SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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heretofore used, but which is in accord with that of the group in which he is now dancing. Although it is true that in most cases such innovations are copied intentionally, that is, imitatively, there are nevertheless these distinct cases in which there has been no intention of adopting the movement or attitude, and no ideational process of considering that detail of the behavior of others. In such cases it frequently happens that one's first deliberate attention to the type of behavior comes in noticing that one has made an innovation in his dancing; and, second, in recalling that it is the similitude of what others have been doing. That the acts of the others have nevertheless been perceived is evidenced by the possibility of remembering them. In any case, the action must have been *learned* previously. The reactor must have built up, by previous reactions, the neural integration which results from the stimulus pattern in question.

In *imitation*, the stimulus pattern afforded by the act of another person produces, not the reaction of doing the act, but a perceptual reaction of some other type; and this first reaction, (the perception), produces an idea, (an ideational reaction), which includes the act. This ideational reaction may be produced immediately by the perception; or it may be produced mediately, by an intervening ideational reaction, or by a series of such. The distinguishing characteristic of the imitation reaction, in short, is the intervention of an *idea*, or a series of ideas, between the stimulus pattern of perception and the act which resembles that stimulus pattern.

The social effects of imitation are enormous, and are most conspicuous in the carrying out of the tendency to *conform*. Social customs, manners of speech, and details of dress are adopted from others mainly through deliberate imitation. No woman copies the type of costume of another woman except in so far as she has ideas that the costume represents a type which is to be worn by the group to whom she wishes to conform. Selective adoption of action is not impossible in the level of similitude reactions, but selection is vastly extended and facilitated by deliberation.

Ideas are simulated and imitated, along with other activities. Simply, or deliberatively, we adopt the religious, political, scientific, and other notions of others by repeating them. The expression of the idea by another person is the stimulus pattern; the thinking of the same idea is our imitative reaction. Although this is only one of the types of promulgation of ideas, and has been overemphasized in the

theories of the past, it is important. All forms of the promulgation of ideas, including imitation, involve language, which is the most important of mental instruments, both socially and individually.

Neither similitude reaction nor imitation, therefore, is a means or method of learning, so far as specific acts are concerned. The reactor must have learned to perform the acts, or he cannot reproduce them. He cannot imitate the methods of speech of another person unless he has already learned to make the inflections and sounds involved, any more than he can imitate the starting of a motor car unless he has learned how to start it.

In another way, however, imitation may be an important method of learning; that is, in the synthesis of acts already learned as individual acts. One might learn to start an automobile by imitating the successive acts of a driver, provided one is already able to perform these successive acts. These acts being called forth in a certain order by successive imitation, may then become fixed in that order, in accordance with the laws of association, and the total reaction, comprising the series of previously learned acts, becomes learned.

In the simulation and imitation responses, the final act resembles the act of the other person which serves as the stimulus pattern; or else, the situation resulting from the act resembles the situation which constitutes the stimulus pattern. When one person's clapping his hands together causes another person to clap his hands, or when an American imitates a Britisher's drawl, we have illustrations of the first type. When the shop girl clothes herself, as nearly as skill and finances will allow, like my lady of the limousine, we have an illustration of the second type.

There is, however, another type of communication which is like imitation in that the ultimate act is the expression of an idea, not of a perception, but differs in that the idea does not result from a perception of an act or situation similar to the act or situation ultimately produced. This type of communication is properly called *suggestion*, and should be distinguished from imitation.[2]

[2] The confusion of the two types of action which has led to a fallacious explanation of all social behavior as "imitation" is due in part to the fact that we have the verb *to imitate* for the reproduction of a model; but we have no verb expressing the influence of the model on the imitator; while, on the other hand, we have the verb *to suggest* for the influence which one man may have on another in this second way, but no convenient verb for the act of the person on whom the suggestion is made effective.

Suggestion is exhibited in a startling way in many of the phenomena of hypnosis; but it is no less present in normal life. On the other hand, neither hypnosis nor the social activities of normal life can be fully accounted for in terms of suggestion. If the hypnotist makes a bow to a properly prepared subject, the subject will bow in return; that is obviously imitation or else mere similitude reaction. If the hypnotist says "You will now greet politely Miss Blank, who is speaking to you," the subject again will bow. This is not imitation, but suggestion.

