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Social Psychology

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Nyla R. Branscombe • Robert A. Baron



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Social Psychology

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Dedication

*To Phil Schlaman, my best friend and essential social support;
You make it all worthwhile.*

—Nyla R. Branscombe

*To the people I care about most and who care most about me—
Rebecca, Ted, Melissa, Samantha, Randy, Paul and Leah;
And to the colleagues who helped make my life's journey such a happy one—
Donn Byrne, Roger Black, Jim Naylor, John Capaldi, and Mike Morris*

—Robert A. Baron

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Preface

Social Psychology in a Changing World

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

—Quote by Nelson Mandela

“As we go forward, I hope we’re going to continue to use technology to make really big differences in how people live and work.”

—Quote by Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google

“Psychology cannot tell people how they ought to live their lives. It can, however, provide them with the means for effecting personal and social change.”

—Quote by Albert Bandura

The aims identified in these quotations are truly impressive ones, and we most assuredly share their faith in the transformative power of education. We agree that equipping people with new ways of understanding themselves and interacting with the world has far-reaching consequences. And—more importantly—we believe that social psychology does provide powerful means of comprehending why people think, feel, and act as they do, and these ideas, in turn, illuminate how the social world shapes who we are and the processes by which we can achieve change, in ourselves and the social world. As you know, the goal of changing the world through technology, at least in terms of its implications for how we interact with other people and access our accumulated knowledge, has in fact been met—to “google” something has become a verb in everyday language, and Facebook and other social media have changed much about how we interact with each other. Just try to imagine life without the many forms of social media we use practically every hour of every day. Probably you cannot because digital technology has become woven into the very fabric of our lives so that we take them for granted and use them as though they are extensions of ourselves. While the founders of Google and Facebook sought to change how people interact with the world, social psychologists seek to illuminate the many “hidden processes” that shape how people influence each other. By providing you with a comprehensive overview of social psychological theory and research, we believe the information in this book offers you

a valuable means of learning about yourself and the social world in which we live.

The social world, which is the primary focus of this book, has changed tremendously in recent years, perhaps more quickly and dramatically than at any time in the past. That includes how we interact with each other, and a key point we will emphasize throughout the book is this: These changes have important implications for how we think about ourselves and other people. *Social psychology* is the branch of psychology that studies all aspects of our behavior with and toward others, our feelings and thoughts about them, and the relationships we develop with them. The central message for social psychology as a field, and for any book that seeks to represent it, is simple: Keep up with these technological changes in terms of their implications for social life, and this is precisely what we do with this 14th edition.

We are happy to report that social psychology provides many important insights crucial to understanding the social changes we have described thus far and can provide you with the means of understanding how to create further—and beneficial—social change. The field continues to be the vibrant and adaptable one it has always been and, we predict, always will be. The scope of social psychological research (and knowledge acquired) has expanded rapidly in the past few years—in fact, much has been learned since the publication of the previous edition of this book—and this new edition fully reflects the many changes now occurring all over the world.

Our central goal for this new edition was to illustrate just how well our field has—and does—adjust to and reflect the changing social world. Technology is not simply changing the way we carry out certain tasks: It is also changing the way we live and—most important—how we interact with each other. Although many basic principles of social life remain, in essence, unchanged—for instance, the nature of love, hate, and emotions in-between—the ways in which these principles are *expressed* and *experienced* have changed drastically.

So, how, precisely, did we set out to reflect these major trends while fully and accurately describing the core of our field—the knowledge and insights that social psychologists have gathered through decades of systematic research? As the 2015 *White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team Report* indicates, social psychological research consists of an impressive body of knowledge about how people actually think, feel, and behave toward other people, and the

accumulated knowledge identifies how changing social conditions can influence those responses, often with an eye to improving life for us all. Indeed, social psychological research has taught us much about the “human animal” that can and is being fruitfully applied in numerous domains. That is precisely what we aimed to do with this edition—illustrate how understanding social psychological processes can help to improve many aspects of life. The following is a summary of the major steps we took to accomplish these important goals.

Changes in Content

An Entirely Revamped Chapter Based on “the Science of Happiness”

Dealing with Adversity and Achieving a Happy Life (Chapter 12)

This capstone chapter is ambitious and entirely consistent with the theme of the 14th edition: *Education for achieving change*. We believe that social psychology can help *you* deal with the stresses of life and serve to guide you on the way toward achieving greater happiness. That’s a tall order, but our field can indeed now provide the central ingredients for thinking about ourselves in ways that can help us be resilient when we enter new social environments and provide insight with specific strategies that, when put into practice, will improve people’s well-being. Here’s what you can learn from this greatly revised chapter (Chapter 12):

Can people be too happy? What roles do culture and age play in defining the meaning of happiness? What do we know about how the happiness of people in different nations can be improved? And, what can we do to make ourselves happier individuals and satisfied with what we have and the choices we have made? In short, this chapter describes social psychological knowledge that can help you in your quest to build the happy and fulfilling life we all seek.

In other words, in this chapter we provide an overview of some of the important ways in which social psychology—with its scientific approach to personal and social change—can help us attain our key goals. Perhaps most important of all—we examine strategies people can use to handle the setbacks they may experience and reveal the ingredients for increasing happiness. Some of the questions we will consider are: What roles do culture and age play in defining the meaning of happiness? What do we know about how the happiness of people in different nations can

be improved? And, how do we turn adversity into strength and achievement? This chapter describes what social psychologists, with their comprehensive approach to understanding social life, have discovered, and this knowledge can help *you* in your quest to build the happy and fulfilling life we all seek. We think that some of the findings we will present are indeed surprising—for instance, the fact that increasing wealth does not necessarily make people happier, but investing in social relationships does indeed make people happier. We believe that this is a unique and important aspect of this text and one that is fully consistent with the practical credo that social psychology, as a field, has always embraced.

