Special Thematic Section on "Societal Change"

Insights from Societal Psychology: The Contextual Politics of Change

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Abstract

In this paper we demonstrate that societal psychology makes a unique contribution to the study of change through its focus on the 'contextual politics' of change, examining the different interests at stake within any social context. Societal psychology explores the contexts which promote or inhibit social and societal change and can be seen as a bridge between social and political psychology. It focuses on how the context shapes the ways in which societal change is understood, supported or resisted. To understand the intellectual rationale of societal psychology, and how it aims to foster societal change, we first consider the history of the discipline. Second, we consider what is meant by 'context', as understanding the environment of change is the hallmark of societal psychology. Third, we lay out three distinct features of a societal psychological approach to change: the politics of change; interventions and planned change; emergent change processes. Finally, the paper examines possible future developments of societal psychology and its role in understanding and creating societal change, alongside its place within the wider canon of social and political psychology.

Keywords: societal psychology, context, social change, interventions, emergent change

The 'Societal Psychology' approach, introduced by Himmelweit and Gaskell (1990) at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and developed by a number of scholars (Bar-Tal, 2000; Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Misra, 2006; Staerklé, 2011; Valentim, 2011), is the focus of this paper and the hallmark of our own research as a collective. All disciplines of psychology consider change to some degree, but we argue that Societal psychology makes a unique contribution through its focus on the *contextual politics* of change. Societal psychology examines social psychological phenomena in context and shows that there are different interests at stake in any context: some perspectives will be dominant, others are marginalised, some will gain from processes of change, others will not. Hence there is a politics at stake within any empirical field. Societal psychology explores the contexts which promote or inhibit social and societal change, and can be seen as bridge between social and political psychology (Staerklé, 2011), with connections to other disciplines such as sociology, geography and social policy.

Rather than societal psychology being a subset of social psychology or political psychology, we argue that societal psychology should be seen as a trans-disciplinary field that includes aspects of social, political, community and organisational psychology, and other disciplines that explore interconnections between psychological processes and social contexts. Following the lead of the special issue editors, we focus on *societal* change, rather than social change. Social change is often operationalised on the interpersonal or inter-group level - where the relations between sets of individuals or groups are examined. To develop a more multi-perspectival and dynamic account of human relations, societal psychology examines change within a broader political context, and incorporates change at the level of communities, organisations, governments, and international networks. This is so the social and environmental factors shaping how societal change emerges can be understood and taken into account.

From a societal psychology perspective, societal change is considered both the *object* and *objective* of study. Thus, the intellectual and practical starting point is the complexity of society as it is lived in specific contexts, rather than discussions of abstract theories. Whereas psychology often searches for simplicity behind the 'messiness' of society, societal psychology takes complexity as a property that must be understood for change to occur. This influences societal psychology in three substantive ways: firstly, societal psychology finds its problems in society; secondly, it conducts its research in society; finally, it aims to make contributions to society. We illustrate this below.

First, Societal Psychologists' research topics include community groups aiming to institute change (Cornish, Campbell, Shukla, & Banerji, 2012; Jovchelovitch, 2007), the culture of care in health services (Reader & Gillespie, 2013), societal debates about current and future technologies (Gaskell, Bauer, Durant, & Allum, 1999), changing organisational practices and systems (Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Lahlou, 2011) and social projects on multicultural identities and inclusive education (Howarth, 2011). Second, instances of societal change offer methodological opportunities for societal psychology. Ruptures, breaches, resistance, conflict, revolution but also social stasis are methodological openings; natural experiments, which reveal the fabric of social life and society's implication in the development and change of psychological phenomena. Our research has found such opportunities in the societal changes occurring in Brazil (Jovchelovitch, 2008), South Africa (Campbell, 2003) and northern India (Gillespie, 2006), in misunderstandings in health services (Reader, Flin, Mearns, & Cuthbertson, 2007), in technological change (Lahlou, Nosulenko, & Samoylenko, 2012), in moments of protest (Cornish, 2012) and resistance (Bauer, 1997; Howarth, 2004) and contests over environmental challenges (Tennant, 2012). Thirdly, societal psychology considers research to be more than a description of society; research is also an intervention in society. Societal psychological knowledge may have a transformative potential (Howarth, 2009). While many recognise that aspirations of societal change have had perverse and unintended consequences (Merton, 1936), and it is now difficult to espouse grand theories of social progress (Lyotard, 1984), addressing social problems remains an important motivation. Societal psychology often aims for social progress through overcoming specific problems grounded in everyday politics and social relations (Andreouli, Howarth, & Sonn, in press; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010b; Wright, 2010), but also recognises that measuring the consequences of change is essential due to their potentially negative or positive effects. Deciding whether change is 'positive' or 'negative' is again a deeply political issue. For some a change may be liberation while for others the same change may entail a loss of liberty. Thus, the abolition of apartheid in South Africa would be seen by most as a positive societal change giving rights and freedom to the majority of South Africans; but for some, this entailed the loss of privilege and status and so was violently resisted. Hence the evaluation of change needs to be embedded within the social and historical context in order to understand the politics at stake in supporting or resisting any change. We return to this complex point in the section on planned change and interventions below.

