
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

JAMES W. VANDER ZANDEN

THIRD EDITION



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James W. Vander Zanden

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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To my parents

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Third Edition

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Preface

Authors often complain in the preface to their books about how “painful” they found the writing process. And they often add that their families have suffered as they single-mindedly immersed themselves in the onerous work. Let me begin, therefore, by noting that writing this and the earlier editions of *Social Psychology* were hardly painful experiences for me. If one enjoys social psychology—in fact, finds it a fascinating field—it is a happy experience to tell others about it.

Moreover, the members of my family also believe that they have benefited immeasurably from *Social Psychology*. My wife died over twelve years ago, and in the intervening years my sons have grown into young manhood integrated into my work and the whole undertaking we know as social psychology. All of us have lived richer lives by virtue of the insights we constantly find in the field. Indeed, this is the way it should be, for no discipline so immediately touches the human condition as does social psychology. It is my hope that instructors and students alike will also find the study of social psychology a meaningful and enriching experience.

It is within the context of this spirit and conviction that this and earlier editions were written. But however compelling its subject matter, a textbook, to be successful, must meet two criteria: first, it must provide the appropriate information; second, it must communicate the subject matter effectively. I attempt to achieve these ends in a number of ways:

The book aims to capture student interest. Most teachers of social psychology find it a stimulating field, and there is no reason why students should not experience the same enthusiasm and challenge. Therefore, in this book top priority is assigned to making social psychology come alive.

One device for achieving this has been the inclusion throughout of excerpts from student journals. In the journals students have recorded observations or events and have interpreted them according to social psychological concepts or principles. These journal entries, in which student teaches student, afford vivid and readable accounts of human experience.

The book aims to provide a scientifically sound presentation. The reader is exposed to a wide sampling of social psychological theory and empirical research. But rather than attempting an encyclopedic coverage, the book focuses upon and highlights key, classic studies.

The book aims to be contemporary. Social psychology is shown in its relation to the real world in which the professor and the students live. Various contemporary social problems are examined, including aggression, conflict, racism, and sexism. The book is also contemporary in that it covers recent trends in social psychology, such as attribution, cognitive processes, prosocial behavior, equity theory, ethnomethodology, pornography, rape, territoriality, social power, and gender roles.

The book aims for an interdisciplinary synthesis. Some chapters necessarily emphasize psychological interests and research; others sociological interests and research. Care is taken, however, to weave this material into a meaningful and coherent whole.

The book aims to provide maximum flexibility in teaching. Clearly, there is not one “right” way to teach social psychology, and the material that is presented can be adapted to suit professors’ own teaching objectives and their students’ needs. The chapters are sufficiently independent so that they can be assigned in any order without posing problems for the students. In short, users of this book should feel free to make it serve their particular purposes. *Social Psychology* is meant to be a tool, your tool.

James W. Vander Zanden

Columbus, Ohio

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Ethical Considerations

A local skating rink is a “stalking grounds” for young singles. My roommate and I go over there a good deal. We both like skating and it is a good place to meet girls. This is what we do. We skate around the rink and size up the girls, all the time trying to establish eye contact with those girls we find attractive. For example, I will glance at a girl, hoping to catch a glance from her. I then skate about the rink several times, each time seeking to establish and hold a “longer look” with the girl. At some point I will couple the glance with a smile. Should the girl smile back, I am usually in business. I will stop and talk with the girl and ask her to skate with me. All this involves a subtle process of communication that goes on between the men and the women at the rink. In contrast, the rink on campus is not a good place to pick up girls. At the campus rink people generally come with their friends and stay with their own clique. Little of the “eye work” goes on at the campus rink that gives the other rink its distinctive tone.

