Currents of Thought in American Social Psychology

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Oxford University Press

Oxford   New York   Toronto
Delhi   Bombay   Calcutta   Madras   Karachi
Petaling Jaya   Singapore   Hong Kong   Tokyo
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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedicated to our fathers and sons
James, Tristan, and Gerrit Michael Collier
Irving and Gregory Minton
Philip and Paul Reynolds

Preface

This project began in 1981 as an attempt to say something about interpersonal relations. This seemed to be a badly neglected area within American social psychology and one that seemed important if American social psychology was to break away from its exclusive focus on individual psychological processes. As we began to review the literature, we discovered that the area of interpersonal relationships had not been neglected at all. It had been treated, and treated quite well, by such eminent thinkers as Emile Durkheim, Harry Stack Sullivan, and George Herbert Mead. Moreover, these thinkers could be placed within broader intellectual traditions, such as European social theory, psychoanalysis, and American pragmatism. This led us to believe that the concept of interpersonal relations could be treated historically by tracing the roots of these ideas to major thinkers in the nineteenth century.

During the second stage of the project, we envisioned a historical critique based on four major areas—evolutionary theory, psychoanalysis, European social theory, and phenomenology. Each section was to begin with an extended discussion of the thoughts and ideas of the founders of each theory and a briefer discussion of those who developed these ideas within a social-psychological perspective. Finally, we wanted to trace the development of these ideas within American social psychology in order to discover when they

appeared and when they were abandoned or how they continue to shape contemporary thinking, either directly or indirectly. The various currents of thought soon swelled well beyond the original four, and the current work covers eleven more or less distinct intellectual traditions.

As we began to review this literature, we became more and more sympathetic to some of the changes that had taken place in American social psychology and more critical of others. Many of the former topics, such as personality and social development, had evolved into distinct areas of psychology. Other topics had been abandoned because they could not be studied experimentally. The central question now became: *Why, out of all the possible topics that could legitimately be considered part of social psychology, had American social psychologists selected the ones they did?*

This question led us to conceive of our project as a historical analysis of the development of American social psychology. Our aim is to provide an understanding of how the discipline has been shaped by internal developments, such as theory, concepts, professionalization, and research procedures, as well as external social forces—that is, the political, economic, ideological, cultural, and intellectual facets of American society. Biographical factors have also played a role, and in those cases where theorical traditions

have been influenced by the personal lives of the theorists, biographical information is included.

Realizing the potential scope of the project and the finite limits of the human mind, we decided to write a book that was relatively brief yet broad enough to cover all the necessary material. The current text is not an "introduction" to social psychology. Several hundred introductory texts have already been written, and more are published each year. Nor is it an extended discussion of social-psychological theories written by people who describe it from an internal perspective (e.g., Karpf, 1932; Sahakian, 1982). What we have attempted to do is to trace the development of various theoretical traditions within American social psychology and show that they have been shaped by developments taking place within the broader social context. By placing social psychology within the larger social context, this book seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of social psychology as a social-scientific discipline.

Many of the ideas contained in this book were developed while the first author was a visiting researcher at the Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale of the University of Paris (VII), and we would like to thank members of the group who became involved in the project, Erika Apfelbaum and Ian Lubek in particular. We would also like to thank Serge Moscovici and Geneviève Paicheler of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, who read parts of the manuscript and made several comments and suggestions. Other people who have seen parts of the manuscript include Ella DiCarlo, Richard Keshen, Gregory McGuire, and Robert Russell. Funds were made possible through a series of internally administered grants provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The book was written by a collaborative team that includes a more traditionally trained social psychologist, a historian of psychology, and an intellectual historian. It was written primarily for social psychologists, social scientists, intellectual historians, and those concerned with the history and philosophy of science, but the style of the book is sufficiently simple that it may appeal to a much more general audience. We believe that it would be an excellent supplement to more standard texts in courses on social psychology, intellectual history, and theories and systems of psychology. The scope of the book, together with a commitment to keep it as brief as possible, prohibits a thorough and more systematic exploration of all of the ideas introduced. Those wishing more information on particular topics should consult the original texts.

