1 On the scope of social psychology

An introduction

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When you think about it for only a minute or so, you realise that trying to understand, explain, predict and, when needed, change people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours is an awe-inspiring task. For example, we know that people often have little insight into their own thinking processes (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), let alone the thoughts and cognitive processes of others (see also Nisbett & Ross, 1980). The same difficulties arise with people's affective feelings (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Furthermore, and perhaps most difficult of all, explaining and predicting social behaviour may be among the most difficult things people can aspire to (e.g., Snyder & Cantor, 1998). Yet it is precisely the explanation and prediction of cognition, affect, and behaviour that social psychologists set out to achieve.

Since its founding days, the field of social psychology has flourished (for an overview, see, e.g., Jones, 1998). One well-known era that has been very important for our field was the period around the 1940s and 1950s, when people like Kurt Lewin (1935), Solomon Asch (1946, 1951), John Thibaut (1950; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and Leon Festinger (1954, 1957) formulated their groundbreaking theories and conducted their pioneering research studies. Yet, notwithstanding the crucial impact of this "golden" period, it could well be stated that social psychology matured only at the end of the 1960s. After all, it was around that time that social psychology moved into its next phase. Young people had been trained then by the pioneers of the field and went on to become key figures in what turned out to be the exciting modern science of social psychology. Meticulous theories and conceptual refinements were formulated and precise methodological tools were invented which could be used to test the hypotheses that followed from the theoretical models proposed.

As a result, since the end of the 1960s social psychology has blossomed,

both in investigating the basics of the discipline and in applying the insights from fundamental social psychology to different fields related to the area. This book is devoted to what the field of social psychology has learned in the last four decades, focusing on both basic and applied social psychology. In doing so, we want to honour one of the key figures in modern social psychology: Wolfgang Stroebe.

The reason why we highlight Wolfgang Stroebe here is not so much his official retirement in May–June 2006. After all, knowing Wolfgang, and knowing his position as Fellow at the Utrecht University College, we are quite confident that he will remain very active as a researcher in both the basic and applied domains of our field. The main reasons why we emphasise Wolfgang's research are three-fold. First, his exceptional work is representative of the development of modern social psychology in the last 40 years. Second, he is one of those very rare individuals whose contributions have been made in the domains of both basic and applied social psychology. Third, in an era of ever-increasing specialisation (where academics are stereotyped as those who know "more and more, about less and less"), Wolfgang Stroebe's career contributions have been characterised by extraordinary eclecticism. He has contributed hugely to theory and research on attitudes and attitude change, social cognition and emotions, interpersonal and group processes, health behaviour and related changes, and bereavement and coping. Thus we have chosen these five areas as the constitutive sections of this volume. The scope of the chapters contained in this volume reflects Wolfgang's *and* social psychology's broad theoretical and research interests. As a result, the volume is designed to provide the reader a broad-ranging, illustrative review of the field of modern social psychology.

The chapters that make up this volume are written by experts in their fields. All authors provide an overview or critical look at their specific area of expertise, and they trace historical developments where appropriate. As the title of the book illustrates, the aim of the chapters taken together was to address the interface of theory and application. More specifically, three sections of the present volume focus on the basics of social psychology: Section 1 focuses on attitudes and attitude change, Section 2 on social cognition and emotion, and Section 3 on interpersonal and group processes. Chapters in these three sections focus on basic social-psychological processes and note important implications of the various lines of research reviewed. The next three sections also use basic social psychology as their starting point but then go on to focus more on applying the insights that follow from basic social psychology. Specifically, Section 4 focuses on health behaviour and conditions that lead to changes in health behaviour, Section 5 discusses theories and studies pertaining to bereavement and coping, and Section 6 places psychological theory and research in context. The book closes with an epilogue from various other observers of Wolfgang Stroebe's university activities. We now provide a brief overview of the various chapters in Sections 1–6, after which we will make some closing comments.

Section 1: Attitudes and attitude change

In the first chapter in the section on attitudes and attitude change, Richard Eiser reviews research on how individuals make evaluative judgements about objects, people, and events in ways that enable them to remain feeling generally positive about themselves and the decisions they make. This theme is examined in relation to the fields of attitudinal judgement, attitude maintenance, self-positivity, attitude learning, attitudes and decisions, and risk, trust, and social judgement.

