

# **A Career in Social Psychology: An Address by Morton Deutsch**

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Morton Deutsch hopes that future social psychologists will be more concerned than his generation with what he called “the socially relevant properties of individuals and the psychologically relevant attributes of social structures.” “To oversimplify it,” Deutsch said during his James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award Address at the APS 19th Annual Convention in Washington, DC, “I hope that they will provide a successful integration of the orientation of three of the intellectual heroes of my youth: Freud, Marx, and Lewin.”

“We live in a highly individualistic society,” Deutsch said. “Its ethos is that of the lone, self-reliant, enterprising individual who has escaped from the restraints of an oppressive community so as to be free to pursue his or her destiny in an environment that offers ever expanding opportunity to those who are the fittest.”

“I think this image has influenced much of American social psychology, which has been too focused on what goes on in the isolated head of the subject with a corresponding neglect of the social reality in which the subject is participating.”

Deutsch, who is a Charter Member of APS, also talked about his own work, saying that although he considered his contributions to psychology to be theoretical, some of his work has had “important practical effects.” A notable example is Deutsch’s *The Resolution of Conflict* (Yale, 1973), which explains how to deal with destructive conflict. Polish psychologist Janusz Reykowski, a key negotiator in facilitating the transfer of power from communism to the Solidarity party in Poland in 1989, told Deutsch that the book “influenced him considerably and facilitated a constructive approach to the conflict.”

Another important practical effect came early in Deutsch’s career as he studied the behavioral and attitudinal effects of interracial housing, comparing the integrated housing of New York City and the segregated housing of Newark, NJ. Partly as a result of Deutsch’s work, Newark went on to adopt a policy of integrated housing. Deutsch recalled that the city’s housing director, Louis Danzig, said, “Many of us have long felt that the artificial separation of Negro and white families was an unwholesome procedure. However, until the study of Dr. Deutsch and Mrs. (Mary) Collins, we had no scientific evidence to substantiate our feelings.”

After retiring from Teachers College at Columbia University in 1990, Deutsch, now 87, founded the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution. Since his “retirement,” he has written more than 50 papers or chapters, coedited two books, and participated in many conferences.

“How long this will continue? If I were religious, I would say ‘only God knows,’” Deutsch said.

Deutsch was born into a middle-class Jewish family in New York City. “Being Jewish and being the youngest in my family, among neighborhood kids, and in school had profound effects on me personally and in my career,” Deutsch said. “It sensitized me to prejudice, discrimination, and injustice as well as to identifying with the underdog.”

During study at City College of New York, he was exposed to the writings of Kurt Lewin and Karl Marx, “with a sprinkling of the Riemannian geometry employed by Einstein in his theory of relativity.”

Later, Deutsch joined Lewin’s Research Center for Group Dynamics, which consisted of a small group of faculty and students at MIT.

“These initial faculty and students were extraordinarily productive, and they played a pivotal role in developing modern social psychology in its applied as well as its basic aspects,” Deutsch said.

He quoted Lewin as saying, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

Shortly after arriving at MIT, he noticed a very attractive and very intelligent young woman named Lydia Shapiro. She was working under Lewin’s direction as an interviewer, and he had been assigned to supervise her work.

“After learning she spent much of her supposed work in sunning herself on the banks of the Charles River, I fired her,” Deutsch said. Then with scarcely a pause, “About a year and half later, we got married.”

“Not least, I was lucky enough to marry a woman whose aesthetic sensibility and practical skills enabled me to focus my attention on scholarly activities,” Deutsch said. They have been married 60 years. ?