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15 Traditional, Present Oriented, and Futuristic Modes of Group-Environment Relations

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As abruptly as the "crisis in social psychology" subsided during the mid-1970s, the domain of applied social psychology emerged. The establishment of two annual monograph series (Bickman, 1980; Kidd & Saks, 1980), the development of a new journal, *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, in addition to the more established *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, and the publication of several related textbooks (e.g., Perlman & Cozby, 1983) all attest to the rapid growth of applied social psychology in recent years. The explicit emphasis on community problem solving and field research methods within this literature seemed to respond to many of the concerns raised during the 1960s and early seventies about the relevance of social psychology to contemporary societal issues (cf. Elms, 1975; Ring, 1967; Smith, 1973).

The systematic application of social psychological theory to the analysis of community problems such as energy conservation (Stern & Gardner, 1981), family planning (Oskamp, Mindick, Berger, & Motta, 1978), and urban stress (Cohen, Evans, Krantz, & Stokols, 1980) has led researchers from their laboratories into the field and has promoted a more eclectic approach to research methodology than was reflected in earlier, predominantly lab-oriented studies. Despite these developments, however, many observers contend that the "crisis" in social psychology has not subsided. Specifically, the shifts from basic to applied research, and from laboratory toward field studies, have failed to address certain fundamental, theoretical dilemmas (cf. Gergen, 1982; Pepitone, 1981). These dilemmas relate to the restricted temporal, spatial, and cultural scope of much social psychological theory. In an effort to develop parsimonious explanations of social

behavior, social psychologists have emphasized narrowly reductionistic analyses while avoiding broader, contextual formulations of social phenomena.

In this discussion, the term "reductionism" refers not to an alleged hierarchical relationship among scientific disciplines (cf. Jessor, 1958, for a discussion and critique of this doctrine), but rather to the restricted contextual scope of many social psychological theories. Social psychological phenomena (e.g., attribution processes, helping behavior, attraction, aggression) are often examined in a de-contextualized manner, as if they can be understood apart from the historical, geographical, and cultural contexts in which they occur. The restricted temporal scope of such research is reflected in its emphasis on short-term situations and events and its neglect of the social psychological dimensions of time (cf. Gergen, 1976; Jacobi & Stokols, 1983). Similarly, much social psychological research is of limited spatial scope in the sense that physical objects and places are viewed as an inert or neutral backdrop for individual and collective behavior. Although the material features of environments have been examined in social psychological studies of noise, density, heat, and air pollution, little attention has been given to the symbolic significance of objects and places for individuals and groups (cf. Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). Finally, social psychological research has all too often treated interpersonal behavior as culturally universal, while neglecting the cultural bases of social behavior (cf. Pepitone, 1981; Triandis, 1978).

The reductionist bias of earlier social psychological theory poses an important challenge for future research: namely, the development of theories that are of broader contextual scope. By developing concepts that encompass the historical, spatial, and cultural underpinnings of social behavior, we can begin to address a diversity of questions that previously were ignored by social psychologists: for instance, (1) In what ways do the symbolic meanings associated with objects and places affect patterns of social behavior? Do groups with enduring traditions, for example, behave differently toward outsiders and toward their own physical surroundings than do those without such traditions? (2) Do symbolically meaningful objects and places serve as social surrogates (e.g., by promoting a sense of security or support) in lieu of more direct interpersonal encounters? (3) Do the physical arrangements of buildings and neighborhoods affect observers' attributions about the occupants of those places? (4) What geographic and cultural factors affect the strength of individual and group ties to specific places?

The present chapter offers a framework for analyzing the temporal dimensions of group-environment relations. The assumptions and emphases of our analysis are directly relevant to the theoretical issues mentioned above. First, we offer a set of terms for describing the ways in which

group members construe their collective history as well as their aspirations for the future. Specifically, we distinguish among four different temporal orientations of groups: traditional, present-focused, futuristic, and coordinated (the latter involving a balance of traditional and futuristic orientations). These terms provide a basis for analyzing the historical dimensions of group experience and, at a practical level, are immediately relevant to several community problems including intergroup conflict, health consequences of residential mobility, conservation of environmental resources, and the psychosocial impacts of modern technology.

Second, our analysis emphasizes the symbolic aspects of physical objects and places and the role of environmental symbolism in facilitating group cohesion and continuity. By focusing on the "social imageability" of physical environments (i.e., their capacity to evoke vivid and widely held social meanings among group members; Stokols, 1981), our analysis gives explicit attention to important social psychological functions of objects and places that have been neglected in prior research.

Third, our analysis focuses on group members' collective representations of their shared history and future, rather than on individuals' perceptions of time in relation to strictly personal events (cf. Albert's 1977 discussion of personal time perspectives). Thus, we emphasize processes of social perception or the ways in which group members collectively perceive and ascribe meaning to their activities and material surroundings. Our concern with the social meanings that often become associated with and symbolized by physical environments reflects a group level of analysis—a perspective that for many years appeared to have been replaced by a predominantly "person-centered" approach to the study of social behavior (cf. Gergen, 1982; Steiner, 1974).

