

# INCLUDING HISTORY IN THE STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL POWER

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*Isaac Prilleltensky's (2003) concept of psychopolitical validity stresses the need to consider both the political and the psychological nature of power in the study of wellness, oppression, and liberation. The authors advocate that psychopolitical validity would be strengthened if it included an explicit appreciation of historical context. The inclusion of historical knowledge offers a greater insight into how power has been exercised to promote and maintain oppression, as well as helps to identify methods for working towards social justice. The authors illustrate how the dynamics of power change over time by using examples of how the field of psychology (including community psychology) treated two historically oppressed groups: African Americans and women. Consistent with epistemic validity, investigation into the history of these two groups demonstrates how the role of psychological research has both contributed to the oppression of others, as well as promoted social change. Consistent with transformative validity, these examples illustrate how marginalized groups can work within an oppressive system to challenge the status quo and, in turn, change their position in society. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

Prilleltensky's notion of psychopolitical validity (PPV) focuses on the need to consider both the political and the psychological nature of power in the study of wellness,

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oppression, and liberation (Prilleltensky, 2003). Psychopolitical validity assists researchers in focusing on social change and avoiding empty rhetoric by providing a framework of accountability for studies claiming to examine power. Although PPV sets criteria for “the extent to which research and action incorporate lessons about psychological and political power” (Prilleltensky, this issue, pp. 116–136), the role of history is not explicitly addressed. Inattention to historical frameworks and references, particularly when studying the effects of power, leaves research (and researchers) vulnerable to making repeated errors in understanding the role time and context play in constructing societal norms. Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1993) acknowledge this void and comment that the field of psychology must “come to grips with its ahistorical, acontextual frameworks for understanding individuals” (p. 271) to more holistically identify factors affecting human behavior. We suggest that, without a *historical* context, this myopic perspective of research impedes our understanding of context and obscures our ability to understand the complex dimensions of power. We propose that PPV could be further strengthened with the inclusion of a criterion focused on historical contexts.

## ISSUES OF POWER

Issues of power play a strong role in understanding historical contexts, but are not often investigated. Power can be used by the collective for bargaining, decision-making, and determining agendas (Gaventa, 1980) or by the individual to access psychological and material resources, exercise participation and self-determination, and experience competence and self-efficacy (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001). Although the role of power has often been written about theoretically, there is little agreement about its essential characteristics and few examples of empirical work. As Hollander and Offermann (1990) write, power is “like love, its importance and existence are acknowledged, but its study is often resisted” (p. 183).

We believe that the lack of investigation into the dynamics of power, especially over time, hinders our ability to promote social change, minimizes the empowerment of oppressed groups, and limits the PPV of interventions for social justice. Deeper exploration of the exercise of power in initiating and maintaining historical oppression will illuminate the uneven allocations of social resources in our current context, thus enhancing psychopolitically validity and, hopefully, research that promotes liberation. The experiences of African Americans and women as targets of psychological research provide examples relevant to the discussion of PPV. To enhance PPV it is important not only to understand the power dynamics within the contexts we study (epistemic validity) and the potential ways to promote liberation and social justice (transformative validity), but also to understand how these dynamics have changed over time.

## EPISTEMIC VALIDITY

Epistemic validity refers to “understanding the psychopolitical dynamics of oppression ... [and incorporating this knowledge] into all research and action in community psychology” (Prilleltensky, 2003, pp. 199–200). We argue that such understanding can only be achieved by considering the role of historical contexts in supporting or limiting oppression. Such an inclusion would expand epistemic validity to “the systematic

account of the role of power in political and psychological dynamics affecting phenomena of interest” (Prilleltensky, this issue, pp. 116–136) *over time*. As Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) claim, oppression is both a state and a process. It is not possible to understand the discrimination of people without an awareness of the historical context in which that form of oppression occurs. Indeed, neither the liberation nor the oppression of a group of people is spontaneous—both are products of historical conditions. At some point in time, power was gained by some and lost or prohibited for others. Over time, subordinated groups change in character, their method and degree of oppression may vary, and the criteria of who fits the subordinated group may be altered.

