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0521812526 - An Atlas of Interpersonal Situations

Harold H. Kelly, John G. Holmes, Norbert L. Kerr, Harry T. Reis, Caryl E. Rusbult and Paul A. M. Van Lange

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An Atlas of Interpersonal Situations

An Atlas of Interpersonal Situations provides a systematic theoretical account for understanding the impact of situations on patterns of social interaction. Through descriptions of 21 of the most common situations that people encounter in everyday life, the authors aim to give readers the tools needed to understand how those situations influence interpersonal behavior. These descriptions are intended to be freestanding, each one offering analysis, research examples, and descriptions of the prototypical situation. The authors build upon the tools of interdependence theory, which stresses the manner in which people's outcomes are determined by the structure of their interaction with each other. This analysis makes clear exactly what is "social" about "social psychology."

Harold H. Kelley has won numerous scientific awards, including the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award, the American Sociological Association's Cooley-Mead Award, the Society for Experimental Social Psychology's Distinguished Career Contribution Award, and the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships' Distinguished Career Contribution Award. He is the coauthor of *The Social Psychology of Groups* and of *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. **John G. Holmes** is a three-time winner of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships' Distinguished New Contribution Award, former Executive Committee Chair of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology, and former Associate Editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. **Norbert L. Kerr** is the coauthor of *Group Process, Group Decision, and Group Action*, former Associate Editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and of the *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, and a former Executive Committee Chair of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. **Harry T. Reis** is the President of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, executive officer of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, former Editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, and coeditor of the *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality and Social Psychology*. **Caryl E. Rusbult** is winner of the National Conference on Family Relations' Reuben Hill Award and the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships' Distinguished New Contribution Award, and former Associate Editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; she holds the William Friday Professorship, an endowed professorship, at the University of North Carolina. **Paul A. M. Van Lange** is scientific director of the Kurt Lewin Institute, an Interuniversity Graduate School of Social Psychology and Its Applications in The Netherlands, Associate Editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, and former Associate Editor of the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.



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This book is dedicated to John W. Thibaut . . . friend, colleague, mentor, and admired exemplar of the best in social psychology. Whatever the merits of interdependence theory may be, it is doubtful whether its perspective on interpersonal relations would have existed without his contributions.

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Preface

This preface is a sketch of the “history” of this Atlas, an acknowledgment of the support we had in its preparation, and a characterization of the social process involved in working together. Perhaps we may be forgiven if, in this preface, we pat ourselves on the back for the effort and goodwill we have managed to put into the enterprise. The reader will be left to judge whether those were “worth our whiles.”

It all began one fall evening on the corner of 24th and M Streets in Washington, D.C. Earlier that day, in an address to the joint meeting of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology (SESP) and the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP), Kelley had described the notion of distinguishing all possible “ 2×2 ” situations and their implications for personal motivation and social interaction and cognition. The meeting participants had enjoyed a dinner reception at the French Embassy, with dancing and champagne. Holmes, Kelley, and Rusbult had returned to the hotel and were standing on the corner when Reis leapt off a later bus and ran up to them saying, “Why don’t we get a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to go to the Bellagio Center on Lake Como and think and write about all those situations?” We quickly planned to discuss the suggestion at breakfast the next morning, at which time we and another colleague, Van Lange, agreed to pursue it.

Subsequently, Kelley prepared a grant application for the Rockefeller Foundation which, unfortunately, did not draw a favorable response. Meantime, however, Van Lange solicited support from the Kurt Lewin Institute at the Free University of Amsterdam, which enabled Kelley, Rusbult, and Van Lange to meet there for two weeks in the spring of 1996. The concept of “atlas” was already in their thinking, so they took it as

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their mission to map out the “terrain” of possible situations and how they variously could be distinguished. They had intense discussions about the properties of interdependence and developed an extensive and detailed outline of headings under which each different situation and its implications would be described. In e-mail consultation with Holmes and Reis, the three also decided to invite Kerr and Eddy Van Avermaet to join the enterprise, and they met with Eddy in Amsterdam.

