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### **THIRTY-ONE YEARS OF GROUP RESEARCH IN *SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY QUARTERLY* (1975-2005)**

Wendy J. Harrod, Bridget K. Welch, & Jeff Kuskowski  
Iowa State University

#### **ABSTRACT**

*We examined trends in group research published in Social Psychology Quarterly (SPQ) from 1975 to 2005. We identified a total of 332 papers about groups published during the time period. Following Moreland, Hogg, and Hains (1994), we created an index of interest in groups by dividing the number of pages in papers about groups by the total number of journal pages. Results show that interest in groups in SPQ generally fell from the late 1970s through the 1980s, rose during most of the 1990s, but stalled in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2005 interest in groups hovered just under the 31-year average. We examined the impact of European and social cognition approaches, expectation states theory, social exchange theory, and symbolic interactionism on these trends. The most popular topic of research is group structure. The most common research method is the laboratory experiment. Papers about groups have increased in length, number of references, and number of authors. Most papers report a single study. The most productive authors and most influential papers are identified.*

## INTRODUCTION

Social psychologists have always been interested in groups. In the early 1970s, however, Ivan Steiner noticed a drop in the level of social psychologists' interest. In his famous paper, "Whatever Happened to the Group in Social Psychology?" Steiner hypothesized that a period of social tranquility decreases social psychological interest in groups: "My point is that when society is serene, and only a few wrong-headed deviants disturb our tranquility, we focus our attention on individuals or on large organizations. But when many small segments of society are vying with one another, our attention is drawn to units of intermediate size" (Steiner 1974:105). Steiner predicted that a period of social unrest would produce an upward trend in social psychologists' publications about groups (with a possible lag of 8 to 10 years), whereas a period of social calm would produce a downward trend. He noted that the Great Depression and WWII were times of turmoil, and they spawned a very "groupy" social psychology in the late 1940s and 1950s. The 1950s were a time of tranquility, and that was followed by "the hibernation of the group" in the 1960s. Because the 1960s and early 1970s were hardly tranquil times, Steiner predicted that by the late 1970s, "the group will rise again!" However, by the 1980s it became clear that group dynamics was not becoming increasingly more popular, and Steiner (1983; 1986) twice revised his optimistic predictions. Despite his frustration in predicting trends, Steiner did succeed in drawing attention to trends in social psychological publications about groups, and in making the study of these trends an interesting topic for research.

Steiner described the "groupy" (versus individualistic) approach to research as looking for causes that are located outside the individual, that are located in the collective actions of others or in the constraints imposed by the larger system. The individual is presumed to be part of a larger system, a small group, an organization, or society. Fellow group members may or not be visible, but they help predict and explain behavior (Steiner 1974). Steiner never collected empirical data on publication trends, and thus never provided an operational definition of group research.

Moreland, Hogg, and Hains (1994) (henceforth referred to as MHH) were the first to collect data on publications about groups and test Steiner's hypothesis. MHH at first thought it would be easy to identify papers about groups by simply looking for papers on classic topics like conformity or group decision-making, that reported data collected from several participants who interacted with each other. They found many papers like that, but soon confronted some complications. One complication was the issue of whether or not to include dyads in their definition of groups. Others include dyads in their definition of groups (see Forsyth 2006), but MHH reasoned that dyads seem different from other groups in many ways, and that some phenomena that occur in groups (like coalition formation, majority/minority influence, and socialization) cannot occur in dyads at all. MHH decided that "most" research on dyads should be excluded, with two kinds of exceptions. In some papers on dyadic bargaining, the parties represented the interests of constituent groups, and these kinds of papers would be included. In other papers, group behavior was studied using data collected, "perhaps as a methodological convenience," from dyads. These kinds of dyadic papers were included only if a "clear interest in group phenomena was apparent" (Moreland et al. 1994:531). They cite Nyquist and Spence (1986) as an example of this kind of paper. Nyquist and Spence studied the contribution of gender as a status characteristic to the determination of leadership choice in task-focused groups. The researchers paired male and female participants with high and low dispositional

(personality) dominance, and found that men were more likely to assume leadership of mixed sex groups even when the men scored lower in dispositional dominance than their female partners. Their method involved dyads but their theory focused on whether men possess more legitimate authority in task groups even when personality may dictate otherwise. Furthermore, MHH did not limit their definition of group research only to studies of small, face-to-face, interacting groups. MHH also included studies of stereotyping, prejudice, intergroup contact, and ingroup bias between members of racial, ethnic, or national groups.

MHH studied group research published from 1975 to 1993 in psychological social psychology journals (i.e., *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*). Contrary to Steiner's predictions, MHH found that interest in groups continued to fall during the late 1970s, remained low in the 1980s, but rose again in the 1990s. They concluded that developments within the field of social psychology itself, rather than levels of unrest in society, explain these trends. In particular, they attributed the growing interest in groups in the 1990s to the growing popularity of European approaches (especially social identity theory) and to the growing popularity of social cognition theories and methods (e.g., stereotyping theories and implicit priming methods). MHH content analyzed the papers about groups, and looked for trends in topics of interest. Their results showed an enormous increase in interest in intergroup relations, making it the most popular topic in psychological social psychological studies of groups. In contrast, intra-group topics were much less popular. Interest in group performance had dropped significantly. The study of group structure was even less popular.

Sanna and Parks (1997) were the next to study trends in publications about groups. Given the focus on intergroup topics in psychological social psychology journals, Sanna and Parks proposed to find out, "Whatever Happened to Intragroup Research?" They reasoned that a logical place to look for intra-group research would be applied and organizational psychology journals (i.e., *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Academy of Management Journal*). Sanna and Parks' study of publications from 1975 through 1994 showed that group performance is the most popular topic of group research in the applied and organizational literature. They found negligible interest in intergroup relations. They also found negligible interest in the study of group structure. Like MHH, Sanna and Parks found that interest in groups fell during the late 1970s, remained low in the 1980s, and rose again in the 1990s. Sanna and Parks concluded that group publications rose in the 1990s in part because social psychologists with papers about intra-group processes started sending these kinds of papers to applied and organizational journals rather than to psychological social psychology journals.

