

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY

History isn't just something that's behind us; it's also something that follows us.

—Henning Mankill, 2011

PREVIEW AND CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter opens by describing why it is important to know about history in general and psychology's history in particular. Then a contrast is drawn between traditional histories of psychology, which emphasize the contributions of distinguished psychologists, the outcomes of famous experiments, and the debates among adherents of different "schools" of psychology, and a more recent approach, which tries to situate events and people in a broader historical context. This chapter also considers the methods used by historians to conduct research in history and the problems they face when constructing historical narratives from available data. After you finish this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the events during the 1960s that led to a renewed interest in psychology's history among psychologists
- Explain why it is important for everyone to have some understanding of history
- Explain why it is especially important for psychology students to understand psychology's history
- Distinguish between "old" and "new" history, as Laurel Furumoto used the terms
- Understand the concept of an origin myth and explain the purpose such myths serve
- Distinguish between presentist and historicist views of history and articulate the dangers of presentist thinking
- Distinguish between internal and external histories of psychology and describe the benefits of examining each type
- Distinguish between personalistic and naturalistic approaches to history
- Define historiography and describe the various selection and interpretation problems faced by historians when they do their work
- Describe the use of digital historiographic methods and how they can coordinate with traditional methods to further historical understanding
- Explain how an evolutionary model of historiography can produce confidence that a measure of historical truth has been attained

WHY TAKE THIS COURSE?

Psychologists have always been interested in the history of their discipline. Histories of psychology (e.g., Baldwin, 1913) were written not long after psychology itself appeared on the academic scene in the late 19th century, and at least a pair of psychology's most famous books, E. G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929; 1950) and Edna Heidbreder's *Seven Psychologies* (1933) are histories. It was during the 1960s, however, that significant interest in the history of psychology as a specialized area of research began. Many people were involved, but the major impetus came from a clinical psychologist with a passion for history, Robert I. Watson (1909–1980). He began with a call to arms, a 1960 article entitled “The History of Psychology: A Neglected Area” (Watson, 1960), in which he documented a paucity of articles about history in psychology journals and urged his colleagues to renew their interest in psychology's history. Watson then mobilized a small group of like-minded psychologists within the American Psychological Association (APA) into a “History of Psychology Group.” By the end of the decade, this group had accomplished the sorts of things that mark the creation of a specialized discipline—they formed professional organizations (e.g., Division 26 of the APA, eventually known as the Society for the History of Psychology), they created journals (e.g., *The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*), and they established institutional bases for the production of historical research (e.g., a graduate program at the University of New Hampshire; the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron).

Today psychologists generally recognize the importance of knowing the history of their discipline, a history of psychology course is offered in most psychology departments, and it is required for psychology majors in many of those departments (Fuchs & Viney, 2002). Despite this consensus, however, students majoring in psychology are often surprised to find themselves taking a course about the history of psychology. They check with their chemistry-major friends and find nothing comparable in that department. They examine the college catalog and discover that the closest course to a history of chemistry course is one in the history of science, but the history department teaches it, not one of the science departments, and it covers a lot more than just the history of chemistry. What's going on? Why is there a history of psychology course taught in a psychology department, but not a history of chemistry course taught in a chemistry department?

The rationale for a history of psychology course is important and will be considered shortly. First, however, let's examine the more general question of why it is important to study the history of anything. Is it true that “history is more or less bunk,” as the pioneering automaker Henry Ford once said (quoted in Simonton, 1994, p. 3), or is it more likely, in the words of Swedish novelist Henning Mankill (2011), that “history isn't just something that's behind us; it's also something that follows us” (p. 220)?

Why Study History?

A typical answer to this question is that knowing history helps avoid the mistakes of the past and provides a guide to the future. These well-worn platitudes contain a germ of truth, but they are both simplistic. Concerning the “mistake” argument, rather than learning from the past, much of history appears to provide evidence that humans ignore the past. This possibility has led some to worry that the only true lesson of history is that people don't learn anything from history (Gilderhus, 2000). This might overstate the case, but it is also true that knowing the past provides only a rough guide, because history

never really repeats itself—all events are tied into the unique historical context in which they occur.¹ History is also a less than reliable guide to the future. Historians recognize this; as psychology's eminent historian, E. G. Boring, once wrote, "The past is not a crystal ball. . . . The seats on the train of progress all face backwards: you can see the past but only guess about the future" (1963a, p. 5).

If knowing history won't prevent repeating mistakes, and if history is an imperfect means of forecasting the future, then what is left? *The present*. In the sentence immediately following the one I just quoted from Boring, he wrote: "Yet a knowledge of history, although it can never be complete and fails miserably to foretell the future, has a huge capacity for adding significance to the understanding of the present" (1963a, p. 5). I believe the single most important reason to study history is that the present cannot be understood without knowing something about the past—how the present came to be.

Think of any current event, and you will recognize that it is impossible to understand the event adequately without knowing some of the history leading to it. For example, consider some late 20th-century history within psychology. I am sure that you know about APA, the American Psychological Association. You might also know about or at least have heard of APS—the Association for Psychological Science.² You might even know that the APS is a fairly recent organization compared to the APA; it was born in 1988, whereas the APA has been around since 1892. Perhaps you also recognize that the APS seems more focused on scientific research than the APA, but you might be wondering why both organizations need to exist. Knowing some history would help you understand this. Specifically, your understanding of why APS was created would be greatly enhanced if you knew of the long-standing tensions between research psychologists and psychologists whose prime interest is in the professional practice of psychology (e.g., psychotherapy). The problem traces to APA's very beginnings in the 19th century and contributed to the formation of a separate group of "Experimentalists" in 1904 (the story of this remarkable group is told in Chapter 7). Also, when the APA was reorganized after World War II, the divisional structure that exists today was designed in part to reconcile the conflicting goals of scientists and practitioners. The goodwill that accompanied the end of the war led those with different interests in psychology to unite, but the unity didn't last long. After decades of frustration with APA, researchers formed their own group, APS. Without knowing something of this history, you could never have a clear understanding of the APS, why it exists today, or why there is lingering tension between APS and APA leaders. And there are practical consequences. As a student, if you have an interest in becoming a psychologist, you will probably want to join one of these organizations as a student affiliate. Deciding which to join requires knowing something of the history—someone aiming for a career in the professional practice of psychology might be more likely to join APA, but a future research psychologist might be better served by joining APS.

Another aspect of the importance of the past for understanding the present is that knowledge of history helps us put current events in a better perspective. For instance, we sometimes believe that our current times are, as Charles Dickens wrote, "the worst of times." We complain about the seemingly insurmountable problems and the ever-present dangers (e.g., terrorism) that seem to accompany life in the early decades of the 21st century. We long for the "good old days," a simpler time when nobody locked their doors and a good house could be mail-ordered as a kit from Sears (this is true). We think that there really used to be places like Disney World's idealized Main Street, USA. But knowing history

¹The American humorist Mark Twain apparently remarked that while history does not repeat itself, it does rhyme.

²In 2006, APS changed its name from the American Psychological Society to the Association for Psychological Science. The name change was designed to highlight the scientific focus of the organization, while at the same making it international in scope.

is a good corrective here. Noted historian Daniel Boorstin, in an essay entitled “The Prison of the Present” (1971), described this good-old-days fallacy:

We sputter against the Polluted Environment—as if it had come with the age of the automobile. We compare our air not with the odor of horse dung and the plague of flies and the smells of garbage and human excrement which filled the cities of the past, but with the honeysuckle perfumes of some nonexistent City Beautiful. (pp. 47–48)

It is a common sentiment, then, to think that “things used to be better.” As the protagonist in the novel *Florence Gordon* (Morton, 2014) put it, a friend always complained that

life was better thirty years ago, when England was a real community. Then he quotes someone from thirty years earlier, saying that the sense of community in England had died out thirty years before *that*. He keeps going back, all the way to the Roman empire, with Pliny or somebody, who’s pining for the way things used to be when *he* was young. (p. 20, emphasis in the original)

Knowing history won’t give us easy answers to current problems, but it certainly can immunize us against the belief that these problems are much worse than they used to be (in the “good old days”).

