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Notes

The History of Psychology in Germany

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Last year a “Memorandum on the State and Future of the History of Psychology” was published in the journal of the German Psychological Society, *Psychologische Rundschau*. It was initiated by Wolfgang Schönplug and it was signed by him and by another 26 psychologists in Germany and Austria (Allesch et al., 2015). The memorandum begins by pointing out that the history of psychology rarely appears in psychology curricula. It then goes on to list some central aspects of psychology that, it is claimed, can only be understood historically. The memorandum points out that the history of psychology is an active area of research. There is a branch of the German Psychological Society that is devoted to the history of psychology and contributions are made to it by historians of science. It also mentions the Adolf Würth Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Würzburg, which is an archival repository similar to the Archives for the History of American Psychology in Akron, Ohio. The memorandum concludes by saying that this research is endangered by the lack of career opportunities for historians of psychology and it makes the following proposals:

- All bachelor’s programs in psychology should contain a course on the history of psychology.
- At least one German university should offer a master’s program in the history of psychology.
- Several universities should collaborate to create a PhD program in the history of psychology, possibly on an interdisciplinary basis.
- Examination work on topics from the history of psychology should be possible in all colleges and universities, including those with PhD programs.
- Academic positions and hiring practices should comply with the above requirements.

The memorandum is followed by nine invited comments, which range from the entirely positive

to the entirely negative, with most of them being somewhere between the two.

None of the commentators were signatories of the memorandum, and they include, perhaps surprisingly, the director of the Adolf Würth Center for the History of Psychology, Armin Stock. His comment reads like an advertisement for the center. He calls on his readers to send him documents, equipment, and instruments of historical interest, and points out that the center can restore and preserve them. He also points out that the center organizes exhibitions on different aspects of the history of psychology and that these attract around 1,000 visitors per year, including many from the United States.

Most of the comments support the memorandum with qualifications. Harald Walach criticizes biographical approaches to the history of psychology and suggests that the field would have more substance if it was combined with philosophy of science. Jochen Fahrenburg also argues for this combination and adds professional ethics into the mix. He suggests that it would have better chances of being accepted if it included these additional fields. There are some sound intellectual reasons for combining these fields, but I doubt that it would make much difference to their marginal status. The relevant sections of the British Psychological Society and the Canadian Psychological Association include both history and philosophy of psychology within their remit and it has made no appreciable difference to the marginal status of these fields.

Anna Sieben and Jürgen Straub support the referendum but add that the history of psychology should be concerned with the psychologization of everyday life. This is a worthy topic, but it is only one of many worthy topics that historians of psychology can research and it does nothing to address the marginal status of the field.

Gerd Jütteman takes a different tack. He has been promoting the field of historical psychology since at least the 1980s, and he suggests that the history of psychology’s subject matter is more important than the relatively brief history of psychology as a discipline. While I have no doubt that historical psychology is an important and worthwhile subject, both history of psychology and historical psychology have a common interest in raising the profile of history within psychology and it seems inappropriate to engage in factionalism with respect to one of them.

Kurt Pawlik says that he does not doubt the importance of history of psychology, but suggests that the issue of whether it should be treated as an independent subject is an open question. This is because he views psychology as a “hub” science that is central to interdisciplinary areas like cognitive science and the neurosciences. He also suggests that it is a progressive or “cumulative” science and that the history of psychology should document this situation. I doubt that many historians of psychology would share this view of their role.

Andrea Abele-Brehm and Edgar Erdinger, Markus Huff and Sonja Utz, and Katharina Scheiter and Kai Sassenberg are less equivocal about whether the history of psychology should be treated as an independent subject, albeit for different reasons. They oppose the proposal in the memorandum that courses in the history of psychology should be offered in bachelor’s degrees and suggest that history should be integrated into existing courses on the various branches of psychology. Abele-Brehm is the current president of the German Psychological Society and so her views on this subject may carry particular weight.

The chair of the history of psychology branch of the German Psychological Society, Christian Allesch, subsequently conducted an informal survey of psychology departments in Germany and Austria to find out if history was being integrated into existing courses and, if so, which. The results were variable and depended to a large extent on how interested in the history of psychology individual faculty members were, but the general finding was that where history was integrated into other courses, it was in introductory psychology courses rather than more advanced courses on the various branches of psychology (Schönpflug, 2016). Thus, while there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of those who advocate the “integrative” approach, it does not appear to be happening in practice and there are no signs that this situation is about to change.

The views of these authors on graduate programs are mixed. Abele-Brehm and Erdinger say that they would welcome an MA on the history of psychology, but add, significantly, that this is a decision for individual universities and does not require any changes to the rules of the German Psychological Society. Huff and Utz are more skeptical. They suggest that research should be conducted to find out if there is a demand for such a course. They may be right in suggesting

that there is limited demand, but this should not be confused with a lack of interest. One of my own former students from Germany was (and is) very interested in the history of psychology, but he described it as “a dead end” from a career point of view and decided to specialize in something else. This shows that study opportunities on their own will have little effect if students view them as a passport to unemployment.

