

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

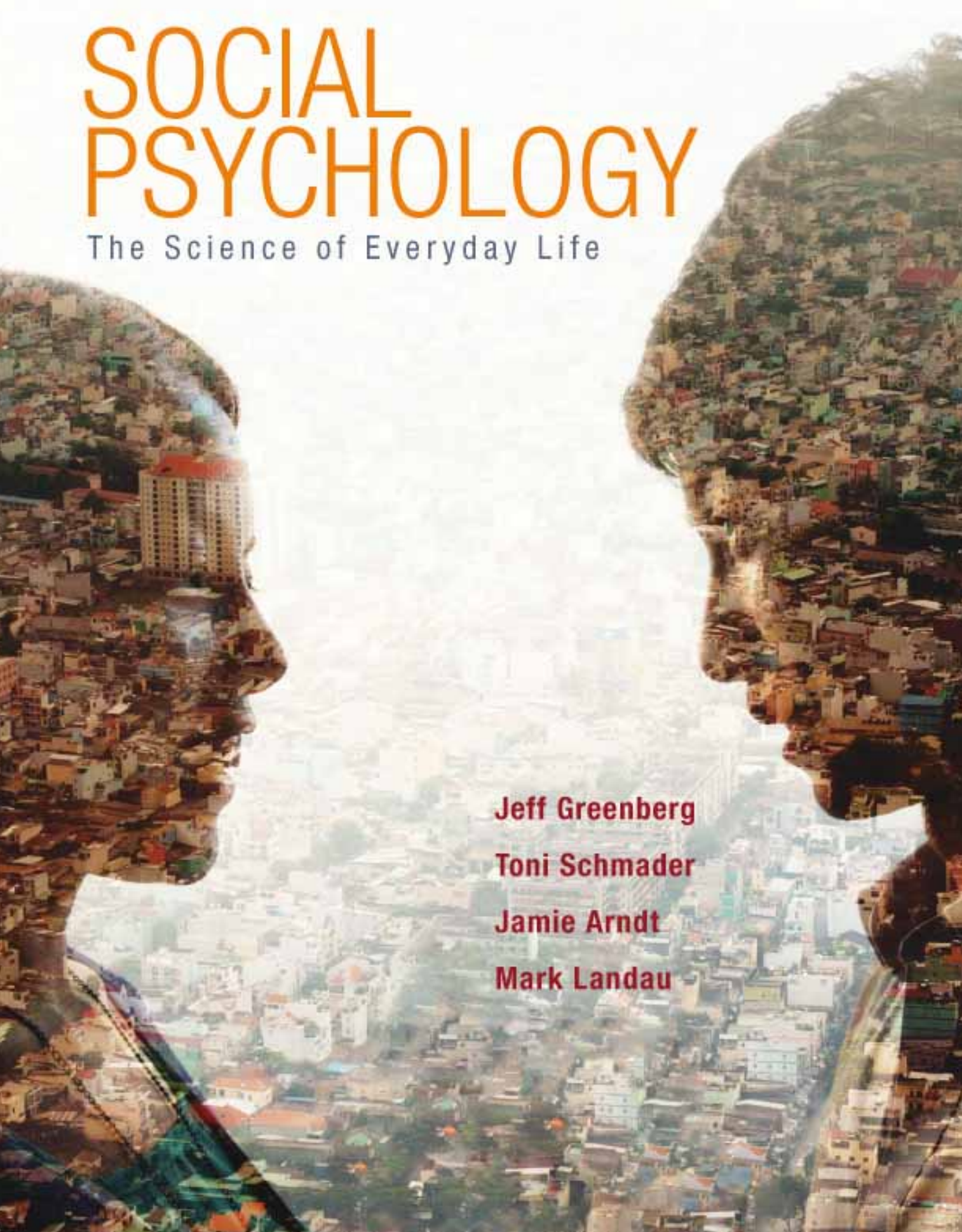
The Science of Everyday Life

Jeff Greenberg

Toni Schmader

Jamie Arndt

Mark Landau





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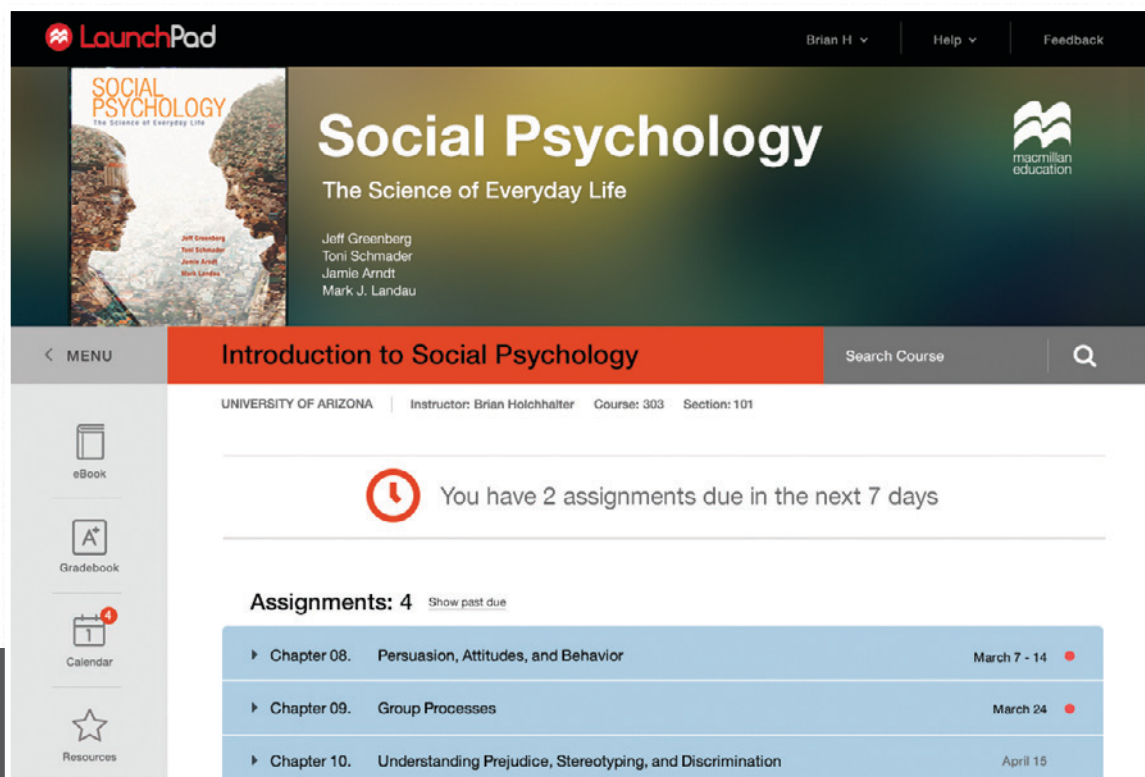
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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
The Science of Everyday Life

Jeff Greenberg
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Jamie Arndt
Mark J. Landau

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| ▶ Chapter 10. | Understanding Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination | April 15 | |

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Social Psychology



Social Psychology

The Science of Everyday Life

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University of Arizona

Toni Schmader

University of British Columbia

Jamie Arndt

University of Missouri

Mark Landau

University of Kansas

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WE DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO

My wife, Liz, and children, Jonathan and Camila, for their love and support throughout the journey.

J.G.

Matt, Hazen, and Ivy. For the support you have always given and the laughter yet to come.

T.S.

Stephanie, Nick, and Alexis for their love and support, and my mom and dad for instilling the value of education.

J.A.

For Mom, with gratitude.

M.L.

