Distinguish between primary and secondary sources of historical information and describe the kinds of primary source information typically found by historians in archives

Explain how the process of doing history can produce some degree of confidence that truth has been attained

PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS HISTORY

One hundred is a nice round number and a one-hundredth anniversary is ample cause for celebration. In recent years, psychologists with a sense of history have celebrated often. The festivities began back in 1979, with the centennial of the founding of Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory at Leipzig, Germany. In 1992, the American Psychological Association (APA) created a yearlong series of events to commemorate the centennial of its founding in G. Stanley Hall’s study at Clark University on July 8, 1892. During the centennial year, historical articles appeared in all of the APA’s journals and a special issue of American Psychologist focused on history; several books dealing with APA’s history were commissioned (e.g., Evans, Sexton, & Cadwallader, 1992); regional conventions had historical themes; and the annual convention in Washington featured events ranging from the usual symposia and invited addresses on history to a fancy dress ball at Union Station featuring period (1892) costumes and a huge APA birthday cake.

Interest in psychology’s history has not been limited to centennial celebrations, of course. Histories of psychology were written soon after psychology itself appeared on the academic scene (e.g., Baldwin, 1913), and at least two of psychology’s most famous books, E. G. Boring’s A History of Experimental Psychology (1929; 1950) and Edna Heidbreder’s Seven Psychologies (1933) are histories. It wasn’t until the 1960s, however, that significant interest in the history of psychology as a specialized area of research began. During that decade, a number of individuals with training as psychologists and a keen interest in history banded together and did the sorts of things that mark the creation of a new specialized discipline—they formed organizations, they created a journal, and they established bases for the production of research.

Many people were involved, but the major impetus came from a clinical psychologist with a passion for history, Robert I. Watson (1909–1980) (Figure 1.1). He began with a call to arms, an American Psychologist article entitled “The History of Psychology: A Neglected Area” (Watson, 1960). He then mobilized a group of like-minded psychologists within the APA into a History of Psychology Group, the eventual outcome being the creation of a new APA Division (#26) of the APA in 1965 (Hilgard, 1982). Naturally, Watson was first president of the division. Also in 1965, (a) John Popplestone and Marion White McPherson (two more clinicians in love with history) established the Archives of the History of American Psychology at their university, the University of Akron, and made Watson chair of the Archive’s Board of Advisors, and (b) the first issue of the Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences was published, edited by Watson. A few years later, as part of a reorganization of their graduate programs, the University of New Hampshire created the first doctoral program offering specialization

1Today, Division 26 is also known as the Society for the History of Psychology—see www.hood.edu/shp/
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY’S HISTORY

of Science, but the history department teaches it, not one of the science departments. What’s going on? Why is there a history of psychology course taught by a psychologist, but not a history of chemistry course taught by a chemist?

The rationale for a history of psychology course is important and it will be considered shortly. First, however, let us examine the more general question of why it is important to study the history of anything. Is it true that “history is more or less bunk,” as Henry Ford put it, or is it more likely, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, that “we cannot escape history” (both quotes from Simonton, 1994, p. 3), and that to “neglect history does not mean to escape from its influence,” as Robert Watson (1960, p. 255) declared in his call for psychologists to become more involved in the history of their discipline?

WHY STUDY HISTORY?

Every history course you have ever taken has preached to you that knowing history helps us to avoid the mistakes of the past and provides us with a guide to the future. There is a germ of truth to those old and well-worn platitudes, but both of these standard reasons are a bit simplistic. Concerning the “mistake” argument, rather than learning from the past, much of history appears to provide evidence that humans deliberately ignore the past. This possibility led the philosopher/historian G. W. F. Hegel to worry that the only true lesson of history is that people don’t learn anything from history (Gilderhus, 2000). This overstates the case, of course. It is also true that when trying to convince others of some course of action, part of the argument usually involves references to the past. And if we seem to ignore the past more than we attend to it, it is also true that knowing the past only provides a very rough guide, for history never repeats itself—all events are tied into the unique historical context in which they occur. History is also a less than reliable guide to the future, a fact that historians recognize, although the acknowledgement seldom prevents them from venturing forecasts. In his celebrated What is history?, for instance, the historian E. H. Carr wrote that “[g]ood historians, I suspect, whether they think about it or not, have the future in their bones. Besides the question why? The historian also asks the question: Whither?” (1961, pp. 142–143). This may be so, but it is worth noting that every paper I have ever read or listened to, for which the purpose was to predict the future, has begun with the same disclaimer. The writer or speaker always starts by going to great lengths to insure the audience that predictions about the future are notoriously inaccurate. As psychology’s eminent historian, E. G. Boring, once wrote, “The past is not a crystal ball. It has more whence than whither to it. The seats on the train of progress all face backwards: you can see the past but only guess about the future (1963a, p. 5).”

