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1 Introduction to the social psychology of everyday life

Core questions to consider while reading this chapter

- What would it mean for you to get on the bus and become a social psychologist?
- What is action research?
- Why is social transformation important to social psychologists?
- What contributions have social psychologists made to society?
- What does 'praxis' mean, and how does it relate to 'reflexivity'?
- What do we mean by 'social transformation'?



Chapter scenario: Getting on the bus by James Ritchie, March 2008

It is 1960 and the South of the United States is seething with the consequences of racial desegregation. Following the stand by Rosa Parks in Alabama to refuse to sit in the segregated back of a rural bus, challenges were arising wherever racial discrimination was practised. The rhetoric of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X was shaking the South and school desegregation was not far ahead. The challenges in the courts were out on the streets and change was inevitable and hard.

I was at Harvard at the time. Why Harvard? Why not! I was beginning a career in social and cultural psychology. Harvard was loaded with repute and with names, and I wanted to meet the real people whose books I had read. Social psychology was on its great modern wave. Gordon Allport was there. His *The Nature of Prejudice* had joined Theodor Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, Kurt Lewin's *Resolving Social Conflicts* and many others, had shaken the bounded limits of orthodox psychology and captured the excitement of the times. Notably, these were voices calling for a psychology that spoke to the issues of the day, calling for political, social and indeed personal commitment.

How could psychologists possibly ignore this? Well, many, even at Harvard, did, but not so Allport's students. They issued the challenge and for several weeks ran training seminars in nonviolent action and organized buses to drive down over weekends to Selma and other places in the Deep South, where they staged sit-ins in segregated bars. They knew that they would be confronted by angry citizens, moved on by the police, subjected to hostility and terror, but they went. The risk of getting your head bashed in was real.

This was the psychology of action that Kurt Lewin had called for in his book twelve years before. The alternative campus excitements of dropping acid with Timothy Leary at Palfrey House or of teaching rats to press bars or pigeons to peck with Skinner at Memorial Hall could not compete with a psychology of the real. Even the clinicians were entering the arena of social understandings because the real client, beyond the individual, was society, and mental health could never be achieved unless social change supported personal change. Social issues moved to the centre of the discipline, where they remain.

We begin with this firsthand account because it raises a number of issues central to this book and the approach to social psychology that we adopt. It highlights how social psychology has been around for some time as an applied area of the human sciences that attempts to meet the needs of people in society. James Ritchie describes a situation in which a group of psychologists are responding to events in the world, and acting in an overtly political manner to help shape the direction of a society. Ritchie was present when psychology rediscovered its conscience.

The scenario also highlights how exciting the world can be. Social psychology can also be exciting, particularly when we involve ourselves in events in the world. Social psychologists have a long history of getting involved in social issues. Through this scenario we can see how social psychology and those contributing to its development can be influenced by, and influence, circumstance. Events in our lives and our experiences permeate our work. Examples of such links

are explored in Chapter 2, such as Kurt Lewin fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany and subsequently advocating the need for psychological work to resolve social conflicts (Farr, 1991). For the authors of this book, this is reflected in Linda's and Neil's work on indigenous land rights; Chris's work with immigrant groups; Cate's responses to the needs of young people who self-harm; and Darrin's and Otilie's efforts to improve the lives of homeless people.

Review exercise

Put yourselves now in the place of those students in 1960 featured in the chapter scenario.

- Would you be on the bus or off the bus?
- How would you decide?

Chapter overview

This chapter provides an introduction to the orientation of this book, the importance of research that addresses everyday realities, and the subsequent chapters. The first section briefly introduces our stance regarding the socially and culturally located nature of social psychology and how this informs the book. The second section explores the importance of an action research and social transformation orientation to the social psychology of everyday life. The final section provides an overview of the book. In summary, this chapter emphasizes:

- The social and cultural embeddedness of social psychology and this book
- The centrality of action research and social transformation in social psychology
- The contributions of each chapter to a psychology of everyday life

A socially and culturally embedded orientation to social psychology

This book encourages readers to think of social psychology as a historically and culturally embedded, relevant and socially responsive discipline. We would like you to consider getting on the bus and engaging in the broader project of social justice that is central to the discipline.

Social psychology is maturing. The discipline is increasingly reaching beyond notions of psychology as science and deeper into the social sciences and humanities. Many social psychologists find themselves working unashamedly as value-oriented and engaged individuals pursuing socially just outcomes through research and

practice. James Ritchie certainly got on the bus and contributed four decades of work that improved the lives of many Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand (Ritchie, 1992). Similarly, Gordon Allport (1968, 1985) extended his work on prejudice as a result of his experiences, to develop a social psychology that was relevant to bettering people's lives. Such work requires an acknowledgement of the social influences on human life, both academic and private. No approach to social psychology is value-free, and all approaches reflect aspects of the social, historical and political climate in which they are developed (Tajfel, 1981). This is why multiple perspectives are valuable.