Changes in Content Within Each of the Chapters

Continuing a long tradition in which each edition of this textbook has included literally dozens of new topics, this 14th edition is indeed “new.” In every chapter, we present new lines of research, new findings, and new theoretical perspectives. Here is a partial list of the new topics included:

Chapter 1

- An increased emphasis on the importance of social relationships for psychological well-being.
- An entirely new section on the importance of meta-analysis in assessing an existing body of knowledge on a topic.
- A new emphasis on how cultural factors shape our conceptions of the self and how that in turn affects individuals’ comfort and ability to navigate different social settings.

Chapter 2

- A new section on heuristic use under conditions of economic threat.
- A new section on the “portion size effect” and how eating can reflect inadequate adjustment from a high anchor.
- New research on belief in free will and its implications for counterfactual thinking.

Chapter 3

- A new section on why we find it difficult to recognize deception in others.
- A new discussion of attributions and terrorism—how perpetrators explain their actions.
- New research on how first impressions are revised over time.

Chapter 4

- An entirely new section addresses how trying to conceal our identity can inhibit social interaction and harm well-being.
- New research addresses why introspection fails, and particularly why people apparently don't know that spending their money on others can make them happier than spending it on themselves.
- An entirely new section on how migration affects self-esteem—both international and domestic moves by students.

Chapter 5

- New research concerning the role of reactance in students' responses to instructor behaviors in the classroom.
- New research addressing how attitudes can be conditioned nonconsciously.
- New research examining when people's behavior reflects their abstract values and when it is based on their economic self-interests.

Chapter 6

- New coverage of how racial group membership affects responses to issues concerning police treatment of citizens.
- New research concerning how groups maintain a favorable view of themselves, despite treating other groups in a prejudicial fashion.
- New research illustrating how stereotypes create gender-based disparities in the workplace.

Chapter 7

- A new section on social skills—our ability to get along with others—and their importance in many aspects of social life.
- A new discussion of how even trivial similarities to others (e.g., sharing the same first names) can increase liking for them.
- New information concerning the attributes that we look for in romantic partners change over the course of our relationships with them.

Chapter 8

- A new discussion of the potential benefits of refusing to “go along”, or not yielding to social pressure.
- An expanded discussion of the effectiveness of various techniques (including several new ones) for gaining compliance from others—for getting other people to say “yes” to our requests.
- An entirely new section focused on unintentional social influence: How others influence us even when they are not trying to do so.

Chapter 9

- A new discussion of “crowd-funding”—a form of online helping in which individuals donate money to entrepreneurs without ever meeting them and without expecting anything in return.
- A new discussion of the role of social class in pro-social behavior.
- New findings concerning how feelings of anonymity (produced by darkness) can reduce willingness to help others.

Chapter 10

- New research concerning the role of genes in combination with exposure to stress affects aggression in children.
- A new section on the effects of narcissism on aggression has been included.
- A new section on situational factors that encourage aggressive behavior including gun availability.

Chapter 11

- New research concerning how groups create greater cohesion among their members when their distinctiveness is threatened.
- New research on how being part of a group helps people achieve a greater sense of control in their lives has been added.
- New research on distributive justice rules and how they vary across cultures was added.

Chapter 12

- This completely revamped capstone chapter offers a “social cure” perspective for managing the stresses in our lives and illustrates the critical role of social relationships for health, well-being, and achieving a meaningful life in a changing world.
- The importance of “believing we can change” for helping us weather adversity is described.
- Why practicing self-forgiveness following mistakes can help people change.

New Special Features with Research Insights on Cutting-Edge Topics

To fully reflect current trends in social psychological research and the field's responsiveness to social change, we now include two new special sections in each chapter—ones that were *not* present in the previous edition. These new sections, which are labeled “**What Research Tells Us**”

About...” integrate important new research that will capture students’ attention and excite their interest in new emerging topics in social psychology. Some examples are:

- A new research insights section on “People’s Preference for the Status Quo.”
- A new research insights section on “Why Not Controlling Ourselves Can Make Us Feel Good.”
- A new research insights section on “The Role of Non-verbal Cues in Job Interviews.”
- A new research insights section on “Why Some People Conclude They Are Superior to Others.”
- A new research insights section on “The Importance of Belonging and Group Ties.”
- A new research insights section on “Perceived Discrimination and Self-Esteem.”
- A new research insights section on “Social Modeling and Eating.”
- A new research insights section on “Culture and Attitude Processes.”
- A new research insights section on “Biases in Our Beliefs About Inequality.”
- A new research insights section on “The Role of Existential Threat in Prejudice.”
- A new research insights section on “Dramatic Differences in Appearance Between Partners: Is Love Really Blind?”
- A new research insights section on “Two Factors That Can Destroy Love: Jealousy and Infidelity.”
- A new research insights section on “How Much We Really Conform.”
- A new research insights section on “Using Scarcity to Gain Compliance.”
- A new research insights section on “Paying it Forward: Helping Others Because We Have Been Helped.”
- A new research insights section on “How People React to Being Helped.”
- A new research insights section on “The Role of Emotions in Aggression.”
- A new research insights section on “Aggression in the Workplace.”
- A new research insights section on “Dissent and Criticism of Our Groups—“Because We Care.”
- A new research insights section on “The Importance of Being Treated With Respect.”
- A new research insights section on “Reducing Post-traumatic Stress Among Veterans.”
- A new research insights section on “The Relationship Between Emotions and Life Satisfaction Within Different Cultures.”

Student Aids

Any textbook is valuable only to the extent that it is both useful and interesting to the students using it. To make this edition even better for students, we have included several student aids—features designed to enhance the book’s appeal and usefulness. Included among these features are the following:

Chapter Objectives: The aims of each major chapter section are presented. With these, students should know what they will learn before they begin each chapter.

