Reconceptualizing the Relationships Between History and Psychology

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The question of how psychological structures and processes are related to the flow of historical events is a fundamental one, with implications cutting across all of the human sciences. Sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science all wrestle with a common set of problems in understanding relationships between individual psychology and continuity and change in social institutions. This chapter attempts to provide a relatively comprehensive conceptualization of the uses of psychology in historical interpretation, one which reveals the internal structure of psychohistory, as well as indicating its place in a wider intellectual landscape. This conceptualization of psychohistory is intended to direct attention not so much to "an established body of knowledge, but to the potentials of a field of inquiry" (LeVine, 1973, p. vii).

To provide a brief preview, this chapter first discusses a number of common themes emerging in earlier chapters. The second section outlines six system levels from persons through groups, organizations, institutions, social systems, and international relations as a framework for conceptualizing the structure of psychohistory. The third section explores how psychology can be used not only directly in history, but used also in fields such as social structure and personality, psychological anthropology, or political psychology, which in turn are drawn upon by historians. Fourth, the chapter argues that there are important conceptual distinctions between the uses of psychology in historical interpretation ("psychohistory"), the inclusion of psychological phenomena
in historical accounts ("history with psychological content"), and the study of transhistorical generality or particularity in psychological phenomena ("historical psychology"). The fifth section outlines work in historical psychology and argues that such research can not only facilitate the use of psychology by historians, but can also make basic contributions to the discipline of psychology. In the sixth section the relationships between history and psychology are placed in a wider evolutionary context, suggesting relationships with other historical sciences such as evolutionary biology, paleoanthropology, or historical sociology. The final section reviews a number of recent examples and exemplars of work in psychohistory as a concrete way of indicating something of the potentials of the field.

Common Themes

As the reader can see from the preceding chapters, there is considerable diversity of opinion about the accomplishments, failures, and promise of psychologically informed history. A number of basic issues emerged repeatedly within different chapters, with various positions on them taken by individual authors. A first controversial issue is the status of psychoanalysis as a foundation for psychohistory, with substantial acceptance of classical Freudian theory by Gay and Wallerstein, with Loewenberg arguing for the greater utility of more recent theoretical developments within psychoanalysis, with Weinstein and Runyan critical of some aspects yet appreciative of other facets of psychoanalytic theory, while Crews was critical of the entire structure of psychoanalytic theory and interpretation.

A second recurrent theme was the process of doing psychobiography or psychohistory, including the significance of the emotional relationship of an author to his or her subject, most notably in Robert Tucker's reaction to Stalin, Jean Strouse's impulse to want to rescue Alice James, and Peter Loewenberg's discussion of the importance of understanding countertransference reactions in psychohistorical research.

A third set of questions emerged about the critical evaluation of psychohistorical interpretations, either in the form of questions about particular interpretations, as in the commentaries of Alexander Dallin on Stalin or Peter Paret on the Victorians; or in Kenneth Craik's discussion of methodological issues in systematically describing historical personalities; or in questions about the appropriate criteria and pro-
cedures for assessing psychohistorical interpretations, as discussed by Weinstein, Crews, and Runyan.

Much of the debate about the accomplishments and failings of psychohistory has centered around the problems and potentials in applying psychoanalysis to history and biography. Most commentators agree that reductionistic errors are too often made in neglecting the social-institutional environment, in focusing exclusively on individual psychopathology, or in neglecting basic canons of evidence, inference, and interpretation. The literature of psychohistory is strewn with examples of inadequate psychohistorical interpretation, which are embarrassing to serious practitioners, as well as with slipshod critiques of the field, which may be equally embarrassing to responsible critics. Whatever the reasons for its embattled status, psychohistory is often perceived as marginal or disreputable by both historians and psychologists. However, the problem of the relationship of psychological processes to historical events is an enduring one, even if it temporarily falls out of intellectual fashion and no matter how many simplistic or wrong-headed solutions to it are proposed. As expressed by Clifford Geertz (1973), “Legitimate questions . . . are not invalidated by misconceived answers” (p. 61).

**Six System Levels and Relationships Between Them**

What relevance, if any, does the study of psychological structures, elements, and processes have to understanding the flow of history? How can we conceptualize the relationships between psychological phenomena and the course of historical events? Given the internal diversity of psychology and the multifarious branches of history—divided by time period, area of the world, analytic approach, and substantive focus—these questions are enormously complex, and at times feel overwhelmingly so.

It can be frustratingly elusive to get a grasp on what counts as “history.” Everything has a history, in the sense of extension over time, but what is the discipline of history the history of? Historians often state that history is primarily concerned not with the history of individual persons (that is, biography), but rather with the history of aggregates of persons, the history of institutions, and with stability and change in society as a whole.

There is considerable controversy about the role of persons as com-
pared with that of larger impersonal, institutional, demographic, and economic forces in shaping the course of history. Historians often have grave reservations about the study of individuals (see the discussion of autobiographical tendencies in Chapter 1), believing that their importance in the overall historical process is naïvely overemphasized. If individuals are not so significant, then their internal psychological processes are not so important either, and there is no need for historians to be concerned with the details of psychological processes of perception, interpretation, unconscious motivation, belief, decision, and action. For other historians, the solution is not to deny the relevance of psychology to history, but rather to argue that a social psychology, dealing with the psychology of groups, is more relevant than the psychology of individuals (Barraclough, 1978; Marwick, 1981). According to this view, the most significant contributions of psychohistory would not be in individual psychobiography, but in group psychohistory.

What, if anything, does an understanding of psychological structures and processes have to do with the whole range of traditional and contemporary historiographic questions about continuity and change in such large-scale phenomena as international relations? the history of Germany, England, China, or the United States? the French, American, or Russian revolutions? peasants in sixteenth-century France? the Mediterranean basin in the age of Phillip II? intellectual history? the history of women? the history of blacks, Indians or Chicanos? the history of social classes? the history of popular culture? or other major historiographic questions?

I will argue that psychology is relevant to understanding such central historical questions, and not merely in peripheral ways. One way of addressing these questions about the relationship between psychological processes and historical events is outlined in Figure 13.1, which shows six different system levels, from persons up through international relations, and three levels of aggregation within each system level, from one to some to all. This figure is based on the premise that history can usefully be analyzed as the history and interaction of a number of distinguishable system levels. The six system levels used here are persons (including their psychological processes), groups (sets of persons interacting with one another, ranging from two-person relationships, through families, to social groups), organizations (such as formally organized business, church, and political bodies), institutions (such as economic, political, military, and religious institutions, which would include a number of specific organizations within them), nations (or entire sociocul-
### Figure 13.1. Six system levels and three levels of aggregation.

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The diagram in Figure 13.1 is intended to provide a framework for exploring three kinds of questions: (1) the relationship of psychological structures and processes to historical events; (2) the issue of studying single individuals or aggregates of persons; and (3) the role of persons in history as compared with that of larger impersonal structures.

The discipline of history unquestionably includes the history of international relations, the history of nations, the history of major social institutions (for example, economic systems, political systems, higher education), the history of particular organizations (Standard Oil, the Democratic party, the *New York Times*, the American Historical Association), the history of particular groups or social movements (e.g., abolitionists, student activists in the 1960s), and the history of aggregates of people (women, blacks, or immigrant groups).

1. The six system levels outlined here bear some similarity to the system levels outlined by James G. Miller in *Living Systems* (1978), although he includes suborganismic system levels of cells and organs, and I include a level of institutions between organizations and social systems.
While historians often focus on the history of a particular system, they may also analyze the history of a period, event, or process cutting across system levels. For example, historical works are often organized around a particular period (such as Victorian England, or Germany from 1933 to 1945), a single event (French Revolution, American Civil War), or a process (industrialization, colonization). For these kinds of studies, it is typically useful to draw on material from a variety of relevant system levels which interact over time. History just is the history of different entities within these various system levels and relationships among them, and of the periods, events, and processes that cut across them.

Psychological processes of perception, sensation, learning, memory, motivation and emotion, unconscious dynamics, decision making, planning, and action all occur within persons (in interaction with their environment), in the bottom row of Figure 13.1. The relationships between psychological structures and processes within persons and aggregates of persons and the course of history are outlined by the multiple connections between the bottom row and the top five rows.

If one could demonstrate the relationships between psychological processes within cells 16 to 18 and each of the other system levels, then one would have laid out the relationship of psychological structures and processes to historical events and have established the relationship of psychology to problems and interests that are central to historians.

Conversely, those maintaining that history has no need for psychology would need to contend that the history of groups, organizations, institutions, nations, and international relations is unaffected by the psychological functioning of individuals, sets of persons, and populations within those systems. Formulated in this light, it is difficult to see how an anti-psychological position could be seriously maintained or plausibly defended.

To illustrate the application of the framework outlined in Figure 13.1, consider the range of examples in Our Selves/Our Past: Psychological Approaches to American History (Brugger, 1981), which suggests the range of psychological approaches that have been taken toward events in American history. This edited book includes chapters on the psychology of witchcraft in colonial New England, the psychology of Revolutionaries and Tories during the American Revolution, the psychology of slavery, the psychology of abolitionists, the psychology of the progressive movement, the psychology of sex roles and female hysteria in the nineteenth century, the psychology of Populists in the 1890s, the psychology of anger and survival guilt among American soldiers who participated in the My Lai massacre, and the psychology of narcissism in
contemporary American society, as well as psychological studies of prominent individuals, including Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Richard Nixon.

