**Where Is the Social in Social Psychology? Assessing Gender Identity Studies**

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**Abstract**

In this thesis I focus on the question of whether the field of social psychology has lost its social aspect and has become more focused on the individual, as claimed by Greenwood (2004). By summarizing and discussing works of Greenwood, Gergen (2008), Fiedler (2014), and Wilson (2022), I present three conditions for a study to be considered "social" in a strict sense. I analyze two recent studies on gender identity (Stokoe, 2010; Zitelny et al., 2022) to answer the question: *Assessing research regarding social identity and gender: Where is "the social" in social psychology?* I conclude that one study (Zitelny et al., 2022) is limited in its focus on individual thoughts and beliefs and does not fully include the social aspect, while the other study (Stokoe 2010) is more successful in incorporating the social aspect by using a social theoretical framework. I suggest a broader examination of social psychology research, to better understand the patterns of research and improve the field by combining the social and psychological aspects in future studies.

**Where Is the Social in Social Psychology? Assessing Gender Identity Studies**

Social psychology is nowadays introduced to students by paraphrasing Gordon

Allport: "the scientific study of the way in which people's thought, feelings, and behaviors are

influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people" (Allport, 1985). This definition

takes a more individual standpoint than Wilhelm Wundt's explanation of Völkerpsychologie

more than a century earlier*:* "Because of this dependence on the community, in particular the

social community, this whole department of psychological investigation is designated as

*social psychology*," (Wundt, 1907 p.26).[1] Thus, social psychology of today is different than it

used to be. Wundt saw Social psychology as grounded in cultural communities. Whereas in

social psychology textbooks of today it's described as the individual experience of social

situations, per Allport's definition. This raises the question of how social psychology has

changed over the years, and if, as Greenwood (2004) claims, social psychology has lost its

social aspect becoming more focused on the individual and less on the group.

The question of whether the field of social psychology is actually social isn't a novel

one. Gergen (2008), Graumann et al. (1986) Greenwood (2000, 2004), Jaspars (1982) and

Steiner (1974) are a few among the many who have asked questions ranging from 'where is

the group in social psychology?' to 'can we still call social psychology social?'. In this thesis

I want build on Greenwood (2004) and Gergen (2008) to ask the same question once again

and apply that question to two recent social psychology papers (Stokoe, 2010; Zitelny et al.,

2022) for an in-depth analysis.

Both Stokoe (2010) and Zitelny et al. (2022) study the social identity of gender. Social

identity is a key aspect of social psychology. It can be found in any social psychology

textbook nowadays. Additionally, social identity is a good example of a concept in which the

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[1] This is a quote from the English edition, in which the term Völkerpsychologie is translated to social psychology. It must be noted, though,  that this translation doesn't capture the full meaning of Völkerpsychologie.

social and individual should be combined, as indicated by the name. Assessing research on social identity might give us some insight in how the social and the psychological are currently combined. Regarding gender: in recent years it has become more common to see gender as a social construct that doesn't have to be linked to the biological sex. Which makes gender an interesting variable to combine with social identity theory. This way, gender and social identity theory present themselves as quite social. But are they truly social? This leads to my research question: *Assessing research regarding social identity and gender: Where is "the social" in social psychology?*

To analyze the selected articles and answer this question, a distinction needs to be made between the 'social' and the 'individual'. Which is why I will, in the following section, summarize and discuss three works that define what social psychology is. First, I will present some ideas of *the Disappearance of the Social in American Social Psychology* by John Greenwood (2004), who claims social psychology has lost its social aspect, and presents a definition of 'the social' based on the original conception of social psychology. Then I will discuss works by Gergen (2008) and Fiedler (2014), they propose a general change of the social psychology approach. Finally, I will discuss Wilson (2022), who tries to capture the current field of social psychology with the construal principle. His work will show how social psychology is currently practiced. Following the discussion of these articles, I will present my own views and articulate three conditions to be fulfilled by a study to be considered "social" in a strict sense.