In both suggestion and imitation we are dealing with the same process, absent in similitude reaction, namely, "the tendency for an idea to express itself in action;" or more strictly, the tendency for the idea reactions to become strong and definite enough to produce outward effects of importance.

In normal life, suggestion and imitation contribute only part of the springs of social action. Many other factors contribute to the determination of the actions of man upon the stimulation furnished by other men, so that suggestion and imitation may be inhibited, accentuated, or reversed. Among these other factors, the influence of desires, and the process of associative recall of ideas are the most important. In hypnosis, both of these factors are reduced, so that the "suggestion" of a course of action fails to bring up associatively conflicting ideas, and the desires have less effect in impelling to or against the suggested acts. The effect of suggestion in normal life, however, is very large.

§4. Language and culture

Language may be broadly defined as a type of stimulation which produces ideational responses rather than perceptual responses. Actually, the distinction between perceptual and ideational reactions is not so sharp as this definition would imply. There are types of responses which are purely perceptual and types which are purely ideational. There are also responses which are both perceptual and ideational in their nature; and stimulus patterns which produce this "mixed" type of reaction are properly designated as *language*, along with the patterns which produce purely ideational responses.

The above definition applies to language in a wide sense of the term, although a perfectly proper sense. In many instances, how-

THE CONCEPT OF IMITATION

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ABSTRACT

Imitation, which was formerly treated as an instinct, is now referred to another cause, but usually treated as a unitary process. Three types of so-called imitation exist. Mob activity is similar in mechanism to the hypnotic response to suggestion. The mob releases attitudes already existing. This type is quick and unwitting. A second type is the slow, unwitting. It is typified by the gradual acquisition of dialects or the slow forming of opinions which seem imitative. This type grows out of the redintegrative process, in which one takes the rôle of another, and thus at times becomes like him. The third type is the conscious copying, which depends on the wishes or ambitions of the person. The copying is merely instrumental. All three mechanisms which produce imitation may be shown to result quite as often in behavior which is so unlike any model that imitation becomes an impossible assumption. The conclusion is that imitation is not an essential attribute of behavior, but a mere accident. The problem ought to inspire extensive researches in order to clear up the unclear issues.

The problem connected with those similarities of behavior called imitation has occupied the attention of most men who have written in the field of social psychology. Emphasized and slightly enlarged, the concept has given its name to whole schools of psychological and philosophical speculation. Formerly imitation was widely held to be a primary instinct, taking its place alongside the old standbys, pugnacity and fear. Recent writing on this subject has tended to introduce certain modifications. McDougall, for example, is unwilling to write it down as an instinct, but has worked out a sort of imaginary switching arrangement by means of which the witnessing of the "expression" of an instinct may cause the same instinct to function in the beholder of the expression. Thus, while fear has its adequate and normal stimulus, the sight of a frightened person has a tendency on its own behalf to arouse the instinct of flight, which is the motor side of fear.

It is the purpose of this article to give an exposition of a point of view differing somewhat from those preceding. Imitation is a fact, or better, a name given to many types of fact. It is observed in many varieties of social experience, and must be dealt with in

any thoroughgoing statement of human nature. But the thesis here presented is that imitation is not only a result of other causal or predisposing conditions, but that so-called imitation arises as a result from several widely different types of mechanism. Moreover, *the same causes or mechanisms or processes, which result in imitative behavior, can be shown to result also in behavior that is in no sense imitative.*

Imitation must clearly involve similarity in behavior to some copy or stimulus. To imitate is to behave like another, though all such likeness may not be imitation. There may be imitation of the movements of another, as when we copy another's dress, reproduce his movements, think thoughts like his, or have feelings and emotions which resemble those of another. Such, at least, is the usual and uncritical assumption.

The functional treatment of imitation, most fully presented in the writing of the French sociologists and engagingly stated by Professor Ross, assigns all these types of imitation to a single cause or mechanism. It is assumed that there is a tendency to imitate that is normal to human nature. Professor Ross goes further and assumes that suggestion is indissolubly linked up with the phenomenon. Man is a suggestible animal, and ideas, feelings, and movements are all thought of as suggestions, and produce in turn imitation. The behavior of crowds and mobs, the spread of fashions and conventions, the social heritage of customs, the conscious copying of new forms, and the unconscious imitation of gestures, dialects, and language elements, all these are assigned to the single and simple impulse of imitation, which comes to us through the avenue of suggestion.