Nova Scotia   G. C.
December 1990

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Introduction

Many of the problems of social psychology are based on definition. Social psychology has been defined so broadly that it includes virtually all of psychology and the social sciences as well. John Dewey (1917), for example, in an address before the American Psychological Association in 1917 distinguished two types of psychological processes—physiological and social. Physiological processes include elementary drives and sensations, whereas the greater part of our mental life, our beliefs, our ideas, and our desires, were seen as socially derived.

Katz and Schanck (1938) went even further. They suggested that social psychology consists of three relatively distinct areas: (1) social stimulation; (2) people's experience of and reaction to social stimulation; and (3) the long-term effects of the social environment on the individual. The first area includes most of society's institutions and values, other people (either present or implied), and their by-products. It would subsume the subject matter of all the social sciences, the natural sciences (since accumulated wisdom is a social product), the arts, and the humanities. The second area focuses more narrowly on the individual's immediate response to these sources of stimulation, while the last constitutes what has more or less become two disciplines, abnormal psychology and personality, including cross-cultural differences in personality.

Perhaps the most general definition was provided by Insko and Schopler (1972), who defined social psychology as "that discipline which people who call themselves social psychologists are interested in studying" (p. xiv). But even this definition is too narrow, because it ignores the contributions of people who would not consider themselves social psychologists. Curtis (1960) has suggested that there are four types of social psychology—psychological, sociological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic—each with its own problems and areas of interests. Contemporary social psychology also borrows from other psychological subdisciplines, such as learning theory and cognitive psychology.

The purpose of citing these definitions is not to expand the scope of social psychology beyond its legitimate limits. Social stimuli and our reaction to them do constitute a major part of our day-to-day life and play a significant role in shaping personality, but they are no more fundamental to psychology than such processes as perception and memory. Rather, these definitions suggest that what has constituted the field of social psychology is so potentially broad that some selection has always been necessary—that is, social psychologists have always focused on certain areas and ignored others.

Previous histories of American social psychology such as Karpf (1932) and Sahakian (1982) have traced the ideas and trends *within* the discipline. Although valuable to students and teachers as resource guides, these accounts are limited to providing an exclusively internal history of the discipline. In contrast, this book provides a history that examines individuals and trends within the discipline together with

the external social and intellectual developments that have helped shape social psychology in America.

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

We began our study with an analysis of social psychology textbooks. Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1970) has argued that textbooks popularize a discipline and introduce it to new generations of practitioners. They must be rewritten each time the language, problems, or methods change or when a discipline undergoes what Kuhn called a "paradigm shift." Textbooks typically contain very little history, and the history they do present is frequently misleading because great authors from previous periods are described as if they were part of the current tradition. Through selection, distortion, and omission the readers are led to believe that they are part of a long tradition that has always focused on those problems of current interest. The tendency to "rewrite history" is augmented within social psychology by a tendency to stress current research. Findley and Cooper (1981), for example, compared chapters in nine widely used social psychology textbooks and calculated that fully half of the articles cited were published within the previous six years.

While any single textbook is therefore of only limited use in understanding the overall history of a discipline, it does provide a source of information about what was considered important and unimportant during a particular period. When two or more disciplines are attempting to explain the same phenomenon from different perspectives, then textbooks can be used to decipher differences in theoretical orientation. By summarizing the most recent literature, textbooks also provide an indication of the type of research actually conducted at a given time. In short, textbooks provide a way for readers to understand the history of a discipline by transporting themselves back in time so that they can reexperience the dis-

cipline from the perspective of the person who is learning it for the first time.

It should be noted, however, that Kuhn's description of the structure of a scientific revolution was developed in order to account for changes taking place in the physical sciences, and it is only partially applicable to developments within behavioral and social sciences. In physics, for example, facts that are either consistent or inconsistent with a given theory accumulate, and when there is sufficient evidence and consensus a paradigm shift may occur that represents a complete transformation of scientific thinking. Once a new paradigm has been established, there are no reversions to previous paradigms. Thus, no post-Copernican scientist would revert to the assumptions and methods of Ptolemy or Aristotle in calculating the position and movements of the stars.