Chapter Openings Linked to Important Trends and Events in Society: All chapters begin with examples reflecting current trends in society or real-life events that illustrate important principles of social life. Here are some examples:

1. How people must make judgments—from what college to attend to what health insurance option to select—with incomplete information (Chapter 2)
2. How many famous people have deceived the public and why their deception was so difficult to detect (Chapter 3)
3. Facebook as a medium for presenting ourselves to others (Chapter 4)
4. How our beliefs about climate change are formed (Chapter 5)
5. How protest movements such as “Black Lives Matter” emerge and why there is a racial divide concerning police treatment of citizens (Chapter 6)
6. The powerful, practical advantages of being highly likable (Chapter 7)
7. How swindlers such as Bernie Madoff, who cheated investors out of billions, use social influence for selfish purposes (Chapter 8)
8. How more than 1.5 billion people have been helped to lead better lives by being provided with more efficient—and safer—cooking stoves (Chapter 9)
9. The goals of recent mass shooting perpetrators in the United States are compared with those committing aggression as part of a group to achieve political ends (Chapter 10)
10. The critical role of sharing an identity with an audience for effective communication in groups (Chapter 11)
11. How U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor overcame adversity to achieve a happy life (Chapter 12)

End-of-Chapter Summaries: Each chapter ends with a summary that recaps the key issues covered.

Special Labels on All Graphs and Charts: To make these easy to understand, we continue to use the “special labels” that are a unique feature of this book.

Supplementary Materials

All excellent texts are supported by a complete package of supplementary material, for both the students and the instructor. This text offers a full array of such aids including:

- **Instructor Manual:** includes chapter outlines, lecture launchers, key terms, in-class, and out-of-class activities.
- **PowerPoint Presentation:** provides a core template of the content covered throughout the text. Can easily be expanded for customization with your course.
- **Test Bank:** includes questions in multiple choice, fill-in-the blanks, short answer and essay response—formats.

Some Concluding Words

Looking back over the changes we have made for this 14th edition, we absolutely believe we have done everything possible to make this edition the best one yet! We sought to create a textbook that fully captures the extent to which modern social psychology reflects, and embraces, the major changes now occurring in the world and illustrate how those affect the social side of life. But only you—our colleagues and the students who use this textbook—can tell us to what extent we have succeeded. So please do send us your comments, reactions, and suggestions. As in the past, we will listen to them very carefully and do our best to use them constructively in planning the next edition.

Our warm regards and thanks!

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Nyla R. Branscombe & Robert A. Baron

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Chapter 1

Social Psychology

The Science of the Social Side of Life



Chapter Overview

Social Psychology: What It Is and Is Not

- Social Psychology Is Scientific in Nature
- Social Psychology Focuses on the Behavior of Individuals
- Social Psychology Seeks to Understand the Causes of Social Behavior
- The Search for Basic Principles in a Changing Social World

Social Psychology: Advances at the Boundaries

- Cognition and Behavior: Two Sides of the Same Social Coin
- The Role of Emotion in the Social Side of Life
- Social Relationships: How Important They Are for Well-Being
- Social Neuroscience: The Intersection of Social Psychology and Brain Research
- The Role of Implicit (Nonconscious) Processes
- Taking Full Account of Social Diversity

How Social Psychologists Answer the Questions They Ask: Research as the Route to Increased Knowledge

- Systematic Observation: Describing the World Around Us
- Correlation: The Search for Relationships
- The Experimental Method: Knowledge Through Systematic Intervention
- Further Thoughts on Causality: The Role of Mediating Variables
- Meta-Analysis: Assessing a Body of Knowledge
- The Role of Theory in Social Psychology
- The Quest for Knowledge and the Rights of Individuals: Seeking an Appropriate Balance
- Getting the Most Out of This Book: A User's Guide



Learning Objectives

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1.1 Evaluate the diverse topics that social psychology seeks to understand</p> <p>1.2 Examine the major avenues that social psychology is currently exploring</p> <p>1.3 Understand the methods social psychologists use to gain insight into the questions posed</p> | <p>1.4 Explain how theories play a key role in social psychological research</p> <p>1.5 Identify how the dilemma of deception is addressed in social psychology</p> <p>1.6 Outline the steps taken to make reading this book a pleasant and informative experience</p> |
|---|---|

Consider, for a moment, what aspect of your life impacts your health and happiness most? Did your relationships with other people come to mind? What would your life be like without your family, friends, roommates, romantic partners, professors, coworkers, sports teammates—all the people you care about and with whom you interact? The truth is human beings are a truly social species. Each of us is connected to and influenced by other people, even if we're not always consciously aware of all the ways we are affected by them. Indeed, a fundamental message of social psychology is that both the good and the bad in our lives involve other people. As evidenced in the following quotations, people from all cultures and walks of life agree that our connections to others bring happiness and meaning to our lives. At the same time, we also know that other people—when they disagree with us, exclude us, or harm us—can be the source of our worst pain.

- The Dalai Lama: “Our prime purpose in this life is to help others.”
- John Lennon, former musician with the Beatles: “Count your age by friends, not years.”
- Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”
- Bob Marley, famous reggae musician: “Truth is, everybody is going to hurt you: You just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.”
- David Byrne, musician formerly of the Talking Heads: “Sometimes it’s a form of love just to talk to somebody that you have nothing in common with and still be fascinated by their presence.”
- Robert Alan Silverstein, author and social change activist: “In our hectic, fast-paced, consumer-driven society, it’s common to feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone. . . . The sense of belonging we feel when we make the time to take an active role in our communities can give us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.”

Connecting with others—both as individuals and as part of social groups—is a major predictor not only of happiness and well-being but also of physical health. Robert Putnam summed up the importance of social connections based on extensive research reported in his book, *Bowling Alone*: “If you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half.” If you had any lingering doubts about the importance of the social side of life, perhaps you don’t anymore!

We also know that solitary confinement is so bad for mental health that it is often considered “cruel and unusual punishment.” Try, for a moment, to imagine life in total isolation from others, as shown in the movie *Cast Away*, the story of a person who finds himself stranded on an uninhabited island after his plane crashes in the Pacific Ocean. After a while, he craves human company so much that he paints a face on a

Figure 1.1 Would Life in Isolation Be Worth Living?

Can you imagine what it would be like to live entirely alone, having no contact with other people? In the film *Cast Away*, a person who is stranded on an uninhabited island is so desperate for company that he “invents a person” by painting a volleyball to look like a human face. He wants to get back to his human connections so badly that he risks his life on the open seas to do so.



volleyball, gives it a name (Wilson), and talks with it regularly because it is his only friend (Figure 1.1). In the end, the character, played by Tom Hanks, decides that his life alone is not worth living, and so he risks all in an attempt to return to civilization and connect with living people again.

