

Back to Social Behavior: Mining the Mundane

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This article examines the declining attention to behavioral research in personality and social psychology and proposes an alternative to the typical laboratory paradigm for studying social behavior. Specifically, the study of “unfocused interactions,” that is, situations where people simply share a common presence without talking to one another (Goffman, 1963), provides an opportunity for analyzing mundane behavior in everyday microinteractions. Because unfocused interactions are ubiquitous, may serve to prime subsequent behavior, and are likely to reflect implicit attitudes and judgments, they are well suited for studying the practical link between social cognition and everyday social behavior. Examples of research on unfocused interactions are described, and their utility in studying interpersonal processes is discussed.

Over the last few decades, the social cognition perspective has been dominant in social psychology. During this time, interpersonal processes have been studied primarily through a cognitive lens. Thus, most social psychological research focuses on people’s judgments of others; self-reports of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings; and evaluations of hypothetical situations or scenarios. Of course, the study of the cognitive processes involved in the judgment of the self and others is important in and of itself. Nevertheless, one might also argue that the ultimate utility of such research is the understanding of *social behavior*. In fact, this was recognized over a century ago in William James’s (1883/1890) observation that “thinking is for doing” (pp. 959–960). In more recent years, there was also a renewed appreciation of the pragmatic nature of social judgments. That is, social cognitions and judgments are goal directed and adaptive in shaping subsequent behavior (Bargh, 1997; Fiske, 1992; Swann, 1984). Consistent with this view, the ecological theory of social perception stressed the behavioral utility present in making affordance judgments of others (McArthur & Baron, 1983; Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). That is, our most basic social judgments are adaptive in focusing on how we can effectively relate to others.

In spite of the widespread recognition of the behavioral relevance of social judgments, the vast majority of research in social psychology measures only social cognitions and judgments and not social behavior. Years ago, in describing their paradigm for studying interactive behavior, Ickes, Bissonnette, Garcia, and Stinson (1990) lamented the dominance of pencil marks on self-report measures as the “behavior” of choice in most published research. Since that time, we can probably add computer keystrokes to the list of preferred measures. More recently, Hebl and Dovidio (2005) criticized the minimal investment in behavioral studies of social stigma. In a similar fashion, Furr and Funder (2007) noted that there is little research in personality psychology examining how personality characteristics affect actual social behavior.

In this article, I take a closer look at the declining interest in behavior in personality and social psychology research and then discuss an alternative approach for redirecting attention back to behavior, specifically to mundane social behavior. Let’s start by examining what has happened to behavioral research in personality and social psychology.

WHITHER BEHAVIOR?

In a recent, brief commentary on the state of research in personality and social psychology, Baumeister and Vohs

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(2006) contrasted the goal of the American Psychological Association's "Decade of Behavior" with the reality of what was actually published in its consensus premier journal. They sampled 24 articles in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP)* from December 2005 and January 2006 and found that only 1 of the 76 studies reported in those issues used an actual behavioral measure. Baumeister, Vohs, and Funder (2007) extended the analysis of behavioral research in *JPSP* to a sample of selected issues (March and May) from 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, and 2006. They coded each empirical study from every article in those issues and made a judgment about whether it contained any behavioral measure, either in manipulating the independent variable or as a dependent measure. Archival behavioral data counted as behavioral measures, but self-reports of past behavior or of hypothetical behavior did not count as behavioral measures. The overall pattern time was quite clear. Approximately 50% of the studies in 1966 and almost 80% in 1976 contained some form of behavioral measures, but the proportion of behavioral research dropped precipitously in 1986 to approximately 25% and continued to decline, eventually to less than 20% in 2006.

