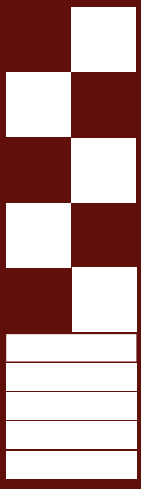
Early Media Effects Theory & the Suggestion Doctrine

Selected Readings, 1895–1935

edited by
Patrick Parsons



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CHAPTER NINETEEN

An Introduction to Social Psychology (1926)

Luther Lee Bernard

New York: Henry Holt, pp. 282–321 [with elisions].

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Luther Bernard (1881–1951) was a student of Ellwood (University of Missouri AB, 1907) and also a graduate student in the University of Chicago's famed sociology department (PhD, 1910). In his peripatetic career, he taught at more than a half-dozen colleges and universities from Cornell to the University of North Carolina to Penn State University. He was president of the American Sociological Society in 1932 and held numerous editorial board positions. His theoretical orientation was behavioristic, and he was said to be successful in helping move sociology away from biological determinism.

Four years after Ellwood's survey text, Bernard published a book with the identical title. It covered, as one might expect, the same ground, but with a stronger emphasis on the social implications of suggestion. In the following excerpt, Bernard sets suggestion inside Floyd Allport's behaviorism: "Suggestion exists when any relatively uncritical and immediate response occurs to a stimulus by means of behavior mechanisms which have already been prepared." Stimuli, further, are described in terms of conditioned symbols and stereotypes.

Capturing much of the extant thinking of the time, Bernard details the variously identified forms of suggestion, such as direct and indirect, and reviews the findings on the suggestibility of differing classes of people. In the end, he finds the suggestion process to be an irrational one and sees great danger in the public's potential susceptibility: "Suggestion operates in almost every sphere and aspect of life. It is a short cut method of controlling effectively conditioned behavior." Referencing specifically the power of the media, he warns, "Through the home, school, church, movie, theater, radio, and newspaper and press generally, we are told what to think or believe in almost all relationships in life." Concern about propaganda—political and commercial—was a growing theme following World War I, and as illustrated by Bernard, was intimately associated with the psychological power of suggestion.—*P.P.*

An Introduction to Social Psychology (1926)

CHAPTER XIX: SUGGESTION AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

DEFINITI0NS—Suggestion exists when any relatively uncritical and immediate response occurs to a stimulus by means of behavior mechanisms which have already been prepared. A suggested response is conditioned ordinarily to a symbol or cue and not to the perception of a total situation, although the term suggestion is also sometimes used to indicate the skillful organization and presentation by another person of stimuli which will compel or induce logically or emotionally the response desired. Since it is a concept adopted for the description of phenomena of a social character, its use is ordinarily limited to behavior in social situations, and especially to behavior in response to symbolic or cue stimuli coming from another person. The cue itself may be either a concrete perceptual or an abstract stimulus. In any case the stimulus is in the nature of an object, act, or symbol which is ordinarily perceived concretely and immediately.

A suggested response may be either imitative or nonimitative, according as it does or does not reproduce the behavior which originally served as the stimulus and which the symbolic or foreshortened cue now represents. If the response has been conditioned to a total stimulus situation which it does not reproduce or resemble, or if it has been conditioned to a symbolic

stimulus merely by association of stimuli it is not imitative. In such a case it is even possible for the response to resemble the behavior of another, some part of which behavior serves as the cue to the response, without its being an imitated response. Such resemblance between the behavior of the two persons is accidental, and is likely to be confused with true imitation.

Suggested and Rational Behavior Distinguished—The suggested response may occur consciously or unconsciously. As a matter of fact most suggested behavior, in the sense in which we are here considering it, is only partly conscious. The greater the degree of the interruption of the suggested behavior, the more conscious the response is, and the more critical or analytical we are of it. Hence the less immediate and more rational the response is, the less truly suggested is the behavior. Purely suggested behavior would be wholly unconscious, or at least unpremeditated and immediate. But there are all degrees of modification of the suggested response from that which is purely automatic and is conditioned to an abbreviated or symbolic cue to that which is in the nature of a rational response. The characteristic of suggested behavior is that it approaches the automatic, while rational behavior is ordinarily highly conscious and is controlled by abstract psychic mechanisms. In suggestion the stimulus situation is ordinarily reduced to a symbolic cue, while in rational behavior the stimulus situation may take on a succession of forms, sometimes even contradictory, and be highly differentiated and spread out over a considerable period of time. Also the suggested response, in its purest form, comes almost immediately after the stimulus is given. Delay in the response means either that thought is entering in to elaborate the response on a more or less critical or rational basis or that there is some hidden unconscious conflict which will not allow the impulses normally arising from the stimulus to go over into immediate action.

Suggestion occurs in the realm of ideas and attitudes or neuro-psychic behavior as well as in that of overt behavior, but the purest forms of suggestion go over immediately into overt responses. Psychic responses to suggestion are never rational in character, for by becoming rational they would cease to have the characteristic of suggested behavior, such as immediacy, automaticity, and unconsciousness. Suggested psychic responses are stereotyped responses, such as conventional beliefs, emotions, desires, opinions, and expressions of polite intercourse. The mechanism for the psychic response is already present, and all that is necessary to put the mechanism into effect is to present the appropriate cue or abbreviated stimulus. The essential characteristic of suggestion is that the stimulus, usually in the form of a cue

or a symbol of the total stimulus, is conditioned definitely to the response, with the result that the conditioned response occurs immediately upon the occurrence of the stimulus or cue. [...]