To understand the intellectual rationale of societal psychology, and how it aims to create societal change, we first consider its history. Second, we consider what is meant by 'context', as understanding the environment of change is the hallmark of societal psychology. Third, we lay out three distinct features of a Societal Psychological approach to change: (i) the politics of change, (ii) interventions and planned change, and (iii) emergent change processes. Finally, we reflect on the future development of societal psychology and its role in understanding and creating societal change, alongside its place within the wider canon of social and political psychology.

The Development of Societal Psychology

The notion of societal psychology was first proposed by Hilde Himmelweit in 1985 to address the 'crisis' in social psychology in the 1970s and 1980s over the irrelevance of social psychological research to the world outside the discipline (Gergen, 1985; Parker, 1989). It was thus primarily outlined to challenge the narrowing of social psychology to a focus on the study of individuals' cognition and behaviours, the identification of generic, universal laws, and, with it, laboratory experimentation as the favoured method of enquiry. For Himmelweit (1990), these shortcomings accounted for why other social sciences made so few references to social psychological research when attempting to explain and address pressing societal issues. Locating research firmly and primarily in real world contexts, societal psychology strives to overcome these critiques.

Yet, Himmelweit and Gaskell's (1990) original outline of societal psychology was not so much a call for a *new* development of psychology as it was for a return to the original ambitions of social psychology. The necessity of a more societal form of psychology was indeed commonly recognised in the early 20th century (Doise, 2004; Farr, 1996). Wundt's (1900-1920) *Völkerpsychologie* remains paradigmatic of the presence of societal phenomena at the very inception of psychological science (Farr, 1990). Other examples of the prominence of the societal perspective in psychology during the pre-1940 era are found in the work of Piaget (1932), Mead (1934), and Lewin (1951). For example, in focussing on group dynamics and different styles of leadership in different social groups (see Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939), Lewin pioneered both action research and the experimental method and so connected societal and experimental psychology, echoing Wundt's integrated approach to experimental and field studies (Farr, 1990). Despite a sometimes marginalised position in contemporary social psychology, several eminent scholars have furthered the societal perspective in their work, such as Gergen (1985), Moghaddam (2012), Moscovici (1976), Tajfel (1978), and Reicher (2004). However, mainstream psychology today seems to have drifted quite far from these early ambitions, as the emphasis is often on cognitive processes (abstracted from their social context), individual differences (abstracted from their social relations) and most recently, brain imagery and neurological processes. Hence the call for a return to societal forms of psychology is timely and urgent, as other social and political psychologists also recognise (e.g., Gergen & Leach, 2001; Haste, 2004; Subašić, Reynolds, Reicher, & Klandermans, 2012). These authors encourage us to reflect on the suitability of our theories and methods to understand and contribute to the social world beyond the university.

In this paper, we wish to advance the contribution of societal psychology to both understanding and instigating societal change. We argue that both societal psychology and an analysis of societal change begin and end with an analysis of the context. Many studies in fact take the reverse position and, using lab-based or survey-based designs, try to remove the multiple influences of context rather than engaging with its inherent complexity. This leaves us with a decontextualized and often individualised understanding of human behaviour and the mechanisms of change (Misra, 2006). Without context, problems in society – such as mental illness, racism, political hostility

- appear as problems of the individual rather than consequences of structural inequalities, histories of oppression or intense inter-group conflicts (Martín-Baró, 1994). For example, extreme and heinous acts of terror are sometimes understood through a focus on the beliefs and childhood experiences of perpetrators (e.g., BBC, 2013). Whilst such factors are undoubtedly important, an individualised approach means the wider contextual factors that shaped beliefs and behaviour (e.g., the collective basis to political hostility) are left under-examined, as attribution theorists have highlighted for some time (Heider, 1958; Ichheiser, 1949). Thus, interventions focused on the individual may not be successful as they do not take into account the contextual influencers of behaviour (i.e., the realities of people's lives). There is therefore a need to promote a societal approach whereby our understanding of social relations and change go beyond the traditional limits within psychology.