When looking at psychological research, it is sometimes difficult to identify the role of power in *what* we study and *how* we study it. As Prilleltensky (this issue, pp. 116–136) notes, “which practices promote wellness and which assumptions perpetuate oppression is not always clear.” The following examples of African Americans and women in the history of psychology illustrate the importance of a historical perspective for understanding the role of power and how it can promote oppression and prevent liberation. Much of the early research in psychology in the United States focused on proving the inferiority of African Americans and women. Psychology mirrored public opinion of the time toward these two groups and served to provide “evidence” to justify the discriminatory practices against them.

### *African American Behavior and Intellectual Inferiority*

A historical review of psychological studies of African Americans provides numerous examples of how research was used to explain racial differences and justify racial oppression. For example, Samuel Cartwright, a psychiatrist in the late 1840s, postulated that a deficiency of red blood cells led to darker skin, smaller brain size and, therefore, less intelligence and morals in African Americans. Cartwright additionally published a study in 1851, which addressed two mental disorders that only affected Negroes. The explanations of both disorders provide a “scientific” rationale for understanding Black behavior, thus furthering oppression of African Americans.

The first disorder was what Cartwright described as *Drapetomania*, a mental ailment afflicting slaves (and occasionally cats) that caused them to run away. This disorder was often the result of the slave owner allowing the slaves to believe they were equals with Whites. As Cartwright (1851) noted:

If the White man attempts to... make the Negro anything else than ‘the submissive knee-bender’... by trying to raise him [the Negro] to a level with himself, or by putting himself on an equality with the Negro... the Negro will run away; but if he keeps him [the Negro] in the position that we learn... he was intended to occupy, that is, the position of submission... the Negro is spell-bound, and cannot run away.” (p. 47)

A simple cure for drapetomania was removal of the afflicted slaves’ toes.

The second disorder, *Dysaesthesia Aethiopica*, was simply rascality in the Negro. This disorder, characterized by laziness, destruction of property, and “stupidness of mind” generally only affected *free* Negroes further illustrating that slavery was beneficial to the Negro race. The cure for this mental disorder was as simple as that for

*drapetomania*—whip the afflicted Negroes and then set them to work in the open air and sunshine.

Such racist research did not end with slavery. With the advent of mental tests (IQ tests) in the early 1900s, racial differences and power dynamics based on these differences promoted greater oppression. The first reported study using the Binet scales to measure racial differences in intelligence was conducted in 1912 by Josiah Morse and his graduate student Alice C. Strong at the University of South Carolina (Guthrie, 1998). The findings of their research concluded that Black children were mentally younger than White children (Guthrie, 1990).

Issues of cultural relevance and validity were all but ignored during the psychological testing movement (Gibbs & Huang, 1989), and over the next several decades the results of these tests were often used to support educational oppression of African American students. Intelligence tests were used as a means of supporting “separate but equal” schooling as well as grade-level tracking systems. Even after *Brown v. Board of Education*, IQ scores were used to argue for continued school segregation (e.g., *Stell v. Board of Education of Savannah-Chatham County*, 1963) on the basis that “the median IQ scores for Caucasian children were substantially higher than that of African American children. Integrating schools would make African American children feel inferior and frustrated” (Pennsylvania State University, 2001).

This early research on Black behavior demonstrates how the research enterprise can easily fulfill the role of rationalizing and maintaining the status quo of existing power relationships. Cartwright, Morse, and Strong’s published analyses of Black behavior and ability contributed to a cycle of oppression, ignored power dynamics and, in turn, rationalized the existence of oppressive environments. Even now, a lack of acknowledgement of the history of psychological research on Blacks limits epistemic validity in our current research by ignoring the power dynamics of groups of people over time. Our ignorance of history contributes to this perpetuation. As recently as 1994, the book, *The Bell Curve* attributed African American’s lower IQ scores to genetic rather than environmental factors (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Current research has continued to accredit racial differences on intelligence tests to such factors as brain size and endocranial measurements (Rushton, 2004; Rushton & Jensen, 2003). Without attention to historical context, it is difficult to understand how power structures within our society are perpetuated and how we all are enmeshed in structures that contribute to the oppression of groups. Explicit attention to history may illuminate these relationships and contribute toward greater understanding of the mechanism through which power perpetuates oppression.