Social psychology is replete with references to the importance of situations and contexts for understanding human thought, actions and relationships (Montero, 2007; Parker, 2005). Discussions of seminal experimental studies into obedience to authority (Milgram, 1965), which you were probably introduced to in introductory psychology courses, often invoke the events of Nazi Germany. These studies attempted to explain why, given specific circumstances, citizens might participate in the systematic extermination of their neighbours. Such studies, which respond to historical events in society, are crucial for the development of a social psychology that is relevant and can contribute to promoting peaceful relations. Needless to say, it was impossible for researchers actually to conduct such a study on local populations, so a series of experimental simulations were appropriate. Yet the reduction of complex social processes to simulations comes at a cost, and it has not gone without criticism. As noted in Chapter 2, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the dominance of experimental methods and reduced engagements with actual events as they occurred in society led to some disciplinary soul searching. Many social psychologists began to reflect openly on the orientation and limitations of the discipline (Gergen, 1973; Parker, 1989). Questions included, What can we know? How do we collect information? What should we do with the knowledge generated through research?

In this book we apply insights both from a social psychology modelled on the physical sciences and from social psychologies that draw more from the social sciences and humanities. This constitutes an attempt to acknowledge the limitations of the discipline while informing our trips on the bus and our efforts to winding roads of research and practice.

All social psychologists need to consider the context of their own interests and work (Montero, 2007; Parker, 2005). However, it seems that many social psychologists are somewhat reticent about their investments in, and motivations for, research. Many scholars feel unable to be open about the ways in which their own backgrounds and experiences influence the focus and direction of their work. This is because such disclosures might be seen as a kind of bias that

undermines the 'objectivity' of the work. Other psychologists are less concerned about accusations of bias. As the Liberation Psychologist Martín-Baró (1994) notes:

There is an assumption that taking a stand represents an abdication of scientific objectivity, but this assumption confuses bias with objectivity. The fact that something is biased does not necessarily mean it is subjective; bias can be the consequence of interests, more or less conscious, but it can also be the result of ethical choice. (p. 29)

Many social psychologists still take their direction from physical scientists and seek objectivity, or detachment from the subject matter being studied, in an attempt to remove bias from the research process. This is reflected in the widespread use of experimental methods in psychology. What is useful in this orientation is the emphasis on careful planning and the systematic conduct of research. Science-inspired work is part of the picture that is social psychology and provides useful insights into the human condition. However, we need to supplement such work and do more. For some time now social psychologists have embraced the relationship between their personal histories, research interests and efforts to work with people to ensure that social psychology remains relevant to the complexities of social life.

In this book we do not assume that forgoing claims to objectivity and science will necessarily result in biased and subjective research. The pragmatic stance adopted in this book, and which is advocated by figures such as Martín-Baró, is informed by a return to the early work of William James, Gustave Le Bon, and scholars in the late eighteenth century (Billig, 2008; Farr, 1991, 1996). This work has been extended over the years by figures such as James Dewey, Marie Jahoda and Gordon Allport. As we will show in Chapter 2, these social psychologists engaged directly with people and communities in their attempts to make the world a better place, and it is from such work that we take our lead in this book.

Central to this book is the idea that social psychology has much to offer in developing an understanding of everyday life and the challenges of living in increasingly diverse societies. We seek rapprochement in the interests of a deeper understanding of social psychology in everyday settings. When discussing nothing less than the nature of people as social beings we must expect controversy. Some sectors of the discipline have been accused of being so focused on the technicalities of experimental control that they are no longer engaged with the issues of our times. They might respond, as noted above, with accusations of bias and political involvement. It is not our intention to overly simplify the complex philosophical debates regarding the nature of reality and knowledge produced in research (Chapter 4), which lie at the heart of the so-called crisis in social psychology (Chapter 2) (Gergen, 1973; Lubek & Apfelbaum, 2000; Parker, 1989). Our aim is

to be pragmatic and to explore insights from a range of traditions and sources and how these can help us understand and improve social life, particularly for the economically and socially marginalized citizens in our midst. The decades of work by social psychologists committed to working with particular social problems in context is our focus, rather than the robust defence of whatever approach is preferred during any given historical period. A complex world deserves and demands complex understandings and solutions. No one approach or orientation to social psychology holds the key to all of these. Consider yourselves invited to participate in a critical conversation about a discipline that has contributed much and has even more to offer the world of understanding and meaning in our lives.

We will explore what social psychology can tell us about the interactions and social situations people experience as they develop, establish social relations and participate in social life. Of course, human relations are forged somewhere, and thus we also need to explore wider historical, institutional, cultural and sociopolitical contexts shaping everyday life (Highmore, 2000a, 2000b; Montero, 2007; Parker, 2005). We cover the core topics educational institutions have come to expect in a social psychology textbook. These include the self and identity, socialization, group dynamics, social cognition and public understanding, conflict resolution, interpersonal influences, media and resilience. These concepts can shed light (or at least cast an eerie glow) on human experience and action. Our engagements with these topics are informed by multiple perspectives, including experimental studies and more critical and qualitative work. What makes the book different is that we have integrated notions of culture, indigeneity and other dimensions of *difference* throughout the chapters, rather than treating these simply as isolated topics. This is because these notions are central to many people's lived experiences. We also consider the potential of a social psychological approach for addressing problems such as intergroup conflict and discrimination and which seeks to improve the lives of people. This reflects the ethical and political commitment that we share with other social psychologists to contribute towards building more equitable, inclusive, just and psychologically healthy societies.