An Analysis of Change Must Start with Real World Contexts

A key distinctive feature of societal psychology is the grounding of its research practice and theorising in the 'real world'. This is different from studies of behaviour in de-contextualised laboratories, conducted to test hypothesised relations among abstract psychological constructs (Hodgetts et al., 2010; but see Farr, 1984, and Jovchelovitch, 2011). Akin to political psychology, our perspective is that "thinking, meaning-making, and concepts, must be understood not as attributes solely of the individual but contextualised within the social and cultural environment" (Haste, 2012, p. 2). Hence, a 'real world' psychology takes concrete human activities in context as its primary material. The philosophy of pragmatism provides a useful epistemology here (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). Scientific or philosophical endeavours must be grounded and tested in concrete practical human activity (Cornish, 2004; Tolman, 1999). Societal psychology's real world phenomena include, for instance, changing racist or sexist behaviour, changes in voting behaviour or organisational structures (Himmelweit, 1990), as well as social issues such as inequality, diversity, rights, and justice (Staerklé, 2011). Societal psychology problematises the traditional relation between 'basic' or 'fundamental' research (to develop theory) and 'applied' research (to solve real world problems). Instead, for societal psychology, the primary test of a theory is in the real world context (Cornish, 2009). While scholars across the social sciences acknowledge the importance of context, rarely do we assess precisely what is meant by context itself (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). Hopkins (2008) discussed 'contexts of practice', which is a useful concept as it highlights the point that contexts are 'where things happen' and implies a societal rather than individualising approach.

We conceptualise context in very broad terms, including both the immediate situation where things happen (i.e., who, where, when, with what, how, etc.), and also 'situation transcending phenomena' (Gillespie, 2010), such as culture, representations, and identities. The immediate situation of action entails both the material context (physical objects and physical environment), and also the social environment that influences and co-constructs behaviour. Others in our social environment share the same cultural constructions (norms, values, practices and so forth): they will reinforce the societal influence on individual behaviour. But 'others' may also hold divergent views or perspectives (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010a; Ichheiser, 1949) – and this makes contexts both constructed and contested and, fundamentally, open to change. Furthermore, actions are usually made in response to other actions, and as such, the actions of others are a crucial aspect of the immediate context (Mead, 1972). The action becomes part of the context and so the context is dynamic and sometimes contested (Gillespie, 2005). While pre-existing social representations of the subject also constitute a context to a specific action (for example, past experience will have an impact on food choice in a given meal), these representations themselves change through social

actions over time. Therefore, making a distinction between action and context or between individual and context is misleading: it implicitly presupposes that the action, individual and the context are independent. Rather, they are all products of the on-going and *changing* process of social construction. Contexts are therefore very complex: they are made up of physical aspects; they are social, containing social norms and knowledge systems; they are historical in that they contain already-constructed representations and discourses; they are dynamic and open to change; and they are ideological, imposing certain constructions over others as well as allowing resistance and controversy.

Important for understanding context is the application of a holistic analytical framework. For example, installation theory analyses human activity and context through examining three levels (Lahlou, 2008): (i) the physical level of the environment, (ii) the social level of institutions, and (iii) the psychological level of representations and practices. The three levels are intertwined, and the theory predicts that sustainable behaviours are the ones that are simultaneously enabled through these three layers (Lahlou, in press). Practices that are enabled in only one or two layers can be sustained for a limited time at some cost, but only those at the intersection of all three layers can be naturally reproduced. We can approach societal change as modifying the interconnections between these layers to make new intersections so that we can produce change. Change at a single layer only, e.g. trying to change individual behaviours with a media campaign targeted at changing representations, is usually not enough to produce sustainable changes (Farr, 1995). Installation research provides a good example of societal psychology, as it focuses on how to produce change whilst also considering the unexpected consequences of change (see Lahlou, 2009; Lahlou et al., 2012). This demonstrates systems to be unpredictably complex, and that only through implementing change 'for real' can we explore the interconnections between the physical, social and psychological. Lewin understood this, saying "if you want to truly understand something, try to change it" (Stam, 1996, p. 31). Hence one of the features of societal psychology is an examination of the interconnections between the psychological, political and physical layers – where change appears as a constant object of study. Different Societal research projects emphasise these interconnections in quite different ways, as we see below. What is always salient is the emphasis on change – the need for change, barriers to change, and resistance to change, i.e., *the politics of change.*

The Politics of Change

When the context of change is removed, so too is its politics. In any context there are competing interests in change processes: some perspectives are dominant, others are marginalised, some will gain from change, others will not. Hence there is a politics at stake within any empirical field. Researchers must establish whose interests are marginalised and whose are dominant, and provide an analysis of what is at stake in maintaining the current social order or seeking societal change.

Without this contextual analysis, there can emerge a de-politicised assumption that any social or societal change is a 'good thing' and that good research automatically supports systems of development and innovation. Yet, this may not follow. For example, changing the working practices of individuals and groups may be about increasing productivity in contexts of reduced rewards and increasing instability or increasing employees' satisfaction at work and loyalty to an organisation; - depending on where one stands in such discussions and whose interests and identities are most dominant. Hence, as researchers, we need to recognise that change is deeply political. Some interests are prioritised over others, and the social representation of change in any context is necessarily contested

or resisted (Bauer, Harre, & Jensen, 2013). Promoting societal change may involve a critique of current social relations or conversely defending current social inequalities. With intense pressures to increase the relevance and 'impact' of social research, we need to be alert to demands that research aligns with social or societal change, without critically examining what different research partners mean by this.

