

**A HISTORICAL CHANGE:  
PSYCHOLOGY IN EASTERN GERMANY AFTER UNIFICATION**

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Due to the unification of the former separate states of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1990, not only the political and economic systems of the former East Germany were changed, but also the working conditions for psychologists at universities as well as in professional practice have been influenced. This paper describes the changes and the current situation of psychologists in the eastern part of Germany.

On the 3rd of October 1990, a political sensation occurred in Germany: The reunification of the two German states which had been separated since 1949 and which had developed during these 40 years of separation in a totally different manner! The opening of the German-German border (part of the notorious "iron curtain" [Eiserner Vorhang]) in 1989 allowed people from the former (socialistic) German Democratic Republic (GDR) to enter the western part of Germany, the (capitalistic) Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Later in 1989, the reunification of both independent countries was voted by their parliaments

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and the process of unification was formally established in the unification contract. Since that 3rd of October 1990, only one Germany exists now, comprised of both very different countries.

In this paper we want to describe the consequences of this unification for psychologists, as well as psychology as a science. We start our presentation with a short description of the situation of psychology in the former GDR (as compared to FRG) and then report about the changes which occurred after unification. For other descriptions of the scientific unification procedure in the area of psychology, see the reports given by Hellfritsch (1992a, 1992b), Probst (1994, 1995), or Rösler (1994). A more general evaluation of the unification procedure is given by Parthier (1996).

### PSYCHOLOGY IN THE FORMER GDR

In 1947, after the universities in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany were reopened, psychology courses concluding with a diploma degree were installed at the psychological institutes of the Humboldt University in Berlin, the University of Leipzig, and the Technical University in Dresden. Jena joined these in 1961. Since 1951, their curricula were shaped by a schedule of studies calling for a four-year course, which was extended to five years in 1955. This schedule called for an identical basic education for all psychology students, who from 1963 until reunification had to commit themselves to a specialization at the very beginning of their studies. These specialized courses comprised clinical psychology (Berlin and Leipzig), psychology of work and engineering (Berlin and Dresden), social psychology (Jena), and educational psychology (Leipzig).

Table 1 is taken from the curriculum for psychology issued by the GDR Ministry for Higher Education in 1963. The subjects are on the left, followed by the envisaged total number of class hours and then their subdivisions. A semester generally lasts for half a year. The 150 mandatory hours in mathematical psychology (number 6), for example, consist of a three-hour course in the first semester followed by a two-hour course in the second semester with an intermediate exam. These are followed by two further two-hour courses in the third and fourth semesters as well as a one-hour course with a final exam in the fifth semester. The basic education extended into the eighth semester, as Table 1 shows, while the specialized education (not shown in Table 1) already began in the first semester (psychology of work and engineering) and the second semester (clinical psychology). The large amount of methodology including statistics and psychodiagnostics in the basic education is remarkable. The natural science nature of this education is certainly one reason that psychology in the GDR was able to exist in a sort of niche, which

**Table 1**  
**The Organization of the Basic Study of Psychology**  
**in the GDR for All Courses of Specialization**

Subject	h	Semester												
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
1. Russian language	105													
2. English language	75													
3. Sports	260													
4. Other nonpsychological subjects (including Marxism, history of the Socialistic Party, etc.)	360													
5. Biology of human beings	150	3	4*	3**										
6. Mathematical psychology	150	3	2*	2	2	1**								
7. Psychological statistics	135	2	4	3**										
8. Psychological methods	180	3	4	3*					2**					
9. Psychodiagnostics	150			2	6*	2**								
10. Experimental psychology	210	3*	2	2	2				2**					
11. Personality	90			4	2*						2**			
12. Developmental psychology	110	4*	2					2**						
13. Philosophical problems of psychology	30					2								
14. History of psychology	30				1									
Sum of hours	2035	27	27	27	19	13	7	8	6	4				

Note: "h" in the third column means total number of hours. The numbers in the columns for the semesters indicate hours per week. These numbers plus the not-mentioned number of hours for nonpsychological subjects add up to the values given in the bottom row. A star indicates an intermediate examination, whereas two stars indicate a final examination. During the 10th semester, the thesis for the diploma is written and defended.

allowed psychologists to achieve some excellence in teaching and research. The psychological research in the GDR was certainly more familiar to many psychologists from the FRG than the education curriculum in psychology

