



Social

Psychology



4TH
EDITION



Gilovich • Keltner • Chen • Nisbett

Social Psychology

FOURTH EDITION

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Social Psychology

Thomas Gilovich

Cornell University

Dacher Keltner

University of California, Berkeley

Serena Chen

University of California, Berkeley

Richard E. Nisbett

University of Michigan



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We dedicate this book to
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



THOMAS GILOVICH is Professor of Psychology and Co-Director of the Center for Behavioral Economics and Decision Research at Cornell University. He has taught social psychology for over 30 years and is the recipient of the Russell Distinguished Teaching Award at Cornell. His research focuses on judgment, decision making, and well-being. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a fellow of the American Psychological Society, the American Psychological Association, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry.



DACHER KELTNER is Thomas and Ruth Ann Hornaday Professor of Psychology and the Director of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. He has taught social psychology for the past 18 years and is the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award for Letters and Sciences. His research focuses on the prosocial emotions (such as love, sympathy, and gratitude), morality, and power. Other awards include the Western Psychological Association's award for outstanding contribution to research, the Positive Psychology Prize for excellence in research, and the Ed and Carol Diener mid-career award for research excellence in Social Psychology. He is a fellow of the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. In 2008, the *Utne Reader* listed Dacher as one of the 50 visionaries changing the world.



SERENA CHEN is Professor of Psychology and the Marian E. and Daniel E. Koshland, Jr. Distinguished Chair for Innovative Teaching and Research at the University of California, Berkeley. She has taught social psychology for the past 18 years and is the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award from Berkeley's Social Science Division. Her research focuses on the social bases of the self and identity, and on the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of social power and other hierarchy-related dimensions (e.g., social class, income inequality). She is a fellow of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, American Psychological Association, and the Association for Psychological Science, as well as the recipient of the Early Career Award from the International Society for Self and Identity. The Association for Psychological Science also identified her as a Rising Star.



RICHARD E. NISBETT is Theodore M. Newcomb Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan and Research Professor at Michigan's Institute for Social Research. He has taught courses in social psychology, cultural psychology, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary psychology. His research focuses on how people reason and how reasoning can be improved. He also studies how people from different cultures think, perceive, feel, and act in different ways. He is the recipient of the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association and the William James Fellow Award of the American Psychological Society and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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PREFACE

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology illuminates and clarifies the nature of human beings and their social world. It is a science that offers novel insights into the foundations of moral sentiments, the origins of violence, and the reasons people fall in love. It provides basic tools for understanding how people persuade one another, why people trust and cooperate with each other, and how people rationalize their undesirable actions. Social psychology offers scientifically grounded answers to questions human beings have been thinking about since we started to reflect on who we are: Are we rational creatures? How can we find happiness? What is the proper relationship of the individual to the larger society? How are we shaped by the culture in which we are raised?

After decades of collective experience teaching social psychology, we decided at the turn of the twenty-first century to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write our own vision of this fascinating discipline. It was an ideal time to do so. Many new developments in the field were reshaping social psychology. Exciting new research had revealed how different kinds of culture—country of origin, regional culture, social class—shape human thought, feeling, and action. Evolutionary theory was helping to guide how social psychologists study things such as homicide, morality, and cooperation. Social psychologists were making inroads into the study of the brain. Specific areas of interest to us—judgment and decision making, emotion, altruism, and well-being—had emerged as well-defined areas of investigation that were producing important insights about human behavior. The lure of writing a textbook, and the challenge in doing so, was to capture all of these new developments and integrate them with the timeless classics of social psychology that make it such a captivating discipline.

It's a bit shocking to us to think that this is the fourth edition of the text; it seems like just yesterday when we first got together in Berkeley, California, to map out what an informative survey of social psychology should look like. Our work on all four editions has been deeply rewarding. Our fascination with the

field, and our pride in being a part of it, has been rekindled and magnified with each edition. It is gratifying to have this book reach the minds of the next generation of social psychology students.

