



a Pelican Original

The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour

Michael Argyle



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

Michael Argyle was born in Nottingham in 1925; went to Nottingham High School and Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was a navigator in the R.A.F. He became University Lecturer in Social Psychology at Oxford in 1952 and has promoted teaching and research in this subject at Oxford ever since. He has been engaged in research in various aspects of social psychology for the last fifteen years, and is particularly interested in the experimental study of social interaction and its application to wider social problems. During sabbatical terms and long vacations, he has been a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, and has been visiting lecturer or professor at the Universities of Michigan, British Columbia, Ghana and Delaware.

Michael Argyle is the author of *The Scientific Study of Social Behaviour*, *Religious Behaviour*, *Psychology and Social Problems*, amongst other books, and has written numerous articles in British and American Journals. He has recently become a Fellow of Wolfson College. He was Social Psychology Editor of the *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* from 1962-7 and helped to found this journal. He is married and has four children; his hobbies are travel, interpersonal behaviour, Utopian speculation and playing the goat.

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* A full list of books and papers cited thus is to be found at the end of the book.

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

It is often argued that modern psychology has become out of touch with the realities of everyday life. There is some truth in the argument. The rigorously controlled experiments which are required in scientific work must usually be carried out in artificial laboratory settings, and in the last decades psychologists have often been more interested in devising experiments to test hypotheses than in making and systematizing observations on everyday behaviour of ordinary people. This book comes as a refreshing change. It is about one particular aspect of social psychology – the ways in which people behave to each other. It is difficult to think of anything which has more relevance to everything one does while not actually asleep or unconscious. Although the findings of research on this subject have great generality, readers of this book will discover that the subject can be treated with scientific rigour.

The author, Michael Argyle, is a leading British social psychologist. He has contributed to his subject at all levels, in his writing on social psychology in general, in theoretical contributions – for instance in his development of the concept of introjection – and through empirical studies of industrial life and also in the laboratory, as in his studies of the part played by eye-to-eye contact during conversation.

In this book Argyle surveys the whole field of the psychological study of behaviour between people, but he chooses several topics to discuss in depth. Some people say that psychology is mainly common sense dressed up in fancy language. For such people this book will be full of surprises because many of the research findings could not have been anticipated by a thoughtful person sitting in an armchair and analysing what happens when people meet. The reason is that we all spend much of our time interacting with other people, with the result that the habits we use in such interaction have been practised over and over again and become automatic. We are no longer

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aware what we do. In this way, as well as in others, social interaction resembles many skills, and one of Argyle's most stimulating and original ideas comes from this analogy.

The book opens with an analysis of the social motives which energize and direct social behaviour. It is in this chapter that there is the closest tie with the psychology of the individual, but even here the author uncovers certain motives which are purely social in origin and which would not be discovered by a psychologist studying the individual in a non-social setting. The author then goes on to discuss the actual behaviour of people in social settings, the social techniques which they use, varying from bodily contact to the persuasive use of language, and he looks at the various styles which people employ in using these techniques. Then there are sections on the way people perceive each other and themselves, on the different kinds of bond which can exist between people and on the determinants of friendship. Other sections are concerned with the relations between interpersonal behaviour and the group and the culture in which people live. Particular attention is given to the importance to the individual of the way other people react to him. The last chapters are concerned with applications of the topic, in the study of mental disorder; in professional social skills such as in interviewing, public speaking, the rearing of children, and in teaching; and finally there is a section on methods of teaching social skills.

For the student of psychology this book will be valuable because of the author's survey of relevant work and because of his original ideas. For others it will provide an illustration of one of the values of psychology, which is that it helps one to think objectively about difficult subjects. The difficulty lies in the fact that these subjects are normally talked about imprecisely or that the observer himself is so involved in what is going on that he cannot see actions for words, or principles for detail.