In each of these examples of group or collective psychohistory, analyses are made of the relationships between psychological structures and processes and an important group, social movement, institution, or event in American history. The point is that psychological structures, elements, and processes within individuals and collectivities of individuals are inextricably related to events and processes at each of the other system levels—are actively involved in producing a Revolutionary War, maintaining slavery or fighting to abolish it, living within or rebelling against women’s roles in the nineteenth century, participating in or demonstrating against the Vietnam War, and so on.

To take a second and more detailed historical illustration, the relevance of psychological processes for understanding each of the six system levels in Figure 13.1 will be illustrated with examples from the Nazi era. Psychological analyses may be useful, or probably even necessary, for understanding those Germans who joined the Nazi party and the S.S., those who engaged directly in the killing of Jews, those Germans who actively opposed Hitler or aided the Jews, the behavior of Jews in the ghettos and concentration camps, those who violently resisted the Nazis, the bystanders in other nations who failed to intervene, and finally, the psychological impact of the Nazi era and the Holocaust on survivors of the concentration camps, former Nazis, emigrants, descendants of those directly involved, and all those who study this historical period.

To illustrate the relevance of the relationships between psychological factors and the six system levels of persons, groups, organizations, institutions, sociocultural systems, and international relations within the Nazi era, let us begin with the bottom row of Figure 13.1, the level of persons. The most obvious starting point for studies of individuals is with analyses of Adolf Hitler. In a population with widespread anti-Semitism, what contributed to the unusual intensity of his own anti-Semitic feelings? How did he manage to attain and wield so much power, and then to contribute to his own destruction? The psychobiographical literature on Hitler is enormous, from an early study by Erik Erikson (1942); to Walter C. Langer’s study for the United States Office of Strategic Services during World War II (published in 1972 as The Mind of Adolf Hitler: The Secret Wartime Report); to an analysis by Rudolf Binion (1976), who argues that Hitler’s anti-Semitism had its emotional origins in the trauma caused by his mother’s death while being treated by a Jewish
physician and also in his linking the traumatic German defeat in World War I to the Jews; to Helm Stierlin’s (1976) argument that Hitler’s hatred of his authoritarian father was displaced onto the Jews, against whom Hitler protected his German “Motherland”; to perhaps the most comprehensive psychobiographical analysis in Robert Waite’s *Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (1977), which critically evaluates a number of earlier interpretations and argues for, among other factors, the importance of Hitler’s abnormal sexual development.

There are, of course, also biographical, autobiographical, and psychobiographical analyses of an immense number of other persons within the Nazi era, including Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels, Herman Göring, Adolf Eichmann, war criminals tried at Nuremberg, concentration-camp directors such as Rudolf Hoess (commandant of Auschwitz from 1941 to 1943), Raoul Wallenberg and others who aided Jews in escaping, autobiographical accounts by concentration-camp survivors, and many others (see Cargas, 1985; Mensch, 1979–80).

Staying at the level of persons, but moving to their aggregation into sets of persons (cell 17 in Figure 13.1), a variety of additional psychological questions come to mind:

1. What psychological processes were involved in supporting, voting for, and joining the Nazi party? What psychological (and other) differences were there between those who joined the party in its early years in the 1920s, those who joined in the early 1930s, and those derisively nicknamed “March violets,” who joined in March 1933 or later, after Hitler had come to power?

2. What was the psychology of those actively engaged in mass murder?

3. What was the psychology of the Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust? What psychological considerations are necessary in order to understand their behavior and experience, such as widespread disbelief in the death camps, processes of adaptation to and survival in the concentration camps, or longer term psychological consequences for survivors and their families (Dimsdale, 1980)?

4. What psychological attributes and processes characterized those who actively fought against Nazism? For example, what was the psychology of those Jews involved in the Warsaw ghetto revolt of 1943? of those in the armed revolts in the Treblinka and Sobibor death camps in 1943? of those in the German “White Rose” student group, whose members distributed anti-Hitler leaflets in 1942 and 1943, for which they were beheaded? or of those involved in various plots to assassinate Hitler (see Hoffman, 1977; Scholl, 1983; Trunk, 1979)?

5. What was the psychology of all the bystanders in Germany, Brit-
ain, the United States and elsewhere who might have helped end the Holocaust, but did not?

6. What about the psychology of the refugees and emigrants from Nazi Germany? Focusing on a subgroup of scholars and intellectuals who emigrated from Nazi-controlled territory, what was the impact of their experiences on their later lives, ideas, motivations, and subsequent intellectual careers (see Bailyn and Fleming, 1969; Coser, 1984)?

In each of these six groups, there is substantial internal heterogeneity, and psychological elements are only one of several kinds of operative factors; yet psychological analyses are still a necessary component of any comprehensive understanding.

Moving to questions about the psychological aspects of populations of persons (cell 18 in Figure 13.1), much earlier research focused on questions about the authoritarian personality and the German "national character," characterized by such features as ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, anti-intracception (impatience with fantasies, feelings, and inner subjective phenomena), idealization of parents, and a rigid conception of sex roles (Sanford, 1973). Paralleling the wider course of research on national character (Bock, 1980), it became clear that such global psychological characterizations of a population had to be disaggregated, as there is a wide range of personality types within a population. This more differentiated analysis, working downward from population-level data to finer and finer subgroups, has probably progressed farthest in analyses of those who voted for the Nazi party, moving from initial aggregate data about the number of people voting for the Nazis in 1928, 1930, or 1932, down to ever more differentiated analyses of election-by-election voting patterns broken down by town, geographical area, religion, age, income, occupation, and a variety of other factors (see Childers, 1984; Hamilton, 1981).

To be complete, psychohistorical analyses at the level of persons cannot be restricted to individual psychobiography, but must move along the whole continuum of levels of aggregation, from one, to some, to all, and correspondingly, to move along the whole continuum of levels of analytic generality, discovering what true statements can be made about the population as a whole, about various groups within it—such as perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and resisters—and, finally, about particular persons within each of these groups. Such psychohistorical analyses, moving back and forth across the whole continuum of levels of generality, hold promise for reducing both psychological and historical oversimplifications.

Let us now consider the second system level, that of groups, families,
and interpersonal relationships (the fifth row in Figure 13.1). The distinguishing feature of this system level is people interacting directly with one another, whether in two-person relationships, families, or informal social groups. In the Nazi era, examples would include the structure of the German family and processes of child rearing; the interpersonal relationships of Nazis, Jews, gypsies, and others; and a variety of informal face-to-face groups, such as the group of Nazis confined with Hitler in Landsberg Prison in 1924 or the group of death-camp inmates planning the escape from Sobibor in 1943. Within this system level, it is also possible to distinguish among three levels of aggregation—the analysis of a single group, a set of groups, or a whole population of groups. Using the example of interpersonal relationships, attention might be focused on psychological aspects of Hitler’s relationship with a particular person, such as Joseph Goebbels; on his relationships with a set of people, such as the seven women with whom he presumably had intimate relationships, six of whom attempted or committed suicide (Waite, 1977, p. 239); and, finally, on the entire set or population of his interpersonal relationships. Similarly, attention to German child-rearing processes might focus on characteristics of the population as a whole, on child-rearing patterns in different social classes or religious groups, or, finally, on child-rearing processes in a particular family.

At the next system level, that of formal organizations (the fourth row in Figure 13.1), attention can be directed to psychological structures and processes related to a variety of formal organizations, such as the Storm Troops, the Hitler Youth, the Gestapo, the Judenrat (organization of Jewish leaders in the ghettos), or I. G. Farben, the biggest chemical company in Germany, which ran a large synthetic-rubber plant near Auschwitz using Jewish slave labor.

To take an example of just one organization, consider the psychology of and the psychological changes over time in the S.S. (Schutzstaffeln, or “protective squads”), which began in 1923 as a group of eight men selected as a personal bodyguard for Hitler. The group, renamed the S.S. in 1925, was taken over by Heinrich Himmler in 1929, and the membership grew from 280 in that year to approximately 30,000 in 1932, 250,000 in 1942, and more than 1 million in 1944, including some 24,000 concentration-camp guards, the infamous “Death’s Head” detachments (Höhne, 1969; Kren and Rappoport, 1980, Chapter 3; Steiner, 1980).

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the troops were followed by four Einsatzgruppen, or “special-action groups,” whose job was to liquidate Jews, Bolsheviks, gypsies, the deranged, and
other "racial enemies." Hundreds of thousands of victims were rounded up, sometimes ordered to dig their own graves, and then shot. A psychological consequence faced by the S.S. was the effects of these murders on the soldiers, a number of whom committed suicide or suffered from nervous breakdowns, nightmares, and alcoholism. After the war, one of their leaders, Paul Blobel, made the not overly sensitive claim that "the nervous strain was far heavier in the case of our men who carried out the executions than in that of their victims. From the psychological point of view they had a terrible time" (Höhne, 1969, p. 364). After watching 200 Jews being shot in Minsk, Himmler was so shaken that he said a new method of killing must be found, which led to the development of gas vans (Höhne, 1969, p. 366). Rudolf Hoess, commandant at Auschwitz, said in his autobiography (1959) that he was relieved at the use of gas, since "I always shuddered at the prospect of carrying out exterminations by shooting, when I thought of the vast numbers concerned, and of the women and children . . . I was therefore relieved to think that we were to be spared all these bloodbaths, and that the victims too would be spared suffering until their last moment came" (p. 165).