**From the Social to the Individual**

John Greenwood is a philosopher with a research interest in the history of psychology. In his work *The Disappearance of the Social in American Social Psychology,* (2004) he argues that social psychology has abandoned its original notion over the years. Greenwood cites a few definitions of social psychology from the early 1900s, using the following

phrasings: "expressions of mental life which take form in social relations, organizations and practices", "people gathered into great planes of uniformity", "collective mental life" (Greenwood, 2004 p.4). Social psychology seemed to be grounded in the collective, in groups, in something that's more than the mental life of individuals added up. However Greenwood tells us that in the 1920s more critical voices against this form of social psychology arose, like Floyd Allport. He claimed that this collective mental life didn't exist: in his opinion social psychology was entirely made up out of the psychology of individuals (Allport, 1924). Greenwood claims that because of this view, social psychology started to look less and less like the social psychology as it was originally defined. It became individual psychology oriented towards a social object; the same psychological processes as used in individual psychology but pointed towards a social object now had the label social psychology stamped on them. The focus was now on how the individual is influenced by the social instead of seeing the individual as part of the social.

Does that mean that something important has been lost? Greenwood (2004) says that others before him have failed to define what exactly has been neglected throughout the years. He criticizes Graumann (1986) and Farr (1996)'s view that the only alternative to contemporary social psychology would be to discard the individual completely and focus on trans- or supra-individual structures. Still, Greenwood claims social states and behaviours are a part of and influenced by the individual, thus the individual shouldn't be discarded to study the social. Instead, he claims the social can be found in individual emotion, cognition and behaviour when these are shared by a social group and are formed because of this social group. Thus, according to Greenwood, concepts like aggression, attitudes or altruistic behaviour don't have to be social, even if they're directed towards another person. They become social when a person holds these believes or engages in this behaviour because the social group does as well.

**The Social and Psychological Framework**

Where Greenwood (2004) seems to think social psychology has, over time, lost its social element, Kenneth Gergen claims that social psychology failed to succeed in bringing the social and psychological together from the start. In his paper *On the Very Idea of Social Psychology,* Gergen (2008) argues that the social and psychological world can't be integrated, because they're grounded in entirely different assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Gergen compares it to the mind/body problem, we don't know how a psychological process such as a decision translates into an action the body takes. This is how Gergen sees the social and psychological as well: we don't know how a psychological process translates to the social environment. When a causal relation between a psychological and social concept is stated, Gergen claims this connection can't be made, but the product of a trick of language. Either the psychological concept is assessed through the language and framework of the social world, or the social concept is assessed through the language and framework of the psychological world. According to Gergen the two worlds never truly merge.

Following Gergen (2008), the solution is to stop trying to involve both frameworks but to study both the social and psychological using only one framework. He proposes that looking at the psychological and social through the lens of the social world is our best option, because he believes it is the social world that grants meaning to concepts like emotions and attitudes. Gergen sees more potential in studying how social knowledge is constructed than to stay in the psychological framework to try and see how a social concept might influence our inner world.

A work that seems to be in line with Gergen (2008) is Klaus Fiedler's *From Intrapsychic to Ecological Theories in Social Psychology: Outlines of a Functional Theory Approach,* (2014). Fiedler looks at the problem from another angle, however he seems to arrive at a similar solution. Fiedler (2014) states that social psychology is different from other

sciences: it isn't grounded in distal and objective theories and variables, but seems to be built on a system that supports itself. Whereas, for example, neuropsychological theories are grounded in physiology (i.e., the anatomy of the brain, synaptic transmitter substances), social psychology theories are grounded in antecedents that are too close to and dependent on the phenomena that are being explained. For example, certain behaviour is explained by corresponding attitudes, intentions or priming effects. Think of aggressive behaviour being explained by a hostile attitude, aggressive intentions or the priming of aggression cues. By staying in this constructed system that is built on its own assumptions, Fiedler claims it's difficult to reach other scientific fields that aren't as viced in the reality social psychologists are building. In addition, Fiedler posits that it hinders the development of sound theories and the making of new scientific discoveries.

