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William J. McGuire
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Constructing Social Psychology

Creative and Critical Processes

This collection of papers by William J. McGuire reports research on the phenomenal self, revealing how we perceive ourselves and other complex stimuli selectively in terms of distinctive or atypical features, often noticing what is missing rather than what is there. The content, structure, and processing of thought systems surrounding the self and other complex stimuli are shown to function by balancing logical consistency, realistic coping, and hedonic gratification. Attitude-change and social-influence processes are described, with particular attention given to the personality correlates of persuadability, how beliefs can be immunized against persuasion, how persuasive communications affect beliefs, and how people can be persuaded by Socratic questioning that does not give them new information but rather directs their attention to selected subsets of information they already have. Also reported are findings on language and thought, psychology and history, and techniques of creative thinking in psychology and other fields.

William J. McGuire is a professor of psychology at Yale University. A Fulbright scholar and Guggenheim fellow, McGuire received the Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award from the American Psychological Association and the Distinguished Scientist Award from the Society for Experimental Social Psychology and is a William James Fellow in the American Psychological Society.

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"In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away

. . . and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."

from Musée des Beaux Arts (December, 1938)

In Mendelson, Edward (Ed.). *W. H. Auden: Collected poems*, pp. 146–7. London: Faber & Faber, copyright © 1976. Reprinted with permission.

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Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of Tables and Figures ix
Foreword xiii

1 Learning My Way 1
2 Immunization against Persuasion 44
3 Attitude-Change Studies 74
4 Integrative Reviews of Social Influence Processes 96
5 Developing Effective Persuasion Campaigns 136
6 Thought Systems: Their Content, Structure, and Functioning 180
7 A Topography of the Phenomenal Self 230
8 Distinctiveness Theory and the Salience of Self-characteristics 263
9 Language and Thought Asymmetries 294
10 Psychology and History 323
11 Winters of Our Discontents: Crises in Social Psychology 376
12 A Perspectivist Epistemology: Knowledge as Misrepresentation 395

Selected References 433
Index 443

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978-0-521-64672-7 - Constructing Social Psychology: Creative and Critical Processes
William J. McGuire
Frontmatter
More information

Tables and Figures

TABLES

1.1 Error scores on learning numbered and unnumbered initial lists and on derived lists that preserve different degrees of the initial lists' ordinal and inter-item associations 14
1.2 H_c (the proportion of pairs correctly anticipated over all 80 trials) in each of the 6 conditions that varied the difficulty of the three component sets of habits 28
2.1 Mean belief levels after attacks preceded by supportive versus refutational-same defenses 58
3.1 Pre- and post-attack attitude levels in forewarned and nonforewarned conditions as affected by type of issue and source credibility 79
5.1 The communication/persuasion, input/output matrix as an aid in constructing persuasive communications 153
5.2 Psychology's guiding-idea theories about motivational bases of human behavior usable in developing persuasion campaigns 159
5.3 Classification of some theories to account for relations between exposure to televised violence and viewer aggressiveness 173
6.1 Results of four studies on thought-systems' contents 206
6.2 Static-structure study on how the judged desirabilities and likelihoods of possible events, Des(CE) and Lik(CE), correlate with types of antecedents and consequences evoked by those events 212
6.3 Dynamic-operation Study 1: From attitude change to salience change 217

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-64672-7 - Constructing Social Psychology: Creative and Critical Processes
William J. McGuire
Frontmatter
More information

6.4 Dynamic operation Study 2, How an induced change in salience of antecedents and consequences affects attitudes 224
7.1 Sex differences in defining the self in terms of significant others 244
7.2 Age trends in the salience of significant others in self-space 246
7.3 Verb classification system used to generate the six verb ratios 251
8.1 Illustration of the distinctiveness postulate for the case of a mixed five-person group 276
9.1 Cognitive and affective positivity asymmetries in the antecedents and consequences evoked by personal versus matched societal (impersonal) eventualities in Experiment 8 305
9.2 How thinking about a stimulus in terms of its cognitively and affectively positive-versus-negative characteristics affects subsequent evaluation of the stimulus 307
10.1 Connotative definitions (distinguishing features) and denonative definitions (notable examples) of the three successive eras of collaboration between political science and psychology 350
11.1 Types of creative heuristics used to generate psychological theories and hypotheses 384

FIGURES

1.1 Acquisition curves for H_c, the proportion of St → Rp pairs correctly anticipated on successive blocks of the 80 trials in each of the 6 task conditions 32
2.1 Persistence of the resistance to persuasion conferred by supportive, refutational-same, and refutational-different defenses of the passive (reading) type 70
3.1 Postulate II. Nonmonotonic relation between audience intelligence (I) and probability of opinion change, Pr(O), as mediated by compensatory trends in probabilities of message reception, Pr(R), and of yielding to the argument, Pr(Y) 92