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TIME

Our analysis of the temporal orientations of groups offers an alternative conceptualization of time than is reflected in earlier psychological research. Generally, temporal concepts and measures have been used in psychological studies to describe dispositional attributes of persons or objective features of environments. Examples of the *trait* perspective on time include recent research on personal dispositions toward the past (Taylor & Konrad, 1980), future time perspective (e.g., Albert, 1977; Oskamp et al., 1978), and time urgency as a component of the coronary-prone behavior pattern (e.g., Glass, 1977). Examples of *environmentalist* conceptions of time include analyses of commuting distance and time as a source of personal stress (e.g., Cullen, 1978; Stokols, Novaco, Stokols, & Campbell, 1978); studies of the relationship between spatial and temporal constraints on daily activi-

ty patterns and family interaction (e.g., Michelson, 1982); and research in which the attractiveness or aversiveness of stimuli and events are examined in relation to the individual's length of exposure to those events (e.g., Cohen et al., 1980; Stokols, Shumaker, & Martinez, 1983; Zajonc, Crandall, Kail, & Swap, 1974).

The trait and environmentalist conceptions of time are often combined within analyses of the interactions between temporally related dispositions and objective measures of time. This *interactionist* perspective is illustrated by Krantz, Glass, & Snyder's (1974) study of stress reactions among Type-A (coronary prone) and Type-B (non-coronary prone) individuals in relation to the duration of their exposure to random bursts of noise. Similarly, Stokols et al. (1978) found that long distance automobile commuting and frequent exposure to commuting delays were associated with different levels of stress among Type-A and Type-B individuals.

In earlier psychological research, then, temporal variables usually refer to characteristic attributes of individuals or environments; and often, the interactive relationships among these personal and situational variables are assessed. In the present analysis, however, we introduce a set of temporal concepts that refer not to the independent attributes of persons and environments, but rather to various forms of interdependence that arise among people and their sociophysical milieu. For example, the concept of tradition as it is developed below does not refer to the characteristics of *either* persons *or* environments. Rather, it represents an important and enduring form of interdependence that can exist between particular groups and places. Thus, whereas trait or environmentalist perspectives construe time as an independent component of situations, our analysis relies heavily on "composite" terms (such as tradition) which emphasize the inherent interdependencies among multiple components of a particular situation (see Stokols [1982] for a further discussion of component and composite analyses of people-environment transactions).

Temporal Orientations of Groups

A distinguishing feature of organized groups, which is absent among noninteracting or co-acting aggregates, is the shared perception of interdependence among individual members (cf. Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This perceived interdependence is reflected in group members' awareness of their common goals and activities. Generally, social psychological research on group dynamics has focused on short-term, experimental groups whose common goals and experiences are quite temporary (e.g., Berkowitz, 1978; Hare, Borgatta, & Bales, 1965; the longitudinal research of Sherif and Sherif [1953] on intergroup conflict is an exception to this trend). Yet, the perception of interdependence among members of naturally occurring

groups often encompasses the cumulative experience of earlier and current generations of members, as well as their present plans and aspirations about future activities and outcomes.

We propose that groups can be usefully differentiated in terms of the *temporal depth* of their shared experience, that is, the extent to which group members perceive their current goals and activities to be linked to past and/or future shared events (cf. Stokols, 1982). Considering that group experiences can encompass both *past* and *future* events, and that the temporal extension of these events can be either *shallow* or *deep*, four distinct temporal orientations of groups are suggested: namely, *present-focused* (shallow past/shallow future), *traditional* (deep past/shallow future), *futuristic* (shallow past/deep future), and *coordinated* (deep past/deep future).

The four temporal orientations suggested above are hypothetical constructs intended to identify important patterns of interdependence among current, previous, and future generations of group members (social bonding), and between group members and their material surroundings (socio-spatial bonding). To be useful, the proposed constructs must be clearly differentiated and the social psychological phenomena that they suggest should be amenable to precise measurement. In an effort to address these definitional and measurement concerns, we suggest five basic criteria for distinguishing among different temporal orientations of groups. Specifically, the proposed temporal orientations can be differentiated in terms of at least five major components, including: (1) a *group referent*, consisting of earlier and/or future generations of the group with whom current members perceive themselves to be linked (also, the current group sometimes serves as its own self-referent, as in the present-focused orientation); (2) *environmental referents*, consisting of objects and places that have functional and symbolic significance for the group, and with which group members perceive themselves to be linked; (3) *cognitive processes*, such as reminiscence about the past, short-term planning of current activities, and anticipation of the future, which reflect the temporal depth of group experience; and shared informational content consisting of the beliefs and values held by current and previous generations of the group; (4) *affective tone* reflecting the emotional valence and significance of attachments among group members and between group members and their material surroundings; and (5) *behavioral patterns*, such as the preservation of historically significant places, utilization of present resources, or investment in the development of future environments; these activity patterns reflect the predominant temporal orientation of group members toward their material surroundings.

The five components, or distinguishing features, of the temporal orientations of groups are summarized in Table 15.1. These features provide a

TABLE 15.1
 The Temporal Depth of Environmental Experience: Distinguishing Features of Traditional, Present-Focused, Futuristic,
 and Coordinated Orientations of Groups

FUTURE ORIENTATION	
<i>Shallow</i>	<i>Deep</i>
	<i>Futuristic</i>
<i>Present-Focused</i>	
<p><i>group referent</i>: current group as self-referent</p> <p><i>environmental referent</i>: objects, places that have current functional significance for the group; example: Las Vegas</p> <p><i>cognitive processes</i>: focus on current activities; short-term planning</p> <p><i>affective tone</i>: satisfaction/dissatisfaction with current situation</p> <p><i>behavioral patterns</i>: consumption, utilization of environment</p>	<p><i>group referent</i>: future generations</p> <p><i>environmental referent</i>: objects, places that symbolize links between current and future generations; example: Three Mile Island</p> <p><i>cognitive processes</i>: focus on the connections between current and future events; longrange planning, envisioning, anticipation</p> <p><i>affective tone</i>: hope/anxiety about the future</p> <p><i>behavioral patterns</i>: investment, development of environment</p>
<i>Shallow</i>	