In line with Gergen (2008), Fiedler (2014) proposes that to solve this, the environment could work as a distal and objective anchor for social psychology. He believes that the statistical distribution and interdependence of environmental stimuli could help us explain social behaviour. For example, what one knows is restricted by how knowledge is distributed and culturally shared, thus influencing how norms, values and traditions form. Fiedler proposes that instead of taking the perspective of how mental and affective constraints influence behaviour, we take the perspective of how socially shared environmental constraints influence behaviour. In the words of Gergen that means looking at the relationship between the social and the individual through the lens of the social theoretical framework instead of the psychological theoretical framework.

### Current Social Psychology: the Construal Principle

I think that Wilson's (2022) view on social psychology in *What Is Social Psychology? The Construal Principle* is a good example of how far we went astray from the original definition of social psychology Greenwood (2004) describes. Wilson (2022) criticizes the

frequently used definition of social psychology by Allport, because in Wilson´s view it doesn't capture the full field of social psychology. He introduces the construal principle as a better basis for the various kinds of research done in social psychology today. He tries to capture the field of social psychology in a definition that more fully describes the research social psychologists do, and thus provides a good source to assess the current state of social psychology. The definition he comes up with is as follows:

> The scientific study of the way in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by their current construals of themselves and social environment. These construals are profoundly influenced by social norms, are amenable to study with the experimental method, and are levers for changing people's behavior. (Wilson, 2022, p.883)

This definition is based on the construal principle: how we perceive, construct and interpret ourselves and the situations we are in. This lays the bar for what could be considered social in social psychology considerably low: a participant merely has to perceive and interpret a social situation (thus doesn't have to be involved in it) for the research to be considered social. Furthermore, the definition even leaves room for situations that aren't social as these construals could also be of the participant themselves, not involving any other party. Wilson's definition using construals may be a good way to gather the current field of social psychology as one, but the fact that this definition has to be used may be a sign of how we have lost sight of the social in social psychology.

**Setting Boundaries**

Greenwood (2004) gave a definition of social cognitions, emotions and behaviour that seems useful. In his perspective, for a study to be considered social, the cognition, behaviour or emotion studied needs to be held by a social group, and not be fully based on one's own arguments. This already rules out Wilson's (2022) definition of social psychology. This is a

clear way of distinguishing social and individual, but it might not be so easy to untangle in what part the social group or the individual exactly influences cognitions, emotions and behaviours because both often play a role in forming these. As Gergen (2008) states we don't know how a socially held attitude translates to an individual held attitude. In addition, one might have two differing attitudes. Think of a Christian who has their own less strict attitude towards shopping on a Sunday, but also has the socially held attitude of their church towards shopping on a Sunday and may judge someone who does.

For the main part of this paper, the analysis of each primary source will be split up in two parts: a methodological analysis, looking at the details of the study: the methods, concepts and operationalization of those concepts, and a theoretical analysis that steps back and looks at the study as a whole, involving Greenwood (2004) and Gergen's (2008) ideas. After reading about the way Greenwood defines the social and rejecting Wilson's (2022) definition, I arrive at three conditions for classifying a study as social in a more strict sense. First: the concept or idea must not be considered social merely because there's a social context instead of an individual one. Which leads to the second condition: the variable, concept or effect studied must be influenced by the social world or be influencing the social world, which means that thirdly, there must be an interaction in which both parties (the individual and the other/the group) are involved.

**Analysis**

I will analyse two studies. The first is *Gender, conversation analysis and the anatomy is membership categorizations practices* by Elizabeth Stokoe, (2010). The second is *the Relation Between Gender and Well-Being* by Zitelny et al. (2022). I will start by presenting the details of the study at hand, and give a first impression of how social they are. I will examine whether other participants were involved, if there was an actual social interaction, what  methods have been used, if the concepts they worked with could be considered social

and any other details that could be relevant for assessment. After that, I will move on to the theoretical analysis.

**Analysis of the Study 'Gender, Conversation Analysis and the Anatomy of Membership Categorization Practises'**

My first source is Stokoe's (2010): *Gender, Conversation Analysis, and the Anatomy of Membership Categorization Practices*. To start, I will tell a bit more about the background of the author and her goals with publishing this paper, then I will summarize the paper and explain how she defines the terms she uses.