Whether students end up as teachers, salespeople, or talent agents, or as software designers, forest rangers, or book editors, other people are going to be the center of their lives. All of us grow up dependent on the members of our nuclear family (and in many cultural contexts, a larger extended family); we go through adolescence obsessed with our social standing and intensely focused on our prospects for romance and sexuality; and as adults we seek out others in the workplace, at clubs, in places of worship, and on holidays. Social psychologists spend their professional lives studying this intense sociality, examining how we act, think, and feel in all of these social encounters—and *why* we act, think, and feel that way. Above all, we want our book to capture the fundamentally social nature of human life and to present the clever, informative, and sometimes inspiring methods that social psychologists have used to study and understand the social life around us.

In our teaching, we have found that many great studies in social psychology are simple narratives: the narrative of the person who felt compelled to harm another person in the name of science, the narrative of the clergyman who did not help someone in need because he was in a hurry, the narrative of the Southerner whose blood pressure rose when he was insulted in a hallway, the story of the young researcher who lived among hunter-gatherers in New Guinea to discover universal facial expressions. In our experience, teaching social psychology brings forth so many “Aha!” moments precisely because of these stories that are embedded within, and that inspire, our science.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD, AND CRITICAL THINKING

These narratives are different, though, from others that try to capture something important about the human condition: the story of the tortoise and the hare, the tale of the boy who cried wolf, and the anecdote of the child down the street who “took candy from a stranger” and paid a high price for doing so. The tales we tell in this book are all grounded in empirical evidence. It’s the scientific foundation of their claims that distinguish social psychologists from other astute observers of the human condition, such as novelists, playwrights, clergymen, and parents, teachers, and coaches. The methods of social psychology are every bit as important as the insights they reveal.

In fact, we believe that social psychology is unparalleled as a means of teaching critical thinking. This new edition has been reworked to emphasize this message even more than the previous editions. The current version makes explicit the power of social psychology’s methods and habits of thought for understanding the world and assessing the likely truth and value of what friends and the media tell us. To make sure students hone their critical-thinking skills, we approach the subject matter of social psychology in several ways.

First, in Chapter 2, The Methods of Social Psychology, we present an overview of the most important elements of conducting research. We tie the

methods of social psychology together by showing how many of them can be applied to a single problem: the nature of the “culture of honor.” That chapter, and much of the rest of the book, is oriented toward providing the critical-thinking skills that are the hallmark of social psychology. We show how the tools of social psychology can be used to critique research in the behavioral and medical sciences students encounter online and in magazines and newspapers. More importantly, we show how the methods of social psychology can be used to understand everyday life and to figure out how to navigate new situations.

Second, a new “Not So Fast” feature in each chapter highlights how easy it is to be fooled by the available evidence and to draw conclusions that seem solid but in fact don’t stand up to scientific scrutiny. They show how even the smartest among us can be misled by what we experience and what we read or hear unless we’ve learned some fundamental principles of the scientific method. Another new feature of this edition is that each chapter ends with a set of open-ended “Think About It” questions that challenge students to think critically in the context of a research-related or real-life scenario.

Third, we embed discussion of methodological issues throughout the book, in the context of many lines of research. This melds the content of social psychology with the principles that underlie research that can be used to understand ordinary events in people’s lives.

Fourth, our You Be the Subject figures invite students to get an insider’s view of experimentation in social psychology. Annotated figures help students read data graphics and understand the take-away points of the research. We have tried to make sure that all our field’s varied methods—such as archival analyses, semantic and affective priming, neuroimaging, and participant observation—are discussed in sufficient depth to give the reader an understanding of how they work, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they can be applied to events in everyday life.

Much of the subject matter of social psychology—attraction, conformity, prejudice—readily engages the student’s attention and imagination. The material sells itself. But in most textbook summaries of the field, the presentation comes across as a list of unconnected topics—as one intriguing fact after another. As a result, students often come away thinking of social psychology as all fun and games. That’s fine up to a point. Social psychology *is* fun. But it is much more than that, and we have tried to show how the highlights of our field—the classic findings and the exciting new developments—are part of a scientific study of human nature that can sit with pride next to biology, chemistry, and physics, and that is worthy of the most serious-minded student’s attention.

THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO EVERYDAY LIFE

Possibly the easiest part of writing a social psychology textbook is pointing out the enormous applied implications of what the field has to offer. We do a great deal of this throughout the text. Each chapter begins with events in the real world that drive home the themes and wisdom of social psychology. For example, Chapter 3, The Social Self, begins with the story of Eminem and his

alter ego, Slim Shady. Chapter 12, Groups, begins with the harrowing story of the abduction of Middle East bureau chief Terry Anderson and his report that the time he spent in solitary confinement was worse than any physical torture he received. Chapter 14, Altruism, begins with the story of Wesley Autrey, who jumped onto the tracks in front of an oncoming subway train to save the life of Cameron Hollopeter. What better way for the student to ponder the findings of social psychology than by relying on them to understand current events? Interspersed throughout the text are Focus On boxes that profile real-world applications of the wisdom of social psychology—for example, in understanding how black uniforms make professional athletes more aggressive, or how meditation might shift a person’s brain chemistry.

To bring into sharper focus the relevance of social psychology to daily living, we have four applied mini-chapters, or modules, at the end of the book. These modules bring science-based insight to bear on four areas of great importance to just about everyone: the latest findings on health and how science-based, practical techniques help us cope with stress during difficult times; the new science of behavioral economics and how it can help us lead more financially stable and rewarding lives; the latest discoveries in the study of human intelligence and education; and a review of social psychological insights into how the legal system functions and how it can be improved. The modules constitute dramatic evidence of the relevance of social psychological findings to advancing human welfare.

NEW CONTENT IN THE FOURTH EDITION

The cumulative nature of science requires that revisions do justice to the latest discoveries and evolving views of the field. This new edition has much to offer in this regard.

- Chapter 3: The Social Self. We incorporated additional theory and research developing the key notion that the self is fundamentally social and shifts as a function of the social context. New topics include introspection, the accuracy of self-knowledge, how social class shapes views of the self, varieties of high and low self-esteem, and online self-presentation.
- Chapter 4: Social Cognition: Thinking About People and Situations. We added a section that explores how the regression effect, and the corresponding regression fallacy, can distort people’s judgments. We also provide even greater coverage than before to the many ways in which sights, sounds, and even smells that people not aware of can nonetheless have a significant influence on what they think and act.
- Chapter 5: Social Attribution: Explaining Behavior. We present important work on how people can recall their past behavior or simulate their future actions by imagining themselves from the “outside,” much as an observer would, or from the “inside,” looking out at the environment. This simple difference in perspective has great influence on people’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- Chapter 6: Emotion. We present new findings that document the social importance of touch, show how mimicry is crucial to friendships, and delineate how emotions like disgust are drivers of moral judgment.

- Chapter 7: Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization. We continue to cover key findings and theories on the relationship between attitudes and behavior, honing our discussion of cognitive dissonance theory and the principles that determine whether and how people reduce dissonance.
- Chapter 8: Persuasion. We cover the latest in social psychological approaches to political ideology, as well recent findings on barriers to persuasion. New topics include the role of meta-cognition on persuasion and the role of incidental factors such as font clarity and the context in which persuasion is attempted.
- Chapter 9: Social Influence. We added a new section on social networks and how people are influenced not only by what their friends do, but by what the friends of their friends do, and even the friends of the friends of their friends.
- Chapter 10: Relationships and Attraction. We include more in-depth coverage of the principles of social exchange theory and Rusbult's investment model of commitment, as well as an updated presentation of attachment theory. We have also streamlined the discussion of different types of love.
- Chapter 11: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination. We have more coverage of what it's like to be a member of a stigmatized group, including recent work on the psychological and physiological costs of trying to conceal one's identity as a member of such a group. We also examine new field research devoted to finding ways for members of groups with a long history of conflict to see one another as individuals and overcome their mutual animosity.
- Chapter 12: Groups. There is a new section on the physiology that accompanies our exposure to other people that we think of as threats or as providers of opportunity.
- Chapter 13: Aggression. We present remarkable new evidence linking inequality within a culture to levels of aggression, and we consider in more depth the topics of violence against women and of barriers to conflict resolution.
- Chapter 14: Altruism and Cooperation. We present new findings on how people from the upper classes are less altruistic in many respects than those from lower-class backgrounds, and on how altruism and cooperation are contagious, spreading from one person to another.