PAST ORIENTATION

	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Coordinated</i>
<i>Deep</i>	<p><i>group referent:</i> past generations</p> <p><i>environmental referent:</i> objects, places that symbolize links between current and past generations; example: Wailing Wall in Jerusalem</p> <p><i>cognitive processes:</i> focus on connections between current and historical events; reminiscence</p> <p><i>affective tone:</i> nostalgia/regret about the past</p> <p><i>behavioral patterns:</i> ritual, preservation of environment</p>	<p><i>group referent:</i> past and future generations</p> <p><i>environmental referent:</i> objects, places that symbolize links between past, present, and future generations; example: "People Tree" sculpture in Columbia, Maryland</p> <p><i>cognitive processes:</i> focus on the connections between past, current, and anticipated events; remembrance of the past, envisioning of the future</p> <p><i>affective tone:</i> nostalgia/regret about the past and hope/anxiety about the future</p> <p><i>behavioral patterns:</i> ritual, preservation of environment; investment in and development of the environment</p>

basis for comparing and contrasting present-focused, traditional, futuristic, and coordinated orientations. A comparative analysis of these orientations is presented below. Before turning to that discussion, however, we note two general measurement issues raised by our proposed typology. The first issue is that of finding meaningful, valid measures for identifying the temporal orientation of a particular group. In other words, what methods can be used to assess the construct validity of our typology of temporal orientations (cf. Cook & Campbell, 1979)? Assuming that valid and reliable measures of the proposed constructs can be developed, a second issue arises concerning the strategic use of these measures to examine the antecedents and consequences of temporal orientations in groups.

The focus of this chapter is on theoretical rather than methodological concerns. Therefore, we will not address the above measurement issues in detail. We do, however, suggest a general methodological strategy for examining temporal orientations in groups: namely, *measuring the functional and symbolic meanings of objects and places that are closely associated with current, prior, and future phases of group existence*. By observing the material context of a group, and by probing the perceived significance of that context for collective identity and continuity, it should be possible to identify the predominant temporal orientation of the group. More specifically, a representative sample of group members can be presented with actual, simulated, or imagined environments, and with structured interview items designed to assess their cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations toward the target environments. Strategies for measuring the symbolic meanings of objects and places are discussed in greater detail in Appleyard (1979), Broadbent, Bunt, and Llorens (1980), Jacobi & Stokols (1983), and Lym (1980).

Our emphasis on the environmental dimensions of temporal orientations derives from the assumption that the material surroundings of groups serve important symbolic functions, including the enhancement of collective identity and continuity. The temporal meanings associated with objects and places constitute a subset of the "perceived social field of the physical environment," or the totality of sociocultural meanings that have become associated with a particular place and are widely recognized by group members (cf. Stokols, 1981). The explicit measurement of the temporal meanings associated with objects and places, we believe, offers a rich but as yet untapped source of information about group formation, conflict, cohesion, and continuity. Our comparison of the different temporal orientations of groups, therefore, will give particular emphasis to the environmental referents and symbolism associated with each orientation.

Present-focused orientation of groups. The temporal orientations of groups reside not in the physical characteristics of the environment, alone,

nor simply in the social organization of the occupants themselves—but rather in the *actual and perceived links between past, present, and future generations of group members; and between the group and particular environments*. According to our analysis, present-focused groups relate to their environment in terms of its functional significance for the accomplishment of immediate goals and plans. Connections between the current group and earlier or future generations are either absent or nonsalient. Thus, the material surroundings of present-focused groups have little (if any) historical significance and convey weak or negligible images of the group's future existence.

Lacking strong connections to either past or future generations, present-focused groups exhibit cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns that reflect members' predominant concern with the "here-and-now" of their immediate goals and activities. Thus, the cognitive processes of group members reveal a preoccupation with short-term decision making and a lack of historical ideals or aspirations for the future. Similarly, affective reactions of group members focus on the favorable or unfavorable quality of immediate environmental conditions in relation to short-term needs and impulses and are not tempered by past experiences or the anticipation of future events. Also, the predominant behavioral orientation of present-focused groups is toward consumption and utilization of existing environmental resources, rather than toward historic preservation or future-oriented investment of those resources.

The Las Vegas "Strip" represents an environmental exemplar of the present-focused orientation (see Fig. 15.1). For many Americans and non-Americans, as well, Las Vegas has come to symbolize a preoccupation with immediate gratification, unencumbered by the Early American ideals of frugality, piety, and family cohesion; or by anticipated regrets about one's current impulsive behavior. The physical structure and symbolism of Las Vegas are a celebration of the here-and-now, with little reference to the past or future. Less dramatic representations of the present-focused orientation are revealed in other commercial areas, such as shopping malls, which are often designed to showcase current fashions and intensify consumer experience of immediate need.

A present-focused orientation is likely to be most apparent during the early stages of group formation, and particularly among the members of "defined-duration" behavior settings (i.e., those that have prescribed termination dates; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). Yet, in those settings where group members continue to interact over extended periods, they may begin to acquire a sense of their own history, reflected in the accumulation of collectively held information about earlier shared events. Previous and present phases of group existence are compared in an effort to strengthen collective identity and to gauge progress toward the accomplishment of mutual goals.