Besides making it possible for us to understand the present better, studying history provides other benefits. For example, it forces an attitude adjustment, keeping us humble in two ways. First, we occasionally delude ourselves into thinking we know a lot (especially true in my profession, university teaching). Studying history is a good antidote. For example, I grew up in southeastern New England, not far from Plymouth, and I thought I knew something about the Pilgrims. However, having read Nathaniel Philbrick’s (2006) history of the Pilgrim experience, *Mayflower*, I am amazed by how little I knew, and by how much of what I thought I knew was dead wrong (e.g., about how the relations between the new arrivals and the local tribes were more hostile than I had thought previously). Second, sometimes ignorance of the past can lead us to a kind of arrogance; we believe that the present is the culmination of centuries of progress and that modern-day accomplishments and thinking are more sophisticated and far surpass those of a crude and uninformed past. Knowing history, however, forces an understanding that each age has its own marvelous accomplishments and its own creative geniuses. Modern-day neuroscientists seem to make fascinating discoveries every day, but the importance of their discoveries and the quality of their scientific thinking do not surpass the elegance of Pierre Flourens’s 19th-century investigations of the brain (Chapter 3), which destroyed the pseudoscience of phrenology.

Finally, studying history ultimately means searching for answers to one of life’s most fundamental yet perplexing questions: What does it mean to be human? To study the history of World War II is to delve into the basic nature of prejudice, aggression, and violence. To study the American Revolution is to examine the human desire for freedom and self-determination. To study the history of Renaissance art is to study the human passion for aesthetic pleasure. And to the extent that history involves people behaving in various situations, studying history means studying and trying to understand human behavior. For this reason alone, psychologists should be inherently attracted to the subject.

Why Study Psychology’s History?

The preceding rationale for knowing history is enough to justify studying psychology’s history, but there are additional reasons why psychologists should be interested in their ancestry. First, compared with other sciences, psychology is still relatively young—not much more than 140 years old. Much of

the content of your other psychology courses traces back through at least half of those years (e.g., Stanley Milgram's obedience studies), and many of the famous studies that you learned about (e.g., Pavlov's conditioning research) formed a major part of the first half of those years. Hence, modern psychology is closely tied to its past, so being a literate student of psychology requires knowing history.

A second and related reason for an interest in psychology's history among psychologists is that the field is still grappling with many of the same topics and issues that occupied it more than a century ago. For instance, an important issue today is the degree of heritability of traits ranging from intelligence to shyness to schizophrenia. This nature–nurture issue, first popularized more than 150 years ago by Sir Francis Galton (Chapter 5) and pondered by humans for centuries, reverberates through the history of psychology. Seeing the parallels between the arguments made now about the interactive influence of heredity and environment, and comparing them with those made in earlier times, you will gain a more informed understanding of the issue.

Earlier, a question was raised about the presence of a history of psychology course and the absence of a history of chemistry course. Whereas an understanding of current research and related issues is essential in psychology, the situation is somewhat different in chemistry. Although the history of alchemy, with its stories of how people tried to transform lead into gold, is fascinating and can teach us a great deal about scientific reasoning and the importance of historical context, it doesn't inform today's students about the chemical properties of lead or of gold. Chemists, who tend to think (naively, as it happens) of their science as steadily progressing from the errors of the past to the truth of the present, aren't normally interested in cluttering their students' minds with "old" ideas. There is a small element of truth to this model of science as advancing through history (nobody tries to turn lead into gold anymore), but it is nonetheless unfortunate that many scientists don't see the value of studying the history of their discipline. At the very least, it would round out their education and teach them something about how scientific thinking evolved. Indeed, there ought to be a history of chemistry course for chemistry students to take. Instead, they have to settle for a history of science course, typically taught in history rather than science departments. Psychology majors, on the other hand, are lucky—they get their own history course!

A third reason why the history of psychology course exists is that it can provide some unity for what has become a diverse and highly specialized field. Despite its youth, psychology in the 21st century is notable for its lack of unity. Indeed, observers for quite some time (e.g., Koch, 1992) have argued that a single field of psychology no longer exists, that a neuroscientist investigating the functioning of endorphins has virtually nothing in common with an industrial psychologist studying the effectiveness of various management styles. Yet all psychologists do have something in common—their history. For the psychology major who has taken a seemingly disconnected variety of courses ranging from developmental to abnormal to social psychology, the history course can serve as a synthesizing experience. By the time you reach the final chapter of this text, where the issue of psychology's increased specialization is again addressed, you will have learned enough to begin understanding the interconnectedness among the different areas of psychology.

Fourth, an understanding of psychology's history makes one a more critical thinker. By being aware of the history of various treatments for psychological disorders, for example, the discerning student is better able to evaluate modern claims for some "revolutionary breakthrough" in psychotherapy. A close examination of this allegedly unique therapy might reveal similarities to earlier approaches. The historically literate student also is aware that on many other occasions, initial excitement over a flashy new therapy (e.g., lobotomy) is tempered by a later failure to find evidence that it works. Similarly, knowing history makes one skeptical about "large claims" (Helson, 1972), for example, the recent idea that all psychology can be known by understanding the brain and that

neuropsychology, therefore, is the future of psychology. Those with an understanding of history will recognize the similarity to claims made in the 19th century about phrenology, will recognize that a brain scan showing activity in area X when a person is lying does not explain *why* the lying occurred, and will understand why modern neuropsychology is sometimes referred to as the new phrenology (Satel & Lilienfeld, 2013).

Finally, the history of psychology course may be a history course, but it is also a psychology course. Thus, one of its goals is to continue educating about human behavior. Studying historical individuals as they helped develop the science of psychology can only increase our understanding of what makes people behave the way they do and how people deal with issues and problems that are timeless. For instance, our understanding of scientific creativity can be enhanced by studying the lives and works of historically creative individuals (e.g., Hermann Ebbinghaus, described in Chapter 4, who created nonsense syllabus to study memory). Some insight into the psychology of controversy and the rigid, dogmatic adherence to one's beliefs can be gained by studying the behavior of scientists engaged in bitter debate with their peers (e.g., the Baldwin–Titchener controversy, described in Chapter 7). And as a third example, the life and career of Ethel Puffer (detailed in Chapter 6) yields insight into the marriage versus career dilemma faced by many educated women. In general, if all human behavior reflects a complex interplay between individuals and the environments they inhabit, then studying the lives of historical characters being shaped by and in turn shaping their environments can only increase our understanding of human behavior.

KEY ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY

A common misconception of history is that historians simply “find out what happened” and then write it down in chronological order. As you might suspect, the process is considerably more complicated. When they are engaged in their craft, historians are affected by several important issues. These were nicely articulated by psychologist-historian Laurel Furumoto, in a 1989 article distinguishing between what she referred to as “old” and “new” history.

The old history of psychology, according to Furumoto (1989), emphasizes the accomplishments of “great” psychologists and celebrates “classic studies” and “breakthrough discoveries.” Within psychology, the preservation and retelling of these “great events” helped psychology secure an identity as an established scientific discipline. The milestones, whether accurately described or not, are passed down from one history text to another. Furthermore, previous insights or achievements are noted only if they somehow “anticipated” or led to some modern idea or research outcome. Old research or theory that is of no current relevance is considered erroneous or quaint and is either discarded or seen as an example of “how far we’ve come.” Thus, from the standpoint of old history, the purpose of the history of psychology is to legitimize and even to glorify present-day psychology and to show how it has progressed from the murky depths of its unscientific past to its modern scientific brilliance.

One effect of the old history thinking about the past is the creation of so-called **origin myths**, stories overemphasizing the importance of specific events in psychology's history. Their purpose is to highlight the contrast between what is said to be a prescientific approach to some psychological phenomenon and the emergence of a more scientific strategy. For example, modern social psychologists consider their field to be one in which scientific methods are used to establish laws about human social behavior. Fair enough. Holding this belief, of course, raises the question of when social psychology became “experimental” (i.e., real science, and therefore “modern” and “noteworthy”). That is, when did it originate? The further back in history this origin can be placed, the greater the legitimacy of an experimental social psychology

(“Oh yes, we have been around for a very, very long time, using science to explore social behavior.”). If experimental social psychology could be said to originate in the 19th century, for instance, then the social psychologist can claim well over 100 years of research, suggesting that modern social psychology (a) is well established and (b) has been accumulating scientifically based knowledge over many years.