Abbreviated or Symbolic Conditioning of the Response in Suggested Behavior—The response may or may not have some similarity to the stimulus. If it is similar to it, the chances are strong that the response was at one time consciously imitative, and that it has now been transformed into suggested behavior by becoming relatively automatic and perhaps by dispensing with the necessity for a perception or recognition of the total behavior stimulus. In such cases of substitution of suggestion imitation for conscious or rational imitation, some conspicuous portion of the total behavior stimulus will ordinarily be singled out to serve as a cue and will condition the response as a whole to itself. This specific portion of the original complete stimulus is now sufficient to produce the total response. Perhaps in the organism's attempt to economize attention no more than this particular selected portion of the stimulus is any longer perceived or recognized. Yet, in real life, such an isolated or selected portion of the original stimulus-giving behavior is not likely to operate alone, unless it be artificially isolated by the subject's attention. In most cases the original total behavior stimulus continues to function, and to the uncritical or unanalytical observer it appears to be necessary to set off the response. Therefore, even if the observer has made the delimitation of the stimulus which we have set forth above, he is likely to mistake such a response for a conscious act of imitation.

This is as true of psychic as of overt responses in suggestion imitation. For example, the mere sight of a certain book or picture or the oral or visual presentation of its title, may be sufficient to set up the habitual or stereotyped line of thinking which we have previously established through abstract imitation of it. It is not necessary actually to reread the book in order to recall the contents which have become conditioned to the title or to the image of the book through their constant association with these symbols. Much also that we do of a similar nature when in the presence of others, although it was originally consciously imitated behavior, is no longer such.

We have the mechanisms of response already fixed or stereotyped and it is merely necessary to receive the selected conditioning stimulus of the presence of the other person or of the perception of some article belonging to him or associated with him to put the behavior in operation. Thus the mere presence of people in a crowd looking toward the top of a building will cause us to look up, expecting to see a man climbing the wall or smoke

issuing from the windows. A picture of people at a football game in the attitude of cheering or singing will call up in the inner or attitudinal behavior of the subject the words of a cheer or of a song, which may or may not be the one which these people are shouting or singing. Acting under the influence of the selected stimulus or cue he responds with the behavior pattern which is preconditioned in him. Such a response is still truly imitative, but it is suggestion imitation, and is not rational or even necessarily conscious imitation. However, non-imitative suggested behavior operates by the same partial or substitute mechanism.

Stereotyping the Symbols Conditioning Suggested Responses—Thus the stimulus which sets off a suggested response is nearly always a symbol which has come by substitution or by selective elimination to condition the original response. In the type of cases just described, where suggestion imitation behavior is substituted for conscious imitation behavior, selection of an outstanding portion of the original total behavior stimulus by means of elimination is the method ordinarily used. The effective stimulus is here a selected partial stimulus. But in many, perhaps in most, other cases the stimulus is a complete substitution, depending wholly upon similarity or association in time or spacial contiguity for its chance to condition the original response. In such cases there may be no recognizable similarity of the stimulus to the response which is conditioned to it. In fact the stimulus or cue may not even be a part of the behavior of another person. This substitute conditioning of the response occurs especially in connection with language symbols. Any word or phrase or gesture or facial or other expression may become associated with any response and thereafter call forth the response by suggestion, although it may have nothing to do with the situation in which the behavior was originally learned or imitated. Thus the word "eventually" has come to have the power of suggesting Gold Medal flour to millions of people. Likewise such conditioning symbols as commands, prohibitions, words or gestures denoting things, qualities, action, etc., must at some time in human history have come to be associated with behavior which they conditioned for the first time in this manner. Consequently in the life of each child they are made, as a part of his training, to condition his behavior through such arbitrary association. Words and gestures as language symbols are also associated with our ideas and attitudes in exactly the same manner and become capable of calling up any sentiment, belief, judgment or train of thought which has become stereotyped and has been conditioned to these stimuli. This is in fact the method of the origin of language and shows how

meaning is conveyed through language from one generation or age to another. This fact will explain why certain stock phrases, shibboleths, proverbs, and the like are so effective in gaining the desired response through advertising, propaganda literature, newspapers, the oratorical efforts of revivalists, political spell-binders, and the like.

The Continuity of Meaning and Stereotyped Symbols—A very large portion of the symbols which serve as suggestion stimuli for the release of conditioned responses are of this long time stereotyped character. That is, they remain the same or almost the same from year to year and from generation to generation. Each child does not create them for himself, but acquires them or learns them from others. They are a part of his social heritage. This is true not only of words and phrases and sentences and systems of knowledge, such as sciences and philosophies, but it is also true of those symbolized personal and social values which condition our behavior with reference to men, groups, and things. It is as true of emotional as of intellectual symbols. The esthetic values in art are transmitted from one generation to another and from one individual or group to other units of the same character. Although we do not always fully realize it, pictures, statuary, music, ritual, poetry, have meanings which are dependent primarily upon this continuity in transmission, just as is the case with meaning which reposes in intellectual symbols. The meaning of art and of science is not a function of the symbols which represent or condition them to us, but it resides in the persons whose responses, overt and internal or attitudinal, are conditioned to the symbols. The symbols are merely the communicative media which carry the meaning from one person to another through the process of conditioning by association. Once the chain of conditioned responses is broken by omitting a generation of men thus conditioned to respond psychically and overtly to these symbols, their meaning is gone. Such has actually happened at times in history, where whole systems of symbols, like the languages and the writing and culture of the Hittites and the Philistines and the Minoans have been lost because the chain of conditioned responses which preserved the meaning of their writings was broken. As yet no one has been able to recondition his responses to these symbols in the same way in which these ancient peoples had conditioned theirs and thus to interpret their meaning. Consequently their cultures are to us sealed books and their symbols have lost completely their original power of suggestion. [...]