Upon critical examination of the facts it seems necessary to make certain distinctions between different types of imitative behavior. There are at least three distinct and divergent sorts of reaction, which may be illustrated by three different types of phenomena.

I

First, the behavior of crowds and mobs. A panic in a theater is picturesquely described as a sort of mental or emotional contagion. At first only a few are frightened, but their screams and fran-

tic efforts to escape may be quickly taken over by others until the whole company is seized with uncontrollable fear. The anger of an excited mob is another instance of the same mechanism. Men find themselves in a mob by accident or join it from curiosity, but later describe their experience as being "carried away" by the emotion of anger. The voluminous literature on the behavior of crowds includes many descriptions of religious revivals, where those who come to scoff remain to pray, sucked into the vortex of religious emotion owing to the tendency to imitate the behavior of those who are observed. Into this class will also fall the panics and collective examples of enthusiasm which do not depend on the actual physical presence of the members of a group. Later in this discussion it will appear why this class should also include cases of hypnotism, in which one person responds to the suggestion of another when the inhibitions are removed by previously established *rapport*. These examples, which could be multiplied, are clearly cases of imitation, and the interpretation of them seems to be in general quite identical, but as will presently appear, the central explanation lies in the previously acquired habitual attitudes which receive a characteristic release.

Another quite distinct type of imitative behavior is the imitation of dialects and tricks of speech, which is a widespread if not universal phenomenon, and in the same category belong even more important imitative changes, which account for the acquisition of opinions, ideals, and social and political views, when one lives among other people, and is in communication with them. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and this is true imitation. Tarde's theory of criminality included this type of experience as well as the next or third category.

There remains a type of behavior differing from both the others. It is typified in fashion, and exhibited in all forms of conscious functional activity. Women who follow the new styles are hardly swept off their feet in an unconscious way, as the members of a mob are, nor do they gradually realize that they have bobbed their hair or shortened their skirts without knowing it. Much of our imitative life is of this character. It is a conscious copying. The model presented appeals to us first or last, and we go and do

likewise. The interpretation of this type of behavior seems to be quite different from that of either of the other two.

If now we compare and contrast these three sorts of activity, it appears that the first type typified by panics and mob behavior is characterized by two adjectives, that is, it is *immediate* and *unwitting*. Sometimes it is spoken of as unconscious, but it is straining the word unconscious to say that an angry mob is not conscious. In typical mob behavior, however, it is not a deliberate purpose, but rather a partially realized activity which is most characteristic. Moreover, it is immediate or quick. Under excitement of a panic, there is not time to think and deliberate, and if one does think and deliberate, he finds himself acting differently from the others.

The second kind, typified by the acquisition of a dialect when it is not planned, differs fundamentally from the first. It is unintentional. It is often spoken of as unconscious, it is certainly unwitting. But unlike the first type, it is slow. It takes weeks or months sometimes, and certainly does not occur in the picturesque suddenness of the mob-activity type of imitation, though in cases of religious conversion, which are marginal to this, the climax may occur with a certain dramatic suddenness. In such cases we assume precedent processes.

The third type differs from both the others in that it is conscious, planned, intended, purposed. To buy a motor car because a neighbor has one, or to acquire a more expensive car like that of our social model, is to be under the influence of a distinct process, quite easily marked off from immediate, unwitting imitation, and also from the slow, unwitting type.

We have then the problem of interpretation which will reveal how these three distinct sorts of behavior come into existence. They appear not to be the result of the same motives or the same processes. Moreover, they are all complex, and ought to yield to an attempt to analyze them.

II

When we examine carefully the first type it appears that mob activity involves a certain release of existing, that is of pre-existing, attitudes, habits, tendencies. The members of a theater party who

are seized with fright are assumed to have already existing a fear of death and fire. Sudden alarm calls out, making kinetic and overpowering the tendency to save one's self from this danger. In the angry mob the situation does not differ. The fury of the members of the mob likewise rests upon already existing hostility, however latent or inactive this feeling may have been previously to the excitement. It is both picturesque and accurate to speak of the contagion of fury, but this contagion is the arousal of hostility and not the inculcation of it. The hostile attitudes are evoked, made active and kinetic. White men have been aroused to extremes of emotion quite surprising to themselves, when in a mob attacking Negroes, and in the Chicago riots the Negroes found themselves in a mob on more than one occasion, but it was a mob of Negroes. I can find no record of a Negro being swept into the contagion of a mob of white people attacking a member of his own race.