These concerns about the status of “experimental” social psychology led Haines and Vaughan (1979) to ask whether 1898 was a “‘great date’ in the history of social psychology” (p. 323). Their answer: not really. This conclusion probably came as a surprise to many social psychologists because 1898 was the publication date for what has become a famous study by Norman Triplett, who wondered why cyclists seem to go faster when they race against other cyclists than when they race alone. He created a simple apparatus that simulated racing and appeared to demonstrate that the presence of a competitor “facilitated” performance (Triplett, 1898). This is similar to a finding later called “social facilitation” and so, to social psychologists in the 21st century, Triplett’s study seemed to be an early experimental demonstration of the phenomenon. Hence, some (e.g., G. Allport, 1954a) argued that Triplett was the founder of experimental social psychology and the cycling study was the origin point. Now, the Triplett study was an interesting one, but it is hard to justify it as the start of experimental social psychology. Triplett certainly did not think it originated anything like a new discipline—he was just interested in cycling. And a strong research tradition in social psychology did *not* begin to develop in the aftermath of the study, as one might expect if the Triplett study was a tipping point. Deliberate efforts to make social psychology research based did not occur until the 1920s, with the work of Floyd Allport (discussed in Chapter 14), and a significant push toward experimental research by social psychologists did not occur until the work of Leon Festinger (also in Chapter 14) in the 1950s. Yet modern social psychology texts continue to trace the origins of experimental social psychology to Triplett, and the origin myth continues to be promoted.³

The field of social psychology does not have a monopoly on origin myths. As we shall see in later chapters, there are several “classic studies” in other research areas that also have their own mythical elements and have turned out to have been much more complicated than typically described in textbooks. Two examples to be examined in more detail later are the famous “Little Albert” study (Chapter 10), from the research area of learning and conditioning, and the so-called Hawthorne Effect (Chapter 13) from the area of industrial/organizational psychology.

Old versus new approaches to psychology’s history, according to Furumoto, can be characterized in terms of three contrasts. Old history tends to be presentist, internal, and personalistic. New history, on the other hand, is more historicist, external, and naturalistic.

Presentism versus Historicism

Earlier, I argued that a major reason for studying history is to better understand what is happening in the present. This is indeed a valid argument. On the other hand, to interpret and assess the past *only* in terms of present understanding is to be guilty of **presentism**. In an editorial in the opening volume of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, George Stocking (1965) contrasted presentism with an approach called **historicism**. As he described it, the presentist interprets historical events only with reference to modern knowledge and values, whereas the historicist tries to understand the same event in terms of the

³A close reading of the Triplett study shows that the “social facilitation” explanation oversimplifies what he apparently found (Stroebe, 2012). Thus, only about half of the subjects in his study performed better in competition than by themselves. The others were unaffected or even adversely affected. Furthermore, subsequent statistical analysis (not available to Triplett in 1898) questioned whether the study found any differences at all.

knowledge and values in existence at the time of the event. Because the historicist tries to place historical events within the overall context of their times, this approach is sometimes called a *contextual* approach to history. The danger of presentist thinking is that it misleads us into thinking that individuals in the past should have known better and that they ought to have foreseen what was coming later. Consequently, we may be led to judge historical individuals more harshly than we ought to. “What were they thinking?” we say to ourselves.

To demonstrate the dangers of presentist thinking, consider some aspects of the history of intelligence testing. As you will learn in Chapter 8, in the years just before World War I, the American psychologist Henry Goddard was invited to Ellis Island in New York to help screen immigrants. Those deemed “unfit” for various reasons (primarily medical) were deported, returned to their country of origin. Goddard firmly believed that intelligence was an inherited trait and that it could be measured with a brand-new technology—something created in France and just beginning to be called an IQ test. Goddard used a version of this test to identify “feeble-minded” immigrants, believing that mental incapacity was just as serious as medical incapacity when it came to making deportation decisions. His conclusion that large percentages of immigrants were “morons” (a term he invented to describe a subcategory of high-functioning feeble-mindedness) probably contributed to the atmosphere that led Congress to pass restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s. From today’s standpoint, based on an additional 75 years or so of research, we know about the need for caution when using and interpreting IQ tests. Hence, we find it difficult to believe that someone as smart as Goddard could have behaved with such obvious bias. “What was he thinking?” we might ask ourselves. But to understand Goddard’s behavior, it is necessary to study it from the vantage point of the historical period in which it occurred instead of with reference to modern understanding. This means knowing about such things as (a) the powerful influence of Darwinian thinking and Mendelian genetics on the psychological testers of that day, which led easily to a belief that intelligence was a trait that had been naturally selected and enabled a physically weak species (humans) to adapt to their environment during the “struggle for existence” and was therefore inherited; (b) the nation’s fears of being overrun with immigrants (large-scale immigration was a fairly new phenomenon at that time); and (c) the assumption, not yet brought into question by such inventions as atomic bombs, that any new technology (e.g., IQ tests) with the “scientific” seal of approval meant “progress” and was therefore good. The list could be continued but the point is clear. Goddard’s work cannot be fairly evaluated by what we know today; it can be understood only in the context of its times. On the other hand, his work does have relevance for us in the present. Knowing about it can (a) help us better understand modern concerns about immigration—it is not a new problem; (b) inform us of the subtle influence of racism and other forms of bigotry, even in intelligent people; and (c) make us properly cautious about the alleged wonders of new technologies that arrive in our own day. Furthermore, just because we attempt to understand Goddard within the context of his own time, this does not mean that we cannot judge his actions; but our criticisms should be made with some caution, taking the form of arguments that were also made by others during the period in question (and Goddard did have his critics). Thus, although the past can help us understand the present, our knowledge about the present should not be used to make simplistic judgments about the past.

The Goddard episode illustrates how difficult it is for us to avoid a presentist orientation (Hull, 1979). After all, we are the products of our own personal histories, and it is perhaps impossible to ask us to think like a person who never experienced, for example, the internet. Nonetheless, for the historian and the student of history it is important to be aware of the dangers of a presentist view of history and to constantly seek to understand historical episodes on their own terms. One must recognize, as pointed out by historian Bernard Bailyn (Lathem, 1994), that “the past is not only distant, but different”

(p. 53) and that the major obstacle in overcoming presentism (or “anachronism,” as historians often call it) is the problem of “overcoming the knowledge of the outcome. This is one of the great impediments to a truly contextualized history” (p. 53). As to how we might go beyond our knowledge of outcomes and overcome presentist or anachronistic thinking, Bailyn had this suggestion:

Somehow one has to recapture, and build into the story, contemporaries' ignorance of the future. . . . One . . . tries to avoid assigning the heroism or villainy that was unclear at the time but that was determined by later outcomes. And, if possible, one gives a sympathetic account of the losers. If one can, up to a certain point, work sympathetically with the losers, one can—in some small part at least—overcome the knowledge of the outcome. (pp. 53–54)

Let me close this section by giving you an example of presentist writing that I found while reading a biography of Sir Isaac Newton (White, 1997). Even good writers and historians can fall into the trap. One of Newton's passions was alchemy, the quest to create gold from base metals. In describing the alchemy interests of one of Newton's predecessors, Paracelsus (famous in the history of medicine), the author wrote that “following many an alchemist in a stereotypical fixation with *finding the unattainable and achieving the impossible*, [Paracelsus] traveled Europe in search of the secrets of the ancients, squandering much of his talent and any money he earned along the way” (p. 120; emphasis added). This is a good example of writing from the standpoint of knowing the outcome (alchemy failed), while ignoring the importance of alchemy to the history of science and the historical context that made alchemy a respected endeavor for a time.

Internal versus External History

Histories of psychology are often written by psychologists who wish to trace the development of the theories and research traditions held by various psychologists. This kind of approach is referred to as an **internal history**—what is written occurs entirely within (“internal to”) the discipline of psychology. Such an approach has the value of providing detailed descriptions of the evolution of theory and research, but it ignores those influences outside psychology that also influence the discipline. An **external history** considers those outside influences.

Internal histories are often referred to as histories of ideas. Typically, they are written by people trained in the specific discipline being analyzed, and they tend to be written by people with little or no expertise in history per se. They are inward looking, focusing on the development of ideas or the progression of research from lesser to greater understanding. On the other hand, external histories take the broader view—they examine societal, economic, institutional, and extradisciplinary influences. An exclusively internal history is narrow and loses the richness of historical context, whereas an excessively external history can fail to convey an adequate understanding of the ideas and contributions of a discipline's key figures. A balance is needed.

The interplay between internal and external history is demonstrated nicely in the history of cognitive psychology, the study of such phenomena as attention, memory, language, and thinking. The story of cognitive psychology is told in Chapter 11, but for now a sketch of it provides a nice contrast between internal and external history. From the standpoint of internal history, cognitive psychology's rise in the United States is often seen in relation to the decline of behaviorism. Behaviorism was a force in American psychology throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and well into the 1950s. Part of its attraction was its seeming ability to explain, by means of conditioning principles, all that was important about behavior. Humans were a product of their conditioning history, so the argument went. One problem,

however, became increasingly clear in the 1950s: Behaviorist accounts of human language were inadequate. The nature of language and the learning of language by children seemed to be inconsistent with conditioning principles (e.g., it happened much too quickly and effortlessly for traditional conditioning principles, such as reinforcement, to explain it). That is, *within psychology*, a shift began to occur from a behaviorist paradigm to one that emphasized cognitive factors.