Practicalities in combining theory, research and action

Everyday life is a complex, frequently rewarding and often problematic place. It contains conflict, dislocation and contradiction, as well as support, love and belonging. Consequently, the research process

through which social psychologists attempt to understand, document and improve the world is also complex and at times problematic. Psychology has a long history of informing our engagements with the world, and the peoples who inhabit it, through research. Research and broader engagements have enabled us to make significant contributions to the world (Apfelbaum, 2000; Zimbardo, 2004). These have not always been as positive for the groups we were working with as many of us might have hoped. However, psychologists have worked to improve group decision-making processes, challenge discrimination and promote health. In providing a synthesis of insights from these diverse efforts, this book emphasizes the relationship between theory, research and action. It is important to note that not all studies have all three of these components. Some research is purely inquisitive in nature and not linked to immediate courses of action. As a discipline, social psychology exhibits all three elements through a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the findings of which have been applied in a range of settings. In this section, we briefly draw on literature that covers praxis, action research and social transformation to outline the practicalities of doing theoretically informed research that contributes to society.

We propose that an ideal within social psychology is the use of research both to address social issues and to generate broader theoretical understandings of pertinent socioeconomic processes shaping such issues. This approach is often referred to as ‘action research’ (Lewin, 1946/1948) and involves a cyclical process of theorizing, planning, conducting, evaluating and revising a research project in dialogue with a range of stakeholders from the beginning to the end of a project (Figure 1.1).

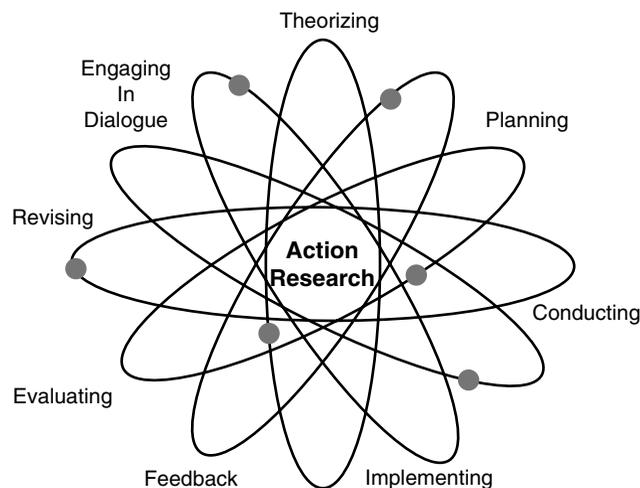


Figure 1.1. The action research process

Figure 1.1 reflects a process of doing research *with* rather than *on* people (Jovchelovitch, 2007), which is expanded in Chapter 4. Here stakeholders do not simply implement the results. They participate in the direction and planning of the project and the production of practical applications. Evaluation strategies enhance our ability to assess and steer the project through dialogue with end-user project partners who have a say in the direction of the research and its implementation. This action research orientation provides for adaptability and enables us to ensure the relevance of research findings to organizations that are also evolving to meet the needs of the people concerned. This orientation allows social psychologists to enact commitments to self-determination (Chapter 5), community partnerships (Chapter 6), social inclusion (Chapter 7) and social justice (Chapter 9). It allows us to transcend artificial and often unhelpful barriers between those who conduct studies and those who are studied (Chapters 4 and 10).

For us, social transformation spans large-scale change in the very societal structures that shape our lives, involving governments and economics and more micro-level processes in the home and workplace. Social transformation is associated with events such as the dismantling of oppressive systems like Apartheid in South Africa or the communist system in Eastern Europe. It is also about ensuring equity, safety and fairness in everyday life settings such as schools, workplaces and homes. Clearly, as we will show in Chapter 3, these levels of social transformation are interwoven.

Central to social transformation is an action orientation in research that draws on notions of praxis and reflexivity regardless of whether one is employing experimental or ethnographic methods. After all, social psychology is about developing understandings of and improving social life (see Chapters 2 and 3). To be effective, we need to be aware of how and why we go about producing such work in specific ways and what other options might be available to us (Box 1.1).