While we know that many people find the thought of a physically isolated existence to be disturbing, let’s consider “disconnection from others” on a smaller, digital scale. Try to remember the last time you forgot your cell phone or lost access to Facebook, Twitter, or other social media outlets. How did it feel to be out of contact? Did it freak you out? Perhaps that’s why it won’t be surprising to learn that even these digital forms of connection to others help to satisfy our emotional needs. For example, research shows that among college students the number of Facebook friends predicts life satisfaction (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). It’s safe to say, then, that social contact is a central aspect of our lives. In a very basic sense, it helps define who we are and the quality of our existence.

So, get ready for a fascinating journey, because the social side of life is the focus of this entire book. Social psychology is the branch of psychology that studies all aspects of our social existence—everything from love and helping people on the one hand, to prejudice, exclusion, and violence on the other. Social psychologists also investigate how groups influence us, how the social context we find ourselves in affects the way we make decisions, and how we explain ourselves and the actions of other people. As you will see, how we think about ourselves at any given point in time—our identity—is shaped by our relationships with other people, which in turn guides our social behavior. We will be addressing some questions you’ve probably thought about already. After all, the nature of the social world is of interest to all of us. But we believe that some of the answers concerning human social behavior that has emerged from social psychological research will nevertheless surprise and intrigue you.

Social psychology covers a lot of territory—much of what’s central to human experience. What differentiates social psychology from other social sciences is its focus on explaining influences on the individual’s thought and behavior. What differentiates social psychology from the informal observations of people that we all make is its scientific nature. What we mean by the science of social psychology is so crucial that we will explain it in this chapter, in terms of the different techniques that are used by social psychologists to go about answering fascinating questions about the social side of life.

We begin with a formal definition of social psychology: what it is and what it seeks to accomplish. Next, we’ll describe several current trends in social psychology. These will be reflected throughout this book, so knowing about them at the start will help you understand why they are important. We’ll also examine the pros and cons of different methods used by social psychologists to answer questions about the social side of life. A working knowledge of these basic methods will help you understand how social psychologists add to our understanding of social thoughts and behavior, and will also be useful to you outside the context of this course to evaluate research findings you read about in major media outlets.

In fact, social psychological research has uncovered so much useful information about human behavior that in September 2015, President Obama issued an executive order requiring federal government agencies to incorporate behavioral science insights—much of it based on social psychological research concerning factors that affect how people actually go about making decisions—into their programs (Sunstein, 2015). As you will see, social psychologists have accumulated an impressive body of knowledge about how people think, feel, and behave, along with the circumstances that influence those responses. Indeed, social psychological research has taught us much about the “human animal” that is being fruitfully applied in numerous domains. These include understanding how people make use of digital technology and social media and how people can best cope with adversity, to making it easier for low-income teens to attend college and adults to participate in retirement savings plans. Consistent with the White House’s Social and Behavioral Sciences Team Report, we believe that social psychological research informs us about how reforms can be made with the aim of improving people’s lives. Given the empirical and scientific approach used by social psychologists to uncover “what works and what doesn’t work,” we think you will see why this branch of psychology is well-placed to provide answers to many questions.

1.1: Social Psychology: What It Is and Is Not

Objective Evaluate the diverse topics that social psychology seeks to understand

Providing a definition of almost any field is a complex task. In the case of social psychology, this difficulty is increased by the field’s broad scope. As you will see in every chapter of this book, social psychologists truly have a wide range of interests. Yet, despite this variation, most focus mainly on the following task: understanding how and why individuals behave, think, and feel as they do in social situations—ones involving the actual or symbolic presence of other people. How people define themselves and others in a given situation can alter how we behave. Accordingly, we define social psychology as the scientific field that seeks to understand *the nature and causes of individual behavior, feelings, and thoughts in social situations*. Another way to put this is to say that social psychology investigates the ways in which our thoughts, feelings, and actions are *influenced by the social environments in which we find ourselves—by other people or our thoughts about them*. We’ll now clarify this definition by taking a closer look at several of its key aspects.

1.1.1: Social Psychology Is Scientific in Nature

Many people seem to believe that this term *science* applies only to fields such as chemistry, physics, and biology—ones that use the kind of equipment shown in Figure 1.2 to investigate some aspect of the physical world. If you share that view, you may find our suggestion that social psychology is a scientific discipline perplexing. How can a field that seeks to study the nature of love, the causes of aggression, the influence of groups on conceptions of ourselves, and many other topics be scientific in the same sense as physics or chemistry? The answer is surprisingly simple.

The term *science* does not refer to a special group of highly advanced fields. Rather, it refers to two things: (1) a set of values and (2) methods that can be used to study a wide range of topics. In deciding whether a given field is or is not scientific, therefore, the critical question is: *Does it adopt these values and methods?* To the extent the field does, it is scientific in nature. To the extent it does not, it falls outside the realm of science. We'll examine the procedures used by social psychologists in their research in detail in a later section, so here we will focus on the core values that all fields must adopt to be considered scientific in nature. Four of these are most important:

Accuracy: A commitment to gathering and evaluating information about the world (including social behavior) in as careful, precise, and error-free a manner as possible. This means that casual “people watching” that each of us might do at a crowded event will not meet this definition. Each of us may focus on different things so there is little precision, and the observations will lack *replicability*—the same “findings” when performed by someone else may not be obtained.

Objectivity: A commitment to obtaining and evaluating such information in a manner that is as free from bias as possible. This means that with casual “people watching” we may evaluate what we see differently than others would, so our observations lack objectivity.

Skepticism: A commitment to accepting findings as accurate only to the extent they have been verified over and over again. Here again you should notice the importance of *replication*—where different investigators can re-produce the procedure used by others and arrive at the same conceptual conclusions.

Figure 1.2 What Is Science?