External to psychology, there were several other forces at work that helped bring about what some called a cognitive revolution. First, it is no coincidence that interest in cognitive psychology occurred in parallel with the growth and development of computer science; psychologists began to see the computer as an interesting metaphor for the human brain. In both cases, information was taken in from the environment, “processed” in various ways internally, and then put in the form of some output. In memory research, for example, diagrams of memory processes looked just like computer flowcharts, tracking the flow of information through a system. Second, the momentum for a shift from behaviorist to cognitive models grew significantly in the 1960s, a decade of great disruption and change in American society. The cultural climate embodied by the phrase “change is the only constant” made it easier for psychologists to embrace change within their discipline. In sum, then, understanding the development of cognitive psychology requires knowing not just about the difficulties encountered by behaviorism (e.g., language learning) but also about developments in the wider world (computer science, the 1960s).

Personalistic versus Naturalistic History

In addition to the presentist–historicist and internal–external distinctions, Furumoto (1989) added one additional contrast. That distinction is between a personalistic history, one that sees the actions of individual historical characters as the prime movers in history, and a naturalistic history, one that emphasizes the overall intellectual and cultural climate of a particular historical era—what the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel called the *zeitgeist*.

According to a **personalistic history**, the important events in history result from the heroic (or evil) actions of individuals, and without those individuals, history would be vastly different. Their actions are said to provide history’s “turning points.” This approach is often associated with the 19th century historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle, whose “On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History,” written in 1840, is remembered for this line: “The history of what man has accomplished in this world is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here” (quoted in Boring, 1963a, p. 6). According to this view, people like Newton, Darwin, and Freud changed the course of the history of science; without them, the history would have been completely different. From this standpoint, the preferred method of writing history is biography. A consequence of this personalistic approach is the creation of so-called **eponyms** (Boring, 1963a). That is, historical periods are identified with reference to the individuals whose actions are believed to be critical in shaping events. Thus, we read of Newtonian physics, Darwinian biology, and Freudian psychology.

The personalistic approach has intuitive appeal. As individuals, we like to think that we have control over our lives and might have some effect on the world in which we live. It is not much of a leap from this type of thinking to an assumption that history is profoundly affected by noteworthy persons. Although Edwin G. Boring (featured in this chapter’s Close-Up) favored a naturalistic model of history and argued that “history is continuous and sleek,” he recognized that influential people “are the handles that you put on its smooth sides” (Boring, 1963b, p. 130). Boring argued that the persistence of a personalistic approach to history results from several factors, including a human need for heroes and the need of hardworking scientists for personal recognition (e.g., Nobel

Prizes). More important, if history is continuous and sleek, then it is also immensely complex. In seeking to understand it, we try to reduce the complexity to understandable dimensions—categorization is a universal cognitive process, essential for achieving understanding. Our recall of concepts like the Freudian unconscious and Pavlovian conditioning are easier when the eponyms serve as retrieval cues.

CLOSE-UP

EDWIN G. BORING (1886–1968)

It is unfortunate that psychology's most famous historian has a name that students often associate with the general topic of history. In fact, E. G. Boring's writings are lively and elegant. His version of psychology's history has been criticized, but historians of psychology owe a great debt to Boring's pioneering historical work.

While an engineering student at Cornell University, Boring first encountered psychology in the fall of 1905 by taking an elective course in elementary psychology taught by the celebrated E. B. Titchener (Chapter 7). Boring described the lectures as “magic, so potent that even my roommates demanded, each lecture day, to be told what had been said” (Boring, 1961b, p. 18). He was not converted at that point, however; he continued his engineering studies and earned a master's degree in 1908. But after two less than rewarding years as an engineer for a steel company and as a high school teacher, he returned to Cornell and earned a PhD from Titchener in 1914. While at Cornell, Boring's research interests included (a) human maze learning, during which he met, fell in love with, and eventually married one of his research colleagues, fellow doctoral student Lucy May (who died in 1996 at the age of 109); (b) nerve regeneration, studied firsthand by severing a nerve in his arm and charting its recovery; (c) the learning processes of schizophrenics; (d) eyewitness accuracy; and (e) his dissertation topic, visceral sensitivity. Boring studied this last topic by swallowing a stomach tube to varying depths, then pouring various substances into the tube and noting the (often unpleasant) sensory effects (Jaynes, 1969b). Nobody could ever accuse Boring of not being involved in his work.

After finishing his degree at Cornell and staying on briefly as an instructor, Boring served in World War I in the Army testing program (Chapter 8), taught briefly at Clark University, and then went to Harvard in 1922,

where he remained for the rest of his career. At Harvard, Boring spent the next decade building up the laboratory and trying to convince authorities that psychology should be a separate department, not just part of the philosophy department; this creation of a distinct psychology department finally occurred in 1934. During the 1920s, he wrote the first edition of his famous *A History of Experimental Psychology* (Boring, 1929), partly to further his political fight with the philosophers and administrators at Harvard, and partly to bolster basic research in experimental psychology at a time when most American psychologists seemed to be more interested in applied psychology (O'Donnell, 1979b).

In his years at Clark and Harvard, Boring's work habits, in imitation of Titchener, were legendary. In his words:

[M]y friends, my children, and my students know how I have talked about the eighty-hour week in the fifty-week year (the 4,000-hour working year) and I have scorned those forty-hour academicians who take long summers off from work. . . . My vacations were never successful until I got a little study with a typewriter in it and could answer eight letters a day and write up the waiting papers. (Boring, 1961b, p. 14b)

Also in the Titchener tradition, Boring taught the introductory course in psychology, believing that a student's first encounter with psychology should be from the master. He even became a pioneer in the video course: 38 half-hour programs on Boston's educational TV channel WGBH in 1960 featured Boring demonstrating various phenomena, but mainly sitting “on the corner of a table and talk[ing] in a friendly, enthusiastic, paternal manner to the red lights on whatever camera was on the air” (Boring, 1961b, p. 77; Figure 1.1).



Robert M. Pringle/Harvard Alumni Bulletin
(now Harvard Magazine)

FIGURE 1.1 Teaching to the masses:
E.G. Boring on educational TV in 1957.

APA's Division 26 was established in 1965, and some hoped that Boring would be its first president. According to Hilgard, Boring refused to run for the office but agreed to be named "honorary president." Boring's increasing deafness kept him away from the division's inaugural meeting

during the APA 1966 convention, but he sent a note to be read, describing himself as the "ghost of History Past, when the interest in the history of psychology had not yet become as vigorous as it is now" (Hilgard, 1982, p. 310). Modern historians of psychology owe much to Boring's example.

There can be serious problems with a strongly personalistic approach to history. The most obvious danger is to overemphasize the importance of the individual at the center of the biography. Biography can descend into **hagiography** (originally defined as a biography of a saint or important religious leader, but more generally a biography that is overwhelmingly laudatory and noncritical). But there are ways in which a personalistic approach can have value. For example, Ball (2012) described several ways in which "historians can engage with eminent figures without resorting to hagiography" (p. 72). One strategy is to rely on as much empirical data as possible. As a measure of "eminence," for example, one might examine the research output of an experimental psychologist in terms of the number of students attracted to that person's lab and/or the number and variety of publications coming from that lab per unit of time. Ball used the experimental psychologist Walter Miles as an example, discovering through a database search that he was "the first American psychologist to achieve the feat of publishing 10 scholarly articles per year in two consecutive years" (p. 76) when he was at Stanford in the late 1920s.

The alternative to a personalistic history is a **naturalistic history**, an approach emphasizing the forces of history that influence individuals. The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was a famous advocate of this determinist approach. One of his goals in writing the massive *War and Peace* was to demonstrate that history is moved by forces beyond the control of individuals. For Tolstoy, so-called "great men" like Napoleon were essentially agents of historical forces larger than themselves. In *War and Peace* he refers to kings and generals as history's slaves: "Every act of theirs, which appears to them an act of

their own will, is in a historical sense involuntary and is related to the whole course of history and predestined from eternity" (Tolstoy, 1869/1942, p. 671).

Boring promoted a naturalistic view of history. Especially in his later years, he championed the *zeitgeist* concept, both in the second edition of his famous history text (Boring, 1950) and in numerous essays. For Boring, understanding history meant understanding the historical forces that influenced the men and women living in a particular era. Although not denying Darwin's genius, for example, Boring argued that the concept of evolution was common in the 19th century and extended beyond just biology (to geology, for instance). Without Darwin, someone else would have produced a theory of biological evolution. Indeed, Darwin's theory might have been called the Darwin–Wallace theory, in recognition of Alfred Russel Wallace, a contemporary of Darwin's who independently developed virtually the identical theory (Chapter 5 tells the story). Great scientists can and do influence events, but simply focusing on individuals leaves unanswered the question of how those individuals were affected by the worlds in which they lived.