*

*

*

Today, on my way home from classes, I noticed that when I stopped at a traffic light, I wanted to turn my head and look into the auto next to mine. Yet if I did this, especially if the other people observed me, I felt quite uncomfortable. On the other

2 INTRODUCTION

hand, I did not experience any inhibitions looking at people walking on the sidewalks or crossing the street in front of me. We have certain rules governing the observation of others. When a person gets into an auto, it becomes “his” space and is not to be invaded by others, not even by eyes.

* * *

I never really thought I had pretty legs. I felt they were too big at the knees, too fat at the thighs, and too small at the calves. Last Thursday I wore gym trunks while throwing a football with some fraternity guys. Later my boyfriend told me a lot of the guys thought I had really pretty shaped legs. Well, then I looked at my legs, and thought, “Boy, my legs do look pretty good.” So I tried wearing my gym trunks again today. A couple of my girl friends told me I had pretty legs. Strange as it may seem, my legs have been looking better and better to me. Now I feel quite confident about them and want to show them off. This just goes to show how the responses others make toward us affect how we come to see ourselves. Our self-image arises out of the feedback others give us in the course of social interaction.

* * *

Tonight was one of those nights where everyone goes crazy and all the people in the dorms acted up. We were all hanging out of our windows, yelling at the guys down below, who were trying to have a panty raid. It all started when the guys from the next dorm projected some choice pornographic film from Denmark over on the outside wall of our dorm. We were egging the guys on, hollering “panties” and waving our “dainties” out the windows. Here I was, a good Christian girl, who never uttered obscenities before, yelling (which is unusual!) the crudest remarks right along with the other girls. When I turned away from the window, my roommate commented, “I can’t believe I yelled that.” I felt the same way. It seems to me both contagion and an emergent norm were operating here. Circular reaction was intensifying our excitement and a new norm came into existence that said you were “square” and “uptight” if you didn’t shout obscenities along with the others.

* * *

Tickets to football games are extremely difficult to come by. Well, my parents have heard so much about our school’s team, they asked me to get tickets so they could attend one of the games. There is a bulletin board in the lobby of our dorm with hundreds of items on it, mostly requesting or offering rides. Well, I put my notice up on the board offering to buy tickets together with my room and phone number. Nothing happened. It occurred to me that no one was noticing my card among all the others on the board. So this week I put up another card with a nude picture at the top. Replies galore! It seems selective perception has been at work. The items on the bulletin board bombard a person’s senses with a great many stimuli—even overwhelm the person. By putting a nude on my card, I made it stand out from the other cards and people centered their attention upon it. If everyone else were to put a nude on each of their cards in the future, we would all be right back where we started.*

* * *

* These edited quotations from student journals, and others that appear throughout this book, are reproduced by permission of the students.

In their journals, all these students were concerned with social interaction—interpersonal behavior—the subject matter of **social psychology**.[†] The late Gordon W. Allport (1968: 3),[‡] a psychologist, regarded social psychology as a scientific “attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.” In sum, social psychology is the study of people—loving, hating, working, helping, trusting, fighting, communicating. It focuses upon the entire drama of our daily lives, all of our activities in relation to one another. As such, it studies the trivial and the vital, the transient and the abiding, the joyful and the painful, the superficial and the visceral.

EARLY ROOTS: PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Although social psychology is an ancient discipline (some point to Plato or Aristotle as its founder) it was officially launched as a separate field in 1908. In that year the first two English-language textbooks appeared—William McDougall’s *Introduction to Social Psychology* and E. A. Ross’s *Social Psychology: An Outline and Source Book*. McDougall was a psychologist; Ross, a sociologist. In the intervening years social psychology has retained its interdisciplinary links to both psychology and sociology. (Boutilier, Roed, and Svendsen, 1980; Pepitone, 1981).