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Jeff Greenberg, Ph.D. is a professor of psychology and a College of Science Fellow at the University of Arizona. As a small child growing up in the Bronx, he was very curious about the human propensities for vanity and prejudice. Jeff majored in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, but it wasn't until he took social psychology in his final semester that he found a field where people were asking the questions he thought should be asked. Soon after starting a master's program in social psychology at Southern Methodist University, he knew this was what he wanted to spend his life studying and teaching. After receiving his M.A., Jeff completed his Ph.D. at University of Kansas in 1982 under the mentorship of Jack Brehm. He has since received numerous research and teaching awards. His research has contributed to understanding self-serving biases, how motivation affects cognition, the effects of ethnic slurs, the role of self-awareness in depression, cognitive dissonance, and how concerns about death contribute to prejudice, self-esteem striving, and many other aspects of social behavior. Jeff has also coauthored or coedited six prior books, including the *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* and *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror*.



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[Omri Gilath]

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[Ira Block/National Geographic/Getty Images]

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Since our own days as undergrads, we've been excited by how the science of social psychology helps us understand everyday life. Our goal in this book is to generate this same kind of excitement for a new generation of students. How? By presenting the best, brightest, and most current ideas and findings the field has to offer in a conceptually coherent and lively narrative. We want students to appreciate that social psychology is, first and foremost, the science of all of us. And so we have aimed to write a book that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, social identities, and career interests, will find enriching and enjoyable.

There's only one good reason to spend many years bringing a new social psych text into the world: to present the field's body of knowledge in a more compelling and appealing way than any of the texts that are currently available. We have tried to do this primarily through a lot of hard work, digging into literatures both from within the traditional bounds of the field and from related disciplines, thinking creatively, staying abreast of the latest developments, and discussing and debating what to present and how best to do it. Indeed, every chapter involved a close collaboration among the four of us, resulting in a consistent voice that conveys our collective knowledge, experience, and insight.

Connecting Theory, Research, and Application

These nuts and bolts are very important, but so is the architectural plan, the overarching vision that provides coherent structure both within and across chapters. Our vision is to present social psychology in a more coherent and integrative way than prior texts have done. As teachers of introductory social psychology, we have long been struck by the tendency of textbooks to treat each topic as a distinct form of human behavior—essentially presenting students with a few topic-focused theories, some clever studies, and closely related phenomena. The result can seem, across chapters, like analyses of entirely different beings: One being is prone to confirmation bias, another to prosocial behavior, yet another to aggression, and so forth. Of course, all of these are elements of human behavior, so in our book we emphasize the core human motivations, cognitive processes, emotions, and cultural and situational forces that contribute to the varied ways we act, think, and feel.

In our teaching, we find that what sticks with students is rarely a single experiment or definition picked from the field's vast array of concepts and findings. Instead, students most value learning the broader theories in the field, theories that often have implications for understanding diverse social phenomena. For instance, Kevin, one of our former students who is now in finance, notes that he has benefited from theories in social cognition that explain how people's habits of thought can bias their judgments and decisions. Anna, now a graduate student, still gains insight from existential theories of the motives behind people's quest for meaning and self-worth. Among the theories we cover in greater depth than most texts are action identification, attachment, cognitive dissonance, conceptual metaphor, construal level, ego depletion, objectification, reactance, regulatory focus, self-affirmation, self-determination, self-perception, social learning, symbolic self-completion, system justification, terror management, and thought suppression.

We believe that theories and research discoveries have their greatest value when they are applied to everyday experiences, important social issues, and contemporary

events. We want students to easily see the intimate connections among theory, research, and applications. To accomplish this, we weave together theory; findings; personal, historical, and media examples; and applications throughout the narrative flow of the text. We also created specially designated application sections that translate findings to health, law, politics, social justice, fashion, and a variety of other topics that matter to students' lives. These applications are seamlessly integrated throughout the text (rather than being covered in separate applied chapters at the end of the text) and are indicated visually with descriptive icons. For convenient reference, the icons also appear next to each application heading in the detailed Table of Contents.

APPLICATION

Can the Unconscious Help Us Make Better Health Decisions?