### ***Female Inferiority and Intellectual Exclusion***

Early psychological research also focused on documenting the inadequacy of women. For example, early research by Jastrow (1891) attempted to prove that women had less mental strength than men, based on their lesser ability to remember lists of words in memorization tasks. This research was extended at the turn of the century as many psychologists argued that men were superior to women based on mental variability. Some psychologists, like Thorndike (1910), argued that men had more mental variability and were, therefore, superior to women. Others claimed male superiority by explaining that men had less mental variability. As Meyers (1913) stated, “Generally the males are better performers than the females, and less variable” (cited in Hollingworth, 1914, p. 520). In addition to documenting the inferiority of women’s

mental variability, numerous early psychologists claimed that women lost all mental strength when menstruating (e.g., Gross, 1911; Hall, 1907). As Engelmann (1900) wrote, “mental energy and acumen are as a rule diminished during the flow... mental exertion and study at that time are more difficult and wearing, and require greater effort” (p. 32).

Although the early research on female inferiority in psychology was plentiful, none of it considered the context of women’s lives or the structures of society in constraining the roles of women. At a time when statements such as “no sensible woman will suffer her intellectual pursuits to clash with her domestic duties” because a woman “has a head almost too small for intellect but just big enough for love” (cited in Welter, 1966, pp. 153–160) were published regularly in women’s magazines, it is not surprising that psychological research was biased towards documenting inferiority of women. Again, psychological research fulfilled the role of rationalizing and maintaining the status quo of existing power relationships to the detriment of an oppressed group in society.

*Education of women.* Psychologists not only researched the inadequacies of women, but vehemently opposed any education of women, especially coeducation. Women were viewed as intellectually inferior (Bohan, 1990) and the rigors of education potentially endangered the survival of the species by posing a grave threat to women’s reproductive ability (Bohan, 1995; Diehl, 1997). Many psychologists, such as Edward H. Clarke, claimed that women’s “deficiency in reproductive power ... can be reasonably attributed to the overtaking of [women’s] brains” (cited in Bohan, 1995, p. 31). Even those psychologists who supported education believed that men and women should hold different positions in society. Often, they suggested that schooling be tailored to specific social roles, such that female education focus on domestic skills and male education be directed towards careers in science, language, and math (Thorndike, 1907). Other psychologists, such as J. McKeen Cattell, overtly opposed female academicians among the ranks of professionals (Bohan, 1990), and attributed the declining birth rate to the education of women (Cattell, 1909). Although more-educated women may have chosen to delay or forgo child rearing, these early male psychologists attributed the reduction in birthrates to reproductive damage from higher education.

As science is predicated on the belief that knowledge builds upon previous research, it is important to consider how historical research has contributed to our current understandings. In the case of race and gender differences, our examination of historical research reveals the role of power dynamics in *what* has been studied before, *how* research was conducted, and the conclusions drawn from these studies. By examining previous research for the role of power in biasing research questions, analytical methods, assumptions, and interpretations, we suggest that distortions in current research due to the influence of power relations may be mitigated. Without an appreciation of the historical context, without exploring how power has shaped and distorted past research, we cannot hope to understand the milieu in which we presently work, thus inclining us to make the same mistakes. Attentiveness to studying the role of power in shaping historical conditions and distributions of resources will not, of itself, eliminate bias in current research. It will, however, strengthen the goal of epistemic validity—it will add a vital component—history—to our understanding of the role of power in analysis of social phenomena. Similarly, an inclusion of a historical

criterion also adds value to transformative validity and how to identify actions that promote social justice.

## TRANSFORMATIVE VALIDITY

Prilleltensky (this issue, pp. 116–136) explains that transformative PPV “derives from the potential of our actions to promote ... wellness by reducing power inequalities and increasing political action.” Prilleltensky (2003) recognizes there are “exemplars of transformative work” and a need to “bring them from the periphery to the center of community psychology” (p. 200). The history of the field of psychology provides many examples from which we may identify patterns of change and potential methods for redistributing power. Improved access to higher education for African Americans and women and their ability to alter biased practices of the discipline against them illustrate mechanisms that Prilleltensky (this issue, pp. 116–136) refers to as *social opportunities* that facilitate true participation.

