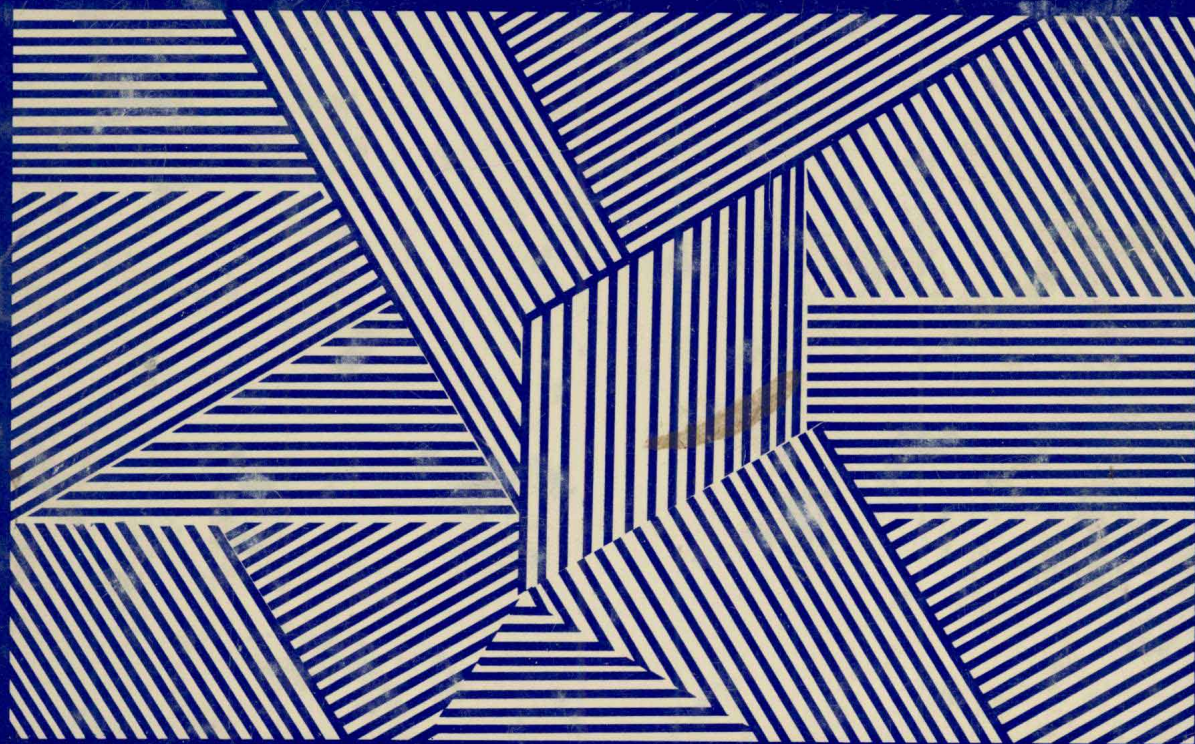
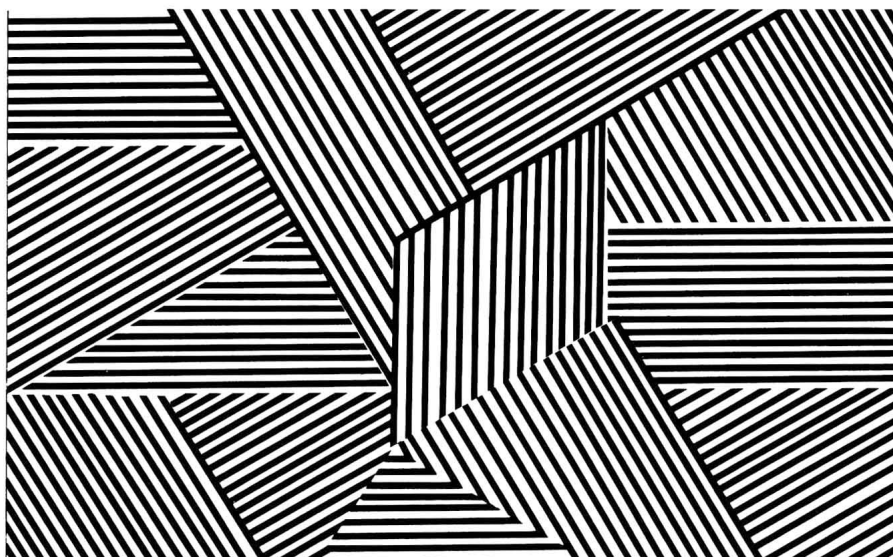


SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



WILLIAMSON
SWINGLE &
SARGENT

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PREFACE

Probably the most fundamental characteristic of this book, now in its fourth edition, is that it represents the integrated work of a sociologist and two psychologists. This collaboration is in keeping with our view that social events can be understood and analyzed only through an integrated effort among the behavioral sciences.

We approach the subject from an eclectic viewpoint. The text is related to neobehaviorism but nevertheless draws on other models in psychology and sociology; indeed, our thinking has been influenced by a number of movements, ranging from the Gestalt approach to exchange theory. We do not believe that these different perspectives are necessarily irreconcilable.

We believe social psychology as a discipline need no longer be as self-conscious as it was a generation ago. It has become a science. Social psychology has been concerned with the manipulation of variables in laboratory settings, and its findings have often seemed artificial and remote. Increasingly, however, research has moved from the confines of the laboratory on campus to the arena of life in the community. With this change the barrier between the micro approach of psychology and the macro approach of sociology has been diminished.

We are convinced that the behavioral sciences, and notably social psychology, can offer data relevant to relieving the critical tensions of contemporary society. It would be foolhardy to suggest that solutions can be found for all problems, but social psychology offers a great deal more knowledge than is currently being utilized by society. In fact, the problem seems to be to convince the politician, the manager, or the public at large to look at the wares social scientists have to offer.

The organization of the book reflects these contentions. Chapter I defines the role of the social psychologist. Part I is concerned with the relation of the individual to his or her culture and the question of socialization. In Part II we turn to fundamental psychological processes such as perception, learning, and motivation as a means of analyzing peoples' cognitions, attitudes, and communication systems. Part III focuses on group processes, which, along with attitudes, we regard as the core of social psychology. Role behavior and leadership are also analyzed in the context of the group. Part IV is concerned with

the relevance of social psychology to social issues. The analysis of mass behavior, social movements, and social change is central to understanding the crises of the late 20th century. The final chapters revolve about these major dislocations, ethnic and international relations, and the more recent issues of the spatial environment and the role of the elderly in our society.

This text, as compared with previous editions, is reduced in scope but gives more attention to methodology and psychological issues. Nevertheless, we continue to be concerned with the individual's orientation to the sociocultural setting. Drawing on both a neobehaviorist and a field approach, the text stresses personality, situational variables, and the person's perception of the situation. We also are committed to the application of findings in social psychological research to the tensions and malaise besetting contemporary society.

Throughout the period of preparing this volume, all three authors have been grateful for the support of their wives and other members of their family. We also want to express our appreciation to the many teachers, colleagues, and students who have played a role in shaping our orientation to social psychology. For the editing of the manuscript we want to thank Gloria Reardon. Equally we are indebted to Ann VanDoren and Timmy Williamson for the typing of the manuscript.

June 1981

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INTRODUCTION



SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

Social psychology is a unique hybrid among disciplines. As psychology, it is concerned with the motivation, attitudes, and behavior of individuals. As sociology, it investigates the structure and operation of the groups in society. In its own right as a field of study, social psychology is concerned with the reciprocal manner in which individuals and small groups influence and are influenced by one another.

