

This Week's Citation Classic

Brown R. *Social psychology*. New York: Free Press, 1965. 785 p.

Evidence is presented that group decisions involving risk become riskier following discussion of individual recommendations because each individual has intended to take a bold risky stand but has not known how to do so until the range of individual stands was made known. [The **Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI™)** indicates that this book has been cited over 735 times since 1965.]

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"I wrote the book, *Social Psychology*, after teaching a course with that title for ten consecutive years, first at Harvard, then at MIT, and then at Harvard again. The course was never twice the same. I maintained a continuing search for topics in social psychology that I could teach with enthusiastic interest. In addition, there was a continuing effort with each topic to find a mode of exposition that would lay bare the issues and quickly engage student interest. There is, I think, no forcing the discovery of good expository structure. It does not come without thorough familiarity with the subject, but even then, it is a blessing that cannot be guaranteed. One is grateful when it happens.

"I felt minimal concern for 'coverage' of social psychology, as conceived in 1965, because it is not a definable theoretical term anyway, but just an educational expedient, and so I added some interesting things not usually included (e.g., the development of intelligence and of moral reasoning) and

dropped some things usually included but, to my mind, dull.

"Although *Social Psychology* was marketed as a textbook I did not hesitate to put forward new theoretical ideas. The explanation of the shift-to-risk in group decision making (see abstract) is the principal cause of the book's frequent citation in scientific articles. The gist of the theory is that, in a wide range of decisions, moderate risk is valued in this culture and that value becomes salient in group discussion.

"The book includes anecdotes and jokes and is sometimes written in the first person, and readers who like the book occasionally think they like it for these qualities. I doubt that these qualities, which are easily adopted, are very important. What mattered most, I think, was the structure which gave direction and some drama to each chapter, and these are, I am sure, more important contributors to 'readability' for adults than are high word frequencies or simple sentence structures or sensational content.

"The book has no illustrations, except for a couple of diagrams which I drew myself; it has no guide to students and no guide to teachers and no associated book of readings. Its level of difficulty is high. I should not say so myself, but I think the book is honest science. It is not pretentious and in content it favors cognitive topics rather than sizzling social issues. It went almost directly from my pencil to the printer and was written about as fast as my pencil could move because, of course, it had all been composed in advance in the antecedent ten years of teaching.

"Nothing derived from my scientific work but extrinsic to it has given me as much pleasure as the letters students have generously written me saying that the book meant something important to them.

"A recent summary of this line of work has been published by D.G. Myers and H. Lamm."¹

1. Myers D G & Lamm H. The group polarization phenomenon. *Psychol. Bull.* 83:602-27, 1976