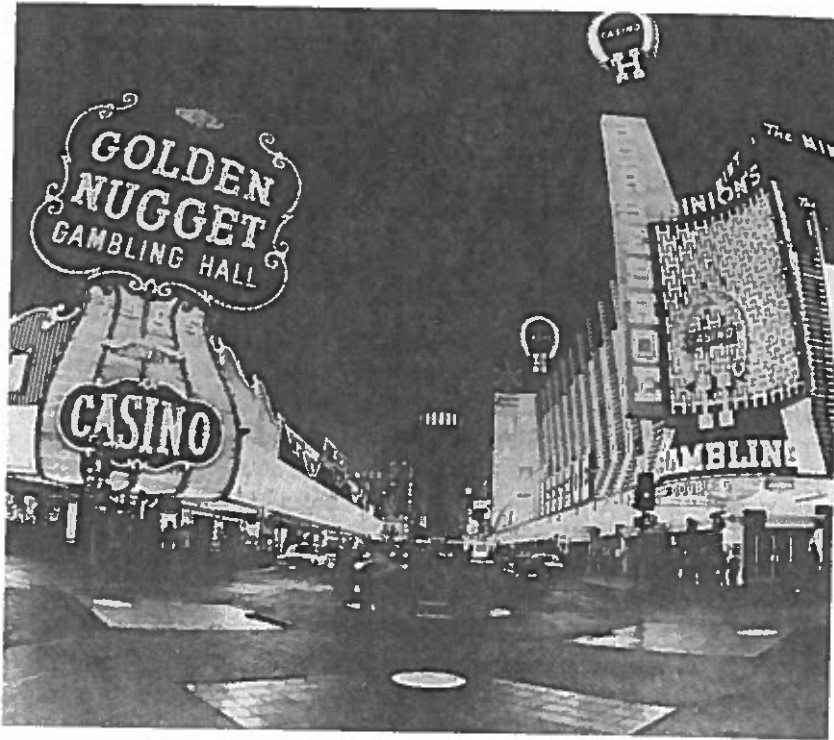


FIG. 15.1 Las Vegas epitomizes a present-oriented setting. (From Las Vegas News Bureau; reproduced in Toll, D. *The complete Nevada Traveler: A guide to the state*. Gold Hill, Nevada: Gold Hill Publishing Company, 1981, p. 138.)

Furthermore, group members may commemorate portions of the physical environment associated with significant prior events to concretize and symbolically convey their shared identity. This phase in the group's existence, when members acquire images and information about their collective past, reflects the transition between a preoccupation with present activities toward the cultivation of group traditions.

Traditional orientation of groups. As in the case of present-focused groups, the physical environment of traditional groups is directly relevant to the accomplishment of everyday goals and activities. But besides having functional significance or behavioral "affordances" (Gibson, 1977), traditional objects and places have historical value as well. That is, they symbolize important aspects of a group's history to its members (and often to outsiders).

An essential function of tradition is to strengthen and preserve the ties between current and past generations of group members. The perceived

connections between the current generation and the *historical referent group*, to which their activities and surroundings are symbolically linked, are based on a set of shared values and experiences (Jacobi & Stokols, 1983). The values and experiences symbolized by traditional behavior and places (e.g., commemorative environments such as the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.) may relate to religious beliefs, ethnic ties, national history, or any other widely held meanings that serve to bind group members with each other.

To the extent that the traditional significance of an activity or an environment endures, it can be inferred that some group is committed to the maintenance of that tradition. It is important to note, however, that traditions are not invariably associated with positive emotional reactions among group members. While one individual may identify positively with a particular tradition and experience a nostalgic appreciation of the past, another member may feel detached from the tradition and express bitterness about certain aspects of the group's history.

Affective response to traditional referents also may vary in relation to the level of external threat, increasing in intensity when the referents (such as symbolically meaningful places) are facing modification or destruction. In these instances, the salience of traditional meanings increases and group members become more aware of the importance of tradition as a basis for preserving their collective identity and survival. Within the group, variation in members' affective responses may be related to group role, such that those individuals who hold positions of responsibility and authority will be most committed to the preservation of traditional behavior and environments. The centrality of traditional meanings to an individual's or group's identity, then, is a major determinant of the affective and symbolic significance of those meanings.

The symbolic and affective dimensions of tradition are overtly manifested through social behavior and environmental design. Many religious settings, for example, are associated with traditional activities and architectural elements. The Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem is a preserved remnant of the Second Temple, most of which was destroyed in A.D. 70 (See Fig. 15.2). To this day, Jews from all over the world come to this place to reaffirm their collective identity and their ties to earlier generations of fellow Jews. Daily religious rituals that have survived the ages are enacted. Although the same rituals are carried out in numerous other locations within Israel and throughout the world, the Wailing Wall is an especially holy and significant place for it constitutes an objective manifestation of Jewish history and a symbolic link with ancient Jewry.