Direct and Indirect Suggestion differ primarily in the extent to which the ultimate stimulus is recognized as the source of our suggested behavior and

the purpose of the manipulator of the suggestion is perceived. In direct suggestion the manipulator relies upon the strength of the conditioning of the response to the stimulus and does not hesitate to bring himself out clearly into the foreground and issue commands or statements which he expects the other person or persons to accept and act upon. This method of suggestion is most effective when used by people who have prestige with the subject. Thus parents, teachers, ministers and priests, officials, employers, and others with authority or who are our recognized superiors, can afford to employ direct suggestion and may secure effective results from its use. They save time and energy simply by giving directions or commands or making descriptive and positive statements. But even when used by persons in authority this method of suggestion must be employed with tact and consideration for others. If the directly suggested person gets the impression that he is being manipulated contrary to his advantage and for the selfish purposes of another person, or if he feels that the suggestions are given harshly and without sympathy, or that they are commandments merely and not "suggestions," or advice, as that term is sometimes understood by induction, they are likely to lose their moral effect, although they may continue to be obeyed as a matter of policy. Many a parent has lost his or her moral prestige with a child by employing direct suggestion too baldly and with too much show of authority. Employers and superintendents or foremen are more often hated because of the brutal directness and unsympathetic character of their suggestions or commands to laborers than for being hard taskmasters.

Superiority of Indirect Suggestion—Indirect suggestion is usually better in every way except for the lack of economy of time and energy involved in using it and sometimes in the lack of clearness of the instructions. Sometimes there is even a saving of time and energy in the long run as the result of the use of indirect suggestion. Ministers perhaps should always employ it and teachers usually, parents and employers at least frequently. The public lecturer and the newspaper and periodical almost invariably make use of indirect suggestion. Its method is merely that of selecting by chance or intention some type of stimulus which calls forth the desired response in the subject without revealing the motive, or perhaps even the source, or the identity of the suggester. Thus one may say to a child who objects to taking his medicine that the medicine looks like honey, or some other substance which appeals to the child. Perhaps even this method is too direct and is likely to lead to suspicion or detection of ulterior motives on the part of the suggester. It may be better to ask the child what he thinks it looks like before

offering it or if he doesn't think it looks like honey. Or it may sometimes be advisable for some one else to sample the substance and declare it tastes very much like honey. The child's eating responses are sufficiently closely conditioned to the stimulus of honey that he will take the medicine unless he suspects the purpose or content of the indirect suggestion.

Methods and Examples of Indirect Suggestion—Indirect suggestions are best made by means of an incidental appeal to the appetites or interests and close associations of the subject. Indeed, no indirect suggestion can be very effective unless thus made. An indirect appeal to vanity is almost invariably successful. People will decide as if of their own initiative to do almost anything if the suggester has succeeded in conditioning the response to the stimulus of his approval of their personal appearance or conduct. The best way for lovers or married people to make up after quarrels is for the offender, or at least the one who must assume the rôle of the offender, to become enraptured with the attractiveness of the other or to speak appreciatively of her many virtues, skillfully conditioning the desired response to the imputed qualities, which will readily be accepted and approved by the subject. This method does not always work so well with marital parties as with lovers, because the element of suspicion of motives or the lack of novelty of the device may have entered into the equation. Tom Sawyer's method of getting his fence whitewashed is a classic example of the employment of the method of indirect suggestion. The political orator's flattery of the reputed wisdom of the people, which he has skillfully associated with the response of voting for his candidate, affords another excellent illustration. The successful insurance salesman or book agent is a master of indirect suggestion. He tells you of all the élite who are his patrons and of the large amount of insurance they carry through his company or of the fine bindings they have purchased.

Dangers of Indirect Suggestion—But indirect suggestion is not without its faults and dangers. It can be employed for socially bad as well as for socially good ends even more effectively than direct suggestion. Direct suggestion brings the moral issue more clearly into view and if a choice is permitted more opportunity is provided for a rational decision on the merits of the proposition. The act or belief desired by the suggester is called by its own name and it is not hidden behind a simile or a compliment. But in the case of indirect suggestion the chief art is to cover up or lessen the direct adjustment significance of the response and to condition it to a motive or an attitude which is really extrinsic to the situation. One is induced to take medicine because it tastes or looks like honey, not because it cures an ill. Another yields

to a lover because he thinks she is beautiful. A third votes for a bad candidate because he has been told that he (the voter) is a patriotic American Citizen. A fourth purchases insurance of an agent because he is told that a railway president did likewise. There is always the danger that a decision may be a wrong one when made for extrinsic reasons. Certainly it is not good moral training to be coddled and teased into doing things only on the basis of a personal selfish appeal to vanity or to the sense of approbation of superiors or to personal pleasure. It is better for one's moral fiber and self-respect, especially for his social and ethical outlook, to face propositions on their own merits. Perhaps there has been too much indirect suggestion used to control the younger generation. It is possible that they have come to feel that they must be wheedled into meeting their obligations to themselves and society. It sometimes looks as if they felt they were doing others a favor in living up to the best social and personal ideals. It is a difficult question to decide in any particular case, whether to use direct or indirect suggestion. […]

CHAPTER XX: THE CONDITIONS OF SUGGESTIBILITY

After what has been said in the previous chapter about the kinds of suggestion, the meaning of suggestibility will be sufficiently clear. One is suggestible in the degree to which (1) he has ready made stimulus-response mechanisms which are effectively conditioned to definite stimuli, (2) in the degree to which interrupting and inhibiting stimulus-response mechanisms or psychic behavior patterns are absent, and (3) the immediacy and unreflectiveness with which the response follows the stimulus. This is a general statement of the conditions of suggestibility or of the effectiveness of the conditioning of stimuli to suggested responses. These conditions may be stated in more detail under two general headings: the external and internal conditions of suggestibility. The external conditions will be discussed first. Conditions (1) and (3) have already been considered.

T*he External Conditions of Suggestibility*—It is not enough to state the internal conditions favorable to the effectiveness of suggestion in the purely negative manner of freedom from the outside interference which tends to stimulate internal conflicts. There are also certain positive external conditions which increase suggestion. Duration and repetition of the stimulus are other important external conditions of suggestibility. [...]

Duration and repetition are made use of in all "educational" campaigns, such as political or religious propaganda, the advertising of commercial products, reform movements, and formal education or training itself.

