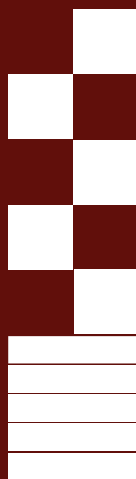


Early Media Effects Theory & the Suggestion Doctrine

Selected Readings, 1895–1935

edited by
Patrick Parsons

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edited by Patrick Parsons

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CHAPTER FOUR

Mental Development of the Child and the Race (1911)

James Mark Baldwin

3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, pp. 100–27, 332–39 [with elisions].

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

While Royce offered an early example of US interest in suggestion and imitation, it was James Mark Baldwin (1861–1934) who influenced a generation of psychologists and social psychologists. He was a pioneer in the field and his work became a ritual touchstone in US writing on the topic. Earning a BA (1884) and PhD (1898) from Princeton University, he initially taught in theology (his undergraduate degree) before transitioning to philosophy and eventually psychology. In 1893 he joined the faculty at his alma mater, where he helped found the university's Psychology Department. Active across the young discipline, he also co-founded *Psychological Review* and *Psychological Monographs* and was founding editor of *Psychological Bulletin*.

His 1896 treatise, *The Mental Development in the Child and the Race*, was a groundbreaking work in developmental and social psychology. Among other things, it helped nudge early US social thought away from the European collectivism of Durkheim and Herbert Spencer and toward a

stronger focus on the individual and social groups. The study had the novel component of employing his own two young children as research subjects, chronicling their personality development over two years.

The conceptual core of the study was Baldwin's reliance on the Le Bon–Tarde formulation of suggestion and imitation as the chief driver of personality development. According to Martindale, "Baldwin's importance lay in the extension of the ideas of imitation and suggestion to the problems of personality and the relation between self and society. . . suggestion [for Baldwin] represents all the processes which mold psychic life" (Martindale 1981, 288–89). Stated Baldwin, "Suggestion by idea, or through consciousness, must be recognized to be as fundamental a kind of motor stimulus as the direct excitation of a sense organ."

In the following excerpt from the 1911 third revised edition, Baldwin, as did the previous authors, starts with an exposition on hypnotism as "an entirely new method of mental study," and, borrowing from James, couches it in terms of "ideo-motor suggestion." He advances the consideration of imitation and suggestion by breaking each into multiple sub-categories, such as "psychological suggestion" and "deliberative suggestion." Ultimately (beyond the excerpt), he categorizes suggestion into nine discrete types.

In addition, where Tarde and Le Bon commonly used suggestion and imitation as a combined phrase and failed to clearly distinguish between the two, we see in Baldwin an early effort to disentangle them. For him, suggestion was the environmental *stimulus* and imitation the *response* to the suggestion. As will be seen, ultimately the two concepts were cleaved, with each following a distinct evolutionary path. In the excerpt, Baldwin additionally offers one of the first uses of the term "suggestibility" to describe an individual's susceptibility to suggestion.

This early text would become, again, a major influence on subsequent turn-of-the-century social scientists as social psychology delved more deeply into suggestion theory.—*P.P.*

References

Martindale, Don. 1981. *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Mental Development in the Child and the Race (1911)

CHAPTER VI: SUGGESTION

§ 1. General Definition

THE rise of hypnotism in late years has opened the way to an entirely new method of mental study. The doctrine of reflexes was before largely physiological, and only pathological cases could be cited in evidence of a mechanism in certain forms of consciousness as well as out of it; and even pathological cases of extreme sensitiveness to casual suggestion from the environment or from other men did not receive the interpretation which the phenomena of hypnotic suggestion are now making possible, *i.e.* that suggestion by idea, or through consciousness, must be recognized to be as fundamental a kind of motor stimulus as the direct excitation of a sense organ. Nervous reflexes may work directly through states of consciousness, or be stimulated by them; these states of consciousness may be integral portions of such reflexes; and, further, a large part of our mental life is made up of a mass of such ideo-motor 'suggestions,' which are normally in a state of subconscious inhibition.

