

Social Action Research and the Commission on Community Interrelations

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The Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI) was officially launched in 1945 by the American Jewish Congress (AJC) with Kurt Lewin as its chief consultant. Its intent was to bring research to bear on religious and racial discrimination. Espousing the ideals of democratic social engineering, CCI's action research projects aimed for scientific credibility and social utility. This article examines CCI's development from 1944 to 1952. By the early 1950s, changes within the AJC and in local communities and increased legal and mass protest strategies for racial justice as well as changes within social psychology as a subdiscipline challenged the viability of CCI's action research programs.

The legacy of Kurt Lewin's commitment to social action research has been duly marked by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) through its annual Kurt Lewin Memorial Award and through its publication of *The Heritage of Kurt Lewin* (Bargal, Gold, & Lewin, 1992). Whereas Lewin's impact on organizational and educational psychology has been well documented, it is less known that shortly before his death in 1947, he was instrumental in bringing about an innovative community-based research organization, the Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI) of the American Jewish Congress (AJC).

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The subject of this article is CCI, one of the earliest social action research organizations designed to combat prejudice and discrimination through community intervention. Research began in 1944, and CCI developed as an active and productive research unit for 8 years. The work of CCI was highly regarded among social scientists: SPSSI awarded CCI the Edward L. Bernays Intergroup Relations Award in 1949. Yet not long after it began, CCI researchers were defending its action orientation to its sponsor, the AJC (Jahoda, 1952), and were gaining employment and research opportunities elsewhere (Smith, 1994).

This article examines the circumstances surrounding the founding of CCI, its accomplishments, and the challenges it faced in creating changes in urban communities in the period after World War II. CCI's blending of research and social action and the politics that surrounded the organization's antiracist work serve as a useful case history for contemporary social psychologists who continue to work for social change in general, as well as those whose interests include the study of prejudice, discrimination, and ethnocultural identity more specifically. A critical analysis of CCI attempts to address the reason why, as Marie Jahoda (1989) wrote, "a non-reductionist social psychology is almost too difficult to be tackled but too fascinating to be left alone" (p. 71).

The work of CCI is best understood from within its institutional, societal, and disciplinary contexts. First, we explore the role of CCI as a part of the American Jewish Congress, an important American liberal Jewish institution committed to progressive social change (Dollinger, 1993). Throughout its years, CCI was impelled to serve both the interests of the AJC as well as other religious and ethnic communities with which it had formed alliances.

This article also describes the philosophy of science and social action promoted by the social scientists affiliated with CCI who pioneered a particular brand of community-oriented investigative practice. Their work had in common the primacy of studying discriminatory practices over prejudicial attitudes and of treating the community as their laboratory. Additionally, CCI's location within a specific ethnocultural community presented researchers with a unique set of challenges addressed by placing an understanding of minority identification at the forefront of their plan to combat racial and religious discrimination.

The early CCI projects, particularly the incident control, community self-survey, and multiple group membership projects stand apart from the variables-based laboratory science taking shape in the psychological social psychology of the late 1950s. In time, social psychology would see the importance of culture and community recede (Cherry, 1995) while basic research and social application would grow increasingly disconnected from one another (Collier, Minton, & Reynolds, 1991). In addition, internal changes to the AJC as well as external political pressures would ultimately redirect CCI's approach to social change.

The CCI: A New Approach to Old Problems

In 1944, the AJC sponsored a conference in New York City aimed at finding solutions to the problem of anti-Semitism. In response to calls raised at the conference for further action, AJC leader Stephen S. Wise began discussions with Kurt Lewin, who at that time headed the Research Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M. Lewin, 1992), on methods for dealing constructively with minority-majority conflicts. Within the AJC there already existed two commissions—Economic Discrimination, and Law and Legislation—that were active in monitoring anti-Semitism and working toward legislation to fight discrimination in employment and education.

The decision to establish a social scientific research unit within the AJC had much to do with the transformation of the goals and aims of the organization toward the end of World War II. Originally, the AJC was organized for the specific purpose of establishing civil rights for European Jews at the end of World War I and for the continued defense of Jewish rights in general, and to represent Zionist interests among American Jews (Urofsky, 1982). Its permanent organization in 1922 reflected a continued concern for more democratic processes in decisions affecting Jewish communities abroad and at home rather than the more elitist process of the American Jewish Committee (Cohen, 1972; Frommer, 1978; Urofsky). Although initially concerned only with “issues that affected Jews as Jews” (Frommer, p. 540), after witnessing the consequences of the failure of Western democracies to intervene quickly in the Nazi expansions, AJC leaders “were determined not to make the same mistake in the domestic arena. Thus, infringement of anyone’s rights—Jews or non-Jews—was cause for concern by the Jewish Congress” (Frommer, pp. 540–541). The organization thus became gradually more aligned with the interests of other minorities facing discrimination. It was amidst this growing commitment to minority rights in general, as well as emerging discussions of cultural pluralism in American postwar democracy, that plans for the founding of CCI took shape.

During World War II, civil rights became a fundamental issue of American liberals as the Nazi persecution of European Jews was translated into a fear of domestic fascism in the United States (Jackson, 1990). By the war’s end, the “work of democracy” (Keppel, 1995) to protect minority rights was being conducted in schools, mayoral standing committees, youth centers, trade unions, church councils, and intercultural associations, as well as in local branches and chapters of national organizations such as the AJC, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Urban League (Johnson, 1946). The “battle for good citizenship” (Giles & Van Til, 1946, p. 34) was being waged on the local, regional, and national stages as both grassroots groups and large institutions joined in the civic-minded effort to promote democracy on all levels.

