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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30r1j6nm>

### Journal

Social Psychology Quarterly, 85(1)

### ISSN

0190-2725

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### Publication Date

2022-03-01

### DOI

10.1177/01902725221085332

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# Introduction of Neil J. MacKinnon, 2021 Cooley-Mead Award Recipient

Amy Kroska<sup>1</sup>, David R. Heise<sup>2</sup>,  
and Lynn Smith-Lovin<sup>3</sup>

We are honored to introduce Neil MacKinnon as the 2021 recipient of the Cooley-Mead Award. Neil has influenced sociological social psychology with path-breaking theoretical and empirical work that has helped shape contemporary understandings of impression formation, emotions, identities and the self, social institutions, and culture.

Neil grew up in Nova Scotia, Canada, and did his undergraduate work at the University of Windsor, graduating in just three years, with a double major in sociology and philosophy. He then began graduate studies in sociology at the University of Illinois, where he made intensive use of that university's powerful computers and its faculty resources on multivariate analyses. In 1970, after just three years, Neil completed his doctoral dissertation on the structure of role expectations. He was Dr. MacKinnon just six years after graduating from high school!

After two years at the University of Minnesota, Neil moved back to Canada and began working at the University of Guelph, where he spent the remainder of his career. During the early years of his career, he published social psychological work on role expectations and role strain and more macro-oriented studies of urban migration and educational attainment.

In 1978, Neil used a sabbatical to go to the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina as a visiting scholar. He connected with all of the prominent scholars of advanced statistical methods that had attracted him there, but he soon concentrated his activities in the group working on affect control theory (ACT), led by David Heise with Lynn Smith-Lovin as a core graduate student. Results of a large National Institute of Mental Health study were pouring in, and Neil took on the task of analyzing perceived likelihoods of interpersonal events, the first comprehensive test of the theory's predictions.

A few years after his sabbatical, Neil initiated a massive cross-cultural replication of all the basic empirical work in ACT, including the development of Canadian impression-formation equations. He identified cross-cultural differences in impression-formation processes and laid the groundwork for other scholars to

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explore the issue in other countries. He also collected sentiment measures for hundreds of identities and other interpersonal concepts, a project that he repeated in the 2000s, thereby giving scholars two waves of Canadian data that could be used to track changes in cultural meanings over time. The materials he assembled—both Canadian equations and sentiment measurements—are incorporated into Interact, the ACT computer program that simulates social interaction, and have been used by scholars to examine cross-national and historical differences in culture. They remain a major resource (available at [affectcontroltheory.org](http://affectcontroltheory.org)), 40 years later.

In 1994, Neil published *Symbolic Interactionism as Affect Control*, a theoretical tour de force that elucidates the theoretical roots of ACT, translates its complex mathematical models to propositional form, shows how the theory addresses fundamental issues of motivation, and applies the theory (using his Canadian data) to questions of role enactment, emotions, attributions, and reidentifications. He also refines the conceptual distinctions among different categories of emotions in the theory (characteristic, structural, and consequent) by linking those categories to the theory's mathematical model and explaining how the theory can address the constructionist versus positivist debate within the sociology of emotions. In this way, he connects ACT to its classic origins and extends symbolic interactionist thought more broadly to incorporate affective dynamics. It is no surprise that for years, the book was used as a core text on symbolic interactionism in the University of Chicago theory class.

In 2005, Neil retired, but he did not slow down. In 2010, he published *Self, Identity, and Social Institutions* with David Heise, another groundbreaking book that tackles critical and neglected issues in sociology. It introduces two

interrelated theories, ACT of the self (ACTS) and ACT of institutions (ACTI), providing a detailed exposition of the theories' intellectual roots and their distinctions from other theories. ACTS illuminates a process long neglected in sociological social psychology: identity adoption. It proposes that actors seek to adopt identities with affective meanings as close as possible to their fundamental self-sentiments because such identity enactments create feelings of self-actualization. It also proposes that if structural constraints force actors to enact identities that fail to confirm their self-sentiments, feelings of inauthenticity will motivate them to move to another identity that differs from the self-sentiments in the opposite (restorative) direction. ACTI explains how the systematic interconnections among identities within a culture create institutions, how individuals understand those institutions, and how those understandings, in turn, affect identity adoption.

*Self, Identity, and Social Institutions* also includes several empirical assessments, including a lexical analysis of the 9,000 identities in WordNet, a delineation of institutions through an analysis of the semantic networks in dictionaries, and an examination of identity preference through an assessment of self- and identity-evaluation, potency, and activity (EPA) profiles collected from both college students and individuals with a mental illness. New studies have also begun to test ACTS and ACTI propositions, including two recent pieces that suggest that the institutional coherence outlined in ACTI is, indeed, important to how we see the world (Joseph and Morgan 2021; Kelly forthcoming).