Without discussing the nature of the hypnotic state in the first instance, nor venturing to pass judgment in this connection upon the question whether the suggestion theory is sufficient to explain all the facts, we may yet isolate the aspect spoken of above, and discuss its general bearings in the normal life, especially of children. Of course, the question at once occurs, is the normal life a life to any degree of ideo-motor or suggestive reactions, or is the hypnotic sleep in this aspect of it, quite an artificial thing? Further, if such suggestion is normal or typical in the mental life, what is the nature of the inhibition by which it is ordinarily kept under—in other words, what is its relation to what we call will? Leaving this second question altogether unanswered for the present,¹ it has occurred to me to observe children, especially my own H. and E., during their first two years, to see if light could be thrown upon the first inquiry above. If it be true that ideo-motor suggestion is a normal thing, then early child life should present the most striking analogies to the hypnotic state in this essential respect. This is a field that has hitherto, as far as I know, been largely unexplored by workers in the psychology of suggestion.

¹See, however, Chap. XIII., below.

It is not necessary, I think, to discuss in detail the meaning of this much-abused but, in the main, very well defined word, 'suggestion.' The general conception may be sufficiently well indicated for the present by the following quotations from authorities. They all agree on the main phenomenon, their definitions differing in the place of emphasis, according as one aspect rather than another supplies ground for a theory. I may gather them up in my own definition, which aims to describe the fundamental fact apart from theory, and is therefore better suited to our preliminary exposition. I have myself defined suggestion as "from the side of consciousness ... the tendency of a sensory or an ideal state to be followed by a motor state,² in the manner typified by the abrupt entrance from without into consciousness of an idea or image, or a vaguely conscious stimulation, which tends to bring about the muscular or volitional effects which ordinarily follow upon its presence."³

Janet defines suggestion as "a motor reaction brought about by language or perception."⁴ This narrows the field to certain classes of stimulations, well defined in consciousness, and overlooks the more subtle suggestive influences emphasized by the Nancy school of theorizers. Schmidkunz makes it: "die Herbeirufung eines Ereignisses durch die Erweckung seines psychischen Bildes."⁵ This again makes a mental picture of the suggested 'event' in consciousness necessary, and, besides, does not rule out ordinary complex associations. It neglects the requirement insisted upon by Janet, *i.e.* that the stimulus be from without, as from hearing words, seeing actions, objects, etc. Wundt says: "Suggestion ist Association mit gleichzeitiger Verengung des Bewusstseins auf die durch die Association angeregten Vorstellungen."⁶ In this definition Wundt meets the objection urged against the definition of suggestion in terms of complex association, by holding down the association to a 'narrowed consciousness'; but he, again, neglects the outward nature of the stimulus, and does not give an adequate account of how this narrowing of consciousness upon one or two associated terms, usually a sensori-motor association, is brought about. Ziehen: "In der Beibringung der Vorstellung liegt das Wesen der Suggestion."⁷ Here we have the sufficient recognition of the artificial and external source of the stimulation, but yet we surely

² *Science*, Feb. 27, 1891, where many of the observations given in this chapter were first recorded.

³ Cf. also *Handbook of Psychology*, II., 297.

⁴ *Aut. Psych.*, p. 218.

⁵ *Hypnotism u. Suggestion*, II. Abs.

⁶ *Psych. der Suggestion*.

⁷ *Philos. Monatshefte*, XXIX., 1893, p. 489.

cannot say that all such stimulations succeed in getting suggestive force. A thousand things suggested to us are rejected, scorned, laughed at. This is so marked a fact in current theory, especially on the pathological side, that I have found it convenient to use a special phrase for consciousness when in the purely suggestible condition, *i.e.* 'reactive consciousness.'⁸ The phrase 'conscious reflex' is sometimes used, but is not good as applied to these suggestive reactions; for they are cortical in their brain seat, and are not as definite as ordinary reflexes.

For our present purposes, the definition just given from my earlier work is sufficient, since it emphasizes the *movement side* of suggestion. The fundamental fact about all suggestion,—not hypnotic suggestion alone, which some of the definitions which I have cited have exclusive reference to⁹—is, in my view, the removal of inhibitions to movement brought about by a certain condition of consciousness which may be called 'suggestibility.' The further question, what makes consciousness suggestible, is open to some debate. There are two general statements—not to elaborate a theory here, however—which are not done justice to by any of the current theories. We may say, first, that a suggestible consciousness is one in which the ordinary *criteria of belief* are in abeyance; the coefficients of reality, to use the terms of an earlier discussion of belief,¹⁰ are no longer apprehended. Consciousness finds all presentations of equal value, in terms of uncritical reality-feeling. It accordingly responds to them all, each in turn, readily and equally. Second: this state of things is due primarily to a violent reaction or fixation of attention, resulting in its usual monoidism, or 'narrowing of consciousness.' For belief is a motor attitude resting upon complexity of presentation and representation. Just as soon as this mature complexity is destroyed, belief disappears, and all ideas 'become free and equal' in doing their executive work. Each presentation streams out in action by suggestion; and stands itself fully in the possession of consciousness, with none of the pros and cons of its usual claim to be accepted as real, gaining also the still greater establishment which comes from the return wave upon itself of its own motor discharge. The question of suggestion becomes then that of the mechanism of attention in working three results: (1) the narrowing of consciousness upon the suggested idea, (2) the consequent narrowing of