In speculating about this dramatic shift in the research landscape, Baumeister et al. identified several possible contributing factors. A first, and obvious, reason was that the direct observation of behavior is often more difficult than simply relying on self-reports. Second, the increasingly restrictive policies of Institutional Review Boards probably discourage behavioral studies. Next, because prestigious journals in this highly competitive field typically require multiple studies, the investment of time and energy in more demanding behavioral research is a risky business, especially when the failure to find significant differences makes publication unlikely. They also noted that the segmentation of *JPSP* into three separate sections between 1976 and 1986 facilitated a relative neglect of behavioral research at a time when the cognitive revolution was promoting a greater focus on internal processes (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Is this sharp decline in behavioral research limited to the premier journal in the field or does it hold more broadly in personality and social psychology? To address this question, I examined another prestigious outlet for personality and social psychology research, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (PSPB)*, the journal of the American Psychological Association's Division of Personality and Social Psychology. A sample comparable to that of Baumeister et al. (2007) was selected, starting with the March and May issues of 2006 and working backward to 1976, the second volume of the journal. Because *PSPB* was published only quarterly in 1976 and 1986, the first two issues of each year

were selected. Furthermore, because approximately half of the articles in the first two issues in 1976 were commentaries or conceptual pieces, I also included the third issue in the 1976 sample. The final sample consisted of 39 studies from 30 articles in 1976, 26 studies from 22 articles in 1986, 24 studies from 18 articles in 1996, and 45 studies from 22 articles in 2006.

The coding system was similar to that of Baumeister et al., which they described as "deliberately liberal" in terms of identifying any behavioral element in a study. This included not only dependent behavioral measures, even archival behavioral data, but also any behavioral manipulation of an independent variable or even a circumstance for manipulating an independent variable, such as performing a task (Baumeister et al., 2007). I was, however, also interested in determining the incidence of studying what people routinely do in face-to-face interactions, that is, the verbal and nonverbal components of mundane social exchanges. Consequently, an added distinction was made in terms of dependent measures that might be described as either "indirectly social" (e.g., reaction times, test performance, shocking a remote "subject," and choices in a prisoner's dilemma game) or "directly social" (i.e., face-to-face behavior in the form of verbal self-disclosure, smiling, complying to a request, or helping a physically present individual). Although the former, indirect measures are important alternatives to self-report, they are different from the more mundane behaviors typical of real-world, face-to-face interactions. Obviously, answering surveys, responding to attitude scales, or rating vignettes were coded as not behavioral. In addition, self-reports, even self-reports of past behavior or hypothetical behavior were coded as not behavioral.

The results of this coding may be seen in Figure 1. The steep decline in behavioral measures involving either the independent or dependent variables was evident with the drop from approximately 70% of the studies in 1976 to approximately 25% in 1996 and 2006. In fact, this pattern was very similar to the Baumeister et al. (2007) results for *JPSP*, where the percentage of behavioral studies decreased from approximately 80% in 1976 to approximately 20% in 1996 and 2006. The largest decrease in behavioral studies in the *PSPB* sample (29%) occurred between 1986 and 1996. In contrast, the largest decrease in the *JPSP* (more than over 50%) occurred between 1976 and 1986, perhaps facilitated by segmenting *JPSP* into three sections (Baumeister et al., 2007). Thus, the shift started earlier in *JPSP* and was manifested somewhat later in *PSPB*.

The middle line in Figure 1 shows the proportion of studies employing indirectly social-behavioral measures (i.e., not face-to-face measures) as dependent variables. The pattern over time was clear, with approximately 30% of the studies using indirect measures in 1976 and

