The most pervasive influence in social psychology during the past twenty years has been and continues to be the theoretical writings and research of the psychologists who have been identified with the point of view of Gestalt psychology. The reason for this extraordinary influence is probably due to the happy but fortuitous conjunction of two attributes of the Gestaltists that are only peripherally related to their theoretical orientation. Unlike both the role theorists and the psychoanalysts, the Gestalt psychologists, having always been experimentally oriented, have developed in the process of experimenting on social psychological phenomena a varied assortment of experimental techniques that make possible a laboratory investigation of problems that hitherto had not been thought of as amenable to experimental study. Studies of "democratic" and "authoritarian" group leadership, of group structure, of intragroup communication, of interpersonal trust and suspicion, of social conformity, of attitudinal change, of affiliation have now become feasible because of this Gestaltist experimental orientation.

Nevertheless, the experimental approach of the Gestaltists would not have had so great an impact on social psychology had it not been accompanied by a willingness to take naive experience as a fruitful starting point for investigation. The reinforcement theorists, who also have an experimental approach, have been unwilling to start with naive experience; for this reason, their work in social psychology has been remote from the significant phenomena of everyday life.

Gestalt psychology initially emerged as a rebellion against the methodological bias of the older structuralism and associationism of orthodox German psychology which assumed that psychological events have to be explained in terms of the combination of elementary local sensations and associations. The Gestaltists protested that direct experience is organized and that the experience of local events (for example, the stimulation of a sensory receptor at a given instant of time) is determined by the organized whole of which it is a component. In their rejection of elementistic doctrines, they affirmed the need to observe and understand psychological events as they occur in direct experience as a necessary first step in the development of a systematic psychology.

In effect, the Gestaltists asserted that it is scientifically legitimate to be interested in naive experience and that a "respectable" psychologist can study the phenomena of everyday experience—hope, power, influence, leadership, cooperation, attitudinal change. This faith encouraged those who were attracted to social psychology because of their concern with existing social life to feel that a scientific attack on significant social phenomena is feasible.

Theoretical Orientation of Gestalt Psychologists

Although the theoretical orientation of the Gestalt psychologists does not explain their impact on social psychology, it is nevertheless true that Gestalt theory has affected the work of such influential social psychologists as Lewin, Heider, Asch, Festinger, Kreech and Crutchfield, Newcomb, and the various investigators who have been affiliated with the Research Center for Group Dynamics, initially at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or, later, at the University of Michigan.

The classical statements of Gestalt theory are given by Köhler (1929) and Koffka (1935). Essentially, there are two key notions. One is that psychological phenomena should be conceived as occurring in a "field"—as part of a system of coexisting and mutually interdependent factors having certain properties as a system that are not deducible from knowledge of the isolated elements of the
system. The second basic notion is that certain states of the psychological field are simpler and more orderly than other states and that psychological processes act to make the state of the field as "good" as prevailing conditions allow. In other words, the conceptual model underlying the Gestalt orientation envisages a complex process with many part events that interact until a certain best end-state is reached. The means by which the best end-state is reached may vary according to the prevailing circumstances; means can be substituted, one for another, since the same end-state can be reached by different routes (there may be variability of the specific means, but invariance of their direction in relation to the preferred end-state).

This Gestalt view was developed from the study of perceptual processes. Its two key notions are that perception is organized and that the organization tends to be as good as the stimulus conditions permit. Let us consider some of the implications of the first notion in perceptual psychology and look for analogous implications in social psychology.

1. If perceptions are organized, then some aspects of perception will remain constant despite a change in all of the elements in the situation being perceived, so long as the interrelations among the elements remain the same. Thus, if all the notes in a song are raised half an octave, the melody (the organized unit) will not be changed. A square will be identified as a square if the lines composing it are colored or replaced by dots. Analogously, in social psychology, one would expect that in organized social interactions, some of the patterns of interaction will remain invariant despite replacement of the individuals participating in the interaction. Thus, a football game will still be identifiable as such even though substitutes replace the original players. A bureaucracy will retain many recognizable features despite a complete turnover in its personnel.

2. If perceptions are organized, then the perception of any element will be influenced by the total field of which it is a part. Thus, even though the retinal images of two objects are identical in size, the object that is perceived to be farther away will be perceived as being larger. The word "drive" will be perceived as referring to motivation or to golf depending on the organization or context in which it is perceived. Similarly, in social psychology the meaning of the behavior of an individual will be very much influenced by his perceived social role and by the perceived social context or frame of reference in which it occurs. Thus, the same words will be interpreted differently if they are used by a private reprimanding a captain rather than by a captain reprimanding a private (Deutsch, 1961). A man disrobing in the locker room of a gym will be reacted to rather differently from someone doing the same thing in Times Square. The appalling poverty in Hong Kong will seem much worse if one has just come from the United States than if one has just come from India.

3. If perception is organized, then some of its characteristics of organization will emerge; these will be the interrelations of the entities being perceived rather than the entities themselves. Thus, a melody is the perceived interrelation among notes. Similarly, the perception of movement is a relational perception. In social relations, the role of husband cannot exist except in relation to the role of wife. Also, such social psychological phenomena as immorality, cooperation, loyalty, and leadership cannot occur in the completely isolated individual (one can only behave immorally or cooperatively in relation to one or more other persons). Social relations involve the relations of at least two people and, as such, are not completely predictable from knowledge of the isolated individuals.

Characteristics of Good Perceptual Organization

Now that we have seen some of the implications and social psychological analogies of the idea that perception is organized, let us consider the Gestalt view that the organization tends to be as "good" as the stimulus conditions permit, or, in other words, that perceptual organization is neither arbitrary nor haphazard but is directed toward achieving a certain ideal state of order and simplicity. The properties of this ideal state have never been specified with precision. Underlying the earlier Gestalt view, however, was the notion that the organization of physical events (as in a soap bubble, a raindrop, an electric field) reflects certain dynamic processes and that there is a similarity in form, an isomorphism, between these dynamic physical processes and psychological processes. Social psychologists in the Gestalt tradition are less likely to
stress the isomorphism of the physical and psychological processes of organization and more likely to attribute many of the features of the perceptual organization of complex events to learning in a socially organized environment; still, like the earlier Gestaltists, most social psychologists place emphasis on the role of such central processes as perception and cognition in the understanding of behavior. Thus they are likely to use the term “perceptual field” rather than “stimulus” and “goal-directed behavior” rather than “response.”

Although the properties of good perceptual organization have never been clearly specified, the Gestaltists have stated some principles of perceptual organization that have implications for social psychology. These principles are described in relation to some common phenomena to which they are applied.

1. **Assimilation and contrast.** The “maximum-minimum” principle, the most general and most vague of the Gestalt notions, posits two basic kinds of simplicity: a minimum simplicity of uniformity and a maximum simplicity of perfect articulation. Thus, perceptual organization is, in a sense, bipolar—it will either be directed toward minimizing stimulus differences so that the perceptual field becomes homogeneous or toward accentuating them if the stimulus differences exceed a certain level or if there is an abrupt discontinuity between parts of the visual field. In Köhler’s words (1935, p. 109), “either as little or as much as possible will happen.” The specific form that such perceptual differentiation takes tends to maximize some stimulus differences so that parts of the perceptual field contrast with one another and to minimize stimulus differences within the contrasting parts (see Figure 2–1).