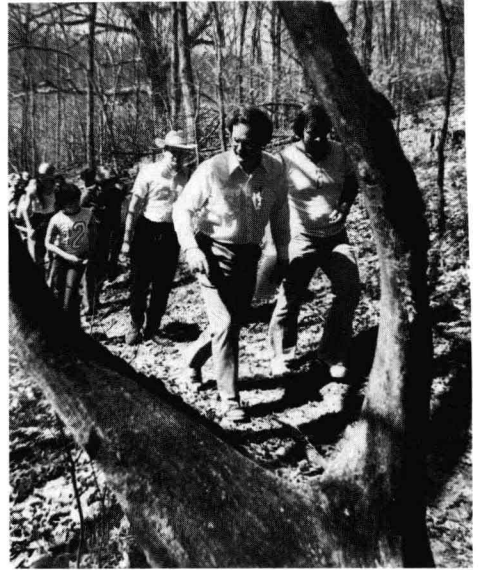
Because social psychology draws from the storehouses of both sociological and psychological knowledge, many universities and colleges offer social psychology courses both in their sociology departments and in their psychology departments. Indeed, until relatively recently, psychologists and sociologists tended to go their independent ways. Psychologists traditionally focused on individuals and the social stimuli that impinge on them. In contrast, sociologists concerned themselves with the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society, stressing the part that social interaction plays within human life (Stryker, 1977; 1980).

Within psychology—the science of behavior and mental processes—social psychology is distinguished from other subfields such as learning, perception, and motivation. While all psychologists study behavior—sometimes even the identical responses—they differ in their primary interest. Social psychologist Robert Zajonc (1967: 1) provides us with the following analogy:

The rat’s response of “turning left in a T-maze” may be analyzed in terms of the number of reinforced trials that have been given to the animal (the psychology of learning); or in terms of the level of the animal’s hunger (the psychology of motivation); or in terms of the physical properties of the right arm of the maze as opposed to those of the left arm (the psychology of perception). If all of the above variations—reinforcement, deprivation, and physical stimulation—are held constant, and if we observe the rat’s responses of “turning left in the T-maze” when there happens to be one other rat in the right arm of the maze, we become social psychologists.

[†] Concepts in **boldface type** are defined in a Glossary at the end of each chapter and in the Glossary at the back of the book.

[‡] A single year in parentheses refers to the work cited in the References section at the end of the book. The number that follows the date is the page number.



The Subject Matter of Social Psychology

Social psychologists study how the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people are influenced by other individuals.

(Patrick Reddy)

Although at one time a minor field within psychology, social psychology has gained considerable stature during the past three decades.

Within sociology—generally viewed as the science of social organization (society) and group life—social psychology has long enjoyed a prominent place. Indeed, many sociologists find it difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the fields. Among sociologists with a symbolic-interactionist orientation, the overlap tends to be complete. Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), an influential early American sociologist and symbolic interactionist, placed the individual and society in a single frame of reference (1902: 1–2):

A separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals. The real thing is Human Life, which may be considered either in an individual aspect or in a social, that is to say a general, aspect; but is always, as a matter of fact, both individual and general. In other words, “society” and

“individuals” do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing, the relation between them being like that between other expressions one of which denotes a group as a whole and the other the members of the group.

In Europe, where social psychology never emerged as a separate specialty, leading sociologists like Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Max Weber (1864–1920), and Georg Simmel (1858–1918) dealt with social psychological matters as an integral part of their sociological studies.

Within the United States, social psychologists differ in their perception of the field. Some social psychologists, such as Edwin P. Hollander and R. G. Hunt (1971), view social psychology as a distinctive discipline—one that is not merely a mixture of bits and pieces from sociology and psychology, but a genuine fusion. Others, such as Zick Rubin (1973), view it not as a discipline like economics, history, sociology, and psychology, but as an “interdiscipline.”

Whether social psychology is viewed as a qualitatively distinct discipline or as an interdiscipline, the overlap between sociology and psychology has contributed to a freshness in approach and has functioned as a stimulus to the further advancement of the frontiers of knowledge. Of course there are scholars who jealously seek to exclude rivals in neighboring sciences from what they view as “their” territory. Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude has increasingly become one of welcoming aid and collaboration from any qualified person, regardless of discipline. Each scientist can and should learn from the others.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Nothing is so practical as a good theory.