The author is Elizabeth Stokoe. She graduated in psychology and teaches social psychology. Her main research interest is social interaction and membership categorisation by conversation analysis. The aim of Stokoe (2010) is to study how people use formulations and phrases based on gender categories to accomplish certain goals in social interaction. But, as a second goal, Stokoe declares that she wishes to bring together conversation analysis and membership categorization, and show the reader research methods with which categories-in-interaction can be analysed systematically.

For her conversation analyses, Stokoe uses a fragment from a radio programme, two calls with a local antisocial behaviour officer and four conversations between suspects and police officers. With these conversations she shows how cultural knowledge is contained in certain phrases, how the interaction invites the other to agree with a statement and join the implied category, all to achieve goals like reporting, justification or defence. As an example, in one of Stokoe's extracts a woman reports an incident with her neighbour. The phrase "You know how men are" is used, implying shared cultural knowledge and an invitation to a shared category, namely women. The antisocial behaviour officer replies with an affirming hum, implying acceptance of the shared category and understanding the implied knowledge about

men. The civilian uses this to achieve the goal of reporting her neighbour and persuading the antisocial behaviour officer of her view of the man.

*Methodological Analysis*

In the next part I will explore the practical details of Stokoe (2010), such as methods used, the concepts defined and finally the details of the analysis. I will do this with the three conditions I stated in the introduction. After that I will move to a more theoretical analysis, and relate this study to the core articles I discussed in the introduction.

To start, I'll examine how social the methods used by Stokoe (2010) are. She uses recorded conversations for the analysis. this already meets the third condition: there is an interaction in which both parties are involved. Recorded conversations like these are a good way of observing without interfering as a researcher. The subjects of study don't know they're being studied, and there isn't the fabricated air that exists with social interactions taking place in labs. But there are also some downsides to these recordings. First, the conversations in these recordings aren't the same as any daily conversation, and not performed by just an average conversationalist. People who call in to radio shows seem to have different traits than non-callers: For example, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) found that callers often feel more threatened by interpersonal communication than non-callers. Additionally, conversations like these, such as between a police officer and a suspect denying a crime, are conversations unlike any other everyday conversation between friends, family or co-workers. Furthermore, all these recordings are small fragments of a few sentences plucked out of whole conversations. Nothing is said about the pool of recordings out of which these are taken, and why these recordings have been chosen over any other. Thus, these recorded conversations are from quite a specific pool of conversations that may not be representative of the usual conversations an average person has. Can these conversations accurately show how people navigate the social world in everyday life?

The concepts Stokoe (2010) defines and uses for her analysis are conversation analysis and membership categorisation. By using conversation analysis to look at the role of membership categorization within social interactions, Stokoe takes a more social perspective on membership categorisation. She uses it to focus on social interaction and the role membership categorisation plays there, instead of studying the psychological properties like the cognitive function of membership categories. By studying the role membership categorisation plays within conversation, Stokoe meets the first requirement: the study must not be considered social merely because there's a social context instead of an individual one.

Conversation analysis also gives us a tool to study membership categorization as an identity that's flexible, shifting in conversations dependent on what's relevant to the person at that moment. As Stokoe (2010) says herself, she's attempting to build a bridge between membership categorisation and conversation analysis, to look at how membership categories are formed, expressed and used to achieve goals in conversations. This way, the second condition is met: the concept studied must be influenced by or influencing the social world. Membership categorisation is doing both. Furthermore, using conversation analysis could be seen as shifting from a psychological theoretical framework to a social theoretical framework for looking at membership categorisation.

The second concept to discuss is membership categorisation. Stokoe (2010) claims that in the social psychologist tradition set by Tajfel and Turner (1986), membership categorization is mainly seen through internal cognitive processes and fixed identities that come out when certain schemas are activated by different social contexts. But Stokoe builds on Edwards' (1991) more flexible view of membership categorisation. He's a supporter of the discursive approach and defines categorization as a flexible concept, dependent on and formed by a conversational context. He says that in contradiction to the cognitive theorists' assumption that discourse is driven by cognition, it is conversations that form the cognition.

