

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITY OF AKRON  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN  
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY  
Fall 2008

**CORE QUESTIONS – ANSWER BOTH 1 AND 2**

1. In a fascinating video documentary on the history and meaning of scientific inquiry, Dr. Jacob Bronowski made a provocative observation. He said: “One aim of the physical sciences has been to give an exact picture of the material world. Yet one achievement of physics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been to prove that that aim is unattainable. There is no absolute knowledge, and those who claim it, whether they are scientists or dogmatists, open the door to tragedy. All information is imperfect. We have to treat it with humility.”

Bronowski is pointing out that scientists, including social scientists, are always walking along the narrow ledge of “certainty.” All we can really hope to do is search for ways of making the ledge a bit wider, recognizing that we will never be able to make the ledge so wide as to pass along with 100 percent confidence and certainty.

What do you think Bronowski would say if he read House’s (1977) famous piece, “The Three Faces of Social Psychology”? In other words, to what extent are the divisions by “faces” or perspectives beneficial for making the “ledge of certainty” as wide as we can make it? Explain. Also, are we more or less “divided” now than we were back when House wrote his famous article? Explain. Finally, thinking about the inter-relations among the different faces of social psychology (or lack thereof), have we done pretty much everything we can to widen the ledge of certainty, or could we do more? If we could do more, what exactly might we do?

NOTE: The committee recognizes that the “third” face represented on the reading list is “structural social psychology” rather than the psychological social psychology in the original House (1977) piece. In answering the question, the committee expects you to discuss the three more contemporary “faces” represented on the reading list.

2. Social psychologists employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Are there some areas of substantive inquiry that are more suited to one method versus the other? Explain and provide empirical examples. Finally, select a substantive research topic and discuss what aspects of this area of research might be better studied quantitatively and what aspects might be better studied qualitatively. Do not forget to discuss specific factors that guide a social psychologist’s choice of method as well as the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research.

### **EXTENDED QUESTIONS – ANSWER 2 OF THE FOLLOWING 5 QUESTIONS**

3. The experience and management of emotion has become of increasing concern to many of those working within sociological social psychology. Using *two* of the perspectives listed below, compare and contrast the perspectives in regard to the following: (1) the conceptualization of emotion or emotional experience; and (2) the measurement of emotional experience and/or management. Finally, how might each perspective benefit by incorporating one aspect of the other's approach to emotion?
  - social structure and personality
  - symbolic interactionism
  - structural social psychology
4. Role theory and identity theory are two traditions that have had a long history within sociological social psychology. Choose *one* of these traditions and discuss the development of the theory over time. What are the main concepts used in describing the dimensions or properties of roles or identities? What is a major sociological contribution or insight provided by role theory or identity theory? What are the primary methodological concerns or criticisms of the theory?
5. The concept of socialization is essential to a sociological social psychology because it allows for an integration of individual and societal constructs or variables to explain social interaction as well as social order. Discuss socialization and its general and specific importance in sociological social psychology. In your answer, be sure to address the following: What is an adequate definition of socialization from a sociological social psychology perspective? Discuss the interrelationship between socialization and issues related to social order or social control including the contexts of socialization. What makes socialization so central to understanding social interaction among sociological social psychologists?
6. A major criticism of the symbolic interactionist perspective in social psychology has been that it contains an inadequate conception of social organization. Thinking about both the classic and contemporary symbolic interactionists you have read, how valid is this criticism? In addressing this question, be sure to include a discussion of at least 3 of the following scholars: Mead, Blumer, Kuhn, Goffman, R. Turner, and Stryker.
7. A longstanding question in sociology is: why is structural inequality accepted as legitimate (the way things "ought" to be), especially by the disadvantaged? How has structural social psychology contributed, both theoretically and empirically, to our understanding of this fundamental social phenomenon? Describe the main theoretical formulations and important empirical findings.