A number of psychological questions are relevant to understanding the history and activities of the S.S. For example, what motivated men to join and remain in the S.S.? How could an organization manage to recruit, train, and coerce or encourage its members to engage in such brutal activities? What were the personality characteristics of S.S. members; were they seriously disturbed or relatively normal? What was the psychological impact of participating in mass murder, particularly on that subgroup of S.S. men involved in the killing of Jewish and other civilians and those working in the death camps? What psychological and other processes led a number of S.S. leaders and members to turn against Hitler in the last years of the war? Finally, how did former S.S. members adapt psychologically to their experiences after the war? These are complex questions, which are addressed elsewhere in more detail than will be possible here (see Dimsdale, 1980; Höhne, 1969; Kren and Rappoport, 1980; Steiner, 1980; Sydnor, 1977).

After Himmler became head of the S.S. in 1929, a public-relations campaign for the S.S. was launched, identifying it as the elite National Socialist organization. Beginning in 1935, S.S. members had to produce proof of an "Aryan" ancestry going back to 1800, and for officers and officer candidates, back to 1750. Members of the social and economic elite were given honorary titles in the S.S., and ordinary citizens made financial contributions in order to be identified as a "sponsoring mem-
ber” of the S.S. A rigorous officer-training program was instituted, and many young men from aristocratic backgrounds were attracted to the organization. These recruitment practices had changed dramatically by the end of the war, when 200,000 dissident ethnicis from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, previously identified as “subhuman” by the Nazis, were incorporated into auxiliary S.S. military forces. By 1944 and 1945, when information about the death camps was rumored throughout Germany, many German parents would not permit their sons to enlist in the S.S. (Kren and Rappoport, 1980).

By the last years of the war, a number of S.S. officers were involved in unsuccessful attempts to kidnap or assassinate Hitler. Heinrich Himmler attempted to escape from Berlin at the end of the war, but was caught several weeks later and committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule. In 1951, a mutual-aid society of former members of the Waffen-S.S. (the military branch of the S.S.) was formed. In a study of 229 former S.S. men (Steiner, 1980), the majority of those in the Waffen-S.S. reported no regrets about their wartime activities, while those members of the S.S. who had served in concentration or death camps, the security police, or the mobile killing units would not have wanted to participate again and expressed regrets. According to Steiner, a former concentration-camp inmate himself, there was some anti-Semitism among former S.S. members, but predominantly indifference or mild sympathy toward Jews, and a belief that the S.S. had served a valuable mission fighting “to bring about a United Europe defending itself against communist aggression and world domination” (p. 444).

An understanding of the history and functioning of the S.S. as an organization requires analysis of a substantial number of psychological topics and processes, including the changing motivations and attitudes of those who joined, Himmler’s emphasis on forming an elite and quasi-religious cult, the personalities of S.S. members engaged in mass killings, the psychological impact of such activities, the turn against Hitler by a number of S.S. officers, and finally, the psychology of former S.S. members after the war in organizations of S.S. veterans.

Working within the organizational system level, and moving to higher levels of aggregation, the study of a specific organization such as the S.S. may be compared with the study of other organizations within Nazi Germany or of paramilitary police groups in a number of other countries. Or, if one starts by focusing on a smaller organization, such as a particular concentration camp, a particular church, or a specific business firm, then analyses can be made of a specific group or population of comparable organizations within Nazi Germany. For example, one

The next system level to be concerned with is that of institutions (the third row in Figure 13.1). This would include an analysis of the psychological aspects of each of the major social institutions in Germany from 1933 to 1945. Extensive studies have been made of the functioning of political, military, legal, business, church, educational, scientific, cultural, mass media, and other institutions during the Nazi era (see Cargas, 1985; Szonyi, 1985). Just as a sample of this literature, there is Turners' *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (1985), arguing that big business was less responsible for Hitler's rise to power than commonly believed; Conway's *Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–1945* (1969), detailing Hitler's undermining of the churches; Beyerchen's *Scientists Under Hitler* (1977), analyzing the responses of physicists to National Socialism; and Blackburn's *Education in the Third Reich* (1984), outlining the massive educational propaganda efforts to shape the minds of German youth in line with Nazi racial theories, political beliefs, and anti-Christian and anti-Marxist ideology.

Psychohistorical study would analyze the psychological elements and processes related to the history and functioning of each of these institutions during the Third Reich. In spite of the massive amount of literature on the Nazi era, and even massive amount of psychohistorical literature (Gilmore, 1984; Kren, 1984; Loewenberg, 1975; Mensch, 1979–80), there is still much more that remains to be done with psychologically informed analysis of each of the major institutions in Nazi society.

Questions about the sociocultural system as a whole (the second row in Figure 13.1) have troubled students of the Nazi era and of the Holocaust for decades. As expressed by Lucy Dawidowicz (1975), "(1) How was it possible for a modern state to carry out the systematic murder of a whole people for no reason other than that they were Jews? (2) How was it possible for a whole people to allow itself to be destroyed? (3) How was it possible for the world to stand by without halting this destruction?" (p. xxi). How are we to understand the values and beliefs of a culture; the political, legal, religious, educational, scientific, and other institutions; the variety of specific organizations; and the array of individual persons from Hitler on down that made this possible?

The entire literature on the Nazi era and the Holocaust deals with different aspects of these questions. Questions about the functioning of the sociocultural system as a whole may be pursued by focusing on the
specifics of Nazi Germany, or by comparing its history with the histories of such other societies as Spain under Franco, Italy under Mussolini, the Soviet Union under Stalin, or Cambodia under Pol Pot.

At the level of international relations (the first row in Figure 13.1), there are a good many issues that have been examined in detail, including (1) most obviously, the psychology of diplomatic and military relations between Germany and the Soviet Union, Austria, Poland, France, Great Britain, the United States and other nations throughout the Nazi period (for an interesting psychological study of German-British diplomatic relations in the late nineteenth century, see Hughes, 1983); (2) the collaboration of international business with the Third Reich, including officials from firms such as ITT, Ford, Standard Oil of New Jersey, and the Chase Bank (Higham, 1983); and (3) the response or lack of response of other nations to the events of the Holocaust, as discussed in Wyman's *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (1984).

This discussion of the psychological aspects of six system levels does *not exhaust* the range of important psychohistorical questions. Within a given historical period and geographical area, such as Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, important questions can also be investigated about the psychological aspects of a chain or sequence of *events* occurring throughout the period, interwoven with the six system levels. This would include such events as Hitler's accession to power on January 30, 1933; the Night of the Long Knives, on June 30, 1934, when the S. S. murdered the leaders of the Storm Troops and gained control over their rival organization; *Kristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass), on November 9–10, 1938, when the Nazis attacked Jews in the streets and looted their shops; the psychology of the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939; the German defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943; the psychology of the Warsaw ghetto revolt in April 1943; the Allied invasion at Normandy, beginning on June 6, 1944; the psychology of Hitler's suicide on April 30, 1945; and the surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945.

For each event, important psychohistorical questions can be asked about (1) the antecedent psychology of hopes, plans, fears, expectations, and preparations that led up to it; (2) the concurrent and constitutive psychology of beliefs, perceptions, feelings, interpretations, statements, and actions directly involved in the event; and (3) the psychological consequences, subjective meanings, and later memories and interpretations of the event.

To illustrate with a single event, such as the *Kristallnacht* pogrom on
November 9–10, 1938, psychohistorical analysis would include research about the psychological antecedents of the event, such as the anti-Jewish riots following the assassination by a young Jew of a German diplomat in Paris, and the fanning of these flames by Hitler, Goebbels, and Heydrich; the psychology of those participating in the looting, refusing to participate, or actively opposing it; the psychological experience of those Jews associated with the 200 synagogues that were destroyed or some 7,500 shops that were looted, or who were related to the approximately 90 Jews who were killed and the more than 20,000 Jewish men who were sent to concentration camps; and, finally, the subsequent psychological impact of this event as it was perceived and interpreted by Jews, Nazis, Germans, and citizens around the world (see Gordon, 1984).

To discuss just one facet of the psychology of this event, the reactions of the German public and even among the Nazi party members were far less homogeneous than might initially be assumed. There was, it seems, substantial opposition to the Kristallnacht pogrom within the German populace and even among members of the Nazi party. The Nazi press directives were to report that the German people had “spontaneously erupted” on Kristallnacht, and all other interpretations were prohibited, but the actual reaction seems to have been somewhat more complex. According to Wilson, the United States ambassador to Germany at the time, “A surprising characteristic of the situation here is the intensity and scope among German citizens of a condemnation of the recent happenings against Jews. . . . Such expressions are not confined to members of the intellectual classes but are encountered here throughout all classes” (quoted in Gordon, 1984, p. 176).

