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Individual and Society: Sociological Social Psychology

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Preface

After recently reflecting on our experiences as students, we realized that our initiation into social psychology and the discipline of sociology was remarkably similar. We both started our college careers as psychology majors and were intrigued by classic studies on perception and behavior covered in our undergraduate social psychology courses. Later, as we discovered sociology, we became sensitive to how societal, as well as individual-level, factors shape people's social experiences. This orientation was solidified in our graduate coursework in social psychology in our sociology program, at which point we found ourselves considering our experiences and how sociological theories and concepts applied to our personal biographies as well as to various social issues and problems.

When we were in college, there wasn't a widely used textbook on sociological sociology that was broad in focus and covered all of the different kinds of research done in the field and its applications. In writing this text, we sought to synthesize the literature in sociological social psychology in a way that conveys both its eclectic nature and its utility as a tool for enhancing people's understandings of the relationship between individuals and the larger society. Moreover, we wanted to do so in a manner that is assessable to college

undergraduates and spurs their curiosity about how and why people think and act in particular ways.

What Makes This Book Unique

This book covers each of the three research traditions in sociological social psychology: symbolic interactionism (SI), social structure and personality (SSP), and group processes and structures (GPS). When defining the field in the early 1980s, sociologist James House described two types, or “faces,” of sociological social psychology—SI and SSP. The third face, GPS, emerged later, in the 1990s.

Other sociology textbooks make distinctions between the different “faces” of social psychology. However, unlike these books, we organized our initial set of chapters by research tradition (or “face” of sociological social psychology), rather than by topic, and emphasize the different theoretical frameworks within which social psychological analyses are conducted within each orientation. We also make clear the link between “face” of sociological social psychology, theory, and methodology.

Qualitative research (favored by symbolic interactionists) and quantitative research (typically used within SSP and GPS) serve very different purposes. We provide a more detailed discussion of the distinctions between these two kinds of research than other textbooks and identify when and why particular methods are used by sociological social psychologists. Here, and throughout the rest of the book, we give examples of both classic and contemporary studies from within

each of the three “faces” of sociological social psychology so that students gain a full understanding of the diverse nature of research in the field.

As we describe the different faces of sociological social psychology and the research they have generated, we emphasize core sociological ideas and their applications. At various points in each chapter, we ask students to step back from the academic discussion to consider how particular theoretical perspectives and concepts within a given face of sociological social psychology apply to their personal experiences or the lives of others.

Once students have learned about the different types of sociological social psychology, the breadth of the research they have generated, and how it can be applied to everyday situations, we discuss the utility of integrating research from across traditions when studying particular topics. We do this toward the end, rather than at the beginning of, the learning process. By starting with the foundations of each of the three research orientations or faces, and their unique foci, this book is structured to provide students with an in-depth and thorough understanding of the field of sociological social psychology; how and why social psychologists trained in sociology ask particular kinds of questions; the types of research they are involved in; and how their findings have been, or can be, applied to contemporary societal patterns and problems.

Although this book does not focus on psychological social psychology, we discuss some classic studies within this tradition that are relevant to the topics and

issues addressed by sociological social psychologists. Moreover, by making clear the distinction between sociological and psychological social psychology in our introductory chapter, we show how the research questions asked, and answered, by social psychologists working within all three research orientations within sociological social psychology (symbolic interactionism, social structure and personality, and group processes and structures) reflect the key themes of their home discipline.

Like the first edition, the book's chapters are cumulative in their organization, such that theoretical frameworks, concepts, and methods that appear early on in the text are revisited and applied in the later chapters, which focus on the various topics studied by sociological social psychologists (socialization; self and identity; emotion; deviance; mental health; personal relationships; prejudice and discrimination; and social influence, constraint, and collective behavior). In teaching our social psychology courses, we have found that this integrated approach to knowledge building works well, especially when it comes to the discussion of theories and research findings that are complex or in opposition to common ways of viewing the world.