Consider the case of hypnotism. Under the abnormally suggestive condition of complete hypnotic control the subject responds immediately to what he is told to do. The subject will masticate a piece of paper and call it good, if he is told that it is candy or beefsteak, but if a person without musical training be sent to the piano, when hypnotized, and told to play a sonata, he will not, for he cannot. The abnormal condition makes it easy to release existing attitudes, but does not create new ones. A Trilby, when hypnotized, will sing and sing better than ever, for suggestion may intensify a potential activity.

We have then this formulation of the "law" of immediate, unwitting imitation exemplified in the crowd behavior: *Imitation in crowd behavior is limited to the release of attitudes or tendencies already existing and which are not new.*

The immediate responses to suggestion, which are most striking in hypnotized subjects, depend upon extreme dissociation, and are, therefore, the same type of behavior as crowd activity. Immediate response to a stimulus without inhibiting tendencies is almost a definition of suggestibility. The important point here is that the behavior of an excited member of a mob is precisely like the behavior of a hypnotized person. It is, therefore, not limited to crowd behavior, but crowd behavior is a special case in the whole general

class of suggestion responses, and it is important to observe that the hypnotized person rarely imitates; he usually obeys. It looks like imitation when the stimulus and response are identical or similar, but if the operator says, "Jump," and the subject jumps, no one whose mind is really alert would call it imitation.

There is another type of behavior which requires mention. Cases of the sudden imitation of social models by little children are frequent in the literature, and, while by no means wholly authenticated, probably do occur. Whether they be entirely new, or the result of the process set forth in our second type, is at present an open question.

If the above "law" be true, there is no justification for the older formulation that the activity or feeling comes into the mind from without. If we inquire into the explanation of crowd behavior, it is apparent that we will need to know the past history or previous experience of the members of a mob, so that we may understand what attitudes are present that can be released. The one point here is that crowd behavior produces nothing new, but is limited to the intensification and activation of the habitual. There is a further point of the highest importance, namely, the failure of one emotional expression to produce its like in another, but this will be discussed later in the paper.

The first or mob type of imitation, being limited to previously existing habits, differs fundamentally from the second type, which consists essentially in new acquisitions. As stated above, this is typified by the widely observed and familiar phenomenon of acquiring a dialect, speech habits, tricks of manner, and gestures, as well as opinions, ideals, and beliefs. We have called this the slow, unwitting type. The writer, after some weeks in France, discovered with surprise that he was shrugging his shoulders like those he talked to. It was a new gesture and had been acquired without intention or knowledge. An even more striking experience was the taking on of a rather inelegant gesture, which consisted of pointing with the lips instead of the hand. The lips were protruded in an exaggerated fashion toward the object indicated. One could hardly imagine one's self wishing to acquire this gesture, and when a friend one day told me I was doing it, I denied the statement, but a

little later I was caught in the act and had to confess. It is very easy to see how different this type of imitation is from the one just discussed. Here is no sudden release of an old attitude, but a slow acquisition of a new one. There is a story in the Bible of a debtor who owed a great sum, which was forgiven him after he had made a plea. Instead of being merciful, he went out and treated cruelly a man who owed him a much smaller amount. This seems to fall into the second category. The servants of cruel masters should be merciful, but they tend to become cruel. In Kingsley's *Water Babies,* the little chimney sweep, after being beaten and kicked by the master sweep, sobbed himself to sleep on a pile of straw and dreamed of the time when he should be a master sweep, and be able to kick little boys around. The point receives hyperbolic emphasis in a ridiculous story by Mark Twain. An infidel and priest on board ship fell to arguing about religion, during which both men became very angry. They separated in a bad humor. Next morning they met on deck, and walked straight up to each other. The infidel held out his hand, which the priest cordially grasped. Said the infidel to the priest, "Father, I wish to apologize for my hasty words. I have been thinking all night about what you said, and I have decided that you are right. I am going to join the church." The priest replied, "I have thought all night about what you said, and have decided to quit the ministry."