![Figure 2–1. Assimilation and Contrast](image)

The ring is seen as a uniform gray in spite of the fact that contrast should be operating. That is because the ring is seen as a whole and each half is assimilated to the other half. Divide the ring by placing a pencil along the boundary between the black and the white fields. Assimilation then breaks down, since the ring no longer appears continuous and contrast is free to operate. Thus, the left half of the ring on the black ground appears brighter than the right half on the white ground. (Adapted from Kreader & Crutchfield, 1958.)

and his group. Also, we tend to assimilate our perception of a person’s action to our perception of the actor (the meaning and evaluation of a statement will usually be such as to be consistent with our view and evaluation of the source of a statement). Thus, the meaning of the statement, “I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms are in the physical,” is interpreted rather differently if it is attributed to Thomas Jefferson (its actual author) or to Lenin. When Jefferson is perceived as its source, American students usually interpret the word “rebellion” to mean “peaceful agitation and change”; with Lenin, “rebellion” is usually equated with “revolution.”

2. **Perceptual grouping.** Max Wertheimer (1923), one of the founders of the Gestalt school, was the first to state a number of “principles” for determining what will be perceived as being grouped together or unified in the visual field. Others have elaborated his views so that, currently, homogeneity is thought to be
based on: (1) the common fate of the elements perceived (for example, they move together); (2) their similarity (for example, they have the same color or same luminosity); (3) their proximity (for example, they occur in close spatial or temporal proximity); (4) a common boundary (for example, the perceived elements are separated from the remainder of the field by an abrupt discontinuity); (5) the tendency to group elements that together make a good form (that is to say, one that is symmetrical or balanced, complete or closed, continuous or smooth, orderly or predictable rather than random, simple rather than complex); (6) the tendency to group elements functionally in terms of a cause-and-effect relationship (for example, to see a billiard ball that strikes another ball and imparts motion to it as being part of the same perceptual organization); (7) past experience or custom that has led to similar responses to the various elements; and (8) set or expectation that the elements are to be grouped together.

Some of the foregoing principles of perceptual grouping are illustrated in Figure 2-2.

It is evident that the principles for grouping may be in conflict with one another in some particular situation—for example, grouping by proximity may conflict with grouping by good form. In general, the Gestaltists consider such factors as proximity and similarity less critical than good form in determining perceptual organization. They have not, however, developed their views in sufficient detail to be able to specify with any assurance what will happen when different principles of perceptual grouping conflict with one another.

In social psychology, there has been a wide application of notions analogous to those involved in the principles of perceptual grouping. Thus, in discussions of whether a collection of individuals will form a group and of how cohesive a group they will become, emphasis is placed on such determinants as social proximity, the similarity of people's attitudes and backgrounds, their common experiences of success or failure, the distinctiveness of a group or person from the other people nearby, the consonance of personalities with one another, expectations about interrelationships, and other parallels of this sort. In effect, the factors determining whether an individual will perceive himself as belonging to a given group are similar to the factors that determine the grouping of elements in the visual field.

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**GROUPING BY:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Common Fate</th>
<th>Similarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● ● ● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ● ●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Boundary</th>
<th>Good Form</th>
<th>Past Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● ● ● ●</td>
<td>□ □</td>
<td>BOYANDGIRL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2-2. Examples of Perceptual Grouping**

"Proximity" leads to the perception of three pairs of dots. Grouping is by "common fate," when some dots move in one way and others in another, or by "similarity," when dots that look alike are grouped together. Perceptible "boundaries" may decide which dots are grouped together. In the fifth figure, the five vertical lines are separated into groups by the fact that two pairs of them contribute to "good forms," i.e., to squares. In the last example, the ten letters divide at once into three words if the "past experience" of the perceiver has been with the English language.

The Gestalt "grouping principles" are also relevant to the study of social perception. Thus, Zillig (1928) demonstrated experimentally that poor performance is attributed to unpopular children by their classmates: similarity in evaluation of the act and the actor groups them together. The well-known phenomenon of "guilt by association" (the notion that a person takes on the characteristics of the people with whom he is seen) may be a kind of grouping by proximity. Grouping by common fate appears in the tendency to see the underprivileged as forming a cohesive social group. The tendency to think of Frenchmen as being alike may reflect grouping by common boundary.

The Gestalt view that perceptual organization tends to be as "good" as possible, that certain configurations are preferred because of their simplicity and coherence, has been the starting point for a number of influential theories in social psychology, such as Heider's theory of cognitive balance (1946; 1958). Newcomb's
theory of communicative acts (1953), and Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957). These theories are all based on the central idea that an organization or structure of beliefs and attitudes or of interpersonal relations can be imbalanced, disharmonious, dissonant, or incongruous, and that when imbalance exists a tendency will arise to change one's beliefs and attitudes until they are balanced. The change may occur by alteration of the reality to which the beliefs and attitudes refer or by direct modification of the beliefs.

Like the earlier approach of Gestalt psychology to perception, these newer theories of social psychology emphasize that the motivation for directed action can arise from structural considerations. Thus, they express implicitly the belief that an important determinant of man's behavior is his requirement for an orderly and coherent view of his relations to his world. The imbalances considered in the social psychological theories are not, however, simply the dissonances in the impersonally perceived external world discussed by the earlier Gestaltists, for self-attitudes and attitudes toward others become components of the configuration that seeks consistency. In striving for a view of his world that is consistent with his view of himself, an individual may grossly distort the objective reality.

Later, in this and the next chapter, we consider the balance and dissonance theories in greater detail. Here, let us indicate the scope of these theories by citing some illustrations of their applications. Configurations that are balanced are, for instance, those that imply (assuming that we like ourselves) that we like the persons and things that "belong" to us; that our friends are also friendly to each other; that we like what our friends like. On the other hand, if we dislike ourselves, we will not like things that belong to us or like people who are friendly to us. Imbalance would be created, for example, if one learned that a good friend has stolen money from a blind beggar; that a deeply rooted habit is injurious to one's health; that one has made the wrong decision in going to one college rather than another. One exposes oneself to imbalance by belonging to a group that contains members whose opinion is markedly different from one's own, by listening to a political candidate of an opposing party, by doing something one dislikes. Imbalance can be prevented or removed by avoiding, denying, distorting, negating, isolating, or reinterpretting the dissonant information or by buttress-

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The Orientation of Solomon Asch

Much of Asch's theoretical writing, which is most fully expressed in his Social Psychology (1952), is a protest against those psychological formulations about human behavior and experience that derive mainly from the study of nonsocial, indeed nonhuman, behavior. He asserts that the study of man as a social being requires its own perspective, which must start from some conception, however tentative, of what it is to be human. An adequate view of man would include as a minimum that he possesses unusual intellectual powers, that he can act with reference to the ideas and ideals of right and wrong, even when he violates them. He assumes that people enter into the world with a structure that can respond to social conditions and with capacities for entering into social relations.

