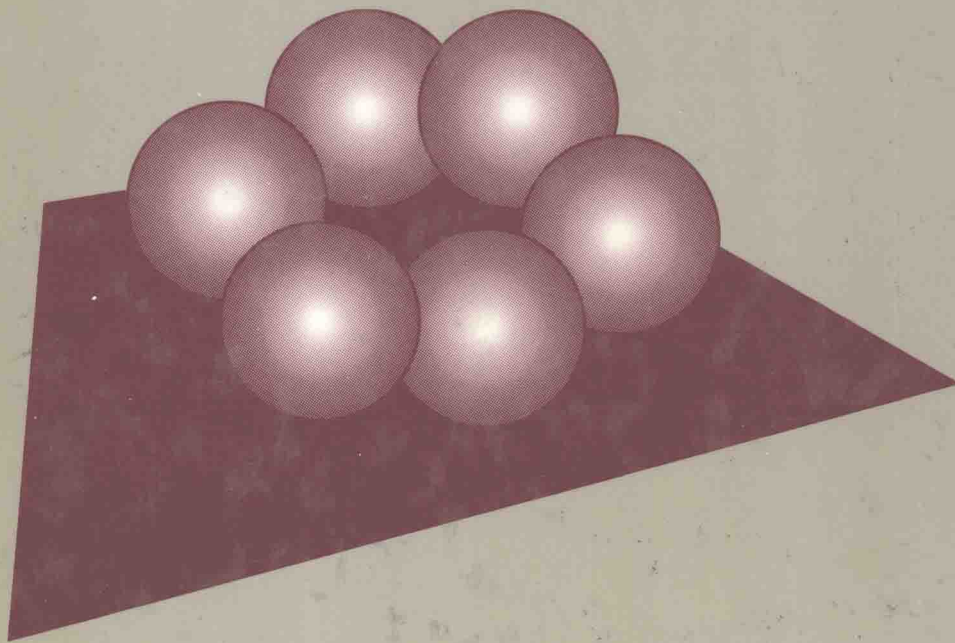


Social Psychology

Seventh Edition



Alfred R. Lindesmith
Anselm L. Strauss
Norman K. Denzin

7TH
EDITION

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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PREFACE

The seventh edition of *Social Psychology* updates the previous edition. We have expanded the selected readings sections at the end of each chapter, introducing the reader to new materials which have appeared since the last edition. We have written suggested study questions at the end of each chapter. We have sought to bring greater clarification to our symbolic-interactionist point of view. As in the last edition, we compare it with semiotics, ethnomethodology, artificial intelligence theories, and the many cognitive social psychologies that now vie for attention in the field. We have deleted outdated materials, kept our discussions of Alzheimer's disease, of AIDS, with new material on the black experience with AIDS, and expanded

our discussions of gay and lesbian experiences. We have retained our discussions of alcoholism, family violence, gender stratification, aging, illness, and death. In the interest of clarity we have added a number of figures which summarize our discussions of cognitive and interpretive social psychologies, signs and symbols, and theories of the self. A Coda returns the reader to Chapter 1 and discusses how each chapter has taken up the problems of freedom, creativity, stability, change, and constraint in human society. The Epilogue, which some might want to insert after Chapter 1, presents our views on science and the interpretive process. The Glossary defines the key terms used in the text and offers a

language for doing the kind of social psychology we advocate. The extensive bibliography is intended to assist in research projects. A test item file is also available.

OVERVIEW OF TEXT

The two chapters in **Part I, The Social Psychological Imagination**, are intended to offer an overview of our social-psychological position which is called symbolic interactionism. We compare this perspective to other dominant social psychological theories, including artificial intelligence. In *Chapter 2* we examine the evolutionary setting of human behavior, review the theory called sociobiology, and introduce a discussion of language and symbolic environments.