If knowing history is no guarantee that mistakes won’t be repeated and if history is an imperfect (at best) means of forecasting the future, then what is left? The present. In the sentence immediately following the one I just quoted from Boring, he wrote: “Yet a knowledge of history, although it can never be complete and fails miserably to foretell the future, has a huge capacity for adding significance to the understanding of the present” (1963a, p. 5). I believe the single most important reason to study history is that the present time we are living in cannot be understood without knowing something about the past—how the present came to be. Historian David McCullough (1992) expressed this
of the Vietnam War, and certainly every American should visit the wall, but an important perspective is gained by knowing about the battlefield just up the road. Knowledge of this kind adds an appreciation of the sacrifices of those from other times and yields an understanding of the idea that war and senseless death are not uniquely associated with just one period of recent history.

There is another way in which knowing history lends perspective to the present day. We sometimes believe that our current times are, as Dickens wrote, “the worst of times.” We complain about the seemingly insurmountable problems and the ever-present danger that seems to accompany life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We long for the “good old days,” a simpler time when nobody locked their doors and a good house could be ordered from a Sears kit (this is true). We think that there really used to be places like Disney World’s Main Street, USA. But knowing history is a good corrective here. Noted historian and former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin, in an essay entitled “The Prison of the Present” (1971), described this fallacy:

> We sputter against the Polluted Environment—as if it had come with the age of the automobile. We compare our air not with the odor of horse dung and the plague of flies and the smells of garbage and human excrement which filled the cities of the past, but with the honeysuckle perfumes of some nonexistent City Beautiful. We forget that even if the water in many cities today is not spring-pure..., still for most of history the water of the cities (and of the countryside) was undrinkable. We reproach ourselves for the ills of disease and malnutrition, and forget that until recently, enteritis and measles and whooping cough, diphtheria and typhoid, were killing diseases of childhood... [and] polio was a summer monster. (pp. 47-48)

Knowing history won’t give us easy answers to current problems, but it certainly can immunize us against the belief that these problems are many times worse than they used to be. In fact, knowing the past can provide a comforting connection with it, and being aware of how others have wrestled with similar problems can provide us with some present-day guidance. There is at least the potential for learning from the past.

Besides making it possible for us to understand the present better, studying history provides other benefits. For example, it forces an attitude adjustment: It keeps us humble in two ways. First, we occasionally delude ourselves into thinking we know a lot (especially true in my profession—university teaching). Studying history is a good antidote. For example, I grew up in southeastern New England, not far from Plymouth, and I thought I knew something about the Pilgrims. However, having just finished Nathaniel Philbrick’s (2006) brilliant history of the Pilgrims, *Mayflower*, I am amazed by how little I knew and by how much of what I thought I knew (e.g., about the Pilgrims’ troubling relationships with local tribes) was dead wrong. Second, sometimes an ignorance of the past can lead us to a kind of arrogance—we believe that the present is the culmination of centuries of progress and that modern-day accomplishments and thinking are more sophisticated and far surpass those of a crude and uninformed past. Knowing history, however, forces an understanding that each age has its own marvelous accomplishments and its own creative geniuses. Modern-day neuroscientists seem to make fascinating discoveries every day, but the importance of their discoveries and the quality of their scientific thinking does not outdo the elegance of Pierre Flourens’s nineteenth-century investigations of the brain, which effectively disproved phrenology (Chapter 3).
them something about how scientific thinking has evolved. Indeed, there ought to be a history of chemistry course for chemistry students to take.

A third reason for the existence of the history of psychology course is that it can provide some unity for what has become a diverse and highly specialized field. Despite its youth, psychology in the early twenty-first century is notable for its lack of unity. Indeed, some observers (e.g., Koch, 1992a) believe that a single field of psychology no longer exists, that a neuroscientist investigating the functioning of endorphins has virtually nothing in common with an industrial psychologist studying the effectiveness of various management styles. Yet all psychologists do have something in common—their history. For the student who has taken a seemingly disconnected variety of courses ranging from developmental to abnormal to social psychology, the history course can serve as a synthesizing experience. By the time you reach the final chapter of this text, where the issue of psychology's increased specialization will again be addressed, you will have learned enough to begin to understand the interconnectedness among the different areas of psychology.