Thus social psychology provides a means we can use to help us understand ourselves in our relations to others and to the society in which we live. It is a science which focuses on the interaction between individuals or between an individual and the members of a group in a social setting—workers at a workbench or students in a classroom, a family group at the dinner table or a crowd at a football game. Or the setting could be an emergency situation—a fight at a rock concert, residents fleeing from a fire or earthquake, or terrorists hijacking a plane. The social psychologist is interested in both the *overt* or evident behavior of the persons involved and in their *covert* or hidden behavior—their feelings and attitudes.

Social psychologists today have special interest in one dimension of social behavior—its rate of change. Since primitive times humans have lived in groups which have been undergoing change, usually very slowly or to a limited extent. By contrast the pace and scope of change in contemporary times, especially since World War II, have been startling. The changes produced have brought dissent and conflict, as well as massive shifts in values, attitudes, and behavior which in

many cases have had bewildering effects. As a result of developments in high-speed communication, we are instantly aware of—and involved in—fundamental changes taking place all over the world. We have witnessed political attacks and assassinations and have had vivid vicarious experiences associated with acts of violence such as the takeover of the U.S. embassy and the holding of diplomatic hostages by “militants” in Iran for more than a year. As a result of the reliance of industrialized nations on increasingly scarce natural resources, the economic initiative has rapidly shifted to previously undeveloped nations who have the resources and can get them to the market.

The extent to which social psychology can help us interpret and deal with such complex and rapidly changing phenomena depends on whether it is possible to deal with them *scientifically* at all. As a scientific discipline, social psychology has existed only since the early 1900s, and it can hardly be expected to yield measurements and predictions that are as precise as those of the older physical sciences such as physics, chemistry, and astronomy. These were established fully three centuries ago, and they deal with nonliving materials and processes which are in many respects more stable and less complex than the behavior of human beings. Nevertheless, since the turn of the century social psychologists have been busily observing, getting hunches, and proposing theories—that is, using the scientific method to propose hypotheses and test them by experiment or further observation. As a result, they have amassed a sizable body of knowledge that is useful in furthering an understanding of individuals and groups under both normal and abnormal conditions.

Indeed, the research activity of social psychologists has been prodigious. Several hundred research articles appear every year in such journals as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Social Psychology Quarterly* (formerly *Sociometry*), and the *Journal of Social Issues*, not to mention the monographs, books, and other publications in the field. Most are laboratory or statistical studies which have implications for individuals and groups in real life. The ability of social researchers to offer meaningful interpretations is increasingly impressive. As with all life sciences, the goal is to predict behavior: how the individual will perform in a group setting, for example, or how children or adults can change their ethnic attitudes, or how people will react in a disaster.

This chapter introduces the many facets of social psychology. It begins by explaining the place of this discipline among the social sciences and its relevance to the problems of our time. Its history is traced from its roots in the 19th century to its emergence as a science, and its close relationship to the other behavioral sciences (such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology) is developed. An analysis of the research methods social psychologists use to study human behavior in society considers the techniques by which scientific precision can be assured and suggests which methods are appropriate for investigating certain kinds of problems. The final section discusses the broad ideas behind the principal theories in the discipline.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

What Do Social Psychologists Study?

The society we live in is complex and often frustrating. We look for explanations why we cannot find a job we want, why food and housing cost so much, or why it is not safe to be out on the streets at night. We are dismayed at its contradictions: We have a high standard of living and an advanced technology, for example, yet a sixth of the people in the United States live in poverty. The computer offers almost limitless knowledge, but it often seems to reduce human beings to mere numbers. More of the people have better educations and higher expectations, but there has been little improvement in the quality of the mass media or in the honesty or dedication of elected officials.

Every issue of a metropolitan newspaper gives further evidence of the spectrum of dissent. For years now, the peoples in most nations have been moving through a succession of crises, both domestic and international. Political leaders seem unable to find solutions for such problems as environmental pollution, deterioration of the cities, and erosion of civil liberties, not to mention the plight of the disadvantaged. The nations devote disproportionate shares of their resources to building up massive armaments in a world that has not yet found workable nonviolent ways to deal with international conflicts.