### *Challenging Sexist Research*

Women entering the field of psychology in the early 1900s focused on disproving male psychologists’ assertions of female inferiority by replicating studies in less gender-biased ways. Examples include Leta Stetter Hollingworth’s empirical demonstration that women had the same degree of mental variability (i.e., range of mental ability) as men (Denmark & Fernandez, 1993). In collaboration with Robert Lowie, Hollingworth (Lowie & Hollingsworth, 1916) reviewed the literature of research on women at the time and concluded that, “every sex difference that has been discovered or alleged has been interpreted to show the superiority of males” (p. 284). Hollingworth, Putnam Jaccobi, and Bissell conducted ample research to disprove the theory that women’s cognitive abilities suffered during menstruation (e.g. Hollingworth, 1914; Jacobi, 1877). Through comparative studies, Helen Thompson documented the equivalent competency of female intellectual, sensory, and motor skills to men (Thompson, 1903) and Cornelia Nevers and Mary Calkins demonstrated the equality of female memory by utilizing vocabulary on memorization lists that were familiar to women (Nevers & Calkins, 1895). By systemically scrutinizing studies that had been previously conducted and noting the explicit social agenda of these studies, these women and numerous others were able to dispel some of the beliefs that perpetuated the subjugation of women.

### *Psychological Research and African Americans*

In a similar approach, IQ testing of Blacks by Blacks provides historical examples of how the questioning of biased research and replication without the goal of perpetuating the status quo can promote social change (and transformative valid research). For instance, the 1979 court case, *Larry P. v. Riles* in California challenged why six African American children were placed in to educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes based on intelligence test scores. When retested by members of the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists using the same IQ tests, the children all scored above the EMR cutoff score. The court ruled that “intelligence tests [were] racially and culturally biased, having a discriminatory impact against Black children, and [had] not been validated for the purpose of essentially permanent placements of Black children

into educationally dead-end, isolated, and stigmatizing classes for the so-called educable mentally retarded” (Guthrie, 1998, p. 80).

### *New foci of psychological research*

Unfortunately, many improvements in the way psychology studied the African American community have still retained the status quo of power relations between the races. At the start of the field of community psychology in 1965, many of the well-intentioned community psychologists began to tackle issues of race from a different perspective. Rather than focus on the differences between the races (as these had already been well-established) researchers began investigating ways to help the disadvantaged Negro. Studies on the African American community found that “we are culturally and psychologically deprived because our experiential background provides us with inferior preparation to move effectively within the dominant white culture” (White, 1980, p.6).

Opinions of Black disadvantage led to compensatory and enrichment programs designed to “help” Blacks achieve. White (1980) stated it gently when he noted, “As the white ... psychologist continues with what for him has become a standard analysis, the next step becomes one of setting up programs which provide Black children with the kind of enrichment he feels is needed to overcome and compensate for their cultural deprivation” (p. 6). This deficit-centered, needs-oriented approach that dominated studies on Black people during this period alleviated feelings of responsibility society might have had by placing the burden of blame on the victim. Social problems and mental illness as well as social oppression were seen as an aspect of the person, not the society. Although the analyses had changed, power dynamics had not; psychology still had the power to define Blacks.

Although this period demonstrated a movement away from the belief that Blacks were inferior, it was not one that altered power relationships, social justice, or even acknowledged the role of power. This deficit-oriented frame to psychological research could be viewed as an era of misdirected aid and paternalism. Rather than continue to allow psychology to inappropriately and inadequately define them, their problems, and the solutions to these problems, African Americans began to use their individual, relational, and collective power to resist harm and oppression and to promote their wellness. Both through civic rights and black power, as well as individual choices to pursue advanced degrees, the supportive role in oppression that social research served became a target of scholars and movements alike. As Guthrie (1998) notes, “a most important aspect in the teaching of psychology in the Black colleges was the deemphasis on the alleged hereditarian basis for differences in intelligence among individuals, races, and social class” (p.123). Social scientists themselves began to recognize that the lens through which they were scrutinizing Black peoples might have been warped, and as such their research biased, and the conclusions of this research discriminatory.

Black psychologists (and eventually others) began to focus on the strengths within the Black community and to emphasize the empowerment of these communities and the people within them (e.g., Billingsley, 1994; Brodsky, 2000; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). This new avenue of inquiry represents transformative validity—the potential of our actions to reduce power inequalities and promote wellness. Although this may not describe all psychological research with African Americans, it demonstrates a movement towards more transformative valid research. Similar patterns of change in power distribution can be seen through the entrance

of women in the field of psychology and their influence on the dominant group (i.e., forefathers of psychology).

