

Preface

Until very recently the scientific study of personality was primarily concerned with locating the individual with respect to a number of dimensions representing enduring characteristic dispositions, as formalized in the classic trait theories. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, a growing awareness that individual behavior was not highly consistent across different situations led many personologists to deemphasize generalized dispositions and focus instead on the impact of the social context in which social behavior takes place. This new personology favored constructs drawn from the behaviorist tradition in experimental psychology—particularly the notions of event–event and response–outcome contingency—as supplemented by new concepts such as vicarious learning, modeling, and self-reinforcement. The development of *social-learning* theory paved the way for an increasing interaction between personality and social psychology. If trait theorists tended to think of personality in terms of response tendencies that were stable across time and situations, social-learning theorists underscored the discriminativeness and flexibility of human behavior. Clearly, however, the operative factors in human behavior were not the objective stimulus conditions but the ways in which situations were perceived and the meanings attributed to them by the individual. Recognition of this fact led investigators to take seriously the cognitive processes by which the individual construes situations and plans behavior in a psychological environment. The resulting *cognitive social-learning* theory provides the basis for future links between personality and cognitive psychology.

This evolutionary trend—in which personality has “gone social” and “gone cognitive”—makes it quite difficult to draw sharp distinctions among the domains of personality, cognitive, and social psychology. Although some may see

this ambiguity as posing difficulties, we do not think that such distinctions are necessary or even useful. Rather, in striving toward a definition of the field we think of personality (or any other subdiscipline of psychology) as a fuzzy set defined by a number of features none of which are necessary or sufficient. There was a time when the domain of personality was defined by, and restricted to, the study of individual differences. But the situation is now such that there are some individual differences—in the capacity of primary memory, for example—that do not clearly belong in the domain of personality and some general processes—such as those involved in the encoding and retrieval of social information—that clearly do belong there. Similarly, another traditional criterion for personality was a concern with cross-situational consistency. Now there is increasing recognition that consistency is an empirical question rather than a defining feature so that personologists are forced to consider the factors—dispositional or situational—that lead to consistency or specificity in behavior.

The present volume presents the domain of personality as a fuzzy set that includes features previously identified with cognitive and social psychology. Few of the individual contributions are centrally concerned with individual differences and cross-situational stability, but these traditional themes certainly appear in several of the chapters. The remaining chapters deal with the general processes mediating the interaction between the person and the social environment, filling out the fuzzy set of personality psychology.

Part I seeks to locate contemporary trends in the cognitive psychology of personality against a backdrop of historical events. Mischel briefly rehearses the conceptual and methodological problems associated with the differential and psychodynamic approaches to personality, at the same time as he discusses the relationship of cognitive approaches to Allport's idiographic psychology on the one hand and Lewin's field theory on the other. Most important, he makes clear that the conception of human behavior in the minds of cognitive-social learning theorists is not that of a passive victim of environmental forces but rather of an individual with a history and goals who creates the social world at the same time as he or she adjusts to it.

The chapters in Part II discuss some of the cognitive processes mediating social behavior. Cantor argues that social information is organized according to prototypes and discusses various ways in which these cognitive structures guide information processing and social behavior. Cohen shows how the schemata brought to bear on social information are themselves shaped by the individual's expectations and goals in particular social contexts. Similarly, Higgins and King discuss the way in which experience—over both short and long periods of time—influences the salience of the constructs by which we organize social perception and memory. Kihlstrom explores a wide range of topics in personality and memory, with a special emphasis on early recollections and other forms of autobiographical recall.

Part III contains contributions concerned with the rules by which people make

judgments about objects in the social world. Borgida, Locksley, and Brekke present a theoretical framework for determining when widely shared sex-role stereotypes will be used to make predictions about individuals. Fiske and Kinder show that individual differences in political sophistication and involvement influence the way in which people make judgments about political topics.