Furthermore, it is not so much a question of 'supporting' societal change or not: all social systems are in an on-going, complex and contested process of social continuity and social change (Kessi & Howarth, in press; Staerklé, 2011) or of conformity and innovation (Moscovici, 1976). For instance, while many depict the dramatic societal changes we see around the world in terms of increased mobility and cultural diversity (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, in press), some research and public debates emphasise how some groups and individuals do *not* appear to change – asserting more traditional or 'fundamental identities' (Giddens, 1991; Moghaddam, 2012), even in contexts of dramatic upheaval. Hence the culturally diverse cities of the world are simultaneously held up as symbols of massive (and often successful) societal change (Harris, 2013) and also as the sites of conflict, separate communities, failed multiculturalism (Cameron, 2011; Wieviorka, 1998) and so failed change projects. Hence, the very same social context and the very same social phenomena can be read as (successful) societal change or a failed attempt at change, depending on political interests.

This emphasises the importance of considering the politics of change for a particular context. For instance, some Societal Psychological research (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2013; Lyons, Madden, Chamberlain, & Carr, 2011) insists that studies of immigration and multiculturalism need an explicit societal approach that emphasises the role of history and politics in shaping the possibilities and constraints on identities, social relations and systems of inclusion and exclusion. Other research is individualised and de-contextualised (Rudmin, 2006); for instance, while the setting may be of Turkish immigrants in Germany, or Roma children in Bulgaria and so intensely intercultural and political contexts – the methods of analysis (e.g. survey) ask individual respondents about their experiences in the abstract (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Without a societal or *contextual* focus we may miss the social, historical and political conditions and restraints on movement, social inclusion and the development of new forms of belonging (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008; Lyons et al., 2011). Failures to change are therefore seen as the 'fault' of individuals. In reviewing Berry's different strategies for adapting to cultural change (Berry, 2008, 2011), for instance, we have argued that we need a grounded contextual analysis of the histories of intercultural contact and communication, the dominant social representations at play, and ways in which communities are so made 'different', 'other' and sometimes depicted as 'non-adaptive' to change (Howarth et al., 2013). In failing to develop such a societal account of global identities today, such research constructs some individuals as marginalised, dysfunctional and even dangerous in failing to integrate into the 'host' society, without recognising the societal constraints and systems of exclusion and prejudice that make changes in identity difficult or impossible (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli, & Howarth, 2012).

In our research into the development of young people's sense of belonging and positive cultural identities in different multicultural settings, what is apparent is that people are not free to pick and choose identities – even in intimate relationships of mixed identities and diverse cultural associations (Howarth et al., 2013). Dominant representations of cultural difference permeate school curricula, institutionalised practices and community relations and young people develop their sense of identity through and against others' representations (Howarth, 2002). For example, in studies on school exclusion, Howarth (2004, 2006) shows that resistance to racist expectations of disruptive and disengaged pupils may be subverted in ways that actually re-produce these expectations. Resistance to ideological representations of 'race' seems futile and societal change in systems of racialization seems

slow. Such examples demonstrate the ways that history and seemingly outdated ideologies of 'race' and 'the other' continue to limit identities today. However, in other research we have examined different practices of inclusion and multiculturalism in schools and how these open up or close down possibilities for more agentic or transformative systems of knowledge – where people have a sense of possibility, and a sense that negative representations of their communities and cultures can be challenged and subverted (Andreouli et al., in press; Howarth, 2009). What this research shows is that change, as any psychological process, does not happen in isolation – but is supported by contextual factors, social relations and political ideologies. Hence change at the individual level cannot be severed from a social or political level of analysis.

Thus, in developing a thorough analysis of context (in terms of its material, psychological and institutional layers), a Societal Psychological perspective requires critical engagement with the *politics of change*. This provokes an important question: what kind of change initiatives 'should' we support as psychologists and researchers? Are there 'good' and 'bad' forms of societal change projects? That is, in social interventions and planned change, how do we negotiate the politics of change? We address these questions directly in the next section.

Interventions and Planned Change

In interfacing with social policy and intervention programmes, as society's planned efforts to improve itself (or others), societal psychology has two contributions to make. First, in the context of a typically psychological, and indeed a wider neo-liberal understanding of behaviour as the responsibility of the individual person, societal psychology embeds that individual in his or her broader society, understanding behaviour as produced as much by social context as by individually responsible persons (Ichheiser, 1949). Second, it is not obvious or given by science which societal goals are the 'right' ones to pursue. Societal psychology also offers a means of deciding on appropriate societal change projects, namely, through public deliberation among the multiple stakeholders concerned.