The four chapters in **Part II, Social Structure and Language**, speak to the "symbolic" aspect of symbolic interactionism. *Chapter 3* introduces the study of language (semiotics). *Chapter 4* connects language to groups and social structures. *Chapter 5* shows how language and group experience define our emotional experiences. The problems of addiction, drug experiences, and Alzheimer's disease are interpreted from within the symbolic interactionist position. *Chapter 6* extends this framework to human memory, planning behavior, and the motives, excuses, and accounts humans give for their conduct.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 in **Part III, Childhood Socialization**, discuss how the social object called child is produced by social groups in and through the process of language acquisition. The origins of the self (*Chapter 8*) are located in early childhood experiences with adult caretakers. The theories of self proposed by Cooley and Mead, Freud, Lacan, Erikson, and Sullivan are reviewed. Mead's views on interaction in childhood are extended in *Chapter 9* to include the

socializing of emotionality and the learning of gender.

The six chapters in **Part IV, Self and Society**, in part return to our opening themes of freedom and constraint in human societies. *Chapter 10* details our approach to the study of face-to-face interaction. *Chapter 11* studies those situations when persons cede, or give self-control, to others. *Chapter 12* locates the individual in a mass society, and examines how moral careers and alienation are experienced. *Chapter 13* takes up the topic of sexuality and sexual identification and presents an interactionist treatment of these topics. *Chapter 14* treats the phenomenon of deviance and deviant worlds. We offer analyses of addiction, family violence, political crime, and individual deviance. *Chapter 15* discusses the existential moments of illness, aging, and dying and shows how group rituals structure and give meaning to these experiences. The *Coda* returns to *Chapter 1* and the promise and focus of an interactionist social psychology. The *Epilogue* presents our view on science as symbolic activity.

As with the last edition, this edition is written in the spirit of C. W. Mills' *Sociological Imagination*. We ask how a sociological imagination, sensitive to power, gender, language, and subjective experience, can speak to our collective lives in the last decade of the twentieth century. We hope that this revision continues to convey the excitement and understanding that comes from the application of symbolic interactionism to the study of human group life. We regard this perspective as the most sociological of all social psychologies. It is our hope that interested readers will be motivated to read more deeply in this perspective and to perhaps examine the journals *Symbolic Interaction* and *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, which presents the latest research and theorizing in this tradition.

At Prentice Hall we thank Ed Stanford, Nancy Roberts, and Virginia McCarthy for

their continued interest and support in this project. We also thank Jeff Ediger for his assistance in preparing this revision, James J. Ennis of the University of Connecticut and Joseph F. Zygmunt of Tufts University for their comments and suggestions for revision, and Richard Louisell and Jamie

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A. R. L.
A. L. S.
N. K. D.

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CHAPTER
1
THE FIELD OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



The two chapters of Part I offer an overview of our social psychological position. In this chapter we have three major goals. The first is to define the field of social psychology. The second is to make a statement concerning our position as social psychologists; we call our point of view *symbolic interactionism*. Our third aim is to compare this point of view with other theories of social psychology.

A DEFINITION OF THE FIELD

Social psychology studies how humans experience freedom and constraint in their daily lives. Humans create and define social experience, but the situations where experience occurs are often given beforehand by the institutions of society. Social, political, gender, economic, cultural, kinship, legal, and religious institutions structure the social situations which give rise to social experience and human consciousness. Social psychology, then, is the study of the interplay between lives and social structure, or biography and society (see Bertaux, 1981).

Social psychologists address two fundamental questions: how humans are created by social order, and in turn how humans create the social orders that shape and mold their behavior. These two questions produce four basic problems pertaining to (1) stability and change in human interaction; (2) the emergence of new forms and patterns of interaction in everyday life; (3) conformity, conventionality, deviance, and power; and (4) social order, constraint, and personal freedom.

Perhaps an example will serve to make our point. American society is a drug-taking society. Not only do Americans use and abuse prescription drugs at a high rate, but alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, and other "street drugs" are regularly consumed by over one half of the adult American population. Twenty-two million Americans—one out of every ten—report having used co-

caine at least once (Gold, 1984, p. 1). In fact, it has become middle-class America's drug of choice, for everyone from athletes and doctors to rock musicians and railroad employees.