The self, a dominant topic in personality theory and research, is treated extensively in Part IV. Rogers employs a variety of techniques familiar in experimental psychology to characterize the generalized self-concept as a cognitive structure. Kuiper and Derry extend this formulation to topics related to person perception and psychopathology. Markus and Smith consider self-knowledge within specific domains and also discuss the influence of self-schemata on the processing of information about others. Finally, Locksley and Lenauer propose a model, based on attribution theory, of the process by which we form impressions of ourselves.

Although many of the chapters are explicitly concerned with the relations between cognition and action—after all, most human interaction takes the form of judgments and communication—the contributions in Part V make the links to overt behavior. Athay and Darley outline within a social-exchange framework a number of interaction competencies important in resolving the tension between “routinizing” and “contextualizing” tendencies in behavior. Snyder presents a framework for understanding how individuals operate cognitively and behaviorally on situations in such a way as to support their characteristic dispositions and confirm their expectations and hypotheses about the social world.

Finally, Part VI offers two discussions of the previous contributions from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Glucksberg points out some hazards in forging too close a link, too soon, between personality and cognitive psychology: Although the cognitive psychology of personality may make profitable use of borrowed constructs pertaining to structure and process, borrowed paradigms may be much less helpful when—as so often happens—they are discredited. Posner draws attention to two other potential problems: the temptation to employ highly generalized cognitive constructs such as attention and schema without committing oneself to precise technical definitions; and a tendency to focus on mental constructs without linking them to overt social behavior.

It seems clear by now that the determinants of behavior and experience are so multifaceted and complex that the study of personality begs for an interdisciplinary approach. Personality psychology in its broadened form shares substantially with both cognitive and social psychology. The focus on cognitive mediation and on the role of goals, expectations, and inferences in shaping behavior joins personality and cognitive psychologists in common cause. Similarly, personality and social psychologists express a joint concern with the interactive nature of social behavior and the flexibility of the individual's response to even subtle situational variation. The new focus does not displace the old concerns with stability and psychodynamics. The intersection of personality, cognitive, and

social psychology forces us to consider the reciprocal relations between relatively long-term social knowledge structures and behavioral dispositions and relatively short-term goals, expectations, and situational demands as they conspire together to shape social cognition and social behavior. The present volume is dedicated to dynamic interactionism as both a model of social behavior and a metaphor for the enterprise of personality research.

The chapters collected here are based on presentations at the Conference on Personality and Cognition held at Princeton University from March 30 to April 1, 1979. Support for the conference was generously provided by the Herbert Langfeld Fund administered under the auspices of the Department of Psychology, Princeton University. Walter Mischel and Mark Snyder expressed early enthusiasm for the idea of the conference; John Darley, Sam Glucksberg, Arlene Rakower, and Uta Runyan provided special organizational expertise and assistance necessary for its successful execution: we thank them all wholeheartedly. Finally, we are indebted to the Department of Psychology at Princeton for permitting 15 cognitive-social-personality psychologists to roam the environs of Green Hall for a long weekend. We stand firm in the belief that the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island was prevented from evolving into a full-scale tragedy as a result of our collective presence and united efforts.

Final preparation of this volume was supported in part by Grant #BNS-8022253 from the National Science Foundation; and by Grants #MH-29951 and MH-33737 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Nancy Cantor
John F. Kihlstrom

PERSONALITY, COGNITION, and SOCIAL INTERACTION

Edited by

NANCY CANTOR
Princeton University

JOHN F. KIHLMSTROM
University of Wisconsin



1981

LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
Hillsdale, New Jersey

Copyright © 1981 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by photostat, microform, retrieval system, or any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
365 Broadway
Hillsdale, New Jersey 07642

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Personality, cognition, and social interaction.

Includes bibliographies and indexes.

1. Social perception--Congresses. 2. Personality--
Congresses. 3. Cognition--Congresses. 4. Social
interaction--Congresses. I. Cantor, Nancy.

II. Kihlstrom, John F.

HM132.P43 302 81-208

ISBN 0-89859-057-4 AACR2

Printed in the United States of America