Fourth, an understanding of psychology's history makes one a more critical thinker. Aware of the history of various treatments for psychological disorders, the discerning psychologist is better able to evaluate claims for a "revolutionary breakthrough" in psychotherapy. A close examination of this allegedly unique therapy might reveal similarities to earlier approaches. The historically literate psychologist will also be aware that on many other occasions, initial excitement over a flashy new therapy is tempered by a later failure to find any evidence that it works. Furthermore, knowing about the developmental course of various historical pseudoscientific approaches to psychotherapy, and understanding their common features, enables the psychologist to spot the presence of a new one and be suitably skeptical.

Finally, the history of psychology course may be a history course but it is also a psychology course. Thus, one of its goals is to continue educating us about human behavior. Studying historical individuals as they helped develop the science of psychology can only increase our understanding of what makes people behave the way they do. For instance, our understanding of scientific creativity can be enhanced by studying the lives and works of historically creative individuals (Hermann Ebbinghaus is a good example; his work is found in Chapter 4). Some insight into the psychology of controversy and the rigid, dogmatic adherence to one's beliefs can be gained by studying the behavior of scientists engaged in bitter debate with their peers (e.g., the Baldwin-Titchener controversy, described in Chapter 6). In general, if all human behavior reflects a complex interplay between individuals and the environments they inhabit, then studying the lives of historical characters being shaped by and in turn shaping their environments can only increase our understanding of the forces that affect human behavior.

**KEY ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY**

A common misconception of history is that historians simply "find out what happened" and then write it down in chronological order. As you will learn in the next two sections of this chapter, the process is infinitely more complicated. When they are engaged in their craft, historians have to confront and take a stand on several important issues.
100 GB hard drive, you have somehow *progressed* as a decision maker. The larger hard drive might indeed make your life easier now (i.e., there has been some progress), but it doesn’t mean that you are any better as a decision maker now than you were five years ago. The old decision might seem stupid now, but that’s only because of what we now know; back then, it was precisely as reasonable a choice as the one made in the present. To understand the old decision requires us to avoid seeing it in the light of what we know now.

To demonstrate the point with reference to a more complex historical event than computer buying, consider some aspects of the history of intelligence testing. As you will learn in Chapter 8, in the years just prior to World War I, an American intelligence tester named Henry Goddard was invited to Ellis Island in New York to help in the screening of immigrants. Immigrants deemed “unfit” for some reason were returned to their country of origin. Goddard firmly believed that intelligence was an inherited trait and that it could be measured with a brand new technology—something created in France and just beginning to be called an IQ test. Goddard used a version of an IQ test that he had translated from the French test to identify “mentally defective” immigrants. He even argued that he could pick out defective immigrants simply by looking at them. His work contributed to the questionable deportation of untold numbers of people and his conclusion that large percentages of immigrants were “morons” (a term he invented to describe a subcategory of “feeblemindedness”) might have contributed to the atmosphere that led Congress to pass restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s. From today’s standpoint, on the basis of an additional 75 years or so of research, we know about the problems with IQ testing and the need for caution when using and interpreting IQ tests. Hence, we find it difficult to believe that someone as smart as Goddard could have behaved with such obvious bias. “What was he thinking?” we might ask ourselves. But to understand Goddard’s behavior, it is necessary to study it from the vantage point of the historical period in which it occurred instead of that of the present time. This means being knowledgeable about such things as (a) the powerful influence of Darwinian thinking and Mendelian genetics on the psychological testers of that day, which led easily to a belief that intelligence was a trait that had been naturally selected and enabled a physically weak species (humans) to adapt to their environment during the “struggle for existence” and was therefore inherited; (b) the nation’s fears of being overrun with immigrants (large-scale immigration was a new phenomenon at that time); and (c) the assumption, not yet brought into question by such things as atomic bombs and ozone-depleting aerosol cans, that any new technology (e.g., IQ tests) with the “scientific” seal of approval had to be good. The list could be continued but the point is clear. Goddard’s work cannot be fairly evaluated by modern standards; it can only be understood in the context of its times. On the other hand, his work does have relevance for us in the present. Knowing about it can (a) help us better understand modern concerns about immigration; (b) inform us of the subtle influence of racism and other forms of bigotry, even in intelligent people; and (c) make us properly cautious about the alleged wonders of new technologies that arrive in our own day.