Asch's basic contention (1952, p. 127) is:

[The] decisive psychological fact about society is the capacity of individuals to comprehend and respond to each other's experiences and actions. This fact, which permits individuals to become mutually related, becomes the basis of every social process and of the most crucial changes occurring in persons. It brings within the sphere of the individual the thoughts, emotions, and purposes of others extending his world vastly beyond what his unaided efforts could achieve. It brings him in a far-flung relation of mutual dependence, which is
the condition of his development into a person. . . . It alters the psychological scene for each, since to live in society is to bring into a sensible relation private and public experience. It is also an irreversible step; once in society we enter into a circle of mutuality that cannot be undone.

Asch's view is that man's psychological processes become transformed in society. He becomes self-conscious; he becomes oriented to the future and to the past, as well as to the present; motives and goals arise out of his ability to perceive and compare himself in relation to others. Asch rejects the view of man as egocentrically oriented. He writes (p. 320): "The ego is not dedicated solely to its own enhancement. It needs to be concerned with its surroundings, to bind itself to others, and to work with them. . . . [A]centration of the self is often a response, not to powerful ego-centered tendencies, but to the thwarting of the need to be a part of one's group, to know that one is respected and liked, to feel that one is playing a part in the lives of others. . . ." He rejects the thesis that a society can be based on egocentric individuals, each concerned with getting as much as possible for as little as possible.

Asch asserts further that man's enlarged sense of alternatives and possibilities introduces at the center of human life a permanent tension between what is and what might be. The ends of life are no longer merely to live, but to live a significant and meaningful life. His views, in this respect, are somewhat similar to the views of such religious philosophers as Kierkegaard, Buber, and Tillich, who stress that man is both a part of nature and apart from nature, that man is the only animal aware of his own separateness and identity, that he is the only animal aware of his mortality, and that he is the only animal aware of his imperfection and of his culpability. Out of these awarenesses, new perspectives and problems arise. Asch is one of the few experimental social psychologists who has had the boldness and imagination to recognize that an adequate social psychology must not lose sight of what is distinctly human.

Although Asch's formulation of his central thesis (the transformation of man in society) suggests a program of developmental research to study how children in different social environments acquire their particular concepts and methods of relating themselves to their social world, his research in social psychology has taken a different tack. Much of his research has consisted of demonstrating the Gestalt tenet that social experience is not arbitrary, that it is organized so as to be coherent and meaningful. Descriptions of three of Asch's important experiments follow.

The Formation of Impressions

While Asch (1946) has done a number of interrelated experiments on the formation of impressions, we shall consider only one. In this experiment, a list of personal characteristics was read to each of two groups, "A" and "B." Except for one term, the list was identical for both groups:

A. intelligent - skillful - industrious - warm - determined - practical - cautious.
B. intelligent - skillful - industrious - cold - determined - practical - cautious.

After hearing one or the other list, the subjects had to write a brief impression of the person to whom the characteristics applied. They also were instructed to select from a checklist of pairs of traits (such as "generous-ungenerous," "shrewd-wise") the item for each pair that best fitted the impression that they had formed. Rather striking differences in impression of the person resulted from the two lists. Impressions based on list "A" were generally far more positive. The subjects consider the "warm" person to be more generous, happier, better-natured, more humorous, more sociable, more popular, more humane, more altruistic, and moreimaginative. Little difference is seen with regard to reliability, importance, physical attractiveness, persistence, seriousness, restraint, strength, and honesty. When "polite" is substituted for "warm" and "blunt" for "cold," the differences in impressions resulting from the two lists are relatively minor. The attribute relating to "warm-cold" is seen to be much more central to our conception of a person than that of "polite-blunt." Other experiments demonstrate how the centrality or peripherality of the "warm-cold" dimension can be influenced by the context of other terms with which it appears, and how the first terms in a series may establish a context in which successive terms are perceived.

Asch concludes from these experiments (1) that one strives to form a complete impression of a person even when the evidence is meager; (2) that the characteristics of a person are seen in interrelation—the intelligence of a "warm" person is viewed differ-
ently than the intelligence of a “cold” person; (3) that impressions have structure—some traits are perceived as central and determining, others as peripheral or dependent; (4) that each trait possesses the property of a part in a whole, influencing and being influenced by the organization of which it is a part—two people, who are charming but otherwise dissimilar, do not appear to have the same charm; (5) that existing impressions set the context within which other impressions are formed; and (6) that apparent inconsistencies prompt a search for a deeper view that will resolve the contradiction.

The Understanding of Assertions

Asch (1948) has sharply criticized the doctrines of suggestion, prestige, and imitation in social psychology. He has indicated that these doctrines rest on the assumption that the association of a statement with a person of prestige results in a “blind” change of its evaluation; although the object of judgment itself remains unchanged, a new evaluation arbitrarily becomes associated with it. Asch’s critique asserts that the change of evaluation of a statement due to the influence of prestige on it results from an alteration in the meaning of the statement. The same statement attributed to Jefferson means something else when it is attributed to Lenin. To demonstrate that suggestion by prestige is not a blind process resulting from the arbitrary transfer of the valuation of the statement’s author to the statement itself, Asch conducted a series of experiments. His basic method was to expose subjects to a statement (for example, “Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society”) in such a way that some of the subjects thought Karl Marx was its author whereas others attributed it to John Adams (the rightful author). As a statement by Adams, subjects tended to think it descriptive of a permanent condition of society, whereas, attributed to Karl Marx, they thought it was a call for social change.

Asch (1952, p. 440) concludes:

One factor seems to be fundamental in comprehending assertions: there are operations of fitting an assertion to its setting that establish its appropriate, relevant meaning. Operations of grouping and segregating, of grasping directions, of convergence and conflict occur. These articulate the given datum by establishing what it means in a given place and time. The conclusion follows that an identical datum

is not the same in different contexts. Operations also occur that work against the arbitrary joining of part to context. This became evident from the tendency to segregate parts from a context when their directions diverge or to reject their kinship altogether.

Asch indicates (p. 442) that the conclusions reached . . . summarize a fundamental requirement for understanding social events. Whether we consider historical movements or economic and political ideas, it remains a fact that an act gains its meaning and significance from its relation to the particular conditions of time, place, and circumstance. . . . Freedom of contract meant one thing when directed against the feudal order. It meant something entirely different when used to declare unconstitutional statutes that required employers to introduce hygienic safeguards for the protection of workers—on the ground that they violated the right of the individual to work under any conditions he wished.

The Modification of Judgments by Groups

A remarkable series of experiments by Asch (1956) has stimulated a large number of experiments by other social psychologists. Asch’s experimental paradigm is ingeniously simple: a single naive subject is asked to announce his judgment of an obvious matter of fact after hearing a unanimous majority (who are accomplices of the experimenter) make a false judgment. The naive subjects experience a profound conflict and many become emotionally upset. Although (over a series of trials) the preponderance of their judgments is correct, more than half of the naive subjects are influenced to make errors that conform to the incorrect judgment of the unanimous majority. When an additional subject is introduced into the experiment, as an accomplice of the experimenter, and is instructed to report correct judgments, the naive subject experiences much less conflict and is much less likely to conform to the false judgments of the majority. When the majority of the subjects are naive and they are confronted by a single person who is instructed to make incorrect judgments, the naive subjects react with complacency, amusement, or disdain.