In making these changes, we have preserved the approach in the previous editions that each chapter can stand alone, and chapters can be read in any order. We have done so stylistically by writing chapters that are complete narratives in their own right. Our chapters stand on their own theoretically as well, being organized around social psychology's emphasis on situationism, construal, and automaticity and highlighting important issues addressing what is universal about human behavior and what is variable across cultures. Although our table of contents suggests a particular order of covering the material, instructors will find it easy to present the topics in whatever order best suits their own preferences or needs.

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 Kimberly Kahn, *Portland State University*
 Andy Karpinski, *Temple University*
 Johan Karremans, *Radboud University*
 Iva Katzarska-Miller, *University of Kansas*
 Sulki Kim, *California State University, Fullerton*
 Leslie Kirby, *Vanderbilt University*
 Marc Kiviniem, *University of Nebraska, Lincoln*
 Stan B. Klein, *University of California, Santa Barbara*
 Catalina E. Kopetz, *University of Maryland*
 Maya Kuehn, *University of California, Berkeley*
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 Jeff Larsen, *Texas Tech University*
 Sadie Leder Elder, *High Point University*

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 Kate Sweeny, *University of California, Riverside*
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 Chuck Tate, *San Francisco State University*
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Social Psychology

FOURTH EDITION

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An Invitation to Social Psychology

Alan Turing, a British mathematician, logician, and philosopher educated at Princeton and Cambridge, is generally considered to be the founder of computer science. During World War II Turing was head of Hut 8, the British government agency responsible for breaking the Enigma code of the German Navy, an accomplishment that contributed greatly to the Allied war effort.

In January 1952, when Turing was 39, he was arrested for “gross indecency,” a term the British used for homosexual conduct. Turing was convicted of the charge and allowed to choose between imprisonment and chemical castration to reduce his libido and cause impotence. He chose the latter punishment, which involved the administration of female hormones. Turing attempted to come to the United States but was considered a security risk and not allowed to enter. On June 8, 1954, Turing was found dead from cyanide poisoning in his apartment. The death was ruled a suicide.

At the time of Turing’s death, homosexuality was illegal in most states of the U.S. In 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled that a Georgia sodomy law forbidding oral and anal sex between homosexual adults was constitutional. The majority opinion, written by Justice Byron White, asserted that the Constitution did not confer “a fundamental right to engage in homosexual sodomy.” Seventeen years later, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Court reversed itself, declaring that homosexual conduct was permitted under the “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Thereupon, all laws in the U.S. criminalizing homosexual acts became invalid.

OUTLINE

Characterizing Social Psychology

The Power of the Situation

The Role of Construal

Automatic vs. Controlled Processing

Evolution and Human Behavior: How We Are the Same

Culture and Human Behavior: How We Are Different

Social Psychology and Critical Thinking



Alan Turing

Founder of Modern Computer Science

Until 1974, the American Psychiatric Association held that homosexuality was a mental illness. Until 1994, homosexuality was a necessary and sufficient cause for discharge from the American military. President Clinton issued an order prohibiting discrimination against homosexual members of the armed forces, but also prohibiting people who “demonstrate a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts” from serving in the armed forces. This “don’t ask, don’t tell” ruling was overturned in 2011 by President Obama, and now it is possible for openly gay individuals to serve in the armed forces.

For many years, elections in the U.S. were won by politicians whose main platform planks were the banning of abortion and the outlawing of same-sex marriage. Until quite recently, public opinion ran strongly against gay marriage. Then, within an astonishingly brief period of time, public opinion swung toward general support for marriage equality. From 2012 to 2014, the percentage of Republicans who supported marriage equality increased from 24 to 40, a two-thirds increase. As of March 2014, 68 percent of 18–33-year-olds supported same-sex marriage. In 2014, Jon Stewart’s *Daily Show* sent two men on a mission to a Waffle House in Alabama, one of the reddest states. One of the men loudly asked the other to marry him. The reaction of the patrons? Applause.