Profoundly affected by Gunnar Myrdal’s (1944) study of racial inequality, the number of American organizations countering ethnic tension and hostility grew

from approximately 300 in 1945 to more than 1,350 by the 1950s (Herman, 1995). According to Jackson (1990), Myrdal's location of the problem of American democracy "as a conflict in the minds of White Americans helped to focus postwar research on psychological issues at the expense of social structural and economic analyses" (p. 279). Thus CCI, with a staff of prominent social psychologists, became one of many organizations of its day committed to the enhancement of intergroup relations.

Given the work of existing AJC commissions and other organizations committed to fighting discrimination, what exactly was new about CCI? From the point of view of those within AJC involved in establishing CCI, there was the appeal of continuing to oppose anti-Semitism using a scientific approach:

There are other organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish, engaged in this work. The question the layman is entitled to ask is: What innovation will the new Commission bring into the general strategy? The answer is knowledge of facts. . . . What the Commission on Community Interrelations proposes to do is to acquire precise and thorough knowledge of facts and to proceed with action based upon the facts. . . . ("An Action Program," 1945, pp. 4-5)

At midcentury, Lewin was hopeful about the potential of social engineering, which he saw as a new science. Ash (1992) and Van Elteren (1993) have both described the shift in Lewin's political affiliations from his more left-leaning days in Berlin to his liberalism in the United States. Working in America, Lewin became increasingly concerned with questions of cultural pluralism and the workability of liberal democracies within which, he believed, social engineering could make a viable contribution. Although autocratic leaders could be expected to exploit and manipulate the less powerful, in democracies, he wrote, "the 'decent' citizen apologizes for his lack of active participation in group affairs by condemning group manipulation and leaving this business to the politicians" (Lewin, n.d., p. 4). He argued that social scientists had an important role to play in the social engineering process, and furthermore, that such a process was beneficial to the maintenance of democratic traditions:

We do not want group manipulation, but we do need that amount of management of groups which is necessary for a harmonious living together. We want this group management to be done "by the people, for the people." This presupposes that not only the social scientist has to know more about all the factors which make for good or poor relations among groups in a community; this knowledge will have to be common knowledge to the ordinary citizen. To my mind, there is hardly anything more essential for the survival and the progress of democracy than that every citizen understand more clearly how the "right to be different" and the "cooperation for the common good" can and should be integrated for harmonious group relations in a democracy. (Lewin, 1945, p. 7)

CCI was headquartered in New York City and was initially promised generous funding to carry out a program of research aimed at combating anti-Semitism and discrimination, improving intergroup relations, and conducting action projects to ease racial and religious tensions in communities across the United States (Marrow, 1969). Its approach was consistent with the brand of "radical liberalism" of the AJC

that depended on educating and immersing citizens in the skills required for democratic participation.

CCI began with Kurt Lewin as chief consultant and Charles Hendry coordinating early research projects. Lewin recruited Stuart Cook to be director of research from 1946–50. Isidor Chein was associate director of research from 1949–52, with John Harding as assistant director of research. CCI's advisory council included, among others, Gordon Allport, Nathan Cohen, Rensis Likert, Charles Johnson, Margaret Mead, and Edward Tolman (Levy, 1945; Marrow, 1969; Smith, 1994). Over the years, CCI engaged a number of social psychologists familiar to SPSSI (Deutsch, 1992; Harris, Unger, & Stagner, 1986; Levinger, 1986), including Kenneth Clark, Claire Selltitz, Marie Jahoda, and Goodwin Watson. Within the AJC, CCI was applauded for presenting a new approach that moved away from "goodwill meetings" and "lectures that 'make things a little better'" (Levy, p. 6) toward a more effective group approach. The enthusiasm with which action research was embraced was evident, lauded because it was "not carried out in ivory towers, but in communities where people live, work, play, and go about their daily lives; in the places where tension and conflict develop" (Levy, pp. 6–7).

Many of those involved with CCI were interested in creating a social technology for addressing social problems. Their published and unpublished research reports and popular pamphlets often spoke of and to "ordinary citizens" at the neighborhood level who, with training, would become a cadre of community "experts." Their writings on discrimination reflected the enthusiasm and hopefulness of the new technologies that had arisen with the war effort. Goodwin Watson, reviewing CCI-sponsored community research, wrote that the "social power of self-directed, cooperative fact-finding in its potential contribution to strengthening democracy, ranks higher than the discovery of atomic energy" (Watson, 1952, p. 13). In their popular writings, CCI staff made extensive use of military, engineering, and medical metaphors. For example, their pamphlets spoke of "combating" prejudice, "testing" a technique for reducing discrimination as one would test a new consumer product, and "writing prescriptions" for preventing or curing the disease of prejudice.

The development and transformation of CCI is one of the earliest examples of the difficulties of liberal social scientists' relationships to action agencies and the delicate balance they attempt to strike between scientific credibility and social utility. The following sections examine some of the contexts in which CCI was enmeshed—scientifically and socially—in its optimistic desire to deliver a "cure" for discrimination.

Action Research: Social Utility and Scientific Meaning

In the writings of social scientists associated with CCI's most active years (1944 to 1952), we encounter the essential ingredients of an early nonreductionist

social psychology. Social psychology in the United States had developed at a rapid pace during World War II, and by the 1950s turned increasingly toward laboratory methods to conduct research about individual cognitive functioning, often with no immediate application (Collier et al., 1991). By contrast, CCI's nonreductionism made the community its laboratory, the group its level of analysis, and the solution of social problems its purpose.