Transformations within the social sciences are rarely so complete. Competing theories exist side by side and form schools of thought. Topics of interest may be abandoned by one generation and "rediscovered" by a later one. Actual research is more sensitive to changing social pressures and reflects not merely the preoccupations of professionals but the public at large. While there is some question about whether social psychology has undergone a paradigm shift in Kuhn's sense, it has undergone shifts in interest that reveal themselves in the literature cited. Each generation of textbooks stresses current interests while previously popular areas and authors are either downplayed or ignored.

In order to trace the history of these ideas, we decided to briefly review all of the social psychology textbooks published before 1990. Gordon Allport (1954a) compiled a list of 52 textbooks published before 1952, and his list was updated by Gibson and Higbee (1979), who provided a total of 105 references. A subsequent search of *Psychological Abstracts* and *Books in Print* identified 29 additional texts published in the late 1970s and 1980s. Since we were interested in contrasting the psychological and sociological approaches to American social psychology, eight of these were elim-

inated. One text was written by a medical doctor (Myerson, 1934), and a second was written by a British philosopher (Sprott, 1952), and these were not included. Also excluded were six textbooks coauthored by psychologists and sociologists (LaPiere & Farnsworth, 1936; Secord & Backman, 1964; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1965; Dewey & Humber; 1966; Kaluger & Unkovic, 1969; Secord, Backman, & Slavitt, 1976). A total of 89 psychological and 40 sociological textbooks were reviewed in all (see Appendix A). The utter preposterousness of obtaining and "briefly reviewing" over a hundred introductory textbooks seems funny only in retrospect.

Three aspects of social psychology textbooks were of primary importance in the present study: (1) the topics covered; (2) descriptions of research methods; and (3) the authors most frequently cited. Once trends were identified, we attempted to trace their histories both backward to discover their historical roots, and forward to discover remnants within contemporary social psychology. The order of the chapters represents the emergence of dominant trends within social psychology, whereas the discussion of these trends focuses primarily on individual authors.

Just as one can tell a great deal about individual authors by looking at their sources, one can also tell a great deal about a period by looking at those authors generally cited. A disadvantage of this approach is that it tends to obscure individual differences and overestimate the consensus within a discipline. A second problem is the typical time lag between preparation and publication. Bonner (1953), for example, stated that he began his book twenty years before it was published and modified it because of events during and after World War II. Despite these changes, his book retains many of the characteristics of texts published during the depression. It is problem-centered and highly critical of economic institutions. Garvey and Griffith (1971) have found a five-year interval between the conception and publication of a typical research project, and a similar period could be expected for social psychology textbooks.

Table 1.1. The Ten People Most Frequently Cited by Psychological and Sociological Textbook Authors During Six Major Periods. Authors Cited Frequently by Both Groups in the Same Period are in Italics. Brackets Indicate Ties in Rank.