Such problems are a continuing challenge to statesmen, scientists, philosophers, and practitioners. They may be fundamentally technical, economic, or political in nature, but they all involve the interaction of human beings, and this brings the behavioral and social sciences into the picture. If we are to avoid the deterioration or even destruction of civilization, every resource for solving our major social problems must be expanded, improved, and mobilized.

Social psychologists can play a significant role in this effort. They can clarify the ways in which opinions are formed and the conditions under which attitudes and prejudices lead to overt behavior. Their research can show how groups and organizations are formed and members are galvanized into action. Their leadership studies can point out the personal qualities and situational factors that are most effective in meeting crises and solving problems.

In recent years the research methods of social psychologists have improved greatly, and their substantive knowledge has grown. They have been able to set up and test many hypotheses which have improved our understanding of social phenomena, though they fall short of predicting precisely what will happen as the result of a given course of action. Many social psychologists are impatient about the inability to provide better answers to problems. Elms (1975) points out the difficulties scientific research has in trying to keep up with the increasing demand for relevance.

How Practical Is Social Psychology?

Leaders in government and industry apparently recognize that social psychologists, along with other social scientists, can make practical contributions



Social problems surfaced well before the 20th century, though they are being more closely monitored today. Hogarth's drawing, "Gin Lane," depicts some social dislocations of 18th-century London. Source: Print Collection, Art, Prints and Photographs Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

to their efforts. The applications of social science technology are evident in advertising and politics. In international relations, the desire to avoid using stockpiled nuclear weapons and to prevent their proliferation has placed new emphasis on finding better ways to work out conflicts than the threat of massive destruction. In labor negotiations, interracial relations, education, corrections, and many other areas, the knowledge derived from social science is being directly applied to contemporary problems.

Bruce Laingen, the senior diplomat among the 52 U.S. hostages held for 444 days in Iran by student-militarists, for example, described the attitude of Iranians in a State Department memo in 1979, shortly before the hostage seizure, in terms that could have been taken from a social psychology textbook. He spoke of a national history of instability that had given the Iranians "an almost total preoccupation with self [that] leaves little room for understanding points of view other than one's own" and described "a bazaar mentality . . . a mindset that often ignores longer term interests in favor of immediately obtainable advantages." (However, as we shall see in Chapter 2, caution must be exercised in making generalizations about national character.)

Box 1-1

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CRISES: BEATING THE CLOCK

The behavioral sciences have grown out of infancy and are approaching adulthood. Social psychology has a contribution to make—provided time does not run out.

When nine leading psychologists were asked to comment on the future role of that discipline in 1978, Stuart W. Cook cited the need for more theoretical integration of research data, with emphasis on practical implications. He suggested the psychologist's input will be needed for several major problems: (1) the crisis in overpopulation, (2) the exhaustion of nonrenewable energy sources, (3) the economic and social deterioration of major urban centers, (4) the role of the aged in society and (5) domestic and international conflict.*

Besides these tensions, there are others that psychology, and particularly social psychology, can help defuse. The depersonalization of human beings caught in a bureaucratic, automated system; the persistence of violence and crime; the barriers to full participation in society that individuals may face due to their sex, race, economic disadvantage, or unconventional lifestyle are some examples.

*M. Wertheimer et al., "Psychology and the Future," *American Psychologist*, 1978, 33, 631-647.

As social psychologists became accepted as scientists, they developed more responsibility and confidence in offering interpretations and making recommendations for solutions to crises and problems (see Box 1-1). Behavioral scientists have been employed in a number of government agencies, occasionally in a policymaking role but usually to provide information on research findings which could affect planned programs. Governments typically call in social scientists for consultation, not decisions. In the early 1970s, the recommendations of the U.S. presidential commissions on civil disorders, obscenity, and violence received at best lip service and at worst outright disapproval from former President Richard Nixon and many members of Congress. When governmental bodies have welcomed recommendations by social scientists, the problems of implementation are often not resolved. A few national governments, notably in Scandinavia, have begun to use social scientists extensively in an advisory capacity.