One central concern for many social psychologists is the transformation of oppressive social realities (Martín-Baró, 1994). The impetus for research and action is often derived from the everyday life problems confronting people. Theoretical concerns are not the only motivations for many social psychologists. This often means that methodological choices are pragmatic and eclectic, combining what have become conventional techniques (e.g. surveys, experiments) and re-emerging techniques (testimony, performance). For example, Sapene-Chapellín (2009) used a research design that Montero (2006) referred to as *participatory experimental intervention* to challenge destructive reactions that people often develop in the context of political polarization. Sapene-Chapellín was concerned with political polarization employed by an authoritarian political regime that uses

BOX 1.1 Useful and interconnected concepts

In the nineteenth century, the philosopher Karl Marx stated, “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it”. The integration of theory and research in concrete actions to promote *social transformation* is often referred to as *praxis*. Praxis is a synthesis of theory and practice so that each has a function in informing the other. Paulo Freire (1970/1993) proposed that theory, research and action should be mutually informing. In this context, *reflexivity* is about self-awareness in terms of how one’s theory, research and actions are affecting others. Reflexivity is about making one’s assumptions and motives and the implications of interventions transparent to those involved. Reflexivity is central to a cyclical process of developing a theory, engaging with events or what is at stake in everyday life, refining the theory and engaging in new applications. Reflexivity requires dialogue with stakeholders and feedback. The concept is used to invoke the multidirectional relationship between theorizing, conducting research, reporting findings, gaining feedback and modifying one’s theoretical assumptions. It allows psychologists to monitor the impact of the application of theory and the conduct of research, and to modify our theories and research strategies in accordance with the lessons learned in practice. This is where action research comes in as a mode of social transformation. Students *getting on the bus* in the scenario at the beginning of this chapter were engaged in social transformation. Along with their academic mentors, they went on to engage in action research as a means of putting the theories they developed out of their experiences into practice (*praxis*) and revising these. Action research works best where there is a long-term commitment to a relationship between psychologists and the groups being assisted. It is about engaging in a process of dialogue that can benefit both the investigators and other partners in the research. Action research is an attempt to restore the relationship between researchers and researched, and to avoid extractive data-gathering that furthers researchers’ careers and interests but does little for those who were the subject of the research. Because of this inclusive orientation it can take years to build up the necessary trust and relationships for such research.

strategies geared towards social division, creating two poles of political opposition – those who support the government and the opposition. This researcher was particularly interested in addressing the emotional reactions among children (e.g. fear, aggression, anxiety) that resulted from political polarization. Such emotions tend to concentrate attention in one direction, which reduces people’s appreciation of social complexities at play. One of the interventions involved designing a quasi-experimental situation that reflected political polarization, typically in a classroom situation. This was combined with a reflection–action–reflection process that allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and life situation. This type of design is not aimed at *controlling* what participants do; instead, it is aimed at creating conditions in which the process of problematization that is central to consciousness-raising is enabled. Thus, experimental designs can be part of our repertoire for engaging in transformative processes, as in this case quasi-experimental methods were used

alongside qualitative techniques to address the effects of particular repressive social realities.

Given the orientation of much social psychology to social transition, it is not surprising that this book emphasizes everyday life. It is crucial that psychologists attend to the daily practices of, and realities experienced by, those we are working with if we want to foster social transformation. Such transformation is unlikely to occur from the top down. We need two-way communication, and action research facilitates a dialogue (see Chapters 4 and 5). This is why social psychologists increasingly do research *with* rather than *on* people (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Paulo Freire (1970/1993) noted that daily practices are sites for the reproduction of social injustices, and therefore need to be considered in developing collective responses to injustice. He engaged in a process of consciousness-raising and dialogue with oppressed groups as a basis for building trust and a commitment to working collaboratively towards social transformation through collective action and ongoing reflection. His work on critical consciousness-raising and community-based action research approaches to social transformation focused on fostering the intelligence, autonomy, creativity, freedom and choices available to illiterate peasants living under repressive regimes in South America. Freire developed an approach that shifted power relations in education from a sermon-type approach to a conversational approach involving the mutual exploration of topics. This egalitarian orientation conceives insights and knowledge as being the products of joint introspection and exploration fostered through dialogue between researchers and participants. This reflects a belief in people's insights into their own experiences, and in their ability to grow and act autonomously. Rather than research always being an abstract process driven by experts, simple strategies such as drawing exercises can be used to open dialogue about social psychological phenomena and possible solutions. The key concern is to find ways to allow people to speak about their issues more holistically and appropriately. Such dialogue is seen by psychologists as a basis for building awareness, reflection and dialogue with those in positions of power who can facilitate the provision of resources for change that will benefit less powerful people (Carlson, Engebretson & Chamberlain, 2006; Montenegro, 2002; Montero, 2007). Freire emphasized that social change requires a combination of insights from actual experiences and daily life along with more abstract academic understandings of the social processes shaping such lives. This work has a long tradition in humanistic psychology (see Chapter 10), where the arts are used as a medium for encouraging dialogue, reflection and conflict resolution (Estrella & Forinash, 2007).

In brief, the orientation towards social psychology foregrounded in this book emphasizes the collective level in relation to issues of social cohesion, inclusion, support and action. Our approach is based on the proposition that all human beings and communities have dignity and the right to equitable chances in life. Psychologists can work in a dignified manner to ensure that the dignity of others is respected and that barriers to people living a dignified existence are removed.

Overview of the book

This book is written primarily for undergraduate students new to social psychology who are attending universities in developed nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. In providing a text on social psychology and everyday life for students from these contexts we have assumed certain things. First, students have access to spaces such as shopping malls, schools and pubs and the virtual spaces offered by media technologies. Second, students are familiar with events that occur in such settings of daily life. Third, students want to engage in a social psychology that is relevant to the world in which they live.