Gordon (1984) argues that a large segment of the previously indifferent German population condemned the murder, destruction of property, and violence, and that many Germans aided Jews by forewarning them of Nazi attacks, hiding them in their homes, and providing food and medical supplies. For such help, a large number of Germans were arrested in an effort by the Nazis to stamp out criticism of their racial policies (p. 178). Disapproval of Kristallnacht was found not only in the German population, but even within the Nazi party, as some Nazi party leaders “refused to obey orders to destroy Jewish property and issued counterorders to prevent this destruction. . . . Indeed, many Nazis aided Jews in escaping from the SA, SS, and Hitler Youth during Kristallnacht” (p. 266).

The sources of opposition to Kristallnacht were varied, partly humanitarian but not solely humanitarian, in that many Germans accepted
legally imposed economic and social sanctions against the Jews, but opposed Kristallnacht, destruction of property, and physical violence that harmed Germany’s image abroad. Gordon (1984) argues that public opposition to anti-Semitism peaked at this time, and was followed by widespread arrests of critics of the Nazi regime. This tactic may have been successful, since the subsequent more orderly “Aryanization” programs were never widely condemned by the German public (p. 180).

The discipline of history may focus on (1) the history of a period and geographical area, (2) the history of particular systems within a period, (3) the history of events and processes, or (4) the history of particular topics or themes. Psychohistorical analysis of topics in the Nazi era would include different classes of behavior and experience during the period, such as the psychology of mass murder, the psychology of violent resistance or passive accommodation, the psychology of denial and disbelief at what was happening in the death camps, the psychology of terror, the psychology of lying and deceit, the psychology of survivor guilt, the psychology of mourning and denial, and so on.

Perhaps the most studied class of behavior related to the Nazi era is that of “obedience to authority” (Milgram, 1974; Miller, 1986). Most notably, Adolf Eichmann and other war criminals claimed that they had acted only in obedience to authority and had had no choice about their actions. Although obedience to authority can certainly be a powerful force, and may have been the dominant factor in some cases, there are reasons to doubt that it provides an adequate explanation of Eichmann’s behavior. Eichmann seems not to have been a man filled with human sympathy who was driven by authority to transport Jews to death camps against inner moral objections. For example, in an interview with a Dutch Nazi journalist in 1957, Eichmann confessed, “To be frank with you, had we killed all of them, the 10.3 million, I would be happy and say, All right; we managed to destroy an enemy” (quoted in Hausner, 1966, p. 11). Eichmann was also selective in his following of orders, and attempted to sabotage or reverse requests for leniency in the treatment of Jews. In 1944, for example, Hitler authorized that 8,700 selected Jewish families and 1,000 children be allowed to emigrate from Hungary so that the Hungarian government would agree to the deportation and execution of the 300,000 Jews remaining in the Budapest ghetto. Eichmann was outraged at this leniency and appealed the matter to Himmler. In accord with Eichmann’s objections, Hitler canceled the emigration permits (Hausner, 1966, pp. 142–145). There are extensive literatures on many of the other classes of behavior and experience related to the Nazi era, although few have
remained as perennially controversial as the topic of obedience to authority.

One additional topic with particular relevance to the Nazi era is that of "countertransference," or more generally, the psychological relationship of the researcher to his or her subject. Studying the period is gut-wrenching for almost everyone, including myself. The strong emotional reactions that the topic engenders are intensified and complicated by the variety of interests involved, whether on the part of concentration-camp survivors, former Nazis, other Germans, descendants of those involved, or even those encountering it solely through the literature.

The Nazi period is of particular importance to psychohistorians, as it has claimed the attention of so many significant contributors to the field, beginning with Erik Erikson's (1942) study of Hitler's imagery and German youth, and including studies by Peter Loewenberg of the Nazi Youth cohort (1971), Himmler's adolescence (1975), and overviews of psychohistorical work on modern Germany (1983); Saul Friedländer on anti-Semitism (1971, 1978), the Catholic Church's un-involvement (1966), and contemporary German treatment of the Nazi period (1984); Kren and Rappoport's overview of Nazi psychohistory in The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior (1980); Fred Weinstein's Dynamics of Nazism (1980); the many psychobiographies of Hitler, including those by Langer (1972), Binion (1976), Stierlin (1976), and Waite (1977); and, most recently, Geoffrey Cocks's Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute (1985), and Robert Jay Lifton's Nazi Doctors (1986). Psychohistorical studies of the Nazi era are so extensive that they are on the cutting edge of helping to define both the possibilities and the limitations of psychohistorical analysis.

To summarize, the study of psychological aspects of each of the six system levels in Figure 13.1—from persons up through international relations—provides a far more differentiated and fine-grained analysis of the structure of the field of psychohistory than does one that makes only the gross distinction between individual psychobiography and group psychohistory.

According to the present analysis, there is a substantial array of different kinds of psychohistorical studies, including psychobiographical studies of single individuals; psychohistorical analyses of different sets of people within a historical period (for example, perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and resisters in the Nazi era); psychohistorical analyses of groups, families, and interpersonal relationships; psychohistorical analyses of organizations; psychohistorical analyses of the major institutions in a society; psychohistorical analyses of aspects of the whole
sociocultural system; and psychohistorical analyses of diplomatic, military, economic, and other forms of international relations. In addition, psychohistorical analyses may also be organized around the study of particular events, processes, and topics cutting across the six system levels.

The more one studies the Nazi period—from the cruelty of individual Nazis, to the brutality of certain organizations, to the agony of the victims, to the heroism of resistant Jews and Germans, to the thoughts and emotions of scholars engaged with the period—the more one sees a need for psychologically informed analyses of the issues. To emphasize again, analyses of psychological threads of these events and processes are not a substitute for sociological, economic, political, demographic, cultural, and other forms of analysis, but rather their necessary complement.

I have found this diagram helpful in analyzing a wide range of questions about the relationships between psychology, biography, and history, but several comments about its limitations need to be made. First, the particular system levels outlined in Figure 13.1 are for contemporary Western culture, and are not immutable in time and space. For working with the medieval, classical, or prehistoric world, one would need to use a somewhat different set of social-system levels, including systems such as tribes, feudal estates, or city-states. There is, in short, a history both of particular entities and of the system levels themselves. Second, the six system levels in Figure 13.1 need to be seen against a background of, and in continuous interaction with, the physical, biological, and technological world. Geographical, climatic, agricultural, technological, and other aspects of the physical world are continuously interacting with the human and social systems sketched in the figure. This is represented graphically in Figure 13.5. Figure 13.1 does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical process, but rather focuses on the interconnections between the psychological processes within individuals and collectivities and the histories of groups, organizations, institutions, nations, and international relations.

The relationships among these six system levels over time are represented in Figure 13.2. What are causal and noncausal relationships between these six system levels over time? In particular, what are the relationships between persons and their psychological processes and the other, more aggregate system levels?

As social theorists and historians frequently point out, persons do not exist in a vacuum and are not entirely free and independent agents, but are shaped, formed, and have their existence and being within particular sociohistorical contexts. Strong determinists even say that indi-
Individuals are totally determined by their social, economic, and historical context, or are "nothing but" the intersection of social forces or social relationships.

The causal relationships, however, go in both directions, from social structures to persons, and from persons to social structures. These two-way relationships are analyzed by theorists of personality and social structure within sociology (Smelser and Smelser, 1970, 1981; Yinger, 1965), by theorists of culture and personality within anthropology (Bock, 1980; LeVine, 1982), and by interaction theorists within personality psychology (Magnusson and Endler, 1977; Pervin and Lewis, 1978).

As argued by sociological theorists such as Giddens (1976, 1984), "the production of society is a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings" (1976, p. 15). Social structures "only exist as the reproduced conduct of situated actors with definite intentions and interests" (1976, p. 127). Finally, "the production and reproduction of society thus has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members" (1976, p. 160). To relate these ideas to the system levels described here, each of the five aggregate system levels—groups, organizations, institutions, sociocultural systems, and international relations—are formed, maintained, and changed through the skilled
and knowledgeable action of their members. Psychological processes of belief, motivation, and action are necessarily involved in maintaining or changing social groups or institutions.

It is *not* as though social institutions and practices had some inevitable inertia of their own, which would keep them rolling along regardless of how persons thought, felt, or acted in relation to them. Social institutions, systems, and relationships are constructed, kept in motion, and changed by the skilled, knowledgeable, and motivated practice of persons and aggregates of persons.

Without such practice by individuals, the institutions decay or disappear, as happens in cases of social change. If all employees go on strike, the company stops functioning. If everyone refuses to join the military, then there is no army. As the saying from the 1960s goes, "What if they gave a war, and nobody came?" Without the active and skilled participation of persons and aggregates of persons (as mediated by psychological processes of perception, knowledge, belief, motivation, decision, and action), groups, organizations, institutions, and social systems would not endure and would not be reproduced or changed from one generation to the next.

The story of the relationship among these six system levels over time is not confined to the story of their causal relationships over time. We can often describe a phenomenon and "place it in its historical context," or relate it to other structures, events, and processes surrounding it in time and space, without being able to talk with any precision about its causal relationships with other events. Biographers have written a great deal about Napoleon, Martin Luther, or Louis XIV without having been able to analyze very precisely their causal influence or to know in a counterfactual sense how the course of historical events would have been different if they had not lived, or had not acted as they did.