### ***Women Entering Psychology***

As an example of the importance of including a historical perspective when considering transformative validity, we again turn to women entering the field. As illustrated above, early American psychology's research and writing strongly opposed the education of women. This position also permeated the way in which initial members of the field treated women. However, some of the early female psychologists had the courage and perseverance to challenge these views. They helped transform the attitudes and impressions of the fathers of psychology; and their challenges resulted in not only less-biased research, but also increased access for women to graduate study and work.

The entrance of women into the field of psychology and the movement to gain more power was not an overt battle with universities, deans, and professors, but rather a subtle process of gaining access and sitting in on classes, studying abroad, and networking with other women and family friends. Women adhered to "the widely accepted code of prudent and genteel behavior expected of women of their day and class. Generally theirs was a quiet rebellion against the restrictions of women's sphere and its emphasis on domesticity" (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987, p. 146).

The first female psychologists were White, well-educated (baccalaureate degrees), most commonly unmarried, and often financially well off. Many had teaching positions at women's colleges that required continued graduate education at another institution (Bernstein & Russo, 1974; Goodman, 1980; Palmieri, 1983; Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987). Through social networking, these women were able to identify which institutions and professors might be amenable to female students. For example, Mary Calkins was able to attend a graduate course in psychology at Harvard because she befriended Alice Freeman, the former president of Wellesley. Freeman was married to George Herbert Palmer, a professor at Harvard, who was able to discuss with William James the possibility of Calkins sitting in on one of his psychology courses (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987). Coupled with a letter-writing campaign by Calkins' father, Calkins was granted admission to a graduate seminar. Such stories of informal access to classes were not uncommon.

The increased presence of women in the academy aided the transformation of the forefathers' attitudes towards the education of women. This slow change of the psychological and political influence of the male leaders of the field can be seen by studying the writings of the forefathers of psychology before and after they worked professionally with women. Two of which, William James and G. Stanley Hall are described here.

*William James.* William James is considered the founder of Functionalism and an important contributor to the infancy of psychology. His early writings, those prior to working with women, clearly expressed a view of female inferiority. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from volume II of *The Principles of Psychology* (1890):

We observe an identical difference between men as a whole and women as a whole. A young woman of twenty reacts with intuitive promptitude and security in all the usual circumstances in which she may be placed. Her

likes and dislikes are formed; her opinions, to a great extent, the same that they will be through her life. Her character is in fact, finished in its essentials. How inferior to her is a boy of twenty in all respects! His character is still gelatinous, uncertain what shape to assume, "trying it on" in every direction. Feeling his power yet ignorant of the manner in which he shall express it, he is, when compared to his sister, a being of no contour. But this absence of prompt tendencies in his brain to set into particular modes is the very condition which insures that it shall ultimately become so much more efficient than the woman's. The very lack of preappointed trains of thought is the ground on which general principles and heads of classification grow up; and the masculine brain deals with new and complex matter indirectly by means of these, in a manner which the feminine method of direct intuition, admirably and rapidly performed within its limits, can vainly hope to cope with (p. 368–369).

Shortly after the publication quoted above, James, as a favor for a friend, allowed Mary Calkins to sit in on one of his seminars (Furumoto, 1980). Calkins was not allowed to enroll in the course, but was permitted to listen in due to her status as a teacher at Wellesley. James warned Calkins about the content of the course in a short letter on October 3, 1890. "My students, four in number, seem of divergent tendencies and I don't know just what will come of the course. Having published my two rather fat tomes, I shan't lecture, but the thing will probably resolve itself into advice and possible some experiments" (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987 p. 35). This seminar slowly deteriorated into only one student, Calkins, and a professor. She and James would sit by the library fire and discuss *Principles of Psychology*. She clearly impressed James and he allowed her to unofficially attend more classes.

In (June 29) 1895, when Calkins defended her dissertation, James had become exceedingly impressed by her performance. In fact, he claimed her defense to be the best in the history of the Harvard Philosophy Department. In a letter to a female friend, James described Calkins's defense as, "the most brilliant examination for the Ph.D. that we have had at Harvard. It is a pity, in spite of this, that she still lacks the degree. Your downtrodden but unconquerable sex is fairly entitled to whatever glory and credit may accrue to it from Miss Calkins's prowess" (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987 p. 46). (It is important to note that since Harvard would not officially enroll women, Calkins never received her doctorate.)