It is clear that we must seek for some other process than the evoking of an existing attitude, if we are to understand such behavior. The key seems to lie in the normal human tendency to converse with one's self, that is, to stimulate one's self, and to answer one's own stimulation, in which process one takes the rôle of the other, and new attitudes from the other enter the repertory of the person.

This analysis of the process of conversing with one's self has been most elaborately set forth by George H. Mead. Social experience consists in gestures and sentences directed to others, and in answering gestures and sentences addressed to us from others. We are stimulated and respond. Others are stimulated by us and respond to us, the social action consisting in the peculiarity that the response to a stimulus is also *ipso facto* a stimulus to a response.

Each gesture, therefore, is both answer and query, both stimulus and response. When, however, the person is alone this same type of activity tends to go on, following the pattern of associated behavior. The individual then comes to stimulate himself and to answer his own stimulation, and to proceed to respond to that answer, after which he goes on to answer that response. As far back as Plato is found the recognition of the fact that thinking is a conversation with one's self.

It should require little argument to show that the individual person can stimulate himself, though the statement is regarded by one popular writer as an obvious impossibility. It would be agreed that a man can shave himself, scratch himself, or pinch himself. He cannot, save metaphorically, kick himself, but Lewis Carroll says that Alice slapped herself for cheating herself when she was playing croquet against herself. Talking to one's self is not an unusual, but a normal phenomenon, and in the reflection which goes on following an emotional social contact, it is normal to live over again the whole scene. I think of what I said, then I think of what he said in reply to me, after which I recall my reply and his answer, and then perhaps I think of the very clever remark I could have made if I had had time to work it out. And so the conversation with one's self goes on including the responses of the other, which are lived over again.

Here we have an approach to the solution of the slow, unwitting imitation. To live over again the conversation or conflict is to say the words of the other in something resembling the same tone, and with the same attitude. It is literally to take the rôle of the other, to play the other's part, to assume the other's character. This would make it clear how the infidel might come to think like his clerical antagonist. It is utterly unlike mob activity, having little in it of the release of stored-up latent attitudes, but is the gradual taking over of new ones, which, indeed, may be organizations of old elements. It is the normal human tendency of playing the rôle of the other when we reflect on past social experiences and re-live the past.

A "law" of this slow, unwitting type of so-called imitation we may then attempt to formulate as follows: *When in rehearsing the*

past, emotional situations are re-enacted, taking the rôle of another sometimes gives rise to a new attitude, which is so like the attitude of the other person that it is often called imitation.

It is evident that we still require further analysis and observation to reveal just how this process can operate. In extreme cases, such as pointing with the lips, and learning to shrug the shoulders, there is involved a form of attention to minimal stimulations which should be the object of research.

This process has been fully treated by Mead and others under the head of redintegration. The incomplete present act tends to be filled out when tension exists, and this filling out is an integrating anew, that is, a redintegration. It is often called imagination, and includes everything within that category and perhaps a great deal more.

The third type of imitation differs from both the others in that it is conscious, volitional, and planned. Many young people go to college because their friends go. Some go to the opera for the same reason. Others buy listerine. The explanatory principle here must involve an underlying purpose or ambition, which is furthered or achieved by the imitated activity. To go to college gives one a standing, a promise of success, or four years of pleasant loafing, and this ambition or desire takes its particular form because of the models that are presented. It is not the imitated act that is the center of interest, but rather the act is the instrumental activity which forwards or realizes the already existing purpose.

The attempt to write out a "law" for the third type of imitation would result in a statement somewhat as follows: *When a purpose or ambition appears to be achieved or furthered by acting like another, the result is the phenomenon known as conscious imitation.*

The three types of imitation then rest upon three different preconditions. To understand the first we must know what are the habitual attitudes that are ready to be suddenly released. To explain the second we must take account of the gestures and opinions or convictions of others, which by rehearsing we come to approximate, while to interpret the third, we must know the ambitions or unfulfilled desires which the mental and muscular activities are assumed to consummate.