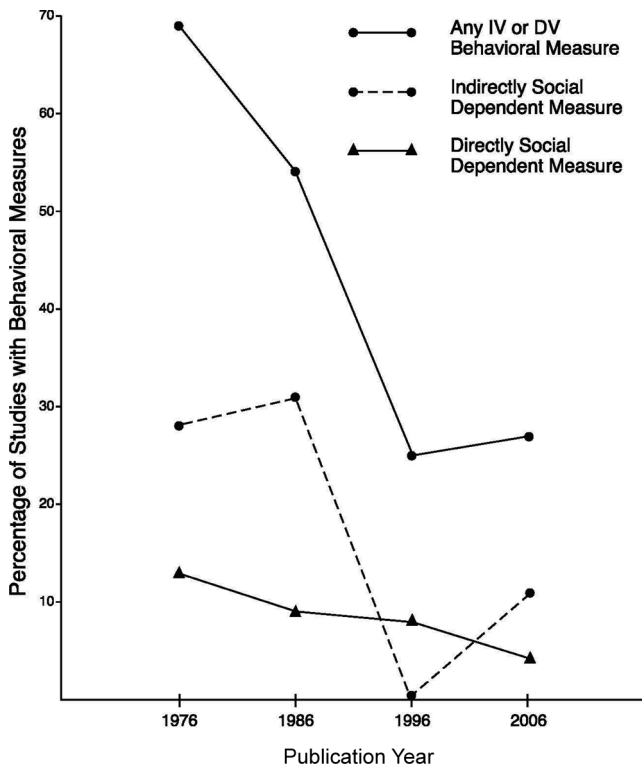


FIGURE 1 Proportion of behavioral studies in a sample of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* articles from 1976 to 2006. Note. IV = independent variable; DV = dependent variable.

1986 and then declining to an average of approximately 5% for 1996 and 2006 combined. What about the study of directly social, or face-to-face, behaviors? As seen in the bottom line of Figure 1, only 13% of the studies in 1976 used directly social-behavioral measures (i.e., face-to-face measures such as smiling, complying, or helping) and this proportion gradually declined to just 4% in 2006. Although both types of behavioral measures were used relatively infrequently in 1976, the proportion of studies employing indirectly social measures decreased by 80% between 1976 and 2006 and the proportion of studies employing directly social measures decreased by 70% over the same period. Thus, the answer to the question “Whither behavior?” at the start of this section is, *not* in two of the most prominent outlets for personality and social psychology research; this is particularly the case for the face-to-face behavior of real-world interactions.

DIVERSITY OF METHODS

There is also a compelling methodological argument for recommending a greater investment in the behavioral correlates of psychological constructs. Many years ago, Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966)

cautioned social science researchers about overdependence on self-reports of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Instead, they advocated the use of different, independent methods of measurement, including a variety of behavioral measures, to demonstrate convergent validity and to increase confidence in results. It is worth revisiting the way they frame this issue in the first chapter of their book *Unobtrusive measures: Nonreactive research in the social sciences*:

But the principal objection is that they (interviews and questionnaires) are used alone. No research method is without bias. Interviews and questionnaires must be supplemented by methods testing the same social science variables but having different methodological weaknesses. (their italics) ... [That is] the necessity for multiple operationism, a collection of methods combined to avoid sharing the same weaknesses. (pp. 1–2)

To the extent that we can demonstrate that the effects of particular variables converge across different measures, we can be more confident in the validity of our results. In addition, when we include behavioral measures in our studies, we have an opportunity to assess the overt manifestations of particular social cognitions and judgments.

Over the years, when interactive behavior has been studied, it is typically done in the laboratory where detailed verbal and nonverbal behavior can be videotaped under controlled conditions and later carefully scored. There are, of course, different laboratory paradigms for studying interactive behavior (see, e.g., Ickes et al., 1990), and there are a variety of ways that observed or videotaped social behavior may be counted, rated, or coded (e.g., Funder, Furr, & Colvin, 2000; Furr & Funder, 2007; Manusov, 2005). This type of research is typically labor intensive and time consuming. When interactive behavior is scored from video records, much more time is required in scoring the videotapes than in simply running and videotaping the interactions. The time demands are undoubtedly one reason that there is relatively little research of this kind, especially when the premier journals expect multiple studies in their articles. Nevertheless, the systematic study of interactions in the laboratory is an important element in a renewed focus on social behavior.