Correspondingly, the book is structured somewhat differently than many social psychology textbooks. Rather than list topics on social cognition, crowds and interpersonal relations we have focused on descriptions of situations from everyday life that can be built upon in a manner that demonstrates the applicability of research findings and interventions from social psychology.

The general structure of each chapter comprises a scenario of an everyday situation, which is unpacked through the chapter by drawing on insights from social psychology. In unpacking the scenario we consider:

- Why such situations occur
- Why it is important to study them
- What we know about such situations
- What it is like for the people involved and what the implications are for their lives
- The strengths and weaknesses of the groups involved
- What can be done to address problems and build upon opportunities

We have chosen this approach in order to bring social psychology to life. We also acknowledge that each reader brings a personal interpretive frame to the enterprise of understanding social life that is based on his or her unique experiences. In our experience as lecturers, the extent to which this frame accords with the insights from

research and practice in social psychology will determine the engagement with the material. So we invite you to join a conversation about what is going on in the world. We invite you to bring your experiences to the scenarios we develop and to explore them systematically through the lenses offered by social psychology.

Before reviewing the content of each chapter, we offer a general scenario regarding the plight of an Aboriginal family in Australia. This scenario is presented in order to show how many, but not all, such families can face a raft of issues and experiences, and with these a range of both positive and negative social psychological phenomena. This scenario also provides a way for us to demonstrate the interrelated nature of the topics social psychologists investigate and to offer a sneak preview of the way the content of this book and the ideas behind it are interlinked.

Everyday reality for an Aboriginal family in Australia

Colin and Maria have four children and live in the far north of Western Australia. They run an extremely successful cultural tourism company. For more than a decade they have offered camping tours through the traditional country of their ancestors. They have a longstanding partnership with an Australian university and have conducted cultural immersion camps with more than 1,000 American study-abroad students. They also conduct spirituality tours and have a regular gig taking geologists into the wilderness in far northern Australia to study the beautiful and unique mountain ranges of the region. Colin and Maria's children are all successful in their own right. Colleen works in the local diamond mine as a manager of travel services, Ronald also works at the mine as a process manager, Beck works for a film company and Mark works with Colin and Maria as a travel guide.

Recently, Colin and Maria moved back to Colin's family's traditional lands, where they own a large block just outside the port town of Wyndham with several buildings and a workshop for the maintenance and repair of the company vehicles. Maria is the co-chair of an Aboriginal trust organization that manages the distribution of funds provided under a royalty agreement with the local diamond mine.

Colin was born in Oombulgurri. Oombulgurri is a small remote Aboriginal community about one hour by boat, twenty minutes by light aircraft, or fourteen hours (and two flat tyres and perhaps a broken axle) by four-wheel drive from Wyndham. Colin was born in Oombulgurri because his mother was stolen from her family by the child welfare authorities early last century and taken to the Forrest River Mission (which was renamed Oombulgurri) when she was just a child. She was one of thousands of children removed from their families and placed in missions as part of the Australian government policy of forced removal of indigenous children from their families that began in the 1920s and continued through to the late 1960s. Most of these children never saw their families again and were subjected to harsh, often inhumane, lives of servitude in pursuit of 'civilizing' them into white society. Colin's mother was one of the very few lucky ones to be reunited in late life with her mother. In the mission the benevolent dictatorship of the Church controlled almost every aspect of community life. The forced removal and placement of children in Oombulgurri brought together hugely disparate groups of desert and saltwater people and systematically eradicated their connection to family, culture and country. Resistance was futile. On the escarpment overlooking the community of Oombulgurri is a shrine, a simple cross made from fencing iron. The cross is embedded in the ground with dirt containing the remains of

the forty or so men, women and children who were killed and whose bodies were burned in the Forrest River Massacre. The massacre occurred as retaliation for the killing of a white man by an Aboriginal man who was by all accounts simply defending his family from abuse.

There was not much to do in Oombulgurri. There still isn't. Most men of working age today are forced to participate in the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) or 'work for the dole'. This scheme was introduced by the Australian government as part of its obligation towards Indigenous Australians. Four of Colin's brothers still live in Oombulgurri, where they have become respected community leaders. Many community members regularly fly the short trip to Wyndham to shop, drink or meet family members and friends.

In Oombulgurri, as in many remote communities, there is very little adequate housing, power supplies are irregular and the standards of health care for residents are far below those enjoyed by non-indigenous Australians. Although there is a school, engagement of young children in schooling is poor, and basic services are virtually nonexistent. Over the years, there has been a palpable rise in the sense of hopelessness and despair that characterizes the lives of people stolen from their loved ones and raised in remote areas often shunned and ignored by government and society. Widespread binge drinking became endemic. Violence also became commonplace, particularly intimate partner violence. Accusations of child sexual abuse were rife. By 2007 the community was in crisis. In the previous eighteen months, six young people had taken their own lives in a community of fewer than 200 people. The community elders were at their wits' end. They were expected to support their community while they and the community were in a cycle of unrelenting grief and loss.