Many people believe that only fields that use equipment like that shown here (left photo) to study the physical world can be viewed as scientific. Others think that “people watching” as shown in the middle photo is a form of science. However, the term *science* actually refers to adherence to a set of basic values (e.g., accuracy, objectivity) and use of a set of methods to *systematically* examine almost any aspect of the world around us—including the social side of life. In contrast, other approaches that are *not* scientific in nature (right photo) do not accept these values or use these methods.



Open-Mindedness: A commitment to changing one’s views—even those that are strongly held—if existing evidence suggests that these views are inaccurate. Social psychologists have produced plenty of surprises by conducting research, which has required us to reconsider the role of groups for our well-being, how many processes operate non-consciously, how the framing of issues can affect our attitudes and preferences, and why what actually makes people happy is often different than our expectations of what will do so. All of these have suggested revisions in assumptions about human nature.

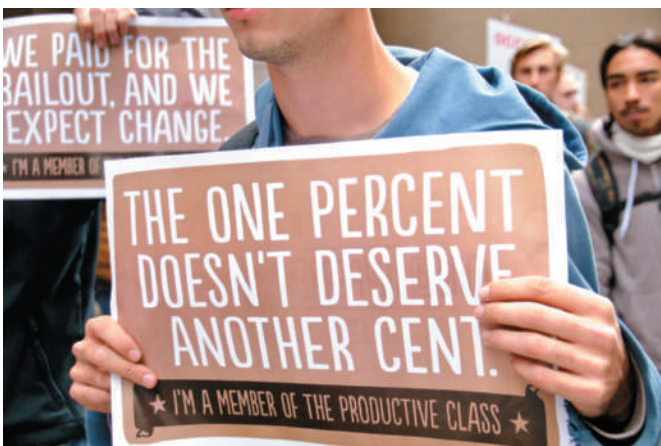
Social psychology, as a field, is committed to these values and applies them in its efforts to understand the nature of social behavior. In contrast, fields that are *not* scientific make assertions about the world, and about people, that are not put to the careful test and analysis required by the values that guide social psychology. In such fields—ones like astrology and aromatherapy—intuition, faith, and unobservable forces are considered to be sufficient (see Figure 1.2) for reaching conclusions—the opposite of what is true in social psychology.

“But why adopt the scientific approach? Isn’t social psychology just common sense?” Having taught for many years, we can almost hear you asking this question. After all, we all spend much of our lives interacting with other people and thinking about them, so in a sense, we are all amateur social psychologists. So, why don’t we each just rely on our own experience and intuition as a basis for drawing conclusions about the social side of life?

Our answer is straightforward: because such sources provide an inconsistent and unreliable guide to understanding social behavior. This is so because our own experiences are unique and may not provide a solid foundation for answering general questions such as: “Why do people sometimes ‘go along with the group’ even when they might disagree with what it is doing?” and “How can we know what other people are thinking or feeling at any given time?” In addition, as we have learned from social psychological research, people are often unaware of what influences them. Individuals may be able to generate “theories” about how they are or are not influenced by other people, but such common sense beliefs are often biased by wishful thinking. For example, as suggested by Figure 1.3, we might want to view ourselves as “independent” and fail to see how we are actually influenced by other people, or alternatively we might want to believe a certain kind of change is possible so we claim to have been influenced by others who share our views, perhaps more than we actually are.

Figure 1.3 Being Influenced by the Actions of Other People

We can be influenced by the behavior of other people—either by seeing and being with them via social media or by physically being immersed ourselves in such events. Such exposure to others, especially when we identify with them, often exerts powerful effects on our own behavior and thought.



It is also the case that there are widely endorsed ideas about various aspects of social life that are inconsistent with each other. Only objective research evidence can provide clear answers about which of such contradictory ideas are true. For instance, consider the following statement: “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” When people are separated from those they love, they miss them and may experience increased longing for them. Many people would agree with this idea, in part because they can retrieve an instance like that from their own memory. But now consider the following statement: “Out of sight, out of mind.” Is this idea true? Did you, after leaving your high school sweetheart and swearing undying love, find a new romantic interest fairly quickly upon arriving at college? Many popular songs advocate just that—for instance, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young’s song: “If you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.” As you can see, these two views—both suggested by common sense and popular culture—are contradictory. The same is true for many other informal observations about human behavior—they each seem plausible, but often imply opposite conclusions. How about these: “Two heads are better than one,” and “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” One suggests that when people work together, they perform better (e.g., make better decisions). The other suggests that when people work together, they may act in ways that actually harm the product (e.g., that they make worse decisions). Much careful systematic research has revealed that whether groups show better or worse performance than individuals depends on a variety of factors: the nature of the task, whether the work can be effectively divided up, the expertise of the group members, and how well information is shared among them (Minson & Mueller, 2012; Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995; van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2009).

By now, our main point should be clear: Common sense often suggests a confusing and inconsistent picture of human behavior. Yet, it can offer intriguing hypotheses that can be tested in controlled research. What it doesn’t tell us is *when* various principles or generalizations hold—for instance, does “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” primarily among relationships that have already attained a certain level of commitment? Likewise, it doesn’t tell us for *whom*, or the sort of relationships, “out of sight, out of mind” is most likely to occur. Only a scientific approach that examines social thought and behavior in different contexts and populations (such as young versus older people) can provide that kind of information, and this is one basic reason that social psychologists put their faith in the scientific method: It yields more conclusive evidence. In fact, as you’ll soon see, it is designed to help us determine not just *which* of the opposite sets of predictions mentioned earlier is correct, but also *when*, for *whom*, and *why* one or the other might apply.

But this is not the only reason for not relying on common sense. As we’ll note over and over again (e.g., Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8), our thinking is subject to several types of biases that can lead us badly astray. Here’s one example: Think back over major projects on which you have worked in the past (writing term papers, cooking a complicated dish, painting your room). Now, try to remember two things: (1) your initial estimates about how long it would take you to complete these jobs and (2) how long it actually took. Is there a gap between these two numbers? In all likelihood because most of us fall victim to the *planning fallacy*, there is a strong tendency to believe that projects will take less time than they actually do or, alternatively, that we can accomplish more in a given period of time than is really true (Halkjelsvik & Jorgensen, 2012). Moreover, we fall victim to this bias in our thoughts over and over again, despite repeated experiences that tell us “everything takes longer than we think it will.”