## **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GROUP RESEARCH IN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?**

Despite the popularity of group research in sociological social psychology, neither MHH nor Sanna and Parks included sociologically oriented journals in their analysis. A search of Web of Knowledge failed to uncover any published research examining trends in group research published in sociologically oriented journals. If intergroup relations is the most popular topic in psychological social psychology, and if group performance is the most popular topic in applied

and organizational psychology, then what is the most popular topic of group research in sociological social psychology? We hypothesized that it would be the study of group structure. Sociological social psychology seems a likely place to find the study of group structure, given the history of its major journal, and the nature of its classic contributions to the study of groups.

Sociological social psychology inherited a focus on sociometry through the history of its major journal. The American Sociological Association's major journal of social psychology, *Social Psychology Quarterly* (*SPQ*), started out in 1937 as *Sociometry: A Journal of Interpersonal Relations*. *Sociometry* was founded by J. L. Moreno (first published as *Sociometric Review* in 1936), as an outlet for research combining "socius-structure of the group" and "metrum-measurement" (Moreno 1955b:17). At that time, *Sociometry* was not a sociology journal, but an interdisciplinary journal "dealing with sociometric and near-sociometric small group research" (Moreno 1954:186). Its editor was a psychologist (Gardner Murphy), and its eclectic editorial board included psychiatrists and anthropologists (e.g., Margaret Mead). Moreno believed *Sociometry* was more advanced than 1930s-style sociology (which he characterized as American "armchair" sociology) because his journal explored the dynamics of group structure with measurement instruments like the sociometric test, sociometric questionnaire, social distance scale, and sociogram (Moreno 1955b:15-16).

Moreno, however, was closely associated with sociology, and belonged to the American Sociological Society. When Moreno decided to step down as editor in 1955, he gave *Sociometry* to the American Sociological Society. The journal's name changed to *Sociometry: Journal of Research in Social Psychology* in 1956, and the new editors broadened the scope of the journal to focus on "the systematic exploration of the processes and products of social interaction at the interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup and intragroup levels" (Editorial 1956). In 1978 *Sociometry* changed its name to *Social Psychology* and in 1979 to *Social Psychology Quarterly*. The purpose of the journal's name change was to reflect more accurately the broad field of theory and research in social psychology. Nevertheless, the journal continued (as stated on the inside cover) to publish "articles concerning the processes and products of social interaction," suggesting that studies of group structure would still find a home. The journal further broadened its scope in 1988 (as stated on the inside cover) to "publishing papers on the link between the individual and society," but it continued with the tradition of welcoming sociometric research (e.g., Hallinan and Kubitschek 1990).

Furthermore, many of the classic (non-sociometric) contributions to group research by sociologists have focused on group structure, and the pages of *SPQ* show that these classic contributions continue to influence sociological research today. Robert Bales (1958) examined roles and role differentiation in small groups. Berger, Cohen and Zelditch (1972) examined status characteristics and social interaction. The continuing impact of these classic contributions can be found in contemporary research on roles and statuses in groups (e.g., Van Rossem and Vermande 2004; Whitmeyer, Webster, and Rashotte 2005). George C. Homans (1958) examined patterns of social exchange and distributive justice in groups. The impact of his ideas can be found in contemporary research on exchange networks and on social justice (e.g., Hegtvedt and Johnson 2000; Walker et al. 2000). The early symbolic interactionists were also interested in group structure (Shalin 1986). Thrasher (1927) and Whyte (1943) examined group structure as an emergent process in their studies of street gangs. Other symbolic interactionists

(e.g., Kuhn and McPartland 1954) studied group structure as a pre-existing, organized, stable pattern of interaction on the basis of which individuals derive their sense of self, their definitions of the situation, and their choice of modes of conduct. The ideas of early symbolic interactionists continue to influence contemporary research focusing on group structure (e.g., Jimerson 1999; Troyer, Younts, and Kalkhoff 2001).

History, then, suggests that sociological social psychology should have an active program of group research, specializing in the topic of group structure. On the other hand, some contemporary researchers have expressed concern about a decline in group research in sociology (Harrington and Fine 2000; Burke 2003). If this were the case, it would be problematic indeed, as the study of groups is one of the pillars of sociological social psychology (Delamater 2003:xi). Although sociological social psychologists may express concern about the demise of the study of groups, we were unable to find any quantitative analysis that would indicate if their fears were justified. Hence, we set out to conduct some research of our own. We decided to examine papers published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005. *SPQ* is not the only sociologically oriented journal of social psychology, but it is the flagship journal of sociological social psychology. It seemed to us to be the best place to find trends in sociologically oriented group research. In Study One, our goal was to adopt the methodology of MHH to study trends in group research in *SPQ*. In Study Two, we intended to characterize the nature of group research published in *SPQ*, using some basic bibliometric methods.

## STUDY ONE

In this study we examined trends in the popularity of group research, determined what are the most common topics and methods, and tried to identify the most important theoretical influences. Data come from papers published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005. We compare our results with those found in previous research.

### Method

We examined every paper published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005 (including awards, book reviews, and comments), and identified the papers about groups. Most of the papers about groups involved the direct study of naturally occurring or experimentally formed groups. For instance, we found observational and survey research on naturally occurring groups such as football teams (Rees and Segal 1984), classrooms (Hallinan 1979), dormitory residents (MacNeil, Davis, and Pace 1975), sororities (Paxton and Moody 2003), juries (Manzo 1996), and therapy groups (McCarrick, Manderscheid, and Silbergeld 1981). We also found studies of ad hoc experimental groups in papers about N-person prisoner's dilemmas (Bonachich 1976), choice shifts (Hong, 1978), social exchange (Simpson and Borch 2005), and coalition formation (Komorita and Brinberg 1977). In some cases, the experimental groups included confederates or simulated partners (e.g., Kaplan 1977).