Colin and Maria are highly respected members of their community. But they are regularly stopped by the police on their way to town. Colin's brothers have been arrested several times and held in custody for offences for which the brothers vehemently proclaim their innocence. On every occasion to date they have been released without conviction after several weeks in custody, only to be re-arrested some time later and have the pattern repeated. They believe their only crime is their determination to be strong leaders who challenge the dominance of white structures and authority.

In the state capital of Perth a series of stories about Oombulgurri have appeared over several months. Invariably, the stories focus on the negative aspects of the community, often accompanied by photographs. When confronted about the unrelenting negativity about the community, despite the efforts of many determined and compassionate people, one journalist replied cynically, "That's not the story we are telling at the moment." One man in the community was heard to say, "When I walk down the street not only am I seen as a blackfella, now I'm also seen as a blackfella who is abusing his kids!"

This scenario is a true story recounting the experiences of real people whom one of the authors has worked with for several years on a youth suicide prevention programme. The scenario represents the kinds of situations and circumstances that ought to be grist for the mill of social psychology. Although social psychologists have a history of researching and responding to such situations (see Chapters 2 and 3), our solutions and reflections often seem, paradoxically, both too simplistic and too complex (see Chapter 5). Our attempts to reduce human behaviour to cause-and-effect relations have led to the nagging belief that it is all too hard. And yet it ought not to be so. This scenario provides an authentic setting within which we can see

the relationship between complex social psychological phenomena as it is played out in everyday life.

Collectivist streams in social psychology have responded to the issues of poverty and discrimination faced by the family in this scenario. Chapter 2 reconsiders some of this early work. It provides an extended account of the importance of historical events and sociopolitical contexts for the development of social psychology and for understanding the issues faced by such families. The chapter begins with an introduction to social psychology, the topics social psychologists are interested in and some of the tensions in psychology. Particular attention is given to crucial historical points of development of the discipline and to the links between classic and contemporary subject matter. We discuss theoretical, political and conceptual issues regarding the cultural location of social psychology and the re-emergence of overtly historically and culturally embedded social psychologies. We consider how this more contextually and politically oriented tradition fell out of favour following the Second World War, to be replaced by a more individual-focused approach that is modelled on the physical sciences and has taken centre stage in some countries. As a result, although psychologists have worked to assist people in situations such as the one outlined in the scenario above, social psychologists have in recent decades often responded in a manner that has not been as effective as it could have been. This book resurrects the importance early social psychologists gave to historical events and sociopolitical contexts for the development of social psychology. In sum, Chapter 2 provides a contextualized history of social psychology that substantiates the relevance of engaging with the complexities of social psychological issues and societal problems as these occur within historical and cultural contexts. We can, and must, seek to learn from the variety of voices in our pursuit of understanding.

Chapter 3 outlines a contemporary orientation for the social psychology of everyday life. Of core concern is what social psychology has to offer in developing an understanding of the challenges of living in increasingly complex and diverse societies. The issues faced by the family in our scenario are played out within specific social psychological contexts. To be responsive to the needs of such people and to develop informed ways of understanding the issues and how to help, social psychology needs to be oriented towards everyday life. This chapter explores social psychology today as a vibrant and interdisciplinary field. It draws on research conducted from a social cognitive perspective into everyday experiences, attitudes, influences and relationships. Attention is paid to what we mean by everyday life and how people such as Colin and Maria develop a sense of self through daily practices. An orientation towards the self as a socially,

historically and culturally embedded being is also introduced. In line with the broader orientation of the book, the importance of the material world and places, as well as cognitions and thoughts, in understanding social psychological phenomena is introduced.

Whether collectivist or more individually oriented, social psychologists assume certain things such as common understandings of the world between us and the people with whom we work. Chapter 4 extends this notion to discuss in depth the ways in which we come to know the world and understand the plight of people such as Colin and Maria. When human beings make sense of the world around them and behave, they do not do so in a social vacuum. Others have already rendered the world meaningful, and we must grapple with the societal narratives and power relations already in play, many of which may contain stereotypes and prejudices, as well as empathy and understanding. Thus, when we think about knowledge production it is important to note that we are born into a world that is already rendered meaningful by others. Shared understandings, norms and ways of doing things are negotiated within social groups and primary settings for socialization, such as the family. Colin and Maria and their family make sense of themselves as part of the shared meanings in society that are sociopolitical, cultural narratives constructed purposely towards some end. They come to be whom they believe themselves to be (and, importantly, whom others believe them to be) in a complex and dynamic interplay. Chapter 4 considers how knowledge is constructed in everyday settings and how this relates to the research and practice undertaken by social psychologists. We explore different perspectives on specific situations such as those experienced by Colin, Maria, their family and their community and how this can lead to intergroup tensions. This chapter includes a discussion of key issues and literature across the social sciences, as well as specifically from social psychology, such as the nature of knowledge and the social construction of knowledge and beliefs.