The case of HIV/AIDS interventions presents an important example of the importance of the societal concern with context. HIV is transmitted through intimate human relations, through sex, sharing drug injecting needles, or from mother to child through pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. Not only are issues of knowledge, behaviour, and interpersonal negotiation at stake, but also issues of stigma, identity, and status. Decisions to take an HIV test, or to access and adhere to treatment depend on people's understanding of risks and benefits as well as their trust in medicine. Giving and receiving care entail complex human dynamics in asymmetrical, emotionally-laden, demanding relationships. In many countries, HIV/AIDS is concentrated in highly marginalised social groups, highlighting the connections between macrosocial inequalities, community living arrangements, interpersonal interactions and our most intimate personal and bodily lives (Campbell, 2003). Finally, intervention programmes to address these issues raise questions of behaviour change, managing organisations, negotiation among stakeholders, collaboration and partnerships (Cornish et al., 2012). Social and societal psychological issues are at stake throughout these issues, and thus our discipline ought to have much to contribute.

Social psychology's contribution in the early years of the HIV response, however, has been charged with causing more harm than good (Waldo & Coates, 2000). In particular, social change programmes were premised on cognitivist 'Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour' models which blatantly failed to take account of overwhelming contexts of poverty, marginality, gender inequality and disempowerment (Campbell & Cornish, 2010). If women were exchanging sex for a meagre income, or risked being thrown out or beaten up by their partners for suggesting con-

doms, their knowledge and attitudes about condom use were of little practical value to them. If people have to sell their productive assets in order to be able to travel to hospitals to receive their HIV medication, weighing up risks and benefits becomes much more than an individual cognitive activity. The basic social psychological insight of situationism – that behaviour is determined more by the situation in which we find ourselves than by intra-psychological processes – was neglected in early, social cognition based approaches. As the failures of individual-level HIV interventions have built up, the emphasis has changed, in the HIV/AIDS field to 'structural interventions' – i.e. interventions that seek to change the social structures shaping behaviour (Gupta, Parkhurst, Ogden, Aggleton, & Mahal, 2008). Understanding behaviour as contextual – or the psychological as societal – means that efforts to change behaviour need to be efforts to change the social or societal context. Societal psychological traditions including community psychology, liberation pedagogy, community development and critical public health have been more productive than traditional 'knowledge, attitude, behaviour' models (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). These fields' acknowledgement of context and power helped to shift the emphasis in HIV/AIDS interventions to questions of empowerment, participation, and partnership-building, in the interests of creating health-enabling community contexts (Campbell & Cornish, 2010). So, not only does societal psychology offer a 'diagnosis' of the contextual constitution of behaviour, it also offers the approach of creating 'better' community contexts as a feasible and desirable approach to intervention. Of course the question of 'better' community projects raises thorny issues of how to define 'better', on whose terms, and the consequent contextual politics of change.

Societal psychology's awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives and interests making up the contextual politics of change sensitises scholars to the often unrecognised expertise and skills of local communities in debating, initiating, and evaluating societal change. The call for change often comes from within the community itself. Hence marginalised and disenfranchised communities who face poverty, ill-health, prejudice and social exclusion are natural fields of research for societal psychology, as we saw above. Another example of this work comes from the favelas of Rio (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013). Our research on sociability and social development in this context sought to go beyond the usual analysis of the negative impact of poverty and segregation to investigate sources of community resilience and 'bottom-up' societal change in contexts of extreme social adversity. We studied relations between seemingly 'invisible' communities, which are pushed underground by stigma and the lack of recognition, and dominant groups in mainstream society. We found that while poverty and marginalisation compromise human potential and undermine the fabric of societies, favela communities are able to mobilise collective resources to resist exclusion and re-write relations with the wider public sphere of the city (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013). How is such change possible? And, most crucially for us, what defines positive societal change from the perspective of the community?

Outside their communities favela dwellers face discrimination and stigma caused by ideological representations that dehumanise and stereotype the favelas as places of violence, crime and drug dealing. Such representations are detrimental; they exert social and psychological violence (Howarth, 2002). However, they are not sufficient to prevent societal change altogether. Organised in new collective movements and bottom-up social organisations, favela communities use the resources of social and cultural identity, in particular the artistic practices of Brazilian black heritage, to develop and assert a positive set of representations to themselves, to the city and even to the world. These organisations and the representations they embrace act as psychosocial scaffoldings, defined as actions and structures that support and connect individual and societal change (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013). What we see is that projects and debates about societal change are found in the everyday practices of social actors and the manner in which they engage and interact in the public sphere - sustaining, challenging and eventually transforming ideological representations into new ones (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, in press).