	1908–1929	1930–1942	1948–1953	1960s	1970s	1980s
People cited most frequently by psychological authors						
1.	*W. McDougall*	F. Allport	G. Allport	*T. Newcomb*	L. Festinger	L. Festinger
2.	W. James	T. Newcomb	*G. Murphy*	L. Festinger	H. Kelley	E. Walster
3.	*F. Allport*	G. Allport	K. Lewin	H. Kelley	E. Aronson	*H. Kelley*
4.	C. Darwin	G. Murphy	H. Cantril	*M. Sherif*	S. Schachter	E. Jones
5.	J. Baldwin	*W. McDougall*	T. Newcomb	S. Schachter	L. Berkowitz	E. Berschied
6.	G. Allport	S. Freud	*M. Sherif*	C. Hovland	E. Jones	S. Schachter
7.	S. Freud	L. Murphy	F. Allport	S. Asch	J. Carlsmith	J. Darley
8.	G. LeBon	D. Katz	J. Dollard	M. Deutsch	C. Hovland	S. Milgram
9.	J. Watson	M. Mead	*S. Freud*	K. Lewin	I. Janis	L. Berkowitz
10.	G. Tarde	E. Thorndike	O. Klineberg	*G. Allport*	S. Asch	B. Latané
	J. Cattell				*S. Freud*	
People cited most frequently by sociological authors						
1.	E. Ross	*F. Allport*	*G. Murphy*	S. Freud	G. Mead	E. Goffman
2.	C. Cooley	W. Thomas	*T. Newcomb*	G. Mead	E. Goffman	G. Mead
3.	*W. McDougall*	L. Bernard	G. Mead	C. Cooley	*S. Freud*	R. Turner
4.	J. Dewey	E. Faris	J. Dewey	*M. Sherif*	H. Blumer	P. Berger
5.	J. Williams	*W. McDougall*	*M. Sherif*	H. Sullivan	C. Cooley	H. Blumer
6.	C. Ellwood	E. Burges	E. Faris	A. Strauss	*L. Festinger*	G. Stone
7.	T. Veblen	R. Park	K. Young	G. Lindzey	A. Strauss	A. Strauss
8.	G. Tarde	C. Cooley	S. Freud	T. Newcomb	T. Newcomb	G. Simmel
9.	F. Allport	K. Young	W. Thomas	W. Thomas	M. Sherif	*H. Kelley*
10.	F. Giddings	J. Dewey	E. Boring	*G. Allport*	T. Shibutani	A. Schultz

What is somewhat surprising is that gaps occur in publications, and these gaps can be used to mark transitions. No text was published between 1942 and 1948, and a second gap occurred between 1953 and 1960. Using these gaps, along with more natural divisions, we were able to divide social psychology textbooks into six periods based on the date of publication: (1) the first two decades (1908–1929); (2) the depression (1930–1942); (3) the postwar period (1948–1953); (4) the 1960s; (5) the 1970s; and (6) the 1980s. Table 1.1 gives the ten most cited individuals during each period for both psychological and sociological textbook authors based on an exhaustive review of all social psychology textbooks published before 1990.

This table will be referred to repeatedly throughout the text, but some general points should be discussed first. Perhaps the most striking feature is the almost total absence of overlap in the literature cited by sociologists and psychologists. Except for the postwar period (1948–1953), the overlap consists of two or three authors during each period and only one during the 1980s.

This table, since it does not include figures,[1] cannot show the full extent of this lack of overlap, so some examples may prove useful. During the first decades, the sociologist Edward Ross was cited 99 times by sociological authors but only four times by psychologists. Charles Cooley was cited 63 times by sociologists but only twice by psychologists. The citations for John Dewey were 44 and 2 during this same period. In striking contrast, six of the authors most cited by psychologists during the 1960s— Leon Festinger, Harold Kelley, Kurt Lewin, Solomon Asch, Stanley Schachter, and Morton Deutsch—were never mentioned by sociological authors. This in itself should dispel the persistent myth that social psychology stands between two disciplines and draws equally from each. *Since its inception, American social psychology has existed not as one but as two separate disciplines, each with its own literature and interests.*

A second point that should be noted is the general decline in sociological textbooks and an increase in psychological texts. The

number of authors in each group was as follows:

Period	Psychologists	Sociologists
1908–1929	7	8
1930–1942	9	7
1948–1953	10	3
1960s	12	3
1970s	30	8
1980s	21	11

This shows that, *although social psychology began largely as a branch of sociology, it has become increasingly dominated by psychological texts.* While there appears to be a slight reversal of this trend in the 1980s, what these figures do not show is the large number of psychological texts brought out in later editions (16 versus 2 by sociologists). When these are added to the new texts introduced in the 1980s, the ratio of psychological to sociological textbooks remains about the same—that is, about three to one. These figures also suggest why a total frequency count of citations would be misleading. The disproportionate number of psychological writers during the postwar period would simply obscure the sociological trends.