For example, Chein (1949a) wrote of the "danger of sterility" as a methodological concern to social psychological research, where "the sole consequence of the research process is that the findings come to occupy a place on the well known library shelf." Referring to his colleagues in "pure" research settings, Chein questioned the practice of allowing experimental design and scientific rigor to take priority over application of research findings to real social problems. With respect to prejudice, he criticized research done for its own sake, arguing that locating the roots of prejudice was neither more basic than applied research nor more likely to offer a solution for ending prejudice.

CCI conceived of itself as offering something different in the effort to promote intergroup harmony: social action founded on proven research knowledge. As one internal document stated, CCI was formed to "take the struggle against prejudice out of the realm of hope, faith, opinion and guesswork and place it within the scope of scientific measurement and scientific fact" (Commission on Community Interrelations, n.d., a, pp. 3–4). Lewin's friend and biographer Alfred Marrow described the precision with which data gleaned from research would be applied to community problems, suggesting that action research was an attempt not merely to measure situations, but to evaluate conditions of success and methods of modifying situations in a scientific manner (Marrow, 1969).

Selltiz and Cook (1948) addressed the question of whether social scientific research could be both socially and scientifically meaningful. Reflecting the concerns of both social researchers and community service workers, they stated that socially useful research should be applicable to concrete social situations; concern problems that have immediate social consequences; and ensure that practical action results from the research findings. They suggested that for scientifically sound research projects to be of social benefit, research must be focused on the process of change, performed in collaboration with social agencies whenever possible, and as part of a coordinated research plan to include many replications in different settings and with different groups (Selltiz & Cook).

Thus, the research objectives of the CCI placed equal emphasis on knowledge gathering and social change. A pamphlet outlining CCI's projects and methodology emphasized the importance of the testing process in determining methods for reducing prejudice and discrimination. The testing process was represented by a five-step methodology (see Figure 1) loosely combining the principles of hypothesis testing and action research, consisting of having a clearly stated problem, getting

THE TESTING PROCESS

Where Do We Stand In The Fight Against Prejudice?

How can we determine which methods are getting results and which are not?

The testing process is basically the same in this field as in any other.

To begin...

- ▶ We must have a clearly-stated **PROBLEM**
- ▶ Next, we need an **IDEA** about solutions to the problem
- ▶ Then we must **TEST THE IDEA** to see if it works.
- ▶ Finally, a report is made of the **FINDINGS**
- ▶ And, the **RESULTS GO INTO ACTION**



When these steps are followed, a **TESTED** method of combating prejudice is being put to use.

Fig. 1. From CCI pamphlet on action research, "But What Works?" circa 1946.

ideas for solutions, testing the ideas, reporting the findings, and putting the results into action ("But What Works?" n.d.).

CCI's promotional literature appealed to midcentury Americans' faith in scientific testing procedures and the effectiveness of new technologies:

A good doctor does not prescribe a drug until its effects have been carefully studied. A successful manufacturer does not buy a machine until he has seen test production figures. A careful housewife does not buy a washing machine or pressure cooker until she has seen the seal of approval by a testing laboratory. We need testing in the fight against prejudice. We cannot afford to work in the dark any longer. ("But What Works?" n.d.)

It would be the job of "ordinary citizens" to research the facts of discrimination in their communities, to respond to bigotry effectively, and to raise children with a positive sense of both their own and other groups' identity. Many of the results of

CCI studies were not published in scholarly books and journals but appeared in popular Jewish periodicals or widely circulated pamphlets or were publicized in addresses to community organizations in order to reach a wider audience.

CCI associates wrote numerous position papers and books establishing the philosophy of action research (e.g., Lewin, 1946; Selltitz & Cook, 1948; Watson, 1947). In an article for the AJC membership, Lewin outlined the philosophy of this “new approach to old problems” (Lewin, 1945, p. 6). His faith in science, captured by his use of the phrase “infra-red rays of social science” (p. 6) led him to believe that the relations between majority and minority racial and religious groups could be studied in the same objective and scientific manner as any other form of social life. However, to have true social utility, such studies must also extend beyond the individual psychological level of analysis. Of the relationship between scientific knowledge and social action, he wrote:

To be the basis for action, fact-finding has to include all the aspects of community life—economic factors as well as political factors or cultural tradition. It has to include the majority and the minority, non-Jews and ourselves. The staff of the CCI is composed of Jews and non-Jews, of sociologists, psychologists and community organizers to fit this variety of tasks. (p. 6)

CCI's action research necessitated the training and involvement of a wide range of community members, often with little or no previous research training. Unlike the top-down approach practiced in industrial and organizational psychology, CCI promoted a particular form of social engineering that relied on the local voluntary efforts of community members, Jewish Community Center workers, and a significant number of women drawn from the numerous chapters of the Women's Division of the AJC.

The Role of the Women's Division of the AJC in CCI

National Women's Division (NWD)¹ members played a significant role in the work of democratic social engineering throughout the CCI's social action phase. Not unlike most middle-class Jewish women's organizations (Baum, Hyman, & Michel, 1976), the NWD existed as a parallel organization within the AJC. Founded in 1933 by Louise Wise, its first president, the NWD was active during and after the war in fund-raising, clothing drives for European Jewish refugees, orphan resettlement, and intercultural and interfaith activities (Urofsky, 1982). Local NWD

¹ The National Women's Division focused its efforts on family, educational, and community activities of the AJC, whereas the Commission on Law and Social Action—the product of a 1945 merger of the Commissions on Economic Discrimination and Law and Legislation—focused on legal activities. Our reading of the various efforts of the AJC suggests that during the period under consideration (1944–52), the AJC reflected the different spheres of men's and women's work consistent with the gender, White ethnic and class stratification in activities of the period.

chapters had participated in the AJC's earlier Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism, and after learning of the CCI's formation, sought representation in CCI projects. Women's chapters formed committees to introduce the "new approach" of CCI to its members and recruited volunteers for many CCI projects ("News of Women's Division," 1945, p. 15).