Why are we subject to this kind of error? Research by social psychologists indicates that part of the answer involves a tendency to think about the future when we are estimating how long a job will take. This prevents us from remembering how long similar tasks took in the past, and that, in turn, leads us to underestimate

the time we need now (Buehler, Griffin, & Ross, 1994). This is just one of the many ways in which we can—and often do—make errors in thinking about other people (and ourselves). Because we are prone to such errors in our thinking about the social world, we cannot rely on introspecting about the influences on us—or rely on common sense—to solve the mysteries of social behavior. Rather, we need scientific evidence about what *most* people do, whether they realize that they do so or not, and providing such evidence is, in essence, what social psychology is all about.

1.1.2: Social Psychology Focuses on the Behavior of Individuals

Societies vary greatly in terms of their overall levels of violence; yet, social psychology focuses on explaining why individuals perform aggressive actions or refrain from doing so. Such acknowledgment of cultural differences applies to virtually all other aspects of social behavior, from conformity to helping, love as well as conflict, but social psychology aims to address the thought and emotional processes underlying those actions in individuals. This means that, as we noted earlier, because none of us are “islands” and all of us, instead, are strongly influenced by other people and the situations we find ourselves in, much research will systematically examine cultural and other contextual factors to illuminate just how those influences are exerted on the individual.

Social psychologists examine *how* groups influence individual behavior, *how* culture becomes internalized and affects individual preferences, and *how* emotions and moods affect the decisions made by the individual. Although our emphasis will be on how social factors affect the individual, as you will see throughout this book, many nonsocial factors (features of the environment; how the information we receive is framed) can exert powerful effects on us, often by influencing our emotions and social thoughts. The field’s major interest lies in understanding just how social situations shape the actions of individuals.

Clearly, this does *not* mean the role that social and cultural factors play in shaping the individual is neglected. Far from it. For example, considerable research has begun to address how ethnicity and social class shape our “selves” (whether we construe it as independent from others or as interdependent with them) and, consequently, social behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). This means that some institutional settings will be experienced as “friendly” or more congenial for one type of self rather than the other. For example, American universities tend to promote an independent model of self, which is more consistent with a middle-class standard of behavior than the self that is formed as a result of growing up in a working-class environment (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). In part because of differences in material resources, students from middle-class homes are encouraged to leave home, develop their own distinct interests, and choose their own pathway in life. In contrast, those from working-class backgrounds are more likely to live in the same place most of their lives, be more strongly embedded in familial and local social networks, and feel a need to fit in by displaying concern for the interests of others. Because of the different life experiences and selves that emerge among those whose social class origins differ, the norms prevalent in American university settings can be a good or rather poor cultural match. What this research reveals is how life experiences, which differ systematically according to social class and other group memberships, affect the individual. Because “who we are”—our identities—affects our thought and behavior, social psychological understanding of the individual is enriched by close examination of the following links.

Social Contexts/Experiences ⇒ *Self-Identities* ⇒ *Social Behavior*

1.1.3: Social Psychology Seeks to Understand the Causes of Social Behavior

Social psychologists are primarily interested in understanding the many factors and conditions that shape the social thought and behavior of individuals—their actions, feelings, beliefs, memories, and judgments. Obviously, a huge number of variables can play a role, although most fall under the five major headings described here.

THE ACTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF OTHER PERSONS Consider the following events:

You are at a party and you notice that a very attractive person is smiling at you. In fact, this person is looking at you in a way that leaves little room for interpretation: That person is sending a clear signal saying “Hey, you look good!”

You return from class one day and as you approach the door to your dorm room you see a friend of yours is sitting on the floor looking very down. You stop to ask if she’s ok, and you see that she’s been crying.

Will these actions of others have any effect on your own emotions, thoughts, and behavior? Very likely. If you too are interested in potential romance, you may be very pleased when you see someone looking at you in a “let’s get to know each other” kind of way, and you may then go over and say “Hi!” When you see that your friend has been crying, you are likely to ask “what happened?” and sit down to provide her with some comfort while you listen to her story. Instances like these, where we observe other people and respond to them, indicate that other people’s emotional expressions often have a powerful impact upon us (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 When Other People Communicate Their Emotions, We Respond

We are often affected by others people’s expression of emotions. Even though in one case the person is expressing positive emotion toward us and in the other the person is expressing negative feelings, in both these instances we may be motivated to approach the other person.



In addition, we are also often affected by others' appearance. Be honest: Don't you behave differently toward highly attractive persons than toward less attractive ones? Toward very old people compared to young ones? Toward people who belong to your own ethnic group compared to ones different from your own? Your answer to these questions is probably "yes," because we do often react to others' visible characteristics, such as their appearance (McCall, 1997; Twenge & Manis, 1998). In fact, research findings (e.g., Hassin & Trope, 2000) indicate that we cannot ignore others' appearance even when we consciously try to do so. So despite warnings to avoid "judging books by their covers," we are often strongly affected by other people's group memberships as indicated by appearance—even if we are unaware of such effects and might deny their existence (see Chapters 6 and 7). Interestingly, research findings indicate that relying on others' appearance as a guide to their characteristics is not always wrong; in fact, they can be relatively accurate, especially when we can observe others behaving spontaneously, rather than in posed photos (Nauman, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009).