B. M. FOSS

PREFACE

MAN is a social animal: he collaborates with others to pursue his goals and satisfy his needs. It is well known that relations with others can be the source of the deepest satisfactions and of the blackest misery. Moralists, novelists and others have written about these things, but the detailed analysis of social interactions and relationships has been lacking. Recent research by social psychologists has made these phenomena very much clearer. In particular there have been important advances in the experimental analysis of social encounters at the level of such things as eye-movements, the timing of speech, and non-verbal communication.

This research has a number of possible applications. The work of many people consists of dealing with people, rather than with things – teachers, psychologists, air hostesses, managers, and many others: research has been done into the social techniques which are most effective, and into how such skills can be taught. Many people are lonely and unhappy, some are mentally ill, because they are unable to establish and sustain social relationships with others. Many everyday encounters are unpleasant, embarrassing, or fruitless, because of inept social behaviour. Conflicts between different social classes and different cultural groups are partly due to the difficulties of interaction. Many of those difficulties and frustrations could be eliminated by a wider understanding, and better training in the skills of social interaction.

This book reflects the activities of the Social Skills research group at Oxford. I am grateful to Professor A. B. Cherns and the Social Science Research Council for financing this research, and to all those who have been associated with the group, especially to Dr Adam Kendon, who has collaborated over this work and made valuable comments on most of the ms., and to Dr E. R. F. W. Crossman, Douglas Seymour, Nicholas Bateson, Janet Dean, Professor J. Ex, Mansur Lalljee, Mary Lydall, Peter

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CHAPTER I

SOCIAL MOTIVATION

MOST people spend a great deal of their time engaging in some kind of social interaction. They live together, work together, and spend spare time with their friends. Why do they do this? Why don't we all behave like hermits, living and working alone? In fact for most individuals solitary confinement, or other forms of isolation for more than short periods, are very unpleasant indeed. Loss of 'face' in the Far East is a cause of suicide, and rejection by friends in our own society is a common source of distress. The explanation given by earlier thinkers was that humans (and most animals) have a 'herd instinct' or 'gregarious instinct' which draws them together. It is now realized that people seek a number of more specific goals in social situations – help with work or other activities, friendship, guidance, power, admiration, and so on.

Different people seek different things in social situations. In the present state of knowledge it looks as if social behaviour is the product of at least seven different drives. A 'drive' can be defined as a persistent tendency to seek certain goals. As well as directing people towards goals, a drive is a source of energy; when the drive is operating there is a general increase of vigour. Much the same is true of biological drives such as hunger: when a person is hungry he will seek food with increased effort. Furthermore the drive can be subdivided into a number of more specific ones for salt, sugar, and so on: animals deprived of one of these substances will select a diet which makes good the deficit.

There is as yet no final agreement on how social motivation should be divided up. What will be done here is to offer a provisional list of seven motivational sources of interpersonal behaviour. These are sufficient to account for the phenomena described in this book, and each has been extensively studied by psychologists and others. Later in this chapter some account will be given of how these drives function and of their origins in

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childhood experience or innate tendencies. Here, then, is the provisional list, together with a note of the goals which are sought in each case. These goals are either responses which are sought from others, or types of relationships with other people.

1. *Non-social drives which can produce social interaction* (such as biological needs for food and water, the need for money) – various kinds of cooperative or competitive behaviour.

2. *Dependency* – acceptance, interaction, help, protection and guidance, especially from people in positions of power and authority.

3. *Affiliation* – physical proximity, eye-contact, warm and friendly responses and acceptance by peers and groups of peers.

4. *Dominance* – acceptance by others, and groups of others, as the task-leader, being allowed to talk most of the time, take the decisions, and be deferred to by the group.

5. *Sex* – physical proximity, bodily contact, etc., eye-contact, warm friendly and intimate social interaction, usually with attractive peers of the opposite sex.

6. *Aggression* – to harm other people physically, verbally or in other ways.

7. *Self-esteem and ego-identity* – for other people to make approving responses and to accept the self-image as valid.

