Although the history of social conflict is as old as humanity itself, the history of social psychological interest in the area is far more recent. The first experimental social psychologist was probably Kurt Lewin, and it was Lewin who first engaged in the social psychological study of conflict (compare Lewin, 1935, 1947, 1951).

Kurt Lewin was not only an important theorist but also a great teacher. Many of his students, in turn, went on to become some of the most important social psychologists to date. These intellectual progeny have had an abiding interest in conflict in its various manifestations. Leon Festinger, for example, did important theoretical and experimental work on the nature of intrapsychic conflict and its resolution, first with his “theory of social comparison processes” (Festinger, 1954), and then with his highly influential “theory of cognitive dissonance” (Festinger, 1957). If Festinger was Lewin's most distinguished student of intrapsychic or intrapersonal conflict, then John Thibaut and Harold Kelley were two of the most influential analysts of interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Their book, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (1959), provides a conceptual framework for understanding interpersonal and intergroup
conflict that has remained, to this day, one of the most important contributions to the field. Finally, bridging the domains of intrapsychic conflict on the one hand, and interpersonal/intergroup conflict on the other, were a number of Lewin's students. The most important of these theorists is Morton Deutsch who, beginning with his "theory of cooperation and competition" (1949) and continuing to his present work on the motive of justice, has advanced a set of propositions that bear on conflict both within and between individuals.

During the 1950s, Lewin's intellectual progeny (in the form of "children," "grandchildren," and "cousins") turned much of their attention to the study of attitudes. Much of the earlier interest in conflict (in one form or another) shifted to include the study of the circumstances under which individuals can be persuaded to change their attitudes—where such change, it was conceived, often requires a three-stage process of "unfreezing" existing attitudes, putting new attitudes in their place, and then "refreezing" these new attitudes. Such models (see, for example, the writings of Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953) assume the existence of intrapsychic conflict, a state of resistance to change that necessitates the three-stage process described above.

With the appearance of Luce and Raiffa's (1957) book, Games and Decisions, a provocative paradigm for the study of interpersonal conflict appeared on the social psychological scene: the Prisoner's Dilemma Game. This deceptively simple research paradigm, involving two players and a nonconstant sum conflict (in which both can win, both can lose, or one can win while the other loses), stimulated an enormous amount of laboratory research during the 1960s and early 1970s. Hundreds of experimental studies used the Prisoner's Dilemma to examine the conditions that are conducive to cooperative versus competitive behavior. Coupled with a few other simple research paradigms for understanding the nature of interpersonal conflict [notably Siegel and Fouraker's (1960) Bilateral Monopoly Game and Deutsch and Krauss's (1960) Acme-Bolt Trucking Game], the study of interpersonal bargaining and negotiation was given so large a boost that in their 1975 review of the experimental literature on bargaining, Rubin and Brown cite nearly 1,000 studies, most of them conducted by social psychologists.

The late 1960s and early 1970s proved to be the high-water mark in the social psychological study of interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Perusal of the major social psychological research journals today would rapidly lead the reader to conclude that psychologists no longer have much interest in the study of interpersonal conflict and negotiation.*

*Note that early research in this area tended to use the term "bargaining" to describe the joint decision making processes involved. In recent years the term has been supplanted by the more fashionable, if conceptually synonymous, term "negotiation."