

Social Psychology

An Overview

By

Halford Fairchild

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What is Social Psychology?

- From our text: “Social Psychology is the scientific study of how we feel about, think about, and behave toward the people around us and how our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are influenced by those people.” (p. 1, 33 words)
 - A rewrite: “Social psychology is the scientific study of the reciprocal interpersonal influences on thinking, feeling and behaving.” (HHF, 16 words)
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What is Social Psychology?

- ...the scientific study of
 - people in interaction
 - social influence (thoughts, feelings, beliefs, behaviors)
 - The effects of the real, imagined or implied presence of others
 - Is anything truly “non-social”?
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Areas of interest

- Social cognition - how we think about social situations
 - Attitudes (formation, expression, & change)
 - Social pressure (compliance/obedience)
 - Cooperation vs. competition
 - Aggression
 - Persuasion & advertising
 - Group & intergroup dynamics
 - Social Problems
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Social influences on the self

- ❑ Leon Festinger: Social Comparison Theory: people evaluate themselves in relation to others, usually similar others, known as reference groups.
 - ❑ Social comparison may be upward or downward
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Situational Influences: The Stanford Prison Experiment

□ <http://youtu.be/sZwfNs1pqG0>

Social Perception

- ❑ Forming impressions & Interpersonal Attraction
 - ❑ See video clip #210: Interpersonal Attraction
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Interpersonal Attraction: Clothes Make the Man

Length: 4:20

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Social Cognition: Attribution Theory

- ❑ Attribution: the process of explaining the causes of behavior
 - ❑ “Fundamental Attribution Error”: focusing on internal factors (in others)
 - ❑ “Ultimate attribution error”: attributing success to internal factors, failure to external ones (and in-group/out-group bias)
 - ❑ Self-serving bias
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Attitudes

- Attitude: tendency to think, feel or act positively or negatively toward stimuli
 - Tri-component theory: cognitive (beliefs), affects (feelings), conative (behavioral)
 - Attitude formation (learning theory)
 - Attitude change (source, content, audience)
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Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- ❑ When attitudes (thoughts, feelings) and behaviors are inconsistent, ***dissonance*** (cognitive tension, anxiety) arises.
 - ❑ Post-decision dissonance occurs after major decisions.
 - ❑ Dissonance reduction occurs by rationalizing our decisions, or changing attitudes to be consistent with our attitude-discrepant behaviors.
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Prejudice and Stereotypes

- Centrality in social psychology
 - Origins in the study of attitudes
 - Witness to the horrors of the Holocaust and WWII
 - Stereotypes: beliefs about members of a group - kernel of truth but false when applied to all group members.
 - Prejudice (negative attitudes -- beliefs, feelings)
 - Discrimination (behaviors)
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Prejudice in action – Video clip 206

WORTH
PUBLISHERS

Video Anthology for Introductory Psychology

Attitudes and Prejudicial Behavior

Length: 7:30

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Causes of Prejudice

- Authoritarianism
 - Acceptance of “traditional values”
 - Unquestioningly follow authority
 - Inclination to act aggressively
 - Enhance self esteem
 - Dissonance reduction (On The American Dilemma)
 - Cognitive miserliness
 - Learning theories ([Anderson 360](#))
 - Psychoanalytic Theory – defense mechanisms
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Reducing Prejudice

- Contact Hypothesis (Gordon Allport, 1954)
 - Equal status
 - Sanction of authority
 - Cooperative
 - Pursuit of common goals
 - Elliot Aronson and the jigsaw classroom.
 - Halford Fairchild and “Star Crusaders”
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Promoting Social Harmony With Positive TV Images

By ANN JAPENGA,
Times Staff Writer

When UCLA professor Halford Fairchild set out to create a television pilot program that would promote racial harmony, he learned that establishing equality in a TV production is just about as tough as accomplishing the same goal in real life.