New to the Second Edition

Updated Content: Discussions of topics related to current events and changing societal patterns pertaining to immigration, race relations, same-sex marriage, gender and division of household labor, and college students' sexual behaviors

have been modified to include the latest research findings. We have also updated statistics from Census and other governmental sources, the General Social Survey, and polls measuring the population's attitudes on various social issues throughout the text.

New or Expanded Content: In addition, we have included, or expanded, our coverage of, a number of topics, per the suggestion of reviewers or in response to the new developments within the literature. Most notable are the following changes.

- We introduce the concept of *intersectionality* earlier, in the introductory chapter, where we ask students to make a visual inventory of their various statuses (an exercise we repeat at the end of the book, with a series of reflection questions, so that students can assess how their understanding of this impact of the organization of society on their lives has increased over the course of the semester). We also give greater attention to the literature on intersectionality throughout the book, with more detailed discussions of how status characteristics combine to shape people's social experiences in the chapters on socialization (Chapter 6), self and identity (Chapter 7), race/ethnicity (Chapter 12), and social movements (Chapter 13).
- We added a section to Chapter 2, on research methods, on the use of *available data and content analysis*. We follow this with examples of these types of analyses in Chapter 2 and in subsequent chapters on emotion (Chapter 8),

personal relationships (Chapter 11), and prejudice and discrimination (Chapter 12).

- Chapter 6, on socialization, now includes a detailed discussion of *new ways of conceptualizing of gender*, where we make distinctions between gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. These concepts are applied throughout the text and, in particular, in relation to topics pertaining to self and identity (Chapter 7), the resistance of stigma (in Chapter 9 on Deviance), and personal relationships (Chapter 11).
- We describe generational differences in perception and behavior in the sections on life course research (Chapter 4) and cohort differences in individuals socialization experiences (Chapter 6), where we discuss emerging research on *Generation Z* and how its members, who were born in the digital era, are likely to differ from Millennials. Students are given the opportunity to listen to a podcast on Generation Z, the nature of the social context into which they are coming of age, and how their attitudes and behaviors are likely to affect society.
- We also review the results of recent studies of the impact of *social media and new communication technologies*, such as Twitter, on people's self-concepts (Chapter 7), emotions (Chapter 8), social networks, friendships, romantic relationships, social development, and psychological well-being (Chapter 11). Overall, the results of these studies are consistent with our conclusion in the

previous edition that the Internet and other forms of electronically-mediated communication have changed, but not radically altered, the nature of people's social relationships.

- At the request of reviewers, Chapter 12 (Prejudice and Discrimination) now includes a detailed discussion of *microaggressions* and the impact of this pervasive form of discrimination on well-being among racial/ethnic and sexual minorities. Cultural shifts reflected in how people respond to microaggressions, and the debate within sociology about the consequences of these changes, are also reviewed, after which students are asked to consider their own views on this issue.
- Given the increase in research on *conspiracy theories*, we added a section on this form of collective behavior to Chapter 13 (Social Influence, Constraint, and Collective Behavior). Here we describe the characteristics of contemporary conspiracy theories, most of which have political themes, their origin and their consequences at both the individual and societal level.
- Toward the end of the text, we expanded our coverage of *contemporary social movements* (Chapter 13) to include progressive Millennial movements, with an emphasis on *Black Lives Matter*. We also added a section on the *Tea Party* and how its ascendance reflects a broader global trend.

As indicated earlier, much of the information new to the second edition is followed by an activity or exercise designed to facilitate students' reflection upon, or application, of the material presented.