The Goddard episode illustrates how difficult it is for us to avoid a presentist orientation. After all, we are the products of our own personal histories, and it is perhaps impossible to ask us to think like a person who never experienced MTV, computers, World War II, or the events of 9/11/01. Nonetheless, for the historian and the reader
The interplay between internal and external history is demonstrated nicely in the history of comparative psychology, the evolution-based study of animal behavior. It developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily out of interest in demonstrating the continuity among species implied by Darwinian evolution. One interest of early comparative psychologists was in determining the extent to which other species showed evidence of consciousness. From the standpoint of internal history, students learn that comparative psychologists studying this question helped make the transition from psychology as the study of consciousness to psychology as the study of behavior. Why? Because studying animal behavior, even if the interest is in understanding “animal consciousness,” requires developing procedures (e.g., maze learning) that involve the objective measurement of observable behaviors. John B. Watson, usually considered the founder of behaviorism as a school of thought (see Chapter 10), cut his research teeth in the world of comparative psychology, and saw how the methods for studying animals could be applied to the study of humans as well. Thus, there appears to be a logical progression from (a) being required to use behavioral methods if one is interested in studying animals, to (b) seeing that these methods could be used to study humans as well. In Watson’s research, for example, there is a gradual shift from the study of animal behavior to the study of human behavior. In addition, other comparative psychologists of the time, especially Robert Yerkes, made a similar transformation from the study of animals to the study of humans.

There is some truth to this internal history of comparative psychology. Watson himself argued that his system of behaviorism first evolved out of his animal work. Nonetheless, a full understanding of the impact of comparative psychology requires knowing about some of the external factors that led researchers to shift from studying animals to studying humans. For example, consider the institutional context. In the early years of the twentieth century, experimental psychology was relatively new and psychologists normally resided within departments of philosophy. In the fight for an adequate slice of the budget pie, psychologists found it necessary to justify the costs of their laboratories. Senior members of the department, usually philosophers, could be difficult to convince. One approach was to demonstrate the usefulness of psychological knowledge in solving practical problems. For instance, sometimes it was argued that the fruits of psychological research would improve education. This problem of demonstrating utility was difficult enough for researchers studying humans in their laboratories; it was infinitely more problematic for comparative psychologists studying other species. Their arguments for the value of their research were even more difficult to sustain. In addition, they had a problem unique to their research interests—their laboratories were an assault on the olfactory senses. A combination of smell and no air-conditioning relegated many laboratories to obscure corners of campuses (O’Donnell, 1985). For many, then, the desire to improve their institutional status was a major driving force in their change from animal to human psychology.

The experience of Robert Yerkes illustrates the problem for animal researchers. A brilliant comparative psychologist at Harvard University at the turn of the century, he found himself initially encouraged to pursue his animal work, primarily for political reasons. Harvard wished to maintain its exalted position in the academic world, and that meant competing successfully with young upstarts like Clark University, 30 miles to the west in Worcester. Clark had established an active program in comparative psychology,
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CLOSE-UP

Edwin G. Boring (1886–1968)

It is unfortunate that psychology’s most famous historian has a name that students often associate with the general topic of history. In fact, E. G. Boring’s writings are lively and elegant. In recent years, his version of psychology’s history has been criticized, but it is also true that historians of psychology owe a great debt to Boring’s pioneering historical work.

While an engineering student at Cornell University, Boring first encountered psychology in the fall of 1905 by taking an elective course in elementary psychology, taught by the great E. B. Titchener (Chapter 7). He described the lectures as “magic, so potent that even my roommates demanded, each lecture day, to be told what had been said” (Boring, 1961b, p. 18). Yet he was not converted at that point and continued his engineering studies, earning a master’s degree in 1908. After two marginally successful years as an engineer for a steel company and as a high school teacher, he returned to Cornell and earned a Ph.D. from Titchener in 1914. While at Cornell his research interests included (a) human maze learning, during which he met, fell in love with, and eventually married one of his research subjects, fellow doctoral student Lucy May (who died in 1996 at the age of 109); (b) nerve regeneration, studied firsthand and rather dramatically by severing a nerve in his arm and charting its recovery; (c) the learning processes of schizophrenics; and (d) his dissertation topic, visceral sensitivity. Boring studied this by learning to swallow a stomach tube to varying depths, then pouring different substances into the tube and noting the (often unpleasant) sensory effects (Jaynes, 1969b). Nobody could ever accuse Boring of not being involved in his work!