In this section, we have argued that societal change needs to acknowledge the tension between top-down and bottom-up change ambitions and projects. Our research shows that productive change often requires collective, grassroots efforts to produce more enabling environments, and that marginalised communities may devise innovative means to challenge the environments that disadvantage them. Each project depends upon assumptions about the 'good' to be pursued (reduced transmission of HIV, adherence to treatment, and positive representations of favela dwellers). Other societal projects could also be envisaged, for example, 'protecting' the cultural homogeneity of a neighbourhood, incentivising long working hours, or discouraging women's employment to 'protect' family values. Societal change, and particularly planned societal change, is never unquestionably 'good' or desirable. If societal psychology has a 'societal politics', how might a societal psychologist choose between competing social goals? It is the recognition of the diversity of competing interests that is the starting point here; recognising that there is no single 'correct' goal or value (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). Nonetheless, social values are intellectual concerns. In other words, societal psychologists can legitimately concern themselves with debates over the social value of a variety of political positions, making the case, for example, for 'feminist' or 'family-friendly', 'multicultural' or 'culturally integrated', 'egalitarian' or 'aspirational' values (among many other dimensions); articulating their politics and acting accordingly. The second approach is to create a process to mediate among those diverse viewpoints, i.e. a process of public deliberation among the relevant communities (Jovchelovitch, 2007; O'Doherty & Davidson, 2010). For both of these approaches, there is no simple answer, nor are they simple approaches to implement. On important, impassioned issues, these processes entail conflict, resistance and disappointments. Because the stakes are high, those advantaged by the status quo are likely to resist change (Bauer, Harre, & Jensen, 2013), and societal change is never easy. Societal psychologists are not outside the politics of change, but a part of it, and politics is not comfortable.

We focused in this section on planned projects directed both by policy and by local initiative. A close examination of particular contexts shows that we also see unplanned, emergent changes happen, as we now turn to.

Emergent Change Processes

Within traditional social psychology, the study of change tends to follow very closely Kurt Lewin's three-step model of change – the unfreezing-moving-refreezing model (Burke, 1994; Lewin, 1951, 1997). This generic 'planned' approach refers to a deliberate, designed process, which arises out of conscious reasoning and actions. It represents a linear understanding of change in which change progresses from one stage to another through a series of pre-planned steps usually designed, implemented and directed by powerful groups or individuals and resisted by others (Burke, 1994; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Yet, as some of the research already outlined above illustrates, a societal psychology approach views change as an on-going process (Ball & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2012; Cornish, Montenegro, van Reisen, Zaka, & Sevitt, in press; Stacey, 2010). Traditional change research often looks for structures and patterns that represent or signify change, while discarding accidental, unplanned or emergent change. Societal psychology argues that the situated, historical and accidental aspects of change are equally important (Cole, 1996; Jovchelovitch, 2012).

This approach is increasingly important when dealing with the growing amount of change, uncertainty and fragmentation in societies today (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000). Traditional approaches to social change do not explain the on-going shifts in human interactions across both time and space, because they often depict change as a linear process that can be managed and imposed. However, changes in organisations and society – for example

in technology and the structures of organisations – mean that organisational and community boundaries are blurring. This creates difficulties in generating enduring collective meanings and coherent personal narratives and identities (Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Sennett, 1998). Efforts to create organisational and societal change often assume these to be stable, yet they are always dynamic (Gleibs, Noack, & Mummendey, 2010; McKenna, Garcia-Lorenzo, & Bridgman, 2010).

For example, an increasing phenomenon in many organisations is to organise work around projects. Yet, by its very nature project work tends to be a temporary organisational arrangement that creates drifting and fragmented working environments. Traditional research on teams rarely acknowledges this fragmentation, and assumes that knowledge about the task and about the team's development can be acquired a priori (Swan, Scarbrough, & Newell, 2010). Indeed, research on teams has been traditionally conducted from two perspectives; one with an 'external' aim: the improvement of team effectiveness, and one with an 'internal' objective: the development of the team itself over time. Team effectiveness research tries to model the 'variables' that influence team effectiveness to 'design and manage' effective or high performing teams (Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, & Thatcher, 2009; Hackman, 1987; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Sundstrom, de Meuse, & Futrell, 1990). However, the resulting representations have far too many variables, meaning complex team models are impossible to validate (Cronin, Weingart, & Todorova, 2011; West, 1996). Furthermore, individual skills are considered without much regard for contextual and/or cultural influences affecting the development of those skills (Chan, 1998; Devine, 2002; Schwartzman, 1986; West, 1996). This reflects a philosophy of viewing successful teams as a result of 'good design' which can be engineered.

Alternatively, team development studies aim to describe internal group processes as patterns that change over time (De Jong & Elfring, 2010). These studies have profoundly shaped the notion of teams 'developing' in stages. A model still widely used for interventions is Tuckman review (1965) coining the notion that teams develop linearly through the f*orming, norming, storming and performing stages*. Yet, whereas it is commonly accepted that teams change over time, the nature of change is not fundamentally questioned, and in particular the fundamental assumption that teams progress linearly through various stages (Gersick, 1988). However, organisational work is often emergent and uncertain, and teams must understand, negotiate and solve varying problems. For example, research in UK information and communication technology (ICT) shows that teams often face uncertain organisational environments (management changes, constant lack of resources). To cope, they develop multiple microstrategies to manage a changing organizational environment, engage in constant boundary management with other project stakeholders, and collectively improvise to maintain the project (Garcia-Lorenzo, Kourti, & Yu, 2013). These 'drifting' conditions affect team development and its members' identification processes and need to be taken into account. Thus, it is not only the ability to follow a pre-given plan but also to accept and engage in emergent ways of work that is critical to success.