There are, however, also countless opportunities for studying social behavior outside of the laboratory in everyday social settings. In addition, as we move from the laboratory into the real world, we may gain a greater appreciation of the power of the situation in shaping patterns of interaction. In an era where the social cognition perspective has emphasized internal, covert processes, too little attention has been directed toward the environment. For example, ecological psychology proposes that the physical environment, social norms,

and behavior are part of a larger dynamic, functional system (Wicker, 1979). Central to this orientation is the concept of a “behavior setting” as a unit of analysis. A behavior setting is a limited, self-regulating system with human components (individuals, behavioral routines, and social norms) and physical features (location, physical structure, and design) that combine to facilitate a program of events.

Examples of behavior settings include a meal at a fast-food restaurant, a college English class, a church service, or a staff meeting at work. Embedded in these events are individuals whose social behavior is very much affected by the physical and normative characteristics of the behavior setting. Of course, individuals are rarely in any setting by chance. People select settings, but settings also select people (Wicker, 1979). These situations are fertile grounds for systematically studying our everyday interactions. In many cases, simple unobtrusive measures might be taken without identifying the individuals involved or violating their privacy. Such a strategy would increase external validity and provide new methods for demonstrating construct validity.

Although my general argument is for a greater investment in all kinds of behavioral research, my specific goal is to highlight the advantages of research on unfocused interactions. That is, to understand better the pragmatic consequences of social cognitions and to increase the methodological rigor in investigating social psychological processes, researchers might consider the opportunities provided in studying unfocused interactions in a variety of mundane social settings.

UNFOCUSED INTERACTIONS

The sociologist Erving Goffman proposed a distinction between interactions in which people have a common focus around verbal conversations and those in which people simply share a common presence but have no expectation to talk with one another. He termed the former *focused interactions* and the latter *unfocused interactions* (Goffman, 1963, pp. 33–35). Of course, when we think of interactions, we typically assume that people are having a conversation, that is, focused interactions in Goffman’s terms. There are, however, many situations in which people interact in the absence of a spoken word. As we stand in line at the grocery store, share an elevator ride, or choose a seat in a crowded waiting room, we make subtle behavioral adjustments to the close presence of others.

Because unfocused interactions do not involve conversations, individuals negotiate their position and relationship to one another through their nonverbal behavior. In social settings with strangers, people often experience ambivalence. That is, they may want to have

friendly “contact” but are still concerned about the uncertainty that strangers present (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989, pp. 170–184). For example, in the midst of strangers, individuals might flash a brief smile to signal a benign intention to those around them (Fridlund, 1994, pp. 129–130). On the other hand, if the close presence of strangers is uncomfortable, individuals may avert gaze and reorient themselves to reestablish comfort and a sense of control (Patterson, 1982). Gazing at another person in these situations of shared presence is important because it indicates a change in attention and may open the door for a response (Ellsworth & Langer, 1976). Furthermore, even a brief glance can precipitate arousal in the recipient (Kleinke, 1986). There is also evidence that gaze recipients experience localized brain activity in the right hemisphere superior temporal sulcus, an area of the brain involved in deriving meaning from the expression and movements of others (Pelphrey, Viola, & McCarthy, 2004). Thus, sharing a close presence with others does constitute an “interaction” and one that often involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral components.

Why Study Unfocused Interactions?

Although unfocused interactions may be interesting and sometimes curious events, why invest our time and effort in studying them? Let me suggest several reasons. First, unfocused interactions are ubiquitous. Consider the number of times in a given day that we share a silent, common presence with others. Most of us now live in or near urban areas where we frequently move among strangers and have no expectation of conversations with them. As our world becomes more urbanized and as travel within and outside of one’s home country becomes more common, occasions for unfocused interactions with diverse groups of strangers will necessarily increase. Although these occasions are typically brief, they can reflect something about the social order and the individuals shaped by it. In addition, cultural differences in these brief interactions may be a reflection of contrasting norms for relating to strangers (Patterson et al., 2007).