The language of the NWD literature represented a blend of the ideals of social engineering and democratic participation and reflected middle-class women's domestic status as well. These materials captured both the enthusiastic promotion of science and middle-class women's growing opportunities for material consumption. For example, one story written by CCI psychologists rendered the new industrial and social technologies into metaphor. NWD chairs introduced these technologies to their members by reading the story, in which the "expert," Mrs. Greenberg, is elevated to "social engineer" among her peers:

Mrs. Friedman got into a discussion with Mrs. Klein over what kind of a vacuum cleaner Mrs. Klein should buy. Each woman was set on a different brand. Finally, Mrs. Greenberg cut in. "Ladies," she said, "pardon me, but since my husband is an engineer and since I know something about his methods, I can tell you that you cannot possibly settle the merits of these machines merely with your own opinions. I suggest you stop speculating and guessing and look up reliable laboratory tests on these cleaners." . . . The ladies agreed that this advice was sound. But would the ladies have agreed if, instead of vacuum cleaners, they had been talking about methods of combating prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination? Would they have been as ready then to test methods in a laboratory? (Commission on Community Interrelations, n.d., c, p. 3)

For the women involved in CCI projects through the NWD, the "work of democracy" was to be practiced in the home, in a classroom, or on an assembly line. Reporting on its involvement with CCI, an NWD president noted:

Perhaps the primary accomplishments of our CCI work in the Women's Division this year has been a change in our members' concept of CCI from one which held the Commission to be an ivory tower to one which pictures it as a source of specific usable techniques which the chairman can use in her own community to go about her daily business of working for good intergroup relations wherever she lives. (Coan, 1949)

Women participating in CCI projects through NWD chapters were involved in community self-surveys, fund-raising for intercultural education programs and cultural-sensitivity training for teachers, study groups on raising Jewish children, fact gathering on housing conditions in Harlem, investigation of "anti-democratic incidents" in neighborhood schools and factories, and monitoring of the introduction of religious curricula into local public schools. In 1948, when AJC cut CCI's funding levels, CCI Director Stuart Cook requested that the NWD recruit more volunteers from Women's Division chapters to aid CCI research.

The women who participated as community researchers and organizers were both promoting their beliefs in intercultural harmony and fulfilling their own educational aspirations. Through working with CCI, women could "obtain a concentrated course in the psychology of prejudice, with readings in the best modern texts"

(Brodsky, 1949). Further, women who were trained as interviewers and Incident Control training leaders received “a very practical training in the psychology of leadership in democratic groups” (Brodsky).

CCI’s action research projects thus proceeded with extensive help from Women’s Division volunteers. A brief overview of CCI’s program of research illustrates the efforts of the research staff to investigate and direct social action processes through the use of social science methodology.

CCI’s Action Research Program

Southern (1987) has argued that *An American Dilemma* (Myrdal, 1944) was perhaps the document most influential to midcentury race relations. Certainly, one can see the impact of Myrdal’s study on the work of CCI researchers. Their projects were premised on the notion that once Americans recognized the moral incompatibility of racism and egalitarian democracy, exclusionary practices would cease.

Although the list of research projects completed by or in cooperation with the CCI between 1944 and 1952 is lengthy (see Marrow, 1969, for an extensive summary), three major paths of investigation guided their projects: the development of methods to be used by small groups to oppose racism and improve intergroup relations; the study of the effects of face-to-face contact between members of different groups under varying circumstances, specifically in cases where the contact resulted in bigoted statements or actions; and the social psychological examination of problems of minority group membership, especially the problem of achieving positive identification with one’s own group while participating fully in the life of the larger community (Jahoda, 1952). Three major research projects corresponding to these investigative paths were the community self-survey, the Incident Control Project, and studies in Jewish identification and child rearing.

Community Self-Survey: Auditing Discrimination

Perhaps one of CCI’s best-known techniques in marshalling the facts of discrimination was the adoption and refinement of the community self-survey of race relations, originated at Fisk University (Lambert & Cohen, 1949) and initiated by several communities (Wormser, 1949). Stuart Cook (1949) cited the work of Gunnar Myrdal and the impact of *An American Dilemma* on CCI’s support for community self-surveys. As project director, Margot Haas Wormser described CCI’s first community self-survey in the fictional “Northtown” as a process intended to reveal facts upon which further action could be taken by communities.

Community self-surveys were action research operations wherein members of a community worked together to identify racial prejudice in the places they lived, worked, and socialized. In effect, a “discrimination index” was secured through the participation of citizens in the community who were concerned about

the democratic makeup of their community. In the pilot project, Wormser herself introduced the concepts and methods of the self-survey, but it was the residents of "Northtown," through their social agencies, community and church groups, ethnocultural organizations, labor council, and business organizations who carried out the research. Through sponsoring organizations, subcommittees were struck and resources and volunteers solicited, and in the end, hundreds of community members took part in the survey, which consisted of in-depth interviews with families from all ethnic and racial groups, employers, schools, and real estate representatives (Wormser, 1949). Ultimately, the community was able to create for itself a picture of intergroup relations and the extent of discrimination in housing and employment, as well as an action plan to address the most obvious sources of racial exclusion.

The community self-survey exemplified the democracy-oriented, progressive community project CCI advocated, in the belief that more progress could be made by involving people who were growing concerned with discrimination than by attempting to activate those who were apathetic. This reasoning illustrates CCI's attempt to move beyond academic expertise and to place the tools of research in the hands of concerned citizens.