⁸ *Handbook of Psychology, Feeling and Will*, pp. 60 ff., and Chap. XII.

⁹ See the section below in this chapter in which the main facts of hypnosis are briefly stated, and the further references to the theory of hypnotism in sect. 3 of the chapter on Volition, below.

¹⁰ *Handbook*, II., Chap. VII.

the motor impulses to simpler lines of discharge, and (3) the consequent inhibition of the discriminating and selective attitude which constitutes belief in reality.

The truth of these general statements is thoroughly confirmed by the observation of children, in whom the general system of adjustments, which constitute the 'worlds of reality' of us adults, are not yet effected. Little children are credulous, in an unreflective sense, even to illusion. Tastes, colours, sensations generally, pains, pleasures, may be suggested to them, as is shown by the instances given in later pages.

It is, however, to the truth of the fundamental fact of normal motor suggestion found in children, that I wish to devote a large part of this chapter; and observations of reactions clearly due to such suggestion, either under natural conditions or by experiment, lead me to distinguish the varying sorts of suggestion mentioned in the following paragraphs, in what I find to be about the order of their appearance in child-life. [...]

Surveying the ground that we have gone over so far in this chapter, the progress of suggestion may be seen by the following brief definitions:

1. *Physiological suggestion* is the tendency of a reflex or secondary automatic process to get itself associated with and influenced by stimulating processes of a physiological and vaguely sensory sort. Perhaps the plainest case of it, on a large scale in animal life, is seen in the decay of instincts when no longer suited to the creature's needs and environment.
2. *Sensori-motor and ideo-motor suggestion* is the tendency of all nervous reactions to adapt themselves to new stimulations, both sensory and ideal, in such a way as to be more ready for the repetition or continuance of these stimulations.
3. *Deliberative suggestion* is the tendency of different competing sensory processes to merge in a single conscious state with a single motor reaction, illustrating the principles of nervous summation and arrest.
4. *Imitative suggestion* is the tendency of a sensory or ideal process to maintain itself by such an adaptation of its discharges that they reinstate in turn new stimulations of the same kind. [...]

CHAPTER XII: CONSCIOUS IMITATION (CONCLUDED)

§ 1. Classification

IT is possible, on the basis of the preceding developments, to lay out a scheme of notions and terms to govern the discussion of the whole matter of imitation. This has been the 'loose joint' in many discussions; the utter lack of any well defined limits set to the phenomena in question. Tarde practically claims all cases of organic or social resemblance as instances of imitation, overlooking the truth, as one of his critics takes pains to point out, that two things which resemble each other may be common effects of the same cause! Others are disposed to consider the voluntary imitation of an action as the only legitimate case of imitation. This, we have seen, has given rise to great confusion among psychologists. We have reason to think that volition requires a finely complex system of copy elements, whose very presence can be accounted for only on the basis of earlier organic, or certainly ideo-motor, imitations. Further, it is the lower, less volitional types of mind that simple imitation characterizes, the undeveloped child, the parrot, the idiot, the hypnotic, the hysterical. If again we say, with yet others, that imitation always involves a presentation or image of the situation or object imitated,—a position very near the popular use of the term,—then we have great difficulty in accounting for the absorption and reproduction of sub-conscious, vaguely present stimulations; as, for example, the acquisition of facial expression, the contagion of emotion, the growth of style in dress and institutions—what may be called the influence of the 'psychic atmosphere.'

I think we have found reason from the analysis above, to hold that our provisional definition of imitation is just; an imitative reaction is one which tends normally to maintain or repeat its own stimulating process. This is what we find the nervous and muscular mechanism suited to, and this is what we find the organism doing in a progressive way in all the types of function which we have passed in review. If this is too broad a definition, then what we have traced must be given some other name, and imitation applied to any more restricted function that can be clearly and finally marked out. But let us give no rein to the fanciful and strained analogies which have exercised the minds of certain writers on imitation.