In support of the *zeitgeist* concept, Boring pointed to two kinds of historical events. In the first, called a **multiple**, two or more individuals independently make the same discovery at about the same time (Merton, 1961). Darwin and Wallace codiscovering natural selection at a time when evolutionary thinking was "in the air" is an example. Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, illustrates the second type of event, a discovery or a theory that is said to be "ahead of its time." Like his more famous grandson, Erasmus developed a theory of evolution; but he did so in the 18th century, when belief in the immutability of species (i.e., each species is created in its finished form by God and doesn't change over time) was stronger than in the 19th century.

Relying on the *zeitgeist* as the *only* way of explaining history can be problematic, however. For example, the uncritical observer might be tempted to reify (i.e., give a concrete and detached existence to an abstraction) the term *zeitgeist* and consider it a controlling force, independent of the historical persons who in fact give it meaning. That is, in answer to the question, "Why did event X occur instead of event Y at time Z?" one might be tempted to answer, "Because of the *zeitgeist*." But such an answer hardly explains the event in question. The concept of the *zeitgeist* invites one to examine the attitudes, values, and theories in existence at the time of some event to be explained, but it cannot exist by itself as some mysterious directing agent. As Ross (1969) pointed out with reference to the history of educational psychology:

It has been stated. . .that neither James, Dewey, Hall, Thorndike, Cattell, Galton, nor Darwin were necessary to the rapid development of educational psychology in America, for that was the trend of the "Zeitgeist." But certainly we only know what the Zeitgeist in fact *was* by the way in which James, Hall, Cattell, Darwin and others behaved. If they had not thought and acted the way they did, neither would the "Zeitgeist" they are said to embody. (p. 257; emphasis in the original)

Thus, a balanced view of history recognizes the complex interrelationships between people acting and the environments in which they act. The characters we will encounter shortly were all products of the world in which they lived, but they also made decisions that helped form and transform their world. Wallace might have been inspired to write a paper proposing a theory of evolution that matched the essence of Darwin's, but it is no accident that the term *evolution* is associated with Darwin and not with Wallace. It was Darwin who invested the years of research examining the intricacies of numerous species, and it was Darwin who followed up his initial writings with the monumental texts that brought evolution into its fullest development.

This Book's Point of View

This section of the chapter began with a reference to Furumoto's distinction between old and new history. Presentist, internal, and personalistic approaches typically go together and comprise what she referred to as the old history of psychology. It is a history that interprets events from the standpoint of the present, concentrates on the development of ideas within a discipline, and views progress as reflecting the accomplishments of important people. The new history of psychology, on the other hand, combines historicist, external, and naturalistic approaches. It tries to examine historical events on their own terms, with reference to the times in which they occurred, looks for the influence of extradisciplinary forces, and looks beyond great men and women to examine the contextual factors that helped to produce their ideas. Furumoto also pointed out that new history is more critically analytical than ceremonial and celebratory.

For historians of psychology conducting research, Furumoto's description of the new history of psychology provides a clear set of guidelines. The best historical research being published today is historicist, external, and naturalistic. For the author of a textbook and the teacher of the history of psychology course, however, the prescriptions about how to proceed are not quite as clear. As psychologist-historian Don Dewsbury (1990b) once pointed out in a review of several history of psychology texts, it is important to distinguish between "scholarly research directed at colleagues and . . . textbooks directed at introductory students" (p. 372). For the latter, the ideals of the new history need to be incorporated into the course, but they must be weighed against a need to inform students about content that is relevant to the psychology curriculum. This book presents a history of psychology that embraces the values espoused by Furumoto, but it is important to remember that the course for which this text is designed is a psychology course. Thus, although every effort will be made to write a historicist rather a presentist account, the book will provide a balance on the other two dimensions. It is important to understand the influence of computer science on the development of cognitive psychology (external), but it is also important for the psychology student to know about the difficulties that behaviorists experienced when trying to explain human language (internal). Similarly, it is important to understand the mid-19th-century zeitgeist within which Darwin operated (naturalistic), it is also important to understand something about Darwin himself, his research habits, for example (personalistic).

HISTORIOGRAPHY: DOING AND WRITING HISTORY

The simplest definition of **historiography** derives from the origins of the word itself—it means "to write history." But the term goes beyond the writing of historical narrative, referring also to theoretical issues like the ones just described, and to the methods that historians use when doing the research that eventually leads to their written histories. Although the primary purpose of this book is to inform you about the history of psychology, a secondary goal is to give you some insight into the behavior of historians of psychology. That is, we will examine the kinds of data of interest to historians and the problems confronting historians as they do their work. At the outset, it is important to be aware of one crucial distinction. It might seem obvious, but accepting it allows one to realize that all history involves some degree of human interpretation. The distinction, pointed out by British historian Keith Jenkins (1991), is between "the past" and "history." They are not the same—as Jenkins pointed out, "the past is gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work" (p. 8). Hence, the past refers to the infinite number of events that have occurred before the present moment, and the past can never be

known because it is gone. What can be known is history, the way *traces* of the past are selected, interpreted, and written into coherent narrative by professional historians. Whether those writings approach “truth” is an issue that is taken up at the end of the chapter. For now, let us examine these traces of history and what historians do with them.

Sources of Historical Data

Writers of psychology’s history, especially textbook writers, have often relied on secondary sources to write their histories. A **secondary source** is a document that has been published and is typically an analysis or summary of some historical person, event, or period. These sources include books, articles published in journals, magazines, encyclopedia, and the like. Those doing research in the history of psychology, however, rely more heavily on **primary sources** of information, which are usually found in archives. An **archive** is normally an area within a university library that holds unpublished information. This primary source information includes university records, correspondence, diaries, speeches, minutes of the meetings of professional organizations, and documents donated by individuals connected in some way with the university. In addition to these separate university archives, historians of psychology often find primary source material at the Library of Congress and other governmental archives in Washington, D.C., and, especially, at the Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP), part of the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology at The University of Akron in Ohio. In general, primary source materials are items written or created at or near the time of some historical event, whereas secondary sources are written at some time after a historical event and serve to summarize or analyze.

AHAP was founded in 1965 by John Popplestone (1928–2013) and Marion White McPherson (1919–2000) (Figure 1.2), two clinical psychologists passionate about psychology’s history; the founding was one of a series of events mentioned earlier that sparked interest in psychology’s history in the 1960s. AHAP’s collection includes the papers of more than 700 psychologists and professional organizations; more than 1,500 pieces of original laboratory apparatus; approximately 20,000 photographs, 6,000 films, and 4,000 audio recordings; and over 12,000 psychological tests.



Cummings Center, University of Akron

FIGURE 1.2 John Popplestone and Marion White McPherson, cofounders of the Archives of the History of American Psychology at The University of Akron.

What can you expect to find in an archive? Just about anything. When looking into the records of a professional organization, for instance, you would probably find lists of officers and correspondence among them, minutes of meetings, early drafts of position papers, and the like. When examining the papers of an individual psychologist, you might find (a) letters between that person and other psychologists; (b) personal diaries and/or appointment calendars; (c) course lecture notes and course schedules; (d) laboratory protocols, drawings of apparatus, data summaries, and other laboratory-related information; (e) early draft manuscripts of writings that eventually became secondary sources; (f) photographs and films of people, places, and research equipment; and (g) minutes of professional meetings attended by the psychologist. There will also be some surprises: One startling example was reported in the magazine *Civilization*, published by the Library of Congress. A researcher was studying the 19th-century Viennese physician Carl Koller, who was experimenting with the use of cocaine as an anesthetic in eye surgery. One of the folders contained a small pharmacist's packet containing, you guessed it, white powder. Federal authorities were called in to remove the drug, but the envelope remains in the archive collection, labeled as follows: "Remainder of the 1st dose of cocaine, which I used in my first cocaine experiments in August 1884. Dr. Koller" ("A stash in the stacks," 1996, p. 15).

How does a researcher interested in psychology's history know which archives to search for electronically, contact, or visit when starting a project? Because their holdings are so extensive, AHAP is a good place to start and its listings can be searched electronically (just go to the Cummings Center website and choose "Archives"). Even if it is not the primary repository for the papers of the person being studied, AHAP might hold some correspondence from that person in the papers it does have. Another good starting place is the university where the person in question worked. Third, bibliographic sources exist. Although dated, one example is *A Guide to Manuscript Collections in the History of Psychology and Selected Areas* (Sokal & Rafail, 1982). Suppose you are interested in the work of IQ researcher Henry Goddard, for instance. The *Guide* briefly describes the contents of the Goddard papers, which happen to be held at AHAP. It also informs you of additional Goddard materials in the papers of Edgar Doll and Emily Stogdill at AHAP, and in the papers of developmental psychologist Arnold Gesell in the Library of Congress.

