Introduction

At a time when integration is a key word, not only with respect to the various sub-disciplines of psychology but also, even more importantly, with respect to the individuals and groups representing these fields in different countries and languages, an increased alertness has developed against anything that might appear as an expression of ‘separatist’ or even ‘nationalist’ tendencies. Therefore, publishing a volume under the title of *Issues in Contemporary German Social Psychology* may, at first sight, seem a highly suspicious venture. In order to alleviate such apprehensions and explain our motives for bringing together a diverse range of social psychological research under the ‘linguistic grouping’ of German social psychology, we feel we can do no better than trace the development of the present volume from its very inception to the final product.

The seeds for the idea were sown in part by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation which sponsored various research visits of the first editor to the Federal Republic of Germany and eventually brought the two of us together at Sussex for collaborative research. The idea grew out of our personal experience of the immense benefits of looking beyond the boundaries of one’s home community and coming to know more intimately the research interests and activities of colleagues abroad. Particularly, this first-hand perspective allowed us to gain immediate knowledge of ongoing and recently completed research which usually takes a long time to become accessible in published form. At the same time, it became obvious to us that the notions held by social psychologists about the state of their discipline in other countries tended to be somewhat vague. Despite a genuine open-mindedness, mutual knowledge and cooperation seemed to be confined to rather specific fields of common interests. One of the reasons for this lack of information certainly lay in the fact that the majority of research conducted in the German-speaking countries was prevented by language barriers from being recognized in Anglo-American communities. Moreover, we realized that there were only a few institutionalized venues, such as the conferences of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, where such an exchange of ideas across national and, more importantly, linguistic frontiers was facilitated.

These deliberations led to the idea of trying to bring together
social psychologists from the German-speaking countries and their
British colleagues in a leisurely forum which would escape the hectic
rush of conferences. The aim was to invite German-speaking social
psychologists to present, in depth and detail, a comprehensive
cross-section of their work which would stimulate an exchange of
interests and research activities among all participants and event-
ually prepare the ground for joint research. From the very begin-
nning, the plan for such an endeavour, discussed with colleagues on
both sides of the Channel, met with a unanimously positive
response. Thus, we were successful in bringing together a repre-
sentative, though clearly not exhaustive, group of eminent social
psychologists from the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, and
Switzerland to meet their British colleagues for a two-day con-
ference at the University of Sussex in September 1985. This volume
contains all the contributions to the conference, along with two
further chapters by authors (Roland Mangold and Theo Herrmann,
and Peter Schönbach) who were unable to attend the conference.
The list of contributions should make clear that the work is not a
culture-bound variety of social psychology. Rather, the specific
research endeavours brought together in this volume represent
integral, though distinctive elements of what is collectively referred
to as the international scientific community.

The contributions are grouped into four sections. The first sec-
tion, 'Historical Perspectives' recognizes the renewed concern with
social psychology's genealogy and heritage. In a programmatic dis-
cussion of the aims and motives underlying the emergence of a new
critical historiography of social psychology, Carl F. Graumann puts
into perspective the various cultural and scientific strands that have
contributed to the present shape of social psychology. Helmut Lück
uncovers the roots of social psychology in Germany and traces their
impact on and transformation into modern American-style social
psychology. In particular, he offers a historical perspective on field
theory and attribution theory which focuses on the work and experi-
ences of Lewin and Heider in Germany and Austria during the early
years of their careers.

The second section, 'Interpersonal and Group Processes',
presents five chapters which cover diverse issues such as problem-
solving in groups, responses to aggression and injustice, and
accounting for failure or norm-violating action. In the first of these,
Amélie Mummendey argues for a more social conceptualization of
aggressive interaction. Rather than treating aggressor and victim as
more or less independent objects of research, she presents a model
of aggressive behaviour which relies on the perspectives of the
interaction partners as either harm-doers or recipients of intentional
harm as determinants of the cognitive appraisal and, eventually, behavioural response of both individuals. Hermann Brandstätter, in his chapter on responses to verbal aggression, pleads for greater recognition of individual differences in social psychology. Gerold Mikula sets out to find a typology of situations, emotions, and reactions associated with the experience of injustice. He, too, attaches crucial importance to the perspective of the individual as either victim or observer in accounting for the perception of and reaction to unjust events. Peter Schönbach’s chapter introduces a detailed analysis of the accounts advanced following events of failure. He has developed a fine-grained taxonomy of such accounts which is based on his four-stage model of the accounting process. In the final part of this section, Mario von Cranach, Guy Ochsenbein and Franziska Tschan extend the scope from the interpersonal to the intergroup level. They explore the homologies in the problem-solving activities of individuals, dyads and organizations, relying on the central concepts of conscious cognitions and communication.

The third section comprises four contributions which deal with ‘Cognitive Approaches’ to social behaviour. Hubert Feger gives a detailed description of his component theory of attitude objects and outlines its relation to traditional theories of attitudes and their measurement. In particular, he takes a critical view of the classical approach to attitude measurement and points out the ambiguities associated with interpreting subjects’ responses to attitude-scale items. Arnold Upmeyer, Hans-Günter Roth and Ashiq Shah emphasize the expressive function of attitudes and suggest a new perspective on the attitude–behaviour relationship which relies on the concept of ‘response modalities’ adapted from psychophysics. In particular, they discuss a number of biases which may affect the transformation of attitudes into response modalities. Roland Mangold and Theo Herrmann contribute a chapter on language based on their specific model of speech production. They conceive of speech production as a problem-solving activity which is critically affected by the respective speech context. Finally, Gerhard Kaminski offers an integrative perspective on social and ecological psychology by exploring the cognitive processing of complex situations. He reports two studies investigating the cognitive activities involved in the processing of surprising events as well as in the task of becoming familiar with a complex behaviour setting.

The final section, ‘Applied Perspectives’, presents two chapters. Dieter Frey and Oswald Rogner report on research in the area of health and illness in their examination of the impact of psychological factors on recovery from an accident. In particular, they utilize concepts from attribution and control theory to address the issue of
whether control over the accident as well as the progress of recovery are adaptive or counterproductive forces in the process of recuperation. Finally, Wolfgang and Margaret Stroebe examine the problem of bereavement as a critical life event in order to outline a research paradigm for the stress–health relationship. They take a critical view of the predominant approach of examining this relationship on the basis of global life-event scales, presenting a strong argument in favour of focusing on specific life events.

Altogether, we hope that the chapters collected in this volume will be successful in furnishing a picture of the diverse contributions made by German-speaking social psychologists to social psychology at large. Our thanks are due to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Economic and Social Research Council which provided the necessary funding for the conference under their bilateral exchange scheme. We are particularly grateful to Dr Hermann Fröhlich (DFG) and Dr David Statt (ESRC) for their support and advice throughout this enterprise. Furthermore, the ESRC generously supported the preparation of the present volume. The moral and financial support of the Social Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society is also gratefully acknowledged. A special word of thanks is due to the Chairpersons who did an excellent job in steering the conference through the two days. This demanding task was shared between Charles Antaki (Lancaster), Alistair Chalmers (Sussex), Dick Eiser (Exeter), Rob Farr (London), Hilde Himmelweit (London), Gustav Jahoda (Strathclyde), Tony Manstead (Manchester), Peter Smith (Sussex) and Geoffrey Stephenson (Kent). Our final word of thanks must obviously be reserved for the contributors to this volume who were not only prepared to embark on long journeys from the continent to the UK but also showed a good deal of stamina afterwards to make the present volume possible.

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