After finishing his degree at Cornell and staying on briefly as an instructor, Boring served in World War I in the Army IQ testing program (Chapter 8), taught briefly at Clark University, then went to Harvard in 1922. He remained there for the rest of his career. At Harvard, Boring spent the next decade building up the laboratory and trying to convince the authorities that psychology should be a separate department, not a part of the philosophy department. This did not occur until 1926. It was during the 1920s that he wrote his famous A History of Experimental Psychology (1929), partly to further his political fight with the philosophers and administrators at Harvard, and partly to bolster basic research in experimental psychology at a time when the majority of American psychologists seemed to be interested in applied psychology (O’Donnell, 1979).

In his years at Clark and Harvard, Boring’s work habits, in imitation of Titchener, were legendary. In his words,

...my friends, my children, and my students know how I have talked about the eighty-hour week in the fifty-week year (the 4000-hour working year) and I have scorned those forty-hour academicians who take long summers off from work. I have no hobbies, except for a shop in my cellar. My vacations were never successful until I got a little study with a typewriter in it and could answer eight letters a day and write up the waiting papers. (Boring, 1961b, p. 14)

Also in the tradition of Titchener, Boring taught the introductory course in psychology, believing that a student’s first encounter with psychology should be from the master. He even became a pioneer in the video-course: thirty-eight half-hour programs on Boston’s educational TV channel WGBH in 1960 featured Boring demonstrating various phenomena, but mainly sitting “on the corner of a table and talk[ing] in a friendly, enthusiastic, paternal manner to the red lights on whatever camera was on the air” (Boring, 1961b, p. 77, Figure 1.2).

We’ve seen that the APA’s Division 26, established in 1965, elected Robert Watson as its first president. According to Hilgard, this occurred after Boring refused to run for the office but agreed to be named “honorary president.” Boring’s increasing deafness kept him away from the division’s inaugural meeting during the APA’s 1966 convention, but he sent a written introduction to Watson’s presidential address, describing himself as the “ghost of History Past, when the interest in the history of psychology had not yet become as vigorous as it is now” (Hilgard, 1982, p. 310). Modern historians of psychology owe much to Boring’s example.
event, a discovery or a theory that is said to be “ahead of its time.” Like his more famous grandson, Erasmus developed a theory of evolution, but did so in the eighteenth century, when belief in the immutability of species (i.e., each species is created in its finished form by God and it doesn’t change over time) was stronger than in the nineteenth century.

Relying on the zeitgeist as a way of explaining history can be problematic, however. For example, the uncritical observer might be tempted to reify (i.e., give a concrete and detached existence to an abstraction) the concept and consider it a controlling force that is independent of the historical persons who in fact give it meaning. That is, in answer to the question, “Why did event X occur instead of event Y at time Z?”, one might be tempted to answer, “Because of the zeitgeist.” But such an answer hardly explains the events in question. The concept of the zeitgeist invites one to examine the attitudes, values, and theories in existence at the time of some event to be explained, but it cannot exist by itself as some mysterious directing agent. As historian Dorothy Ross (1969) pointed out with reference to the history of educational psychology,

> It has been stated, for example, that neither James, Dewey, Hall, Thorndike, Cattell, Galton, nor Darwin were necessary to the rapid development of educational psychology in America, for that was the trend of the “Zeitgeist.” But certainly we only know what the Zeitgeist in fact was by the way in which James, Hall, Cattell, Darwin and others behaved. If they had not thought and acted the way they did, neither would the “Zeitgeist” they are said to embody. (p. 257, italics in the original)

Thus, a balanced view of history recognizes the complex interrelationships between people and the environments in which they act. The historical characters you are about to encounter were all products of the world in which they lived, but they also made decisions that helped form and transform the historical context that surrounded them. Wallace might have been inspired to write a paper proposing a theory of evolution that matched the essence of Darwin’s, but it is no accident that the term evolution is associated with Darwin and not with Wallace. It was Darwin who invested the years of research examining the intricacies of numerous species, and it was Darwin who followed up his initial writings with the monumental texts that brought evolution into its fullest development.