Historians also rely on their general knowledge of the field to aid in their search. For example, some years ago I became interested in Edmund Clark Sanford (1859–1924), the first director of the psychology laboratory at Clark University (Goodwin, 1987). Through contact with the archivist there and two visits, I accumulated some information, but not a great deal. Sanford did not seem to save very much, or if he did, the information didn't find its way to Clark. Some of the university records were helpful, however, in determining such things as laboratory purchases, and the papers of psychologist–university president G. Stanley Hall (Chapter 6) yielded some additional data, including one exciting discovery—a series of photographs taken in the laboratory in 1892, several of which you will find in later chapters of this book. Many of them showed (or simulated, most likely) experiments in progress, thus providing a glimpse of what it was like to be doing research in psychology then. By searching through secondary sources, I knew about other psychologists who were contemporaries of Sanford. I also knew from his obituaries that Sanford was close to E. B. Titchener of Cornell and Mary Calkins of Wellesley (Sanford died of a heart attack in 1924 on his way to give a talk at Wellesley). Archive visits to Wellesley and Cornell yielded more information. The Titchener papers were especially helpful because unlike Sanford, Titchener seemed to keep just about everything. I also looked at about two dozen other archives that I guessed might be holding papers that Sanford might have written to his colleagues. Copies of a few letters trickled in. By the time I started to piece together Sanford's career, I had several hundred primary source documents in hand.

Over the past 15–20 years, archival searching has been made considerably easier through electronic means. Archives frequently post “finding aids” (detailed listings of the contents of a specific collection) online and sought-after documents are sometimes available digitally. Other archival holdings can be discovered through Google searches. For example, as part of some research on the experimental psychologist Walter Miles (mentioned earlier in connection with the discussion of personalistic history), I was looking into his activities as a researcher at the Carnegie Nutrition Laboratory in Boston in the period from 1914 to 1922. From the Miles papers at AHAP, I knew that the laboratory’s director was Francis Benedict. A Google search for Benedict yielded a connection to his papers at the archives of the Harvard Medical School, which in turn led to email contact with a helpful archivist and, eventually, to some important information about Benedict and the Carnegie Lab (e.g., the details of three different trips made by Benedict to Russia, where he visited Pavlov’s laboratory and reported on Pavlov’s research).

The Miles papers at Akron are a rich source of information for historians of psychology, mainly because Miles seldom threw anything away (Goodwin, 2003). The collection fills 128 boxes, occupying 70 linear feet on the shelves; the detailed finding aid alone runs to 756 pages (in a searchable .pdf file, fortunately). To give you some idea of the variety of the materials that can be found in an archival collection, I will share some of the Miles documents with you at various places throughout the text. The first of these “From the Miles Papers. . .” pieces describes an academic genealogy event during a trip to Europe that Miles made while working as a researcher at the Carnegie Lab.

FROM THE MILES PAPERS. . .

MILES MEETS HIS ACADEMIC GRANDFATHER

From April until August 1920, while a senior researcher at the Carnegie Nutrition Lab in Boston, Walter Miles (1885–1978) toured Europe, his first trip abroad. The trip’s purpose was to reestablish links between the Carnegie Lab and European laboratories that had been disrupted by World War I; for Miles, it was also a chance to become acquainted with some of Europe’s leading scientists. During his trip, Miles visited 57 labs in 9 different countries. He also went to several conferences, including one for the British Psychological Society in London. There he met Edward Scripture for the first time. When Scripture was at Yale in the 1890s, his best-known student was Carl Seashore (second from the left in the front row of Figure 6.6). Miles, in turn, earned his doctoral with Seashore. In terms of their academic genealogy, then, Miles was a “descendent” of Scripture, his “academic grandson.” Miles was therefore eager to meet Scripture, but was disappointed in the encounter, and it appears that the presence of Miles was for Scripture an uncomfortable

reminder of his (Scripture’s) time at Yale. Shortly after returning to Boston, Miles wrote this to Seashore:

In England I attended a meeting of the British Psychological [Society]. . . The first paper for lecture, somewhat over an hour long, was by Dr. E. W. Scripture on “Speech Inscriptions in Normal and Abnormal Conditions.” I was very glad of an opportunity to see and hear Scripture. . . [He] looks and dresses the part of a wealthy consultant doctor of the Harley Street group of London. His hair was cut very short and worn pompadour, he has a Vandyke beard, and at first impression you would hardly think him more than forty-five years. He spoke with a great deal of gesture. I [illegible] his young wife with whom, according to what Spearman told me, he eloped from New York. I believe she was his former stenographer. Following Scripture’s lectures, we had tea and at

the end of this, while he was picking up his lantern slides, I introduced myself. The conversation which ensued was rather one-sided. I had to do most of it. He seems, I thought, a bit embarrassed. He spoke presently of you and he was pleased at the great success you had made. Very shortly after the meeting reassembled to hear the paper of Major Klein on the subject of camouflage in land warfare I saw Scripture and this very smartly dressed young woman slip quietly away. (Miles, 1920)

The Edward Scripture story is one that often has been made into a morality tale about the consequences of excessive conceit—someone who went from being a talented and creative yet excessively arrogant researcher to

a disgraced and marginal bit player, whose obituary in the *Journal of Psychology* appeared 20 years after he died because his 1945 death went unnoticed at the time (Boring, 1965). Scripture founded one of the first psychology laboratories in the United States, at Yale in 1892, wrote a popular description of the “new psychology” (highlighted at the start of Chapter 8) in 1895, and had every reason to think that he would quickly rise to the top of his profession. Yet he was fired from Yale just after the turn of the 20th century after a series of acrimonious conflicts with colleagues, and he was accurately accused of plagiarism by E. B. Titchener (Chapter 7). In Europe he reinvented himself, developing an expertise in speech pathology and making a living as a consultant on speech disorders in London.

Problems with the Writing of History

The journey from archive visits to a published paper or book is long, often tedious, occasionally exhilarating, but never easy. Along the way, the researcher must confront two interrelated difficulties. First, there are problems associated with the collection of data. The historian must be able to find some data, evaluate the validity of the data that is found, and select some of the data for inclusion in the historical narrative. The second problem concerns analysis. Historians are human, so their interpretations of the data will reflect their beliefs, their theories about the nature of history, and potentially, their biases.

Data Selection Problems Historians usually find more information than will make its way into their historical narrative. Hence, they must make judgments about the adequacy and relevance of the data at hand, and they must select a sample of the data while discarding the remainder. Sometimes, despite the large amount of data that might be collected during an archive visit, important pieces might be missing, further complicating the historian's life. For example, Titchener and Sanford wrote to each other frequently, but only Titchener saved his correspondence. The Titchener papers contain several hundred letters from Sanford to Titchener, but the Sanford papers include *none* from Titchener. In trying to piece together the Sanford–Titchener relationship, the historian gets only half the story.⁴

Sometimes information that could aid a historian can be lost through what insurance adjusters would call an act of God. For example, after painstakingly tracking down descendants of Mary Whiton Calkins (Chapter 6), the APA's first woman president, Furumoto discovered that many of Calkins's papers had been entrusted to her younger brother. Unfortunately, he put them in his cellar, where they were destroyed by the flood that accompanied a famous New England hurricane in 1938 (Furumoto, 1991).

Data might also be missing on purpose. In the last year of his life, John Watson, behaviorism's founder (Chapter 10), burned his remaining notes, correspondence, and rough drafts of manuscripts. According to Watson's biographer, when “his secretary protested the loss to posterity and to history,

⁴More than half, actually. After about 1910, Titchener often made and kept carbon copies of his letters.

Watson only replied: ‘When you’re dead, you’re all dead’” (Buckley, 1989, p. 182). Similarly, on two separate occasions Sigmund Freud destroyed his papers, partly to make it difficult for others to trace the sources of his ideas (Chapter 12 details one of these episodes).