Recently the major league baseball commissioner ruled that all professional baseball players must submit to regular drug tests to determine if they were free of illegal drugs, including cocaine. Drug testing for all federal employees also may be required. If it is, some say it will be an invasion of personal freedom.

As society reaches out through its laws and legal agencies into the workplace and home, it creates social situations that constrain and alter human experience. While on the one hand our society encourages drug-taking, it also argues that taking certain drugs is illegal. We have, with this example, an illustration of the four concerns of the social psychologists. Drug-taking experiences will change as a result of these controversies. New drugs will appear, and perhaps some will replace cocaine and alcohol. Some people will conform to the new laws, should they be written; others will deviate and not conform.

As this occurs, society through its laws will exercise power and constraint over those who deviate. Hence, *new* forms of constraint will come into existence as the freedom to take drugs will be challenged, if not taken away.

BASIC SOCIAL PROCESSES

Four fundamental processes structure human experience. The first is material reality itself, including human needs, money, health, housing, work, and labor. The second process involves gender; a system of gender stratification organizes the relation between the sexes in any society (Clough, 1987). Language is the third process; it defines and mediates human experience. Subjective experience is the fourth

major process that orders and gives meaning to human existence.

Gender

All of human experience is gendered, that is, filtered through the socially constructed categories of male and female. These terms are enacted in performances in daily life: in the conversations between males and females (West & Zimmerman, 1987), in dating situations when males open doors for females, and women fix dinners for men. A feminist sociological imagination (Balsamo, 1990; Deegan & Hill, 1987), which draws upon symbolic interactionism, examines how contemporary culture recruits and creates sexually gendered subjects. It asks how deviant labels are applied to men and women who do not fit the "heterosexual" norms of the culture (gays and lesbians), and studies the current AIDS crisis as an instance of the homophobia that permeates much of Western culture. In later chapters we will take up the topics of gender socialization in early childhood, and the worlds of gay men and women. For the moment we note only that gender, a commonly ignored category in social psychological theory, is one of the four basic processes which structures all of human experience.

Language

Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), the Swiss linguist, gave the term *langue* to the system of language that exists for any speech community (i.e., English for Americans). He used the term *parole* to refer to the speaking side of language. Language is "the norm of all other manifestations of speech" (Saussure, 1959, p. 9). Languages are social institutions; they have their own systems of organization and their own history, and they are external to any given speaker. Speech is particular to each user of a language. However, the way any speaker uses a term

will not alter its meaning within *langue*, or the larger language system.

Language refers to (1) a system of signs or words; (2) a set of rules that combines those signs into meaningful utterances (syntax); (3) a system of meanings attached to those words which arises out of use and speech; (4) speech behavior itself; (5) the institution of speaking and thinking for any group, culture, or society; and (6) the culture of a group (see Hymes, 1979).

Language exists over and above speech and can be studied separately from speaking. The science that "*studies the life of signs within a society*" is called semiology, from the Greek word *sēmetō*, or sign. Semiotics is a part of the field of social psychology (Saussure, 1959, p. 16, italics in original).

A sign has two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified*. These two terms refer to the *sound-image* that is heard and seen when a word is spoken (i.e., tree) and the *concept* that is seen as lying behind the sound-image. When I say the word *tree* you hear the sound "tree" and can imagine the picture of a tree in your mind. You have a concept that gives meaning to that word. Saussure (1959, pp. 66–67) called the sound-image the signifier and the concept the signified.

Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results from the simultaneous presence of the others. Like a sheet of paper, thought is the "front and the sound is the back" (Saussure, 1959, p. 114). We cannot divide thought and sound; they depend on each other. The process of using signs, which are like words but mean more than words, is called *signification*.

Robert Perinbanayagam (1985, p. 9) has given the term "signifying act" to the act of articulating "a symbol by the initiator of a message." Humans communicate and interact through signifying acts, which rest on signs and their meanings.