In the next chapter, Klaus Jonas and René Ziegler focus on the issue of attitudinal ambivalence, which may result from evaluating attitude objects as both positive and negative simultaneously. The chapter discusses definitional aspects pertaining to ambivalence and different forms of attitudinal ambivalence as well as different ways of measuring the concept. The authors then review research on attitudinal ambivalence as a moderator of the attitude–behaviour relationship, showing the theoretical and applied implications of this work as well as the interrelationship between different moderating effects of ambivalence. The enhanced insight this gives into attitudes, attitude change, and the attitude–behaviour relationship is discussed, as well as additional facets of research on attitudinal ambivalence. The chapter ends by drawing conclusions and sketching lines of future research on attitudinal ambivalence.

Icek Ajzen and Antony Manstead use the theory of planned behaviour as an approach to change health-related behaviours. Introduced as an extension of the theory of reasoned action, this approach can not only predict intentions and behaviour quite accurately, it can also provide useful information about the behavioural, normative, and control considerations that influence adherence or non-adherence to recommended health practices. Many attempts to identify antecedents of health-related lifestyles focus on broad personal, demographic, and environmental factors. The theory of planned behaviour considers such factors as background variables that only influence health behaviour indirectly through their influence on more proximal factors that are directly linked to the behaviour of interest. The authors are also careful to note some important theoretical and applied limitations their approach may have, and specify the relevance of their model for health education campaigns and effective interventions.

Alice Eagly, in her chapter on the effects of defensive processing on attitudinal phenomena, comments on motivational analyses of attitudes and examines efforts to develop theory pertaining to defensive processes. Motivational themes have long been prominent in attitude theory and research. Among the most important and enduring of these themes is the idea that attitudes reflect motives to defend values and other positive states. This principle has emerged repeatedly in research on persuasion and attitudinal selectivity, and predictions based on it have enjoyed some success. After reflecting on these motivational analyses, Alice Eagly focuses on the concepts of value-relevant

involvement as well as defence motivation as two important models of self-defensive processes. She also discusses applications of these concepts in research on attitudinal selectivity and persuasion.

Section 2: Social cognition and emotion

The section on social cognition and emotion begins with a chapter by David Hamilton and Miles Hewstone. These two authors review 35 years of theory and research on how people perceive groups. A noteworthy aspect of social psychology's long history of interest in group perception is that in the past three decades work on group perception has evolved and elaborated from a singular focus on the stereotypic associations for various groups into a multifaceted analysis of various aspects of how groups are perceived. Similarly, conceptual understanding of intergroup relations, particularly the implications of intergroup contact for changing stereotypic beliefs and prejudicial attitudes, has advanced to more sophisticated analyses of how and why rather than simply when. In this chapter, the authors review these developments and highlight how this furthers insight into the dynamics of group perception and intergroup relations.

Arie Kruglanski and Gün Semin provide an original integration of two erstwhile separate domains, lay epistemology and the linguistic category model, to consider epistemic bases of interpersonal communication. Building on the notion that the essential function of communication is the exchange of some kind of knowledge, the chapter reviews evidence that the process of such conveyance is significantly influenced by communicators' epistemic motivations. That is, such motivations may determine the perspective that communicators may adopt, and may influence the level of linguistic abstraction at which communicators couch their messages. The chapter introduces the reader to the concept of epistemic motivations and reviews the specific theory and evidence that link such motivations to various communicative effects.

Norbert Schwarz and Fritz Strack, in their chapter on life satisfaction, consider what cognitive social psychology may contribute to a better understanding of the processes that cause people to think of themselves as happy or satisfied with their life in general. In doing so, these authors offer some tangible advice on how people should and should not think about their lives. Life-events play an important role in judgements of happiness and life-satisfaction. Yet their impact does not follow the simple assumption that good events will make people happy. Instead, the same event can increase as well as decrease life-satisfaction, depending on how people think about it. In their chapter, Schwarz and Strack consider the role of what comes to mind, how easily it comes to mind, and how it is used, as well as the impact of positive or negative feelings that a memory may elicit. The underlying processes are systematic and the reviewed results reliably replicable, provided that properly controlled experimental conditions channel how people think about

their lives. In the absence of controlled conditions or controlled research methods, however, different people choose different judgement strategies, resulting in a wide variety of different outcomes.

Section 3: Interpersonal and group processes

Chester Insko and Scott Wolf open the section on interpersonal and group processes by discussing factors pertaining to the tendency for relations between groups to be more competitive and less cooperative than relations between individuals. The authors review findings of a meta-analysis, showing that this interindividual–intergroup discontinuity effect is descriptively large. As a result, understanding the circumstances in which this effect occurs is of obvious social significance. The chapter goes on to focus on three situational variables that impact the generality of the effect: (1) the correspondence of outcomes, (2) the joint control of outcomes, and (3) social support for the competitive choice. Findings are reviewed that show the importance of these variables as well as the need to be specific about the types of social situations and types of games in which these variables are studied.