Asch’s explanation of his results is, in essence, that the naive subjects are placed in conflict between two normally trustworthy sources of information—their own senses and the judgments of the others. The conflict is a profound one because, in general, individ-
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actualizations, nor has he indicated how these potentials can be distorted by social experience.

The Orientation of Fritz Heider

Among those acquainted with his small body of work, Heider has the reputation of being one of the most original and profound thinkers of the Gestalt school. Although his writings in the field of perception are not well known, they have had a significant influence on such important theorists as Kurt Koffka, Kurt Lewin, James Gibson, and Egon Brunswik. (For a selection of his papers on perception, see Heider, 1959.) His theoretical work in social psychology, most fully expressed in his book *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (1958), is guided by the central thought-model underlying the Gestalt approach to perception. His work is primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with understanding how people perceive interpersonal events.

Heider's major thesis is that people seek to develop an orderly and coherent view of their environment, and, in the process, they build up a "naive psychology" that resembles a science in an important respect. A science may be viewed as our attempt to represent the invariant properties of the environment lying behind the changing surface events, which give rise to the diverse events we observe. Similarly, in our naive perception of our social environment, we look behind the surface behavior (somebody steps on one's toe) at the person who produced it, at his motives and attitudes, and at the social context in which the event occurred. In other words, we seek out these invariant relationships that can help us to understand the myriad of specific, changing events which lie within our field of observation.

Heider's work is an attempt to explicate the psychological concepts and their interrelations that are embodied in naive psychology. In part, he is motivated by the view that to understand a person's social behavior one must understand the common-sense psychology that guides it and, in part, by the view that scientific psychology has much to learn from the treasure of insight that is embodied in common sense. His work has not, however, involved the study of the naive psychology of specific individuals, but rather the
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social perceptions. In social perception, as compared with physical perception, there is more likely to be distortion of the underlying causal core, for two reasons. First, the relevant social context (the surrounding field) of a given event is less likely to be represented in the proximal stimuli which reflect a social event; and, secondly, the social mediating processes through which social events are often perceived are more likely to have idiosyncratic, distorting properties.

Heider points out that it is particularly important in the interpretation of social events whether we attribute an event to causal factors located in the person or to causal factors in his environment. For example, a person's enjoyment of a play may be attributed either to the play itself or to his own personal idiosyncrasies; a person's success or failure on a task may be attributed to the ease or difficulty of the task or to his ability (or lack of it); a teacher's reprimand to a student may be attributed to the personal intentions of the teacher toward the particular student or to the objective requirements of the teacher's role.

Heider (1958, p. 62) suggests that a naive version of J. S. Mill's method of difference (more appropriately labeled as the "joint method of agreement and difference") provides the commonsense model for such causal attribution: the effect is attributed to that condition which is present when the effect is present and which is absent when the effect is absent. Thus, failure on a task is attributed to the difficulty of the task rather than to the incompetence of the person, if other people who are considered to be able also fail on it, and if the person who fails it is able to perform other tasks that are thought to require some ability.

It is evident that attribution of behavior to one or another causal source (one's self or the environment, personal idiosyncrasies or the objective requirements of the situation, and the like) will often require social comparisons. To be able to tell whether one's judgments, beliefs, or opinions are objectively right or are merely personal idiosyncrasies, it may be necessary to compare one's beliefs with the beliefs of others. To decide whether the difficulty experienced in a task lies in oneself or in the task, one will need information about how well others do. To judge whether one's emotional response to a situation is appropriate or not, social comparisons may be useful. Festinger's theory of social comparison (Chapter 3) is a more precise and more experimentally oriented formulation of the

investigation of the naive psychology implicit in everyday language or expressed in literary, philosophical, and common-sense propositions concerning interpersonal relations. His method is to analyze the underlying psychological concepts that are used in language, and to study the interrelations of these concepts as they are employed in fables, novels, and other literary forms. Naive psychology, he says, includes the following basic concepts (Heider, 1958, p. 17): "People have an awareness of their surroundings and the events in it (the life space), they attain this awareness through perception and other processes, they are affected by their personal and impersonal environment, they cause changes in the environment, they are able to (can) and try to cause these changes, they have wishes (wants) and sentiments, they stand in unit relations to other entities (belonging) and they are accountable according to certain standards (ought)." The italicized terms are the basic concepts whose interrelationships Heider examines at length in the successive chapters of his book.

Two major, interrelated, dynamic themes run through Heider's analysis of naive psychology: "attribution" and "balance." In his early paper (1927), "Thing and Medium," Heider developed the theme that people tend to attribute happenings in their environment to central unitary "cores," which are internally conditioned and in some way centers of the causal texture of the world. They do not attribute such happenings to the mediating processes which are molded by these cores. We see a stone, not the light rays which intervene between the stone and the eyes. The mediating processes which meet our sense organs are spurious units, for they are built up of many parts that are independent of one another (the light rays reflected from one edge of the stone are independent of the light rays reflected from another edge). Without attribution to their unitary cause, the order that is imposed on the mediating processes remains unintelligible. Thus, in our perception of the physical world, perception focuses on the distal object (for example, the stone) that makes intelligible the order in the mediating processes as they impinge on our organs of sense.

Similarly, in perceiving the happenings in our social environment, we try to make sense out of the manifold proximal stimuli by focusing on the central unitary causal cores to which the surface events can be attributed. Such concepts of naive psychology as intension ("want") and ability ("can") are at the causal cores of our
process of social comparison. Heider, in effect, indicates how these specific processes are outcomes of the more general human attempt to find an underlying causal network that will make sense of the multiplicity of surface events impinging on us.

Heider points out in his important discussion of "the naïve analysis of action" that the attribution of personal responsibility involves a decision as to which of the several conditions of action—the intentions of the person, personal power, or environmental factors—is to be given primary weight for the actual outcome. In general, the more the environmental factors are thought to influence the action, the less the person is held responsible for an action with which he is connected.

Heider also suggests that the connection between a person and an action may take a number of forms, each of which represents a different stage of conceptual development. At the most primitive level, the connection is a global one; the person is held responsible for each effect connected with him in any way; for example, a person may be accused of the wrongdoings of his ancestors. At the next level, an event is connected with the person only if he were a necessary condition for its occurrence, independently of his intentions or his ability to foresee or to alter the event's outcome; a person is judged in terms of the results of what he does; for example, a man who makes money on the stock market is enhanced in his valuation as a person. Piaget (1948) refers to this level as that of "objective responsibility." In the next stage, a person is considered responsible for an aftereffect he might have foreseen or prevented even though it was not his intention to produce it—a person's car runs out of gas because he forgot to check his meter. Next, only what the person intended is perceived as being caused by him; in Piaget's terms, this is "subjective responsibility." Finally, even actions that are intended and produced by a person are not entirely ascribed to him if his intentions are seen as having been produced by the environment, i.e., if his intention is regarded as having been provoked, coerced, or seductively induced by the environment.