COGNITIVE PROCESSES Suppose that you have arranged to meet a friend, and this person is late. In fact, after 30 minutes you begin to suspect that your friend will never arrive. Finally, she or he does appear and says "Sorry . . . I forgot all about meeting you until a few minutes ago." How will you react? Probably you will feel some annoyance. Imagine that instead, however, your friend says "I'm so sorry to be late. . . . There was a big accident, and the traffic was tied up for miles." Now how will you react? Perhaps you'll feel less annoyance—but not necessarily. If your friend is often late and has used this excuse before, you may be suspicious about whether this explanation is true. In contrast, if this is the first time your friend has been late, or if your friend has never used such an excuse in the past, you may accept it as true. In other words, your reactions in this situation will depend upon your memories of your friend's past behavior and your inferences about whether her or his explanation is really true. Situations like this one call attention to the fact that *cognitive processes* play a crucial role in social behavior. We try to make sense of people in our social world by attributing their actions to something about them (e.g., their traits) or something about the circumstances (e.g., unforeseeable traffic). This means we engage in lots of social cognition—thinking long and hard about other people—what they are like, why they do what they do, how they might react to our behavior, and so on (Shah, 2003). Social psychologists are well aware of the importance of such processes and social cognition is a very important area of research (Fiske, 2009).

ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES: IMPACT OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD Do we become more irritable and aggressive when the weather is hot and steamy than when it is cooler and more comfortable (Bell, Greene, Fisher, & Baum, 2001; Rotton & Cohn, 2000)? Does exposure to a pleasant smell in the air make people more helpful to others (Baron, 1997)? Does simply seeing money—such as a picture of a dollar bill—interfere with our ability to enjoy small pleasures in life like the taste of chocolate (Quoidbach, Dunn, Petrides, & Mikolajczak, 2010)? Research findings indicate that aspects of the physical environment can indeed influence our feelings, thoughts, and behavior, so these variables, too, certainly fall within the realm of modern social psychology.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS Is social behavior influenced by biological processes? In the past, most social psychologists might have answered no, and certainly not in any direct fashion. Now, however, some suggest that our preferences, emotions, and behaviors may be linked, to some extent, to our biological inheritance (Buss, 2008; Schmitt, 2004)—although social experiences too have a powerful effect and may interact with genetic factors in generating the complex patterns of our social lives (Gillath, Shaver, Baek, & Chun, 2008).

In fact, it is becoming clear that the operation of these two factors—biology and social experience—is not unidirectional. Experiences of stress, especially early in life but also in adulthood as a function of exposure to various forms of trauma including

political violence, can induce neurobiological changes that affect psychological well-being (Canetti & Lindner, 2015; Hertzman & Boyce, 2010; McInnis, McQuaid, Matheson, & Anisman, 2015). Indeed, there is now accumulating evidence that environmental factors and social experiences—through what is called *epigenetic processes*, where the operation of certain genes is turned on or off—can influence behavior, sometimes long after initial exposure (Spector, 2012).

The view that biological factors play an important role in social behavior has been emphasized among those who take an **evolutionary psychology** perspective (e.g., Buss, 2004; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). This branch of psychology suggests that our species, like all others, has been subject to the process of biological evolution throughout its history and that, as a result, we now possess a large number of *evolved psychological mechanisms* that help (or once helped) us to deal with important problems relating to survival.

Through the process of evolution, which involves the three basic components of variation, inheritance, and selection, such tendencies become part of our biological inheritance. Variation refers to the fact that organisms belonging to a given species vary in many different ways; indeed, such variation is a basic part of life on our planet. Human beings, as you already know, vary on what sometimes seems to be an almost countless number of dimensions. Inheritance refers to the fact that some of these variations can be passed from one generation to the next through complex mechanisms that we are beginning to understand only now. Selection refers to the fact that some variations give the individuals who possess them an “edge” in terms of reproduction: They are more likely to survive, find mates, and pass these variations on to succeeding generations. The result is that over time, more and more members of the species possess these variations. This change in the characteristics of a species over time—immensely long periods of time—is the concrete outcome of evolution. (See Figure 1.5 for a summary of this process.)

Social psychologists who adopt the evolutionary perspective suggest that this process applies to at least some aspects of social behavior. For instance, consider the question of mate preference. Why do we find some people attractive? According to the evolutionary perspective because the characteristics they show—symmetrical facial features; well-toned, shapely bodies; clear skin; lustrous hair—are associated with “good genes,” they are likely to indicate that the people who possess them are healthy and vigorous and therefore good mates (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Tesser & Martin, 1996). For instance, these characteristics—the ones we find attractive—potentially indicate that the persons who show them have strong immune systems that protect them from many illnesses (Li & Kenrick, 2006). Presumably, a preference for characteristics associated with good health and vigor among our ancestors increased their chances of successfully reproducing; this, in turn, could have contributed to our preference for people who possess these aspects of appearance.

Is there any reason to suppose that evolution might favor different behaviors for men and women? When asked to indicate the characteristics in potential romantic partners that they find desirable, both genders—but especially women—rate a sense of humor high on the list (e.g., Buss, 2008). From an evolutionary point of view, a sense of humor might signal high intelligence, which would make humorous people attractive (Griskevicius et al., 2009). Another possibility is that a sense of humor signals something else: interest in forming new relationships. Humor might signal that the person is available—and interested. Research by Li and colleagues (2009) found that people are more likely to use humor and laugh when they find

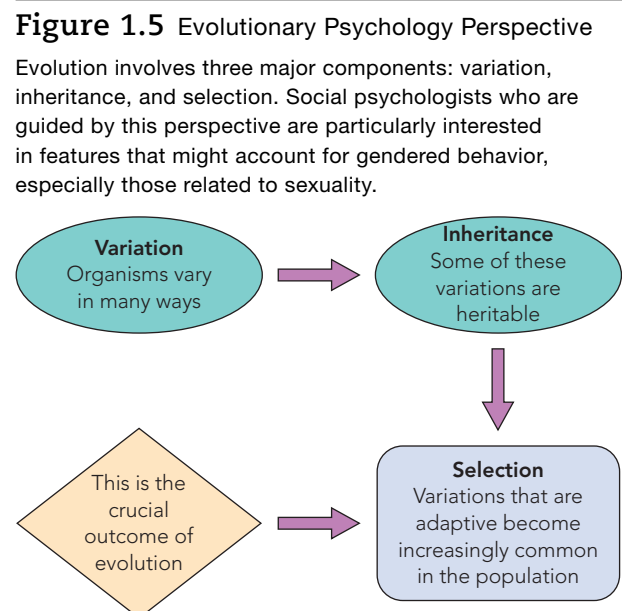


Figure 1.6 Humor: An Important “Plus” in Dating

Research findings indicate that humor is viewed as a desirable characteristic in potential romantic partners, partly because it is perceived as a sign that the person is interested in forming a new relationship. Such effects occur in many situations, including dating. So, if you want romantic partners, keep on smiling and make jokes.



another person attractive than when they do not; people who used humor during speed dating sessions were perceived as showing more romantic interest than ones who did not (see Figure 1.6).

