

Preface

Like many textbooks, *Social Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives on People* grew out of the need for more student-oriented material in the courses we teach. We wanted a textbook that would encourage the natural interest in the topic of social behavior that most students have and at the same time develop an understanding of and appreciation for contemporary theories, studies, and applications. It soon became clear that an appropriate organizational framework was necessary if this end was to be satisfactorily achieved. But how does one systematically relate the various ideas and research of the ever-proliferating topics and subtopics of the field in an integrated fashion? How does one convey a sense of the "big picture," when some practicing social psychologists are expressing doubts that one even exists?

The Organizational Framework

Social psychology is a pluralistic enterprise and this pluralism reflects the basic complexity of human social behavior. In line with this thinking each chapter is organized around five broad perspectives of social behavior. (Cultural differences, the life-span, the individual, the situation, and the social group) Each perspective or analytic lens, gives a different but not necessarily independent or contradictory view. Each makes certain suggestions about appropriate methods of study, important variables, and concepts. As you will note, the perspectives are not new. What is new is using them as an organizational framework for a textbook thereby providing consistency across diverse content areas.

Two of the perspectives, the cultural and the life-span deal with the "large-context" influences on the social behavior of relatively large numbers of people over rather extended periods of time. They address the kinds of questions that recent critics of social psychology argue have been too long overlooked. We hope inclusion of these two perspectives at the beginning of each chapter will encourage students to question the cultural, historical, and age specificity of most social psychological research and theory.

The three others, the individual, the situation, and the social-group perspec-

tives, focus on the compelling experiences of individuals and small groups in their here-and-now environments. They cover the topics, questions, and research that have traditionally constituted most of the social psychologist's domain: for example, the effects on social behavior of cognitive processes, emotions, and person-to-person interactions. In reading the sections on these three perspectives bear in mind that there are no clear lines separating one from another. A single study may be equally at home in two or more sections. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, there is a trend toward conceptualizations that incorporate at least two of the three perspectives. For simplicity of discussion, however, we decided to maintain the perspectives as separate divisions.

Do the perspectives work to bring about their desired end? You, the instructor or student, are the ultimate judge of that. Our experience indicates that they do. In writing our chapters we were often pleasantly surprised at how well the perspectives organized new material and demanded the presentation of a balanced review of each topic. Moreover, our students usually find that the perspectives offer a logical, understandable overview, which greatly reduces the overwhelming enormity of the field of social psychology. We would be interested in hearing from you about your experiences in using the book.

Flexible Coverage

The sequence of chapters generally follows the traditional organization from topics focusing on the individual (attachment and self-perception) to the large social group (social change). With the exception of the first two chapters, there is no implicit logic to the ordering. Each chapter is organized around the five perspectives and can "stand on its own." If the instructor wishes, the chapters may be covered in a different order.

Applications

The core text of each chapter is supplemented by three kinds of insert material: *Close-ups* provide detailed discussion of study methods and results; *Social Stats* contain statistics from surveys and demographic studies on current social trends; and *Case Studies* offer in-depth descriptions and discussions of individuals.

In addition, each chapter contains a number of examples of applied social psychology and ends with a separate section discussing one example of applied research. The amount of material on applied social psychology reflects our conclusion about its current and future importance to the field. The decision to integrate this material into each chapter, rather than the more conventional strategy of placing it in a separate chapter, is based on our belief that the distinction between "basic" and "applied" is often rather arbitrary and likely to become more so in the future.

Research Studies

For somewhat different reasons, research issues are also integrated into the chapters. The collective experience of the authors suggests that with introductory students, particularly nonmajors, research issues are best given in small doses and discussed in conjunction with specific contents. In this way their relevance to the understanding of social behavior is most apparent. Thus, our preliminary coverage of research methods in Chapter 1 is brief and details are discussed later as part of the other chapters.

Since the book covers the basic topics of the field, we feel that it is a comprehensive text. We did wish to avoid writing a book that reads like a series of mini-*Psychological Bulletin* literature reviews and have made a conscientious effort to be selective in citing studies. We are far from short on material, however. "People" cites about 1500 references—45% post 1975 and 12% since 1980.

The Total Teaching/Learning Package

In addition to the text which incorporates comprehensive coverage of social psychology for the instructors and pedagogical material for the students the following ancillaries have been prepared:

**Teaching Social Psychology: A Sourcebook with Test Bank for Instructors* including components of effective teaching, course objectives, critical learner characteristics, strategies of instruction, evaluating teaching effectiveness, checklists for test construction, chapter-by-chapter aids, (learning objectives, lecture and discussion notes, demonstrations and projects, list of readings and films) and over 24 hand-outs which can be duplicated to supplement the lectures. Finally, there are approximately 600 multiple-choice items written by Kenneth Heilman, a psychologist whose speciality is tests and measurements.

**Learning About Social Psychology: A Student Study Guide* covers study suggestions, learning objectives and four sets of practice items for each chapter (sentence completion, vocabulary, matching and multiple choice items).