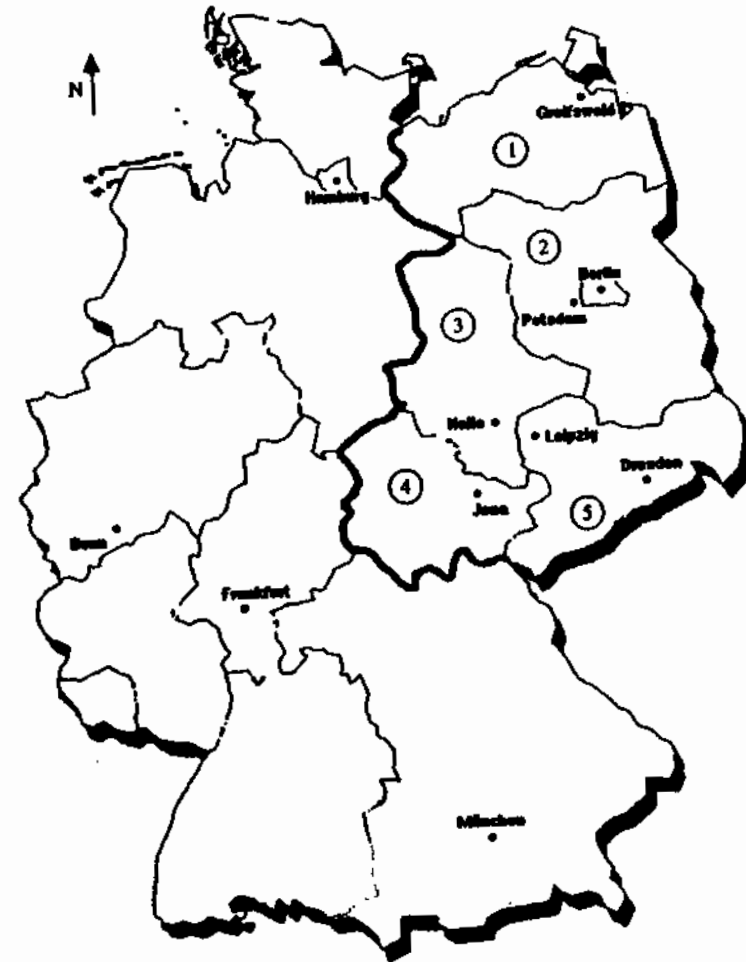
because they could at any time read the two scientific journals, *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* (Journal of Psychology) and *Probleme und Ergebnisse der Psychologie* (Problems and Results of Psychology). The *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, founded in 1892, particularly documented the high level of psychological research in the GDR. In some areas, such as cognitive psychology, psychophysics, developmental psychology, psychology of work and engineering as well as history of psychology, internationally recognized research was conducted.

### CHANGES AFTER UNIFICATION

Serious changes affecting the educational situation, which cannot all be mentioned here, were forced after reunification by the political condition (see Bredekamp, 1993, for details). It is important to note that a personal and professional evaluation of the staff of the former GDR's universities was prescribed in the unification agreement. The personal evaluation covered the examination by commissions of any human rights violations and cooperation with the Stasi (the GDR's secret service) on the part of the staff. The professional evaluation covered the determination of their professional aptitude. Only positive results from these examinations could enable a scientist to maintain his position.

To avoid professional evaluations by scientists from other fields than psychology, the German Psychological Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie, DGPs) insisted immediately after reunification on participating in the staff examinations. These efforts led to its participation in all professional evaluations. The DGPs is an scientific organization that includes most of the German scientists active in teaching and research (including in the meantime many of the former GDR scientists) as well as many colleagues from Austria and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. In addition, the DGPs offered to help the responsible ministries in the new states that formerly belonged to the GDR to reorganize the existing psychological institutes in Berlin (Humboldt University), Dresden, Jena, and Leipzig, as well as to develop new concepts for psychological institutes. This initiative led to its participation in the restructuring of all old institutes and the creation of two new psychological institutes with diploma degree programs in Potsdam and Halle, where Hermann Ebbinghaus (the founder of experimental memory research) was once active. Still another institute was created without DGPs participation in Greifswald. Figure 1 shows a map of Germany indicating the locations of the seven institutes in the eastern part.

Figure 1  
Map of Germany Indicating the Location of the Seven Psychological Institutes in Eastern Germany



Note: The former German-German border is marked by the bold line. Thin lines indicate the states within Germany. The eastern states are numbered as follows: 1 = Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2 = Brandenburg, 3 = Sachsen-Anhalt, 4 = Thüringen, 5 = Sachsen.