The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and the behavioral patterns associated with it illustrate the five components of tradition outlined in Table 15.1. The affective significance of the Wall is evident in the emotional reactions

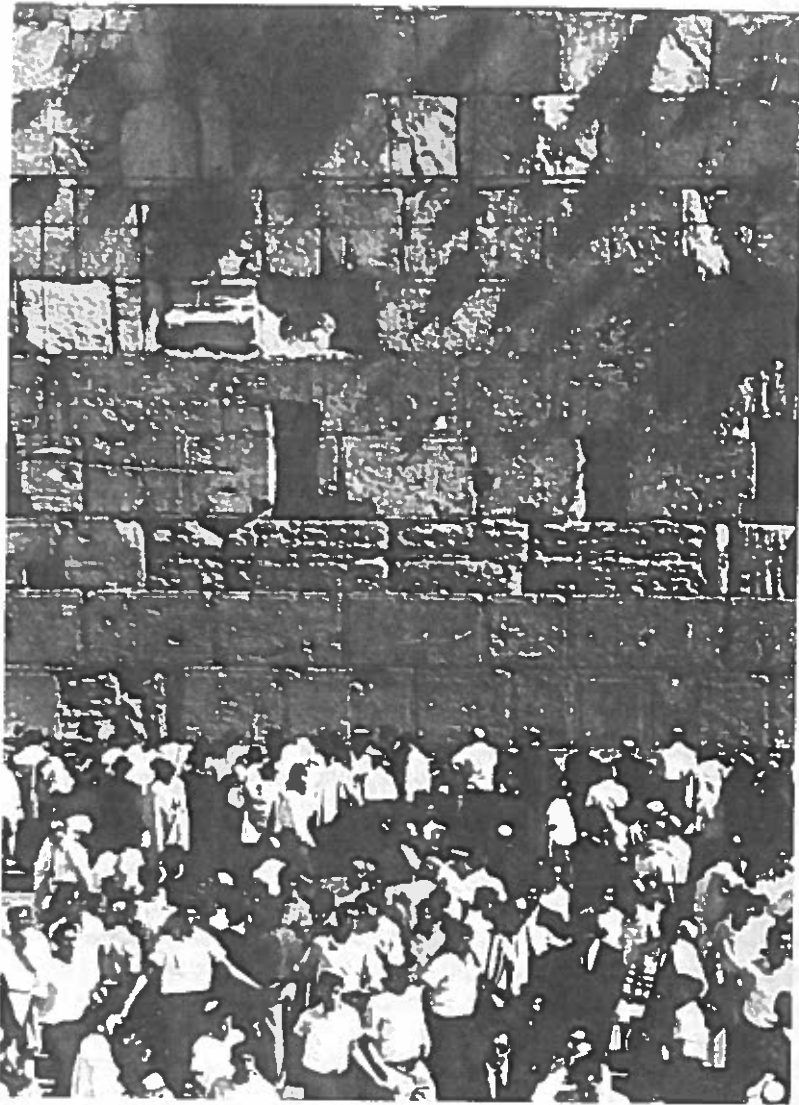


FIG. 15.2 The Western Wailing Wall exemplifies a traditional setting symbolizing the history and continuity of cherished religious values. (From Kollek, T. & Perlman, M. *Jerusalem sacred city of mankind: A history of forty centuries*. Jerusalem: Steimatzky's Agency, Ltd., 1968.)

of visitors who often kiss and caringly touch the ancient stones. A vivid demonstration of the importance of the Wall occurred immediately after the June 1967 Six Day War when thousands of Israelis visited the Old City to commemorate the return of the Wailing Wall to Israeli sovereignty.

For many Jews, the Wailing Wall symbolizes the perseverance of Judaism throughout the ages, despite recurring tragedies and adversity. Yet the particular values and symbolic meanings attached to the Wall may vary depending on the religious fervor of its visitors. For orthodox Jews, the preservation of the Wailing Wall signifies the continuity of religious ritual and values. For nonreligious Israelis, however, the Wall symbolizes the preservation of the Jewish nation and its ties to the land of Israel, rather than the continuation of religious rituals and values.

Finally, the physical qualities of the Wall (e.g., its geographical location, the texture of its stones) and the behavioral patterns associated with it (e.g., daily prayers, ceremonial events) exemplify the objective manifestations of Jewish history and tradition. These physical symbols of Judaism derive their significance and power from the collective experiences and perceptions that are associated with them.

The Wailing Wall exemplifies a traditional behavior setting in which recurring patterns of group activity perpetuate the ties between current members, a historical referent group, and a specific location (cf. Jacobi & Stokols, 1983). At a more micro level of group-environment interaction, individual artifacts and structures (even when placed within relatively non-traditional settings) can evoke a sense of history and symbolize the enduring values of a particular group. Family heirlooms exemplify traditional artifacts. These cherished objects link family members to their ancestors and reflect family values (cf. Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Important chapters in the family's history are evoked by the heirlooms. The artifacts help the family retain a sense of connection to their past and an understanding of their current identity.

Family heirlooms may convey meanings and significance other than traditional ones. For instance, the heirlooms may be sold to outsiders who value them for their aesthetic qualities or monetary worth. In such a case, their traditional meaning will be modified or lost, since the new owners lack the insider's knowledge of the historical referent group.

Tradition is only one element of the multiple and complex meanings contained within the physical environment. The traditional referents in the physical environment, rather than promoting a constant awareness of historical links, carry important meanings that are accessed by group members as needed. The physical manifestations of tradition comprise a repository of latent meanings which group members draw on to reaffirm their links with the past. The salience of such meanings may be higher, for example, during holidays, commemorative anniversaries, or when the

group is facing some threat to its existence. At other times, however, the aesthetic, functional, and nonhistorical features of the environment may be more salient to group members than traditional meanings.

To this point in the discussion, we have emphasized the role of traditions in linking previous and current members of the group. Although traditions sometimes reflect a rigid preoccupation with the past, they are often associated with group aspirations for the future and emphasize the enduring connections between past, present, and future generations. The confirmation ceremony in Catholicism or the Bar Mitzvah ceremony in Judaism, for example, not only mark personal developmental transitions, but also symbolize the perpetuation of a religious heritage from one generation to the next. In such instances, the temporal orientation of the group reflects a balanced blend of historical and futuristic perspectives, rather than an exclusive emphasis on past or future events. Before discussing this *coordinated* temporal perspective in further detail, we examine the predominant elements of a *futuristic* orientation.