The community self-survey became popular among civic organizations; following the publication of Wormser's (1949) study of "Northtown," more than a dozen community groups contacted CCI for information on planning their own self-surveys. In time, CCI published a detailed manual, *How to Conduct a Community Self-Survey of Civil Rights*, for distribution to interested community groups. The manual was later published in book form (Wormser & Selltitz, 1951). Findings gleaned from the self-surveys assisted in the preparation of legal interventions undertaken by the AJC's Commission on Legal and Social Action (CLSA). These community audits served a very real educational function that mobilized awareness of the necessity for social change.

However, Wormser's published description of the "Northtown" project is also a valuable process document on the limitations that researchers faced in their attempt to develop a community-based social psychology. She described problems stemming from disagreements among community groups. For example, the sponsoring committee ran into conflict with the employers' association, which objected to some of the questionnaires included in the survey and threatened to withdraw its support. Because members of the community at large were for the first time documenting unfair business and housing practices, the vested interests of the business community were challenged directly. Their antagonism was in part fueled by "the fact that *outsiders* were running the survey" (Wormser, 1949, p. 11) as well as by suspicions arising from Wormser's own involvement with the project. "Rumors began to reach me," Wormser wrote, "that the survey was being called a Communist survey, that the volunteers were accused of being Communists, and that stories regarding the political orientation of CCI were circulating" (p. 10). Instances of studies being interrupted due to rumors of

Communist involvement were in fact reported in the community-based social psychology of the late 1940s and 1950s, as McCarthyism became more threatening to social scientists (see Festinger et al., 1948).²

Incident Control Project: Stopping the Spread of Prejudice

After World War II, minority-majority public contact in Northern cities on bus platforms and in restaurants and office buildings was becoming increasingly common. As part of its efforts to study face-to-face contact among members of different groups, CCI turned its attention toward public manifestations of antidemocratic racial and religious prejudice. To this end, CCI's research on "how to answer the bigot" (Citron, 1946, p. 6) became a key action research project. Initially named the Democratic Participation Project, this large-scale training program was carried out in collaboration with six Women's Division chapters. Once again, it is possible to see the compatibility of this project with Myrdal's analysis of America's fundamental dilemma, that bigotry was un-American.

According to Abraham Citron, the project director, bigotry was learned, and if left unchecked, could be passed along in group situations. Through fact-finding techniques such as role-playing bigoted incidents, then measuring audience reactions, one could discover the most effective "antidote." The foes of democracy were portrayed as spreading a virus in communities; CCI was conceptualized as the medical team that could provide a vaccine to protect the population from contamination. According to a popular CCI pamphlet:

It is important that you answer the bigot, because careful research has found that a bigoted remark, unanswered, can and does spread prejudice to the people who hear it. . . . The bigot is more than a pain in the neck. He is a source of infection for the spread of prejudiced ideas. But you can stop him! (Commission on Community Interrelations, n.d., c)

The Incident Control Project was more concerned with observers of racial incidents than with bigots themselves. The rationale was developed as one of the lessons of the Holocaust for American democracy. As Citron (1946) explained, Nazis had tested the acceptability of anti-Semitism to the broader German public by organizing public insults, which at first met with little enthusiasm. Citron argued that permissiveness ultimately lent credibility and support for more extensive actions. Prejudice was learned in small groups "from people—living among them, listening, and talking to them" (Citron, p. 6). He went on to argue:

² It is not known to what extent studies sponsored by CCI came directly under the McCarthy glare. If anticommunism in the immediate postwar period threatened liberal organizations such as the AJC, it appears to have been well countered through legal action (Dollinger, 1993).

The more intimate the group, the deeper the attitudes take root. Although the bus and restaurant situations . . . are not of the most intimate type, many people who hear such remarks time after time are inevitably influenced by them. More people "catch" prejudice in this way than are ever affected by hate sheets or hate meetings. In this kind of incident we witness the mass production of blind prejudice and hate. (Citron, pp. 6–8)

Research into the problem of public bigotry used the "socio-drama," wherein randomly selected participants (often passersby chosen off the street) were asked to witness skits simulating public race baiting in order to gauge ordinary citizens' reactions to challenges to the race baiter. Socio-dramas were pretested on more than 1,000 subjects in order to find the most effective argument and tone for answering the bigot.

Myrdal's "American Creed" was built into the socio-dramas and was often the most effective response for dissipating public expressions of prejudice. The unfairness of anti-Semitism would ultimately weaken democracy, according to the Creed, leaving it open to the threat of Communism. In one scenario, two trained volunteers role played an incident wherein Jews are stereotyped in a public incident:

Stevenson: That's no way to talk. What kind of country would we have if we didn't stick together? We'd be easy suckers for someone to make trouble.

Jones: What business is it of yours?

Stevenson: I'm telling you it's unfair to pick on the Jews or on any other group. Everybody in America should get the same square deal.

Jones: Why are you so worried about the Jews?

Stevenson: It's not just the Jews I'm worried about. It's the danger of that kind of talk to our democracy that worries me. This country is made up of all races and religions and it's up to us to see that they all get an even break. (Commission on Community Interrelations, n.d., c)

CCI research found that some audiences—such as war veterans and union members—were more likely to respond positively to "Stevenson" employing the "American tradition" argument than to silence or to an appeal to individual differences, which stressed that personal traits were not unique to particular social groups. People chosen off the street preferred the latter appeal.