From mental illness and illegality of homosexual behavior to tolerance of same-sex marriage—in scarcely more than a generation. This fact, and a hundred others concerning homosexuality in relation to social norms and individual psychology, are the kinds of topics that deeply interest social psychologists.

Why was homosexuality ever such a threat to people in modern Western societies? In many cultures, homosexuality never was considered abnormal or reprehensible or even particularly worthy of notice; in others it has been punishable by death since time immemorial. Why has homosexuality for women in virtually every society always been more tolerated than homosexuality for men? To what degree is homosexual behavior, even sexual orientation, influenced by social norms and institutional settings? How is it possible for an entire society to change its attitudes toward a salient social phenomenon in, so to speak, the blink of an eye? What are the effects of societal rejection versus acceptance on the emotional, even physical, well-being of individuals who are gay or lesbian? How do stereotypes of gay people change over time? How do sexual-minority cultures and subcultures change over time, and what are the factors that influence such changes?

In this chapter, we explain what social psychology is and what social psychologists study. We also present some of the basic concepts of social psychology, especially the surprising degree to which social situations can influence behavior; the role of construal, or the interpretive processes people use to understand situations; and how two different kinds of thinking—one rapid, intuitive, and non-conscious, and the other slower, analytical, and conscious—contribute in tandem to understanding what is happening in social situations. We also describe some recent developments in social psychology that have changed the field—namely, the application of evolutionary concepts to human behavior, the use of the tools of neuroscience, and the discovery of some significant variations in human cultures that frequently lead people in diverse societies to respond to the “same” situation in very different ways.



Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality

Same-sex marriage is now legal in the United States, and adoption of children by gays is legal in many states. Openly gay politicians such as Tammy Baldwin are being elected to national political office.

Characterizing Social Psychology

People have always sought explanations for human behavior. Stories, parables, and folk wisdom have been passed from generation to generation, in an attempt to explain why people do what they do and to prescribe behaviors to avoid or follow. Social psychologists go beyond folk wisdom and try to establish a scientific basis for understanding human behavior. **Social psychology** can be defined as the scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

Why are people inclined to stereotype members of different groups? Why do people risk their lives to help others? Why do some marriages flourish and others fail? How do orderly crowds turn into violent mobs? These sorts of questions lie at the heart of social psychology, and careful research has provided at least partial answers to all of them. Some of the answers probably won't surprise you. For example, we tend to like people who like us, and the people we like generally have attitudes and interests that are similar to ours. When experimental findings reflect what our intuitions and folk wisdom say will happen, social psychologists expand upon that folk wisdom, seeking to discover what lies behind the phenomenon in question. In contrast, other answers have been so counterintuitive that they surprised even the social psychologists who conducted the research. As you will see throughout this book, many of our most strongly

social psychology The scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

“The test of learning psychology is whether your understanding of situations you encounter has changed, not whether you have learned a new fact.”

—NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING
PSYCHOLOGIST DANIEL
KAHNEMAN

held folk theories or intuitions fail to give complete answers to important questions, and others are just plain wrong. Social psychologists test these intuitions by devising studies and crafting experiments that reveal the causes of behavior in social situations.

Explaining Behavior

In April 2004, more than a year after the start of the war in Iraq, CBS broadcast a story on *60 Minutes II* that exposed American atrocities against Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. CBS showed photos of naked prisoners with plastic bags over their heads, stacked up in a pyramid, and surrounded by laughing male and female American soldiers. Other photos showed hooded prisoners standing on narrow pedestals with their arms stretched out and electric wires attached to their bodies. CBS also reported that prisoners had been required to simulate sexual acts.

The reaction on the part of many Iraqis and others in the Arab world was to regard the acts as evidence that the United States had malevolent intentions toward Arabs (Hauser, 2004). Most Americans, too, were appalled at the abuse and ashamed of the behavior of the U.S. soldiers. Many of those who saw the photos on television or in the newspapers assumed that the soldiers who had perpetrated these acts were rotten apples—exceptions to a rule of common decency prevailing in the military and the general population.