III

All three types of activity are referred to as imitation, and it is confusing to deny the applicability of the word. Yet the imitation is a mere accident, in the old scholastic meaning of accident, a non-essential result of the three distinct processes already described. For it seems clear upon reflection that the same type of experience which gives rise to the three sorts of so-called imitation—that is to say, the same mechanisms—may produce, and more often than not do produce, types of behavior to which one could assign this term.

Let us return to the first type of activity, the quick, unwitting imitation, so-called. It is a sudden release of movements. It produces the phenomena of emotional and muscular uniformity. Fear sweeps over a crowd, or anger, or generosity, but all that happens is a sudden release, and more often than not, the sudden release is of the opposite sort. In the Cleveland Convention of 1924, the whole delegation was drawn into a kind of mob uniforminty with the stubborn exception of the delegation from Wisconsin. They were not for Coolidge, and neither bands nor banners could make them march. There were stampedes of many kinds at the New York Democratic Convention of the same year, but the waves of McAdoo enthusiasm left the Smith delegates unmoved, and vice versa. It is a bit superficial to say, as is often said, that there is a tendency when one emotion is expressed to feel within ourselves the same emotion. Ask the disappointed and forlorn lover whether devotion always inspires the same. A courtship would be very easy if this were true, perhaps too easy to be exciting. Professor McDougall should witness a dignified and corpulent gentleman fall down suddenly on the sidewalk. Such a person often has emotions, but the spectators' emotions are probably quite different, and may generate in turn a third type of emotion in the unfortunate man. The case of the girl who, when the theater fire was started, did not run but began to play on the piano, shows that sudden release in an emergency is not necessarily always of the same sort as the copy. A mob or crowd will act alike if previously existing latent attitudes are similar and can be simultaneously released, but the members will act very differently if they possess different attitudes, and this happens quite as often as not.

Likewise with the second type. To argue with another person means to think it over and take his rôle, but whether we come to think like him or not depends on too many factors to make the outcome sure. Not every argument between a Catholic and Protestant results in both parties changing their faith. Some eastern people go to California and come to take on the native race prejudice toward Orientals, but by no means all. It is, therefore, of the highest importance to observe that the same process that results in so-called imitative behavior, results equally often in utterly unlike action.

The case of conscious copying is even easier to state. Someone starts a fashion of bobbing hair, rouging cheeks, penciling the brows, and painting the lips. At least the fashion gets started, whether it can ever be traced to any one source or not. Now these fashions come to be imitated, but not by everybody, nor all at once. Painted lips have their charm if not overdone, and would doubtless be more attractive if the flappers had better illumination at their dressing-tables. Many imitate them, but many do not. And why not? One said to me, "I'm not that kind of a girl." And this is the real underlying explanation of all conscious copying. If she is that kind of girl, she will imitate what seems to her to advance her status in the desired direction. The law student will let his hair grow long like the famous advocate, the young medical student will grow a pathetic beard in imitation of some famous surgeon. It is the ambition or ideal lying behind the whole which explains the activity, and this produces imitative behavior only when it finds the pattern instrumentally attractive. When I see a well set-up man walking very erectly, I find myself squaring my shoulders in imitation, but when I see a person with an unattractive stoop, I find that, instead of stooping, I am reminded of my defect, and I square my shoulders. When Queen Victoria heard a joke at which people laughed, but of which she disapproved, she used to say with a severe look, "We are not amused." The conscious copying then is a mere irrelevant detail. To see a girl using her makeup in public hardly incites any man to want to shave.

IV

It is then the conclusion of this discussion that imitation is hardly a justifiable psychological category. We have seen that

habitual attitudes produce crowd imitation, that talking to one's self produces another type, and conscious choice a third. On the other hand, the releasing of old attitudes, talking to one's self, and conscious choice, all three result in behavior that no one would call imitation. Imitation is then a mere accident of these three quite distinct types of mechanism. There is no instinct to imitate. There is no tendency to take over immediately a like thought or feeling, and all the uniformities which have received loosely the name of imitation are to be interpreted in quite the same way as the non-uniformities growing out of the same processes.

Imitation then is a result, but an irrelevant result. It is an apparent, but not a real result in a causal sequence. It cannot be brought inside of any general statement or psychological law. The contrary opinion seems to result from that type of error which has given us so many wrong conclusions in the past, namely, defective analysis.