Causal analysis, at least in its rigorous forms, is possible in only a limited set of conditions that enable us to infer how things would have been different without the event in question (von Wright, 1971). For many historical situations, we simply do not know enough and/or the flow of events is too complex and idiosyncratic to permit any rigorous kind of causal analysis. Even under conditions when causal analysis is impossible, there is a great deal to say about a historical person, institution, or event, such as describing it in detail, tracing its changes over time, indicating how it was perceived and interpreted by various individuals and groups, analyzing its "meaning" to contemporaries and subsequent generations, and placing it in time, in space, and in relation to other events.
In short, causal relationships are only a subset of the relationships of system levels over time. Even when the flow of events is too complex and idiosyncratic to permit causal analysis, there is much to be learned about the history, details, meanings, and contexts of particular entities and processes. Ideally, we want forms of inquiry that deal with the historical evolution and interrelationships among these six system levels over time and that include, but are not limited to, analysis of their causal relationships.

This diagram of six system levels and their relationships over time is quite abstract, and due to limitations of space, will have to remain so; but one of its purposes is to construct a conceptual framework that is sufficiently spacious to indicate relationships among many different levels of analysis, so that researchers do not feel forced to suppress other forms of analysis as if their very existence were a threat to the integrity of their own program or level of analysis. The aim is to avoid the perspective of Annales historians, who at one time felt it necessary to suppress the biographical in order to survive; of Marxists, who felt it necessary to suppress individual and psychological levels of analysis; or of psychohistorical reductionists, who felt impelled to ignore institutional and structural levels of analysis. In particular, the diagram is addressed to the concerns of historians who feel that acknowledging psychological factors and processes is somehow incompatible with their interests in institutions, nation-states, social structures, aggregates of persons, and long-term continuity and change in social systems. The objective is to avoid structural, economic, or psychological forms of reductionism by constructing a conceptual framework comprehensive enough to encompass these diverse forms of analysis and indicate their relationships to one another.

Inquiry at any one system level is often enriched by or even dependent on analysis of its relationships with other system levels. Many historical questions require analysis of the interplay between continuity and change in social structures and the psychological processes of persons and aggregates of persons. Dare it be said, this is “psychohistory”—a psychological history not reducing history to psychology, but also not reducing history by leaving out the psychology.

**Disciplinary-Mediated Relationships**

I have argued that the relationships between psychology and history can usefully be conceptualized by disaggregating “history” into the evo-
lution and interaction of six or so system levels. The six system levels outlined in Figures 13.1 and 13.2 are relevant to a wide array of problems and discourses in the social sciences, with sociologists, anthropologists, and historians focusing primarily on the social-system end of the spectrum; political scientists and economists, on political and economic institutions and their contexts; and psychologists, on psychological processes within and between persons and groups of persons. In order to understand the relationships between history and psychology as disciplines and between historical events and psychological processes as phenomena, it is necessary to analyze the relationships between psychological structures and processes and each of these other system levels.

Research on the relationships between psychological phenomena and these other system levels is currently pursued within a variety of disciplines. To indicate briefly the disciplines engaged at each system level, there is research on the interrelationships between psychological structures and processes and (1) the functioning of groups, families, and interpersonal relationships, as studied in sociology and social psychology; (2) the functioning of organizations, as studied in organizational and industrial psychology, and in the sociology of organizations and organizational careers; (3) the functioning and change of major social institutions, as studied in political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology; (4) the functioning and history of cultures and social systems, as studied in sociology and anthropology in such subfields as socialization, deviance, social control, personality and social structure, historical sociology, culture and personality, and cognitive anthropology; and (5) the structure and history of international or intersocietal relations, as studied in international politics, international economics, cultural-diffusion analysis, and world-systems theory.

In short, the relationships between history and psychology can be mediated by the relationships of psychology with each of the other aggregate-level social-science disciplines, as illustrated in Figure 13.3. The figure emphasizes those areas of the social sciences that have explicitly developed their connections with psychology. In sociology, anthropology, and political science, there are formally developed subfields that focus on relationships with psychology, including social structure and personality, psychological anthropology, and political psychology, and others such as socialization theory or life course sociology.

The essential point of Figure 13.3 is that all the connections between history and psychology need not be direct ones. The contributions of psychology to history may come not only directly from the discipline of psychology, but also indirectly through other disciplines that, in
turn, have made use of psychology. There is a substantial literature in each of these hybrid fields for historians to draw on. The literature is too vast to review in detail, but to mention only a few significant works, with an emphasis on overviews, historically relevant work is discussed in the literature in social structure and personality (Inkeles, 1983; Rosenberg and Turner, 1981; Ryff, 1987; Smelser and Smelser, 1970, 1981; Yinger, 1965), in psychological anthropology (Barnouw, 1985; Bock, 1980; LeVine, 1982; LeVine and Shweder, 1984; LeVine and White, 1986; Rosaldo, 1980; Runyan, 1986; Spindler, 1978; Westen, 1986), and in political psychology (Davies, 1980; Elms, 1976; Greenstein, 1975; Hermann, 1986; Janis, 1982; Jervis, 1976; Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, 1985; Long, 1981; Roazen, 1968; Tetlock and McGuire, 1986; White, 1986). Figure 13.3 is not intended to be complete and could be supplemented by adding fields such as socialization theory, life course sociology, historical sociology, and historical anthropology. To the best of my knowledge, the literatures on relationships between psychology and economics (Katona, 1975; Maital, 1982), and between psychology and demography (Easterlin, 1980; Miller and Godwin, 1977), are not as well developed, although there will be more to draw on over time.

Psychological history is not some bizarre fringe movement that just ought to go away and stop bothering people, but is intimately related to a number of those aggregate-level social sciences with which historians have already established relationships and that they are often more comfortable dealing with. As Lawrence Stone (1981) has noted, there are historical trends in the relationships between history and the social sciences, with history borrowing at first most heavily from economics, then from sociology, and most recently from anthropology. Psychology
is sometimes mentioned as a possibility, but the reception of psychology by historians has often been far more ambivalent (see Gay, 1985). Historians may borrow with profit from each of these interdisciplinary social-scientific and psychological hybrids and, in turn, may make significant contributions to each of them by directing attention to issues of continuity and change in relationships between psychological processes and social structures over the course of time.

**Conceptual Distinctions Between Psychohistory, Historical Psychology, and History with Psychological Content**

There is considerable confusion about the scope and definition of psychohistory. Many define it as the use of psychology (often psychoanalytic psychology) in historical interpretation (Anderson, 1978; Brugger, 1981; Friedländer, 1978), while others define it more broadly as also including the history of psychological phenomena and/or the history of thought about psychological development and the life course (Gilmore, 1984; Manuel, 1972; Schoenwald, 1973).

There are at least three analytically separable issues which need to be distinguished. These three, with proposed terminology, are (1) *psychohistory*, or the explicit use of formal psychological theory in historical interpretation; (2) *historical psychology*, or research on the transhistorical generality or specificity of psychological structures, elements, and relationships; and (3) *history with psychological content*, or the extent to which psychological phenomena such as human motivations, beliefs, emotions, and actions are included as subject matter in a historical study.

These three analytically separable enterprises can be placed on a continuum between their parent disciplines of history and psychology, as shown in Figure 13.4. We can proceed by first attempting to characterize the objectives of the disciplines at each end of this continuum, and then examining how history with psychological content, psychohistory, and historical psychology fit between them.

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**Figure 13.4.** Conceptual distinctions in the relations between history and psychology.
In the most general terms, history is *phenomena-centered*, in that it is concerned with the description and interpretation of particular phenomena and events in the past. Psychology, on the other hand, and particularly academic psychology, tends to be *theory-centered*, concerned with developing general conceptual and theoretical analyses of various classes of psychological phenomena, as in the areas of developmental, social, personality, abnormal, cognitive, and biological psychology. Another way of putting this distinction is to say that historians typically collect evidence in order to develop more adequate descriptions and interpretations of particular phenomena in the past, while psychologists carry out research in order to collect evidence for the somewhat different purpose of testing the adequacy of general theoretical formulations. These theoretical formulations, in turn, are intended to apply to a whole universe of psychological structures and processes.

In relation to these characterizations of the objectives of history and psychology, history with psychological content (column 2) can be described as historical accounts that include the description and interpretation of particular psychological phenomena in the past. Psychohistory (column 3), draws explicitly on systematic psychology in the description and interpretation of the psychological dimension of historical events. Historical psychology (column 4) is concerned with studying the transhistorical generality or specificity of psychological theories.

The most developed work in terms of these three distinctions would be a historical work including a focus on psychological phenomena, explicitly interpreted with formal psychological theory, and using psychological theory whose transhistorical generality has been explicitly tested.