Neither the research method nor the number of participants, however, was a decisive factor in determining whether the paper was about groups. For instance, some theoretical papers (e.g., Harrington and Fine 2000) and some comments (e.g., Nemeth 1983) were about groups, despite the fact that they did not involve the direct study of any participants. Other papers about groups

involved the direct study of individuals. This was especially true of experimental and survey research about intergroup relations, on topics such as social identity (Ellmers, Van Dyck, Hinkle, and Jacobs 2000), stereotyping (Gaertner and McLaughlin 1983), or contact (Stephan 1977). Likewise, papers involving the direct study of dyads could be about groups. In some cases the dyads were categorized into groups (Yamagishi and Kiyonari 2000), or the dyads were representatives of groups (Insko, Schopler, Kennedy, and Dahl 1992). In other cases, the researchers used dyads as a methodological convenience to test a theory about groups. For instance, Ridgeway, Diekema and Johnson (1995) studied the legitimacy of hierarchy in peer groups. In the theory section of their paper, the authors make it clear that the topic is about groups. They define peer groups as homogeneous interactional groups whose members do not obviously differ in external status characteristics or established skill levels. They give an example by adding that, “informal groups among people working at the same job or among students are often peer groups of this type” (p. 298). In the methods section of the paper, the authors make it clear that they studied dyads as a methodological convenience. The authors explain that they needed to create task-oriented groups with emergent influence hierarchies, and that “to accomplish this in the simplest way, we formed task-oriented dyads of one confederate and one naïve subject” (p. 303). Because a “clear interest in group phenomena was apparent,” we included this dyadic paper in the category of group research, following MHH’s guidelines.

Also following MHH’s guidelines, we did not count dyadic papers as being about groups if they focused particularly on dyads, and were not just using dyads as a methodological convenience to test a theory about groups. Most of the papers eliminated on this basis were either about romantic couples (e.g., Schafer and Keith 1980; Cast 2003) or about dyadic models of equity (e.g., Moschetti 1979, 1982; Alessio 1980) or social exchange (e.g., Molm 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1981a, and 1981b).

Social exchange papers by Linda D. Molm illustrate our reasoning. In a series of papers, Molm (1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1981a, and 1981b) tested hypotheses about reinforcement on behavior. Two participants, isolated from each other, sat in front of experimental consoles with three sets of stimulus lights, two response buttons, and a “reinforcer panel” with lights and a counter indicating the sum of money earned. Participants knew that the colored stimulus lights were associated with the patterns of button presses that would produce earnings, and they knew that at any phase of the experiment their earnings might depend upon their own responses, the other person’s responses, or their joint response. Participants did not know, however, what the reinforcement patterns or contingencies were. Molm manipulated the amount of money earned by different responses (i.e., sequences of button pushes) across different stages of the experiments, and tested the impact of differential reinforcement contingencies on behavior. Since the theory (having to do with operant conditioning and reward contingencies) and the research paradigm specifically focused on dyadic behavior, we did not count these papers as being about groups. Three later publications by Molm, however, we did count as being about groups. In one, she studied dyads embedded in a 4-person exchange network with two simulated partners (Molm 1988); in a second paper, she studied single participants in a 4-person exchange network with three simulated partners (Molm 1994a); and in a third paper, she wrote a theoretical analysis about social exchange in networks and groups (Molm 1994b).

Our classification of Molm's earlier social exchange publications as being specifically about dyads is consistent with Yamagishi and Cook's (1993) assessment of social exchange research. They describe "traditional" social exchange theory as limited primarily to the analysis of dyadic exchange relations. They say that in response to this limitation, researchers then "launched a series of theoretical and empirical efforts to extend social exchange theory beyond the initial, fairly narrow dyadic perspective" (p. 235). Yamagishi and Cook explain that the first avenue for extending social exchange theory beyond its dyadic perspective was to embed these relations in larger network structures (as Molm did in her later research). Thus, Yamagishi and Cook's description of "traditional" versus extended social exchange theory is consistent with our conclusion that Molm's earlier papers were about dyads but her later papers were about groups.

We collected data on the papers about groups following the methods and coding categories used by MHH. We coded papers on the basis of their research methods and topics (see Appendix A for examples of articles from each of the topical areas). We coded papers according to whether they reflected European or social cognition approaches utilizing the same parameters set by MHH. Influence by a European approach was indicated in a paper by its discussion of and citations to minority influence or social representations theories by Moscovici and his colleagues, or to social identity and self categorization theories by Tajfel and Turner, and their colleagues. Nationality of the paper's authors played no part in the determination of European influence. Influence by a social cognition approach was indicated by a paper's discussion of and citations to any attribution theory, or any theory of cognitive structure or process (e.g., cognitive balance, cognitive consistency, attitudes, heuristics). Also included in the social cognition approach were papers that included self theory and the measurement of self (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept). Finally, papers reporting use of any cognitive method (e.g., recall, priming, response latency, implicit association) were counted as being influenced the social cognition approach.

In addition to following MHH's coding strategies, we also wanted to examine the possible influences of theories identified by Delamater (2003) as "basic" to contemporary sociological social psychology. Delamater identified five such basic theoretical perspectives: symbolic interactionism (SI), social exchange, expectation states (EST), social structure and personality (SS&P), and evolutionary social psychology (ESP). So in addition to coding papers on European and social cognition approaches, we also kept track of whether a paper was influenced by any of these five basic theories. In our analysis, SI included classic, structural, and identity approaches, dramaturgy, and conversation analysis. EST included status characteristics theory, status construction theory, and various theories about performance expectations based on rewards or interchange patterns. Social exchange theory included research on bargaining, coalitions, equity, distributive justice, economic sociology, and social dilemma/game theoretical research. SS&P included theories about the impact of social stratification or social class on individual feelings, attitudes and behaviors particularly in school, work, family and health contexts; theories of modernity or social change as they impact psychological functioning; life course theories; and any other research elaborating on the work of Kohn and Schooler. ESP included theories explaining human social behavior by characteristics humans share with other animals such as biological factors or ecological factors, and evolutionary perspectives on reproduction, aggression, or altruism.