Speaking of the role of social scientists in current affairs, Kelman (1968) says: "We still have a long way to go before becoming truly influential and we may find the road rather bumpy. Nevertheless, we must anticipate the possibility that social scientists will meet with a serious interest in their ideas." The findings of social psychology and related disciplines are in fact being taken into account in government and industry—a notable difference from the days when executives based their decisions on hunches and guesses. The degree to which behavioral scientists' conclusions are accepted depends on the social and political climate.

If the extent to which government in particular and society in general will accept the validity of the behavioral sciences is measured by the amount of research funded by federal agencies, the evidence is discouraging. Psychologists represent about 8 percent of all research scientists in U.S. universities, but in 1974, for example, they received only 3 percent of research funds. Psychology and the social sciences together were granted a seventh of the funds allotted to the physical sciences, not including engineering. Correcting for the differing ratios of scientists in given disciplines and comparing the funds per full-time scientist, the physical scientists received almost twice as much as the psychologists and more than four times what the social scientists were awarded (Kiesler, 1977). The prospect for the behavioral sciences has become even more discouraging since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Within the social sciences, of course, there are differing orientations whose value to society varies with the times. Political scientists are particularly concerned with governmental structures and the management of conflict. Legal theorists focus on the development of group sanctions associated with departures from a society's mores or norms. Behavioral geography directs attention to the effects of physical surroundings on a person's or group's behavior.

The utility of social psychologists' contributions and the demand for their services also vary greatly. They draw upon the work of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists in their efforts to understand major tensions in our society, such as ethnic and minority relations, labor conflicts, or newer problems deriving from such social forces as sexism or ageism. More important, we are seriously concerned for the first time in history with the survival of humanity. Control of nuclear war and management of the ecology of our planet

involve all the subjects in the academic curriculum, and certainly all the sciences. But since war is primarily a problem of human relationships, it is particularly a challenge to social scientists, and most appropriately social psychologists, to discover solutions to this most horrible of all social tensions. (See Chapter 18.)

THE FORERUNNERS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The contemporary position of a field of study often bears little relation to its origin. Thus astronomy and chemistry, two of the oldest and most firmly established sciences, sprang from astrology and alchemy, respectively. Psychology, located academically between biology and the social sciences, owes its origin to philosophy and to 19th-century physiology.

Social psychology combines elements of psychology and the social sciences and has a complex genealogy which includes strains from many disciplines. It came on the scene about 1900, after the way had been prepared by at least four groups of scholars: social philosophers, pioneer anthropologists, British evolutionists, and early sociologists.

The best references on the 19th-century background of social psychology are Karpf (1972) and Watson (1977).

Social Philosophers

Ancient, medieval, and early modern philosophers speculated widely about human nature, heredity, instincts, impulses, customs, and social relations. In Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*, and the writings of Montesquieu, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and many others, the problems of social living were given considerable attention. Some of the ideas of the pre-19th-century social philosophers were original and provocative; others now seem vague, unscientific, and contradictory. It is hardly surprising that they failed to understand the subtle relationship between an individual and society—there is some doubt that we do now! But they did focus interest on many important questions later taken up by writers who were more specialized in their training and scientific in their approach.

Pioneer Anthropologists

In 1860, two German scholars, Hermann Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus, established a journal called *Folk Psychology*, with the intention of discovering the mental processes of primitive peoples by studying their language, mythology, religion, literature, and art. Their work turned toward philosophy and mysticism as they became concerned with "group minds" and "folk souls." These concepts helped set the stage for the study of culture (see Chapter 2), and they inspired Wilhelm Wundt, the father of experimental psychology, who produced a ten-volume series titled *Elements of Folk Psychology*.

Wundt felt that higher social processes could not be explored in the laboratory, but they had to be investigated by way of individual minds. This was one of the first protests against the ancient doctrine that a group may have a collective mind, soul, or psyche over and above the minds of the individuals in the