To provide an example of the relationships among the different kinds of studies noted in Figure 13.4, consider the case of obedience to authority. In column 5, psychological research on obedience to authority would consist of experimental and other forms of research designed to assess those factors that produce, maintain, or minimize obedience to authority (Milgram, 1974). Research on historical psychology (column 4) would investigate questions about the degree to which there is historical stability or change in these theoretical relationships. For example, have there been changes in patterns of authoritarian child rearing (Sanford, 1973) that make obedience to authority less likely? Has the level of obedience to authority or the factors shaping it changed in Germany since the 1930s? Have there been reflexive or enlightenment effects from the study of obedience to authority or from the study of the Nazi era that make uncritical obedience to authority less likely?
In psychohistorical inquiry (column 3), what use of psychological theory and research about obedience to authority could be made in explaining the behavior of specific individuals and groups, such as Adolf Eichmann, other Nazis tried as war criminals, or Lieutenant Calley during the My Lai massacre in Vietnam? History with psychological content (column 2) would include the description (and perhaps interpretation in lay terms) of a number of examples of obedience to authority, such as S.S. men performing atrocities when ordered to, or examples of defiance of authority, such as Jews resisting Nazi authority (Trunk, 1979) or Germans opposing Hitler's authority (Gordon, 1984). History (column 1) would include accounts of the Nazi era that gave varying amounts of attention to psychological phenomena, from almost no attention, to a history with a substantial emphasis on psychological phenomena (as in column 2.)

The degree to which psychological phenomena are included within a historical analysis may range from nonexistent or marginal, to auxiliary interest, as in constituting one strand in a complex bio-psychosocio-historical analysis, to central or primary interest, as in studies of mentalités or the history of intimate relationships. The limiting case of history with psychological content would be a history of psychological phenomena, such as a history of psychosocial identity (Baumeister, 1986), the history of American national character (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, 1985; Lasch, 1979; Riesman et al., 1961), the history of relationships and intimacy within the family (Shorter, 1975; Stone, 1977), the history of anger and the conventions controlling it (Stearns and Stearns, 1986), the history of different forms of psychopathology (Shorter, 1986), or the history of attitudes, values, and subjective well-being (Hamilton and Wright, 1986; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka, 1981).

A key controversy dividing many historians from psychohistorians is not just the place of psychological phenomena in historical studies, which most would include to varying degrees, but whether such phenomena should be interpreted with formal or informal psychological theory. Critics of psychohistory claim that the use of systematic psychology is unilluminating and ahistorical, while supporters of psychohistory argue that even those vehemently opposed to systematic psychology are forced to rely on an implicit psychology (Erikson, 1958). "The professional historian has always been a psychologist—an amateur psychologist" (Gay, 1985, p. 6). If historians necessarily rely on either a formal or an informal psychology, "are historians, then, like modern
versions of Monsieur Jordan, practicing psychohistory without knowing it? I am afraid so. They have to” (Degler, 1987, p. 80).

While psychohistorical interpretation relies importantly on an empathic understanding of the particulars of an individual case (Kohut, 1986), the choice of a conceptual framework to use in interpreting these particulars is not a simple matter, either for psychohistorians making explicit use of formal psychology or for more traditional historians relying on implicit psychological theories. For those drawing on formal psychology, there are a multitude of psychoanalytic, neoanalytic, and nonanalytic frameworks to draw from (see Chapters 7 and 12). Even for those relying on implicit or lay theories, there is more than one relevant framework to draw on. For a biography, this would include the psychological beliefs and interpretations of the subject, of those who interacted with him or her, of the biographer, and of the intended audience of the work. Any biographical or historical work requires some negotiation and reconciliation between the everyday psychological beliefs and interpretations of the historical subjects and those of the author and intended audience.

Is there any reason for the historian to go beyond a purely intuitive or implicit psychology to use formal psychology in interpreting historical events? The issue has been extensively debated (for example, Eriksen, 1958; Gay, 1985; Loewenberg, 1983; Runyan, 1982; Waite, 1977), and I do not propose to enter into an extended discussion of it here, but rather to place it in the context of a wider set of issues about the connections between history and psychology. My own view is that although formal psychology has substantial gaps and deficiencies, its accomplishments are not without merit, particularly when compared with lay psychology. A total rejection of formal psychology in the interpretation of history is not much more convincing than the position of a person on the street who rejects historical research on the grounds that we intuitively already know what happened in the past and why, without bothering with formal historical research to test or extend that knowledge. Just as history has contributed something, although flawed and incomplete, to our knowledge of the past, psychology has learned a good deal, although imperfect, about human motivation, unconscious processes, personality, development, social interaction, decision making, and behavior that can be of use to historians. One controversial issue is the transthistorical generality of this psychological research, an issue to be discussed in the next section.

In summary, there are important conceptual distinctions between (1)
the extent to which psychological phenomena are or are not included in historical analyses, (2) the degree to which such psychological phenomena are interpreted in terms of formal or informal psychology, and (3) the extent to which the formal psychology available for use has or has not been tested for its transhistorical generality or specificity. I have proposed that these three issues can usefully be designated by the terms of history with psychological content, psychohistory, and historical psychology. Others may prefer different labels, but the important issue is to maintain an awareness of the underlying conceptual distinctions. For those preferring a broader definition of psychohistory, these three kinds of work might be seen as distinctive sub-types of psychohistory.

I hesitate to introduce any additional conceptual categories here, as I fear that readers’ eyes may begin to glaze over, but at least two additional distinctions seem necessary in order to delineate the variety of ways in which history and psychology can be related to each other. First, historical evidence can be used to develop nomothetic psychological theories, as in William McGuire’s (1976) review and analysis of “the use of historical cross-era data to develop and test psychological theories” (p. 161), Paul Rosenblatt’s (1983) use of nineteenth-century diaries to test contemporary theories of grieving, or Dean Simonton’s (1984) massive transhistorical analysis of factors affecting creativity and leadership. In the discipline of “historiometry,” which is defined as “the method of testing nomothetic hypotheses concerning human behavior by applying quantitative analysis to data abstracted from historical populations” (Simonton, 1984, p. 3), Simonton tests nomothetic theories about creativity and leadership as related to age, education, birth-order effects, role-modelling influences, and the principle of cumulative advantage in careers.

A second possible relationship between historical and scientific analysis is in those studies that use social scientifically collected data to address particular historical questions, as in Glen Elder’s (1974) use of longitudinal data from the Institute of Human Development studies at the University of California, Berkeley, to address historical questions about the impact of the Great Depression on the psychological and social development of children who experienced it, or in Hamilton and Wright’s (1986) use of survey research data to critically evaluate a number of popular claims about psychological changes in the values, attitudes, and subjective well-being of Americans in recent decades. They find, for example, no evidence in survey data that worker dissatisfaction
is rising, that a new and higher "Consciousness III" is developing, or that social concerns are replacing economic ones for most Americans.

These two enterprises of (1) using historical data to develop or test nomothetic psychological theories, and (2) using scientifically collected data to study historical questions are different in focus from psychohistory, but they help to fill out the range of ways in which historical and psychological inquiry can be related to each other. In terms of the categories in Figure 13.4, which are based on the objectives of different types of study rather than on the sources of evidence as in these two distinctions, using historical data to test nomothetic psychological theories would be a branch of psychology and using scientifically collected data to study historical questions would be a branch of history.

**Historical Psychology as a Resource for Psychohistory**

One of the most common criticisms of psychohistory is that it relies on a parochial psychology that is naively presumed to hold across space and historical time. The problem was clearly formulated in 1938 by historian Lucien Febvre: "How can we as historians make use of psychology which is the product of observation carried out on twentieth-century man, in order to interpret the actions of the man of the past?" (quoted in Gilmore, 1979, p. 31). It is claimed that many psychohistorians "begin by postulating that there is a theory of human behavior which transcends history" (Stone, 1981, p. 40). Or, "The psychohistorian employs theoretical models and cognitive assumptions created from the material of the present—and then imposes them on the past. In so doing, he or she must assume that in most fundamental ways all people, at all places, at all times, have viewed themselves and the world about them in substantially the same fashion" (Stannard, 1980, p. 143).

One way of addressing this concern is to develop a historical psychology that explicitly examines the extent to which psychological concepts and theories do or do not apply across historical eras. As Kluckhohn and Murray (1953, p. 53) stated, every person is in certain respects (1) like all other persons, (2) like some other persons, and (3) like no other persons. On the historical dimension, some psychological generalizations can be expected to hold across all historical periods; others, within limited historical periods; and others, perhaps only within specific historical circumstances. Psychohistorical inter-
pretation is a complex, three-tiered intellectual enterprise that has to
draw on psychological theories that hold universally, other theories that
hold only within limited sociohistorical contexts, and, finally, idiographic relationships that hold only within specific cases. A range of
idiographic relationships, such as particular subjective meanings, idiosyncratic patterns and correlations, and causal relationships holding
within only a single case, are reviewed elsewhere (Runyan, 1983).

Psychologists often talk about the generality of a theory as an ideal,
but only rarely do they explicitly assess the transhistorical generality of
theories. There is considerable concern for generalizing across subjects,
across situations, and across measurement instruments, but far less re-
search on generalizing over time. To the extent that psychologists intend
to develop truly general psychological theories holding across space
and time, there is a crying need for research on the historical stability
and mutability of psychological relationships.