Hence, societal change is not only rooted in particular contexts but also in particular histories which evolve and develop over time, in directions that are rarely predictable. Societal psychology examines both the planned nature of most top down and bottom up attempts at societal change - the planned 'revolutions' or interventions – as well as the on-going, fragmented, emergent, and collectively developed change processes that happen in daily practices as we have seen here. Indeed, it is not profound or inaccessibly 'deep' knowledge, but the common-sense knowledge and practices of everyday settings that are most revealing when it comes to understanding societal change and its political implications.

In this section we argued that organisational, or in broader terms, societal change, can be understood as dynamic and on-going. Whereas traditional approaches may highlight that changes move through clearly defined stages, a Societal Psychological perspective focuses on the emergent 'waves' of change in the context in which change occurs. Furthermore, aside from factors that describe individual (Cartwright, Tytherleigh, & Robertson, 2007) or group-level (Amiot, Terry, & Callan, 2007) reactions, societal psychology understands the change processes as embedded in the political and historical context and therefore residing in the multiplicity of perspectives and interests of organisations, communities and their members. This multiplicity of perspectives is often formed out of a clash of views, and those involved in the change process have to constantly evaluate their perspectives on and fit within the changed social context to recreate an understanding of who they are (Gleibs, Täuber, Viki, & Giessner, 2013). In this sense, emergent change is closely related to the earlier described top-down/bottom-up aspect of change, and also associated with conflict and resistance. Indeed, our research makes clear that when working with social collectives we need to account for both planned/designed interventions as well as emergent/participatory and developmental changes. Thus, in developing a more contextual approach to change, a societal approach that focuses on the multiplicity of experiences might be able to help us manage these divergent tensions while enabling us to innovate in our social organizations and relationships. These three aspects of societal psychology's particular approach to change are therefore interconnected, and lead us to some issues for future development.

Possibilities for Future Developments within Societal Psychology and the Study of Change

Drawing on key features of societal psychology for the study of societal change, we see three key considerations for future research. Firstly, to examine the contextual politics of change and understand the local interests of change projects, it is necessary to work with key stakeholders and, in particular, the potential beneficiaries. Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) approach to participation in education, participatory research methodologies have become the bedrock of societal psychological approaches to community (Campbell & Murray, 2004) or technological innovation (Lahlou, 2009). Within societal psychology, participatory research approaches have helped ensure that the methods and the analysis are influenced by participants within the context. While this involves careful attention to the politics involved in 'taking sides' in research (Back & Solomos, 1993; Hammersley, 2001), it can open the research process to potential beneficiaries and innovative methods. For instance, in the study of everyday forms of multiculturalism (Andreouli et al., in press; Howarth, 2011) we involve stakeholders in education, social policy, arts and community projects to ensure that our research designs and grounding assumptions work in constructive parallels with those in the field, with a particular focus on developing creative methods and insights from the arts.

A second consideration for the study of societal change is the political implications of our research. Researchers cannot be separated from the societal ecosystems to which research belongs – and so researchers "have a moral obligation to recognise the potential impact of their work" (Haste, 2012, p. 6). In the very first stages of re-search conceptualisation, the stakeholders who might influence the political landscape should be identified and involved. Social science research more generally is moving towards research-policy networks or 'collaborations' where policy-makers are actively involved in the research process (Aveling & Jovchelovitch, in press; Brown et al., 2012; Jones, Jones, Shaxson, & Walker, 2012). Such activities enable greater engagement between researchers and those making policies about contemporary social issues. Societal psychology's emphasis on the opportunities

and the challenges of using dialogue to facilitate societal change equips it well to deal critically with such competing demands (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

As a third consideration, we need to contemplate how to assess the impact of our research on societal change or in helping maintain the status-quo (Reicher, 2004). In other words, how do we understand what 'impact' means? As researchers interested in the psychological dynamics of the social world, we need to participate in the development of tools to understand (as well as critique) how research influences and/or critiques policy-making. Research impact may occur in many ways (i.e., not necessarily adoption into policy), and there may not be the political will or indeed may not have the appetite for academics' recommendations regarding desirable societal change. This is especially the case where research explicitly challenges policy (e.g. Wagner et al., 2012). Furthermore, societal psychology has much more to contribute in terms of critical contributions to further investigation of the societal processes that shape policy-making and its impact on society, for example, in the field of environmental policy-making (see Tennant, 2012). Drawing from the societal psychological perspective first outlined by Himmelweit and Gaskell (1990), this requires interdisciplinary collaborations between societal psychologists and other social researchers in order to fully analyse the social phenomena that lead to change.