According to Saussure signs are arbitrary and are understood as social facts which exist within the system of language of any

social group. However, groups assign values to their terms so that a sign not only signifies (points to) something in reality, but it gives a value to what is signified. Saussure (1959, pp. 115–16) offers an example:

Modern French *mouton* can have the same signification as English *sheep* but not the same value, and this for several reasons, particularly because in speaking of a piece of meat to be served on the table, English uses *mutton* and not *sheep*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* is due to the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term while the French word does not. (*italics in original*)

We could offer additional examples. The French word *madame*, which refers to a married woman, can signify in English house-madame, meaning a woman who runs a house of prostitution. The English term carries two meanings. Many observers have noted that the English language is sexist and trivializes women (see Nash, 1985, pp. 234–36 for a review). An adult woman can be called a girl, hussy, spinster, broad, mistress, wife, mother, whore, and so on. As Nash notes, English contains thousands of words and phrases that describe women in sexually derogatory ways, but not nearly so many for men. Signs, then, signify reality and give a value, or meaning, to the unit of reality that is signified.

The language system of a society interacts with and reflects the gender stratification of the society, and this system in turn rests on the economic division of labor that exists in the society. Hence, language, gender, and labor, together with subjective experience, constitute four fundamental processes which order social experience.

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

C. Wright Mills (1959) coined the term *sociological imagination* to refer to a form of sociological thought which attempts to speak

to the promise of the social sciences. Borrowing Mills' term, we can call the "social psychological imagination" that perspective which attempts to grasp the larger historical context which shapes lived experiences. This view tries to come to terms with the personal and public problems of any given generation. It studies inner and outer lives, locating each person as a *universal singular* (Sartre, 1981) in his or her historical time. Each person's life is seen as having universal themes which are articulated in his or her experiences with self and others. Social psychology examines the dominant themes of each historical epoch. One social psychologist (Strauss et al., 1985) has studied medical technology and the influence of current medical practices on the experiences of the chronically ill. Lindesmith (1968) has studied the process of drug addiction. Denzin has recently completed a study of the American alcoholic (Denzin, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c). These kinds of investigations attempt to (take common human experiences and reveal how they are given meaning by interacting individuals. They locate these experiences within their historical moment)

The person with social psychological imagination makes an effort to understand how the broader historical scene creates false consciousness, indifference, and insecurity for particular groups of individuals. This imagination promotes self-reflectiveness. It calls for a critical attitude toward history and the world situation that enters one's life on a daily basis through the mass media. This perspective assumes that humans can influence how their histories are made. The social psychological imagination also attempts to identify the dominant themes and problems of any given generation; it then examines those problems as they enter into people's lives. If the 1960s focused on civil rights and the Vietnam War, the 1970s focused on women's rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the like. The 1990s have taken on the threat of nuclear war, personal freedoms, health and medical

care, worldwide terrorism, protection of the natural environment, family violence and child abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse as central problems. We will address these issues throughout this book, and in so doing will attempt to promote a sense of the social psychological imagination in you, the reader.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

The term *symbolic interaction* refers to a sociological and social psychological approach to the study of human group life and human interaction (Blumer, 1969, p. 1).

Within American sociology, the work of Herbert Blumer (1969) has been most commonly associated with this perspective. The work of symbolic interactionists is routinely published in *Symbolic Interaction*, the official Journal of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, and in *Symbolic Interaction: A Research Annual*.

In 1937 Blumer coined the term *symbolic interactionism*. Philosophically, symbolic interactionism is most closely aligned with American Pragmatism (William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey), German Idealism (Hegel, Kant), and German and French Phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty, H. Bergson, Sartre). The perspective has a certain compatibility with various forms of Marxist thought, psychoanalytic theory, phenomenological sociology, semiotics, ethnomethodology, and humanistic and existential psychology and philosophy (Rock, 1979). It is opposed to various "external" models of human experience, including behaviorism and functionalism.

Basic Assumptions

Symbolic interactionism rests on three basic assumptions. *First*, humans act toward things "on the basis of the meanings that

things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Things are termed social objects and they may be as concrete as typewriters and pens, or as abstract as religious and philosophical systems of thought. *Second*, the meanings of social objects arise out of social interaction; meanings are not in objects. *Third*, meanings are "handled in, and modified through an interpretive process" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). That is, people interact with and interpret the objects they act toward. As a consequence, the meanings of objects change in and through the course of action; meanings are not fixed.