In addition to missing data, some information might be restricted by the donor and inaccessible to the historian. Even someone with the status of E. G. Boring could be denied. Writing to John Popplestone of AHAP, Boring indicated that even as a known historian and a faculty member at Harvard, he had been denied access to some papers at the Harvard archives. In his words:

I trust the general atmosphere of the Archivists at Harvard. This is because I have been denied access to some things that are none of my business, graciously denied it because I am a Harvard professor. But, nevertheless, shut off from certain files of William James. (Popplestone, 1975, p. 21)

Beyond dealing with missing or incomplete information, the historian must make judgments about the adequacy of the available data. We know that eyewitness descriptions of everyday events can be wrong, that two witness accounts can differ substantially. If eyewitness unreliability can be demonstrated easily in modern psychology laboratories, then it is safe to say that the same lack of reliability exists for eyewitness accounts of historical events. A good example of this was experienced by Boring. While preparing a history of Titchener’s Experimentalists (Chapter 7), Boring wrote to colleagues who had been to the meetings, asking for firsthand descriptions. There were numerous discrepancies among the letters, including one amusing example from a colleague who recounted to Boring in detail a dinner conversation with Harvard’s Hugo Münsterberg at the 1917 Experimentalists meeting at Harvard. Boring wrote back gently reminding his friend that Münsterberg had died the year before (Goodwin, 2005).

Information found in someone’s correspondence or diary can also be of questionable value. Was the letter writer providing insight into the personality of a colleague or merely passing on unsubstantiated gossip? When the diarist described the meeting as meaningless and a waste of time, would others at the same meeting have drawn the same conclusion? Can letters and diaries be slanted by the writer’s knowledge that historians might someday read his or her words? To what extent do the contents of letters and diaries reflect the personal prejudices of the writer? I think you can see the difficulty here.

Those who create the data that eventually occupy archives are human and therefore susceptible to the subtleties of human belief, preconception, and bias. Those who explore the archives and write the history are also human and subject to the same frailties. By virtue of their training, historians are more disciplined than laypeople; nonetheless, when making decisions about what information to select for historical analyses and narratives, the historian is not a machine. Boring expressed the problem eloquently in the preface to his 1942 book on the history of research in sensation and perception:

Indeed, so much a matter of selection is the preparation of an historical text, that I am sobered by the responsibility. The [history] text of 1929 has existed long enough for me to see how *the mood that determined the choice of an afternoon’s exposition can fix the “truth” of a certain matter upon graduate students for years to come*. With industry and patience one may avoid the falsification of facts, but those virtues are not enough to make one wise in choosing what to ignore. For that one also needs the wisdom and the integrity of objectivity, and who knows for sure whether he commands such? (Boring, 1942, p. viii; emphasis added)

As you will learn in a few paragraphs, this passage from Boring is ironic. One of the themes of modern historiography within psychology is that Boring’s writings reflect a strong bias for a specific brand of psychology. It also appears that he was motivated in part by the political and institutional context of his time.

Interpretation Problems Winston Churchill is alleged to have said that history would be kind to him because he was going to be the person writing it. Historians normally try to be objective though, while realizing that all historical narrative will necessarily reflect something about the writer. Decisions about selection and about writing history both involve interpreting information, and those interpretations are influenced by the individual characteristics of the historian and by the features of the historical context in which the historian is writing. That is, historians will be influenced by their preconceptions, by the amount of knowledge they already have, as well as by the theories they hold about the nature of history (e.g., personalistic versus naturalistic emphases). In addition, even without necessarily being aware of it, historians can be influenced by the historical context in which their histories are being written. For example, you will discover in Chapter 4 that the work of Wilhelm Wundt was reevaluated in the 1970s (e.g., Blumenthal, 1975), and many of his ideas have been found to be like those of modern cognitive psychologists. This similarity would not have been noticed before the advent of modern cognitive psychology, however, and Blumenthal was writing at the height of the so-called cognitive revolution in psychology. Thus, historical characters are not the only ones influenced by the historical context in which they live; historians are affected as well.

The famous 1929 history written by Boring is a case in point. You know from this chapter's Close-Up that Boring was a devoted student of E. B. Titchener and, in the 1920s, he was a vigorous advocate for the development of a separate psychology department at Harvard that would emphasize "pure" laboratory research rather than applied psychology. Both of those facts played a role in the way he wrote his 1929 history text. First, his training as an experimental psychologist in Titchener's laboratory at Cornell surely affected his overall conception of psychology. More specifically, it influenced what Boring thought about Wundt, in whose laboratory Titchener had earned a PhD in 1892. In general, Boring believed that Titchener's brand of experimental psychology, called structuralism, was virtually identical to Wundt's psychology, and that Titchener had merely imported it to America. In fact, Wundt's system was quite different from Titchener's system. Because of Titchener's influence on Boring, combined with the fact that Titchener translated much of Wundt's work and that Boring was not fully knowledgeable about some of Wundt's nonexperimental writings, the distinctions between Titchener and Wundt were lost. Thus, when writing his history, Boring's description of Wundt was filtered through Titchener's version and was consequently flawed. Because most psychologists trained in the period 1950 to 1980 learned their history by reading Boring's monumental *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929; 1950), the mythological identification of Wundt's and Titchener's systems became conventional wisdom.

A second distortion in Boring's history relates to his emphasis on basic experimental psychology to the exclusion of applied psychology. As O'Donnell (1979) has shown, Boring was disturbed by the growing status of applied psychology in the period after World War I, especially mental testing. Believing basic laboratory research to be in jeopardy, he took several steps to restore its standing. One was writing the first edition of his history in 1929, which largely ignored the work of a substantial number of psychologists who were busily applying psychological principles to education, mental health, and the workplace. For instance, Boring (1929) began his brief section on mental testing by writing that "the history of mental tests can conveniently be excluded from the history of experimental psychology" (p. 545). The reader of his 1929 history could be excused for believing that applied psychology barely existed. In fact, as you will learn in Chapter 8, applications occupied center stage in American psychology in the 1920s and 30s.

A common misconception of history goes like this: The events occurred in the past; now that they have been lined up chronologically and described in a historical narrative, that's the end of it. As the E. G. Boring case shows, however, historical analyses are in continual need of revision in the light of

new information and new ways of examining old information. In recent years, for instance, scholars (e.g., Leahey, 1981) have taken a fresh look at the relationship between Wundt's and Titchener's ideas and the role of application in the development of psychology in America. As a result, newer histories describe the Wundt–Titchener differences more accurately and document the pervasive influence of applied psychology.

Comparing different editions of a history text can illustrate this reexamination process. For example, one popular history text, clearly influenced by Boring in its early editions, also showed the impact of the recent scholarship on Wundt in its later editions. In the book's third edition (Schultz, 1981), Wundt is described in a chapter that has *structuralism* in its title. The following chapter, on Titchener, refers to Wundtian psychology being “transplanted” to America by Titchener and includes this sentence: “A knowledge of Wundt's psychology provides a reasonably accurate picture of Titchener's system” (p. 87). Later, in the book's fourth edition, *structuralism* no longer appears in the title of the Wundt chapter, there is an explicit description of the problems with Boring's historical account, and the Titchener chapter opens by saying that the systems of Wundt and Titchener were “radically different” and that Titchener “altered Wundt's system dramatically while claiming to be a loyal follower” (Schultz & Schultz, 1987, p. 85).

The important lesson for the reader of history is to be alert to the dangers of assuming that if something is printed in black and white, it somehow must be true. Rather, it is important to read histories, including this one, with a healthy dose of skeptical awareness that other information might have been selected for inclusion in the narrative and that other ways of interpreting the historical record exist. As Bailyn (Lathem, 1994) put it, “there is no end to the writing of history—nor should there be, because new questions come up and new techniques develop, new data are discovered, and succeeding generations will and should tell the story differently” (p. 94). One example of the use of a “new technique” in historiography is the development of what has been called “digital history.”

Digital History

In recent years, new historiographic strategies have evolved that rely on the computer's ability to process large amounts of information very quickly, and these methods have collectively been referred to as digital history (Green, 2016). Consider the situation in psychology at the start of the 20th century. Traditionally, historians of psychology have focused on those considered to be the major players (e.g., William James of Harvard, whose life and work are described in Chapter 6) and those publications that have had an unquestioned impact on the developing field (e.g., James's famous two-volume *Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890). Yet by 1900 there were well over 100 other psychologists diligently working in this new field of science, at least three dozen laboratories of experimental psychology had been established (Benjamin, 2000a), and the work of these labs was being described in several different journals (e.g., *American Journal of Psychology*, *Psychological Review*). The traditional historian would find it virtually impossible to read everything published during this period, make informed judgments about the relevance of each article, and synthesize the information into a coherent historical analysis. Enter the computer, which can take the content of every research article published in, say, a five-year period, and the use of a variety of artificial intelligence algorithms to perform content analyses of the language used in these articles. The result is a set of connections among psychologists and laboratories that would suggest common research and theoretical interests among those working in different locations. The procedural details of the analyses done on these articles need not concern us, but digital history has already yielded interesting results. For instance, digital analyses of the content of

Psychological Review have shown how the journal evolved from 1894 to 1923 from being an outlet for specific research topics (e.g., color vision was a common topic) to a journal more generally concerned with theoretical issues, which eventually became its focus (Green, Feinerer, & Burman, 2015a, 2015b).