**This Book’s Point of View** This section of the chapter began with a reference to Furumoto’s distinction between old and new history: presentist, internal, and personalistic approaches typically go together and comprise what she referred to as the old history of psychology. It is a history that interprets events only from the standpoint of the present, concentrates on the development of ideas within a specific discipline, and views progress as reflecting the sequential accomplishments of important people. The new history of psychology, on the other hand, combines historicist, external, and naturalistic approaches. It tries to examine historical events on their own terms, with reference to the times in which they occurred, looks for the influence of extradisciplinary forces, and looks beyond great men and women to examine the contextual factors that produced their ideas. Furumoto also points out that new history relies more on archival data and primary source materials than on secondary textbooks, and it is more critically analytical than ceremonial and celebratory.
Sources of Historical Data

Writers of psychology’s history, especially textbook writers, have often relied on secondary sources to write their histories. A secondary source is a document that has been published and is typically an analysis or summary of some historical person, event, or period. These sources include books, articles published in journals, magazines, encyclopedia, and the like. Those doing research in the history of psychology, however, rely more on primary sources of information, which are usually found in archives. An archive is normally an area within a university library that holds unpublished information. This primary source information includes university records, correspondence, diaries, speeches, minutes of the meetings of professional organizations, and papers donated by individuals connected in some way with the university. In addition to these separate university archives, historians of psychology often find primary source material at the Library of Congress archives in Washington, D.C., the British Museum Library in London, and, especially, the Archives of the History of American Psychology (AHAP) at the University of Akron, Akron, Ohio. In general, primary source materials are items written or created at or near the time of some historical event, while secondary sources are written at some time after a historical event and serve to summarize or analyze.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, AHAP’s 1965 founding by John Popplestone and Marion McPherson (Figure 1.3) was one of a series of events sparked by the efforts of Robert I. Watson to generate interest in psychology’s history. As of its 40th anniversary in 2005, AHAP’s collection included the following: the papers of more than 750 psychologists (e.g., Abraham Maslow, Henry Goddard) and organizations (e.g., APA’s history division, #26); more than 1000 pieces of original laboratory apparatus; approximately 20,000 photographs and 6000 films; and over 15,000 psychological tests.

of Cornell and Mary Calkins of Wellesley (Sanford died of a heart attack in 1924 on his way to give a talk at Wellesley). A visit to Wellesley and two visits to Cornell yielded more information. The Titchener papers were especially helpful—Titchener seemed to keep just about everything. I also wrote to about two dozen other archives that I guessed might be holding papers that Sanford might have written to his colleagues. Copies of a few pieces trickled in. At the same time, I was reading everything that Sanford published (not much, actually) and everything else that could shed some light on him and the world he inhabited.

Problems with the Writing of History

From an archives visit to a published paper or book is a long, often tedious, occasionally exhilarating, but never easy journey. Along the way, the historian must confront two major difficulties. First, there are problems associated with the collection of data. The historian must evaluate the validity of data and select a subset of those data for inclusion in the historical narrative. The second problem concerns writing history. Historians are human, so their interpretations of the data will reflect their beliefs, their theories about the nature of history, and potentially, their unexamined biases.

Data Selection Problems

Historians usually collect more information than will ever make its way into the historical narrative they write. Hence, they must make judgments about the adequacy and relevance of the data at hand and they must select a sample of the data while discarding the remainder. Sometimes, despite the large amount of data that might be collected during an archive visit, important pieces might be missing, further complicating the historian’s life. For example, Titchener and Sanford wrote to each other frequently, but only Titchener saved his correspondence. The Titchener papers contain several hundred letters from Sanford to Titchener, but the Sanford papers include none from Titchener. In trying to piece together the Sanford–Titchener relationship, the historian gets only half the story. Another example concerns Walter Miles, an experimental psychologist from Stanford, who once wrote an article on the early development of mazes (Miles, 1930) that included excerpts of letters he received from some of the early pioneers (e.g., Willard Small, who completed the first maze learning study with rats). The Miles papers at AHAP do not contain any of the correspondence related to the maze history paper, however. This is surprising, considering the size of the Miles collection. It fills 128 boxes and the inventory alone runs to a numbing 756 pages (Goodwin, 2003).

