

Part 1

Background

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Conscious and Unconscious Motives

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• MOTIVES AS ONE OF THREE MAJOR DETERMINANTS OF BEHAVIOR

What is the subject matter of motivation? From the commonsense point of view, *motivation* refers on one hand to conscious intents, to such inner thoughts as, I wish I could play the piano, I want to be a doctor, and I am trying hard to solve this problem. On the other hand, looking at behaviors from the outside, *motivation* refers to inferences about conscious intents that we make from observing behaviors. Thus, if we see a young girl perform a connected series of acts such as walking into a room, drawing up the piano stool, getting out some music, opening the piano, and starting to play, we infer that she wants to play the piano. If she stops playing after a while, we infer that she no longer wants to play the piano. As Marshall Jones (1955) put it in introducing the annual volumes of the *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, the subject matter of motivation has to do with “how behavior gets started, is energized, is sustained, is directed, is stopped.” Put another way, motivation has to do with the *why* of behavior, as contrasted with the *how* or the *what* of behavior. We can observe what the girl is doing, that is, playing the piano. Or we can observe how she is doing it, that is, what motor skills she is using to play the piano. Or we can try to determine why she is doing what she is doing.

Of course, when we make inferences from observing behavior about a person's intent, we can arrive at a conclusion about the intent that differs from what the person feels her or his intent was. We refer to people's perception of their wishes as *conscious intents*, and we infer that their wishes were *unconscious intents* if they differ from the report of conscious wishes or if people cannot report at all on their intents. The inferences we make about interests from observing behavior can be wrong; for example, we infer that the girl wants to play the piano, whereas the same acts would be consistent with her feeling that she is being compelled to practice.

It is very important to recognize at the outset that there are several kinds of answers to the question *why*, only some of which deal with the problem of motivation. A complete answer to the question *why* must include all the determinants of behavior, not just the motivational ones. To distinguish among the determinants of behavior, it is useful first to realize that any behavioral outcome is a function of determinants in both the person and the environment. Fritz Heider (1958) uses the example of a man rowing a boat across a lake to get to the other side. Getting to the other side (the behavioral outcome) may be determined partly by the individual who is rowing or partly by wind currents blowing on the boat. If the man did nothing and simply was blown across the lake, we ordinarily would make no inferences about his motivation—about his desire to get to the other side. On the other hand, if the day were perfectly calm and he rowed vigorously, we would attribute the behavioral outcome to his intent to go across the lake.

A number of recent experimental studies have dealt with the problem of *personal causation*. In general, we do not think of people as causing an outcome if we can find sufficient reason for the outcome in the external environment, as

in the example of the wind blowing the boat across the lake (Deci, 1975). However, if there are no environmental pushes or if such pushes would work against a particular outcome, and if people have acted in ways that seem to produce the outcome, we are even more apt to attribute the outcome to their actions.

For a concrete example of this principle, consider an autobiographical statement made by Sigmund Freud (1910/1938), one of the most important contributors to the psychology of motivation, whose work will figure largely in this chapter and the next: “For psychoanalysis is my creation; for 10 years I was the only one occupied with it and all the annoyances which this new subject caused among my contemporaries has been hurled upon my head in the form of criticism.” Freud is saying that all the environmental forces were acting against the creation of psychoanalysis. He got no help—only criticism—from his contemporaries. So it is proper to infer that he personally caused the creation of psychoanalysis, since he persisted in the face of criticism. Or as Weiner and Kukla (1970) have shown, “if one succeeds when others fail, or fails when others succeed, the outcomes are attributed to the person” (Weiner, 1980a). They found, for example, that if a person succeeded in performing a task at which only 10 percent of the people succeeded, judges overwhelmingly attributed the success to the person rather than to the characteristics of the task.