In that light categorizations wouldn't be fixed, pre-defined or culturally formed cognitions, but they could be actively being formed as the conversation goes on, with goals like persuasion, blaming, denial, accusations, etc. in mind. This meets the first condition: instead of studying an individual in a social context, Stokoe examines how membership categories are formed from social interaction, how they are accepted, denied and how they are used to achieve certain goals.

Finally, Stokoe (2010) analyses the recordings by looking at how the membership categorisations are made in the conversations and what goal the speaker is trying to achieve. The first section of the analysis is focused on how speakers assign categorical memberships to others outside of the conversation, the second part is about how the speakers categorize themselves. Think of a man denying a crime by stating "I've never hit a woman in my life, I will never hit a woman in my life" to imply the shared knowledge that a 'decent man' would never hit a woman, and that he belongs to that category. The second part comes across as less social because it's more focused on the self and how the speaker identifies, but it's taken further than just identifying as belonging to a category. Stokoe looks at how that categorisation is communicated and used to achieve goals, such as to make a statement about innocence, like in the example above (I don't belong to *that* group of people). In her analysis Stokoe shows that in categorisation participants imply shared knowledge, collaborate to develop and establish categories and look for acknowledgement of a shared category. This meets all three conditions: (1) There's more to it than just categorization in a social context instead of an individual one, (2) categorisation is influenced by the conversation and also directs the conversation and (3), both parties are involved in the interaction and the forming of the categorisation.

### *Theoretical Analysis*

Now, let's take a step back from the details and consider the more theoretical implications of Stokoe (2010). I think Gergen (2008) relates well to this article, he mentions the gap between social psychology and sociology and claims this gap would be very difficult to bridge but Stokoe (2010) seems to attempt to bridge this gap with this very study. She doesn't mention it herself, but what she does say is that she wants to bridge the gap between membership categories/social identity, a social psychological topic, and conversation analysis, a method developed and mainly used by sociologists (Whalen & Raymond, 2000): she uses a mainly sociological method to study a psychological phenomenon.

However, what can conversation analysis infer about a psychological phenomenon? By analyzing conversations to see how group membership is expressed and the goals that may be achieved by doing that, the research stays within the social domain. Thus only the social visible social processes are analyzed, not the internal processes that depict how someone comes to the decision to say such a thing. One could say that the merging of the two dimensions failed then, and Gergen (2008) does claim it is impossible to truly merge the two worlds. But Gergen also argues that this is the closest thing to bringing the two together: by incorporating the psychological into the social domain and using social terms and measures to describe psychological phenomena. Language and social interactions may give us the tools to categorize things and give them meaning instead of the mind making these things up on its own. In line with Gergen, this work by Stokoe (2010) can be considered an integrated social psychological way of studying group membership.

Greenwood (2004) defines a cognition or behaviour as social only when this cognition or behaviour is shared and exists because of a social group. Thus, membership categorization would only be social if this cognition (and the behaviour of categorizing) is engaged in because the social group shares this cognition. Stokoe (2010) showed that with categorization the speaker often implies a shared knowledge about the category to their conversation partner,

shared knowledge that is often understood and agreed with. This shows that the conversation partners have shared social beliefs about a category. But still, this only a part of Greenwood's point, the shared belief is there: but we can't infer if it's engaged in because the belief is shared. In that light, membership categorization in social interaction could be quite individual because the individual clearly has their own goal they want to accomplish with categorizing (i.e., denying, accounting, explaining) and it isn't clear whether this categorization depends at all on a social group.

**Analysis of the Study 'The Relation Between Gender and Well-Being'**

The second article is Zitelny et al. (2022) the *Relation Between Gender and Well-Being*. The authors are Hila Zitelny, Tzipi Dror, Shahar Altman and Yoav Bar-Anan. All of them are specialized in social psychology and they work at the psychology department of either the university of Tel Aviv or the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba. The background of the researchers being social psychology as well as the topic of the paper suggest that the article was meant to be a contribution to social psychology.

