

# PREFACE

I drafted an original version of this statement in 1984 and made a half-hearted attempt to have it published the following year. Several of my friends, whose judgment I respect, recommended that I delay publication. In the words of one, “A breakthrough is something recognized by others, not something one claims to have accomplished.” Even if that is so, other factors, in my judgment, justify publication at this time.

Some of those who advised delay in 1984–1985 also stated that publication of this statement would embarrass me and my friends. If any of my friends feel embarrassed by this statement, I apologize. I do not anticipate personal embarrassment.

Only those directly involved have given any indication that an intellectual leap occurred significant enough to merit the term breakthrough. Despite overall skepticism from those I respect, and also from those who did not experience what I and a core group of graduate students experienced, I remain as convinced today as I was in 1974 and in 1984 that we achieved a breakthrough in the study of human social life. Further, I still hold to my claim (some might say my arrogance) that the breakthrough will have an impact on the social sciences equal to that of Mendel’s impact on the biological sciences. At the very least, the breakthrough will have an impact on any discipline willing to study interpersonal communication and to deem such study as central to its core.

My desire to publish my claims outweighs my respect for my friends’ counsel and my concern for their own possible embarrassment. It also outweighs what would probably constitute smart counsel to wait for greater acceptance. I suppose my decision to publish stems, at least in part, from an interest in heaping praise on myself. I cannot deny my pride in the part I played in the enterprise. However, I hope readers will view this statement as something more than egotistical bombast. At the minimum, it contains one person’s description of a journey that involved a number of committed students and scholars that created a new way of examining social life. We emphasized the combined and coordinated activities of two or more people, rather than the activities of individuals.

At least two purposes beyond mere self-promotion informed the original drafting of this narrative. One includes my desire to bestow a modicum of recognition on those I judge responsible for the breakthrough. Second, I wish to emphasize the sacrifices associated with breaking new ground in the social sciences made by those who committed their callings and their careers to an approach to the sociology of human behavior. Many others took a more conventional path and either ignored this innovative approach or decided that it was too far outside of the mainstream. For them, the commitment to an alternative route constituted too much risk. As a corollary to these two broad purposes, this narrative also provides some data for those interested in the sociology of science, although I did not consider the provision of adding to the literature on such scrutiny as motivating me to draft the original statement.

The substantive content of this altered draft contains many similarities to the 1984 draft on which my friends and colleagues provided commentary. I have rewritten much of the draft, perhaps more than anything, to temper my more vainglorious assertions. Omissions of personal names and in some cases, private events that involved people who did not consent to be included in this book also distinguish this revision from the original draft. Most importantly, to impress upon the reader that our breakthrough had sociological substance and durability, I have added an Appendix (A) that attends to the methodology that defined the breakthrough and that also describes some of the theoretical content of the breakthrough. In any event, this narrative constitutes an insider's description and interpretation of events. If it suffers from anything, it suffers from the shortcomings common to such descriptions.

I have based my descriptions on unaided recall. I did not keep a diary and have no field notes, as a rigorous ethnographer would define them. I did make a few notes to myself and hung onto a few documents that verified and jogged my memory of the sequences of events leading up to the breakthrough.

Whether or not the accomplishment is as grandiose as I claim, the affair is still worthy of attention. A few months after the breakthrough, in a moment of doubt, I asked Marion Weiland, who will later appear as one of the key researchers involved in the breakthrough, if we had really achieved a paradigm change. Her response was, "Either we have or we are collectively insane, but either way we are worthy of our fellow sociologists' attention." Her assertion strengthened my own resolve for writing the following pages, providing me with the moral support I needed. Such bravado may only document how a small group of social scientists went collectively insane, but it may also demonstrate how a small collective altered the landscape of the study of interpersonal processes.

Perhaps the breakthrough will never be recognized; it may be that what those of us regard as a breakthrough was nothing more than a collective illusion. On occasion, human beings have so fervently wished for a state of affairs that they have deluded themselves into believing their wishes were reality. Many have so wished to speak with God with unabashed passion that they

have convinced themselves and, in some cases, others, that they did speak with God. As yet the scientific community has not validated such encounters; although lack of scientific validation has not precluded faith in other communities. Perhaps what we consider to be a breakthrough will never be validated by any communities. If the discovery is to have the consequences I foresee, others in addition to the small group involved in the discovery will have to validate the discovery.

This statement will not go through the painstaking delineation of the precise content of the breakthrough, nor will it elaborate on the specific conceptualization that makes up what I call a paradigm. Instead, I offer a description of events and conversations that I judge as relevant to building a foundation for a breakthrough. I stress the ethos associated with our accomplishments and my own interpretations of the transformation of my orientation to social psychology, which will include my take on the elementary forms of social processes. Hopefully, readers will gain appreciation of my intentions and efforts once they immerse themselves into my overall growth and development as a teacher and researcher. To familiarize readers with more comprehensive accounts of our research, I am attaching another Appendix (B) which demonstrates some of the implications of the breakthrough and attendant applications.

My position as the academic advisor to the graduate students who participated in our work makes me as qualified as anyone to offer descriptions of what occurred and judgments on who contributed what. I occupied a central position in the communication network of those responsible for the achievement. In my more pretentious moments I even regard myself as the catalyst for the accomplishment. Even so, I do not pretend to be responsible for the critical research, the reformulations of the questions, or how previous works became reconceptualized. The hard work of my students, their dedication, and the seriousness of their commitments made the breakthrough possible. Formally, I took on the role of teacher, but in day-to-day practice, I became their student, learning with them as we all went along.

I may have slighted the contributions of some. I apologize to those who feel slighted; perhaps they can offer their own account. Others may make different assessments and interpretations. Allowing everyone to have a say remains one of my most important values, but a time comes when something, even if it lacks unanimity, must be written. I feel strongly that the time has come for our breakthrough to be acknowledged in writing; bestowing credit orally and behind closed doors amounts to a shallow endeavor. I hope the reader considers this narrative an attempt to give a more powerful voice to our accomplishments. If the breakthrough as I see it turns out to resemble, in the eyes of others, an illusion, consider me one more academician who assigned great value to his or her work while resembling a lone academician who has lost his way.