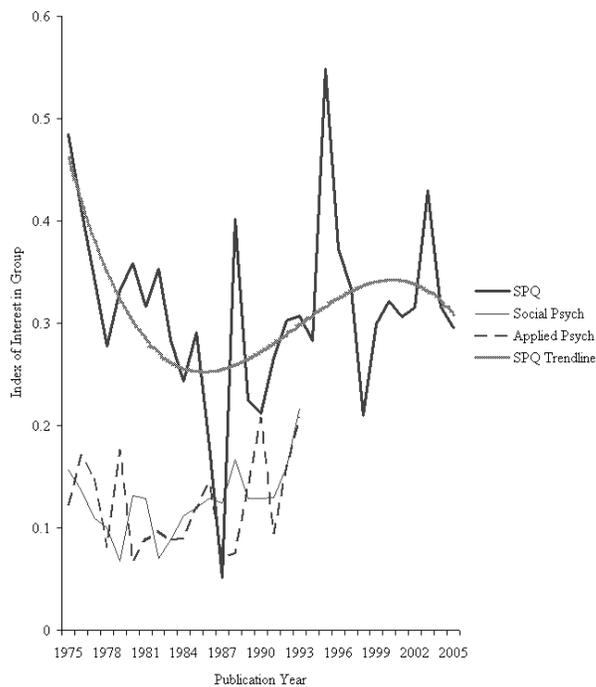
We dummy coded papers (zero or one) for the influence of each of the two approaches and five theories. Thus, it was possible for papers to be influenced by any combination of approaches and theories, or to be influenced by none at all. Most papers (76%) were influenced by at least one of the approaches or theories (see Appendix B for examples of articles influenced by the approaches and theories).

To assess the reliability of judgments about group research, one of us (Welch) independently evaluated 103 papers randomly selected out of the 1,037 papers evaluated by another one of us (Harrod). We achieved 98% agreement in our evaluations of whether a paper is about groups. This yielded a Cohen's kappa value of .96. To assess the reliability of other judgments, one of us (Welch) independently evaluated 33 papers randomly selected out of the subset of (332) group papers evaluated by another one of us (Harrod). In judging European approach, we achieved 97% agreement, and this yielded a Cohen's kappa of value of .83. The percentage of agreement and the Cohen's kappa value for other judgments are as follows: social cognition approach, 94% and .85; EST, 97% and .83; exchange theory, 100% agreement; SI, 97% and .87; research method, 94% and .92; and topic, 90% and .89. These are good reliability levels. One of us (Harrod) then coded papers for the influence of SS&P and ESP.

## Results

We identified 332 papers about groups out of the 1,037 papers published from 1975 to 2005. The number of papers about groups per year reached a low of 2 in 1987, and a high of 19 in 1976, with an average of 10.7 per year. Following MHH, we counted the number of pages in papers about groups and divided that number by the total number of pages in all papers in the journal to construct an "index of interest in groups." Figure 1 shows the index of interest in groups in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005. This index ranges from a low of 5.1% in 1987 to a high of 54.9% in 1995, with an average of 31.2%. Data from psychological social psychology journals (reconstructed with permission from Richard Moreland), and from applied and organizational psychology journals (reconstructed with permission from Lawrence Sanna and Craig Parks) are shown in the bottom of Figure 1. In comparison to these other journals, *SPQ* has a much higher level of interest in groups. In every year except 1987 (which included a special issue on language), *SPQ* published relatively more pages of papers on groups than did the psychological journals.

Figure 1. Levels of interest in groups in *SPQ*, and in social and applied psychology journals.



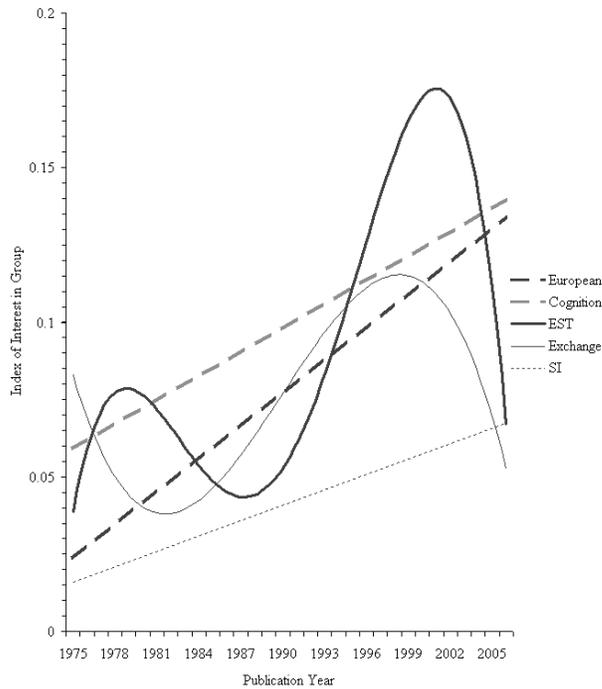
We performed a number of polynomial regressions to test for linear, quadratic, and cubic effects of years on index of interest. We found that a cubic regression equation best describes the data,  $F(3,30) = 3.57, p < .03$ , with an  $R^2$  of about 28%, and a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.01, indicating little serial correlation among adjacent residuals. The trendline is shown in Figure 1. It indicates that in *SPQ* interest in groups generally fell through the late 1970s and 1980s, rose into the 1990s, but stalled in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2005, interest in groups hovered under the 31-year average.

Following MHH, we looked for changes in the popularity of the social psychological approaches and theories to explain these trends. We constructed measures of popularity by counting the number of pages in papers about groups influenced by each approach and theory, and divided those numbers by the total number of pages in all papers in the journal. After determining popularity by year, we tested for linear, quadratic, cubic, and quartic trends. Results are shown in Figure 2. The popularity of European and social cognition approaches are best represented by upward linear trends, whereas the popularity of EST, exchange, and SI are best represented by quartic, cubic, and linear trends, respectively. On average, social cognition and EST have been the most popular theoretical perspectives in group papers in *SPQ*. Group papers about social cognition made up 9.94% of all pages published in *SPQ* during the 31-year period, and group papers about EST made up 9.20%.

The popularity of SS&P and ESP are not shown in Figure 2 because we found too few group papers influenced by these theories to justify trend analysis. Only 8 group papers were

influenced by SS&P and only 5 by ESP in the 31-year period. With most years showing zero popularity, we decided that the influence of SS&P and ESP could not help explain trends in the popularity of group research. Therefore, we dropped consideration of the influence of SS&P and ESP from further analysis.

Figure 2. Trends in the popularity of approaches and theories in SPQ.