The aim of the paper was to study what aspects of a strong gender identity are helpful and what aspects are harmful to well-being. They found that acceptance and belongingness towards one's gender is helpful for well-being while identity centrality, the importance of gender to one's self concept, is not. Additionally, they found that for women perceived gender inequality and for men pressure to conform to masculine roles could mediate the negative relation between identity centrality and well-being. They did fourteen studies in total, half of the studies were done with men, the other half with women.

*Methodological Analysis*

First, I will examine the methods Zitelny et al. used, then I will go into the concepts and their operationalizations. To start with the methods, every variable was measured with the help of questionnaires. The participant had to rate on a six-point scale how much they agreed

or disagreed with a long list of statements. This means that except for an imagined other or interaction, there was no other involved and there were no social interactions taking place during the study, thus the third condition was not met.  Furthermore, as Gergen (2008) points out, by using a questionnaire, do we know how a psychological process such as emotion or cognition translates to the behaviour of selecting an answer from a six-point scale? We may be measuring a social interaction instead of the intended psychological concept, the participant is trying to communicate something to the researcher, after all.

The main concepts in this study are gender identity, well-being and the mediator: perception of gender inequality. According to Zitelny et al. (2022) Gender identity is part of one's social identity, which is defined as people's "knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tjafel, 1981, p.255).  In this definition of social identity, three components can be found: knowledge, value and emotional significance. These three concepts are used by Zitelny et al. (2022) to measure gender identity. Each concept is operationalized with two variables, which I will examine now.

To measure the first facet, knowledge of the membership of a social group, the variables gender definition and centrality are used. Gender definition is how important femininity or masculinity is to one's social identity (example statement by Zitelny et al.: *When I am asked to describe myself, being female/male is one of the first things I think of*) and centrality is defined as the importance of gender to one's self-concept and the frequency with which it comes to mind (*In general, being a man/woman is an important part of my self-image*). For the next facet, the value of a social identity, the variables used are gender acceptance and ingroup affect. Gender acceptance is defined as the extent to which one feels comfortable and satisfied as a woman or man (*I meet my personal standards for femininity/masculinity*). And ingroup affect measures the positive feelings one has towards

their gender (*In general I'm glad to be a woman/man*). The last facet of social identity is feelings of belongingness and the similarities one has with the group. Gender typicality and ingroup ties are the variables used to measure this. Zitelny et al. (2022) don't give an example of how they define or asked participants about ingroup ties. But gender typicality is described as how well one fits with the group and how similar they are to other members of their gender (*I feel just like women/men my age*).

First, are these variables considered social merely because of the social context? I think they are, identifying with, evaluation, acceptance, feeling like you belong, are all cognitions and emotions that in itself aren't considered social, but because they are pointed towards a social group, they are. For the second condition, are these variables influenced by or influencing the social world? Masculinity and femininity are categories defined and influenced by culture, thus in an indirect way the evaluation, knowledge and feeling of belonging towards gender are also influenced by the social world. Thus these variables do meet the second condition, but not in a direct and concrete way. Then thirdly, there must be an interaction with both parties involved. These variables stay very much with the individual, measuring how an individual identifies. There are no other parties involved, except maybe the imagined typical man or woman one compares oneself to. The feeling of belonging to a group might be considered more social than the knowledge and evaluation of a group, because it insinuates some sort of bond between the individual and the group, one has to feel welcomed in a group to feel like they belong, which implies interaction.

Let's examine the mediator: perception of gender inequality. Zitelny et al. (2022) operationalized perception of gender inequality with four variables. The first variable is perceived gender status, the participants had to agree or disagree with statements on a scale. The women had to agree or disagree with statements about oppression of women and the men about male privilege (*Men have privileges that women do not have*). The beliefs that women

are oppressed and men have privileges could be socially shared beliefs, informed by a social group, but that isn't what's being measured.  Yes, comparing status could require the individual to estimate what others think of their social group, and to compare social groups. But we can't distinguish any influence of a social component on these beliefs, they may as well be personal arguments. Thus the first condition is not met: these beliefs are considered social merely because of the social context and, disproving the second condition, not because it's influencing the social or being influenced by the social. The third condition is not met either, there is no social interaction in the belief that one is oppressed or has privileges.