Second, it is likely that the occurrence and quality of specific unfocused interactions affect subsequent reactions. If individuals simply primed with words related to the elderly walk more slowly after the leaving the experiment room than do those who were not primed (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996), might our real-life, brief encounters with outgroup members also serve to prime subsequent cognitions and behavior? Suppose that the elderly gentleman in the checkout line in front of you at the grocery store has difficulty managing his purchases. As a result, the line is stalled for 2 extra minutes and the impatient customers behind you push a

little closer and make you uncomfortable. Afterward, as you are walking out of the store, are you more or less likely to contribute to an appeal for Alzheimer's research? In recent years, a growing body of research suggests that everyday social behavior and judgments operate automatically, primed by situational cues (Bargh & Williams, 2006). Thus, even when these events do not register within awareness, subsequent focused and unfocused interactions may well be affected.

Third, because unfocused interactions are common, low investment, and frequently very brief events, actors' nonverbal behavior in these situations can provide a unique perspective on interpersonal attitudes. In contrast to verbal behavior in focused interactions that may well reflect self-reported (or explicit) attitudes, spontaneous nonverbal behavior is probably a better reflection of implicit attitudes (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Thus, subtle changes in spacing, gaze, or expressions can reflect the implicit attitudes not accessible for self-report. Furthermore, unfocused interactions are less likely to engage behavior monitoring and management. In contrast, as situational constraints increase, individuals are more likely to behave consistently with social norms (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005; Patterson, 1982). For example, we are usually more careful in our self-presentation when meeting and talking with an outgroup member for the first time than in simply passing the same person on the sidewalk. Thus, the effects of the automatic perceptions and judgments of everyday life (Bargh, 1997) will typically be more evident in unfocused than in focused interactions.

Fourth, the ethical constraints sometimes posed by studying behavior in the laboratory, where participants may be individually identified, can often be avoided in studying unfocused interactions. Baumeister et al. (2007) suggest that one result of the increasingly restrictive policies of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) is that self-reports are seen as less intrusive than observing actual behavior. Nevertheless, in many cases, unfocused interactions may be observed in public settings with minimal intrusion while protecting the anonymity of participants. For example, Levine and his colleagues creatively employed confederates feigning need of minor assistance in unobtrusive studies of helping behavior in 36 cities in the United States (Levine, Martinez, Brase, & Sorenson, 1994) and in other major cities across the world (Levine, 2003). In our own studies of public social behavior, the campus IRB recognized that our unfocused interactions did not put participants at risk and, at the same time, preserved their anonymity. Consequently, informed consent and debriefing were unnecessary for such benign encounters.

Finally, research on these kinds of mundane interactions maximizes the external, or ecological, validity of

the results. Even carefully crafted laboratory studies are only approximations of the settings to which we would like to generalize. Furthermore, laboratory experiments enlist a restricted range of individuals who choose to participate. In contrast, a wide range of social settings provides opportunities for observing diverse individuals who are not volunteers. As a result, unfocused interactions are particularly fertile grounds for studying the subtle give-and-take between ingroup and outgroup individuals. In addition, because unobtrusive measures can be employed in unfocused interactions, participants are not aware that they are being observed and, consequently, demand characteristics are minimized. A few examples of previous research in unfocused interactions might illustrate the nature and utility of this approach.

Field Experiments in Shared Presence

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were a number of studies on reactions to spatial invasions (e.g., Felipe & Sommer, 1966; Fisher & Byrne, 1975; Patterson, Mullens, & Romano, 1971) and to staring by a stranger (e.g., Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Henson, 1972; Elman, Schulte, & Bukoff, 1977). For example, in the case of spatial intrusions, confederates would select solitary individuals and sit at varying distances (e.g., one, two, three seats adjacent or directly opposite at a library table) and record how long individuals remained in the setting. Sometimes observers also monitored more subtle behavioral adjustments such as leaning or turning away from the confederate in attempting to compensate for the close presence of the intruder (Patterson et al., 1971). These intrusion studies provided some of the early data on the role of nonverbal behavior in managing the dynamic flow of interactions (Patterson, 1976). The particular adjustments that people make are also moderated by culture (Hall, 1966) and gender (Fisher & Byrne, 1975). In the latter case, it seems that women are most affected by an immediately adjacent intruder whereas men are most affected by an intruder directly opposite them (Fisher & Byrne, 1975).