To Conclude: Towards a Psychology 'Discovered' in the Real World

Societal psychology takes societal change as an object of study, as a tool for study and as a research goal. It therefore emerges as less an example of applied psychology and more as an alternative perspective: concerned not only with applying social and political psychology to real-world issues, but more importantly understanding societal change in context, through both a focus on top-down and bottom-up planned change, as well as unplanned, emergent change.

Rather than imposing an a priori theoretical frame, the interactions between context and stakeholders are investigated to obtain a nuanced explanation of societal change. This is not to say that Societal psychology eschews explanatory expectations in principle: a common meta-theoretical position is that social thought and action involves culturally entrenched skills and practices rather than highly abstracted, portable generalisations of knowledge. Specific details of particular situations may be the most important explanatory factors, as opposed to generalised and generalisable regularities across situations.

Clearly, other forms of psychology promote a similar vision – such as community psychology, political psychology, critical psychology, feminist psychology and postmodern psychologies. However, our approach contrasts with other ways of applying psychology to social issues per se. One contrast concerns the content of the theories, and the other concerns the relation between the theories and practice. Regarding theory content, Societal psychology is necessarily eclectic, since different tools are required to explain societal change in different historical and cultural locations and regarding different forms of social thought and action. Rather than being a form of individual psychology with social content or focus (e.g., social cognition: Fiske & Taylor, 2008), societal psychology takes an intrinsically interdisciplinary approach (Himmelweit, 1990). The range of theoretical tools cannot be specified a priori, since the choice of additional disciplines that are necessary to invoke depends on the phenomenon at issue. This is emphasised by change as part of the method of societal psychology: rather than operationalising predefined theoretical constructs in a controlled study, societal change itself provides natural experiments which generate specific explanatory challenges.

The outcome may resemble something akin to an inter-field theory (e.g., Bechtel & Hamilton, 2007; Darden & Maull, 1977; Grantham, 2004): different theoretical tools have different explanatory purposes, and one theory's 'gaps' may be 'filled' by another's explanations; the extent to which each theory is utilised depends on exactly what is explained. An excellent example of this is the integration of social representations with social identity theory (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011; Howarth, 2002). This suggests highly specific conceptual 'trading zones' between different theories and also between theories and the local expertise of practitioners and community members (Galison, 1998). Galison discusses the development of radar, where physicists and engineers drew on different prior representations in generating a specialised, joint theoretical language. Such local coordination of practical and symbolic activities of different aspects for understanding societal change mirrors the trading zones and collaborative outcomes in our research. The resulting explanatory pluralism means that the explanation derived depends on the case in question.

As a result, societal psychology emerges as less concerned with psychology applied to the real world, than with psychology as it is *discovered in the real world*. Two approaches to conducting research on applied problems can be distinguished, one starting with theory and the other starting with a social problem. Applied psychology has typically used theory developed in traditional forms of research (e.g., laboratory-based experiments or questionnaire-based surveys) to address real world problems in a piece-meal way. For example, Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam (2009) apply Social Identity Theory to a range of issues in health, illness and well-being. This approach gives priority to the preselected theory which is applied to a phenomenon, asking theory-relevant questions about that phenomenon, and generating data that feed back to the theory. Howitt (1991) contrasts this with 'Social Policy Research', which aims to inform the policy choices of decision-makers, where the problem agenda is usually set by the policy makers. Buunk and Van Vugt (2008), for instance, develop a model of engaging 'end users' in research at each key stage, from problem identification, to analysis, model testing and intervention design.

Societal psychology is different from both of these approaches. Starting with real world problems, the theory grows out of the field, rather than being developed externally and then 'applied'. But societal psychology does not align itself with a particular problem definition (such as that of policy makers, or employees or employers, and so on). Societal psychology starts with problems in the field, and seeks to develop theorised understandings of those problems, incorporating the diversity of perspectives in the field.

The role of practice and real situations vis-à-vis theory evokes Lewin's famous dictum that 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory' (Lewin, 1951, p. 169). However, the closer coupling we propose – the constitutive relation – prompts us to revisit this. For societal psychology, there is nothing so practical as a good theory because there is nothing so theoretical as good practice. In aspiring to produce good practice, we draw on social and political psychology for core understandings of the dynamics of situated human interactions, and the practice influences the choice of theory. However, there is a strange disconnect. Applied fields demonstrate little explicit recognition of the potential contribution of social and political psychology, even where they rely on insights from these fields; interventions often focus on an outcome (safety, better health, less prejudice), rather than on the theory that can help explain that outcome.

Yet this does not compromise research quality. Societal psychology also enriches the 'canon' of psychological concepts typically explored in abstract settings, suggesting ways they might begin to incorporate the more situated style of researching and theorising that works in real settings. Hence, societal psychological contributions to knowledge have often emerged as part of related psychological literatures (e.g., political psychology, human

factors) or applied fields (e.g., global public health, education). Societal psychology promises a way of bringing together theory and practice in psychology, to the mutual benefit of the discipline and the applied fields in which we work.

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