Sometimes information that could aid a historian can be lost through what insurance adjusters would call an act of God. For example, after painstakingly tracking down descendants of Mary Whiton Calkins, the APA’s first woman president, Laurel Furumoto discovered that many of Calkins’s papers had been entrusted to her younger brother. Unfortunately, he put them in his cellar where they were destroyed by flooding that accompanied a devastating New England hurricane in 1938 (Furumoto, 1991).

3More than half, actually. After about 1910, Titchener often made and kept carbon copies of the letters he sent.
eloquently in the preface to his 1942 text on the history of research in sensation and perception:

> Indeed, so much a matter of selection is the preparation of an historical text, that I am sobered by the responsibility. The [history of psychology] text of 1929 has existed long enough for me to see how the mood that determined the choice of an afternoon's exposition can fix the "truth" of a certain matter upon graduate students for years to come. With industry and patience one may avoid the falsification of facts, but those virtues are not enough to make one wise in choosing what to ignore. For that one also needs the wisdom and the integrity of objectivity, and who knows for sure whether he commands such? (Boring 1942, p. viii, italics added)

As you will learn in a few paragraphs, this passage from Boring is ironic. One of the themes of modern historiography within psychology is that Boring distorted psychology's history and that his writings reflect a strong bias for a specific brand of psychology. It also appears that he was motivated at least partly by the political and institutional context that he occupied.

**Interpretation Problems** Winston Churchill, who made history and also wrote it, is alleged to have said history would be kind to him because he was going to be the person writing it. Historians normally try to be more objective than this, while realizing that all historical narrative will necessarily reflect something about the writer. Decisions about selection and about writing history both involve interpreting the information at hand, and those interpretations are influenced by the individual characteristics of the historian and by the features of the historical context in which the historian is writing. That is, historians will be influenced by their preconceptions, by the amount of knowledge they already have, as well as by the theories they hold about the nature of history (e.g., personalistic versus naturalistic). In addition, even without their being aware of it, historians can be influenced in many ways by elements of the environment in which their histories are being written. For example, you will discover in Chapter 4 that the work of Wilhelm Wundt has been reevaluated recently (e.g., Blumenthal, 1975), and many of his ideas have been found to be similar to those of modern cognitive psychologists. This similarity, of course, could not have been noticed prior to the advent of modern cognitive psychology—Blumenthal was writing at the height of the so-called cognitive revolution in psychology. Thus, historical characters are not the only ones influenced by the historical context in which they live; historians are affected as well.

The history written by E. G. Boring is a case in point. You know from this chapter's Close-Up that Boring was a devoted student of E. B. Titchener's, and in the 1920s, he was a vigorous advocate for the development of a separate psychology department at Harvard that would emphasize "pure" laboratory research rather than application. Both of those facts played a role in the way he wrote history. First, his training as an experimental psychologist in Titchener's laboratory at Cornell surely affected his overall conception of psychology. More specifically, it influenced what Boring thought about Wilhelm Wundt, in whose laboratory Titchener earned a Ph.D. in 1892. In general, Boring believed that Titchener's brand of experimental psychology, called structuralism, was virtually identical to Wundt's psychology, and that Titchener had merely imported it to America. In fact, Wundt's system was quite different from Titchener's system (the
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY

Approaching Historical Truth

From the foregoing discussion, you might be tempted to accept a version of historical relativism in which five different historians make five different claims for truth and there is no reasonable way to decide among them. Relativism among historians is a postmodern outgrowth of a reaction against traditional history, which held that the job of the historian is to search out the facts of "what really happened" and place them into a narrative with enough style to attract readers. The outcome was a tendency to write history from the standpoint of what happened to those who happened to be in positions of power and influence, while ignoring the rich variety of alternative perspectives. Thus, a traditional history of the American West, taught to American schoolchildren and grounded in a belief in the idea of manifest destiny, glorified the rugged pioneer who persevered in the face of daunting obstacles, including wild men who liked to shoot arrows. It is clear, though, that the very same history could be written from the standpoint of the Native American who valiantly defended the homeland against the invasion of wild men who liked to shoot guns.