Citron (1946) was enthusiastic and saw his findings as "ammunition" in reducing bigotry. He advised his readers: "Don't let the bigot get away with it," "Remind the bigot that the country was built for all and stands for equality," "Peg your argument to the situation"—that is, state that in your personal experience all members of any group are not alike and that you don't condemn the actions of all members of a group based on the actions of one—and, finally, use a "somewhat militant' and serious" but not "aggressive or unpoised manner" especially when "calling up the 'American symbols' argument." He concluded that it was best to "act in a spirit of fair play when you talk about fair play" to avoid sounding "like a politician" (p. 8).

True to CCI's objective of following research with action, Citron proceeded with an elaborate venture of setting up Incident Control Training Institutes where community and religious organizations as well as labor and women's groups were

given skills to train their members. In the training, a racist incident from one of a number of scripts would be acted out, and participants would practice their arguments. It is not known how many participants were ultimately trained in how to answer the bigot, but institutes were established in a number of Northern cities across the United States, a training manual was made available to community groups, and evaluations were conducted on the training institutes.

Jewish Self-Identification: Raising Healthy Minority Children

As CCI's social action projects got underway, so did a preoccupation in Jewish communities with what it meant to be Jewish in the postwar era. At various historical times, Jewish identity in the United States had involved conformity to Anglo-American standards as well as participation with other cultures in a melting pot ideology to produce something uniquely "American." Postwar discussions of Jewish identity, however, emphasized retention of cultural identity in a pluralistic society where one could be both American and Jewish (Shapiro, 1992). Not surprisingly, with a research unit in one of the most prominent Jewish organizations in the United States, support for research into determinants for producing an increased sense of belonging in minority group members became a priority. Both Lewin (1948) and Chein (1949b, 1949c, 1952) wrote extensively on multiple group membership. After Lewin's sudden death in 1947, many of his essays on identity were published in the collection *Resolving Social Conflicts* (Lewin, 1948). Chein's works on identity were found mostly in Jewish publications, as working documents for CCI, or as talks given to Jewish community center workers, parents, educators and social workers; most remain unpublished (Borshuk & Cherry, 1997).

Lewin's writings on Jewish identity focused on his people's historical ambivalence and uncertainty, particularly after their emancipation from the period of European ghettoization that had previously "made the boundaries obvious and unquestionable for everybody" (1948, p. 149). In the United States, where assimilation had become more possible, notions of self-hatred and group belongingness were especially relevant to a discussion of raising healthy minority children (Lewin, 1946). For Lewin, it was not belonging to many groups that caused difficulty for children, but an uncertainty of where they belonged. "Parents," he wrote, "should not be afraid of so-called 'double allegiance.' . . . The real danger lies in standing nowhere" (1948, p. 185).

Chein's discussion of group membership was geared toward the pluralism of American social life. Chein advocated Jewish participation in institutional settings—for example, integrated housing and hospitals—in order to avoid divisiveness or a sense of separateness, but separation in matters uniquely religious. He wrote, "Our goal is a feeling of Jewish identification which is integrated with the best values of American culture and which opposes both assimilation and ghettoism" (1949b, p.

8). Chein was strongly in favor of the notion of multiple group membership, writing:

Opportunities for Jews to participate as Jews in affairs which are of concern to the general community—e.g., in working for specific civil rights programs—should be developed and exploited. . . . It helps the person to feel that being a Jew does not prevent him from participating as an individual in the broader grouping—and hence eliminates a barrier to a feeling of dual membership. (Chein, p. 9)

Both Lewin and Chein expressed strong support for a dual-identity role compatible with notions of cultural pluralism and intercultural education and action. Lewin often repeated Rabbi Hillel's famous phrase: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?" With that in mind, both Chein and Lewin promoted working on behalf of social justice for other ethnocultural and religious communities as well as their own, something they felt was possible only from a secure position of belongingness to one's own group.

Discussions of American Jewish identification after World War II were increasingly set in the context of the meaning of the Holocaust for Jewish religious life and the role of American Jews in the newly formed State of Israel. CCI sponsored study groups, published papers, and public lectures to promote discussion and debate of these topics. Most of the research conducted focused on in-group diversity and methods for grounding the Jewish child in a positive cultural identification while maintaining a bicultural stance toward American life (Chein, 1949c). Results of extensive exploratory studies directed by CCI and carried out in Jewish community centers in Boston and New York City revealed that Jewish children sometimes experienced the non-Jewish world as "alien and hostile," and displayed more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with being Jewish. This led CCI to promote and engage in further investigations into Jewish identification, as well as to sponsor a study of African American group identity (Rose, 1949).

It was the work on multiple group membership that the American Jewish Congress would continue to support even as its overall commitment to CCI was waning. The National Women's Division furthered the issue by producing with CCI a discussion guide to be used by its chapter members to promote exploration of how to raise Jewish children (Chein, Kendler, & Coan, 1949). Study group leaders prompted members to discuss their experiences and ideas related to group membership and to discuss what it meant to be Jewish in the United States, the role of yeshivas and other Jewish education programs, the benefits and drawbacks to homogeneously Jewish groups in education and housing, and the general adjustment of Jews to American life.

The AJC had ample reasons for its increased interest in studying the topic of Jewish identity. As expressed by a Mid-Queens study group, Jewish communities of the time were faced with the growth of anti-Semitism in America, the new State of Israel, effects of World War II, and an increased interest among their children in

Judaism. Jewish identity was being reevaluated in light of new challenges and changes in American life and world Jewry.