The nature of attribution that occurs in any particular instance is determined not only by the stage of cognitive development, by the naïve application of the joint method of agreement and difference, by one's expectations, by personal style, but also by the need to prevent cognitive imbalance. The striving for cognitive balance is the second major theme in Heider's analysis of naïve psychology.

He points out that cognitive stability requires a congruence among causal expectations with respect to related objects. For a state of complete cognitive harmony to exist, the various implications of a person's expectations or judgments of any one aspect of the cognized environment may not contradict the implications of his expectations or judgments in respect of any other aspect of the cognized environment. Thus, if a person judges X to be of potential benefit to his welfare, he cannot at the same time judge that Y (which is judged to be of benefit to his welfare) and X are antagonistic and still maintain a stable or balanced cognitive structure. (X and Y may be things, people, the products of people, or the characteristics of people.) When the cognitive structure is in a state of imbalance or is threatened by imbalance, forces will arise to produce a tendency toward locomotion so as to change the psychological environment or to produce a tendency toward change in the cognition of the environment. Under conditions that do not permit locomotion, the tendency for cognitive change is enhanced.

In the preceding example of X and Y, cognitive change could occur by changing one's judgement of X or of Y, or by the relationship between X and Y, or by differentiating X or Y into independent or segregated subparts. Thus, instead of continuing to like both X and Y, who hate each other, one may come to dislike either X or Y, or to feel that they do not hate each other, or to feel that he likes X because she is beautiful and that Y hates X because she is wealthy and that there is no interaction directly or indirectly between these two characteristics of X—beauty and wealth. In general, the nature of the cognitive changes resulting from an imbalance will tend to produce the most congruence and least changes in the perceptual-cognitive field.

From assumptions that are similar to those just outlined, and with three hypotheses about the conditions of cognitive imbalance, Heider has been able to develop a keen insight into some of the conditions that determine perceptions in interpersonal situations. Here are three: (1) In respect of attitudes directed toward the same entity, a balanced state exists if positive (or negative) attitudes go together; a tendency exists to see a person as being positive or negative in all respects. (2) In respect of attitudes toward an entity combined with belongingness, a balanced state exists if a person is united with the entities he likes and if he likes the entities he is united with; and the converse is true for negative
attitudes. (3) If two entities are seen as parts of a unit, a balanced state will exist if the parts are seen to have the same dynamic character (positive or negative); but if the two entities have different dynamic characters, then a balanced state can exist only if they are seen to be segregated (by breaking up the unit).

One may consider these hypotheses as true for various types of positive attitude (to like, to love, to esteem, to value) and also for various types of negative attitude. Similarly, the statements about belonging or being part of a unit refer to diverse types of unit (membership, belonging, causality, possession, similarity, or proximity). We must, however, not forget that the unbalanced cognitive situation produces only a tendency to change; whether or not locomotion or cognitive change will actually occur depends on the strength of the other forces operative in the situation.

The reader may demonstrate for himself some of the implications of Heider’s hypotheses by considering three interrelated entities—his own self (P), another person (O), and a third object (X). Specify the perceived attitude (positive or negative) between any two of the entities and you can determine what the perceived relationship is likely to be between the other two. Thus, if P likes X, and P dislikes O, then one could predict a tendency to perceive O as disliking X; if P likes X and also likes O, one can predict a tendency to perceive O as liking X. The reader may introduce some additional factors by considering the relation of belongingness. For example, given that P likes O, and that O caused X, one could predict a tendency for P to like X, and so forth. The reader might find it of particular interest to consider X as an aspect of the self and to see some of the predictions one would make, from Heider’s hypotheses, about attitudes toward aspects of the self under varying conditions.

**Newcomb’s Theory of Communicative Acts**

Theodore M. Newcomb (1953) has extrapolated Heider’s theory of balance to formulate a set of propositions concerning interpersonal communication. He concludes that the tendency for balance is characteristic of interpersonal as well as intrapersonal systems. In effect, he states that, when two people perceive themselves as (positively) interdependent and each is oriented toward some third entity, they will tend to develop similar orientations toward this entity. Interpersonal communication thus increases the likeli-

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hood that similar orientations will develop. On the other hand, dissimilar orientations in an interdependent pair or group tends to increase the frequency of communicative acts so as to reduce the dissimilarity of the orientations. The strength of these “strains toward symmetry of orientation” are partly determined by the strength of the bond between the two people and the strengths of their attitudes toward the third entity.

Newcomb elaborates his basic propositions to explain how the “pressure for uniformity” and the “tendency to direct communications toward deviant members” arise within cohesive groups. In a more recent work (Newcomb, 1961), he has demonstrated the great importance of perceived similarity of attitudes in determining both friendships and the structure of informal groups.

**Formalizations of Heider’s Theory**

Cartwright and Harary (1956) have formalized and generalized Heider’s theory of cognitive balance by using concepts from the mathematical theory of linear graphs. They point out that Heider’s formulation has certain ambiguities and limitations. For example, Heider does not distinguish between the complement and the opposite of the “belonging” relation: the complement of “belonging” is “not belonging”; its opposite is unspecified, but probably is equivalent to “disunity” or to being “competitively linked.” Also, Heider’s formulation is limited to the perceived interrelations among three units (for example, three people, or two people and an object) and distinguishes only between “balanced” and “unbalanced” states, but does not make possible the identification of different degrees of imbalance. The mathematical formulation of Cartwright and Harary overcomes some ambiguities and limitations of Heider’s formulation. Abelson and Rosenberg (1958) have also revised Heider’s theory so as to make some of its implications more precise. Their formulation uses the formalism of matrix algebra, which is logically similar to the linear graph formulation of Cartwright and Harary, and they have attempted to specify principles for identifying which of the various methods of reducing cognitive imbalance will be utilized in any particular instance.

**Concluding Comment**

Heider’s theoretical work constitutes a bold and original application to social psychology of the Gestalt view that there is a
tendency for orderliness and simplicity in mental organization. His ideas have a wide sweep, with implications for many aspects of social psychology. Not having formulated them in such a way as to make their implications for practice and research self-evident, the impact of his writings is largely to be found in the work of others.

3

FIELD THEORY IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Kurt Lewin

The phrase "field theory in social psychology" is associated with Kurt Lewin and his students. Although Lewin was a member of the Berlin Gestalt group, he quickly began to break new ground by focusing his attention on motivation instead of the classical Gestalt problems of perception. The range and impact of the work of Lewin and his associates is indicated by a listing of some of the areas in psychology that they opened up for experimental investigation: dynamic studies of memory, resumption of interrupted activities, substitute activity, satiation, level of aspiration, group leadership, and group decision. Many of the terms associated with Lewin are now part of the common vocabulary of psychologists: "life space," "valence," "locomotion," "overlapping situation," "cognitive structure," "action research." Here we may briefly sketch some of Lewin's central theoretical notions as they relate to social psychology.