Persistence wins the convert to any cause. "At first we endure, then we tolerate, and next we embrace," is another way of saying that we condition a favorable response through constant operation of some stimulus which formerly was ineffective.

Volume of stimuli is closely allied in method and results to duration and repetition. The latter attributes in fact, when taken consecutively, constitute volume. The propagandist and the advertiser and the proselytizer know well the uses of volume. What one hears or sees or tastes constantly, if it is at all tolerable, becomes essential to one's comfort. Thus men learn to use narcotics and intoxicants, develop habits of labor, or fall into the dissipations of vice. Volume of suggestion works negatively as well as positively. It cuts off former stimuli from operation and concentrates attention upon new ones which thereby are afforded a clear field for the conditioning of responses. There is no particular reason why we should eat K's cornflakes instead of A's, except that we see them advertised more persistently and with greater frequency. If we hear of nothing but the lost condition of our soul we will eventually save it according to the method prescribed by the particular religious propaganda which we have the good fortune to hear. We are Protestants or Catholics, Jews or Christians, Republicans or Democrats, not because each system of belief or interests is superior to all the rest—a contradiction in itself—but because the volume of suggestion in that direction has been overwhelming. We establish our conditioning of responses almost unconsciously (some people erroneously say, instinctively) and thereafter we respond readily to Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Christian, Republican, or Democratic stimuli, according as we have been conditioned to respond. If the other side challenges us, we learn, that is, condition, arguments with which to confound them. Since they have done the same, and since the whole argument is a contest of suggestion instead of reason, neither side wins, unless one side is more suggestible, or there is greater vitality or volume or prestige on the one side than the other. Volume is perhaps not so exclusively limited to the conditioning of responses as are duration and repetition. The greater the volume the greater, within limits, is the opportunity for the suggesting or conditioning stimuli to be effective, that is, to cross the threshold of stimulation.

Prestige in the stimulating object, usually a personality, group of personalities, or a theory or a system of thought, or belief, conditions a strong readiness to respond to this object. This readiness is due to the fact that the responses of the subject are conditioned strongly through previous experi-

ence by certain attributes or powers possessed by the object. Thus prestige as an external factor means simply power to give suggestion and relates primarily to the power of the object to release a ready made response and secondarily to its power to condition such a response to itself as stimulus. Prestige is the prime external essential condition of suggestibility. If it exists, volume, duration and repetition are not necessary in order to make the suggestion effective. Prestige is effective conditioning plus a strong affective evaluation of the stimulus. [...]

The Internal Conditions of Suggestibility are both negative and positive. The positive condition is, as has already been stated, the existence of a strongly conditioned association between stimuli and response mechanisms. The negative internal condition is the absence of any conflicting or inhibiting psychic processes or competing stimulus-response mechanisms. This absence of inhibiting mechanisms may arise either from the fact that such competing tendencies or psychic behavior organizations have never been introduced into the psychic personality or from the fact that dissociation of conditioned overt response or inner behavior processes has been effected. These two negative conditions are very similar, except that the former is simpler and more negative than the latter. In such cases the mind or inner behavior organization has never been filled with inhibiting dispositions, with the result that there is little chance for inner conflicts or interruptions to occur. In the second case the development of conflicting conditioned responses may have occurred, but the conflict is prevented by isolating the inner behavior mechanisms either by means of concentrating the attention upon certain stimuli to the exclusion of others or by developing some internal control over psychic content which leads to dissociation of inner mechanisms, such as occurs typically in auto-suggestion. This inner control is probably effected by fixing the attention upon some external or, more frequently, psychic or mnemic symbol or cue which organizes the psychic and overt responses in the desired manner as preconditioned. Thus concentration of the attention upon external involuntary stimuli or voluntary fixation upon an external object, as in crystal gazing, or upon an internal symbol, as in automatic trance, is essential to that degree of dissociation of psychic processes which renders one readily suggestible in a unilateral direction.

Where one is suggestible to a large number of stimuli at the same time we say he is excited. He is as truly suggestible or suggested in this as in other cases of suggestion where the behavior is more direct and unified, but since we have associated the term suggestion with a fairly well integrated and

isolated type of response which excludes other types we do not speak of response by general excitement as suggested behavior. Of course, excitement may also be due to conflicts in imitation or of some other form of stimulation. The more intense and concentrated or isolated the relatively automatic and uncritical conditioned responses are, the purer and more profound the type suggestion, according to conventional usage.

The Unfilled Mind as a Condition of Suggestibility—The unfilled mind operates as a favorable factor in suggestibility in a great many types of cases. But it can thus operate only if there are certain behavior mechanisms in the mind which are effectively conditioned to stimuli. This condition is likely always to exist, even in those of the lowest intelligence quotient or with the least training. Because all animals, human or otherwise, have certain natural drives or prepotent dispositions, such as the need for food, and the desire for sex satisfaction—to which they soon add other and acquired drives for at least shelter, protection from enemies, and possibly for association with their kind, as a minimum requirement for existence—certain habits of response grow up to supplement whatever instinctive behavior processes there may be for the effective realization of such drives. These responses, native and acquired, become conditioned to appropriate stimuli and render the subject suggestible to these stimuli which call for the satisfaction of his native and acquired interests by whatever means he has learned or inherited. What we really mean when we speak of a mind unfilled by inhibiting behavior mechanisms is that the higher and more socialized, esthetic and ethical, behavior patterns which we find in cultivated or civilized man have not yet been, or cannot be, added to our behavior complexes to serve as restraints upon the relatively irrational satisfaction of our wants and desires under the dominance of suggestion. Certain classes of animals and human beings are particularly suggestible because of this fact. [...]