This need has been expressed most vividly within social psychology,
with a seminal article by Kenneth Gergen, “Social Psychology as His-
tory” (1973); a rebuttal, “Social Psychology and Science,” by Schlen-
ker (1974); a symposium on the issue in the Personality and Social
Psychology Bulletin (Manis et al., 1976); and subsequent publications
by Gergen (1982, 1984), Gergen and Gergen (1984), Cronbach
(1975, 1986), and others. Gergen’s central arguments are first, that
since social phenomena and relationships are undergoing rapid histori-
cal change, many social-psychological generalizations have only a short
half-life, and, second, that social-psychological research can produce
reflexive “enlightenment effects” and change the phenomena under in-
vestigation.

Fortunately, an increasing concern with the transhistorical generality
of theory seems to be emerging across several branches of contempo-
rary psychology (see the comprehensive bibliography in Peeters, Gielis,
and Caspers, 1985). For example, within historical social psychology,
there is new research on historical changes in attitudes and motives,
gender relationships, structure of the family, aesthetic tastes, expressive
gestures, and conceptions of the self (see Gergen and Gergen, 1984).

Steps toward a historically sensitive psychology are also being taken
within life-span developmental psychology, where there has been an
increasing recognition of the importance of historical or cohort effects
on the course of human development, with many features of the devel-
opmental trajectory, such as intellectual capacity, achievement, gender
roles, and parenting, varying widely across generations (see Bronfen-
brenner, 1979; Caspi, 1987; Keniston, 1981; McCluskey and Reese, 1984; Nesselroade and Baltes, 1974; Runyan, 1984).

Third, there is a long tradition of inquiry into historical changes in personality and national character, such as the work of Riesman in The Lonely Crowd (1961), on changes from traditional, to inner-directed, to outer-directed American social character; the study by Barbu (1960) of the formation of personality in classical Greece and early modern England; analyses of the history of selfhood and identity (Baumeister, 1986; Broughton, 1986); the extensive research on "modernization" of personality in developing countries (Inkeles, 1983; Inkeles and Smith, 1974); the work of Philip Greven (1977) in delineating three types of early American character, the evangelical, the moderate, and the genteel; the analysis by Christopher Lasch (1979) of the narcissistic personality of our time; and the work of many others (Bellah et al., 1985; Direnzo, 1977; Fromm, 1942; Horney, 1937; Marcus, 1984).

Fourth, there is research on the history of cognitive structures and processes, such as Julian Jaynes's speculative and thought-provoking Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (1976); Radding's (1985) study of cognitive processes in the Middle Ages, which argues that most people made only very limited progression in terms of the stages of cognitive development outlined by Piaget; a study of the increase in intelligence of the American people from 1750 to 1870 (Calhoun, 1973); studies of the evolution of artistic styles and aesthetic tastes (Blatt, with Blatt, 1984; Martindale, 1984); and a line of work influenced by Vygotsky on historical changes in cognitive development (Luria, 1971, 1976; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Wertsch, 1985).

In short, just as there is a Historical Social Psychology (Gergen and Gergen, 1984), there are also possibilities for a historical developmental psychology, historical personality psychology, historical cognitive psychology, and historical abnormal psychology. In every branch of psychology, important questions can be asked about the transhistorical generality or specificity of psychological phenomena that have remained constant over varying periods of time.

The scope of inquiry in historical psychology is suggested by the following question: Starting with any contemporary psychological theory of interest (whether in social, developmental, personality, cognitive, or abnormal psychology), what hypotheses can be formulated about its transhistorical generality or specificity, and what bodies of evidence can be brought to bear on these questions? Some questions cannot be an-
An Evolutionary Perspective

It is sometimes difficult to imagine the extent to which psychological structures and processes can be different from the way they are at present. An abstract argument for the existence of such differences may seem a little thin in comparison with the weight of everyday experience, which seems to provide palpable evidence of their solidity and fixedness. One way of making vivid the temporal fluidity of the psychological world is to consider it in evolutionary perspective. Not only could the psychological world be radically different than it is at present, it has been radically different.

Consider stages of psychosocial development. There was a time when the demands and opportunities provided by childhood, adolescence, and old age were substantially different than at present, or when these stages did not even exist. Consider contemporary forms of psychological disturbance, such as narcissistic and borderline disorders or anorexia nervosa. It is unlikely that their prevalence and distribution has been constant across historical periods. Consider processes of sensation and perception. There was a time before organs of sensation and perception even existed. In short, the structures and processes studied in every branch of psychology have all changed over time.

One way of conceptualizing the most comprehensive evolutionary story is shown in Figure 13.5. The universe can be roughly divided into three worlds or levels, the physical, biological, and human-social-historical worlds, which mutually influence one another. Temporally, these three worlds emerged in chronological sequence, with the Big Bang origin of an expanding universe occurring approximately 15 billion years ago; the formation of the earth, about 4.6 billion years ago; the origin of life on earth, about 3.4 billion years ago; the evolution of mammals, about 200 million years ago; the appearance of Homo habilis, about 2 million years ago, through Homo erectus, about 1.5 million years ago, to Homo sapiens sapiens, or "modern man," about 40,000 years before the present; the domestication of plants and animals, about 8000 B.C.; and the rise of "civilization," about 3000 B.C. These dates are necessarily approximate estimates, but there is substantial consensus on their sequence and scale (Delbruck, 1986; Lewin, 1984; Weinberg, 1984).
Earlier phases of the evolutionary process are investigated in a variety of historical disciplines, including cosmology, historical geology, evolutionary biology, paleoanthropology, archaeology, and history. Within this array of historical sciences, the study of historical psychology is at present relatively underdeveloped, particularly when compared with the substantial developments in historical sociology (Abrams, 1982; Skocpol, 1984). If historical psychology is distinguished from evolutionary psychology, then historical psychology would focus on continuity and change in psychological structures and processes in the relatively recent past (perhaps the last 3,000 to 5,000 years, with an emphasis on the past several centuries, for which more evidence is available), with evolutionary psychology studying the evolution of psychological structures and processes in earlier human history and in other species.

An evolutionary perspective directs attention to the interactions among biological evolution, the development of psychological structures and processes, and growth and change in sociocultural systems (see the sociobiology debate; for example, Caplan, 1978; Lumsden and Wilson, 1981, 1983; Kitcher, 1985; Montagu, 1980; Wilson, 1975, 1978). The rationale for introducing an evolutionary perspective into the present discussion is not to address this entire set of issues, but rather to em-
phasize the temporal fragility of psychological structures, relationships, and processes. Current psychological structures and processes are not eternally fixed, and for most of the history of the universe and most of the history of life on earth, did not even exist. They have developed substantially since their initial emergence, have continued to change during the course of recorded history, and are unlikely to remain fixed in the future.

Some biological and neurological aspects of psychic structure and function may well have remained relatively stable since the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, but those structures and processes influenced by social, cultural, and historical conditions, including much that is studied in social, developmental, cognitive, personality, and abnormal psychology, are likely to have changed substantially during the course of recorded history. After taking an evolutionary perspective on the history of the universe, one is less likely to rest content with a purely contemporaneous psychology, assuming that it is likely to be "general" across time and space.

The next section moves beyond these relatively abstract considerations, and discusses several recent exemplars of work in psychohistory which more concretely illustrate the field's accomplishments and potentials.

**Examples and Exemplars**

Advances in psychologically informed history may proceed through at least two processes: (1) through attempting to lay conceptual foundations for the field, which provide an orienting vision and suggest a framework for assessing the current status and future possibilities of the field, with progress coming through filling in the spaces of a relatively programmatic vision, or (2) through building up and out from a small number of paradigmatic studies, which catch the imagination of others and inspire them to imitate, replicate, and extend such approaches in their own work. In the field of psychohistory, works such as Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910/1957) and Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1958) have served as inspirations for many.

The intent of this section is to identify and briefly describe a number of additional studies that may serve as exemplars in stimulating further growth in the field. This is not to say that these works are flawless, but rather that they are exemplary in a number of aspects and provide much
that others can learn from. Beginning with the work of contributors to this volume, I would like to call attention to Robert Tucker’s *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879–1929: A Study in History and Personality* (1973), with its emphasis on interconnections between individual personality and the social, political, and historical context; Jean Strouse’s *Alice James* (1980), for its artful and unobtrusive use of psychoanalytic theory in presenting the particulars of an individual life; and Peter Gay’s *Education of the Senses* (1984), with its wide-ranging illumination of sexual attitudes and behavior in the Victorian world.

Two of the most important contributors to the field of psychohistory are Peter Loewenberg, beginning with his classic article “The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort” (1971) and continuing with major chapters on psychohistorical methodology, education, and substantive studies of German and Austrian leaders in *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach* (1983), as well as the papers “Psychohistorical Perspectives on Modern German History” (1975) and “Why Psychoanalysis Needs the Social Scientist and the Historian” (1977); and Fred Weinstein, whose contributions include *Psychoanalytic Sociology* (with G. Platt, 1973), with its illuminating analysis of linkages between psychological theory and the interpretation of collective behavior, and *The Dynamics of Nazism: Leadership, Ideology, and the Holocaust* (1980), which emphasizes the heterogeneity of the subjective appeals of the Nazi movement to its members. I am also partial to my own *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982), which analyzes such issues as psychological reductionism, the reconstruction of earlier events, the influence of childhood experience on adult personality and behavior, the testing of alternative explanations, and ethical problems in the study of living political figures.