The skeleton regulations for conducting examinations that were issued for the FRG in 1987 served as the instrument for the staff planning at the old institutes (Berlin, Dresden, Jena, and Leipzig) and the new ones (Halle and Potsdam), and the principles for shaping the regulations for conducting examinations at the individual universities. Despite these guidelines, the courses can vary considerably from institute to institute, so that a summary similar to the one in Table 1 is not possible. The guidelines envisage dividing the study of psychology into two parts. The first part, lasting four semesters (=two years), is comprised of experimental psychology (perception, memory, language, thinking, motivation, learning, and emotion), developmental psychology, differential and personality psychology, social psychology, biological psychology, and methods of psychology, the last of which includes statistics. The second part lasts five semesters and includes the subjects of clinical psychology, educational psychology, psychology of work and organizational psychology, diagnostics and intervention, and evaluation and research methods, as well as a research-oriented specialty subject. This last subject should deal mainly with basic research done at the institute.

Education based on these guidelines differs considerably from the training conducted in the GDR. Unlike the GDR regulations for conducting examinations, the FRG guidelines call for separation in time between the basic training and education in the applied subjects. Three applied subjects are now required while only one applied subject was mandatory in the GDR. Mathematical psychology and the history of psychology do not exist as separate subjects in the current guidelines. Nevertheless, the guidelines allow the teaching of these subjects, for example, as part of education in experimental psychology, which is twice as extensive as education in the other basic subjects. Because the guidelines were used to plan the staff structure of the old and the new institutes of psychology of the former GDR, this procedure resulted in considerable changes in the education there. It has been completely adapted to the education in the FRG. However, changes were also necessary because the institutes of psychology in the former GDR were forced to accept more students than before reunification. The educational capacity, which depends on the staff size of an institute, now averages 74 new students per year at each of the universities of the new east German states (ranging from 31 to 120), while only 115 new students at all four old institutes, an average of 29 per institute, were registered shortly before reunification. A central office in Dortmund assigns the psychology students to all institutes in Germany. Of course, all applicants cannot be accepted. The average grade in the Abitur (the German secondary school diploma) is the deciding factor. In the 1995-96 winter semester, only 3,460 out of 12,700 applications for a place in study could be accepted.

## CURRENT SITUATION

We now report on the present situation in psychology five years after reunification. The emphasis of our report is on the university area because only little systematic material is available about the situation of practicing psychologists except that of one study which we present in a bit more detail now.

One important study on the professional situation of applied psychologists in east and west Germany has been presented by Schorr (1995): She conducted a questionnaire study between 1990 and 1992 with samples from eastern (N=154) and western (N=1,630) psychologists regarding qualification, areas of specialization, employment structure, and career prospects. It turned out that there is a high degree of similarity between east and west concerning postgraduate qualification and areas of interests. Differences showed up in terms of the professional daily life: East German psychologists cooperated more often with doctors and less frequently with social workers and educators; also, administrative duties as well as teamwork played a distinctively smaller role in their daily routine (Schorr, 1995, p. 55). East German psychologists performed their activities more self-sufficiently and independently than western psychologists. Looking into the future of professional psychologists, Schorr (1995, p. 55) argues that "by imposing West German structures onto East German circumstances, it can transpire in the long run that the numerous undiscovered freedoms in East German institutions will be flattened in the course of restructuring."

Our own report on the current situation focuses on the east German universities. Systematic surveys on this topic have not been readily available to a broad range of readers, so the presented material may show some interesting aspects of east German universities.

### Universities

To assess better the changed situation at the four "old" universities of Berlin, Dresden, Jena, and Leipzig (B, D, J, L) as well as at the three newly created institutes in Greifswald, Halle, and Potsdam (G, H, P), we conducted a short survey of these seven institutes in the summer of 1995. Fortunately, all institutes responded to our questionnaire. The questions concerned five areas: (a) current situation, (b) teaching capacity, (c) staff and equipment, (d) research activities, and (e) subjective assessment of the current situation.

(a) *Current Situation.* These questions were concerned with the state of the reconstruction, namely the reorganization of the institutes. Only in one institute (D) has this work been concluded, while five others are still midway through

the procedure, while one institute (H) has only just begun. Only D and H report rapidly concluded procedures for hiring professors; on the other hand, the other institutes report considerable difficulties. In the established procedure, the university submits proposals for hiring professors to the Ministry of Science which "gives a call" (offers the position) to the applicant with the highest rank on the university's proposal. If she or he rejects the call, the procedure is continued with the person proposed as the next one. The causes of the difficulties mainly lie in the relatively high number of rejections of calls reported by these institutes. Several professorial positions are still vacant at these institutes. Rejections of calls resulted not only from personnel problems at the institutes, but also because of the serious overcrowding of classrooms, laboratories, and other facilities. New university building measures were quickly taken, but require considerable time to be implemented. This appears to have been a considerable obstacle in reviving and reorganizing the eastern institutes. In addition, legal action by former institute staff members who were dismissed during the professional and personal evaluations are also responsible for the partly slow staff reorganization of the institutes.