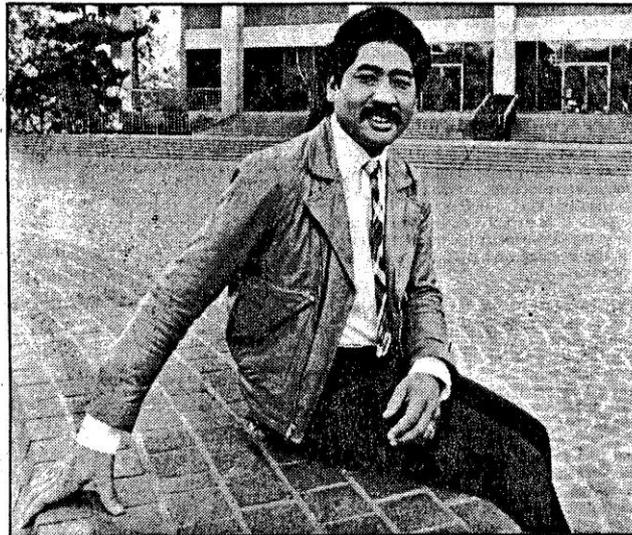
Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Fairchild's "Star Crusaders" tells the story of a roving band of peace-makers made up of two black men, a Latino, a white man, an Asian woman and a robot. The Star Crusaders travel to the warring planet Umoja on a mission to restore harmony by utilizing non-violent weaponry, which includes acrobatics and logic.

Sculpting Values

Fairchild, an assistant professor of social psychology and a faculty associate in UCLA's Afro-American studies program, wanted to show how pro-social programming—as he calls television that presents models of cooperation and non-stereotypical roles—can sculpt the values and self-images of children.

He found, instead, he said, that the medium is often counterproductive to such goals.

In an article just released in the *Journal of Educational Television*,



RANDY LEFFINGWELL

Halford Fairchild's "Star Crusaders" aims at racial equality.

Fairchild, 35, recounts the production problems that hounded "Star Crusaders."

Budget limitations, for instance, forced him to scrap the plan to portray warring factions on the alien planet. It was too costly to have the opposing groups differentiated by eye color, as the script originally called for. And union

rules meant that in order to cast characters in equal-status relationships, as he had planned, he would have had to pay all the actors top scale.

Despite the setbacks, Fairchild said he remains convinced that television could help inspire harmony in society by showing examples of positive behavior. Studies

have shown that the educational television series "Freestyle" and "Sesame Street," as well as network series "The Waltons" and "Lassie," have altered the attitudes of young viewers after repeated exposure, Fairchild said.

Yet a 1982 study cited by the professor showed that only 1% of children's network programming depicted cross-racial associations. And those programs that have content favorably depicting social interaction tend not to be consistent in their messages, he said.

The child of a black father and a Japanese mother, Fairchild said he was the target of racial taunts himself growing up in a mostly black neighborhood of South-Central Los Angeles.

Subtle Messages

Fairchild said he never connected the subtle messages conveyed by his favorite television shows with the oppression he experienced. "I loved Shirley Temple (in old movies on TV)," he said. "And I thought 'Amos 'n' Andy' was the greatest show on Earth."

It wasn't until later, when he began studying media in college, that Fairchild concluded that his favorite TV shows weren't doing anything to improve his self-image.

In the late '60s, while Fairchild was working on a doctoral degree in social psychology at the University of Michigan, there appeared at local theaters a rash of what were then referred to as "blaxploitation" movies. Films such as "Cotton Comes to Harlem" and "Shaft" shared a theme Fairchild described as "a black superhero getting in his

Please see **CRUSADE**, Page 8

Los Angeles Times

VIEW

Ideas

Part V/Wednesday, January 9, 1985

Aggression

- ❑ An act intended to do harm
 - ❑ 1.6 million + violent crimes in the U.S. yearly, including 91,000 rapes and 16,000 murders.
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Causes of Aggression

- Freudian theory
 - Hereditary influences
 - Biological mechanisms (brain and hormones)
 - Learning (Socialization Theory)
 - Frustration
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Altruism and Helping Behavior

- Presence of others may lead to a diffusion of responsibility.
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Other topics in social psychology:

- ❑ Cooperation, competition and conflict
 - ❑ Group dynamics
 - ❑ Leadership (task oriented vs. person-oriented)
 - ❑ Groupthink (Irving Janis's idea about closed loop thinking in groups that can lead to fiascos).
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