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INTRODUCTION

Once you become an octogenarian and have engaged in social psychological research and writing for two thirds of a century, you must ask yourself just what it all adds up to in the end. Were there central themes? Was there an overarching perspective that developed over the years? What, if anything, contributed to advances in my discipline of social psychology?

This volume provides my answers to these questions. I have consistently tried, with varying success, to place the psychological characteristics of individuals within their structural, cultural, and normative contexts. In other words, I have long sought to help establish a *contextual social psychology*.

The idea of a contextual social psychology is simple, straightforward, and hardly new. It simply means placing data from one level of analysis within the context of other levels. In what was one of the very first studies in North American social psychology, Norman Triplett (1898), an amateur bicycle racer himself, keenly observed that riders tended to pump harder and race faster when riding with others than when riding alone—a basic contextual result.

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Contextual Social Psychology: Reanalyzing Prejudice, Voting, and Intergroup Contact,
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But advancing the contextual idea is anything but simple. Indeed, social science has wrestled with this problem both theoretically and methodologically throughout its history. This book illustrates how, over the years, slow progress has been made in establishing a theoretically and methodologically sound contextual approach in the discipline. Indeed, recent years have witnessed major methodological and statistical advances that have made contextual research far easier to conduct, more rigorous, and more common. And it is this emergence of contextual research in social psychology that this volume traces and describes, and for which it advocates. I have attempted to write the book so that non-social scientists can easily follow the argument. But it is aimed primarily at social scientists in general and at advanced undergraduates and graduate students in psychology and sociology who wish to learn about these contextual ideas and how they have historically developed.

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Let me first provide an outline of the book's nine chapters so that the reader understands how the book's contentions unfold.

Chapter 1: A Personal Quest

My two thirds of a century of research and writing has been shaped by a desire to see psychological social psychology become a more contextual discipline. This chapter records aspects of my life that contributed to this aspiration. With great good fortune, I benefited from instruction from three inspiring Harvard University professors—Gordon Allport, Samuel Stouffer and Talcott Parsons—as well as from two caring and candid African Americans: Mildred Adams and Kenneth Clark. And my experiences in the courtroom, on racial commissions, and advising school districts and other organizations bolstered further my conviction that a multilevel, contextual approach is essential.

Chapter 2: What Is Contextual Social Psychology?

Just as its name implies, contextual social psychology seeks to place basic psychological phenomena in their social contexts. This procedure typically involves more than one level of analysis. Figure 2.1 presents a simple diagram

involving three levels of analysis—the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels—with six causal paths connecting them. The chapter provides examples, both empirical and theoretical, to illustrate each path. This diagram is then used throughout the volume.

Chapter 3: Five Advantages of Contextual Analyses for Social Psychology

This chapter answers the question “Why employ contextual analyses?” by specifying five advantages of the approach.

1. *Contextual analyses offer a rapprochement between social psychologists in sociology and psychology, as well as with the other social sciences.* Examples show how other social sciences, especially political science and economics, have benefited from borrowing social psychological ideas and how social psychology could benefit from their ideas.
2. *Contextual analyses avoid the compositional fallacy, the ecological fallacy, and the single-factor fallacy.* Each fallacy is described, and examples are provided. This is an especially significant advantage because these fallacies are surprisingly common in the social science literature and even more common in popular discussion.
3. *Contextual analyses importantly expand social psychology’s explanatory power.* Using the cognitive example of group attribution bias, this section cites the numerous contextual factors that influence the bias.
4. *Contextual analyses help to counter social psychology’s so-called crises.* Over the past half century, social psychology has experienced two self-inflicted “crises.” The first was the crisis of relevance. During the 1960s, many social psychologists worried that the discipline was drifting from its roots as a change-oriented field. The second crisis is currently a crisis of method, concentrating on “false positives” and replication failures. Both concerns have been overblown, but this latest crisis has led to greater methodological and statistical rigor. Contextual analyses aid the corrections for these related issues.
5. *Contextual analyses generate results that more easily influence public policy.* Social policy largely operates at the macrolevel. Policymakers, who are often lawyers, cannot easily use social science findings at micro- and mesolevels, levels at which social psychologists typically work, but contextual findings that use the macrolevel readily translate into policy terms.

Chapter 4: Statistical Advances Enable and Encourage Contextual Analyses in Social Psychology

This chapter traces the development over the past half century of advanced statistics that both enabled and encouraged the use of contextual analyses. First came *structural equation modeling* and related methods. Then Blalock (1984) published his *explicit analysis of contextual effects models*. Next came simple and direct methods for uncovering *mediating and moderator effects*. Then *meta-analysis* offered a standardized and systematic method for combining the results of multiple studies. Finally, *multilevel analyses* were introduced—the most valuable method of all for contextual analyses. Indeed, this volume describes one multilevel analysis study after another to establish how important this statistical advance is for the contextual approach.

Chapter 5: Applying Contextual Analyses to Intergroup Prejudice

Chapters 5 through 8 demonstrate how predictors of an important phenomenon are found at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels. Prejudice correlates at the microlevel include authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, openness to experience, agreeableness, need for closure, and deprovincialization; at the mesolevel, intergroup contact; and at the macrolevel, restrictions on intergroup contact (e.g., segregation), discriminatory norms, and difficult economic times.

Chapter 6: Applying Contextual Analyses to Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation also has correlates at all three analysis levels. The microlevel has political alienation and inefficacy, age, and education; the mesolevel has differences in economic well-being in the immediate environment; and the macrolevel has cultural and normative differences in individualism and collectivism and has economic differences between nations.

Chapter 7: Applying Contextual Analyses to Intergroup Contact

Again, critical correlates of this central phenomenon emerge at all three levels. The microlevel has the usual suspects—authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, sensitivity to threats, empathy, perspective taking, insecure attachment, and the Big Five traits of Agreeableness and Openness to Experience. The mesolevel has prior intergroup experience, situational threat, equal-status and common goals of groups in the situation, and

intergroup cooperation. The macrolevel has cultural and normative differences in egalitarian values and authority support.

Chapter 8: Applying Contextual Analyses to Far-Right Voting Patterns

This chapter records the remarkable similarities at all three analysis levels in extreme right-wing voting in the United States, the United Kingdom, and continental Europe. At all levels, the predictors of voting for Trump and other nationalists are much the same as those for positively predicting prejudice and those negatively predicting intergroup contact. The micro-level has authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, prejudice, and relative deprivation; the mesolevel has lack of intergroup contact; and the macrolevel has the rapid recent arrival of immigrants in the area.

Chapter 9: Looking Ahead

The final chapter summarizes various implications of the contextual approach for the teaching of social psychology at the graduate and undergraduate levels, as well as the proposal for concepts that span all three levels of analysis.

From this outline, we turn to the details of my long experience in the discipline that led me to become an ardent advocate of contextual analyses of social psychological phenomena.