For example, an American might well be attracted to a meal which features roast leg of lamb with young potatoes and garden salad. Few Americans would be attracted to "roast leg of sheep." The meaning of the term and the object lies in the interpretive process and in the meanings brought to the object and the word. To take another example, one which reveals how meanings change, the word-phrase *PC* (personal computer) would have little meaning to a person who knew nothing about computers and word processing. Ten years ago personal computers existed for only a few individuals; today they are commonplace. Computers have become personal possessions, and their meanings have drastically changed as a result.

The central object with whom one must deal is oneself. Persons are both objects and subjects to themselves. The division between subjective and objective worlds of experience is removed in symbolic interactionist thought. The world is in the person, just as the person is in the world. The two are connected through the "circuit of selfness" (Sartre, 1956, pp. 155–58) wherein the person, the world, the situation, and self-consciousness interact, interpenetrate, and plunge through one another in a synthesis of being, action, meaning, and consciousness.

Language, as we have indicated, is the means for interaction and the medium

through which it occurs. The term *symbolic* in the phrase *symbolic interaction* refers to the underlying linguistic foundations of human life, just as the word *interaction* refers to the fact that people do not act toward one another, but *interact* with each other. Language, as a system of signs, symbols, oppositions, and meanings, permits people to enter into their own and others' activities and to make those activities objects of meaning and action. Through language, people enter into one another's ongoing lines of conduct. The study of language lies at the core of social psychology, and symbolic interactionism makes language a fundamental point of departure in the study of human interaction (Saussure, 1959).

By *interaction*, symbolic interactionists commit themselves to the study and analysis of the developmental course of action that occurs when two or more persons join their individual lines of action together into joint action, or into interactional sequences. Goffman's studies of encounters (1961), frame analysis (1974), and forms of talk (1981) at times emphasize this interactive feature of human conduct.

Studies of face-to-face interaction reveal its negotiated, situated, temporal, biographical, emergent, constructed, and taken-for-granted properties (Garfinkel, 1967; Strauss, 1978). The central object to be negotiated in interaction is identity (Stone, 1962; Strauss, 1969). The meanings of identity, one's own and that of others, lie not in people, but in the interaction itself. Hence, the study of symbolic interaction requires constant attention to the study of a process—the process of interaction. This emphasis on process sets symbolic interaction apart from other points of view that stress the fixed, static, structural, and attribute-like properties of persons and their actions (Strauss, 1977, pp. 282–84).

The methodology of symbolic interactionism is naturalistic, descriptive, and interpretive (Denzin, 1988). The interactionist seeks to study symbolic interaction in the

natural settings of the everyday world. Experimental methods and the use of social survey techniques are seldom endorsed by symbolic interactionists. The languages, meanings, actions, and voices of ordinary people—the verbs and nouns of the worlds they are experiencing—are captured in interactionist works. Preferred methods include participant observation, life stories, unobtrusive methods, ethnographies, and thickly contextualized interaction episodes or behavior specimens; although any method which yields understanding is to be applauded. Thick description is a goal (Geertz, 1973). Interactionist interpretations seek to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation and to embed description in relational, interactional, historical, and temporal materials (Sartre, 1956; Denzin, 1989a, 1989b). Causal explanations are set aside in favor of processual interpretations (Lindesmith, 1968).

Applications

Symbolic interactionists have contributed understanding to such diverse fields as social deviance and mental illness (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1961), drug addiction (Lindesmith, 1968), collective behavior (Blumer, 1978), childhood socialization (Denzin, 1977), death and dying (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), aging (Unruh, 1980), illness and pain (Charmaz, 1980), and the sociology of art (Becker, 1982).

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that demands that the study of human group life be grounded in the everyday natural world of interacting individuals.

Assertions

To establish the framework of symbolic interactionism, we can enumerate a number of key assertions that are central to this perspective. They may be stated as follows:

- ① Biological variables do not determine behavior; they only influence it.