This trend has also been noted by Liska (1977) in an article entitled "The dissipation of sociological social psychology." He argues that social psychology has shifted from a multidisciplinary enterprise to one increasingly dominated by psychology. Not only has psychological social psychology expanded enormously in the past few decades, but sociological social psychology has contracted. Although sociological authors keep abreast of developments within psychological social psychology, psychologists rarely cite sociological authors or journals. While many adhere to the ideal of a multidisciplinary approach, this ideal is being constantly eroded by the fact that social psychology is becoming a psychological subdiscipline.

A final point is that a citation count does not distinguish between positive and negative references. Perlman (1979) noted that citation rates are highly correlated with opinion polls of eminence, based on scholars' ratings of one another for overall im-

portance. The present ranking corresponds well with Lewicki's (1982) survey of the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, where leading social psychologists ranked the persons who had the most influence on them. But some authors are cited because they aroused opposition.

William McDougall (1908), for example, was cited frequently by sociological authors during the first two periods, but these references were almost uniformly critical, because sociologists strongly opposed the tendency to explain social behavior through social instincts. Similarly Floyd Allport (1924) was frequently cited by sociologists during the 1930s because they objected to his strong emphasis on the individual. Both McDougall and Allport, however, forced sociologists to make major revisions in their own theories. One could argue that these authors were influential *because* they were controversial, and therfore it makes little difference whether a citation is supportive or critical.

It should be stressed that textbook analysis is merely a starting point. It is a very crude way to identify major authors and research traditions during a particular period. Once these have been identified, they can be placed within the context of more broad-based intellectual traditions. These ideas did not suddenly pop up, dominate, and then disappear. They often had a long period of development before they became popular. Those who developed these ideas most fully were often not recognized and seldom cited.

In attempting to trace the history of an idea, one must be wary of citing sources in which a topic is casually mentioned and then dropped. It is one thing to have a sudden insight into a problem and another to develop this insight in a painstaking and meticulous manner. One can, for example, find forerunners of Freud's concept of the unconscious in the writings of Leibniz, or in Dostoevski for that matter. But their unconscious is merely a lack of awareness and does not include Freud's concept of the dynamically repressed. Freud explored the depths of the unconscious, used it to explain phenomena that were previously incomprehensible, and shook our faith in the power of human reason. Anyone who addresses these issues today knowingly or unknowingly follows in Freud's footsteps (see Chapter 6).

It is not always easy to trace the history of an idea. Social psychology, as mentioned previously, did not develop in a social vaccum. Ideas have been shaped by both internal and external sources. Promising lines of research have been prematurely abandoned and rediscovered later. This is illustrated by the concepts of imitation and suggestion, which were popular at the turn of the century and have been revitalized and given scientific credibility by Neil Miller and John Dollard (1941) and Albert Bandura (1971) under the name of social-learning theory. Similarly, the detailed yet impressionistic descriptions of crowd behavior inspired work on social facilitation and inhibition and their subsequent explanation through physiological arousal (Zajonc, 1965). Thus, progress does occur in social psychology, but it is easy for researchers to lose contact with previous insights, because they often undergo name changes so profound as to obscure their origins. "Social instincts" (McDougall, 1908), for example, became "human proponent reflexes" (Allport, 1924), then "native impulses" (Ellwood, 1925), and later "dependable motives" (Klineberg, 1940). Ethology and sociobiology may be regarded as recent attempts to deal with the same theme. A history of these ideas may prove useful, because it can lead researchers back to previous sources that contain a great many valuable insights.

The focus on broad-based intellectual traditions forced a chronological division somewhat different from that in Table 1.1. American social psychology has undergone four major periods of development. The first represents the formative period, which began at the turn of the century and is characterized by the development of two distinct social-psychological approaches—one sociological, the other psychological. Disciplinary differences were temporarily obscured during the depression and World War II as pressing social problems forced social psychologists to view social behavior within a broader social context. Differences between disciplines became even more pro-