(b) *Teaching Capacity.* As already mentioned, admission to the study of psychology is regulated by a central institution in Dortmund called the "Zentralstelle zur Vergabe von Studienplätzen" (ZVS). The ZVS distributes students to the available study places according to their average grade in the "Abitur." For the academic year 1995-1996, the average grade required for studying psychology is the highest for all subjects distributed by the ZVS. This is so because the ratio between number of applications and number of openings is higher for psychology than for any other field of study. Each institute has a certain capacity for yearly admissions, which is determined mainly by the size of the staff. Large institutes with more staff have to accept higher admission quotas than small ones. Table 2 shows the number of current students as well

**Table 2**  
Students in the Seven East German Institutes:  
The Actual Number of Students, the Yearly Admission  
Limit According to ZVS, and the Expected Increase

Type of Staff	B	D	G	H	J	L	P
Actual Number of Students	600	415	70	0	260	?	95
Yearly Admissions	120	115	40	31	70	108	35
Increase Expected	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes

Note: B=Berlin, D=Dresden, G=Greifswald, H=Halle, J=Jena, L=Leipzig, P=Potsdam.

as the yearly admission quotas for our seven institutes and the expected increase in these quotas.

To evaluate these numbers properly, remember that there are yearly about 3,460 applicants to be accepted at 40 institutes. The average admission quota of 74 students for the eastern institutes is clearly below the western average of 90 students. The wide range between the institutes reflects the fact that eastern and western institutes vary greatly in their sizes. This will become clearer in the following paragraphs.

(c) *Staff and Equipment.* The personnel structure is interesting at the east German institutes. Table 3 shows the staff structure divided among professors, assistants, and administration.

**Table 3**  
The Structure of Staff Members in the Seven German Institutes

Type of Staff	B	D	G	H	J	L	P
Professors	13/7	13/5	6/0	5/0	11/2	10/6	9/3
Assistants (permanent)	5/5	7/6	4/1	3/0	4/1	5/5	10/8
Assistants (for a stipulated period)	18/10	28/19	9/0	8/1	17/9	7/7	15/2
Administration	20/8	20/20	6/2	4/3	14/13	7/7	11/4

Note: B=Berlin, D=Dresden, G=Greifswald, H=Halle, J=Jena, L=Leipzig, P=Potsdam. The first figure gives the total amount of positions, the second indicates the number of persons from eastern Germany.

Compared with west German institutes, most of the east German institutes are well staffed. The relative portion of east German staff is especially interesting. Except for Leipzig and Berlin, most professorial slots are filled by colleagues from the western part of Germany. However, this relationship is reversed among the assistants and administrative staff.

Regarding other aspects, the institutes report that computers are either already adequately present or are about to be acquired (H). This applies not only to the institutes' staff but also to the students, who also have special computer equipment. (The numbers of computers for students are D: 14, G: 10, J: 25; L: 10; P: 22). Generally speaking, access to the Internet is already available or about to be achieved.

Library facilities are also important for evaluating the present situation. Table 4 contains the appropriate data for the seven institutes.

The number of available books varies greatly, especially between the older institutes and the newer ones. The situation is similar regarding subscriptions to journals. The quotas for yearly acquisitions of books vary between 500 and

2,500; this is probably not different at the western institutes. The number of English-language books and journals is listed separately. A considerable shortage can be determined here and should be addressed in the future.

The availability of electronic information and retrieval sources (PsychLit, Psyn dex, SSCI, etc.) is being built up and already available at about half of the institutes.

**Table 4**  
Data from the Institute Libraries

Type of Publication	B	D	G	H	J	L	P
Books (in thousands)	25.0	16.0	12.0	0.2	16.9	26.0	6.5
English Books (in thousands)	7.5	5.0	7	0.1	4.2	6.5	1.5
Yearly Book Acquisitions (in thousands)	2.5	2.0	?	1.2	1.0	0.5	1.2
All Journals	70	110	66	9	113	60	109
English Journals	45	60	37	9	86	30	77

Note: B=Berlin, D=Dresden, G=Greifswald, H=Halle, J=Jena, L=Leipzig, P=Potadam.

The annual funding of the institutes is difficult to compare because of the different budget structures. It varies from amounts of about DM 100,000 (L, J) to more than DM 250,000 a year (B, D, P). Four of the seven institutes (D, J, L, P) have already used special funding by the federal government and the states for university building projects; all institutes (except D) want to do this in the near future.