Futuristic orientation of groups. Certain objects and places become strongly associated with group members' hopes and concerns about the future. Consider, for example, the nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island (TMI). As a result of the malfunction and near-catastrophe that occurred at TMI during 1979, the images of the TMI reactor towers have become indelibly ingrained in the minds of many residents and nonresidents as a symbol of future technological disasters (see Fig. 15.3). These visions of an uncontrollable future have been linked in recent research to anxiety and physiological stress among TMI residents (Baum, Grunberg, & Singer, 1982). Moreover, pictures of the TMI reactor and images of the near-disaster that occurred there have provided a concrete, symbolic focus to the anti-nuclear movement in the U.S.A., whose political objectives are to close existing reactors and to prevent the construction of new ones. For the members of these social movements, the vision of an alternative, non-nuclear future and concerns about the safety of current and future generations have prompted substantial investments of time, energy, and funding—all directed toward the protection of environmental quality and collective security.

A preoccupation with the future is often evident in geographical areas associated with rapid technological change. During the early 1960s, thousands of scientists and professionals migrated to Cape Canaveral, Florida, in response to the career opportunities afforded by the sudden expansion of the United States' space exploration program. The growth and prosperity of Cape Canaveral during the Sixties was viewed by many as the beneficial by-products of the nation's investment in space technology. Moreover, physical elements of the Cape Kennedy Space Center (e.g., ma-

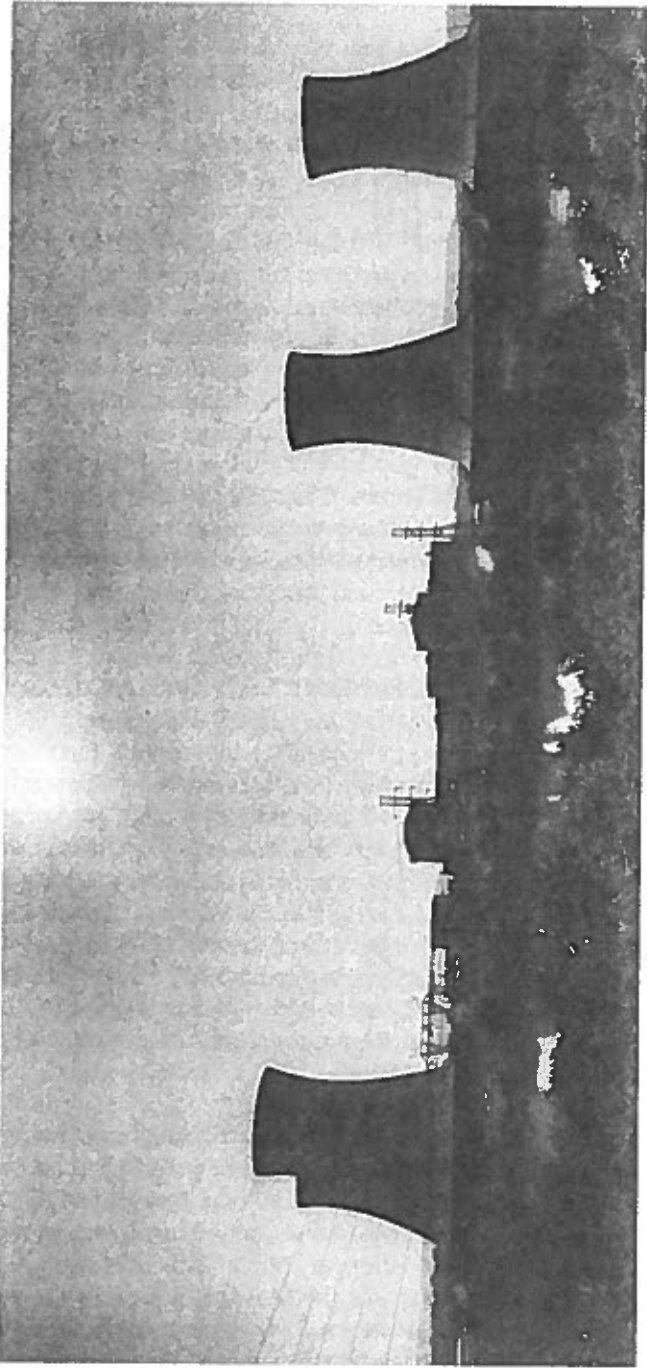


FIG. 15.3 The nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania illustrates an environment with futuristic connotations. (By Margaret Smyser; reproduced in Corbett, M., *A better place to live: New designs for tomorrow's communities*. Emmaus, Penn.: Rodale Press, 1981.)

jestic missiles resting on elaborate launch pads) became symbols of a new era in human history—interplanetary exploration and colonization.

Mission-oriented groups, such as the scientific teams associated with the lunar landing of 1969, typically disband once the mission has been completed. Yet, even before their major goals are accomplished, groups may face coordination and resource constraints that threaten internal cohesion and task completion (Bales, 1965). During these crisis periods, the survival of the group may depend as much on the availability of enduring traditions and values as on the strength of collective goals for the future. A group that can view present problems from a broad, historical and futuristic perspective may be better equipped to cope with immediate constraints than those that remain exclusively oriented toward either the past or the future. This temporally coordinated orientation is described below.