Two ingenious techniques were employed by Knowles (1972, 1973) to examine the permeability of groups in public settings. In the first study, confederates attempted to split a pair of individuals approaching on the sidewalk by walking between them (Knowles, 1972). The results clearly showed that male-female pairs were most resistant to splitting (83% avoided separating), followed by female-female pairs (62%), with male-male pairs least resistant to splitting (38%). In the second study, people walking down a hallway encountered one of several conditions where they had to choose to walk between or around two-person and four-person low-status and high-status groups

(Knowles, 1973). In general, pedestrians were most likely to walk around high-status four-person groups and least likely to walk around low-status two-person groups.

In an extension of Knowles's (1973) study, Brown (1981) varied the racial composition of conversing male dyads and examined whether shoppers walked between or around the dyad members. Both male and female shoppers were significantly more likely to penetrate the Black dyad (64%) than either the White (47%) or the mixed (38%) dyads. In addition, among those who walked around the mixed dyad, shoppers were more likely to pass behind the White member than behind the Black member. These results are a likely reflection of the subtle effects of racial attitudes and are consistent with Knowles's (1973) effects of status on splitting two- and four-person groups.

A study of gazing behavior in elevator riders was specifically designed to test Goffman's (1963, pp. 83–88) prediction of civil inattention in unfocused interactions (Zuckerman, Miserandino, & Bernieri, 1983). According to Goffman, civil inattention occurs when strangers entering a common setting recognize the presence of one another person with a brief glance but then look away and respect the other person's privacy as they approach more closely. Across three studies, Zuckerman et al. found that a single glance toward another passenger followed by avoidance was the most common and most positively rated pattern, consistent with Goffman's predictions.

Perhaps the most common circumstance for encountering strangers in public settings is, however, that of pedestrians passing one another on the sidewalk. The next section discusses a new methodology and initial results from a series of studies on the brief behavioral adjustments pedestrians make as they approach and pass one another on the sidewalk.

Passing Encounters

According to Goffman (1963, pp. 83–88), civil inattention also occurs as pedestrians approach and pass one another on the sidewalk. Presumably, this takes the form of a brief recognition glance at a distance greater than 8 ft, followed by visual avoidance until the pedestrians pass one another (Goffman, 1963, p. 84). Goffman likened this to drivers dimming their bright lights as they approached another car at night. In a series of four studies on pedestrian passings, Cary (1978) found, however, little evidence for civil inattention. To examine just what people do as they approach and pass one another, we developed an experimental procedure to observe the subtle behaviors of pedestrians as they approach and walk past a confederate (Patterson, Webb, & Schwartz, 2002).

Methodology. Because the details of our methodology are published elsewhere (Patterson et al., 2002), this section simply provides a brief overview of the method. We decided to focus on what happened from approximately 12 ft and closer as participants approached and passed by a confederate. Relatively flat and straight sidewalks were selected to permit unobstructed vision in identifying approaching participants and to allow participants to see the approaching confederate. An experimental procedure was employed that involved a confederate and an observer walking approximately 30 ft behind the confederate. At approximately 12 ft from the approaching pedestrian, the confederate initiated the conditions (avoid, look only, and look and smile) and the observer monitored the pedestrian's reactions in the passing zone.