(d) *Research Activities.* According to the German Research Society (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG, which provides financial support for basic research projects), the east German portion of total applications for funds within the last five years has been relatively stable at about 13 percent and the share of successful applications is at about 10-11 percent. Except for the Psychological Institute of Halle, which is still under development, all other institutes have already received support from the DFG. In addition, the Volkswagen Foundation, the European Union, and federal and state ministries as well as business contributors have been financing research at the new institutes. In the five years from 1991 to 1995, four of the seven institutions (D, J, L, P) report such funding of more than DM 1,000,000. It seems to be possible that there is only a relatively small portion of applications for funds concerning basic research supported by the DFG, whereas the situation of applied research is not worse than in the western part of Germany.

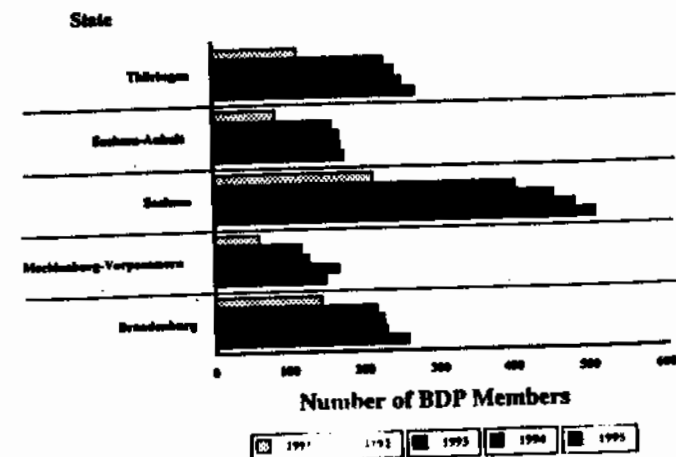
(e) *Subjective Assessment of the Current Situation.* The concluding questions

referred to the comparison between the east German institutes and the presumed standard at west German institutes concerning teaching and students, research opportunities, and administration. Except for Halle, all institute directors provided such comparisons although these might have been difficult to make. While a difference was not noticeable for teaching and students (an even better situation was reported in P), three of the six respondents leaned toward a relatively negative evaluation regarding research opportunities, and as many as four of the six institutes consider their administrations worse in the east than in the west.

### Practicing Psychologists

The present situation regarding practicing psychologists in east Germany is difficult to evaluate (Schorr, 1995). Reports like those of Rösler (1994) about the situation of clinical psychologists provide one indication. A glance at the membership in the "Berufsverband Deutscher Psychologen" (BDP, a kind of German Psychological Association, in which many practitioners are members) is interesting, too. Membership figures from the five eastern states increased from 621 members in 1991 to 1,355 in 1995 (see Figure 2). The proportion of eastern to western members in the BDP is roughly 1:20.

**Figure 2**  
Development of BDP Membership Figures in the Five Eastern States from 1991-1995



## FINAL REMARKS

The preceding report shows that a considerable adaptation in the field of psychology (regarding the university situation) is noticeable five years after reunification. Not only could new institutes be founded to reflect the need to educate more students, but also the existing institutions could be made compatible with the system existing in west Germany. However, critics have noted that the direction of this influence has clearly been from west to east. This also means that most of the special elements that existed in the former GDR (such as the system for psychologists with a specialization diploma; a mathematical foundation; a simultaneous basic and applied education) were not adopted by the new structures. Mainly responsible for this were the existing skeleton regulations for conducting examinations in the west. These regulations did not become invalid through reunification, but rather had their jurisdiction expanded to the territory of the former GDR.

We are aware of the fact that the mere counting of heads, books, and money shows only the surface of the dramatic changes in eastern universities during the last five years (about 50 percent of the former scientists lost their jobs!) Behind the scene, the fairness of the described transformation process as well as its outcome has been challenged by various people (Parthier, 1996). One obvious reason is the fact that the evaluation procedure which should test the moral integrity of each eastern scientist (Stasi contacts!) as well as his or her scientific potential has not been adopted yet for western scientists. The competence and fairness of the evaluators was simply assumed—a prejudice which may not be justified in every case. But with respect to this topic, the current situation in eastern Germany appears to be the same as in the western part: The quality of the selected staff depends on the quality of the selection procedure—and we have to admit that in eastern as well as in western Germany the number of successful selections does not reach 100 percent.

Nevertheless, not least of all because of enormous financial support, conditions were created to give the east German institutes a fair chance in the national competition. The further course of their development will finally determine when the differences between eastern and western institutes will be removed completely and be replaced by other characteristics. At least, the development so far is encouraging from our point of view.

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