For the remainder of James's career, he continued to work with women (many more than most of his colleagues) and appeared to cease writing on the inferiority of women. It is difficult to claim that working with Mary Calkins and later other female psychologists changed James's views on women, but it appears that there was some positive effect on him (and the field of psychology). Through Calkins's stellar defense and sound research, she was named one of the 50 most important men of science and appointed the 14th president of the American Psychological Association. Perhaps this helped other women to see the possibility of survival in this new field and helped men to appreciate female psychologists as contributing meaningfully to the discipline.

*G. Stanley Hall.* G. Stanley Hall is another example of an influential psychologist whose extensive sexist writing halted after working with some of the first female psychologists. Initially, Hall wrote of how women's intellectual ability would preclude

any significant achievement (Bohan, 1990). In 1906, he described the dangers of coeducation for men and women:

At a time when her whole life depends upon normalizing her lunar month, is there not something not only unnatural and unhygienic, but a little monstrous, in daily school associations with boys, where she must suppress and conceal her instincts and feelings, at those times when her own promptings suggest withdrawal or stepping a little aside to let Lord Nature do his magnificent work of efflorescence (cited in Shields, 1975, p. 745).

Prior to the turn of the century, Hall believed women to be inferior and that the constant interaction between the sexes in adolescence could masculinize women and feminize men. The masculinization of women would result in damage to the reproductive organs and inevitable infertility. He, therefore, actively lobbied against coeducation. Furthermore, at the start of the 1900s Hall claimed that the education of women was causing a reduction of birth rates and that women had fallen “prey to the gospel of feminist” (1904, cited in Diehl, 1997) and were therefore choosing not to have many children. However, as the president of Clark University, Hall realized the financial benefit of enrolling women and therefore agreed to the education of women *solely* in feminine disciplines. He advocated training them for nurturing, feminine careers as mothers, nurses, social workers, and elementary school teachers (thus, not jeopardizing their reproductive abilities).

The presence of women at Clark University seemed to have a positive influence on Hall. Rather than limit these female students to the “feminine studies” Clark reluctantly and gradually admitted several to graduate study in psychology. In 1909, as president and professor, Hall hired a female professor, Amy Tanner, the first female psychology professor at Clark University. As Hall worked with Tanner he became a supporter not only of her research, but her poetry and short stories as well. That same year, Hall promoted his favorite student, Phyllis Blanchard, to research assistant and claimed her to be the best assistant in his 32 years at Clark.

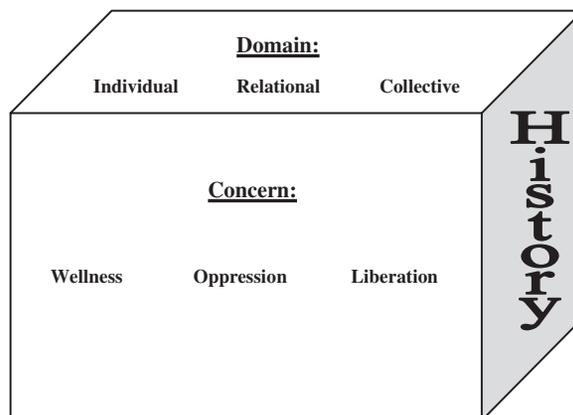
As Hall worked with more women, he allowed more women into the university. His views seemed to slowly evolve from believing women to be intellectually inferior to simply needing roles that were feminine and nurturing. Whether or not Hall’s views were egalitarian or not, he created an environment in which women could receive graduate degrees and legitimacy in the emerging field of psychology. Clark’s admission practices sent a message to society that women should, indeed, be educated.

The replication of discriminatory studies in less-biased ways, increased access to education and the professional field of psychology, as well as the influence of key members of the dominant group supporting the oppressed provide examples of power transformations for African Americans and women. These transformations occurred gradually. Whether it was by influencing the forefathers of psychology or by using psychological research in legal cases, these two historically oppressed groups worked towards their liberation. They provide examples that power is never static and there are always examples of power transformations that “reduce political inequalities and increase political action” (Prilleltensky, this issue, pp. 116–136). A focus on the historical context of the groups we study helps provide insights into how to promote change and increase the transformative validity of our current research practices.