Overview of results. We have completed three studies examining the effects of confederate attention (avoid, look, and look plus smile) toward a passing stranger in both the St. Louis area (a college campus and in downtown) and on a college campus in Matsue City, Japan (Patterson et al., 2007; Patterson & Tubbs, 2005; Patterson et al., 2002). Across the three studies, we initiated more than 1800 trials and observed pedestrians' reactions to the confederates. Over the three studies, there was a consistent effect of condition. The confederates' initiation of a look and smile (compared to avoidance or a simple look) in the passing zone precipitated significantly more participant glances, smiles, and nods. Female confederates also received more glances from pedestrians than did male confederates (Patterson et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 2002). In addition, recent work, we also found that evidence for residual effects of a confederate's smile. Specifically, pedestrians who received a smile from a first confederate smiled more at a second confederate walking past approximately 5 sec later (Patterson, 2006).

We also found cultural differences in pedestrian responsiveness (Patterson et al., 2007). In a study comparing American and Japanese passing encounters, Americans glanced marginally more frequently at the confederates than did the Japanese. Other behavioral differences were, however, very large. Among the pedestrians who did glance at the confederates, Americans were approximately 10 to 25 times more likely to react with a smile, nod, or greeting. For example, only 2% of the Japanese smiled back at the confederates, whereas 25% of the Americans did. The contrasting patterns of smiles, nods, and greetings for the Japanese and Americans are consistent with the Japanese having different norms and expectations for relating to ingroups versus outgroups than Americans do (Lebra, 1976,

pp. 219–220; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

Thus, across several studies, we found that pedestrians are quite sensitive to differences in confederates' characteristics and behavior. That is, in the 1.5 to 2 sec it takes to cover the 12-ft passing zone, pedestrians respond selectively to the confederates. Furthermore, the norms for managing these microinteractions seem to vary across culture. Consequently, this paradigm provides a method for unobtrusively studying important individual and interpersonal differences in a common, real-world context.

Ethical issues. A basic concern in conducting these studies of unfocused interactions involves the ethical treatment of the participants and ensuring their privacy. In the materials prepared for our own IRB, we emphasized that these very brief encounters were representative of the kinds of events, common to all of us, that happen frequently every day. In the course of walking from one location to another, people who pass us sometimes glance toward us and sometimes they do not. Among those who do glance in the passing zone, some also smile and, more rarely, nod or offer a greeting. Thus, our manipulations are comparable to what people experience everyday. Unlike the manipulations of spatial invasions and staring, discussed earlier, that can make people momentarily uncomfortable, the few seconds of sharing a common presence present no apparent risk to individuals. Consequently, the IRB review concluded that informed consent and debriefing were unnecessary. Obviously, if consent and debriefing were required, it would not be possible to do this kind of research and expect candid reactions from people.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, social psychological research has produced a wide and deep body of work on individual and interpersonal processes including attitudes, social judgments, persuasion, aggression, decision making, altruism, group dynamics, relationships, prejudice and discrimination, and others. Common to all of these pursuits is the overwhelming use of only self-report measures in investigating the relevant constructs. There are, of course, issues that necessarily focus on specific behavioral outcomes. Much of the research on influence examines how people behave in response to a wide variety of manipulations (Cialdini, 2001). There is also a growing body of research on behavioral mimicry and interpersonal processes in social interactions (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003). The research on

nonverbal communication frequently examines how individuals behaviorally manifest various states, motives, and intentions in relating to others (see Manusov & Patterson, 2006, for an overview). Nevertheless, such pursuits are clearly in the minority and in this “Decade of Behavior,” it seems ironic that the observation and measurement of interactive behavior merit so little attention in the published research in personality and social psychology.