—Kurt Lewin

Theory is the net we weave to catch the world of observation so that we can explain, predict, and influence it (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965). Formulating a theory is a way of making sense out of a confused set of data through a symbolic construction (Kaplan, 1964). It allows us to bring together a multitude of facts in a meaningful manner so that we may comprehend them all at once. Consequently, theory is in part a summary of known facts and in part conjecture about the implications of such facts and the probable relationships that exist among them. More specifically, theory performs a number of functions (Shaw and Costanzo, 1982). First, it permits us to organize our observations and to deal meaningfully with information that would otherwise be chaotic and useless. Second, theory allows us to see relationships among facts and uncover implications that would not otherwise be evident in isolated bits and pieces of data. And third, it stimulates inquiry as we search for knowledge about many different and often puzzling aspects of our behavior.

Within social psychology, a number of differing theoretical traditions have emerged. This is hardly surprising, since the same behavior may be viewed from differing perspectives. Take, for example, the matter of eating. We could consider eating in terms of the experience of hunger that is alleviated by food; the stimulus that the sight or smell of food provides; the social meanings attributed to eating with friends or enemies;

or the ways in which people fit their actions together to provide food or a particular meal. In this chapter we will examine several major approaches within contemporary social psychology. Since the various orientations will appear again in various parts of the book, we will limit ourselves to a brief description of each orientation.

Behavioral theory

How an organism learns—acquires responses—has been the chief concern of a major and productive group of American psychologists whose approach is termed **behaviorism**. The behaviorist approach was initially set forth by John B. Watson (1914, 1919) and further developed and elaborated by such psychologists as Edward L. Thorndike (1907, 1931), Edward C. Tolman (1932), Edwin R. Guthrie (1935), Clark Hull (1943, 1952), and B. F. Skinner (1953, 1957, 1974). When Watson began his work early in this century, American psychology was preoccupied with topics like “mind,” “image,” and “consciousness.” Watson rejected these concepts, labeling them “mystical,” “mentalistic,” and “subjective.” Instead, he called for a totally objective psychology, one that would deal only with the observable activities of organisms—their “doings and sayings.” Hence, Watson insisted that psychology should study how peo-



Removing Barriers

By stripping away mystery and cant, social science can have a liberating effect. With knowledge, people can break down the barriers that lock individuals within unjust social arrangements. It offers us the opportunity to improve the human condition by helping us to achieve freedom, self-identity, and self-fulfillment. (Patrick Reddy)

ple in fact behave and that this could best be achieved by employing the experimental procedures of animal psychology.

Behaviorists have argued that introspection (observation of one's own perceptions and feelings) is unreliable and that psychologists should not concern themselves with internal or mental events. Instead behaviorists segment *behavior* into units called **responses** and they divide the *environment* into units called **stimuli**. Accordingly, behaviorism is also referred to as stimulus-response (or simply S-R) psychology.

Behaviorists assert that a particular stimulus and a particular response are "associated" with one another, producing a functional relationship between them. For example, a stimulus like one's friend coming into one's visual field elicits a response like a smile. This notion regarding the connection between stimuli and responses is a logical outcome of the behaviorists' downgrading of inner mental considerations. It is not surprising, therefore, that extreme behaviorism is often termed a "black box" approach. Stimuli enter the "box" (the organism) only to come out as responses. The internal structures or mental processes that intervene between the stimulus and the response, since they are not directly observable, are minimized by traditional behaviorists.

Behaviorists stress the part that *reinforcement* plays in establishing and strengthening stimulus-response connections. Reinforcement refers to any event that strengthens the probability of a particular response. A good illustration of reinforcement procedures is provided by Benjamin Franklin. Two centuries ago a minister on a ship complained to Franklin that the sailors rarely attended prayer meetings. Franklin suggested that the minister take charge of passing out the daily ration of rum and that he dispense it immediately after the prayers. The minister did what Franklin recommended and "never were prayers more generally and more punctually attended" (Franklin, 1969). Chapter 4 will consider behaviorist theory at greater length.