Social psychologists, however, were not so quick to make such an assumption. Indeed, 30 years before the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues paid 24 Stanford University undergraduate men, chosen for their good character and mental health, to be participants in a study of a simulated prison (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). The researchers flipped a coin to determine



Prison Situations and Intimidation

(A) Military guards at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq used torture, humiliation, and intimidation to try to obtain information from the prisoners. This included stripping them and making them lie naked in the prison corridors. (B) Such degradation echoes what happened in the Zimbardo prison study, as shown in this photo of a “guard” seeking to humiliate one of his prisoners at the simulated prison.

who would be a “guard” and who would be a “prisoner.” The guards wore green fatigue uniforms and reflective sunglasses. The prisoners wore tunics with nylon stocking caps and had a chain locked around one ankle. The “prison” was set up in the basement of the psychology department, and the researchers anticipated the study would last 2 weeks. Right away, the guards turned to verbal abuse and physical humiliation, requiring the prisoners to wear bags over their heads, stripping them naked, and requiring them to engage in simulated sex acts. As a result, the study had to be terminated after 6 days because the behavior of the guards produced extreme stress reactions in several of the prisoners.

Zimbardo today maintains that the balance of power in prisons is so unequal that they tend to be brutal places, unless the guards observe strict regulations, to curb their worst impulses. Thus, at both Abu Ghraib and Stanford, “It’s not that we put bad apples in a good barrel. We put good apples in a bad barrel. The barrel corrupts anything that it touches” (quoted in Schwartz, 2004). Some might contend that the soldiers in Iraq were only following orders and that, left to their own devices, they would not have chosen to behave as they did. That may be the case, but it only pushes the question back one step: Why did they follow such orders?

Social psychologists seek to find answers to just such questions. They study situations in which people exert influence over one another, as well as the ways people respond to influence attempts of various kinds. Social psychologists are also interested in how people make sense of their world—how they decide what and whom to believe; how they make inferences about the motives, personalities, and abilities of other people; and how they reach conclusions about the causes of events.

Much of what social psychologists have learned about human behavior is invaluable. Social psychology now forms a significant part of the curriculum in many schools of business, public health, social work, education, law, and medicine. Social psychological research on such topics as judgment and decision making, social influence, and how people function in groups is relevant to all those fields. Social psychologists apply their knowledge to important questions concerning individuals and society at large, studying how to reduce stereotyping and prejudice in the classroom and workplace; how to make eyewitness testimony more reliable; how physicians can best use diverse sources of information to make a correct diagnosis; what goes wrong in airplane cockpits when there is an accident or near accident; and how businesses, governments, and individuals can make better decisions.

Research by social psychologists regularly influences government policy. For example, research on the effects of different kinds of welfare programs is used in shaping government assistance policies. Research also affects decisions by the courts. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling that struck down school segregation in the United States drew heavily on social psychological research, which indicated that segregated schools were inherently unequal in their effects (and thus unconstitutional).

By the time you finish this book, you will have acquired a greater understanding of yourself and others. You will also have knowledge you can apply in your education, your career, and your interpersonal relationships.



Explaining Situations

Social psychologists seek to understand how individuals act in relation to others in social situations and why. Is this father an especially impatient person, or is his son being particularly obnoxious? If the son is being particularly obnoxious, how might the father behave in order to encourage better behavior in his son?

Comparing Social Psychology with Related Disciplines

Events like those at Abu Ghraib can be studied from many viewpoints, including those of anthropologists, criminologists, sociologists, and personality psychologists. Each type of professional takes a different approach to what happened and offers different kinds of explanations.

Personality psychology is a close cousin of social psychology, but it emphasizes individual differences in behavior rather than the social situation. Personality psychologists try to find a consistent pattern in the way a person behaves across situations—an individual's position on a trait dimension. Social psychologists would examine the general situation at Abu Ghraib, in which orders were not clear but the guards were pressured to “soften up” the prisoners to get information about other insurgents and future attacks. Personality psychologists would instead look at whether certain traits and dispositions—for example, sadism or hostility—would predict cruel behavior across a range of situations.