The second mediator is perceived gender-based discrimination. Participants had to agree or disagree on a scale with statements related to gender based discrimination and whether they had experienced it before (*I feel like I am personally a victim of society because of my gender*). To answer these statements, the participant most likely thought back to situations in which they were discriminated against. This way, what is being measured may be considered social this time. There is (a memory of) an interaction involved, whether one feels discriminated against is directly influenced by the social world (under the condition that the individual didn't perceive something as discrimination without any prompting from the other party), and discrimination is not seen as social merely because of the social context.

Male guilt is the third mediator and was only completed by men (*I feel guilty about the past and present social gender inequality*). Like Greenwood (2008) states, an emotion like guilt could wrongly be seen as social because it is focused on another and depends on the other to exist, but that doesn't mean it is social. With guilt, the person it's focused on doesn't even have to be aware that the emotion is being felt, that way the other isn't truly involved. This counters the first condition: guilt is considered as social because of the social context of guilt, not because guilt is social in itself. The second condition however is met, the social world must influence the individual for the individual to feel guilt, there needs to be

something to feel guilty about after all. The third condition isn't met, there doesn't have to be an interaction to feel guilt, the other doesn't have to be involved so the last condition isn't met.

The last mediator measured is gender-role expectations (*women should be less career interested than men*). Feeling the pressure to conform implies the involvement of others and an interaction between the two parties, which would confirm the third condition. However, the pressure only needs to be perceived as being there and could be experienced just one-sidedly. Which means there doesn't have to be an interaction. The second condition is met however: the social world directly influences whether one feels the pressure to conform (whether the social world is aware of it or not). The first condition is also met, these gender roles are not merely social because of the context, they show a social belief of what is feminine and who should adhere to that role. This may be a good example to show what Greenwood (2004) sees as a social belief versus an individual belief. When one feels pressure to conform to feminine-role expectations, they have to somewhat share in this social belief of what being a woman looks like to feel this pressure. On the other hand they also have an individual belief that isn't in line with this social belief, since perceiving pressure conform means one doesn't naturally agree and conform.

### *Theoretical Analysis*

Zitelny et al. (2022) show that identity centrality can lead to lower well-being. For women this is the case when they perceive their gender as disadvantaged. For men, it leads to lower well-being when they feel the pressure to conform to gender roles, most likely because they know their status is privileged, but also precarious: if a man were to lose his status as a 'real' man, he would also lose those privileges. How social are these conclusions? I have already discussed all the individual variables with the criteria I set. Now I want to take a broader perspective and include the views of Greenwood and Gergen.

Greenwood's (2004) main criticism of social psychology is pointed towards cognitions, emotions and behaviour being called social just because the variable is implied to be social in nature, or the variable is individual but studied in a social context. He claims a cognition, emotion or behaviour is truly social when it is shared, and represents that shared cognition, emotion or behaviour. Let's first look at the findings that strong gender identity centrality could lead to lower well-being among women when they perceive larger gender inequality. Ingrained in this idea is how the individual is influenced by their own beliefs about and experiences with the social, there's no indication of a shared belief, or of involving the social group. Gender inequality could be a shared belief, but it's not treated that way: it only matters whether the individual perceives gender inequality or not.

Then there's the second finding that among men strong gender identity centrality could lead to lower well-being when pressure to conform to gender roles is involved. Zitelny (2022) et al. theorize that this could be because men know they have an advantaged status, but they also know they could lose that status if they don't conform to gender roles. This shows a shared belief of what a 'real' man is like, and the behaviour of conforming could result from that shared belief. But the fact that one feels the pressure to conform, implies they don't conform naturally and may have their own beliefs of what a 'man' is. This means the belief doesn't have to be shared by the individual, and it could only be the fear of repercussions and the loss of that advantaged status that leads to the behaviour of conforming. Thus, taking Greenwood's (2004) perspective in mind, I wouldn't consider these findings social.