Gestalt and cognitive theories

Man is a reasoning animal.

—Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, 63 A.D.

Behaviorists view organisms as essentially *passive* receivers of stimuli. Indeed, early behaviorists viewed the brain as a kind of switchboard that merely routes the proper responses to incoming stimuli. In contrast, Gestalt and cognitive psychologists see the organism as an *active* agent in receiving, using, manipulating, and transforming information. They depict people as thinking, planning, problem solving, and decision making—as mentally manipulating images, symbols, and ideas. **Cognition** is a term referring to all the mental processes that transform sensory input in some meaningful fashion—that code, elaborate, store, retrieve, and appropriately use it.

In clear contradiction to behaviorist approaches, cognitive theorists believe that thoughts are causal factors in behavior. They criticize behaviorists for portraying individuals as robots who are mechanically programmed by environmental reinforcements. Instead, cognitive psychologists say that people are capable of intervening in the course of their affairs with conscious deliberation. They view people as able to make decisions which are rational in that the decisions are based upon available information and an abil-

ity to process the information intelligently. Thus cognitive psychologists are interested in how we use information from our environment and our memories to make decisions about what to do.

The recent surge of interest in cognitive processes has been markedly influenced by the work of earlier Gestalt psychologists. Max Wertheimer (1880–1943) and two of his German coworkers, Wolfgang Köhler (1887–1967) and Kurt Koffka (1886–1941), are considered founders of the Gestalt movement (*Gestalt* is a German word meaning configuration or organization). The major emphasis of the Berlin Gestalt group was on the part-whole relationship, especially as it found expression within perceptual phenomena. The Gestalt psychologists emphasized that parts or elements do not exist in isolation; rather, they are organized into wholes. For instance, when we look at a building, we do not see lumber, shingles, bricks, glass, and other components—instead we see a house. Hence, the brain is said to process, organize, and interpret stimuli received from receptor organs; it relates an experience to other experiences in terms of some larger, more inclusive context.

The initial impetus to Gestalt psychology came in 1910 when Wertheimer discovered the *phi phenomenon*. The phi phenomenon involves the illusion of motion. If two lights blink on and off at a certain rate, they give the impression that the light is moving back and forth. The principle finds expression in motion pictures when stills are shown in rapid succession and in the apparent movement of neon-lighted arrows that seem to fly when lighted in succession. The experience of motion emerges from our organizing elements into wholes.

Gestalt and cognitive theories have had a major impact upon the work of such influential social psychologists as Kurt Lewin (1939, 1948, 1951), Fritz Heider (1946, 1958), Solomon Asch (1946), Leon Festinger (1957), and Theodore Newcomb (1950, 1961). Such orientations have found reflection in various theories of attitude consistency: people tend to organize their attitudes in a harmonious manner so that their attitudes are not in conflict (see Chapter 6). And they have found expression in attribution theory, which deals with the process by which people impute causes to behavior (see Chapter 2).

Field theory

Field theory is closely identified with Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) and his students. Although at one time a member of the Berlin Gestalt group, Lewin moved in sufficiently new directions for social psychologists to distinguish his field theory from Gestalt theory. Lewin's approach was based on the concept of **field** or **life space**. He felt that all psychological events, be they acting, thinking, dreaming, hoping, or whatever, are a function of life space—the person and the environment viewed as one constellation of interdependent forces (Deutsch, 1968). The life space consists of all past, present, and future events, since all three aspects of life can influence behavior in any single situation.