In 2015, Neil extended his work with Dave on self-sentiments with *Self-Esteem and Beyond*, which examines the structural components of ACTS and advances a three-factor model of self-sentiment,

consisting of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-activation. In the book, he analyzes and synthesizes the literature on self-esteem and self-efficacy and uses his Canadian data to replicate several previous studies. His analyses address unresolved issues in the self-esteem literature, including the number and interpretation of the dimensions of self-feeling and the predictive power of global versus specific self-esteem, with findings that demonstrate the value of the three-factor model of self-sentiment. The book is yet another foundational text that is becoming required reading for graduate students in social psychology.

Throughout his career, Neil has collaborated with students and colleagues on a series of innovative articles and chapters that use affective meanings and ACT in new ways. He and his collaborators show, for example, how affective meanings can be used to illuminate the structure of emotions (MacKinnon and Keating 1989), occupational prestige scores (MacKinnon and Langford 1994), the gendering of traits (Langford and MacKinnon 2000), and cultural change (MacKinnon and Luke 2002). They also show how ACT simulations can identify the types of situations most likely to elicit depression (MacKinnon and Goulbourne 2006) and explain group dynamics and stereotyping (MacKinnon and Bowlby 2000).

Recently, he has worked with Jesse Hoey, a computer scientist, to use Bayesian statistics in affect control theory (Hoey, MacKinnon, and Schröder 2021; MacKinnon and Hoey 2021). BayesACT more accurately models the way that people infer meanings and emotions and adjust interpretations and behaviors in uncertain situations. This new work infuses a degree of uncertainty in ACT predictions, making them more realistic and more akin to traditional symbolic interactionist perspectives. It also provides a promising tool for improving the

interaction skills of artificial agents as they deal with humans. This collaboration is likely to produce yet another pathbreaking line of work that will have important benefits in sociology, computer science, and the field of artificial intelligence.

Neil has been working on the application of ACT to the study of morality by using cultural sentiments and Interact simulations to explore the moral implications and overtones of social concepts and events. He is interested in how these ideas developed from the early philosophers and how ACT compares to modern moral psychology and other sociologies of morality. There's a taste of this work in the forthcoming special issues of *American Behavioral Scientist* focused on ACT (MacKinnon forthcoming)—but only a taste. We fully expect this line of research to lead to yet another important book.

In addition to his research accomplishments, Neil has also been a generous, thoughtful, and helpful mentor to younger social psychologists. This generosity is especially evident when he reviews papers, something Lynn observed when she coedited *SPQ* and Amy later observed when she served as an *SPQ* deputy editor. His reviews—and he does a lot of them—are consistently insightful, helpful, and detailed. He offers a thoughtful solution for each problem he identifies, making it clear that his goal is to help the authors improve their research. In this way, his reviews share his extensive knowledge and advance the field.

Despite all his accomplishments, Neil remains steadfastly humble, a trait well captured by the joke he made when receiving the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Section. Neil asked the audience, “What does a Canadian say after winning a major award?” The answer: “I’m sorry.” Now that he has three ASA awards (from the Emotions Section, the Altruism and Social

Solidarity Section, and now the Social Psychology Section), we're not sure what he'll say, but the punchline of his joke describes him to a tee. He has put together a distinguished record of groundbreaking work but remains a humble and generous intellectual citizen. Indeed, when we sent him a draft of our introduction, he asked us to give more credit to Dave for his guidance and collaboration.

In short, Neil is an extraordinary scholar whose distinguished record includes numerous pioneering advances. He has used his mathematical, statistical, and theoretical knowledge to do careful empirical and theoretical work that is shaping our field. For these reasons, we see him as a model scholar who richly deserves this prestigious award.

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## BIOS

**Amy Kroska** is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Riverside. Her research focuses on social psychological processes related to gender, mental health, crime, and the family. Her recent studies have used social psychological theories to illuminate the gender gap in business leadership, the sanctioning of white-collar criminals, the connection between a juvenile delinquency adjudication and self-meaning, and the effect of a mental illness diagnosis on group influence, social distancing, and self-meaning. Her research has appeared in *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *Social Science Research*, *Social Forces*, and elsewhere.

**David R. Heise** was Rudy Professor Sociology Emeritus at Indiana University. He

served as editor of the journals *Sociological Methodology* and *Sociological Methods & Research*. His social psychological research focused on the affective and logical foundations of social interaction. He received Distinguished Career Awards from four sections of the American Sociological Association—Social Psychology, Sociology of Emotions, Mathematical Sociology, and Methodology—and from the International Academy for Intercultural Research.

**Lynn Smith-Lovin** is Robert L. Wilson Professor of Arts and Sciences at Duke

University. She studies identity and emotion and has received the Cooley-Mead Award from the ASA Section on Social Psychology, the James S. Coleman Award from the ASA section on Mathematical Sociology, and Lifetime Achievement Awards from the ASA sections on Emotions and on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity. She has served as president of the Southern Sociological Society, vice president of the American Sociological Association, and chair of three ASA sections, and she coedited *Social Psychology Quarterly* (with Linda Molm) from 1997 to 2000.