Now let's shift to Gergen's (2008) perspective. He claims that the social and psychological world can't be merged, and claims that, to effectively study social psychology we need to work from one framework to study both the social and psychological world. Gergen proposes that working from a social theoretical framework would be most fruitful. I think that Zitelny et al. (2022) never really left the psychological world. The findings depict

what goes on in the inner world of the individual without really involving the social world. What happens here is what Gergen calls a mistake in the language used by social psychologists. It is assumed that psychological concepts translate to social concepts to infer causation. But when Zitelny et al. (2022) use perceived discrimination, perceived pressure to conform to gender roles or perceived gender inequality this doesn't translate to the social world, it only tells us how the individual interprets the social world. This means that the social world isn't involved in this research.

**Conclusion**

My research question, as stated in the introduction, is: *assessing research regarding social identity and gender, where is "the social" in social psychology?* After reading Greenwood (2004) and Gergen (2008), I presented three conditions for a study to be considered "social" in a strict sense. These were the conditions: (1) the concept or idea must not be considered social because there's a social context instead of an individual one, (2) the concept must be influencing or be influenced by the social world, (3) and there must be an interaction in which both parties are involved. With the help of these criteria, I analysed two recent studies on gender identity (Stokoe, 2010; Zitelny et al., 2022).

Stokoe (2010) comes across as quite a social study, she meets all the conditions set in the introduction. However, When taking Greenwoods (2004) perspective, the research seems focused on the individual and their personal cognitions and beliefs. The conversation partner does get involved, but only as a supporting role in expressing categorizations and in achieving goals. But this research is a good example of Gergen's (2008) beliefs about doing social psychological research: Stokoe addresses both the social and psychological by working from a social theoretical framework to study psychological processes.

For Zitelny et al. (2022), taking the practical analysis in mind, some of the variables met more conditions than others, but none of them met all three conditions convincingly. In

the theoretical analysis, I compared the Zitelny et al. (2022) research to Greenwood's (2004) definition of social and showed that even though some components may imply that the social world is involved, the work stays with the inner world of the participants. This is in line with how I related Gergen's (2008) perspective to this work; Zitelny et al. (2022) stayed in the psychological theoretical framework and couldn't truly involve the social world, merely the participant's interpretation of it. The study can't conclude anything about how these psychological processes are influenced by or influence the social world, consequently I don't consider Zitelny et al. (2022) a social work.

To conclude, Zitelny et al. (2022) is limited in its focus on individual thoughts and beliefs and does not fully include the social aspect, while the Stokoe (2010) is more successful in incorporating the social aspect by using a social theoretical framework. Gergen's perspective enables us to see that when the social is studied from a more psychological framework, the research usually does not deal with the social world, in the sense of assessing broader collective social phenomena. Whereas Gergen's position is quite clearly outlined, Greenwood's definition of "the social" is more difficult to put to practical use because the definition itself tries to combine the social and psychological world. Here is an example to illustrate my point: Greenwood claims a belief is social when it is shared by a social group and exists within the individual because of that group. According to Gergen, on the other hand, it would be impossible to see how social belief influences the belief of the individual, because it means trying to merge the social theoretical framework with the individual theoretical framework.

However, my literary research assessed in depth two primary sources (Stokoe, 2010; Zitelny et al., 2022). The scope is a limited selection of articles because I worked with just two articles on a topic that is now-a-days receiving broad attention by researchers and the public. Therefore, the two articles can't be taken as representative neither for the sub-fields of

gender identity research, nor for social psychology as a whole. I have shown in this thesis that social identity and gender are two social concepts that can be studied in both a more and a less social way. We may now ask: Is this also the case for other studies and research topics within social psychology? To gain a better understanding, a broader look at social psychological research would be necessary. Questions we could ask are: how is social psychological research being done in other subfields? What are the patterns of social research? To what extent are collective phenomena addressed? In what ways is social psychology already moving away from this individualistic way of doing research? And, what could be done to improve research practices in this field? These are questions which could only be answered by doing further research.

### *Reflection*

I am a Dutch bachelor student at the University of Groningen. My training is mainly in experimental methods, with here and there a mention of qualitative methods. But I do believe that qualitative methods are undervalued and an important tool to advance psychology, which have guided my analysis and my conclusions. I agree with the constructionist view that culture and social interactions construct our reality and the way we see the world, which may have influenced my preference for Gergen's views over Greenwood's.

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