Adhering, then, to the definition which makes of imitation a 'circular' process, we may point out its various 'kinds,' according to the degree in which a reaction of the general type has, by complication, abbreviation, substitution, inhibition, or what not, departed in the development of consciousness

from its typical simplicity. We find, in fact, three great instances of function, all of which conform to the imitative type. Two of these have already been put in evidence in detail; the third I am going on to characterize briefly in the following section under the phrase 'plastic imitation.'

First: the organic reaction which tends to maintain, repeat, reproduce, its own stimulation, be it simple contractility, muscular contraction, or selected reactions which have become habitual. This may be called *biological* or *organic imitation*. Under this head fall all cases lower down than the conscious picturing of copies; lower down in the sense of not involving, and never having involved, for their execution, a conscious sensory or intellectual suggesting stimulus, with the possibility of its revival as a memory. On the nervous side, such imitations may be called *subcortical*; and in view of another class mentioned below, they may be further qualified as *primarily subcortical*.

These 'biological' imitations are evidently first in order of development, and represent the gains or accommodations of the organism made independently of the conscious picturing of stimulations and adaptation to them. They serve for the accumulation of material for conscious and voluntary actions. In the young of the animals, their scope is very limited, because of the complete instinctive equipment which young animals bring into the world; but in human infants they play an important part, as the means of the gradual reduction to order and utility of the diffused motor discharges of the new-born. I have noted its presence under the phrase 'physiological' suggestion in another place. It is under this head that the so-called 'selective' function of the nervous system finds its first illustration.

Second: we pass to *psychological*, *conscious*, or *cortical* imitations. The criterion of imitation—the presence of a copy to be aimed at—is here fulfilled in the form of conscious presentations and images. The copy becomes consciously available in two ways: first, as presentation, which the imitative reaction seeks to continue or reproduce (as the imitation of words heard, movements seen, etc.); and second, as memory. In this latter case there arises complexity in the 'copy system,' with desire, in which there is consciousness of the imitative tendency as respects an agreeable memory copy; and with the persistence of such a copy, and its partial repression by other elements of memory, comes volition. We find, accordingly, two kinds of psychological or cortical imitation, which I have called respectively 'simple' and 'persistent' imitation. Simple imitation is the sensori-motor or ideo-motor suggestion which tends to keep itself going by reinstating its own stimulation; and

persistent imitation is the 'try-try-again,' experience of early volition, to be taken up in more detail below.

Third: a great class of facts which we may well designate by the term 'plastic' or 'secondarily subcortical' imitations, to which more particular attention may now be given.

§ 2. *Plastic Imitation*

This phrase is used to cover all the cases of reaction or attitude, toward the doings, customs, opinions of others, which once represented more or less conscious adaptations either in race or in personal history, but which have become what is ordinarily called 'secondary automatic' and subconscious. With them are all the less well-defined kinds of response which we make to the actions, suggestions, etc., of others, simply from the habit we are in, by heredity and experience, or conforming to social 'copy.' Plastic imitation represents the general fact of that normal *suggestibility* which is, as regards personal *rapport*, the very soul of our social relationships with one another.

These cases come up for detailed discussion in the later volume. They serve to put in evidence the foundation facts of a possible psychology of masses, crowds, organized bodies generally. They may be readily explained by one or both of two principles—both really one, that of Habit. The principle of 'lapsed links,' already explained, applies to cases of conventional conformity, or custom, which is but an expression for abbreviated processes of social imitation. This accounts for the influence of the old, the venerated, the antique, upon mankind. The other principle is the application of habit itself to imitation, whereby absorption by imitation has become the great means, the first resort of consciousness, in the presence of new kinds of experience. We have become used to getting new accommodations, fine outlets for action and avenues of happiness, by taking up new thoughts, beliefs, fashions, etc. This accounts for the tyranny of novelty in all social affairs. So in these two principles, both exhibitions of the one law of imitation, we reach the two great forces of social life, conservatism and liberalism. So we find under this heading such fundamental facts as the social phenomena of contagion, fashion, mob-law, which Tarde and Sighele so well emphasize, the imitation of facial and emotional expression, moral influence, organic sympathy, personal *rapport*, etc., all matters set aside for later treatment. The term 'plastic' serves to point out the rather helpless condition of the person who imitates, and so interprets in his own action the more intangible influences of his estate in life.