These terms, which have the scent of the physical sciences, do not represent an attempt to derive psychological processes from physical ones. Lewin's attack is consistently psychological. His motivational concepts are concerned with the purposes that underlie behavior and the goals toward or away from which behavior is directed. His terminology, to which we shall adhere, reflects Lewin's
view that what he termed "the logic of dynamics" may be similar in the various sciences. Some of Lewin's early interests and writings (and these were much influenced by the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer) were concerned with the nature of theory in science. He was imbued with the ambition to understand the various sciences in terms of a similar logical approach, an ambition that was fashionable in German intellectual circles after the advent of Einstein's theory of relativity. Contrary to the views held by many of his colleagues in Germany, Lewin's conception of what he termed "the comparative science of sciences" rejected the philosophical Utopia of a single universal science in which psychological explanations must rest on physics. His attempt was directed at characterizing the common modes of explanation that could be applied fruitfully in the various sciences, while he nevertheless maintained that psychological and physical phenomena must be explained within their own frameworks. Of course, he did not succeed, but his terminology is the mark of his large aim.

**Dynamic Concepts**

The concepts "tension," "valence," "force," and "locomotion" play a key role in Lewin's theorizing about motivation. Lewin states that a system in a state of tension exists within a person whenever a psychological need or an intention (sometimes referred to as a quasi need) exists. Tension is released when the need or intention is fulfilled. Tension has certain conceptual properties: (1) it is the state of a region that tries to change itself in such a way that it becomes equal to the state of its surrounding regions, and (2) it involves forces at the boundary of the region in tension. A "positive valence" is conceived as a field in which the forces are all pointing toward a given region of the field (the valent region that is the center of the force field), whereas all the forces point away from a region of "negative valence." The construct "force" characterizes the direction and strength of the tendency to change at a given point of the life space. Change may occur either by locomotion (a change in position) of the person in his psychological environment, or by a change in the structure of his perceived environment.

There exists a definite relation between tension systems of the person and certain properties of the psychological environment.
Zeigarnik predicted a quotient of greater than 1. The quotient obtained was approximately 1.9, clearly supporting Lewin's assumptions. Since many completed tasks were also recalled, however, it was obvious that additional factors were involved. Analyzing the situation of the subject at the moment of recall, the investigator concluded that, in addition to the force operating on the subject to think about the uncompleted tasks and hence to recall them, there was also a present force toward recall of both uncompleted and completed tasks, induced by the experimenter's instructions to "try to recall the tasks you worked on earlier." The Zeigarnik quotient can be viewed as an indicator of the relative strengths of the induced force to recall all tasks and the force to recall the uncompleted tasks. As the strength of the induced force increases in relation to the force toward the task goals, the quotient should approach one; as it decreases in relative strength, the quotient should increase beyond one. These additional predictions, which follow from an analysis of the situation at recall, were borne out in further experiments by Zeigarnik and others. Thus, when the strength of motivation associated with the interrupted task is relatively high, or when the strength of the experimenter's pressure to recall is low, or when the task is interrupted near its end, the Zeigarnik quotient will be high.

A number of more recent experiments have indicated that the situation of recall is frequently even more complex. When not finishing a task can be interpreted as a personal failure (as in an experiment where the tasks are presented as measures of a socially esteemed ability), and when recall of failure threatens one's self-esteem, or when the recall of success raises a lowered self-esteem, the Zeigarnik ratio tends to be less than one.

From the general assumption that when a need is present for a certain goal there is a corresponding force causing a tendency to move toward the goal, it follows that, as long as the tasks are psychologically incomplete, the subject will continue to try to perform the task (providing there are no sufficiently strong counterforces). Ovsiankina (1928) created conditions such that the subject thought he was interrupted by chance and at a later time was left free to do as he wished in an experimental room. There was 100 per-cent resumption of the interrupted task. When the interruption appeared to be intentional, there was still 82 per-cent resumption.

Lewin postulated that the change of the difference in tension between any two systems would depend on the time interval and the degree of interdependence of the systems. With increased time, one would expect differences in tension between interdependent systems to decrease. Thus Zeigarnik, in her experiments on the recall of interrupted activities and Ovsiankina in her experiments on the resumption of interrupted activities both found that, as time elapses, there is a decreasing tendency to recall or resume the interrupted activities.

The degree of interdependence of two tension systems is conceived to be a function of the degree of fluidity or rigidity of the person and of the structural relations or connections between the systems. The fluidity of the person is affected by general states of the person. For example, a person is considered to be more fluid when tired, when he is undergoing a wave of emotional tension, when he is young, when he is in a "make-believe" or "irreal" situation, when he is more intelligent. Experiments by Zeigarnik have indicated that in the more fluid states the differences in tension between systems tend to dissipate relatively rapidly.

The structural relations between tension systems refer to such questions as whether two systems are subparts of a larger system, whether the two have a relationship of simple dependence, interdependence, or organizational dependence, and also the proximity of the regions. While the problem of characterizing structural arrangements mathematically has received only scant attention, a number of interesting experiments have been conducted that deal with structural relations. Experimental studies of substitution are relevant in this connection.

By a technique of resumption, Lissner (1933) studied the value of one activity in reducing a tension originally connected with another activity. Other experimenters have employed the technique of recall. The substitute value is measured by the amount of decrease in resumption or recall of the interrupted original activity after a substitute activity has been completed. The results of the experiments on substitute value can be summarized briefly as follows. (1) The substitute value increases with the perceived degree of similarity between the original and the substitute activity and with the degree of difficulty of the substitute activity (Lissner, 1933). (2) The substitute value increases with increasing temporal contiguity between the original and the substitute activity and with the attractiveness of the substitute activity (Helen, 1942).
(3) The substitute value of an activity (thinking, talking, or doing) depends on the nature of the goal of the original task. Tasks that are connected with the goal of demonstrating something to another person (the experimenter for example) require an observable substitute activity (not merely "thinking" without social communication); "realization tasks," in which the building of a material object is the goal, require "doing" and not only telling how it can be done; for intellectual problems, talking (or telling how it can be done) can have a very high substitute value (Mahler, 1933). (4) "Magic solutions," "make-believe solutions," or solutions that observably violate the requirements of the task have little substitute value for tasks at the reality level. However, if the situation is a make-believe or play situation, make-believe substitutions will have substitute value (Dembo, 1931; Slosberg, 1934). (5) A substitute activity that is identical with the original activity will have little substitute value if it does not serve the same goal. Thus, building a clay house for John will have little substitute value for building a clay house for Mary. If the emphasis is on building a clay house and not on the "for somebody," then, of course, substitution will occur (Adler & Kounin, 1939). (6) Having someone complete the subject's interrupted task tends to have little substitute value, especially when completion of the task is related to self-esteem. When pairs of individuals work cooperatively on a task, however, the completion of the task by one's partner has considerable substitute value (Lewis, 1944; Lewis & Franklin, 1944).