HOW MOTIVATION WORKS

Before describing how these particular social drives operate, it may be useful to say something about human motivation in general.

Biological and other drives. The best-understood drives are hunger and thirst. There seems to be a bodily self-regulating system which keeps the levels of food and water in the body at an equilibrium level. For example, when there is a shortage of water, thirst is experienced and this drive is aroused, leading to behaviour which makes good the deficit and restores the equilibrium. Most of the other drives do not work like this. Sex is an interesting intermediate case: in lower animals sexual arousal depends on the level of sex hormone in the blood stream

— though there is no deficit here; in higher mammals and in man there is little connexion between hormones and sexual arousal and activity; castration after puberty leads to no loss of sexual desire (Ford and Beach, 1952).*

In the case of other drives, such as those for affiliation and money, the contents of the bloodstream are not involved: whatever physiological basis they have must be in the brain. There is no deficit, so that satisfaction of the need does not lead to a cessation of activity: it may lead to more.

Conscious and unconscious motivation. It is said that a drive is operating when a person is observed to be pursuing some goal in an energetic and persistent manner. Often people are consciously aware of the goals which they are seeking, but this is not always so, and then the motivation must simply be deduced from the behaviour, or measured in certain indirect ways, which will be described below. The operation of 'unconscious' motivation is illustrated by the following experiment. A subject is hypnotized and given the suggestion that he should, for example, stand on the table at a certain time by the clock: he is told to forget this suggestion before being de-hypnotized. When the appointed time comes the subject will rather sheepishly stand on the table, and if asked why he is doing it will make up some reason. Clearly he is unaware of the true motivation, and furthermore is liable to make up other reasons for his actions. It is clear that conscious experiences are only a very partial and sometimes a quite misleading guide to the underlying processes.

Arousal and satiation. People are not hungry all the time; the momentary strength of any drive depends on how far it has been aroused or satiated. It is now known that the activation of any drive system involves a similar pattern of physiological 'arousal'. This consists of electrical activity originating in the hypothalamus, and of activity in the sympathetic nervous system, producing higher blood pressure, a faster heart-beat and

* An alphabetical list of books and papers referred to is at the end of the book.

perspiration – though the physiological pattern varies between individuals.

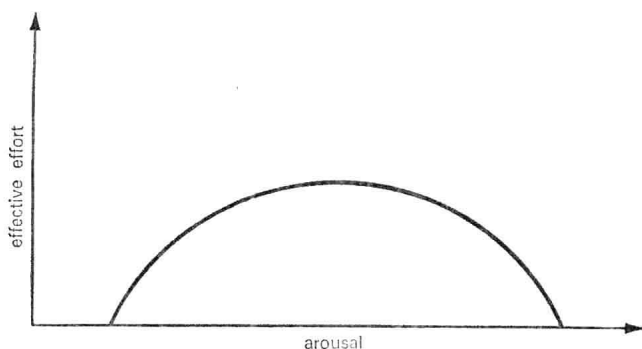


Figure 1. The relation between motivational arousal and effective effort.

A well-known law in psychology states that increasing arousal has an energizing effect, which first improves performance, but later leads to deterioration, as emotionality disrupts the pattern of behaviour. The optimum level of arousal for most effective performance is lower the more complex the task.

An ingenious experiment by Schachter and Wheeler (1962) showed how the same physiological state may be experienced differently, and how physiological and external stimuli may interact to produce a particular kind of emotional or motivational state. Some subjects were given an injection of adrenalin, while others had neutral injections of salt solution. Some of each group of subjects were placed in the company of a confederate of the experimenter, who generally behaved in a wild and crazy manner. Further groups of subjects were subjected to an insulting interview, in the company of a confederate, who became very angry with the interviewer. The main finding was that the adrenalin-injected subjects became very euphoric in the first situation, and aggressive in the second – more so than those injected with salt solution. Whenever a drive is activated, physiological arousal occurs, though the feelings experienced and the behaviour produced are specific to the drive.