With regard to establishing a PhD program, Abele-Brehm and Erdinger say that they would welcome to such a development, but add that it should be regarded as interdisciplinary area that involves history and possibly philosophy and sociology as well. Scheiter and Sassenberg agree that it should be regarded as an interdisciplinary area, but add that historical research involves competencies that psychologists do not usually possess. This may be true, but a PhD program in the area would go a long way toward changing this situation. These attempts to portray the history of psychology as an interdisciplinary or extradisciplinary field help to weaken any sense of responsibility that psychologists might have for it.

Taken together, the memorandum and the comments present a picture that will be familiar to historians of psychology elsewhere. There is a small community of psychologists who are dedicated to the history of psychology, but many of their colleagues are reluctant to accept it as a legitimate area of specialization in teaching and research. One of the consequences of this situation is that the community of psychologists who are dedicated to the history of psychology is aging and there is no younger generation of psychologists coming forward to replace them.

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rums “Zur Lage und zur Zukunft des Faches Geschichte der Psychologie”, an die Mitglieder der Arbeitsgruppe zur Umsetzung des Memorandums [To the authors of the memorandum and the discussion forum, “On the state and future of the history of psychology” and to the members of the working group to implement the memorandum]. Unpublished document.

Society for the History of Psychology President’s Report

James T. Lamiell

Made at the APA Convention
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One of our most important items of business every year is the construction of the Society’s program for the annual APA convention. During my year as President-Elect, Arlie Belliveau accepted my invitation to serve as this year’s Convention Program Chair, and Elisabeth McClure agreed to serve as Vice-Chair. The two of them exhibited extraordinary diligence and attention to detail in fashioning this year’s program, and I could not possibly thank them enough.

Another very important part of the Society’s work every year is the selection of the winners of the various awards bestowed by the Society. Hank Stam announced those winners as follows:

- Lifetime (henceforth to be named Career) Achievement Award: Katherine Milar
- Early Career Achievement Award: Jennifer Bazar and Wahbie Long
- Best Article published in *History of Psychology* during 2015: coauthors Alan Costall and Paul Morris

Ingrid Farreras has agreed to accept reappointment as the Society’s representative on the Council on International Relations in Psychology (CIRP), and, in like fashion, Alexandra Rutherford has accepted reappointment as the Society’s representative on the Council of Women in Psychology (CWP). We owe a debt of gratitude to both women for their service to our Society on these respective councils. Meanwhile, during this year several projects have been undertaken thanks to the initiative and hard work of Society members.

One of these was the “I Am Psyched” and Museum Day Live event organized by Alexandra Rutherford, Sherri Miles-Cohen, and Cathy Faye,

and held at the APA building this past March 12. I myself was unable to be there, but Alexandra reported that Dr. Bertha Holliday represented our Society at the event and made a big impression on the young ladies in attendance. Alexandra pronounced the event a big success. The Society contributed \$1,000 to help finance the event. Throughout the convention, there was a display based on the Museum Day Live event set up in the convention hall. One component of the Museum Day Live initiative was an essay contest. Four members of our Society served as judges of the essays. They were Jennifer Bazar, John Greenwood, Ed Morris, and Hendrika Vande Kemp.

A third project of direct relevance to our Society was the Museum of Psychology Kickstarter drive, overseen largely by Society member Cathy Faye of the Center for the History of Psychology in Akron. Our Society pledged \$1,000 to the fund. Unfortunately, Kickstarter’s pledge goal was not reached, so our Society’s pledge was voided, but it is to be hoped that a similar opportunity will arise in the future.

I made mention at the meeting my abiding concern over the low profile of graduate-level coursework in what I call psychology’s “conceptual foundations,” by which I mean history and philosophy of psychology. That concern was only intensified by the Society membership profile report recently issued by APA: 56% of our Society’s membership is age 70 or older, and only 27% is less than 50 years of age. I do not see how our Society will be able to continue to prosecute its mission to, as stated in our Policy Manual, “extend the awareness of and appreciation for the history of psychology” if we do not recruit younger colleagues who themselves have an awareness of and appreciation for our discipline’s history, and I do not see where we are going to find such colleagues to recruit in a population consisting largely of persons who themselves have never had any coursework in the subject.

If I am naturally concerned about the survival of our Society, I am even more concerned about the long-term intellectual health of our discipline. Our reason for existing as a society is not simply to exist as a society, but, ultimately, to enhance psychology scientifically. I think that there is room for real concern here.

I mentioned some unfinished business to which I intend to return during the remaining months of my term as Society President.