In their chapter, Bernard Nijstad and John Levine argue that in order to understand group creativity, one needs to consider the different stages of creative problem solving. The authors discuss three stages of the creative process: (1) identifying and defining the problem, (2) generating solutions to the problem, and (3) choosing the best idea and then developing and implementing it. Group creativity, the authors propose, occurs if people collaborate in at least one of these stages and if the final product would not have been possible without that collaboration. One major conclusion to be drawn from the chapter's overview of the stages of creative group problem solving is that greater research effort should focus on the question of *when* it is useful to have input from other group members, rather than on the question of *whether* such input is useful. Furthermore, new group members can make useful contributions in all three stages of the creative process reviewed in this chapter.

Katherine Stroebe, Russell Spears, and Hein Lodewijkx contrast and integrate social identity and interdependence approaches as they pertain to intergroup discrimination in the minimal group paradigm. The authors argue that both approaches can help to explain intergroup discrimination in this paradigm and that it can be fruitful to consider them jointly. After reviewing the history of the social identity and interdependence approaches, studies are discussed that propose an integration of these approaches. Building on these integrative studies, a theoretical framework is proposed. This framework accounts for both social identity and interdependence processes, and determines factors that affect the relative strength of each process in a given context. In this way, the authors try to show that a joint approach may provide interesting theoretical avenues in future research on intergroup discrimination in the minimal group paradigm.

Section 4: Health behaviour and health behaviour change

This section begins with the chapter by Susan Folkman and Judith Moskowitz who make a strong case that positive affect occurs during stressful situations that are chronic, and that there is good reason to believe that the presence of positive affect over time can influence health, independent of negative affect. The authors review developments in psychologists' understanding of meaning-focused coping processes that play a major role in the regulation of positive affect, especially in chronically stressful situations where favourable outcomes are not readily available. Feedback loops are proposed through which both positive affect and meaning-focused coping can restore coping resources and motivate coping effort over the long term. In this way, this pioneering chapter tries to further work that will help elaborate insights into the role of positive emotions in enabling individuals to maintain well-being under highly stressful circumstances.

In the chapter by John de Wit, Enny Das, and Natascha de Hoog, the authors focus on the important role of beliefs regarding personal risk or vulnerability in understanding health-related behaviours and promoting change. In particular, the biased nature of these perceptions and subsequent information processing is addressed. Classic social-psychological theories of health and social behaviour have mostly been based on the assumption that health behaviour is guided by rational deliberation and cognitive processing of information. By contrast, more recent perspectives emphasise the interplay of affect and cognition in predicting persuasion. The complex dynamics between emotions and thoughts pertaining to health behaviour and health behaviour change constitute the main focus of this chapter. An important part of the chapter is devoted to theory and research regarding the efficacy of communication strategies to promote awareness and acceptance of a personal health threat. This overview features novel theoretical conceptualisations of health threat communication that see persuasion as resulting from the biased processing of information, and helps to synthesise extant theory and research.

Arnold Bakker, Wilmar Schaufeli, Evangelia Demerouti, and Martin Euwema present an organisational and social-psychological perspective on burnout and work engagement. After defining both burnout and work engagement, these authors discuss the central premises of their job demands–resources model, a psychological model that integrates previous organisational research on burnout and work engagement. The authors then argue that because burnout and work engagement affect employees in social contexts, it is important to study these phenomena using a social-psychological approach. In adopting such an approach, the authors argue that burnout and work engagement may transfer from employees to others in their social environment such as colleagues, supervisors, and intimate partners. The chapter closes with avenues for future research and a discussion of practical implications.

Section 5: Bereavement and coping

In the first chapter of this section, Robert Weiss reflects on a classic study in the literature on bereavement and coping, showing that while having supportive friends effectively ameliorates the distress associated with social isolation of widows and widowers, these factors do little to reduce the loneliness associated with marital loss (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Abakoumkin, 1996). Specifically, Weiss offers a theoretical and empirical context for these findings. The theoretical context stems from the work of Bowlby and includes an extension of this work to include a concern for community relationships and also a theory of loneliness. The empirical context includes efforts to establish that the emotional partnership of a marriage and the linkages to others that can be categorised under the heading of relationships of community make different provisions to individual well-being. It also includes efforts to establish that the loneliness that is associated with the absence of a marriage or similar relationship is different from the loneliness that is associated with the absence of relationships of community. Implications and future avenues for research are discussed.