This emphasis on the relatedness of the individual and the environment constituted a major contribution to the field of psychology. Traditionally, psychologists had focused on the characteristics of individuals (“instincts,” “heredity,” “intelligence,” “needs,” and “habits”) relatively independently of the situations in which the individuals

operated. But according to Lewin, statements that do not take the situation into account are unacceptable. Lewin would rule out such observations as the following: "He is psychotic because of his heredity." "He became leader of the group because of his personality." "Her emotional outburst was due to her hysteria." "Friends work together better than strangers." (Deutsch, 1968.)

Lewin stressed that the understanding of behavior requires knowledge not only of a person's past experiences, present attitudes, and future expectations, but also of the immediate context or situation. John R. P. French (1944) inadvertently demonstrated this principle when he undertook an experiment designed to compare the behavior of organized and unorganized groups in a fear-provoking situation. While students were completing questionnaires in a locked room, the experimenter switched on a smoke machine that sent smoke curling under the door of the experiment room. Shortly thereafter, a fire siren was sounded. Unhappily for French, some students reacted in a disappointingly calm manner. In one group, a student said, "I smell smoke. Is there a fire?" while another serenely observed, "They probably want to test our psychological reactions." In another group, the first student to observe the smoke jumped up, shoved open the locked door, and knocked over the smoke machine. The response of subjects, then, depended on how they defined the *situation*—whether they saw the smoke as part of an experimental hoax or as caused by a real fire. The unexpected results of French's experiment demonstrate that social psychologists cannot interpret a subject's responses unless they have knowledge of the totality of psychological facts that exist in the person's life space at the time of the experiment.

Lewin's interest in life space led him to the study of group dynamics. One of his studies concerned behavior in various social climates (Lewin, Lippitt, and White, 1939). The research dealt with democratic and authoritarian leadership and the effects of such leadership on the productiveness and behavior of a group of boys. Authoritarian leadership was found to be accompanied by high levels of frustration and some degree of aggression toward the leader. When the leader was present, productivity was high; when he was absent, it was low. In contrast, democratic leadership was associated with greater individual happiness, more group-minded activity, greater productivity (especially in the leader's absence), and less aggressive displays. Studies such as this opened up important new ideas for social research and contributed to the growth of social psychology. Shortly before his death, Lewin was instrumental in developing what is now termed sensitivity training. The T-groups (training groups) that he set up were the first part of a movement later characterized by encounter groups.

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory has roots within both psychology, identified with such psychologists as John W. Thibaut and Harold H. Kelley (1959), and sociology, identified with such sociologists as George C. Homans (1961, 1974) and Peter M. Blau (1964). However, the theory has gained popularity only in the last decade, during which time publications in the area have grown exponentially (Beniger and Savory, 1981). The tradition represents an attempt to integrate the behaviorist theory that learning is brought about through reward and punishment with the principles of classical economics. According to this theory, people enter into exchange relationships because they de-



Social Exchange: Marriage and Divorce

According to social exchange theorists, people enter a marriage relationship because they anticipate that their rewards will outdistance their costs. However, they will continue in the relationship only so long as they define it as being more rewarding than it is costly.

(Patrick Reddy)

rive rewards from doing so. Social exchange theorists broaden the economist's concept of exchange of commodities to include the exchange of social approval, love, gratitude, security, recognition, and so on. They broaden the behaviorist's theory of learning to include the process by which people satisfy one another's needs and by which they reward and punish one another.

In social exchange theory people are viewed as being engaged in a sort of mental bookkeeping that involves a ledger of rewards, costs, and profits. *Rewards* are anything that human beings will incur costs to obtain. *Costs* are whatever human beings attempt to avoid. And *profits* are rewards less costs. Thus social behavior consists of an exchange of activity between at least two people that is perceived as being more or less rewarding or costly to one or the other. Such an activity (a job, a love affair, a marriage, a friendship) will continue only if it is profitable to both parties (relative to alternative activities). (See Chapter 9.) By way of illustration, let us assume that you and I are co-workers. I continually ask you for advice; you continually provide me with it. We are engaged in social exchange. I exchange my approval, recognition, and gratitude for