Once it has been decided that the person is responsible for an outcome, when do we attribute motivation to the person? As Heider has pointed out, common sense distinguishes between effort (the motivational factor) and ability. A behavioral outcome is jointly determined by a person’s efforts and ability to perform the task. The outcome is also partly determined by the person’s understanding of the situation. Jones and Davis (1965) use the example of Lee Harvey Oswald shooting President John F. Kennedy to illustrate how these three factors interact to produce an outcome. Before we can infer that Oswald intended or wanted to kill the President, we must know that he knew how to shoot a gun, that is, that he had the ability and had not accidentally pulled the trigger. We also need to know that he understood that the gun was loaded and that if he pulled the trigger a bullet might enter the President’s head and kill him, as well as that this would somehow fit into his ideas of what ought to be. These ideas or expectations usually are referred to as *cognitive variables*.

Personal causation is made up of cognitions, skills, and motivations or intents. Any general theory of action or of personality must take into account a person’s motives, skills or adaptive traits, and cognitions or schemas (McClelland, 1951). These three types of variables interact in complex ways, as later chapters will show, but the emphasis in this book is primarily on motivational variables. More careful definitions of the determinants of behavior will be given in later chapters. The purpose here is simply to give a general picture of the types of variables psychologists have used to explain behavior.

Once again let us turn to Freud’s autobiography to see how these factors interact to produce an outcome in a concrete case. He said, “I had become a physician quite reluctantly, but was at that time impelled by a strong motive to help nervous patients, or at least to learn to understand something of their conditions. I had placed reliance on physical therapy and found myself helpless in the

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face of the disappointments with [it]" (Freud, 1910/1938). Freud made a statement about his motives—his desire to help nervous patients—and a statement about a technique or skill (physical therapy) he tried that is considered to be another separate determinant of his actions. More specifically, he tried to help a patient he called Dora. He knew of an event in her life that he believed had caused the outbreak of her illness but said, "I tried uncounted times to analyze the experience, but all that I could receive to my direct demands was the same scanty and broken description" (Freud, 1910/1938).

Only when he used his new technique of getting the patient to free associate backward from the scene itself to earlier experiences was he able to understand and solve the actual conflict. When he got to the root of the problem he discovered it was sexual: "The fact that a gross sexual . . . transference occurs in every treatment of a neurosis . . . has always seemed to me the most unshakable proof that the forces of the neuroses originate in the sexual life" (Freud, 1910/1938). Freud was describing a third element that played an important part in his treatment of a patient—namely, his understanding of the situation or his sexual theory of the origins of the neuroses. In other words, his treatment or its behavioral outcome was a joint function of his motivation to help, a particular technique or skill he used (the free associative method), and his general understanding of the etiology of the neuroses.

As in this particular example, psychologists have shown that the personal determinants of a behavioral outcome can be broken down into motivational variables, skill or trait variables, and cognitive variables (beliefs, expectations, or understandings). A general theory of behavior must include the contribution of all three elements and their interactions, but this book will focus attention primarily on motivation.

• CONSCIOUS INTENTS

Consciously wanting something is an everyday experience. It will be called a conscious intent to have, to get, or to do something. What people tell themselves or others they want to do is closely related to what they will do, provided the intent refers to the here and now. If a man in a clothing store says he wants to buy a shirt, the chances are very good he actually will go to the shirt department and buy a shirt. If a woman in an automobile says she wants to get some gas, her statement of intent is excellent evidence that she will in fact buy gas and not a shirt. Psychological studies have shown that conscious intents in the here and now correlate about .95 with actions taken subsequently in the here and now (Ryan, 1970; Locke & Bryan, 1968). As a recent example of this well-known fact, consider a study reported by Smetana and Adler (1980). The investigators questioned a large number of women awaiting the results of a pregnancy test as to whether they did or did not intend to have an abortion if the test was positive. The stated advance intention of the fifty-nine women with positive tests correlated .96 with whether they had the abortion or not.

The reason such intents predict actions so well in the here and now is that they take into account not only motivation, but also the other determinants of

action, as Chapter 6 will show. That is, the environmental determinant is present. The man is in the store; the abortion is available. Also, the skills necessary for performing an act like buying a shirt or going to see a doctor are available. So are the cognitive determinants of the act: the customer understands what a shirt or an abortion is for. Thus, conscious intents are not pure indications of the motivation involved. They are a product of the motivation (including its unconscious aspects, considered later in this chapter) and other determinants of action as well. Historically, however, intents have played an important role in the way psychologists have studied motivation.