Following MHH, we subtracted the pages associated with the approaches and theories from the overall index of interest in groups, and re-estimated trends in order to understand which perspectives contributed most to the observed increase in popularity of group research during the 1990s. Figure 3 shows that a rejuvenation of interest in groups in the 1990s would not have taken place without the contribution of European and social cognition approaches. Figure 3 shows the cubic trendline for the overall index of interest in groups in *SPQ*, along with the re-estimated trendline after taking out pages in papers influenced by social cognition, and after taking out pages in papers influenced by the European approach. Without either of these approaches, interest in groups would have continued to fall well into the 1990s before starting a slow, partial recovery. Without the European or the social cognition approaches, the average index of interest in groups across the 31-year period would have been reduced from 31.2% to 23.3% and 21.3%, respectively.

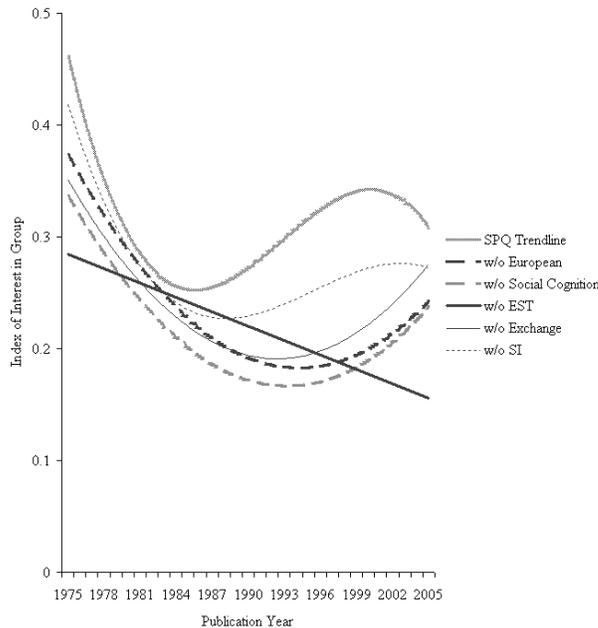
Figure 3. Influence of approaches and theories on interest in groups in *SPQ*.

Figure 3 also shows that SI, exchange, and EST each played a role in reviving interest in groups in the 1990s. The index of interest in groups would not have been reduced very much before the 1990s if papers about SI were subtracted. After that point, however, removing pages inspired by SI would noticeably pull down the interest in groups. Over the 31-year period, the average index of interest in groups would have been reduced to 27.0% without the influence of SI. Social exchange theory played an even bigger role than SI in supporting group research, particularly starting in the late 1980s. Without papers inspired by exchange, interest in groups would have fallen through most of the 1990s, and the average index of interest in groups would have been reduced to 23.6%. EST had an even bigger impact. Without the influence of EST, interest in groups would have continued to go down across the 31-year period. There would have been no revival starting in the 1990s. By the late 1990s group research would have been in the doldrums. Without papers inspired by EST, the average index of interest in groups would be 22.0%.

The research methods used in papers about groups are shown in Table 1. Laboratory experiments account for almost half of the research methods in the group papers published in *SPQ*. This is substantially lower than the popularity of lab experiments found in group publications in psychological social psychology journals, but comparable to that found in applied and organizational psychology journals. *SPQ* publishes more group research using surveys than the other journals. *SPQ* publishes substantially more papers using "other" methods, including commentaries, awards, and editorial introductions.

**Table 1. Distribution of Methods Used in Papers about Groups.**

Method	SPQ	Journals	
		Psychological Social	Applied/Org Psychology
Laboratory experiment	47%	76%	50%
Field experiment	2%	3%	7%
Survey	15%	9%	10%
Field study	16%	1%	21%
Other	20%	11%	12%

*Note.* The psychological social psychology journals evaluated were *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* for the years 1975-1993 (Moreland et al. 1994). The applied/organizational psychology journals evaluated were the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Academy of Management Journal* for the years 1975-1994 (Sanna and Parks 1997). The evaluation of *SPQ* was for the years 1975-2005.

The topics addressed in papers about groups are shown in Table 2. As expected, group structure is the most popular topic in the papers published in *SPQ*. A substantially greater proportion of papers about group structure are published in *SPQ* than are published in either psychological social psychology or applied and organizational psychology journals. Intergroup relations is somewhat popular in *SPQ*, but much less so than in the psychological social psychology journals. Perhaps the most surprising finding in Table 2 is the relative neglect of group performance in the pages of *SPQ*. Group performance is either the most or second most popular topic in the psychological journals, but it appears to get short shrift in *SPQ*.

**Table 2. Distribution of Group Papers by Topic.**

Topic	<i>SPQ</i>		Journals		Applied/Org Psychology	
	Percent of total	n	Percent of total	n	Percent of total	n
Group structure	42	140	8	57	2	7
Conflict within groups	18	61	17	120	19	75
Intergroup relations	18	60	38	269	2	8
Group performance	8	27	23	162	64	259
Ecology of groups	6	19	4	28	10	39
Group composition	4	15	7	50	3	14
Other	3	10	3	21	0	0

*Note.* The psychological social psychology journals evaluated were *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* for the years 1975-1993 (Moreland et al. 1994). The applied/organizational psychology journals evaluated were the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Academy of Management Journal* for the years 1975-1994 (Sanna and Parks 1997). The evaluation of *SPQ* was for the years 1975-2005.

Table 3 shows the relative popularity of group topics in *SPQ* over time. These data show that group structure has been and continues to be the single most popular topic of group research in *SPQ*. Group structure dipped somewhat in popularity during the periods 1985 to 1989 and 1990 to 1994, when this topic accounted for 35% and 26.2% of all pages in papers about groups, respectively. However, group structure shot back up in popularity during the period 1990 to 1994, accounting for an impressive 51.1% of all pages in papers about groups. Table 3 shows that interest in social dilemmas and power appears to have increased, but interest in bargaining and coalitions, and in minority/majority influence has gone down. Interest in every aspect of group performance has gone down. In the area of intergroup relations, only the topic of social identity appears to be growing in popularity.