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-64672-7 - Constructing Social Psychology: Creative and Critical Processes
William J. McGuire
Frontmatter
More information

9.1 Increasing proportions of cognitive negations in 7- to 17-year-old children's free associations about familiar life domains (self, family, school, the future) 303
9.2 The research parallelepiped: Conceptual space within which a program of research, such as that on word-order regularities, can be developed 311
10.1 Variations from century to century in fields of endeavor in which fame was attained 369

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978-0-521-64672-7 - Constructing Social Psychology: Creative and Critical Processes
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Foreword

William J. McGuire is among the most original and influential thinkers of psychology's first century. He began his career at Yale University in the 1950s where he studied with Carl Hovland, completing his first research within the dominant tradition of learning theory. Even in his earliest papers, there is evidence of a master experimenter at work: aesthetic designs, meticulous analyses, and complex interactions predicted with precision, revealed that his use of learning theory was a tool to study the issues that most excited him concerning human thought and its complex functioning in social contexts.

After a postdoctoral fellowship at University of Minnesota with Leon Festinger, Bill spent the next several years at other great universities. At University of Illinois, he entered into a bet (with a colleague who was perpetually anxious about tenure) that he would not publish a paper until he was tenured. The evidence is in his curriculum vitae: Ten papers appeared in 1961, the year after he received tenure. Among the most notable of these contributions is a highly influential and counterintuitive idea concerning attitude change. Using the metaphor of medical immunization, Bill's genius was to suggest that small doses of a persuasive message would increase resistance to further attitude change instead of reducing it. His programmatic research on immunization against persuasion remains a model of a creative idea flawlessly executed. Bill demonstrated that ephemeral human thought processes can be described by the same laws previously considered to be true of physical and biological systems.

In the following decades, Bill continued his empirical research on attitudes, focusing on social influence processes and on the construction of effective persuasion campaigns. Academic psychologists deeply respect the originality of his theories and the elegance of his methods. Marketing researchers know and admire his creativity and boldness in speaking about attitude change and persuasion as it af-

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fects their discipline. During the middle years of his career, Bill continued his empirical research while writing exquisite reviews of attitude theory and research that simultaneously informed his peers and introduced novice students to the wonders of social psychology. He also wrote more popular, inspirational pieces that are read and re-read and for which he is beloved. One article stands out for its role in rejuvenating social psychology at a time when the field was considered to be in crisis regarding its identity and mission. In a paper presented at an international congress in Japan, Bill used the metaphor of the yin and yang of social psychology. Describing the opposite yet synergistic ways of conducting research Bill eloquently pointed out the many converging paths to truth. To social psychologists, the "yin and yang" paper offered new inspiration about their discipline and its future. Its appeal was the presentation of a view of what social psychology in all its richness could be, in language that was at once strong and inspirational. It remains among the most widely read papers even decades later, long after the field has emerged from its crisis.

Intellectual contributions come in many forms, and Bill is owed an enormous debt for his heroic service as editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the premier publication in the field. His love of his field and the individuals who produce its work are exemplified in the sheer quantity of work he did as editor from 1965–1975 (personally handling 350 manuscripts a year for *JPSP*). He continues to review with zest, in a tradition of which he remains the best exemplar; detailed reviews (sometimes approaching the length of the manuscripts themselves) of exceptional quality, known also for their supreme charity and support, especially to young scientists.

In the late 1970s, Bill McGuire began a program of research to map the topography of the phenomenal self. He faulted the field for its reliance on reactive methods that forced research participants to respond to questions in formats fixed by the investigator. This time, his maverick strategy led him to study children of various ages who supplied him jewels of data in response to his simple query: "Tell me about yourself." The papers on self-concept showed the advances that are possible when an investigator dares to break away from the established method of a discipline and has the courage to opt for labor intensive methods. Many regard Bill's research on the self as among the most creative studies of uncensored human thought ever conducted.

There are many, many other accomplishments that mark this great and admired career. It remains a thrill for Bill's colleagues to watch

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him and his wife and collaborator, Claire Vernick McGuire walk to school each day, run experiments, analyze data, and write about their discoveries. At age 73, Bill remains not only active but dauntingly productive. He travels regularly to "hardship posts" in London and Paris, joking with local colleagues that his fame is an inverse function of the square of the distance from New Haven.

William McGuire's thoughts and words transformed psychological science in deep and permanent ways. His work embodies a rare confluence of experimental rigor, creativity, and aesthetics. Fortunately for us, he chose social psychology as the discipline in which to do his life's work. We are honored to have been able to persuade him to publish his writings in a single volume; they appear here with bridging sections and commentary provided by him. With great pride in the brilliance of our field as revealed in the thoughts and words of this genius who spent much of his life analyzing the thoughts and words of others, we offer you the writings of William J. McGuire.

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