New Closing Chapter: To solidify students' understanding of the both the breadth and utility of sociological social psychology, we added a new, final, chapter (*Reflecting On What You Have Learned About Sociological Social Psychology and Its Applications to Everyday Life*) that addresses both of these issues. Here we provide an overview of key book themes, embedded within a review of the literature on grit and achievement, a topic given a lot of media attention in recent years that is rarely examined from a sociological perspective. In doing so, we illustrate how students can apply what they have learned over the course of the semester to this or any other subject pertaining to individuals or society. Once we have exemplified this process, we provide students with an opportunity to go through a similar set up steps focusing on one of a number of contemporary social issues or problems. As noted earlier, our goal in writing this text was for students to become adept in putting social psychological perspectives, concepts, and methods into practice by applying them to both their personal experiences and broader societal patterns. This chapter, which builds on the material covered throughout the book, is structured to help facilitate this outcome.

Teaching Resources for Instructors: New instructional support features include PowerPoint Presentations for each chapter and a revised test bank that includes

three tiers of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions of increasing scope and difficulty. The online Instructors' Manual that accompanied the first edition of the text has also been updated to reflect recent developments in the field. Like its predecessor, it includes detailed chapter summaries; a variety of in-class exercises; written assignments; and links to online resources, including news articles and videos.

Flexibility in How the Book is Used

This book has a number of features that can be used either in or outside of the classroom to enhance students' understanding of research within sociological social psychology and how it pertains to people's everyday lives. Within each chapter there are multiple individual and group exercises that facilitate the application of social psychological perspectives, methodologies, and research findings. In many chapters, we also present news articles that discuss, or illustrate, the concepts and studies covered.

In addition, throughout the book, we have included standard measures of key social psychological concepts (e.g., self-esteem, embarrassability, perspective taking, delinquency, and relationship commitment) for students to complete. Benchmark scores from one or more studies within the literature are included, with which students can compare their own results. Providing samples of commonly used measures is a strategy we have found to be effective in

cultivating student interest in the field and in increasing their understanding of the relevance of social psychological research to their lives.

The use of these features, as well as the exercises and activities described earlier, are optional. While they are designed to stimulate students' interest in particular topics and facilitate their application of the material covered to their social experiences and broader societal patterns, their completion is not required for them to gain an understanding of the information presented in the body of the chapter.

The same is true for the many studies used to illustrate different theories and methods, or to highlight results pertaining to a particular topic that are especially interesting or insightful. Students might be required to have a full understanding of these analyses. However, many students, and their professors, are more interested in the bigger picture, especially given the pace at which material must be covered during the course of the semester. The Key Points to Know, listed at the end of each chapter, provide a succinct overview of main chapter themes. Moreover, each chapter ends with a set of questions for review and reflection designed to help students to synthesize, apply, and critically evaluate the material presented in the chapter. These questions are relatively broad in focus and also touch upon the most important aspects of the chapter. Thus, they should be of use to students seeking to solidify their understanding of

core concepts, theories, methods, and bodies of literature within sociological social psychology.

Goals of the Book

In acknowledgment of the diversity of the field, its methods, and applications, this book is designed to:

- familiarize students with the three “faces” of sociological social psychology and the kinds of research they have generated;
- illustrate the utility of applying multiple perspectives, and methods, to particular topics;
- introduce students to the social psychological literature pertaining to a number of topics of interest to sociologists;
- facilitate students’ abilities to apply social psychological perspectives and findings to various topics and social problems; and
- provide students with the tools needed to analyze their own experiences from a sociological perspective.

Students: When the semester is over, and you have finished this book and your social psychology course, you might go back and think about how has your perspective changed over the course of the semester? What have you gained from learning about sociological social psychology?

As you begin reading this book, you will see the relevance of sociological social psychology to yourself and the people with whom you share your life. As

human beings, we balance multiple levels of expectations (self, others, societal) and plan patterns of action within this context. Sociological social psychology provides us with frameworks for identifying and understanding the nature of these expectations and their consequences. Thus, there is no field of study more relevant to our day-to-day experiences. Together, the three “faces” of sociological social psychology yield substantial insight into the nature of human social behavior at both a general and a personal level.