Of course, this was even a problem more than 40 years ago when Webb et al. (1966) discussed the overreliance on self-reports and issued a call for multiple operationism in social science research. Unfortunately, in personality and social psychology, this problem has accelerated over the last few decades, as behavioral measures are increasingly uncommon. The results of the Baumeister et al. (2007) analysis of *JSPS* articles since 1966 showed a dramatic decrease over time in the proportion of studies using *any* kind of independent or dependent behavioral measures, dropping to less than 20% of the sampled studies in 2006. A comparable analysis of *PSPB* articles, reported here, showed a similar steep decline in the proportion of studies using any kind of independent or dependent behavioral measures. Furthermore, an additional analysis of just the dependent measures used in the *PSPB* sample also showed a marked decline in measuring behavior from 1976 to 2006. In fact, in 2006, only 11% of the studies sampled used indirectly social measures, such as reaction times or test performance. Only 4% (2 of 45) of the *PSPB* studies sampled in 2006 employed face-to-face behavioral measures, down from already low level of 13% in 1976. Thus, two of the leading outlets for personality and social psychology research rarely contain behavioral studies, especially studies of what people actually do in social settings—mundane face-to-face behavior.

The purpose of this article was not simply to discuss the lack of behavioral research in personality and social psychology and document its declining occurrence in *PSPB*. In addition, I wanted to emphasize the potential for research on unfocused interactions in field settings as a complement to traditional laboratory research. Unfocused interactions are important because they are common events that most of us experience frequently in the course of our daily activities. Whether it is an instance of waiting in line at a fast-food restaurant or simply walking past someone at the mall, these brief events can tell us something about how social settings operate and provide another perspective on interpersonal processes. In fact, these subtle, and often rapid, behavioral adjustments may reflect judgments that are inaccessible to the actors themselves (Wilson, 2002). This may be particularly useful when implicit and explicit attitudes are not highly correlated (Nosek, 2007). Furthermore, to the extent that specific

encounters prime subsequent interactions, their influence can reach well beyond their brief duration. That is, the course of subsequent focused and unfocused interactions may be primed by the initial event. In addition, with the more benign and brief interactions, such as those in the passing encounters paradigm, participants are exposed to little or no risk and their anonymity is protected. Finally, the ecological validity of research is maximized when we study mundane social behavior in real-world settings with a much broader sampling of individuals than is typical of laboratory research.

Several different examples of studying behavior in unfocused interactions were described in this article, and the effects of both subtle and not so subtle confederate manipulations were discussed. More important than the particular results from these studies is the broader potential for these methods in addressing basic issues in current social psychological research, such as prejudice and discrimination (Dovidio et al., 2002; Hebl & Dovidio, 2005).

Because unfocused interactions are so common, there are many opportunities for studying the different ways in which we react to a common presence with strangers around us. For example, in an unpublished project, we found that individuals entering a building were more likely to pause and hold the door for a trailing person of the opposite sex than one of the same sex (Patterson, Haislip, Hutson, & Tubbs, 2000). In addition, how do individuals space themselves in queues or in waiting rooms as a function of the characteristics of the people around them? Individual and group characteristics might be manipulated, and side-by-side separating distance could be observed as individuals pass confederates on a sidewalk or in a hallway, similar to the methods of Knowles (1973) and Brown (1981). In other cases, latency or duration measures might be taken on reactions to staged situations in public settings. Unfocused interactions may also provide a window on changing social norms, including the effects of technology in our everyday contacts with one another (see Bugeja, 2005). For example, my students and I are now collecting data on how pedestrians' use of cell phones might reduce their sensitivity to others in public settings.

In conclusion, over the last few decades, researchers have made impressive advances in understanding the form and process of social cognitions. There has, however, been little attention paid to the practical, behavioral correlates of social judgments in everyday life. An important, yet neglected, aspect of our everyday social contacts is the way we manage unfocused interactions. Because outgroup contacts are more likely to take the form of unfocused, than focused, interactions, these brief exchanges can provide new insights into the relationships between social cognitions and social behavior.

Finally, the systematic study of unfocused interactions may also tell us something about the larger, unwritten social order that regulates our everyday contacts with others—the very issue underlying much of Goffman's (1959, 1963, 1971) work long ago. Thus, mining the mundane is one way of reinvesting attention in social behavior.

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