In the summer of 1996, the original five, all of whom are active members of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, met for an afternoon and evening discussion immediately after its Biennial Conference, held that year at the Banff Conference Center in Alberta. Dismay was expressed at the technical detail and complexity of the entry format developed from the Amsterdam discussions. Reis, in particular, argued for an approach that would produce shorter descriptions of each situation, would be more accessible to readers unfamiliar with the technical ideas, and would resonate more strongly with their existing knowledge of interpersonal phenomena. Thus, there developed a mild tension between the favorite technical pirouettes of some of the interdependence theory aficionados and the vision of an audience of readers unfamiliar with interdependence thinking advanced by the “newcomers” to the theory. The resolution of that tension is reflected in the format to be found in this Atlas.

Several members volunteered to prepare some sample “entries” according to suggestions growing out of the Banff meeting. Those were discussed at the next meeting of the group, which followed the 1997 meeting of SESP in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. Kerr joined the group at that meeting and provided an additional “outsider” perspective. Further entries were planned.

Meantime, the absence of outside support for our meetings began to concern us. It became clear that we should ask ourselves about the feasibility of pursuing a project of this magnitude without such support. A crucial unscheduled meeting took place one evening in the front room of Kelley’s home in Malibu. He, Van Avermaet, and Van Lange were discussing the matter when the same thought occurred to Kelley and Van Lange: “Let’s just do it ourselves, without outside support,” or in Paul’s colorful phrase, “Let’s go for the banana!” That was the point at which we (or at least some of us) gave up the idea of an exotic working trip and replaced it with an implicit plan to continue our ad hoc sessions, piggybacked on conferences, and rely primarily on independent individual work interspersed with group feedback. It goes without saying that the feasibility of that

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process depended heavily on the fact that we all tended to go to the same conferences and, during the interim periods, had access to e-mail and could rapidly exchange ideas, rough drafts, and comments.

All seven of us met next at the 1998 SESP meetings in Lexington, Kentucky. (Van Avermaet later found it necessary to withdraw because of the growing demands of his university duties in Louvain.) At that time we each volunteered to prepare specific entries according to the emerging format. At our next meeting, in July of 1999 in the charming courtyard of the Old Parsonage in Oxford (in connection with the EAESP meetings), both Holmes (by e-mail) and Reis felt able to announce, "We have the makings of a book here."

Two later piggyback meetings were held in conjunction with the new independent meetings of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (Nashville, 2000; San Antonio, 2001). And we are greatly indebted to SSCI (Social Sciences Conferences Incorporated), and to Bibb Latané and Deborah Richardson, for their generous support of a very productive five-day working session in late May 2000, at their Nags Head Conference facility at Sea Frolic, Highland Beach, Florida.

In retrospect, an important component of the project's initial appeal was to have a trip to Bellagio and the Italian Lake region, with good friends. Later, as we slowly got under way with the Atlas and began to produce entries, we realized how intrinsically interesting the enterprise itself was. We learned a good deal from each other about how to distinguish and represent situations and how to conceptualize their different implications. That learning was bidirectional, with the "newcomers" becoming familiar with the interdependence perspective and language, but also with the "card-carrying" interdependence people being encouraged to simplify and clarify that language (while still adding conceptual curlicues necessary for richer situational analysis). And it was not unusual for a simple idea innocently advanced by one person in preparing a particular entry to lead to an unanticipated and useful conceptual advance proposed by another member of the group. We also learned to work together, sweetening criticism with humor and making jokes out of each other's foibles. So, increasingly, the meetings became welcome occasions of pleasurable intellectual exchange. Perhaps the reader will also realize that the joint product presented here was accomplished by a group of senior people in their various specialties and departments – people who have had and continue to have heavy responsibilities of instructing graduates, chairing departments or areas, officiating at conferences, gaining grant support, and supervising assistants in research programs.

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So we present here, with considerable pride, the product of that rather extended and messy, but ultimately enjoyable, process. Perhaps we may be forgiven for some minor variations in style and voice among the various sections of the Atlas. The person(s) indicated as primarily responsible for each portion produced the first draft and made subsequent revisions, but every section was read closely by each of the six of us and was almost always subject to several cycles of revision. So we feel that the designation of the six of us as “authors” is entirely justified by that process. In the list of authors that appears on the cover and title page, Kelley drew the first position in recognition of the other authors’ gratitude for his contributions to the development of interdependence theory. The rest of the list is in alphabetical order.

The Authors, May 2002