It is important to note that even those most enthusiastic about applying digital methods do not see the strategy as an alternative to or replacement for traditional historiography. Rather, advocates see digital methods as an important complementary method, capable of raising questions that can be the impetus for research along more traditional lines. Thus, the results of digital analysis “often result not in ‘answers’ to historical questions but, rather, in the generation of new questions that . . . require additional conventional historical research to answer” (Green, 2018, pp. 377–378). Furthermore, questions raised by traditional historical analysis can lead to hypotheses that can be tested digitally (e.g., in the 1920s and 1930s, just how central was behaviorism in the research activities of most psychologists?).

Approaching Historical Truth

From the earlier discussion of the problem of interpreting historical data, you might be tempted to accept a version of historical relativism in which five historians make five different claims for truth and there is no reasonable way to decide among them. A degree of relativism among historians is an outgrowth of a reaction against traditional history, which held that the job of the historian is to search out the facts of “what really happened” and place them into a narrative with enough style to attract readers. The outcome was a tendency to write history from the standpoint of what happened to those in positions of power and influence, while ignoring the rich variety of alternative perspectives. Thus, a traditional history of the American West, taught to American schoolchildren and grounded in a belief in Manifest Destiny, glorified the rugged pioneer who persevered in the face of daunting obstacles, including wild men who liked to shoot arrows. It is clear, though, that the very same history could be written from the standpoint of the Native American who valiantly defended the homeland against invasion by wild men who liked to shoot guns.

The critique of the narrowness and arbitrariness of traditional history has had the meritorious effect of enriching our knowledge of history. Hence, we have come to recognize that history extends beyond the lives, deeds, and misdeeds of white males; it must be more inclusive. On the other hand, an unfortunate consequence of this broadening has been a relativism that, taken to extreme, can lead to absurd claims like the one made occasionally that the Jewish Holocaust in World War II never really happened but was merely “constructed” and exaggerated out of a few isolated events (said to have explanations other than genocide) by historians sympathetic to the Jewish movement who wished to encourage the creation of the nation of Israel following the war (Israel was created in 1948, 3 years after the close of World War II). Those arguing for the “myth” of the Holocaust claim that their version is as valid as any other. Yet this example makes it clear that some versions of history are clearly better (i.e., closer to truth) than others. How does one decide?

To reach the truth through historical analysis requires an objectivity that recognizes the limits of one historian’s views but also has faith in the notion that meaningful historical narrative and analysis can emerge from the combined efforts of many scholars, according to historians Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob. In *Telling the Truth About History* (1994), they argue for a historiography in which truth about history emerges from a Darwinian-like struggle among competing ideas held by historians, that “knowledge-seeking involves a lively, contentious struggle among diverse groups of truth-seekers” (p. 254). Some measure of truth “evolves” from this struggle. Thus, just as individual variation within

a species provides the basis for natural selection, so do different versions of historical episodes exist, subject to competing critical analyses that determine which version adapts best to the scholarly environment. This does not mean that the goal is a single version of truth that is then “settled” and immune to change. Rather, historical truth continues to evolve as new information is discovered and brought to light and as old information is subjected to new interpretations. Also, evolving historical truth includes a variety of perspectives. Multiple eyewitnesses to an event might give different versions of it, but all might agree that the event occurred. From their combined information, a complex truth might emerge that would improve on a single description from one perspective. If one historian of the Civil War period “sees an event from a slave’s point of view, that rendering does not obliterate the perspective of the slaveholder; it only complicates the task of interpretation” (Appleby et al., 1994, p. 256).

Historical thinking bears many similarities to the kind of scientific thinking you have encountered in your other psychology classes. Although psychological scientists create their data through direct empirical studies, while psychologist–historians discover and uncover data that already exists in some form (and perhaps buried in an archive somewhere), scientists and historians generally *think* the same way about the evidence they accumulate. For example, they both hope to find evidence that can effectively rule out certain alternative explanations of the phenomenon under study, while at the same time looking for evidence supporting their hypotheses about the phenomenon. And just as theories in science are temporary working truths that guide future research, their futures depending on the open and honest inquiry of scientists, so may historical truths be considered tentative yet valuable guides for further research by intellectually honest historians with open access to historical materials. And just as some research outcomes and theories in science are more durable than others (e.g., Darwinian evolution), so are some historical truths (e.g., the Holocaust): “All knowledge can be provisional, in theory, without eliminating the possibility of some truths prevailing for centuries, perhaps forever” (Appleby et al., 1994, p. 284).

Presumably, based on the hard work of many historians of psychology over the years, some degree of truth about the discipline’s history has emerged and I will try my best to describe it to you in this book. Many disagreements among historians of psychology exist, but Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob would consider that to be a good thing, the basis for future historical truths to develop during psychology’s future. Placing the *A* in the title of this book, rather than a *The*, recognizes the fact that other histories exist now and more will exist in the future. Nonetheless, I believe that what you are about to read contains some truth about the discipline you have chosen to study. To the extent that some of the truth might be tentative, I hope it will motivate you to continue learning about psychology’s history long after you have finished with this version of it.

SUMMARY

Why Take This Course?

- Interest in the history of psychology has grown steadily since the mid-1960s, as reflected in the creation of professional organizations for historians of psychology, journals, archival collections, and graduate programs.
- Knowing history might occasionally help us to avoid mistakes of the past and to predict the future, but its most

important value is that it helps us understand the present. Knowing history puts current events into a better perspective; without knowing some history, we cannot understand the world in which we live.

- Knowing history can immunize us against the belief that our current time has insurmountable problems, compared to the “good old days.” Every age has its own set of problems. Knowing history also reduces the tendency to

think that modern-day accomplishments represent a culmination of the “progress” we have made from the inferior accomplishments of the past.

- Because psychology is a relatively young science, much of its history is recent and of relevance for understanding psychological concepts and theories. Also, many issues of concern to early psychologists (e.g., nature–nurture) are still important.
- The history of psychology course can provide a synthesizing experience, tying together the loose threads that comprise the diverse specialties of modern psychology.
- Knowing about historical examples of supposed breakthroughs in psychological research or practice, or new theories that were shown to be pseudoscientific, the student of history can evaluate modern claims more critically.
- Because the history of psychology course informs the student about people behaving within their historical context, the course provides further understanding of human behavior.

Key Issues in Psychology's History

- The traditional approach to the history of psychology has been presentist, internal, and personalistic, and it tends to create what are called origin myths. Recently, historians have tended to be more historicist, external, and naturalistic.
- The presentist evaluates the past in terms of present knowledge and values, often passing judgment unfairly. The historicist tries to avoid imposing modern values on the past and tries to understand the past from the standpoint of the knowledge and values existing in the past.
- An internal history of psychology is a history of the ideas, research, and theories that have existed within the discipline of psychology. An external history of psychology emphasizes the historical context—institutional, economic, social, and political—and how this context influenced the history.
- A personalistic approach to history emphasizes the major historical characters and argues that history moves through the action of heroic individuals. When historical periods are labeled with reference to people, those labels are

called eponyms (e.g., Darwinian biology). A naturalistic approach emphasizes the *zeitgeist*, the mood or spirit of the times, as the prime moving force in history. The existence of multiples, and of people with ideas said to be “ahead of their times,” is consistent with a naturalistic view.

Historiography: Doing and Writing History

- Historiography refers to the process of doing research in history and writing historical narratives.
- Historians rely on both primary and secondary sources of information. A secondary source is a document that has been published. Primary source materials constitute the raw data for historians and include documents created at or near the time of the historical event in question (e.g., diaries, correspondence).
- Historical research often takes place in archives, which hold primary source information such as diaries, notes, original manuscripts, and correspondence, as well as secondary source information. The major archive for historians of psychology is the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron.
- Archival collections can be extensive, but they can also be incomplete and have important information missing for various reasons. The information that is available is subject to numerous sources of error (e.g., the biases of the diary writer; the vagaries of eyewitness memory).
- Historians are faced with two major problems: selection of information for their historical narratives and interpretation of the information at hand. These decisions can reflect bias on the part of the historian, and they can reflect the historical context within which the historian is writing.
- Digital history involves using computers to process large amounts of information (e.g., journal content), looking for patterns that raise questions answerable by more traditional historiographic methods.
- Most historians believe that some degree of truth can be reached through an evolutionary process of the open exchange of information and by examining historical events through a variety of perspectives.