different fields when they are addressing a common problem. It is unfortunate when conceptual blinders are prevalent in interdisciplines that by nature deal with problems beyond the scope of one discipline.

Clearly, not all interdisciplines are engaged in integration and developing more comprehensive understandings. It is difficult to get to a credible understanding when a pertinent parent discipline does not fully cover its own subject matter, omits including relevant perspectives, and avoids confronting conflicting methodologies and perspectives. Integration that is not comprehensive may be the result.

These findings raise the question of the relationship between interdisciplines and being interdisciplinary. Klein and Newell have told us that interdisciplinary studies "integrates" the "insights" from "disciplinary perspectives . . . through construction of a more comprehensive perspective" in relation to "answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic" that cannot "be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession" (1997, pp. 393-394). A 2004 report of the National Academies concurs in connecting being interdisciplinary with integration. "Research is truly interdisciplinary when it . . . is an integration and synthesis of ideas and methods" (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, 2004, p. 27). To Veronica Boix Mansilla, "interdisciplinary understanding. . . involves the *integration* of disciplinary views." This "capacity to integrate knowledge" aims at producing "a cognitive advancement" (2005, p. 17, 16). In 2008, when offering an "integrated definition," Allen Repko replaced Klein and Newell's "more comprehensive perspective" with "a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement" (2008, p. 12). Four years later, in the second edition, he eliminated "cognitive advancement," kept "a more comprehensive understanding," and in both versions stressed integrating disciplinary insights (2012, p. 16). By these standards the interdisciplines of political psychology, psychohistory, cognitive science, social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and cultural psychology, among others, are not

interdisciplinary, but biochemistry is. The non-integrative interdisciplines do not often aim at being comprehensive, nor do they combine insights from the parent disciplines in an effort to find a balanced synthesis. As remarked earlier, they may well produce a cognitive advancement without being comprehensive. Thus, those interdisciplines that synthesize ideas and methods are interdisciplinary, and those that are not oriented towards integration are not.

There is still more to discuss on the relationship of interdisciplines and interdisciplinary studies. This relates to what Julie Thompson Klein claims is “a major faultline in the discourse of interdisciplinarity” and that is between “Instrumental ID and Critical ID” (2010, p. 22). Allen Repko also finds “two dominant forms of interdisciplinarity: instrumental interdisciplinarity and critical interdisciplinarity” (2012, p. 22). Both Klein and Repko see the instrumental variation in terms of the above definitions. Critical interdisciplinarity, Klein writes, “interrogates the dominant structures of knowledge with the aim of transforming them, raising questions of value and purpose silent” in the instrumental approach to the field (2010, p. 23).

The critical approach raises the issue of the relationship of interdisciplinarity to the disciplines. Many assert, as Boix Mansilla does, that “interdisciplinary understanding is . . . *deeply informed by disciplinary expertise*” (2005, p. 17). Stephen Toulmin says that “interdisciplinary ideas” are “parasitic” on the disciplines, and that only “within a world of disciplines can one be interdisciplinary” (2001, p. 140). There is generally agreement between the criticalists and the instrumentalists that examining the disciplines is intrinsic to being interdisciplinary. According to Klein, the instrumentalists and criticalists approach the disciplines from different outlooks. How then can these different perspectives be compared, and can the study of interdisciplines contribute to this potential dialogue?

One way to start this discussion is to place it in another context, and this was done by Liora Salter and Alison Hearn back in 1996. To them, “critical interdisciplinarity” constitutes both “a profound epistemological challenge to disciplinarity” and “a quest for critical and transformative knowledge” (p. 35). This description is in accord with what Klein and Repko wrote over a decade later. Salter and Hearn, though, consider critical interdisciplinarity as a variation within what they call “conceptual interdisciplinarity,” which they contrast with what they label “instrumental interdisciplinarity” (pp. 30-31). “Conceptual interdisciplinarity” is divided into “those views that embody an overt critique of disciplinarity in their formulation of interdisciplinarity and those that do not” (p. 9). “Conceptual interdisciplinarity” has the potential

to bridge that gap between critical and instrumental interdisciplinarity. The term “conceptual interdisciplinarity” can even be broadened to be seen as involving the study of the disciplines within interdisciplinary studies, and this would include approaches highly critical of the disciplines and those that are less so. Allen Repko also believes that critical and instrumental interdisciplinarity can be compatible, in that the “integrated definition of interdisciplinary studies . . . leaves ample room for critique and interrogation of the disciplines” (2012, p. 23). Where there may be disagreement is that instrumentalists often stress the value of disciplinary expertise and disciplinary insights, while some critical interdisciplinarians emphasize disciplinary inadequacy.

The examination of interdisciplines is relevant here, as they are a halfway house between the disciplines and interdisciplinarity, situated as they often are within and/or between disciplines and intrinsically including studying problems beyond the competency of a single discipline. This particular comparison of political psychology and psychohistory has findings pertinent to what transpires within and between some disciplines, and that helps us understand some disciplinary realities. Psychology, political psychology, and psychohistory do not comprehensively or adequately cover their recognized subject matter. Each of these fields adopts methodologies that can discourage coverage of relevant topics, or are in conflict with each other. As a result, they are not sufficiently scientific. If pertinent disciplines are not fully covering their subject, use incompatible methodologies, omit important perspectives, and/or are uninterested in being comprehensive, this could impact on the quality of the interdisciplinary research. If interdisciplinarians view disciplines as primarily providing expertise and insights, will these interdisciplinarians have sufficient critical perspective on the limits of each field? If the disciplinary biases are not recognized, the resulting integrations could well have problems built into them. Should the distortions, omissions, and incompatibilities within a discipline cause misperception of the actual nature of the subject matter, illusions could be present in disciplinary findings and any interdisciplinary synthesis derived from these findings. There are well-known instances of social science disciplines being dominated by one-sided approaches that omit or misrepresent much vital to their subject matter: Behaviorism in psychology and rational-choice theory in economics are two such examples. Interdisciplinary studies aims at integrating insights of the various pertinent disciplines; at times interdisciplinary efforts might also be synthesizing disciplinary illusions. Incorporating misperceptions into integrations does not promote what the National Academies view as the aim

of being interdisciplinary and that is to “advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems . . . beyond the scope of a single discipline” (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, 2004, pp. 26-27).

A task of the study of disciplines within interdisciplinarity is to be able to ascertain the strengths and limits of each discipline that is addressing a complex problem, to see when they are comprehensive, when fragmented, when divided, when omitting pertinent approaches and methods, when containing diverging research methodologies, when insightful, coherent, integrative, partial and/or exclusionary. Being able to separate the disciplinary wheat from chaff in the interdisciplinary research process is essential for achieving more reliable, valid, and comprehensive understandings. Interdisciplinary researchers will need to know the achievements, gaps, omissions, distortions, and divisions within the relevant fields of study. Using conceptual and/or critical interdisciplinarity to understand the strengths and limits of the disciplines in question can aid efforts within instrumental interdisciplinarity.

Further case studies and critical examination of how both interdisciplines and disciplines function in practice are essential to the scholarship of interdisciplinary studies. It is through examining actual practices that the field of interdisciplinary studies can comprehend the full complexity within disciplines and interdisciplines, and then construct highly credible, comprehensive understandings.

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