The Lewinian Project in an Era of Change

Community life in the United States in the immediate postwar era was rapidly changing, as was the nature of civil rights work in urban communities. And CCI, having established itself as a liberal research institution focused on reducing inter-group tensions through its work in communities, would also change. CCI's social action research focused on three strategies: maintaining vigilance over discriminatory practices in communities and making findings part of a legal response; containing the spread of prejudice by responding to rather than ignoring its public interpersonal expression; and raising Jewish children with a positive sense of their dual social identity as a preventive means of combating the impact of prejudice and discrimination. With CCI as a research unit within the AJC, these strategies had served the Jewish community well in the immediate postwar period. However, CCI was eventually challenged, and its struggles to maintain the research unit by the early 1950s are best understood by examining events both within and external to the AJC. The Lewinian project became less of a priority for the AJC as civil rights battles were fought in court and in mass political action. As well, the rise of experimental social psychology in academic psychology found researchers studying prejudice in the laboratory rather than discrimination in communities.

The Civil Rights Battle Goes to Court

In its efforts on behalf of minority groups, the AJC, as perhaps the most progressive of liberal Jewish organizations, became less concerned over time with communities and more concerned with courts. In fact, from 1944 to the mid-1950s, much of the action around civil rights advancement and the attack on exclusionary racial covenants was in the courts and in the executive orders of the federal government. Beginning in 1948, the Commission on Law and Social Action copublished with the NAACP what became an annual joint report on civil rights in the United States. The NAACP and its legal staff, headed by Thurgood Marshall, made extensive use of social scientific research in its court challenges, the most famous of which was *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (see Herman, 1995; Jackson, 1996; Kluger, 1976; President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947; Rosen, 1972; Southern, 1987). The AJC, along with other civic agencies, filed amicus briefs, and CCI staff such as Stuart Clark and Isidor Chein testified in several court cases.

Divisions in the Jewish Community

The AJC also encountered factions within the Jewish community that did not share its enthusiasm for racial integration. Dollinger (1993), in reviewing the substantial literature on Jewish liberalism, has argued that after the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate public schools, "Northern Jews discovered that their own desire for social inclusion compromised their liberal civil rights stand and drew them uncomfortably close to the political view of their Southern co-religionists" (p. 207). Other variables also acted to dissolve long-standing organizational alliances between Jewish and African American groups: the suburban flight of Whites following urban rioting, decreased support for public education, and the rise of Black nationalism and increasing expressions of anti-Semitism (Clark, 1946; Diner, 1977; Salzman, 1992). By the mid-1950s, many American Jews were benefiting from the postwar economic boom that was accompanied by the lifting of anti-Semitic restrictions on housing, education, and employment. The cost of social inclusion sometimes meant collaboration with racial separation and a waning commitment to African American civil rights, prompting one historian to remark:

[After the Depression] the role of the Jewish agencies in nurturing the national mood and making it more receptive to change was critical. Arguably, the period from just before the end of World War II to the mid-1950s, when the black-led protest movement got underway, may be said to have been the Jewish phase of the civil rights revolution. (Friedman, 1995, p. 136)

Throughout the 1960s, however, many Jews did remain committed to the legal civil rights movement and were well represented among White ethnics when it moved into mass social protest (Carson, 1992). In this phase, they participated by joining groups such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and Congress of Racial Equality directly rather than through liberal Jewish organizations (Dollinger, 1993). The intercultural work of CCI was increasingly viewed as less useful by a younger generation of activists for whom reformist solutions and unenforced court decisions were insufficient to the task of full equality. Although CCI's brand of social action research could assist in evaluating a problem and creating mechanisms for slow change through educational and legal venues, African Americans had been struggling to break down the color line for too long to leave the matter to liberal reform tactics.

CCI Comes Under Scrutiny

CCI continued to bolster the work of the legally oriented CLSA, primarily through research on social contact that supported desegregation legislation (Jahoda, 1952). But whereas the CLSA remained at the forefront of legal efforts to combat discrimination, the value to the AJC of an internal social psychology research unit

such as CCI came into question. As Marrow (1964) wrote, "Although [CCI's] program was scientifically meaningful and socially useful to an unusual degree, this was not recognized by the local welfare federations across the country on which the AJCongress depended for its resources" (p. 9). In response to concerns about its continuing utility, Marie Jahoda was asked to evaluate the feasibility of the research group.

In her evaluation report, Jahoda (1952) argued strongly that officially sanctioned fact finding on intergroup relations and prejudicial attitudes was consistent with American Jewish values. She argued that scientific knowledge was better than mere "enthusiasm and intuitive insights" in the matter of social action, but that spectacular results could not be expected, only "application of the most rational procedure available . . . in dealing with complex social problems" (p. 4).

Some of the AJC's concerns were prompted by a worsening financial situation as well as its desire to pursue legal courses of action. How much of the research being done was actually related to Congress activities? And weren't there other research units, particularly at universities, where this work was being conducted? Jahoda responded by pointing out that some of the work of CCI, particularly "the development of methods that can be used by the ordinary citizen to improve intergroup relations," had "a special slant" not undertaken elsewhere in the United States (1952, p. 6).

Jahoda also tackled the problem of adequate time for conducting research in the context of a community agency that might desire faster results. In fact, although shorter term research could be of immediate use in legal argumentation, longer term research extending up to 3 years was required to evaluate new techniques for solving social problems. Researchers' success, concluded Jahoda, could not be measured by the same standards as those for the regular staff of AJC given the type of research being undertaken; there were those who felt CCI's research standard was too high, and others thought it too low. CCI staff were often viewed as aloof from the main organization, yet they were often self-critical, their morale low, ever mindful that they worked in an environment where their funding was on the critical list. Despite the fact that their function was never particularly well defined, they were a highly productive research unit (Jahoda, 1952). When CCI did search for external financial support, private foundations did not want to risk tax-exempt status by sponsoring research of a political nature. "Apparently," Marrow wrote, "the problems under study were too controversial" (1964, p. 9).