Besides demonstrating the obvious point that conscious intents influence actual choices, early psychologists investigated the strength of conscious intents. Narziss Ach (1910) approached this problem by pitting an intent against a well-practiced habit. He had subjects learn a number of pairs of nonsense syllables that rhymed (for example, *dak-tak*). After the subjects had practiced learning these pairs for some time, he would introduce a new set; for example, he would ask the subjects to respond to the first nonsense syllable with its mirror image (*dak-kad*). He wanted to measure the strength of the new intent by discovering how many practice trials on the rhymed association task were necessary to break through the new set. That is, if the first, or rhyming, task had been practiced only a few times, it was easy to maintain the new intent (mirror image learning) without interference from the old one. As the number of practice trials on the first task increased, however, errors from that type of learning crept more readily into the new learning set, interfering with the intent to produce the mirror image of the first nonsense syllable.

Ach thought he was measuring the strength of will by pitting it against an old habit, but Lewin (1935) pointed out that there was an intent involved in the first task also, and that really a conflict existed between two intents. He took the position taken by this book: A habit (for example, an associative link between *A* and *B*) does not contain a motivational force of its own, as some association theorists have argued. Rather, an association is an aspect of the determination of a response that is conceptually distinct from the behavioral intent. Thus, in analyzing Ach's experiment, think in terms of a conflict between the old intent to say *dak-tak* and the new intent to say *dak-kad*.

Conflicts in Conscious Intents

Lewin's interest in the conflict of intents led him and his students to do a number of studies on motivational conflicts. He introduced a very elaborate system of notation for describing motivational forces in a psychological field, only a little of which is relevant here. Table 1.1 illustrates Lewin's contention that the intent, or psychological force, to perform an act was a product of two person variables (need and valence) divided by an environmental variable (psychological distance). *Need* meant the desire for some end state; *valence* meant the reward value of the end state; and *psychological distance* referred to all the difficulties involved in performing a task or in adopting the means necessary to get to the goal. Table 1.1 illustrates how this conceptual model explains the characteristics of different types of motivational conflicts.

Table 1.1.

LEWIN'S MODEL OF MOTIVATIONAL CONFLICTS (after Lewin, 1935)

$$\text{Force toward an action} = \frac{\text{Need} \times \text{Valence}}{\text{Psychological distance}}$$

Approach-approach conflict: deciding whether to stay home and write or go out to the opera.

$$\frac{\text{Needs fame (10)} \times \text{Fame from book (3)}}{\text{Psychological distance in difficulty in writing (6)}} = \frac{30}{6} = 5.$$

$$\frac{\text{Needs music (2)} \times \text{Enjoyment from opera (5)}}{\text{Psychological distance in going out to opera (2)}} = \frac{10}{2} = 5.$$

Avoidance-avoidance conflict: deciding whether to endure Jung's criticisms or the rejection of the scientific world.

$$\frac{\text{Needs scientific accuracy (10)} \times \text{Jung's critique (-5)}}{\text{Psychological distance in accepting Jung (5)}} = \frac{-50}{5} = -10.$$

$$\frac{\text{Needs acceptance of psychoanalysis (10)} \times \text{Anti-Semitic rejection (-5)}}{\text{Psychological distance in correcting Jung (5)}} = \frac{-50}{5} = -10.$$

Approach-avoidance conflict: deciding whether to tell the truth or avoid Breuer's disapproval in writing up the Dora case.

$$\frac{\text{Needs scientific accuracy (6)} \times \text{Truth about Dora's sexuality (5)}}{\text{Psychological distance in writing up Dora case (5)}} = \frac{30}{5} = 6.$$

$$\frac{\text{Needs Breuer's friendship (5)} \times \text{Breuer's disapproval (-6)}}{\text{Psychological distance in writing up Dora case (5)}} = \frac{-30}{5} = -6.$$

An approach-approach conflict is unstable and easily solved. The traditional example of a donkey who starved because he was standing equidistant from two equally attractive piles of hay is incorrect. As a further example, suppose Freud is trying to decide whether to stay home and work on his book or go to an opera for the evening; both alternatives hold some attraction for him. If we assign appropriate weights to the variables in Lewin's formula, we can equalize the attractiveness of the two alternatives. On the one hand, he is an ambitious man who needs fame (let us assign that a value of 10) and knows that he will get some fame from publishing this book (3); however, there is considerable difficulty involved in writing (6), which somewhat reduces the overall attractiveness

of this alternative. The formula determines the attractiveness of Freud's staying home and writing as $(10 \times 3)/6 = 5$.