Extending the discussion of Western social psychology from Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 5 provides an account of indigenous social psychologies. These psychologies offer broad and distinct orientations to the social world and our places in it, and for conceptualizing social relations. They legitimate the voices of people such as Colin and Maria. Chapter 5 explores what indigenous psychologies can contribute to developing more pluralistic, flexible and relevant understandings of people in social settings. After all, what it means to be a person in societies that are increasingly diverse can be different for different people in different circumstances. Different cultures have different perspectives on the nature of individuals and groups and the extent to which people and environments influence us. In fact, the very notion of a separation of individuals and environments is a particularly

Western one. This is exemplified by the people of Oombulgurri. To make sense of the situation the family find themselves in and how we might respond, we need to understand processes of colonization. The associated forced removal of people from their traditional lands and culture has been the cause of pain and deep feelings of alienation and loss that many non-indigenous people simply cannot fully grasp. The case of mental health assessment will be used to illustrate the importance of cultural competence as a precursor to insight into, and understanding of, people from different cultural backgrounds. This chapter illustrates how there is not just one legitimate approach to social psychology or understanding for the people involved in our scenario. It includes an account of the interconnected self, which explores what it means to be a person in societies that are increasingly diverse. We also address processes of socialization, acculturation and enculturation through which we come to understand ourselves and others in the context of everyday life.

A sense of place in a home, club or social networking site is central to social relations and our sense of belonging. When people talk about themselves they often tell us where they are from. The family in our scenario often refer to Oombulgurri in this context. When we meet new people we also often make judgements about them on the basis of where they are from or live. Oombulgurri is associated with stigma, which taints the people who come from and live there. Chapter 6 explores how the cultivation of place-based identities can increase social participation and have positive benefits for the health of communities. Central to the chapter are the social psychological processes through which places are imputed with meanings or textured through use. We consider also how a sense of belonging somewhere can be ruptured and what consequences this can have for communities. As is illustrated in the scenario, our access to places is determined by our socioeconomic and in-group or out-group status, and by whether we conform to particular social codes. Consequently, place has a particular importance for many indigenous people. Attention is given to how social psychologists can work to support opportunities for repairing social relations in such places as a means of supporting the health of people who live there.

Explorations of indigenous psychologies and place bring us directly to consideration of people who have experienced dislocation, fracture, displacement and change in their lives. Throughout human history groups of people (such as the family in our scenario) have been displaced, losing a sense of belonging, and have often had to adapt to the social settings and norms of other groups. Chapter 7 explores the issue of human displacement and what happens to groups of people when they are uprooted and displaced. What can we learn from the experiences of refugees and immigrant groups that can help

us assist people on the move? What can issues around land rights and tenure among indigenous people whose connection to place is ruptured tell us about contemporary social and health disparities? We document research and theoretical notions central to understanding acculturation experiences and the different ways in which immigrants and refugees respond to dislocation and relocation. The chapter uses scenarios to extend acculturation models in two ways. First, it highlights the political nature of intergroup relations and the need to understand the multiple social and cultural resources that people draw on to remake their lives in new places. This includes a discussion of the importance of history and collective memory in the reconstruction of community and social identities. Second, emphasis is given to a more interconnected conceptualization of intergroup relations that will bring in to focus the responses of receiving communities. That is, how do receiving communities respond? What are the social, cultural and political processes of privilege protection that the receiving communities develop? Chapter 7 emphasizes the need for a dynamic and political reading of the processes of immigration and settlement.

Chapter 8 picks up the issue of disruption in everyday life with a focus on the social influences on health and illness. This chapter provides an account of the ways social psychological processes can either enhance and preserve our health or contribute to the incidence of illness. We draw on the work of social psychologists who propose that health is both physical and relational. The chapter includes a criticism of common rhetoric promoted by some social psychologists that endorses the idea that health and illness are the products of personal lifestyle choices. Associated health promotion initiatives propose a moral obligation to make the 'right' decisions to ensure one's well-being. This neglects that fact that many people, such as the family in the scenario, do not have control over many factors in their environments that contribute to illness. Their health is shaped by social structures and inequalities, as well as by personal choices and actions. In the scenario, Nicky, a young mother, attempts to make healthy choices for her family in the supermarket but faces a number of challenges and situations that make it less realistic for her to meet the expectations of wellness campaigns. The chapter explores notions of personal responsibility for health in relation to lifestyle choices, encompassing the roles of social influences, theories of conformity and normative practices, and the impact of social and economic policies on these choices. On the basis of the scenario, the options available to Nicky are discussed, such as the availability of safe options for physical exercise.