## DISCUSSION

These examples illustrate the importance of including the study of historical contexts for understanding the factors that contribute to oppression and those that promote positive social change. Consistent with both epistemic and transformative psychopolitical validity, acknowledgement of the historical context provides ideas for studying change, as well as methods to help facilitate it. A historical perspective might suggest studying change by examining relationships between groups over time or by investigating whether the nature of transformation unfolds gradually or through punctuated equilibrium. Furthermore, scrutinizing history helps identify catalysts of larger change, such as William James working with women at Harvard University or the court's acknowledgement of racism in IQ testing in *Larry P. v. Riles*. For these reasons, we include history as an essential component of psychopolitical validity.

Figure 1 illustrates our position that issues of power through history are integral for the study of psychopolitical validity. The historical examples in this paper demonstrate how the study of power at the individual, relational, and collective level *over time* informs us about issues of oppression, liberation, and wellness. They help us understand, within psychology, the ways in which transformations toward empowerment occurred. At the start of the formalization of psychology, women and Blacks were viewed as inferior and denied access to the field as well as to other aspects of the greater society. This level of oppression limited their individual power and obstructed their individual movement towards liberation and wellness. At the relational level, women and African Americans slowly entered academia and began to alter power differentials through their relations with other professionals. The first female psychologists networked with each other to help leverage power and interacted with the men of psychology to change their oppressive views. Black graduate students and professionals began dialogues about the focus of research that lessened the degree of bias in research. At a collective level, women and African Americans worked towards liberation and greater well being by altering generalized psychological views. By questioning gender-biased research and promoting more strength-based investigations, they increased access into the discipline for others and reduced some of the prejudices in research.



**Figure 1.** Relationship between PPV domains, concerns, and history.

Psychopolitical validity is aimed at understanding the role of power in oppression and liberation. We assert that power needs to be viewed within the historical context of how it was obtained and exercised (Foucault, 1980). Present conditions of inequity are the product of structural conditions that have been cultivated over time, through the actions of individuals and social systems, to advantage some at the expense of others. To both understand power and to understand the role of power in social change, it is imperative that examination of the evolution of these structural arrangements of advantage and disadvantage are undertaken. As the above examples illustrate, to better understand (epistemic) and promote change (transformative), one must study oppressed groups in times of oppression, as well as in movements towards empowerment. Prilleltensky (this issue, pp. 116–136) warns that PPV vacillates between “a diluted version ... perpetuating the status quo, whereas a rigid form risks dogmatism.” Adopting a historical perspective when studying power helps provide a framework to question norms and reveal invisible biases present in current research.

Although the study of history is essential for research to be psychopolitically valid, we caution that the inclusion of history will not buffer our own biases and distortions. As Bond (1997) explains, “appreciation for historical forces obviously has to be balanced with an understanding of current context” (p. 737). Reconstructing the history of psychology is difficult and must rely on fragmented pieces of manuscripts, books, personal correspondences, and oral histories. This discussion has been based on the chronology of events and the apparent corresponding changes, thus the occurrence of events can only be supported; their causal relationship to subsequent events can only be inferred. Further, how we frame an investigation influences what is found and, at times, results in some groups being overlooked (such as women who are Black).

As science is based on the notion of building knowledge, for research to be psychopolitically valid, we must look at historical context. Psychopolitical validity is a tool for critiquing previous work and providing a framework of accountability for current research. It is easy to see the discriminatory practices towards women and African Americans in the previous examples and assume that the field has transcended past these practices. However, this would be a dangerous assumption. For example, questionnaires and tests are still fallible and perform differently depending on the populations studied. Studies that interpret findings without consideration of current power dynamics and societal norms may perpetuate oppression. Although our testing efforts no longer ban women and Blacks from formal education, misinterpretation of research that suggests racial and gender differences may potentially justify oppressive practices, such as occupational segregation. Critiquing our own methods and practices must be an ongoing exercise as we are all enmeshed in our own roles, positions, and culture. Without such a critique, psychology will assuredly come to the same faulty conclusions as Cartwright and Jastrow. The inclusion of history in PPV will not yield bias-free research, but it will enhance our ability to move closer to research that is conscious of the distortions of power and increase the probability that we can support genuine social change. When investigating power over time, we need to be careful of our own biases, looking at *what* topics are studied and *how* we choose to study them. As the historical examples illustrate, the field of psychology has used power to validate oppression, assist in liberation, and promote wellness. We argue that no research is psychopolitically valid unless it is aware of its own historical antecedents.

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