**Table 3. Topics of Group Papers in *SPQ* (Table Values are Relative Percentages).**

Topic	1975- 1979 (N = 82)	1980- 1984 (N = 69)	1985- 1989 (N = 40)	1990- 1994 (N = 42)	1995- 1999 (N = 45)	2000- 2004 (N = 46)	2005 (N = 8)	Total (N = 332)
Ecology of groups	8.5	8.7	2.5	2.4	6.7	2.2	0.0	5.7
Group composition	3.7	4.3	10.0	4.8	2.2	4.3	0.0	4.5
Group structure	40.2	50.7	35.0	26.2	51.1	45.6	37.5	42.2
Social dilemmas	1.2	1.4	7.5	14.3	11.1	4.3	12.5	5.7
Bargaining and coalition	6.1	2.9	7.5	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	3.3
Majority/minority influence	9.8	4.3	5.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	4.2
Power	1.2	0.0	7.5	9.5	13.3	4.3	12.5	5.1
Leadership	2.4	1.4	0.0	4.8	2.2	0.0	0.0	1.8
Productivity	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Descriptive decision making	2.4	1.4	10.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4
Prescriptive decision making	9.8	4.3	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6
Social identity	6.1	2.9	7.5	9.5	13.3	26.1	12.5	9.9
Conflict between groups	3.7	7.2	5.0	4.8	0.0	2.2	25.0	4.5
Stereotyping	3.7	5.8	2.5	7.1	0.0	2.2	0.0	3.6
Miscellaneous	1.2	4.3	0.0	9.5	0.0	4.3	0.0	3.0

## Discussion

Groups are a popular topic of interest in *SPQ*, accounting for an average of 31.2% of its pages. The level of interest in groups, however, does not seem to respond to levels of unrest in society as Steiner predicted. The 1960s and 1970s were times of social unrest in American society, but the popularity of groups in *SPQ* fell in the late 1970s and remained low through the 1980s. The 1980s were a period of social calm in America, but the popularity of groups in *SPQ* increased in the 1990s. Whether terrorist attacks or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will eventually boost interest in groups is unknown, but recent interest in groups appears to be hovering below the 31-year average.

Interest in groups in *SPQ* does seem to be explained by developments in the field of social psychology. The two developments that MHH claimed to have boosted interest in groups in psychological social psychology also seem to have boosted interest in groups in sociological social psychology. These are the growing popularity of European approaches (especially social identity theory) and the growing popularity of social cognition. These approaches pulled group research out of a decline in psychology, and apparently did so in sociology as well.

The popularity of group research in *SPQ*, however, can also be explained closer to home by developments within the field of sociology itself. Our data show that Berger was correct in 1992 when he said, "Within the past few years, I believe we have witnessed the emergence (or reemergence) of the 'new group process movement': social psychologists in sociology who are concerned with research and theory on interpersonal or group processes and structures" (Berger 1992:9). Group research had indeed started to take off by the 1990s. Our data show that Berger was also correct in identifying two of the biggest contributors to the resurgence in popularity of group research in the 1990s: exciting new developments in exchange theory (stimulated by the work of Karen Cook, Linda Molm, Toshio Yamagishi, Jane Sell, and others) and in EST (stimulated by the work of James Balkwell, Cecilia Ridgeway, and others). Although not as apparent in 1992 when Berger commented on the field, SI would also play a role in the reemergence group research. Ethnographic studies of existing groups (for instance by Fine, Cahill, Lois, Jimerson, and others) became more common in *SPQ*.

The topic of group structure is neglected in psychological social psychology and in applied and organizational psychology, but it is the major topic of interest in *SPQ*. In other words, the topic of group structure characterizes not just the classic but also the contemporary contributions of sociologists to the understanding of small groups. Remarkably, however, the study of structure has not been accompanied by the study of function. Relatively little group research published in *SPQ* has focused on the quality or quantity of group performance. Also surprising for a sociologically oriented journal is the relative lack of research published on the topic of intergroup conflict. Hunt et al. (2000) content analyzed papers published in *SPQ* according to whether they dealt with race/ethnicity. They found a surprising lack of research on this topic. Our data seem to echo their findings.

## STUDY TWO

Our goal in Study Two was to characterize the nature of group research published in *SPQ*, from 1975 to 2005, using some basic bibliometric methods. Bibliometric methods refer to the quantification of bibliographic information such as authors, references, and citations. Bibliometric analysis answers questions such as who are the most prolific authors and which are the most influential studies? Bibliometric analysis can also be used to gauge the scientific progress of a field of research (e.g., Quiñones-Vidal et al. 2004).

### Method

We used the dataset of 332 papers described in Study One. In this dataset, we collected information about the number of authors and number of studies per paper, the national affiliation of first authors, number of references, and the methods and topics of papers. We also obtained

information from the Web of Science, using the "advanced search" option. We selected "Social Sciences Citation Index," and typed in the search box, "SO = Sociometry or SO = Social Psychology or SO = Social Psychology Quarterly" to find papers from our source journal under its three names. We selected "all documents." After clicking on the results, we used the "publication years" tool to click on years 1975 to 2005, and then clicked on "view records." This procedure gave us the list of all papers published in the journal from 1975 to 2005. We used the "analyze" by "author" options to create a list of the most productive authors, and used the data set we had created in Study One to verify how many of each author's papers were about groups. We used the "citation report" tool to get a list of the most cited papers, and again we used the data set we had created in Study One to verify whether or not each paper was about groups.

## Results

Table 4 shows the most productive authors of group research published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005 (based on our definition of group research as explained in Study One). Almost all of these authors study topics related to status or social exchange. All except one (Yamagishi) have American institutional affiliations. Four of the top ten authors are women. Table 5 shows the most influential (in terms of citations) group papers published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005 (based on our definition of group research as explained in Study One). These data must be interpreted with caution. Citation counts are often inaccurate (especially when authors list their names differently or when citations are incomplete or faulty). Citation counts do not indicate the quality of a paper. Older papers and review articles generally have more citations. Among the most productive group authors, Yamagishi has three of the most influential group papers, Cook has one (coauthored with Yamagishi), and Hallinan has one. Ten out of the 21 most influential papers are authored or coauthored by women. The most frequent topics are group structure (6 papers), intergroup relations (6 papers), and social dilemmas (3 papers). The most common methods are experiments (11 papers) and field studies (6 papers).