The research findings with respect to substitute value have implications for a wide range of problems in psychology—from the relative gratification value of individual versus socially shared projective or fantasy systems to the development of specialized roles within a group. This point can be illustrated by the important finding that the actions of another person can be a substitute for one's own actions if there is a cooperative relationship. The fact of such possible substitution enables persons who are working cooperatively on a common task to subdivide the task and to perform specialized activities, since no one of the individuals in a cooperative situation has the need to perform all the activities himself. On the other hand, the individual in a competitive situation is less likely to view the actions of others as possible substitutes for similarly intended actions of his own. Thus, when a competitive situation exists in a group, specialization of activities is less likely to develop (Deutsch, 1949a; Deutsch, 1949b).

The concept of tension systems has also been fruitfully employed in experimental studies of satiation. With regard to most needs, one can distinguish a state of deprivation, of satiation, and of oversatiation. These states correspond to a positive, a neutral, and a negative valence of the activity regions which are related to a particular need or tension system. Karsten (1928) has studied the effect of repeating over and over again such activities as reading a poem, writing letters, drawing, and turning a wheel. The main symptoms of oversatiation appear to be (1) the appearance of subunits in the activity leading to the disintegration of the total activity and a loss of the meaning of the activity; (2) an increasingly poorer quality and greater frequency of errors in performing the task; (3) an increasing tendency to vary the nature of the task, accompanied by a tendency for each variation to become quickly satiated; (4) a tendency to make the satiated activity a peripheral activity with an attempt to concentrate on something else while doing the task—an attempt which is usually not completely successful, for the mind wanders; (5) an increasing dislike of the activity and of similar activities with an increased valence for different tasks; (6) emotional outbursts; (7) the development of "fatigue" and similar bodily symptoms which are quickly overcome when the individual is shifted to another activity.

Satiation occurs only if the activity has, psychologically, the character of marking time or of getting nowhere. If the activity can be viewed as making progress toward a goal, the usual symptoms of satiation will not appear. Embedding an activity in a different psychological whole so that its meaning is changed has practically the same effect on satiation as shifting to a different activity. The rapidity with which satiation occurs depends on (1) the nature of the activity (with increasing size of its units of action and with increasing complexity satiation occurs more slowly); (2) the degree of centrality of the activity (other things being equal, activities which are of more significance to the person are more quickly satiated than peripheral activities); (3) the state of the person (the more fluid the state of the person, the more quickly he is satiated). The rate of satiation and cosatiation of similar activities (the spread of
the effects of satiation from one activity to similar activities) decreases with a person’s age and also with his lack of intelligence (Kounin, 1941a; Kounin, 1941b).

Most satiation phenomena can be explained by assuming that continued performance of a task leads to a lowering of the level of tension in the system corresponding to the task; with increasing repetition the system corresponding to the task may be represented as reaching a lower level of tension than the surrounding systems. This reduction should result in the person’s turning away from the repeated task to other activities. With time, he will also turn away from such activities as are related to tension systems interdependent with the satiated system and will turn toward activities that are not related to the satiated activity. The general tendency is to turn away from similar activities and to turn toward dissimilar activities. This breakdown of the satiated activity into disorganized units fits in very well with Lewin’s analysis of the “differentiation and unity of a whole based on simple dependence” (Lewin, 1941; Lewin, 1951, pp. 305–335).

The concept of tension system and the various experimental studies on the recall and resumption of interrupted activities, substitution, satiation, and frustration all have direct relevance to many problems of social psychology (although, as yet, their relevance has not been fully exploited). The concept of tension system is applicable, for instance, to socially derived needs and intentions, to motives that develop from belonging to a group and from participating in group activities, to interpersonal influences. The various effects of tension on psychological processes have advanced insight into those social and group factors that produce individual motivation as well as into social and group factors that facilitate the reduction of individual tensions.

**Structural Concepts**

Lewin attempted to develop a geometry, which he termed “hodological space,” to represent a person’s conception of the means-end structure of the environment—of what leads to what. Although Lewin’s “hodological space” was never developed adequately from a mathematical standpoint, it highlighted the necessity of considering a person’s conception of his environment in analyzing his behavioral possibilities and in characterizing the di-

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rection of his behavior. (An individual who circumvents a fence to get to a ball behind it is, psychologically, walking toward the ball even while he is physically walking away from it.)

The view that direction in the life space is dependent on its cognitive structure has been applied to give insights into some of the psychological properties of situations that are cognitively unstructured. Most new situations are cognitively unstructured, since the individual is unlikely to know “what leads to what.” Hence, it follows that in such situations the individual is unlikely to know what direction he should follow to achieve his objective. As he strikes out in any direction, he does not know whether it is leading him toward or away from his goal. His behavior will be exploratory, with trials and errors, vacillating, and contradictory, not efficient nor economical. If reaching the goal has positive significance for him and not reaching it has negative significance, then being in a region that has no clear cognitive structure results in psychological conflict, since the direction of the forces acting on him is likely to be both toward and away from any given region. There will be evidences of emotionality as well as of cautiousness in such situations. In addition, the very nature of an unstructured situation is that it is unstable; perception of the situation shifts rapidly and is readily influenced by minor cues and by suggestion from others.

This characterization of some of the psychological implications of cognitively unstructured situations is of considerable usefulness to social psychology. For example, Lewin employed this concept to provide insight into the psychological situation of the adolescent (1939; 1951), of minority group members (Lewin, 1955a; Lewin, 1948), of people suffering from physical handicaps (Barker, Wright, & Gonick, 1946), of the nouveaux riches, and of other persons crossing the margin of social classes. The model may be applied to any situation in which the consequences of behavior are seemingly unpredictable or uncontrollable, in which benefits and harms occur in an apparently inconsistent, fortuitous, or arbitrary manner, or in which one is uncertain about the potential reactions of others.

It has also been applied by Lewin in stressing the importance of “action research” by social agencies and civic groups that are concerned with eliminating and preventing community problems. Lacking research on the effectiveness of their actions, the investiga-
tors will "feel in a fog on three counts: (1) What is the present situation? (2) What are the dangers? (3) And most important of all, what shall we do?" (Lewin, 1945, p. 34).

Lewin has also employed his structural concepts, in conjunction with his dynamic concepts, to give insight into the nature of "conflict situations." He distinguished three fundamental types of conflict:

1. The individual stands midway between two positive valences of approximately equal strength. A classical instance is Buridan's ass starving between two stacks of hay. This type of conflict is unstable, however. As the individual, because of the play of chance factors, moves from the point of equilibrium toward one rather than the other goal region, the resultant force toward that region increases; hence, he will continue to move toward that region (and therefore away from the point of equilibrium). This conclusion follows from the assumption that the strength of force toward a goal region increases with decreasing distance from the goal.