Changing Communities, Changing Tactics

There were also those who thought that CCI's research agenda was not controversial enough. Gardner Murphy (1952), although acknowledging the tremendous organization in the variety of projects against discrimination, wondered if the

skilled practitioners involved were practicing “benevolent despotism” despite their openness and purported commitment to democratic ends:

If a few people can get stores to hire Negroes and those who don't like it have to accept it, we liberals will all applaud. The game can be played exactly in reverse, and we will all groan. But is the process democratic in a Lewinian sense—is it based on a group decision? (Murphy, p. 13)

Murphy wrote that political pressure, contingent on increased economic power, was the key to minority gains. He felt the racial crises of the time required both “group decision and sheer force of political pressure—mixed well before using,” and that “political democracy in large amounts” was required “to protect and to implement the results of social science” (Murphy, 1952, p. 13).

Although it is not clear from the archival record exactly how matters raised by Jahoda's report were resolved, it is known that by the mid-1950s the focus of CCI had shifted away from intercultural education toward social conflict and urban affairs. CCI's new research director, Don Hager, expressed disenchantment with the intergroup relations approach and its “studied avoidance of the relation between economic and political power structures and the fact of prejudice, discrimination and conflict” (Hager, 1955, p. 7). For Hager, conflict was part of the democratic process. It could not be eliminated but only channeled to constructive ends. Racial hostility reflected socioeconomic ills and differences in social mobility. The urban crisis of impoverishment, violence, and despair made the liberal goals of integration unrealistic with respect to the priorities of low-income communities. Hager's reorientation of CCI toward conflict analysis and urban affairs would remain in place throughout the 1960s.

Laboratory Psychology and the Primacy of Prejudice

While CCI was being evaluated, several of its core group of social psychologists became employed by the Research Center for Human Relations at New York University (NYU). Stuart Cook moved to NYU in 1949 and became head of the Department of Psychology there in 1950, collaborating with colleagues Claire Sellitz, Isidor Chein, and Marie Jahoda on research similar to that conducted at CCI (Smith, 1994). Although the investigative practices developed for a community-based social psychology were both pragmatic and eclectic, designed for application to the particular problem of intergroup discrimination, increasingly the social psychological mainstream was disconnecting research and graduate training from the immediacy of solving social problems (Lundstedt, 1968). As American social psychology came of age between 1950 and 1970 (Apfelbaum, 1992; Collier et al., 1991), its practitioners would devote their energies to a practice bounded by the parameters of laboratory experimentation, based primarily on individual behavior, and geared toward managerial concerns (Danziger, 1990, 1992). Removed from the

intergroup context, the study of discrimination would quickly reduce to attitude and personality measurement.

Samelson (1978) has documented social psychology's "thematic reversal" from the study of race superiority in the early part of the century to the social psychology of prejudice and race relations that was developed by the end of World War II. Part of that reversal involved the emerging distinctions between prejudice and discrimination. As experimental social psychology moved into laboratory settings, prejudice became an isolated psychological variable, detached from the processes of intergroup relations. In the 1950s, the study of prejudice, enhanced by the use of attitude measurement techniques developed during the 1930s and World War II, became increasingly the focus of academic social psychologists (e.g., Allport, 1954). The study of race relations turned to the study of individual attitudes, cognitive biases, and personality dispositions, mainly of Whites (Herman, 1995; Samelson). The focus on specific communities was sacrificed for the general and the context-free. CCI, in its promotion of community relations, was a noteworthy exception to the movement toward laboratory experimentation on attitudes.

CCI's social psychology of community intervention was greatly influenced by the social democratic notions of social scientists such as Goodwin Watson, Kurt Lewin, and others who attempted to bring a nonreductionist understanding to a point where society and individual meet. However, the emerging demands of their field downplayed those aspects of their work that were devoted to community and group relations. Just as the AJC came to expect quick and productive results from its researchers, so did the culture of social psychology require traces of experimentally derived evidence to add to its growing stream of literature. Thus, large-scale societal investigations of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Allport, 1954; Bettelheim & Janowitz, 1950; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939) were abandoned to make room for the products of prejudice research such as the *F* scale and an increasing number of attitude and social-distance measures. For the mainstream of social psychology's practitioners, scientific meaning had been severed from immediate social utility as measurability became paramount.

Conclusion

The history of CCI reveals a group of social psychologists committed to the midcentury ideals of egalitarian democracy and social engineering and heady with the promise of the technological advance of social science methodology. Their story is instructive as a precursor to the civil rights movement, experimenting with a social psychology that was located in communities, identities, and relations between groups. If their efforts to train citizens to stanch the spread of racial hatred seem naive today, or their technological and curative analogies quaint, it should be remembered that this group also represented an early social

psychological attempt to place ethnocultural identity in a key position for understanding prejudice and discrimination (see Gaines & Reed, 1995, for earlier work in the African American tradition).

The challenges faced by those associated with CCI in the 1940s are not atypical of those of social psychologists who continue to create roles for their expertise in social agencies and community organizations today. CCI's investigative practices offer a rare glimpse into the action research of midcentury, when such work was in its earliest stages of development. It was, of course, only one of several historical models of action research that inform contemporary scholar-activists in their social change work (Wittig & Bettencourt, 1996). The record of CCI's research unit reveals what were then the central difficulties faced by community-based researchers working within larger agencies or organizations. Balancing the demands of voices calling out for social justice against the needs of sponsoring organizations and their bureaucracies, along with expectations of methodological rigor, continues to be a central challenge to community and social psychologists.

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