**Table 4. Ten Most Productive Authors of Papers about Groups in *SPQ*, 1975-2005.**

Author	# Papers	Topics	Affiliation
Gray, Louis N.	6	Power, Influence, Group Structure and Differentiation	Washington State University
Hallinan, Maureen	6	Friendship, Group Composition, Social Networks	University of Notre Dame
Johnson, Cathryn	6	Power, Leadership, Status, Group Structure	Emory University
Balkwell, James	5	Status, Group Structure	University of Georgia
Cook, Karen S.	5	Status, Social Dilemmas, Exchange	Stanford University
Lawler, Edward	5	Coalitions, Leadership, Exchange	Cornell University
Sell, Jane	5	Status, Social Dilemmas	Texas A & M University
Simpson, Brent	5	Power, Coalitions, Social Dilemmas	University of South Carolina
Zelditch, Morris	5	Status, Power	Stanford University
Yamagishi, Toshio	5	Social Dilemmas	Hokkaido University

**Table 5. Top 20 Cited Papers about Groups in SPQ, 1975-2005.**

Cited paper	Times Cited
Freeman, Linton C. 1977. "A set of measures of centrality based on betweenness." <i>Sociometry</i> 40:35-41.	229
Gaertner, Samuel L. and John P. McLaughlin. 1983. "Racial stereotypes: Associations and ascriptions of positive and negative characteristics." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 46:23-30.	126
Gurin, Patricia, Arthur H. Miller and Gerald Gurin. 1980. "Stratum identification and consciousness." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 43:30-47.	119
Eskilson, Arlene and Mary G. Wiley. 1976. "Sex composition and leadership in small groups." <i>Sociometry</i> 39:183-194.	78
Hogg, Michael A., Deborah J. Terry and Katherine M. White. 1995. "A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 58:255-269.	72
Krackhardt, David and Robert N. Stern. 1988. "Informal networks and organizational crises: An experimental simulation." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 51:123-140.	67
Schofield, Janet W. and H. A. Sagar. 1977. "Peer interaction patterns in an integrated middle school." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 40:130-138.	66
Mazur, Allan, Alan Booth and James M. Dabbs. 1992. "Testosterone and chess competition." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 55:70-77.	58
Nemeth, Charlan J. and Julianne L. Kwan. 1985. "Originality of word associations as a function of majority vs. minority influence." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 48:277-282.	56
Yamagishi, Toshio. 1988. "The provision of a sanctioning system in the United States and Japan." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 51:265-271.	54
Lee, Margaret T. and Richard Ofshe. 1981. "The impact of behavioral style and status characteristics on social influence: A test of two competing theories." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 44:73-82.	53
Yamagishi, Toshio and Karen S. Cook. 1993. "Generalized exchange and social dilemmas." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 56:235-248.	48
Kleinpenning, Gerard and Louk Hagendoorn. 1993. "Forms of racism and the cumulative dimension of ethnic attitudes." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 56:21-36.	47
Latane, Bibb and James M. Dabbs. 1975. "Sex, group size and helping in three cities." <i>Sociometry</i> 38:180-194.	46
Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 1995. "Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in preadolescent cliques." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 58:145-162.	43
Kaplan, Martin F. 1977. "Discussion polarization effects in a modified jury decision paradigm: Informational influences." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 40:262-271.	43
Jussim, Lee and D. W. Osgood. 1989. "Influence and similarity among friends: An integrative model applied to incarcerated adolescents." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 52:98-112.	42
Yamagishi, Toshio. 1988. "Seriousness of social dilemmas and the provision of a sanctioning system." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 51:32-42.	42
Hallinan, Maureen T. 1979. "Structural effects on children's friendships and cliques." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 42:43-54.	41
LaFrance, Marianne. 1979. "Nonverbal synchrony and rapport: Analysis by the cross-lag panel technique." <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 42:66-70.	41
Driedger, Leo. 1976. "Ethnic self-identity: A comparison of ingroup evaluations." <i>Sociometry</i> 39:131-141.	41

Note: Data are from Web of Science search on 2/16/07. 21 papers are shown because of ties.

Table 6 presents some descriptive information about the 332 group papers. Data on authorship show increasing levels of collaboration and international diversity in the publications about groups. Linear regression shows that the average number of authors per paper has increased significantly over the years,  $F(1,331) = 9.75, p < .003$ . The percentage of single authored papers is down. The percentage of first authors from North America has fallen significantly across the time periods shown, Chi Square = 25.26,  $df = 12, p = .0136$ . Data on papers show that they are getting longer. The average number of pages per paper has increased across the years,  $F(1,331) = 72.82, p < .0001$ , as has the average number of references,  $F(1,331) = 114.06, p < .0001$ . The average number of studies per paper, however, has not increased, and the percentage of single study papers has not gone down. The proportion of papers reporting experiments, surveys, or other methods has significantly changed over the time periods shown, Chi Square = 25.26,  $df = 12, p = .0136$ . Surveys have increased and experiments have decreased in usage.

**Table 6. Descriptive Information on Papers about Groups in SPQ.**

	1975- 1979 N=82	1980- 1984 N=69	1985- 1989 N=40	1990- 1994 N=42	1995- 1999 N=45	2000- 2004 N=46	2005 N=8	Total N=332
<b>Authorship</b>								
Average number of authors per paper	1.83	1.81	1.82	2.31	2.18	2.28	2.37	2.01
Percent of single authored papers	40.24	37.68	37.50	38.10	26.67	21.74	25.00	34.34
Percentage of first authors with U.S. or Canadian institutional affiliation	98.78	97.10	92.50	76.19	77.78	76.09	87.50	88.55
<b>Papers</b>								
Average number of pages per paper	10.26	8.39	10.37	11.83	14.31	15.02	15.12	11.41
Average number of studies per paper	1.18	1.23	1.08	1.39	1.36	1.16	1.00	1.22
Percentage of single study papers	87.67	86.54	92.11	77.42	78.57	89.19	100.00	86.07
Average number of references per paper	21.13	22.90	30.07	41.40	42.73	46.02	46.87	32.14
Percentage reporting lab or field experiments	57.32	47.83	60.00	38.10	55.56	30.43	50.00	49.10
Percentage reporting surveys	8.54	11.59	7.50	21.43	11.11	30.43	37.50	14.76

Note: Analysis of studies per paper excludes papers without any studies (e.g., commentaries, theoretical reviews, award introductions).