Issues raised in Chapters 1 to 8 bring us to what, in many ways, is the passionate and compassionate heart of the book. The experiences

of Colin and Maria and their friends are quintessentially issues of justice, or more precisely injustice. Chapter 9 continues the focus on intergroup relations and explores social justice and inclusion in the context of differential power relations and efforts at influence and persuasion. Perspectives of justice have permeated our social world, yet for most people justice is poorly understood at the coal-face of everyday life. Whereas philosophical ideas of justice address the standards of justice that ought to pertain, the social psychology of justice explores everyday experiences of, and reactions to, justice and, more pertinently, injustice. The chapter provides a framework or lens to understand more fully inclusion (exclusion), power and the creation of discourses in the media (in all its forms) that marginalize, disenfranchise and oppress. Chapter 9 begins with an exploration of the complex and contestable nature of justice. The search for a comprehensive definition of social justice will conclude with the following anonymous observation that ‘justice is like a greased pig; it squeals loudly but is hard to catch’ – which is probably as good a definition as any currently available. The chapter reviews the theoretical threads in the literature: distributive justice, procedural justice, the scope of justice and retributive justice. What is presented is a particular lens on social justice through which to explore not only the experiences of marginalized groups but also the everyday experience of people in society. The scenario guiding the chapter raises possibilities for encounters with many groups and provides an opportunity to deconstruct taken-for-granted and stereotypical views from a justice perspective.

The individuals and families in the Oombulgurri scenario may seem to be facing some fairly dire circumstances. The tragedy is that this scenario is based on the experiences of real people facing injustice. What is particularly remarkable about human beings is that many people facing such difficulties do more than just survive: they also continue to love, support and grow. As we emphasized earlier in this chapter, social psychology does not focus simply on problems or the negative side of life. It is also important to explore positive processes through which social life can enhance our lives. However, it is in Chapter 10 that we focus directly on strengths and humanistic dimensions of social psychology such as altruism, social support and agency. Despite the hardships they face, the family from Oombulgurri is still altruistic towards other members of the community. Brought to the fore in this chapter is the idea that human beings are social beings who need each other. Mostly, our behaviour towards others is pro-social and conditioned by the norms and expectations of our social contexts. Pro-social behaviour – being polite and considerate of others, helping others out, doing favours – has its returns. We get something out of it, and so do others. This chapter begins with a

consideration of positive-focused traditions in social psychology and how these can be combined, repoliticized and extended into a critical humanism. Chapter 10 covers the literature on social exchange and reciprocity, social support, solidarity and collective agency, with particular attention to what we get from doing these things. Emphasis will be placed on the importance of critical humanism for understanding community resilience.

Chapters 1 through 10 focus primarily on face-to-face interactions as these occur in everyday daily life. It is, however, important to note that aspects of our identities, relationships and understandings of events and situations in our lives are also constructed with resources obtained at a physical distance via various media technologies. Many people spend considerable time reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, checking their email and posting material on social networking sights. They might learn about the events in Oombulgurri from news reports and might even respond by writing a blog. Chapter 11 explores the centrality of media to everyday life and social psychology. We ask whether we can have a relevant social psychology today that does not engage with media processes. Most Australian do not know Colin, Maria or the people of Oombulgurri yet feel they have come to know them through the various media constructions and representations of Aboriginal people. The chapter explores classic concerns and current knowledge regarding what media do to people, what people do with media, and the general and increasing role of media devices in daily life. The chapter also explores ways in which psychologists have produced various forms of media content to support educational initiatives and have worked to facilitate access to a 'voice' in the media for socially marginalized groups. An important consideration is how media provide spaces within which human interaction can occur and people can dwell, often for considerable periods of time. These representational spaces overlap in everyday life with offline spaces, such as the bedroom. The interweaving of online and offline places raises a range of issues regarding time and place that are of central concern to many social psychologists.

In the final chapter of the book, we provide a review of content from across the chapters. However, we do not try to tidy up the field too much or give the impression that somehow the social psychology of everyday life comprises a coherent whole. Chapter 12 elaborates the 'social psychology of everyday life' by providing a synthesis of the scenarios offered in the previous chapters. We restate the importance of reconfiguring social psychology in a way that is engaged with people and events occurring in the world around us. Social psychology is therefore located once again at the heart of everyday understandings of the social, cultural and political world in a way that makes it accessible and relevant for students. The chapter explores

what we can do, what we have to offer society and what we do not know, which leaves the field open for students to develop their own research agendas. We finish the book by emphasizing that more work needs to be done to address social psychological issues in everyday life. In this way, the book ends by offering you, the reader, a seat on the bus, and a say in where we are headed to the future (Box 1.2).

BOX 1.2 Key themes from the book

1. One key thread is the complex and interconnected nature of self, which manifests inside heads/bodies and human relations and in places and objects. This gets us beyond the limiting and dated notion of an enclosed independent individual who reasons and behaves in predictable ways. It also allows us to present a socially, politically and economically situated vision of people.
2. The importance of history and culture in shaping and orienting social psychology is also threaded throughout the book. This thread allows us to include many social cognitive and humanist ideas as useful insights for the times in which these were formulated (and within the historical and cultural restraints).
3. Another key thread is the importance placed on taking research insights into action. Each chapter presents practical suggestions on how social psychologists can get involved and improve the human condition.

Review exercise

What are some of the ways in which psychologists get involved in social events? (We are not asking about parties.) In answering this question you might do a web search using the term 'giving psychology away'.

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