The postmodern critique of the narrowness and arbitrariness of traditional history has had the meritorious effect of enriching our knowledge of it. Thus, we have come to recognize that history extends beyond the lives, deeds, and misdeeds of the stereotypical dead, white, European male; it must be more inclusive. On the other hand, an unfortunate consequence of this critique has been a relativism that, taken to extreme (an absolute relativism?), can lead to absurd claims like the one made occasionally that the Jewish Holocaust in World War II never really happened but was merely "constructed" and exaggerated out of a few isolated events (said to have explanations other than genocide) by historians sympathetic to the Jewish movement who wished to encourage the creation of the nation of Israel following the war. Those arguing for the "myth" of the Holocaust claim that their version is as valid as any other. Yet this example makes it clear that some versions of history are indeed better (i.e., closer to truth) than others. How does one decide?

To reach the truth through historical analysis requires an objectivity that recognizes the limits of one historian's views but also has faith in the notion that meaningful historical narrative and analysis can emerge from the combined efforts of many scholars, according to historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. In Telling the Truth About History (1994), they argue for a historiography in which truth about history emerges from a Darwinian-like struggle between competing ideas held by historians, that "knowledge-seeking involves a lively, contentious struggle among diverse groups of truth-seekers" (p. 254). Some measure of truth, then, evolves out of this struggle. Thus, just as individual variation within a species provides the basis for natural selection to operate, so do different versions of historical episodes exist, subject to competing critical analyses that determine which version adapts best to the scholarly environment. This does not mean that the goal is a single version of truth that is then "settled" and immune to change. Rather, historical truth continues to evolve as new information is discovered and brought to light and as old information is subjected to new interpretations. Also, evolving historical truth includes a variety of perspectives. Multiple eyewitnesses to an event might give different versions of it, but all agree that the event did indeed occur. From their combined information, a complex truth might emerge that would improve on a single description from one perspective. If one historian of the Civil War period "sees
the student of history is able to evaluate modern claims more critically.

- Because the history of psychology course informs the student about people behaving within their historical context, the course provides further understanding of human behavior.

## Key Issues in History

- The traditional approach to the history of psychology has been presentist, internal, and personalistic. Recently, historians have tended to be more historicist, external, and naturalistic.

- The presentist evaluates the past in terms of present knowledge and values, often passing judgment unfairly. The historicist tries to avoid imposing modern values on the past, and tries to understand the past from the standpoint of the knowledge and values present in the past.

- An internal history of psychology is a history of the ideas, research, and theories that have existed within the discipline of psychology. An external history emphasizes the historical context—institutional, economic, social, political—and how it influenced the history of psychology.

- A personalistic approach to history glorifies the major historical figures and argues that history moves through the action of heroic individuals. When historical periods are labeled with reference to people, those labels are called eponyms (e.g., Darwinian biology). A naturalistic approach emphasizes the zeitgeist, the mood or spirit of the times, as the prime moving force in history. The existence of multiples, and of people with ideas said to be "ahead of their times," is consistent with a naturalistic view.

## Historiography: Doing History

- Historiography refers to the process of doing research in history and writing historical narratives.

- Historians rely on both primary and secondary sources of information. A secondary source is a document that has been published and includes analysis. Primary source materials constitute the raw data for historians and include documents created at or near the time of the historical event in question (e.g., diaries, letters).

- Historical research often takes place in archives, which hold primary source information such as diaries, notes, original manuscripts, and correspondence, as well as secondary source information. The major archive for historians is the Archives of the History of American Psychology, located at the University of Akron.

- Archival collections can be extensive, but they can also be incomplete, with important information missing for various reasons. The information that is available is subject to numerous sources of error (e.g., the biases of the diary writer; the vagaries of eyewitness memory).

- Historians are faced with two major problems: the selection of information for their historical narratives and interpretation of the information at hand. These decisions can reflect bias on the part of the historian, and they can reflect the historical context within which the historian is writing. Nonetheless, most historians believe that some degree of truth can be reached through the open exchange of information and by examining historical events through a variety of perspectives.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the contributions of Robert Watson during the 1960s to the discipline of the history of psychology.

2. Explain why "understanding the present" is a more compelling reason for studying history than the traditional arguments about avoiding the mistakes of the past and predicting the future.

3. Explain why it is important for (a) any educated person to have an understanding of and appreciation for history and (b) any student of psychology to have an understanding of psychology's history.

4. What is the point made by Boorstin in his essay on The Prison of the Present?

5. Explain why psychology majors are more likely to be required to study the history of psychology than chemistry majors are likely to be required to study the history of chemistry.

6. Define presentism, give an example of presentist thinking, and explain the dangers of this manner of looking at history.