The chapter by Georgios Abakoumkin, Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, Robert Hansson, Henk Schut, and Margaret Stroebe has been inspired by work of Wolfgang Stroebe and his colleagues (e.g., Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). Building on this work, Abakoumkin et al. document the development of scientific research on bereavement across several decades. This review includes a description of how the bereavement research started and how the literature developed, and considers what future lines of research probably will be, or need to be. Fundamental questions asked are whether death of a loved one causes death of the remaining spouse; who participates in bereavement research; whether helping in the bereavement process really helps; and whether there is support for the notion that people have to do their grief work in order to come to terms with their loss. Within each main area of bereavement research, stringent empirical tests suggest that there is no sound empirical evidence that emotional disclosure facilitates adjustment to loss in *normal* bereavement (Stroebe et al., 2005). It simply takes time to heal from the loss of a loved one and precious little can be done to speed up the process. The implications of this conclusion for both bereavement researchers and popular media and counsellors are discussed.

The chapter by Emmanuelle Zech, Bernard Rimé, and Jamie Pennebaker closes the section on bereavement and coping. Following the Abakoumkin chapter, this chapter has been inspired by work of Wolfgang Stroebe and his colleagues—research that has debunked simple models of people's grief reactions and suggests that no interventions seem to work for most people in reducing the pain of bereavement (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2005). Zech et al. point out that these conclusions are both distressing and raise new challenges for the next generation of bereavement researchers. Furthermore, the strength of the research by Stroebe and colleagues has been in pointing to the shortcomings

of many of the basic assumptions most of us hold about death and loss. Through carefully controlled real-world studies, they have repeatedly demonstrated the difficulty of modifying grief reactions. In short, Stroebe et al. highlighted the fact that understanding human reactions to bereavement is more complex than previously proposed: Specific sharing interactions should work for specific individuals at a precise point in time of their grieving process. The chapter by Zech et al. outlines potential moderators and mediators of the effects of emotional disclosure in coping with bereavement.

Section 6: Psychology in context

In this section, psychological research is put into context by pointing out the necessity of, and specific possibilities and opportunities for, starting interdisciplinary social-scientific research. Karl-Dieter Opp describes 30 years of interdisciplinary social-scientific research conducted by himself, Wolfgang Stroebe, and colleagues such as Hans Albert, Klaus Foppa, Bruno Frey, Wilhelm Meyer, Kurt Stapf, and Viktor Vanberg. The chapter describes how this group was founded and was able successfully to practise interdisciplinary work. In this way, this chapter may inspire and help scientists to look beyond the boundaries of their own scientific disciplines and start to conduct truly interdisciplinary scientific research.

Epilogue

This volume closes with an epilogue in four parts, written by Lloyd Strickland, Jaap Rabbie, Rein van der Vegt, and Lizet Hoekert. One of the things this epilogue describes is how to manage the other duties (such as administrative duties) one faces when aiming to be an active researcher. The epilogue may help social psychologists and other scientific researchers to get the maximum out of their research activities and other duties.

Closing comments

In closing this introductory chapter, we want to thank the people and organisations that have helped us to realise this project. These include Psychology Press—and especially Mike Forster—for their support for the enterprise, as well as the Department of Social and Organizational Psychology at Utrecht University, and the research school of Psychology and Health in the Netherlands. Furthermore, we thank all the authors involved here. As every social psychologist knows, the list of authors presented in this book is quite impressive, and if one realises how busy these famous social psychologists are, the list is even more striking. Thus, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to all of them for making space in their demanding schedules to contribute to this book. The reason why all the people and organisations involved were so willing to cooperate with this book, we think, was that all

wanted to honour the exciting developments in the past four decades of the basic and applied domains of social psychology, and in doing so, wanted to show their deep scientific appreciation for the man who has played such an exemplary role in all these fields of active research and who still is such an active researcher in both basic and applied social psychology: Wolfgang Stroebe.

In a famous historical chapter on social psychology Gordon Allport (1968) remarked that "Today the outstanding mark of social psychology as a discipline is its sophistication in method and experimental design" (p. 67). But he also warned that "many contemporary studies seem to shed light on nothing more than a narrow phenomenon studied under specific conditions . . . some current investigations seem to end up in elegantly polished triviality—snippets of empiricism, but nothing more" (p. 68). Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of Wolfgang Stroebe's research contributions to social psychology—always elegantly polished; never trivial.

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