There is a big push in the health care field to assist patients in making more informed medical decisions. You or someone you know may have encountered some of these so-called decision aids like the one shown in the photo on the left. In addition to providing information about the disease and treatment options, they guide you through a series of rational and deliberate questions so that you can arrive at a more educated understanding of the choices you can make for your treatment. In short, they rely strongly on the conscious processing system.

(© Sonda Dawes/The Image Works)



But is conscious reasoning always the best way to make these decisions? Recent research suggests that perhaps even medical decisions can benefit from some input from the intuitive processing system (de Vries et al., 2013). One reason for this may be that the intuitive system is better able to integrate feelings and emotions that can play a key role in treatment adherence. Although the potential benefits of intuitive processing by no means suggest that we should avoid information or careful reasoning in health and other important decisions, it does highlight the possibility that complex decisions may best be made by integrating conscious and unconscious processes (Nordgren et al., 2011).

To reinforce further how social psychological knowledge can illuminate the world we all live in, we also highlight in feature boxes how the field's knowledge can be applied to understand real historical and personal events (Social Psych Out in the World):



Food for Body, Mind, and Soul

One of the ways that culture influences you in your everyday life is the food you eat. Think about what you have eaten so far today. How would the food you eat be different if you had grown up in Chicago, Berlin, Tokyo, Marrakech, or Chang Mai? Not only do cultural adaptations dictate how we obtain sustenance but all cultures have particular ways of preparing and serving foods that embody their unique identity as groups and help to define the social environment. Whether it's hot dogs in the United States, schnitzel in Germany, sushi in Japan, tagines in Morocco, or panang curry in Thailand—you get the idea, and we're getting hungry!—specific food preparations help define a culture. People in that culture are especially likely to eat those foods at times when they want to commemorate particular past events that serve to affirm their cultural identity. Just as most Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving, other cultures also have specific dishes that are eaten on days of particular historical and symbolic importance. As a result, food is a delicious representation of a culture.

Cultures also specify ritualistic ways in which meals are to be consumed. This includes prayers (“Thank you, Lord, for

this food we are about to share”) and other utterances that precede meals (“Bon appetit!”), utensils that should be used (forks, chopsticks, fingers), rules for exactly how the utensils should be held, and customs for the order in which different courses are served. If you have ever watched the culinary explorer Anthony Bourdain on television, perhaps you've caught a glimpse of some of the food customs of far-flung places around the world.

The echoes of cultural adaptation on how we eat don't stop at the social environment; they extend to the metaphysical. The physical necessity of eating is transformed into an



Anthony Bourdain has built a reputation for hosting television programs that introduce viewers to the food and eating customs of far-flung cultures.

[Tannis Toohey/Toronto Star via Getty Images]

Culture and the arts are mirrors to our inner nature as well as the major issues facing society. So each chapter also includes a feature box that connects theories and findings to human behavior as portrayed on film. These boxes reinforce key concepts by bringing them to life using vivid examples from classic and contemporary films (Social Psych at the Movies):

SOCIAL PSYCH at the MOVIES

Milk: Charismatic Leadership Style

Milk (Jinks et al., 2008) is a moving biopic about Harvey Milk, an influential figure in the movement for gay civil rights. In depicting Milk's rise to leadership, the movie illustrates a number of features of an effective leadership style. The story begins in the Castro district of San Francisco in the early 1970s. Milk, played by Sean Penn, has just moved from New York, and although he is enamored of his neighborhood's charm, he is outraged by everyday acts of discrimination in his new city. Police harassment and harassment from neighbors are common, and Milk is told that he should join the neighborhood merchant's union to improve his "unholy" lifestyle.

Fed up, Milk stands on top of a building and announces to his neighbors that he is beginning his rise into the political spotlight as an activist—referred to by his neighbors as "the Milk" on Castro Street—to being one of the first openly gay men to hold a major public office in America. In 1977, he was on the Board of Supervisors, and in 1978, being fatally shot, he made major contributions to the movement. What made him an effective leader?

