

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUPS

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The Social Psychology of Groups by John W. Thibaut & Harold H. Kelley

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**THE SOCIAL
PSYCHOLOGY
OF GROUPS**

*The Social Psychology
of Groups*

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Preface

In the summer of 1953, upon finishing an earlier work (Kelley and Thibaut, 1954), we agreed that for our next joint project the order of authorship would be reversed. The continuation of this agreement is indicated by the order in which our names appear on the title page of this book. The order of authorship shown there does not signify any difference in our respective contributions to the thought or writing. It is highly unlikely that either of us could have written this book alone, and we assume equal responsibility for its strength and weaknesses.

On that earlier occasion we resolved that if ever given an appropriate opportunity we would write a textbook for the small group field. Such an opportunity presented itself when both of us were able during the year 1956-1957 to accept appointments as Fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California. The unusually favorable circumstances at the Center encouraged us—even inspired us—before beginning to write to take a long and fresh look at the basic theoretical problems of the small group field. As a result, we devoted most of the first half year to the luxury of developing and following out the implications of what we believe to be a rather new approach to the old problems of interdependence, attraction to the group, power and control, status evaluations, social norms, etc. When the goal of producing a book finally reasserted itself, it was clear that our textbook had also to be a presentation of this theoretical viewpoint.

Despite the attempt to be systematic and cumulative, it must be admitted that this end product of our efforts has a very eclectic appearance. We have borrowed freely, as we saw fit and needed to

borrow, from conceptions originating in such areas as economics, learning theory, and sociology. Ideas have been used that best fit the demands of clear understanding and internal consistency without concern for their disciplinary origins. The selection of concepts and assumptions was not guided by any explicit a priori conception of what a theory of interpersonal relations should be. They were selected (and we would justify them) only on the grounds that they seem to "work" (i.e., they fit or "explain" the data) and they "feel" right (i.e., they seem internally consistent and do not violate our intuitions). We claim no innovations in regard to basic ideas. We have merely selected and revamped for our purposes a number of notions that are already part of the intellectual equipment of most social psychologists.

The refurbishing of old ideas for new purposes inevitably creates problems of disagreement about meanings. In numerous instances we have tried to give rather delimited conceptual definitions to such familiar notions as "power," "attraction to the group," "status," and "group goal"—definitions related to our basic assumptions and more or less consistent with one another. Once a concept had been defined, we tried to adhere to the prescribed meaning and not to attach to it any connotations from prior usage. We must ask the reader to do the same—to avoid bringing to these terms any of the additional meanings they may have for him. This problem might have been avoided by the use of neologisms, but this, in our estimation, creates other and more serious problems. In some instances an attempt has been made to show how our definition or usage relates to existing ones, but a thorough practice of this procedure would have cluttered the text needlessly and overtaxed our capacities for scholarship.

The approach presented here does not flow from our own research efforts (although the reverse process is already in effect) but from our familiarity with the research literature of the field and a strong desire to keep theory and data as intimately related as possible. Of course, a theory written now inevitably poses questions that past research cannot answer, so we have often resorted to anecdotes and authoritative statements in lieu of better evidence. On occasions, when the point seemed important enough, speculation has even been permitted to slip the leash of evidence entirely. We hope the text provides enough cues to the quality of various pieces of evidence that even the unwary reader can distinguish the more from the lesser proven assertions.

It is with some reservations that we have used the designation "theory" for what we present. The reader will not find here a deductive system that poses questions for research and also proposes, in the

form of research hypotheses, the answers. He will find an attempt to analyze a variety of important phenomena in the same limited set of simple terms and to show the interrelatedness of phenotypically diverse research findings. The main value of our work, we believe, is to highlight interconnections and to point out important research areas without necessarily suggesting the answers to be found there. Perhaps what we present is better described as a "point of view" or "framework" rather than a theory. In the first two chapters there is a number of comments about the nature of this approach and its relation to existing theories. These are offered very tentatively, in full awareness of the limitations of our own perspective as a basis for judging and classifying our own work. In the final accounting the reader must make these judgments for himself.

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