Other topics have been studied from the evolutionary perspective (e.g., helping others; aggression; preferences for various ways of attracting persons who are already in a relationship), and we’ll describe this research in other chapters. Here, we wish to emphasize the following fact: The evolutionary perspective does *not* suggest that we inherit specific patterns of social behavior; rather, it contends that we inherit tendencies or predispositions that may be apparent in our overt actions, depending on the environments in which we live. Similarly, this perspective does *not* suggest that we are “forced” or driven by our genes to act in specific ways. Rather, it merely suggests that because of our genetic inheritance, we have tendencies to behave in certain ways that, at least in the past, may have enhanced the chances that our ancestors would survive and pass their genes on to us. These tendencies, can be—and often are—overridden by cognitive factors and the effects of experience (Pettijohn & Jungeberg, 2004). For instance, what is viewed as attractive changes over time and is often very different in diverse cultures. So yes, genetic factors play some role in our behavior and thought, but they are clearly only one factor among many that influence how we think and act.

1.1.4: The Search for Basic Principles in a Changing Social World

One key goal of science is the development of basic principles that are accurate regardless of when or where they are applied or tested. Social psychologists seek to uncover the basic principles that govern social life. For instance, they’d like to determine what factors influence attraction, helping, obedience, the attitudes we form, and so on. The research they conduct is aimed to yield such knowledge—basic principles that will be true across time and in different cultures.

On the other hand, social psychologists recognize that cultures differ greatly and that the social world in which we live is constantly changing—in very important ways. For instance, cultures vary greatly with respect to when and where people are expected to “dress up” rather than dress casually. While casual is acceptable in almost all contexts in the United States, more formal “dressy” attire is often expected in other cultures. This same point applies to more important aspects of social life, too: Should teenagers be allowed to date and meet without adult supervision? Should you name your baby after a relative, or should you give your child a unique and, perhaps, unusual name? At what age should people retire, and how should they be treated after they do? Should we make choices that are the same as other people we know, or should we try to be “different” and stand out from others (see Figure 1.7)?

Cultures differ tremendously in these and countless other ways, and this complicates the task of establishing general principles of social behavior and social thought. Should we try to compliment another person to make him or her like us? This is an ingratiation tactic that, as you will see in Chapter 8, has been found to be generally effective in individualistic cultures. Yet, research has revealed that because people from some cultures value independence (being seen as unique and separate from others) while others value interdependence (being seen as similar to and connected to others), responses to such seemingly positive treatment depends on whether it implies the person is different or the same as other members of his or her group (Siy & Cheryan, 2013). So, for example, those who are Asian-born respond more negatively to treatment that implies they are different from other group members, whereas those who are U.S.-born respond more negatively to treatment that implies they are the same as other group members.

In addition, within a culture, how we interact with each other can change across time. Because of social media, and digital technology more generally, people now meet potential romantic partners in different ways than in the past when, typically, they were introduced by friends or met at dances arranged by their schools, churches, or other social organizations. Does this mean that the foundations of attraction

Figure 1.7 Cultures Differ in Many Ways—including the Importance of Personal Uniqueness

In some cultures, it is considered important to be different from others, while in others it is seen as important to fit in with those around us.



are different today than in the past? Social psychologists believe that despite these changes, the same basic principles apply: Physical attractiveness is still a basic ingredient, even though what is deemed attractive may differ across time. Likewise, the basic principles of persuasion too remain much the same, even if messages aimed at influencing us are delivered in a different format (e.g., electronically) than in the past (e.g., print). In short, although the task of identifying basic, accurate principles of social behavior and social thought is complicated by the existence of cultural differences and rapid changes in social life, the goals of social psychological research remain the same: uncovering basic, accurate knowledge about the social side of life that applies in a wide range of contexts and situations.

In summary, social psychology focuses mainly on understanding the causes of social behavior—on identifying factors that shape our feelings, behavior, and thought in social situations. It seeks to accomplish this goal through the use of scientific methods, and it takes careful note of the fact that social behavior is influenced by a wide range of social, cognitive, environmental, cultural, and biological factors. The remainder of this text is devoted to describing some of the key findings of social psychology. We're certain that you will find it fascinating—after all, it is about *us* and the social side of *our* lives! We're equally sure that you will find the outcomes of some research surprising and that it may challenge many of your ideas about people and social relations. We predict that after reading this book, you'll never think about the social side of life in quite the same way as before.

Questions

1. Define social psychology. Explain the core values adopted by social psychology as a science.
2. Why is it important to adopt a scientific approach in order to draw conclusions in social psychology? Why can't one rely on common sense to understand the social world?
3. How does social class and group membership affect our self-identity, and how does our self-identity influence our thought and behavior?
4. What are the various factors and conditions that shape the social thought and behavior of individuals? Elaborate each factor by citing examples.
5. What do we know about the behavioral tendencies related to mating and sexuality from an evolutionary perspective? How do cognitive factors and experience affect such tendencies?
6. What is the role of culture with regard to social behavior and social thought? Compare the practices of your culture with another, and discuss how it complicates the application of social principles to various cultural contexts.

1.2: Social Psychology: Advances at the Boundaries

Objective Examine the major avenues that social psychology is currently exploring

Textbooks, like fine wine, don't necessarily improve with age. So, to remain current, they must keep pace with changes in the fields they represent. Making certain that this book is current, in the best sense of this term, is one of our key goals. You can be sure that the research presented in the chapters that follow is a contemporary view of social psychological knowledge concerning the social side of life. Consistent with this goal, we will now describe several major trends in modern social psychology—themes and ideas that you will see throughout this text because they represent what is of central focus to social psychology.