Feeble-minded persons, like lower animals, are highly suggestible in line with their fundamental drives, but find it very difficult or impossible to condition their responses effectively to cultural or social stimuli of a high order, especially when a considerable degree of intelligence is involved. The higher grades of the feeble-minded can be successfully conditioned to stimuli to sympathetic response, acquiescence and loyalty and tenderness of a high degree of concentration in simple relationships, and are thus made highly suggestible to some of the finest simple emotional values in our culture. But, without constant reënforcement of the suggestion through the presence of the stimulus or even some supplementary stimulus, the cultural and more

complex and abstract acquired conditionings give way before the more nearly instinctive and appetitive. [...]

The young, like the feeble-minded and lower animals, are highly suggestible in the direction of their relatively few preconditioned responses. But unlike the feeble-minded and animals, they can build up a rational psychic content or rival conditioned responses, which inhibit the more appetitive responses to suggestion. The conditioning of rival responses is in effect a process of rendering the subject responsive to new and more cultural or more highly socialized stimuli to broader range of stimuli which serve to condition responses away from the more appetitive stimuli and thus to sublimate and intellectualize and socialize behavior is, in the broadest sense, the process of education, whether it be in schools or elsewhere. [...]

The uneducated and those inexperienced in the problems of life adjustment are much like children both in their lack of the development of susceptibility to rival stimuli of a cultural character to condition or inhibit their prepotent or previously conditioned responses and in their capacity to develop a high degree of susceptibility under proper circumstances. The same is also true of backward races and peoples. In fact, there is a very close social analogy between the backward peoples of all races, whether they come from isolated districts in the midst of a highly cultivated civilization, as from mountainous regions, or from the slums of great cities, or from larger geographical units of isolation in the midst of a world civilization. [...]

Men and women of culture are also highly suggestible, by skilled manipulators, in those fields in which they lack experience or scientific data with which to check stimuli. Insurance agents, book agents, and other persistent salesmen, usually find women easier prey than men, and a pretty woman can sell some men almost anything in spite of their experience with agents. In the one case, the woman's responses are conditioned to the glowing words of idealism and day-dreamy promises, which her experience or knowledge is not able to contradict. Living a more or less repressed and inexperienced life, she consequently responds to the stimuli of hope or to the suggestion that all the other women of intelligence and fashion have purchased the article, instead of to the actual merits of the object which is before her. In the second case, the average man responds by previous conditioning to the artfully manipulated sex stimuli, while he thinks he is rationally considering the value of the books or other articles. Thus in reality women sell sex appeal while the men frequently buy this stimulus and pay for books they never open. It is not possible, however, under normal stimuli conditions, to

suggest a social false step to a well-trained woman of fashion or the purchase of worthless oil stock or submerged real estate to a keen businessman. In their own fields men and women are "hard boiled," unless their responses are conditioned by analogy and unconsciously to stimuli that release other responses which are ordinarily censored and kept in the background. This is what happens in the case of the man buying books for which he has no use because the saleswoman appealed to his unconscious admiration for a pretty woman while his critical financial judgment was in temporary abeyance. On the whole, it may be said that women of good intelligence are more likely to be suggested contrary to reason where a matter of lack of experience is involved. Both men and women are likely to be suggested contrary to interest where the suggester can make a covert and unrecognized appeal by conditioning a substitute stimulus which operates strongly in the subconsciousness of the one being manipulated, but is carefully kept out of the argument. […]

Somewhat more radical is the dissociation in the case of what we call prejudices. A prejudice arises from the strong conditioning of certain psychic behavior or attitudes to certain corresponding stimuli and the dissociation of inhibiting tendencies, with the result that the inhibiting processes are not adequate to break these conditionings. As a consequence the prejudiced person has a fixed idea or is radically suggestible in the direction of his belief or allegiance. Such prejudices are particularly liable to form in connection with religion, politics, sex matters, one's kin or property, art, or any other objects which call from us strong emotional responses. It is very difficult to be rational and objective, or unprejudiced about things which are close to us or for which we have made sacrifices or which we have molded to our own liking, that is, things to which our responses have become strongly conditioned. We are strongly suggestible in favor of our friends, family, party, creed, property, and the like, and just as strongly suggestible against our enemies and the friends, families, and property of our rivals. A "good" Republican or Democrat will believe almost anything he reads or hears in favor of his own party or in opposition to the rival parties. It is only recently that we have persuaded ourselves not to consign the adherents of rival religious creeds to the flames in the world to come or as surely to expect to meet all of those who profess our own faith, regardless of their morals, in the realms of bliss. Prejudices, from which no one is free, are the result of a mild form of dissociation. Nevertheless they cause a vast amount of distortion of functional adjustment in our world. [...]

The Ubiquitousness of Suggestion—Suggestion operates in almost every sphere and aspect of life. It is a short cut method of controlling effectively conditioned behavior. It is in itself quite devoid of moral character and may be used indifferently for ethical, non-ethical, or anti-ethical ends. It is frequently said that rationally directed conduct is of a higher type socially than suggested behavior. This is of course true, but it is not possible to be self or socially conscious about everything. Short cut controls in behavior are inevitable. The greater volume of suggestion occurs in the direction of everyday contacts, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, where it is ordinarily unmanipulated by some supervising agency. But there is also a vast amount of manipulated suggestion. This comes especially through the family, the school, the church, politics, the stage, the newspaper and periodical, and advertising. The newspaper, through its news articles, editorials, and advertisements, does much to control public opinion. Commercial advertisements to a large extent determine consumption, at least with reference to brands and styles, if not with regard to the contents and quality of the articles themselves.

Through the home, school, church, movie, theater, radio, and newspaper and press generally, we are told what to think or believe in almost all relationships in life. Sometimes this suggestion is direct and sometimes it is indirect, according to the degree of resistance which the person or public offers to the suggestion. The control of propaganda suggestion for proper social ends has become one of the serious problems of our day and must be attained by some method or other if society is not to be increasingly manipulated for selfish or partisan purposes. Controlled by suggestion we probably shall be, but this control should be for legitimate social purposes. It is not the function of this work on the principles of social psychology to go into details regarding either the methods of suggestion employed in concrete cases or types or the methods of controlling such propaganda. This belongs to the applications of social psychology, especially to the subjects of social organization, social control, and social ethics.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Principles of Sociology (1928)

Frederick Elmore Lumley

New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 220–27 [with elisions].