2. The second fundamental type of conflict situation occurs when the individual finds himself between two approximately equal negative valences. Punishment is an example, a type of conflict much influenced by the structure of the situation. Here are three types of conflict between negative valences: (1) A situation in which a person finds himself between negative valences with no restraints to keep him within the situation. For instance, a girl will have to marry an unpleasant suitor or become an impoverished spinster, but there is nothing to prevent her leaving the village. (2) A situation in which a person is between two negative valences and cannot leave the field. For instance, a member of a group is faced with the prospect of losing social status or performing an unpleasant task, and it is impossible for him to leave the group. (3) A situation in which a person is in a region of negative valence and can leave it only by going through another region of negative valence. For instance, a man is cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to testify whether or not some of his acquaintances were members of the Communist party, and to purge himself he must become an informer.

It is evident that the situation depicted in (1) will lead to a going "out of the field." Escape behavior will follow from the fact that the resultant of the forces away from the two regions of negative valence will tend to push the person in a direction that is perpendicular to the path connecting the two negative regions. Only if restraints prevent the individual from leaving the field will such a situation result in more than momentary conflict. Restraints as in (2) introduce a conflict between the driving forces related to the negative valence and the restraining forces related to the restraining barrier. There is a tendency for a barrier to acquire a negative valence that increases with the number of unsuccessful attempts to cross it and that, finally, is sufficiently strong to prevent the individual from approaching it (Fajans, 1933a; Fajans, 1933b). Thus, the conflict between driving and restraining forces is replaced by a conflict between driving forces, as in (3). This fact is especially important for social psychology since, in many situations of life, the barriers are social. When a person turns against the barrier, he is in effect directing himself against the will and power of the person or persons, or of the social group, to whom the erection of the barrier is due. That is, when there is no way to escape the conflict between negative valences except by overcoming social barriers, both the barriers and the people with whom one perceives the barriers originate will take on negative valence as the individual is unable to escape. One of the effects of the threat of punishment is to create a situation in which the individual and the creator of the barrier stand against each other as enemies.

3. The third fundamental type of conflict occurs when the individual is exposed to opposing forces derived from a positive and a negative valence. One can distinguish at least three different forms of this conflict. (1) The situation in which a region has both positive and negative valence (a person wishes to join a social group but fears that being a member will be too expensive). The Freudian concept of ambivalence is subsumed under this variety of conflict. (2) The situation in which a person is encircled by (but is not actually in) a negative or a barrier region and is attracted to a goal that is outside the negative or barrier region (a person has to go through the unpleasant ordeal of leaving his home or his group in order to pursue some desired activity). The nature of this situation is such that the region of the person's present activity tends to acquire negative valence as long as the region that encircles him hinders locomotion toward desired outer goals. Thus, being a member of a minority group or being in a ghetto or in a prison often takes on negative valence, apart from the inherent characteristics of the region, because one can get to desired goals...
from the region only by passing through an encircling region of negative valence. (3) The situation in which a region of positive valence is encircled by or is accessible only through a region of negative valence. This type of situation differs from (2) in that the region of positive valence rather than the region in which the person is to be found is encircled by the negative valence. The "reward situation," in which the individual is granted a reward only if he performs an unpleasant task, is an example of this type of conflict. Similarly, the initiation rites in many social groups—the hazing procedures of college fraternities, for example—may be viewed as exemplifying this kind of conflict.

Lewin (1946, 1951, p. 259), as well as Miller (1944), has pointed out that the forces corresponding to a negative valence tend to decrease more rapidly as a function of psychological distance than do the forces corresponding to a positive valence. The amount of decrease depends also on the nature of the region which has a positive or negative valence. It is different, for example, in the case of a dangerous animal which can move about than in the case of an immovable unpleasant object. The difference in the gradients of decrease for forces deriving from positive and negative valences accounts for the fact that a strong fear or a strong tendency to withdraw may be taken as evidence of a strong desire for the goal despite the apparent paradox. Only with a very attractive goal will the point of equilibrium between the tendencies for approach and avoidance be close enough to the negatively valent region to produce a strong force away from the goal. On the other hand, strengthening the negative valence of a region may very well have the effect of weakening the forces in conflict, since the point of equilibrium (where the force away from the negative valence and the force toward the positive valence are of equal strength and opposite direction) may be pushed a considerable distance from the valent regions.

**Socially Induced Change**

Lewin’s concepts do not presuppose that motivation is primarily induced by physiological deficits; he leaves open the possibility that tension and valences may be aroused socially (for example, by an experimenter’s instructions to perform a task). He also indicts that the forces acting on a person may be “imposed” or may directly reflect that person’s own needs.

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In this connection, it is relevant to introduce the concept of "power field," which, although not well defined, has been employed in many social psychological investigations (Arsenian, 1943; Cartwright, 1950; Frank, 1944; Lippitt, 1940; Wiehe, cited in Lewin, 1935b). A power field is an inducing field, which can induce changes in the life space within its area of influence.

The source of a power field is usually but not necessarily a person. It is possible to speak of a person’s area of direct social influence as his power field and to speak of the changes that can be or are induced in the life spaces of other people by this person’s power field. For example, where workers have no intrinsic interest in their work, not viewing it as a means to some important goal, they would be inclined to loaf were it not for the presence of a supervisor who can induce forces in the direction of performing work. When the supervisor is not psychologically present, and, when his power field is therefore absent, the workers resume their loafing.

The distinction between “own” and “induced” forces has been useful in explaining some of the differences in behavior under autocratic and democratic leadership (Lippitt and White, 1943), a difference that was a focus both for Lewin’s scientific interests in the study of leadership and group processes and also for his concern about the effects of autocratic governments. This focus was extraordinarily productive. Scientifically, it helped to stimulate the development of group dynamics. The Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1949) study of various styles of leadership showed that it was possible to experiment with important properties of groups and, in so doing, revealed exciting new prospects for psychological experimentation. Socially, Lewin’s interest in style of leadership and his demonstration that democratic leadership is more likely to produce groups whose members contribute to group objectives willingly and on their own initiative helped to provide a psychological rationale for democracy when it was under attack from dictatorial governments. Further, it has helped to stimulate changes in style of leadership in industrial, educational, and military groups, and it has given rise to programs of training in human relations which are widely employed in aiding people to acquire skills in group leadership.

The findings of the study of different types of leadership indicate that children in a club led by authoritarian leaders (who de-
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Perhaps no other area of research that Lewin and his students have opened to experimental investigation has been the subject of so many studies as that of the level of aspiration, which may be defined as the degree of difficulty of the goal toward which a person is striving. The concept is relevant only when there is a perceived range of difficulty in the attainment of possible goals and there is variation in valence among the goals along the range of difficulty.

In discussing the level of aspiration, it may be helpful to consider a sequence of events that is typical for many of the experimental studies in this area. (1) A subject plays a game or performs a task in which he can obtain a score (for example, throwing darts at a target); (2) after playing the game and obtaining a given score, he is asked to tell what score he will undertake to make the next time he plays; (3) he then plays the game again and achieves another score; (4) he reacts to his second performance with feelings of success or failure, with a continuing or a new level of aspiration. In this sequence, point (4), reaction to achievement, is especially significant for the dynamics of the level of aspiration.

In outline form, the theory of level of aspiration is rather simple (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944). It states that the valence of any level of difficulty (V) is equal to the product of the valence