On the other hand, Freud may need music (2) less than fame and enjoy the opera (5) somewhat more than writing, but the difficulty in going out to the opera (2) is much less than the difficulty in writing. This increases the attractiveness of this alternative, making its overall attractiveness the same as staying home and writing, or $(2 \times 5)/2 = 5$.

Note, however, that moving in one direction or the other toward either alternative immediately reduces the psychological distance, making that alternative more attractive and solving the conflict. If Freud puts on his coat in preparing to go out, he has reduced the psychological distance to the goal of going to the opera and is likely to continue in that direction. If he starts writing, however, the difficulty associated with that alternative is reduced, making it the likely choice for the evening. All the donkey has to do is accidentally move toward one pile of hay or the other for that choice to be more attractive.

An avoidance-avoidance conflict tends to be very stable. Early in the history of the psychoanalytic movement Freud was pleased to gain the support of an energetic young Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung. Freud was very sensitive to the scientific world's rejection of his sexual theories and felt some of the criticism was motivated by anti-Semitism, since all the early psychoanalysts were Viennese Jews. He felt that Jung, who was not Jewish, was a very important ally and arranged for him to be president of the Psychoanalytic Association. However, Jung soon began to differ with Freud and introduce ideas of his own. This put Freud into an avoidance-avoidance conflict. On the one hand, he was very upset by Jung's new ideas, which he felt were wrong and would undermine or dilute his most basic insights.

On the other hand, Freud wanted to avoid the criticism of the community by taking advantage of Jung's value as a non-Jewish supporter of psychoanalysis. As the formulas in Table 1.1 show, Freud's moving toward continuing to accept Jung would decrease the psychological distance in the first alternative, making the reality of Jung's deviationism even more painful. Thus, if he started to do this he would immediately back off, as this alternative would become more unpleasant than the other: $(10 \times -5)/5 = -50/5 = -10$. On the other hand, if Freud moved toward correcting Jung or even removing him from the Psychoanalytic Association presidency, the reality of rejection by the scientific community would be even stronger. Having moved in this direction, Freud would find it even more unpleasant and would back off again to increase the psychological distance to this alternative. Thus, he would tend to vacillate, trying to avoid first one unpleasant alternative and then the other. This in fact happened over a number of years as Freud tried to resolve this avoidance-avoidance conflict. As Lewin pointed out, avoidance-avoidance conflicts are serious only if a person cannot escape simply by going out of the field and avoiding both. In this case Freud could not escape, because the action to be taken involved either correcting or accepting Jung.

An approach-avoidance conflict also has special characteristics. Consider the case of Freud's deciding whether to tell what he thought to be the truth about the sexual cause for Dora's neurosis or to avoid the disapproval of his mentor,

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Josef Breuer, which he was certain would follow if he published his findings. Again, such a conflict is serious only if the same act or goal has both approach and avoidance aspects. If two different goals are involved, the person simply avoids the negative one and approaches the positive one. However, here the same act—writing up the Dora case for publication—would satisfy Freud’s scientific needs (approach) but earn Breuer’s disapproval, which in the end had less negative valence than his positive push to tell the truth about Dora’s sexuality.