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Frederick Lumley (1880–1954) was among the first wave of scholars to study the social role of radio, publishing several journal articles on the nature of the radio audience and the use of the new medium in education. With a PhD from Yale (1912), he joined the faculty at The Ohio State University in 1920 and rose to chair of the Department of Sociology in 1932, retiring in 1945.

In addition to radio, Lumley had a strong and related interest in propaganda, expressed in his books *Means of Social Control* (1925) and *The Propaganda Menace* (1933). There he warned, "We have now come to recognize that wherever there is any sort of connection between individuals, there the propagandists flock to pour in their poison" (192). Propaganda is treated more fully in the next section of this anthology, but Lumley's work is a reminder here that throughout the 1920s and 1930s, writing on suggestion theory, in both the academic and popular press, was usually bound up to a greater or lesser extent in discussions of the media's capacity to create and alter the public consciousness.

In his 1928 survey text, excerpted below, Lumley reviews by then well-trod ground, laying out for the student the definitions, categories, and conditions of suggestion, as well as imitation, and citing many of the figures already sketched here: Baldwin, Bechterew, Judd, Ellwood, and Bernard.

He offers examples of suggestion-based manipulation along the way, stating that "an increasing amount comes from books and magazines and especially the newspapers and the movies. These tell us more and more what to think and what to do and how to feel." In many ways, his analysis is a glum one. He describes "the vast numbers" who for various reasons make up "the suggestible part of the population," adding, moreover, that "none of us is free; we always have some weak point or several weak points by which we may be taken captive." Lumley was not totally without hope, however. While not included in this excerpt, in other work he expresses the Progressive's faith in the prophylactic of education to provide adequate protection against "The Propaganda Menace."—*P.P.*

References

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Principles of Sociology (1928)

CHAPTER XI: SUGGESTION-IMITATION

We are still considering major social processes, social interactions, characteristic "goings-on"; these are the plots of the social drama which interest us now. The next social process selected for treatment is a double affair, a social Siamese twins. We can hardly think of imitation without at the same time thinking of what is imitated—which leads directly to suggestion—and we can hardly think of suggestion without thinking of what comes out of it—which leads often to imitation. In this chapter, then, we have to deal with a more obviously circular form of interaction—the activities of people forming a continuous hail of suggestions, these being taken up by others who act imitatively and suggest to yet others, and so on without end. [...]

SUGGESTION

1. Definition

Suggestion has been defined in various ways. Bechterew describes it as "the direct infection of one person by another of certain mental states" or "the penetration or inoculation of a strange idea into the consciousness, without direct immediate participation by the 'ego' of the subject." This is passive suggestion. But there is also active suggestion wherein the subject necessarily takes part by attention, reflection, judgment, and will. These two phases of the process are obvious to all of us, for while we are actively attending in one direction, we are at the same time open to impressions from other directions, and thus active and passive at the same time; we may be intent upon the book we are reading—direct suggestion—but become vaguely aware that we have been called to do something about paying our overdue taxes—indirect suggestion. Our environment is continually furnishing us with hints, noted and unnoted, for our next or for future movements.[1]

"By suggestion" says Ellwood, "we mean the process of communicating an idea from one individual to another, when the idea is accepted more or less uncritically or without rational ground."[2] According to Allport, suggestion may be regarded from three points of view and thus defined in three ways. First it is a process of building up predispositions toward behavior in certain ways. We might think of these predispositions as being organized around the native drives or urges such as hunger, sex impulses, fear, and the like; and we can also think of them as being organized about and enlargements of certain acquired patterns, such as habits of action and belief—religious, political, aesthetic, and others. Looked at in this way, suggestion is the process of forming attitudes or prejudices; the emphasis here is upon what takes place within the subject; it is suggestibility.

In the second place, suggestion may be regarded as some external signal or stimulus which releases or sets off predispositions already built up. When we are already very fond of pie or detest it, attracted to foreigners or abominate them, emotionally aroused by the flag or untouched, deeply in love with some one or antipathetic;—these are predispositions which are easily touched off. This is what we mean when we say that a person is "quick on the trigger"; we mean that he is like gunpowder—ready to "go up in the air"

[1] Cf. Park and Burgess, op. cit., p. 410.

[2] "The Psychology of Human Society," p. 347.

or, like a turtle "sink into his shell" at the mere mention of a certain matter; we mean the cue that touches off our readiness to respond in certain ways.

In the third place, suggestion may be defined as that process by which these predispositions are augmented or intensified. Thus, if we are fond of pie, we may be made to be more fond of it by certain acts or words of others; or we may be made to detest it. If we dislike foreigners, we may be made to hate them by the suggestions of others. We find that advertisers and propagandists are all the while working to enlarge our predispositions in certain directions and dwarf them in others.

It will be evident that these three views are all important for a well-rounded view of the subject. It will also be apparent that the first and the third views are similar, the latter referring to an advanced stage of the process indicated by the former. It will also be obvious that the second view is the more common one. This view stresses the fundamental characteristics, namely, the strength of the predispositions, the immediacy and automaticity of the responses.[3]

2. Suggestibility

These points but confirm our own observation that, in certain ways and upon certain matters, we are all very impressionable; we are very suggestible; we are "quick on the trigger" when certain hints are given but are left cold by others; we "go up in the air" when some matters are mentioned but are quite indifferent to others; and we vary in suggestibility. Why is this? What are the reasons why some stimuli affect us always and others do not or why the same stimuli affect us differently at different times? In other words, we come now to inquire briefly into the nature and causes of suggestibility. We might consider first the internal conditions and second the external conditions.