I would like to briefly discuss several additional exemplars, indicating both the present accomplishments of the field and suggesting future possibilities. The first work is John Demos’s *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (1982), which is unusually effective in integrating biographical, psychological, sociological, and historical approaches. In analyzing witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England, Demos combines detailed biographical studies, asking about the age, gender, social status, and life histories of those who were accused of witchcraft; a psychological analysis of the motives, emotions, unconscious processes, and developmental trajectories of those identified as witches; a sociological analysis of group and community tensions involved in witchcraft accusations and trials; and a historical analysis of conditions associated with the rise and decline of witchcraft trials over
the years. All four vantage points usefully complement one another in illuminating the place of witchcraft within the lives, psyches, communities, and changing historical circumstances of early New Englanders. The work also combines scientific quantitative analyses with narrative and aesthetic evocations of the lives and circumstances of witches and their persecutors. As expressed by Demos (1982), "Biography, psychology, sociology, history: four corners of one scholar's compass, four viewpoints overlooking a single field of past experience. Each captures part, but not all, of the whole. . . . To see all this from different sides is to move at least some way toward full and final comprehension" (p. 15).

A second example is Robert Jervis's *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976). Two features of this book are particularly relevant for present purposes. First, the book illustrates the application of cognitive psychology to the analysis of historical actors; thus it complements the bulk of literature in psychohistory, which utilizes psychodynamic theories. Jervis draws on literature from cognitive psychology, social psychology, attitude change, and visual perception to analyze the processes used by political decision makers in perceiving, interpreting, predicting, and making inferences about other political actors in international relations. A second feature of the book is its persuasive discussion of the "level of analysis" problem, or the relationships between individual and social-system levels of analysis. Jervis makes a powerful case for the importance in political analysis (and hence in historical analyses that involve politics) of studying not only the international environment of states, their national politics, and the bureaucracies surrounding politicians, but also the perceptions, beliefs, and decisions of individual political actors. All four levels of analysis—personal psychological, bureaucratic, national political, and international—are valuable in analyzing political affairs, with the importance of each level varying from one issue to another and possibly varying at different stages of the decision-making process (Jervis, 1976, pp. 16–17). For the purposes of this book, I have identified six system levels of analysis, ranging from persons through international relations, but the basic point is the same—that for understanding many political events or historical processes, the psychological level of analysis is, in conjunction with other levels, an indispensable level of analysis.

This is not the place for a comprehensive review of contributions to psychohistory, but a few additional works can be mentioned. In psycho-biography, we are in the fortunate position of having excellent studies of three members of the same family: Leon Edel's (1953–72) pioneering five-volume study of Henry James, recently revised in one volume
(1985); Jean Strouse's (1980) study of Alice James; and, most recently, a study of intergenerational dynamics and processes of career choice and identity formation in the oldest brother, William James (Feinstein, 1984). A sample of other outstanding psychobiographies would include studies of Woodrow Wilson (George and George, 1956/1964; George et al., 1984), T. E. Lawrence (Mack, 1976), Samuel Johnson (Bate, 1977), James and John Stuart Mill (Mazlish, 1975), Beethoven (Solomon, 1977), Hitler (Waite, 1977), Picasso (Gedo, 1980), and Wilhelm Reich (Sharaf, 1983). On the psychological involvement of authors with their subjects, a distinguished recent collection is Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness (Baron and Pletsch, 1985), which includes reflections by John Mack (1976) on his work with T. E. Lawrence, Richard Westfall (1981) on his massive biography of Isaac Newton, Arnold Rogow (1963) on his study of the first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, and Steven Marcus on his biographically related work on Charles Dickens (1965) and Friedrich Engels (1974). On the applications of psychoanalysis to biography, a valuable new collection based on a conference at the Institute for Psychoanalysis, Chicago, has been edited by Moraitis and Pollock (1987). In a recent paper, I have attempted to outline the processes that contribute to "progress" in psychobiography (Runyan, 1988).

In group psychohistory, a stimulating collection of work on American topics is provided in a volume edited by Brugger (1981), which contains selections from psychohistorical analyses of witchcraft (Boyer and Nissenbaum, 1974), the American Revolution (Burrows and Wallace, 1972; Hull, Hoffer, and Allen, 1978), slavery (Elkins, 1959), abolitionists (Walters, 1976), women's "hysteria" and role conflict in the nineteenth century (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972), public responses to Theodore Roosevelt (Dalton, 1979), and Vietnam veterans (Lifton, 1973). Collective psychohistorical analyses have also shed light on and raised important questions about topics as diverse as the rise of Nazism, anti-Semitism, student activists and revolutionaries, intellectual groups, religious movements, achievement motivation and economic growth, effects of the Great Depression, consequences of military experience, and responses to life-threatening disasters (in studies such as those of Elder, 1974, 1986; Feuer, 1963; Friedländer, 1978; Greven, 1977; Keniston, 1968; Lifton, 1967; Manuel and Manuel, 1979; Mazlish, 1976; McClelland, 1961; Scharfstein, 1980). A number of significant methodological papers are collected in a recent volume by Cocks and Crosby (1987).

Within group or institutional psychohistory, a good deal of interesting work has been done in recent years within political psychology (or
political psychohistory, as some of it can be called), including analyses of the impact of psychological and group processes on political decision making (George, 1980; Janis, 1982), a survey of processes of perception and misperception in international politics (Jervis, 1976), an analysis of psychological factors in nuclear deterrence (Jervis, Lebow, and Stein, 1985), a recent collection of articles by leading researchers on *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War* (White, 1986), and a variety of other topics covered in surveys of the field (Davies, 1980; Elms, 1976; Etheredge, 1978; Falkowski, 1979; Greenstein, 1975; Hermann, 1986). For further references, extensive bibliographies on psychobiography and psychohistory are provided by Kiell (1982) and Gilmore (1984).

There are, in short, a substantial number of high-quality works to be learned from and built on. Assessments of the state of psychohistory can no longer focus on several well-known errors, such as Freud’s mistranslation of the word *nibbio* as “vulture” rather than “kite” in his study of Leonardo, or on one of Lloyd deMause’s less plausible inferential leaps, as a basis for critiquing the field as a whole. Margaret Mead has commented that theoretical positions are sometimes known primarily through caricatures by their opponents, and there is a danger of this happening to psychohistory. Critical evaluations of psychohistory cannot responsibly be based on citation of a few widely known errors, but need to consider the full range of work in the field.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to provide a sounder conceptual foundation for the use of psychology in historical analysis. The argument is based on an analysis of six system levels, ranging from persons through groups, organizations, and institutions to social systems and international relations; on consideration of the relationships between history and psychology as mediated by developments in the aggregate-level social sciences; on a discussion of historical psychology as a resource for psychohistory; on an evolutionary perspective on the human-social-historical world; and, finally, on a selective review of substantive contributions to psychohistory.

A reconceptualization of psychohistory suggests a “new case” for the use of psychology in history, a case based on the following components: (1) the use not only of classical psychoanalytic theory, but also of recent developments within psychodynamic theory, and of psychoanalytic theory in relationship to the extensive empirical and philosophi-
cal literature assessing its strengths and limitations (see Eagle, 1984; Fisher and Greenberg, 1977; Grünbaum et al. 1986); (2) reliance not exclusively on psychoanalytic theory, but also on the full range of resources of personality, social, developmental, cognitive, biological, and abnormal psychology; (3) reliance not solely on a contemporary psychology, but also on a historical psychology that systematically assesses the transhistorical generality and specificity of its claims; and finally (4) the use of psychology not only applied directly to history, but also the use of psychology mediated through the aggregate-level social sciences, particularly such subfields as social structure and personality, historical sociology, psychological anthropology, and political psychology.

This is a demanding set of aspirations, which will be difficult to realize, but we can be encouraged by the amount of high-quality work in these areas already being produced, both within psychohistory and in the adjacent fields of historical sociology, historical anthropology, and political psychology. An appropriate criterion for evaluating work in this domain is not analytic perfection, which can be paralyzingly ambitious, but rather, comparisons with the level of rigor and confusion in the parent disciplines of history and psychology, and comparisons with historical studies that neglect psychological factors and analyses.

I am acutely aware of limitations in this discussion of relationships between history and psychology, limitations that stem from the perspective of one trained primarily in psychology, from difficulties in mastering the range of relevant literatures, and from such a brief treatment of a complex set of issues. The possibilities for working out relationships between history and psychology have only begun to be explored, and with the range of unresolved problems, there is a great need for contributions and alternative analyses by those from a variety of disciplines.

The issues that psychosocial history forces us to address are, I believe, of fundamental importance across the human-social-historical sciences, issues such as the relationships between human agency and institutional determinism, between individual biography and population processes, and between the search for theoretical generality and the understanding of particular sequences of events. Work in psychosocial history has too often been a flawed addition to the intellectual landscape, but at its best, it promises to shed light on problems cutting across each of the human sciences, as well as revealing the deep interconnections between psychological processes, social structures, and historical continuity and change.
References