To answer this question, let's look at the concept of *charisma*, introduced as one of the key concepts in this chapter. Charisma is that special

quality seen in larger-than-life celebrities and leaders, but it is difficult to define. According to Ernest Becker (1975), a charismatic leader is one who with great self-confidence offers people a heroic vision, a grand mission to triumph over evil and bring about a better future.

Early in his career, Milk was a *relationship-oriented* leader who focused on making sure that his staff members felt included and enjoyed their work on his campaign. But his career really took off after he followed the advice given to him by another politician: If you want to win over the people, you have to give them hope for a better life and a better tomorrow. Eventually Milk embodies charisma. His heroic vision can be seen in three messages that he gave to the American people.

First, Milk has a heroic vision of a better future—a legacy that will make a mark on history. For example, he says to members of his campaign, "If there should be an assassination, I would hope that five, ten, one hundred, a thousand would rise. I would like to see every gay lawyer, every gay architect come out—if a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door. . . . And that's all. I ask for the movement to continue." This message is attractive to people because, as we've noted in this chapter, they join groups in part to cope with the fear of death. Belonging to a group means that one's life does not end with death but continues on so long as the group survives.

A third message in Milk's heroic vision is that there is a clear enemy out there who is holding society back from progress. In 1978, Anita Bryant, a former singer and model, started advocating for a proposition that would ban gays from teaching in schools. Armed with moral rhetoric and the support of the Christian community, she got this legislation passed in Florida and was gaining traction in other states. Milk initially feels defeated by Anita Bryant's success, but when he walks into the street, he finds that it is exactly what was needed to bring the gay community's anger to the boiling point. Now hundreds of citizens are ready to take action. Milk seizes the moment, grabs a bullhorn, and says, "I know you're angry. I'm angry. Let's march the streets of San Francisco and share our anger."

He leads the march to the steps of City Hall, where he gives the people the enemy they want: "I am here tonight to say that we will no longer sit quietly in the closet. We must fight. And not only in the Castro, not only in San Francisco, but everywhere the Anitas go. Anita Bryant cannot win tonight.

Anita Bryant brought us together! She is going to create a national gay force!"

Because of Milk's charismatic leadership style, he is remembered today as a major figure in the continuing struggle for equal human rights.



Guided by the charismatic leadership of Harvey Milk (portrayed by Sean Penn in the movie *Milk*), gay rights supporters felt united in a grand mission to overcome discrimination.

[Focus Features/Photofest]

Think ABOUT



[media/Shutterstock]

Why might humans have evolved the ability to experience moods in the first place? For one thing, moods may inform the person about the status of things in the immediate environment. Think about this from the evolutionary perspective.

To help students relate concepts to their own lives, we engage them in the narrative by asking specific questions throughout the text, often highlighted as *Think About* features. Here is one such question, in blue type and accompanied by a photo, asked directly to the student.

Overarching Perspectives

A final aspect of this textbook's overarching integrative vision is to utilize five broad perspectives that serve as recurring motifs throughout the book: culture, evolution, social cognition, cognitive neuroscience, and existential psychology. These themes provide some sense of continuity both within and across chapters. Of course, social psychology is a diverse field that is not constrained by one single perspective or one small set of perspectives. Instead, the field's accumulated knowledge has benefited from researchers' seeking to understand behavior from many different points of view and levels of analysis. We think that's one of the most exciting aspects of our field. Although each of the five broad perspectives is noted in the context of presenting particular theories and research findings, it was important to us not to use them in a restricting, rigid, or imperialistic way.

Both across and within chapters, there is no one perfect way to organize the vast array of theories and research programs generated by social, personality, cultural, and evolutionary psychologists, as well as researchers in related disciplines. We believe that, whatever the topic and approach to organization, the coverage has to convey the classic and contemporary discoveries that are most revealing in answering important questions. With this goal in mind, we have ensured that our organization of each chapter is not guided in a formulaic way by the five perspectives but by our desire to provide a conceptually coherent, comprehensible, and memorable discussion of the best and most useful theories and findings pertinent to that topic.