1. Internal Conditions.—The first part of the answer to the question of our impressionability is found in our *predispositions*, native and acquired; it is found in the response mechanisms present at the moment. Illustrations are abundant and at hand. If we already fear Catholics, then we are very sensitive to hints from the Klan; fearing, we are already getting away from Catholics as quickly as possible, and hints from the Klan but help us in our flight; or, fearing them, we are ready to believe that they are planning to dominate the country, and cues from the Klan but nerve us to fight them the more viciously. Thus, the Klan works with a set-up which we already have, either to set it off or to strengthen it. If we need or believe we need a

[3] Cf. Bernard, "Introduction to Social Psychology," p. 284.

new suit of clothes or a new dress, then we are especially attentive to the announcements of the advertisers about bargain sales and the new fashions; our wants are a weakness into which these manipulators put their verbal and pictorial hooks; our needs are systemic conditions which are ready for inoculation. If we are Republicans, then we are especially susceptible to favorable remarks about Republicans and are ready to believe terrible things about Democrats. If we are laborers and members of unions, then we are impressionable to hints against capitalists. Thus, our suggestibility is partly a matter of our training, our moulding, up to date; it is partly a matter of our mental structure and how we have been in the habit of responding. Since we all have prejudices, we are all susceptible; since we are all brought up in groups with certain folkways and mores dominant, we all have prejudices.

Again, we are suggestible in proportion to the *absence of inhibiting* or competing set-ups. This is but the negative aspect of the situation described above which might be regarded as positive; it is equivalent to saying that while we are strongly conditioned in certain directions and upon certain matters, we are unprotected and weak at others. For instance, if we are drinkers, we are impressionable to stimuli from liquors, liquor bottles, the clink of glasses, the smell of a barroom, conversation about drinking, and the like—unless we have made a New Year's resolution or pledged ourselves to the temperance society to quit drinking; this acts as an inhibiting factor to these suggestions. If we are fond of football or the theater, then the preparations of others about us to go to the game or the show, their conversation, their enthusiasm are suggestions which we find it hard to resist unless we have determined to study or to do something else.

Says Bernard:

> The unfilled mind operates as a favorable factor in suggestibility in a great many types of cases. But it can thus operate only if there are certain behavior mechanisms in the mind which are effectively conditioned to stimuli. This condition is likely always to exist, even in those of the lowest intelligence quotient or with the least training.[4]

The animals below man are highly suggestible in the direction of their instinctive and simple acquired interests or needs. Feeble-minded persons, like the lower animals, are highly suggestible in the same way and thus find it impossible to meet the highly developed and complicated restraints of ordinary social life. The young, like the feeble-minded and the lower animals,

[4] "Introduction to Social Psychology," p. 305.

are highly suggestible in the direction of their relatively few preconditioned responses. They can build up, however, many conditioned responses whereas the feeble-minded and the animals cannot do so. The uneducated and the inexperienced are like children with respect to suggestibility. The same is true of the so-called backward races. Men and women of culture are also very impressionable to the suggestions of skilled manipulators in those fields in which they lack experience or other rational inhibitions; the most careful scientists are often sold "gold bricks" by high-powered salesmen.

Many *mental diseases*, such as hysteria, functional amnesia, absent-mindedness, dual personality, and the like are very favorable to suggestibility in some directions. During great emotional stress, one is usually more suggestible—at the time of a death in the family, for instance. Fatigue, fasting, and intoxication make us all more susceptible. These interfere with the nerve pulsations, cause the weaker, because acquired, reactions to cease functioning, and the individual is given over to the control of the older and stronger impulses. Thus, the tired person or the one who has fasted some time is usually more irritable and less reasonable than the one who has not poisoned the tissues in these ways. It is under such conditions as these that excellent and sensible people often do the most fiendish things.

We might also speak of the presence of *fixed ideas*, manias, and various fears as heightening suggestibility in line with these outgoings. There are all degrees of intensity here, from the mild peculiarities, foibles, hobbies, up to and including the wildest insanities. To sum up, we have, then, among us and everywhere vast numbers of biased people, empty minds, sick minds, children, absorbed folk, who constitute the suggestible part of the population; and, indeed, none of us is free; we always have some weak point or several weak points by which we may be taken captive.

2. External Conditions.—What takes us captive? The answer is, very naturally, the stimuli which impinge upon us from without. Suggestions reach us from many parts of our world; but we are interested in the suggestions which reach us from other people, from the members of our own species. Then, of course, wherever there are people in action, there are suggestions. This leads at once into the problem of imitation; but there are several points to be made before we take up that matter.

Monotony and rhythm in the stimuli reaching us are important factors in aiding these stimuli to do their work. If the teacher talks in a monotonous tone, we either become fixed upon it, as it were, or we utterly lose interest and go to sleep or do something else. The rhythm of the music and the dance

take us in almost invariably—unless we are righteously opposed to dancing and dance music, which is inhibition. We seem to be very susceptible to stimuli in these forms in our work, in recreation, in worship, and elsewhere.

Very important, also, are the *duration and repetition* of the stimuli. The criminal who is stolid and unyielding finally breaks down and confesses when put through the "third degree," which is almost the severest ordeal any man has to go through. In the evangelistic meeting, the perpetual reiteration of the same theme finally weakens the sin-ridden and gains the results sought; as the result of high pressure for a time, some begin to surrender, then more, and, finally, droves respond. In a certain hymn, the idea "where He leads me I will follow" is repeated three times in the chorus, and the chorus is sung with each stanza, so the singers say this phrase a *dozen* times. Again:

— It's the old time religion,
It's the old time religion,
It's the old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

This same thing is found in advertising, no one being able to go out any more without being assailed at every available point by glowing descriptions of numerous commodities.