Coordinated orientation of groups. The combination of traditional and futuristic perspectives within the same group can be distinguished from the three temporal orientations outlined earlier, in which group members are predominantly oriented toward present, past, or future events. In many (and perhaps most) groups, all three of these temporal perspectives (traditional, present-focused, futuristic) are jointly operative, with the relative salience of each depending on situational factors such as the nature of group goals and the duration of members' shared experience.

One example of a combined or "hybrid" orientation is the temporally coordinated perspective in which group members ascribe *equal* significance to past, present, and future events. The members of these groups perceive themselves as linked to both earlier and future generations, and they measure the quality of their current situation in relation to previous and anticipated experiences. The activities of temporally coordinated groups reflect a blend of traditional and innovative behavior. Furthermore, the use and investment of existing resources are balanced by a concern for the preservation of historically significant areas (cf. Firey, 1945).

The evolution of a coordinated temporal orientation occurs gradually as group members acquire a sense of collective history, as well as shared images and ideals about the future. During the early stages of group formation, when present and future concerns are more predominant among group members than images of their collective past, the yearning for a sense of tradition and shared identity among members may be especially acute. To hasten the development of traditional bonds between themselves and their surroundings, group members often decorate and embellish their environments with symbols of group identity. After moving into a new home, for example, family members are often eager to display cherished objects evocative of their shared past, thereby establishing a sense of continuity

with past homes and experiences (Altman & Gauvain, 1981; Vinsel, Brown, Altman, & Foss, 1980).

In many of the planned communities, or "new towns," that have developed in the United States during the last 10 years, planners have incorporated environmental symbols to promote shared identity and cohesion among residents (cf. Burby & Weiss, 1976). An example of these symbols is the "People Tree" sculpture designed for the community of Columbia, Maryland (see Fig. 15.4). This sculpture, situated in the Village Center of Columbia, symbolically conveys the importance of family ties and friendship bonds among all members of the community. As symbolized by the *People Tree* (Fig. 15.4), Columbia was intended to be a melting pot of diverse individuals and groups, all of whom are linked by a common respect for the value of the individual and a reverence for the community as a whole. Although Columbia is a relatively new town, the "People Tree" provides a visible and succinct summary of the traditional American values shared by residents of the community. Thus, an attempt seems to have been made by the planners of Columbia to link the futuristic ideals of the new community with enduring cultural traditions.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED TYPOLOGY FOR SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Kurt Lewin (1936) introduced the term "social power field" to describe the direct influence of group members on each other that occurs by virtue of their co-presence. The present analysis suggests that the physical environments of groups gradually acquire a *symbolic* power field of social meanings through their association, over time, with group activities and experiences. Once established, the symbolic meanings of places influence the thoughts and actions of their occupants even when other group members are not immediately present. The perceived social field of the physical environment becomes, in effect, a surrogate source of social influence—its impact on individuals occurs even in the absence of direct interpersonal contact.

Previous research on social influence has given little attention to the symbolic properties of physical environments. For instance, Latané (1981) defined "social impact" as the various changes that occur in an individual (e.g., physiological, emotional, behavioral) as a result of the "real, implied, or imagined presence" of other persons. Latané's integrative review of the literature reveals that empirical studies of social impact have focused almost exclusively on the influence of *co-present* individuals. *Little if any attention has been given to the social influence of persons who are physically and*