Social psychology is also related to cognitive psychology, the study of how people perceive, think about, and remember aspects of the world. In fact, many psychologists call themselves cognitive social psychologists. Social psychologists differ from cognitive psychologists primarily in that the topics they study are usually social, such as social behavior and perceptions of other people. Cognitive psychologists would be more likely to study categorization processes or memory for words or objects.

Sociology is the study of behavior of people in the aggregate. Sociologists study institutions, subgroups, bureaucracies, mass movements, and changes in the demographic characteristics of populations (for example, age, gender, socioeconomic status). Social psychologists sometimes do sociological work themselves, although they are likely to bring an interest in individual behavior to the study of aggregates. A sociologist might study how economic or government policy influences marriage and divorce rates in a population, whereas a social psychologist would be more likely to study why individuals fall in love, get married, and sometimes get divorced.

The Power of the Situation

Are we all capable of acts of brutality? In 1963 the philosopher Hannah Arendt suggested as much in her controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1963). Arendt described the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the notorious architect of Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Advancing a very provocative thesis, Arendt described Eichmann as little more than a bureaucrat doing his job. While not condoning his actions (Arendt herself was Jewish), she argued that Eichmann was not the demented, sadistic person everyone expected (and that the prosecutor claimed he was), but instead a boring, unimaginative cog in a machine that he served with a resigned (if nevertheless perverse) sense of duty. Perhaps even more disturbing, the logical conclusion of Arendt's theory is that any one of us is capable of performing acts of brutality. Look at the person sitting closest to you right now. Do you think that he or she is capable

of atrocities? Do you think any situation could be so powerful that an ordinary person—even you—could act as Eichmann did in Nazi Germany or as the prison guards behaved at Abu Ghraib?

Arendt's book created a firestorm of indignant protests, and she was denounced for what many regarded as her attempt to exonerate a monster. But research has supported Arendt's unorthodox views about what she called "the banality of evil." This research raises a question that is central to the study of social psychology: How does the situation people find themselves in affect their behavior?

Kurt Lewin, the founder of modern social psychology, was a Jewish Berliner who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and became a professor at the University of Iowa and then at MIT. Lewin was a physicist before becoming a psychologist, and he applied a powerful idea from physics to an understanding of psychological existence. He believed that the behavior of people, like the behavior of objects, is always a function of the field of forces in which they find themselves (Lewin, 1935). To understand how fast a solid object will travel through a medium, for example, we must know such things as the viscosity of the medium, the force of gravity, and any initial force applied to the object. In the case of people, the forces are psychological as well as physical. Of course the person's own attributes are also important determinants of behavior, but these attributes always interact with the situation to produce the resulting behavior.

The field of forces in the case of human behavior is the role of the situation, especially the social situation, in guiding behavior. The main situational influences on our behavior, influences that we often misjudge or fail to see altogether, are the actions—and sometimes just the mere presence—of other people. Friends, romantic partners, even total strangers can cause us to be kinder or meaner, smarter or dumber, lazier or more hardworking, bolder or more cautious. They can produce drastic changes in our beliefs and behavior not only by what they tell us explicitly, but also by modeling through their actions what we should think and do, by subtly implying that our acceptability as a friend or group member depends on adopting their views or behaving as they do. We rely on other people for clues about what emotions to feel in various situations and even to define who we are as individuals. All these effects have been shown in numerous studies demonstrating the power of the situation.

The Milgram Experiment

One of the most striking and famous demonstrations of the power of situations is a classic experiment by psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974). Milgram advertised in the local newspaper for men to participate in a study on learning and memory at Yale University in exchange for a modest amount of money. (In subsequent experiments, women also participated; the results were similar.) When the volunteers—a mix of laborers, middle-class individuals, and professionals ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s—arrived at the laboratory, a man in a white lab coat told them they would be participating in a study about the effects of punishment on learning. There would be a "teacher" and a "learner," and the learner would try to memorize word pairs such as *wild/duck*. The volunteer and another man, a somewhat heavysset, pleasant-looking man in his late 40s, drew slips of paper to determine who would play which role. But things were not as they seemed: The pleasant-looking man was actually an