A closely allied feature is the *volume* of stimuli. This is well illustrated again from advertising. Indeed, we might truly say that duration and repetition constitute volume. Volume of stimuli cuts off other pressures by outdoing them and thus leaves a clear field for the particular pressures applied. There is no particular reason why we should chew A's gum more than B's except that we see it advertised more frequently, more sumptuously. If we have been continually plied with the idea that our soul is lost, then we are apt to save it or have it saved according to the pattern prescribed by those who have been most persistent in helping us reach the fixed idea that it is lost.

That undefinable but real thing which we call *prestige* also has its weight. The factors composing it are numerous and various, but some of them are old age, special skill, high position, erudition, or superiority of some kind. The Bible has immense prestige with many because it is a very old book and is supposed to be inspired. When the makers of a certain cigarette recently plied us all with the idea that great singers and public speakers were testifying that this particular brand of "coffin nails" did not hurt but actually improved their voices, they were using prestige. When some one clinches an

argument with the assertion that some great author, banker, military leader, statesman, or scientist did this or said that, he is using prestige; and we find it very difficult to resist such an argument; we tend to respond promptly and automatically. We are "charmed," or "hypnotized," or "fascinated" by the big, the overpowering, the superior.[5]

3. The Ubiquitousness of Suggestion

According to Bernard:

> Suggestion operates in almost every sphere and aspect of life. It is a short cut method of controlling effectively conditioned behavior. It is in itself quite devoid of moral character and may be used indifferently for ethical, non-ethical, or anti-ethical ends. It is frequently said that rationally directed conduct is of a higher type socially than suggested behavior. This is of course true, but it is not possible to be self or socially conscious about everything. Short cut controls in behavior are inevitable.[6]

The greater volume of stimuli reaches us from our immediate surroundings—the home, the school, the playground, the local clubs, in short, the primary groups. But an increasing amount comes from books and magazines and especially the newspapers and the movies. These tell us more and more what to think and what to do and how to feel. These things "make up our minds" for us all along the line. We think we are acting of our own accord and in the light of our own judgment, when, as a matter of fact, this is almost impossible considering the amount of pressure, the strength of it, and the ubiquitousness of it.

Besides that inevitable pressure which we cannot escape simply because we live among people with these developed means of communication, there is a vast amount of special interest manipulation. Having nothing to meet but the pressures applied by the members of our families, our friends, and the like makes the problem of individual decision tremendously difficult; but when we have sharpshooters of skillfully directed stimuli all about us trying to impregnate us with their own special charges, and when we rarely can know who they are, where they are, or how they work, the problem is immeasurably complicated. The advertisers are bad enough, but the propagandists are worse. According to these, we must always be doing

[5] Cf. Bogardus, "Fundamentals of Social Psychology," p. 124.

[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 320.

something different from what we are doing. We do find some relief in the struggles which they have among themselves to outdo each other in getting our attention. But, in spite of this, the pressure they apply is terrific. We are everlastingly watched. The Evil Eye of primitive man was no more potent for direction than the pressures which modern experts use. But now we are ready to consider imitation.

IMITATION

1. Some Definitions

According to Judd, imitation is used to "designate any repetition of any act or thought which has been noted by an observer. Thus one imitates the facial expression of another or his mode of speech."[7] The conception is narrowed by Kirkpatrick:

> In general, we think of acts as imitative when they reproduce acts that have been observed by the performer. The psychological basis of imitation is the general tendency of the idea of an action to result in the action. In imitation the idea of the act comes more or less directly from the perception of the act as performed by another. It is imitative just in proportion as the idea and the impulse are derived from the perception of the act.

He points out that if a hungry child begins eating when he sees some one else eating, the act is not properly imitative, since the child knows how to eat and is hungry; it would eat at the sight of food. But when it tries to eat *like* someone else or eats when it is not hungry because it sees some one else eating—that is imitation.[8]

The term is broadened again by Baldwin who uses the notion to cover the kinds of actions already noted and, in addition, repetitions of actions of the imitator himself. Thus, one imitates oneself and sets up what is called *circular reaction*. Stout points out that we must carefully distinguish between the ability to imitate and the impulse to imitate. We might take again the case of the child eating. It knows how to get food to its mouth—that is its ability. But its impulse to eat may be set off by the sight of food or by somebody else trying to eat; this latter would be imitation if the child were not hungry. When the cough of one man sets another man coughing, it is evident that

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[7] Park and Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

[8] "Fundamentals of Child Study," p. 129.

imitation here applies only to the impulse to cough; the second man does not learn how to cough from the first man; he is simply prompted to cough at this time by the coughing of the other man.[9]

Bernard says:

> Imitation is the doing what the other person does because perception of his behavior sets up in the imitator the same or similar responses to those which serve as stimuli. The imitated behavior may be either a total overt response or symbolic behavior. It is not possible to imitate or copy the behavior of another unless that behavior has been conditioned as a response organization in the imitator to the behavior of the one imitated, or of some one behaving as he does, as stimulus . . . Thus imitation is a social category within the field of the conditioned response.

2. Kinds of Imitation

Two types and four subtypes of imitation are distinguished by Bernard. These are suggestion imitation—automatic and accidental, and purposive—by trial and error and projection. We must understand what these things mean.

1. Suggestion Imitation.—*a.* There is first of all that sort of imitation which we might call *automatic*. We go to the tap and turn it, and the water runs out. Similarly, we act on people. We say to a person: "You are a liar." That speech is a turning of the tap or a pulling of the trigger—whichever simile seems the more appropriate. The point is that there is something ready to come forth—of itself, automatically—and we simply occasion the coming. We do not force it out; we simply make its coming possible.

Conditioned as we all are to react to certain stimuli, we are ready to be angry at such a speech, we are ready to lift our hats when we see others doing so, we are ready to run when we see others running, we are hungry when we see others eating, we are ready to get in step on the sidewalk when we are walking with others, we are ready to beat time with our foot, we are ready to yawn when we see others yawn. We do these things automatically, without taking thought, without our being aware what we are doing. And we have already pointed out that there are many copies about, many cues to follow, many hints to take, many stimuli plying us all the time.

[9] Park and Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 390.