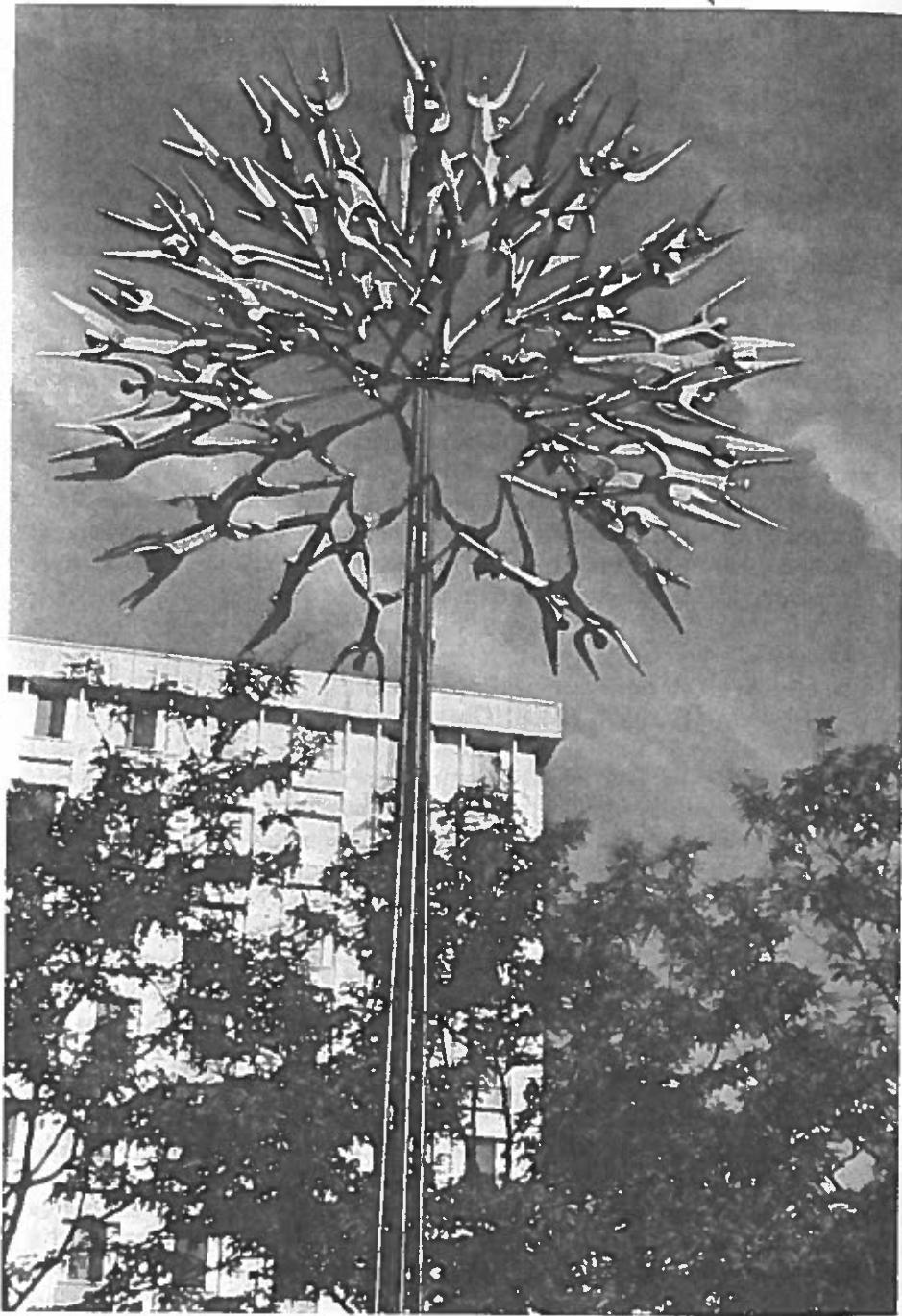


FIG. 15.4 The "People Tree" sculpture in Columbia, Maryland reflects a coordinated temporal orientation, representing community continuity and cohesion. (Photograph by Irwin Altman)

temporally distant from the target individual. Our analysis of temporal orientations in groups suggests that the symbolism of physical environments serves as a vehicle of social influence by making past and future generations of the group more salient to its current members.

Assuming that symbolic objects and places transmit the influence of spatially and temporally distant persons, and that these implicit processes of influence can be reliably measured, the present analysis suggests some new directions for social psychological research. Studies of conformity, altruism, and aggression, for the most part, have emphasized immediate situational variables such as the number and relative status of interacting persons. Yet the *environmental and symbolic context* of social interaction may also affect individuals' tendencies toward compliant, altruistic, or aggressive behavior. The environmental symbols of traditional groups, for instance, may encourage prosocial behavior by making shared values and ideals more salient to group members. The surroundings of present-focused groups, on the other hand, may be less promotive of prosocial behavior due to the relative lack of traditional environmental symbolism.

At the same time, symbolic environments may play a prominent role in promoting or sustaining intergroup conflict, particularly when opposing groups lay claim to the same historically significant areas. The Middle East conflict exemplifies an enduring struggle among diverse political and religious groups, all of whom view themselves as historically tied to the same geographical region. The old sector of Jerusalem, for example, contains several shrines and holy objects that are associated with strong, but often conflicting, symbolic meanings for Moslems, Christians, and Jews. Closer to home, the discovery of natural resources in locations considered sacred by some Native American groups has resulted in conflict between industry, with a predominantly futuristic orientation, and Native Americans, with a strong traditional orientation (U.S. Forest Service, 1981). The role of environmental symbolism in promoting or reducing intergroup conflict is an issue that warrants further attention in social psychological research.

The relationship between environmental symbolism, psychological stress, and health is another topic that has received little attention among social psychologists. Futuristic symbols, for example, may help to promote a sense of optimism among group members in the face of immediate environmental constraints and hardship. An optimistic perspective on the future has been linked in many studies to enhanced coping and the reduction of stress (Caplan, 1983; Kobasa, 1979; Stokols, 1982). Also, the presence of environmental symbols that signify individuals' connections to past and future generations has been found to be associated with enhanced emotional well-being among elderly persons (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Rowles, 1978). Future research on the functions of environmental symbols in providing surrogate (noninteractional) social sup-

port could have important practical implications for community planning and urban design.

Finally, an emerging area of psychological research concerns the social impacts of technological change (cf. Ittelson, 1980). Here again, environmental symbols of the future may play a crucial role in mobilizing social movements (as in the case of TMI nuclear reactor; see Fig. 15.3) and collective efforts to ensure group continuity and well-being. A short-sighted, temporal perspective (one that gives disproportionate emphasis to current environmental conditions) may inhibit group members' capacity for long-range planning and, ultimately, impair their collective survival (cf. Kaplan, 1972). The visual imagery conveyed by futuristic environmental symbols, thus, may serve the crucial function of reminding group members about future contingencies and constraints.

SUMMARY

Much social psychological research reflects a restricted temporal scope (emphasizing short-term situations and events) and neglects the symbolic significance of the physical environment for individuals and groups. In this chapter, we have presented a framework for analyzing the temporal orientation of a group and the role of the environment in conveying temporal and other symbolic meanings that are closely associated with group identity and continuity. A major purpose of the chapter is to offer a typology of different temporal perspectives in groups and to identify some of the distinguishing features of these perspectives. Accordingly, the various temporal orientations have been portrayed in the preceding discussion as static or "ideal" types. A more complete analysis would address the dynamic nature of temporal orientations in groups and give explicit attention to the evolution and change of these orientations as a result of factors internal and external to the group. Thus, an important research direction suggested by our typology is the analysis of circumstances associated with the development and social psychological consequences of temporal orientations in groups.

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