The general character of plastic imitation may be made clearer if we give attention to some of its more obscure instances, and assign them places in the general scheme of development.

The social instances noticed at length by Tarde, and summarized under so-called 'laws,' are easily reduced to the more general principles now stated. Tarde enunciated a law based on the fact that people imitate one another in thoughts and opinions before they do so in dress and customs, his inference being that 'imitation proceeds from the internal to the external.' So far as this is true it is only partially imitation. Thoughts and opinions are imitated because they are most important, and most difficult to maintain for one self. And it is only a result of similar thought that action should be similar, without in all cases resorting to imitation to account for this last similarity. But the so-called facts are not true. The relatively trivial and external things are most liable to be seized upon. A child imitates persons, and what he copies most largely are the personal points of evidence, so to speak; the boldest, most external manifestations, the things that he with his capacity is most likely to see, not the inner essential mental things. It is only as he grows to make a conscious distinction between thought and action that he gets to giving the former a higher valuation. And so it is in the different strata of society. The relative force of convention, imitation of externals, worship of custom, seems to have an inverse relation to the degree of development of a people.

Again, Tarde's laws relative to *imitation mode* and *imitation coutume*—the former having in its eye the new, fashionable, popular, the fad; the latter, the old, venerable, customary—are so clearly partial statements of the principles of accommodation and habit, as they get application in the broader genetic ways already briefly pointed out, that it is not necessary to dwell further upon them.¹¹

The phenomena of hypnotism illustrate most strikingly the reality of this kind of imitation at a certain stage of mental life. Delbreuf makes it probable¹² that the characteristic peculiarities of the 'stages' of the Paris school are due to this influence; and the wider question may well be opened, whether suggestion generally, as understood in hypnotic work, might not be better expressed by some formula which recognizes the fundamental sameness of all reactions—normal, pathological, hypnotic, degenerative—which exhibit the form of stimulus-repeating or 'circular' process characteristic of simple imitation. In normal, personal, and social suggestion the copy elements

¹¹Tarde's other principle, that 'inferiors imitate superiors,' is clearly a corollary from the view that the progressive sense of personality arises through social suggestion.

¹²*Revue Philosophique*, XXII., pp. 146 ff.

are, in part, unrecognized; and their reactions are subject to inhibition and blocking-off by the various voluntary and complicated tendencies which have the floor. In sleep, on the other hand, the copy elements are largely spontaneous images, thrown up by the play of association, or stimulated by outside trivialities, and all so weak that while action follows in the dream persons, it does not generally follow in the dreamer's own muscles. But in hypnotic somnambulism, the copy elements are from the outside, thrown in; the inner fountains are blocked; action tends to follow upon idea, whatever it is. Even the idea of no action is acted out by the lethargic, and the idea of fixed self-sustaining action by the cataleptic.¹³

Further, in certain cases of madness (*jolie a deux*, etc.) the patient responds to the copy which has been learned from a single person only, and which has aided in the production of the disease.¹⁴ In all these cases, the peculiar character of which is the performance, under conditions commonly called those of aboulia, of reactions which require the muscular co-ordinations usually employed by voluntary action, we have illustrations of 'plastic' imitation. On the pathological side, we find, in aphasic patients who cannot write or speak spontaneously, but who still can copy handwriting and speak after another, cases which illustrate the same kind of defect, yet in which the defect is not general, but rather confined to a particular group of reactions, by reason of a circumscribed lesion.

In this form of imitative suggestion, it is now clear, we have a second kind of subcortical reaction. It is 'secondarily subcortical,' in contrast with the organic or 'primarily subcortical' imitations. When looked at from the point of view of race history, it gives us further reason for finding in imitation a native impulse.

¹³It may be well to quote Janet's summary of his determinations of the characteristic features of general catalepsy, all of which indicate a purely imitative condition of consciousness, *Aut. Psych.*, p. 55: "The different phenomena which we have described are these; i.e. the continuation of an attitude or a movement, the repetition of movements which have been seen and of sounds which have been heard, the harmonious association of the members and of their movements." Cf. Janet on hysteria, *Arch. de Neurologie*, June, July, 1893.

¹⁴Cf. Falret, *Eludes cliniques sur les maladies et nerveuses*, p. 547.