Other investigators have shown that as a conflicting goal in a situation like this is approached, the tendency to avoid its negative aspect grows stronger more rapidly than the tendency to approach its positive aspect. Figure 1.1 illustrates the different slope of approach and avoidance gradients. In the original study that demonstrated this difference, J. S. Brown (1948) placed some white rats in harness in a runway and measured the strength with which they pulled toward food or away from shock. One consequence of the difference in slopes is apparent in Figure 1.1. If the approach tendency is very strong, it will get a person very near the goal before he or she recoils in fear; this is not true if the approach tendency is weak. Thus, if a man is still strongly attached to a woman who has rejected him, he will do everything he can to get near her; just as he gets in her presence, however, he will pull back in fear. His fear reaction will be much stronger than it would be if he were not so attached to her, because in that case the fear would have blocked him from approaching her much sooner.

In reference to Figure 1.1, Miller (1951) says,

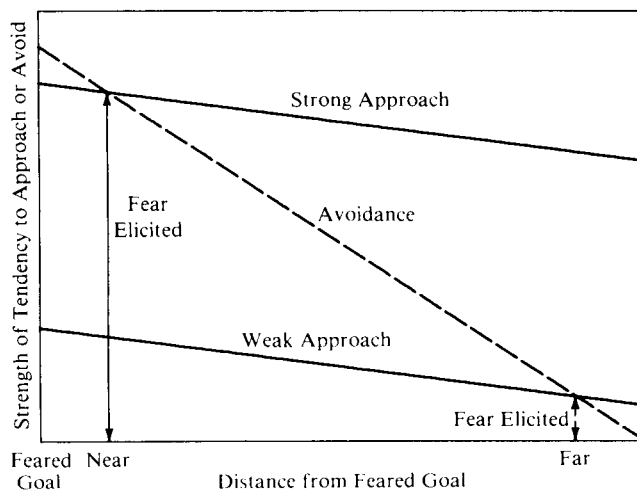


Figure 1.1.

Graphic Representation of an Approach-Avoidance Conflict and of the Effect of Increasing the Strength of the Motivation to Approach (Miller, 1951).

... When the point at which the gradients intersect is between the subject and the goal, approach is stronger than avoidance. Therefore, the subject moves toward the goal. When he passes the point of intersection, avoidance becomes stronger than approach; so he stops and turns back. Increasing the strength of the drive motivating approach raises the height of the entire gradient of approach. Since this causes the point of intersection to occur nearer the goal, the subject approaches nearer. Since this nearer point is higher on the gradient of avoidance, more fear is elicited.

These deductions hold only for the range within which the two gradients intersect. It is only for the sake of simplicity that the gradients are represented by straight lines in these diagrams. Similar deductions could be made on the basis of any curves that have a continuous negative slope which is steeper for avoidance than for approach at each point above the abscissa.

Another consequence of the difference in slopes is illustrated by the example of Freud's approach-avoidance conflict given in Table 1.1. Given the equal weights assigned the two tendencies in that case, it would be predicted that Freud would not have written up the Dora case. As he started to write up the Dora case, the threat of Breuer's disapproval would have grown stronger faster than would the positive pull toward explaining the truth about Dora.

Blocked Intent

Lewin and his students also were interested in what happened to an intent when it was interrupted, for it seemed to continue to influence behavior. For instance, Lewin had observed that if he intended to mail a letter, it would continue to "stay in his mind" even while he did other things until he actually had mailed the letter. One of his students, Zeigarnik (1927), showed that tasks that were interrupted tended to be better remembered than tasks that had been completed.

Other investigations dealt with what happens when an interrupted task cannot be resumed. Two possibilities are that the person either finds a substitute way of satisfying the intent or, if none is available, becomes frustrated and engages in disorganized or regressive behavior. For instance, in one study children were shown an attractive toy that was then covered up by a heavy shield with a handle on top. The children showed their intent to get at the toy by trying to lift the heavy cover off. If they could not succeed, they often complained or sat down, cried, and did nothing, showing signs of regression to maladaptive forms of behavior. If they were offered other toys, they might be satisfied with those as substitutes. Much work has been done on the conditions under which children will accept substitutes, regress, or show other forms of maladaptive behavior such as aggression when an intent is interrupted.

Conscious Goal Setting

Probably the most influential work carried out by the Lewin group involved the level of aspiration experiment (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944). These studies deal with the effects of conscious goal setting on behavior. Subjects typically are given a task to perform in a limited period, for example, a page of