## Discussion

Data on group research published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005 show that most of the productive authors and many of the influential papers focus on group structure or social exchange. Intergroup relations is a topic of influential papers, but is not studied by the most productive authors. Descriptive data on authorship and papers show a mixed picture of "scientific maturity." On the one hand, increasing collaboration and international diversity among authors

is a favorable sign. Quiñones-Vidal et al. (2004) point out that the highest levels of collaboration are found in the "hard sciences" and the lowest in the humanities. Collaboration is an indicator of "scientific maturity" because it suggests the existence of synergistic teamwork, an established program of research, external funding, and a pipeline of dissertations and journal publications. Single authors simply cannot be as productive as research teams. On the other hand, the complexity and rigor of group research does not appear to be increasing. Most articles still report a single study, and the use of nonexperimental methods has somewhat increased. The papers are longer and the list of references has increased, but the explanation for these trends is unclear (see Adair and Vohra 2003).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our research is the first to characterize and analyze trends in group research published in sociological social psychology. Our empirical findings can be compared to Steiner's unflattering characterization of the field of group research in sociology:

"Sociological social psychologists talked even more incessantly about the group, and sometimes attempted to treat it as a system in its own right. But their theorizing tended to drift toward symbolic interactionism, or to rely very heavily upon static, structural concepts like position, status or power. Left to themselves, I suspect the sociological types might have nourished the group more adequately, but they were usually outnumbered and outmaneuvered by their psychological brethren" (Steiner 1974:101).

Based on our analysis of group research published in *SPQ* from 1975 to 2005, we conclude that the "sociological types" have in fact nourished the group more adequately than their psychological brethren. The index of interest in groups is much higher in *SPQ* than was found either by MHH in psychological social psychology or by Sanna and Parks in applied and organizational psychology journals. Perhaps it is not surprising that sociologists would show more interest in groups. Sociologists were the first to use the term "small group," and introduced concepts like "primary group," and "face to face group" (Moreno 1954:180). Moreno was told by a friend, "I'm glad that you always ran with the sociologists rather than the psychologists because it becomes increasingly apparent that the 'group factor' is much more important in understanding human behavior to say nothing of predicting it than orthodox psychologists and even the unorthodox ones like Freud ever imagined" (Moreno 1955a:7). Unlike psychologists, sociologists have never been bogged down in debates about the reality of groups. Sociologists see groups as the building blocks of society, and as microcosms of the larger social world. In a recent call for sociologists to pay even more attention to groups, Harrington and Fine (2000:312) claim that the core issues of the discipline come together in small groups: "Small groups are the locus of both social control and social change, where networks are formed, culture is created, and status order is made concrete." Whether sociologists will heed this call, and continue to surpass psychologists' interest in groups remains to be seen. We understand that Gwen M. Wittenbaum and Richard L. Moreland have recently extended MHH's research by examining group papers published from 1995 to 2006. Their new data show that interest in groups in psychological social psychology journals has now climbed above 30% (Moreland, personal communication).

Steiner was correct in believing that sociological social psychology tends to focus on topics related to group structure. However, his characterization of structural concepts like status as being "static" is hardly accurate. The "dynamics" of status is clearly shown in Ridgeway's (2006) research on the social construction of status beliefs. Steiner was also wrong when he characterized group research in sociological social psychology as drifting toward symbolic interactionism. The impact of SI on group papers published in *SPQ* has never been as strong as EST or exchange. SI has grown in influence over the years, however, and did contribute to the revitalization of group research in the 1990s.

If there is any theoretical "drifting" to be found in *SPQ*, it is toward European and social cognition approaches. The impact of social identity theory and social cognition can be seen in papers on a variety of topics, ranging from group composition (e.g., Kameda et al. 1992), to social influence (e.g., Bagozzi and Lee 2002), networks (McFarland and Pals 2005), justice (Wenzel 2004), public goods (Sell et al. 2002), and status (e.g., Oldmeadow et al. 2003). Had intergroup relations and group performance been more popular topics in *SPQ*, the "drift" toward European and social cognition approaches would have been even more pronounced.

Based on our research, we conclude that the study of groups in sociological social psychology is alive and doing much better than some had feared. On average, about 31% of *SPQ* is devoted to groups. Interest in groups appears recently to have dropped somewhat below average, but it is too early to know whether this trend will continue. The "call for papers" on the topic of "small groups in social life" issued in *SPQ* in March 2007 may indicate a promising future for group research in its pages. The increasing collaboration and international diversity of authors is also encouraging. The prominence of women in the lists of most productive authors and most influential papers is impressive. These are signs of vigor and engagement. The fact that all of the most productive authors are sociologists, however, suggests that group research in *SPQ* is more specialized than interdisciplinary in nature. Somewhat troubling is the persistence of single study publications in *SPQ*, when other journals like *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* are averaging over two studies per paper (Quinones-Vidal et al. 2004). Single study publications in *SPQ* might be explained by less thorough training in experimental methods and less of a commitment to incremental research on the part of sociologists. Or, it might be explained by structural constraints that sociologists who do experimental research often face, like the lack of access to laboratory space and the absence of organized "subject pools." Only with an equipped lab, an abundance of participants, and a team of colleagues and graduate students can researchers manage to complete and publish multiple studies at a time. Threats to research productivity, and lack of interdisciplinary appeal may challenge the future of group research in sociological social psychology.

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## **Appendix B. Examples of Papers Influenced by Approaches and Theories.**

### **European Approach**

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### **Social Cognition Approach**

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## **AUTHOR BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

Wendy J. Harrod is an associate professor of sociology at Iowa State University. Her research focuses on group dynamics and attitudes toward inequality. Her email address is: wharrod@iastate.edu

Bridget K. Welch is a PhD student in sociology at Iowa State University. Her specializations are social psychology and social inequality.

Jeff Kushkowski is an associate professor of library at Iowa State University. His research focuses on economics and bibliometric analysis.