Overview of the Text's Organization

Chapter 1 begins with a brief consideration of the roots and history of social psychology. We then lay out the five perspectives and the core assumptions of the field. The second half of the chapter is devoted to introducing students to the scientific methods used by social psychologists to investigate human behavior, with a focus on the cyclical interplay of theory and research, correlational and experimental methods, and strengths and limitations of theory and methods. We conclude with a consideration of ethics in research.

Chapter 2 considers cultural and evolutionary perspectives in more detail. Our treatment aims to give equal weight to both perspectives, each of which helps set the stage for understanding the fundamental motivations and cognitive architecture that underlies human behavior. Culture profoundly influences human experience. It's not just something to discuss to explain gender roles or differences in prevalence of the fundamental attribution error. In our view, culture reveals as much about how people are similar as it does about how they are different. Thus, we carefully consider in Chapter 2 how cultures are structured and the psychological functions they serve. Similarly, the evolution of our species didn't merely produce domain-specific adaptations that may help explain individual phenomena such as sex differences in aggression or attraction. More clearly, evolution produced the basic sociability, cognitive capacities, potential for learning and growth, motivations, and emotions that underlie all of our experiences and behaviors. By explaining the joint roles of culture and evolution in shaping the core proclivities of our species, we aim to provide students with a richer and more balanced framework for understanding and evaluating subsequent theory and evidence regarding human behavior.

Following up on these broad aspects of human behavior, Chapters 3 and 4 review the important insights that have come from understanding social cognition, including cutting-edge research from social neuroscience that examines brain regions and processes associated with particular aspects of thought, emotion, and judgment. Typically, traditional topics in social cognition, such as heuristics and biases, are presented in a listlike, piecemeal fashion. We instead begin with the motives that guide perception, memory, and decision making. Part of the motivational frame is provided by the fifth perspective we present, an existential perspective that emphasizes how

social life is shaped by core aspects of the human experience, including the needs for meaning, belonging, security, and growth.

After covering how we view others and the world around us, we focus on the self in Chapters 5 and 6. These chapters cover the structure and functioning of the self and set the stage for subsequent chapters by illustrating the mutual constitution of self and social reality. The self-concept is largely the product of social and cultural influences; at the same time, individuals' self-regulatory capacities and motives for consistency, esteem, self-presentation, and growth inform their construal of self, other people, and social events.

The next three chapters, 7 through 9, focus on the rich topics of social influence, persuasion, and group processes. Together, these chapters show how individuals' motives, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior influence, and are themselves influenced by, interactions with other people. But in addition to covering classic theories and research, these chapters describe recent developments, such as social priming and mimicry, regulatory focus, implicit attitudes, and system justification.

Having examined the person's core needs, desires, cognitive capacities, self-motives, and relations to the social world, we proceed in the final six chapters to focus on specific forms of social thought and behavior. The first three cover the darker side of human behavior. Chapters 10 and 11 examine prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination—their determinants and consequences, as well as potential ways to counteract them. Chapter 12 takes up the equally complex problem of interpersonal aggression. We discuss the consequences of aggression, its distal and proximal causes, and practical ways to move toward less violent societies.

In contrast to these negative proclivities, the final three chapters focus on the more positive aspects of human experience: prosocial behavior, interpersonal attraction, and close relationships. We choose to end with these topics for three main reasons. First, they cast a hopeful, upbeat light on human behavior. Second, researchers have made great strides in understanding these topics in the last decade. And finally, although all the topics in social psychology are relevant to everyday life, none are more pertinent to students' own experiences than those concerning the human desire for and experience of community and close relationships.

We have worked long and hard to write a text that truly conveys our field in a coherent, engaging, and up-to-date manner that works very well for both instructors and students. Of course, it's up to all of you to decide if we have succeeded, so please let us know how we did, one way or the other. We would love to hear from you. Here are our email addresses:

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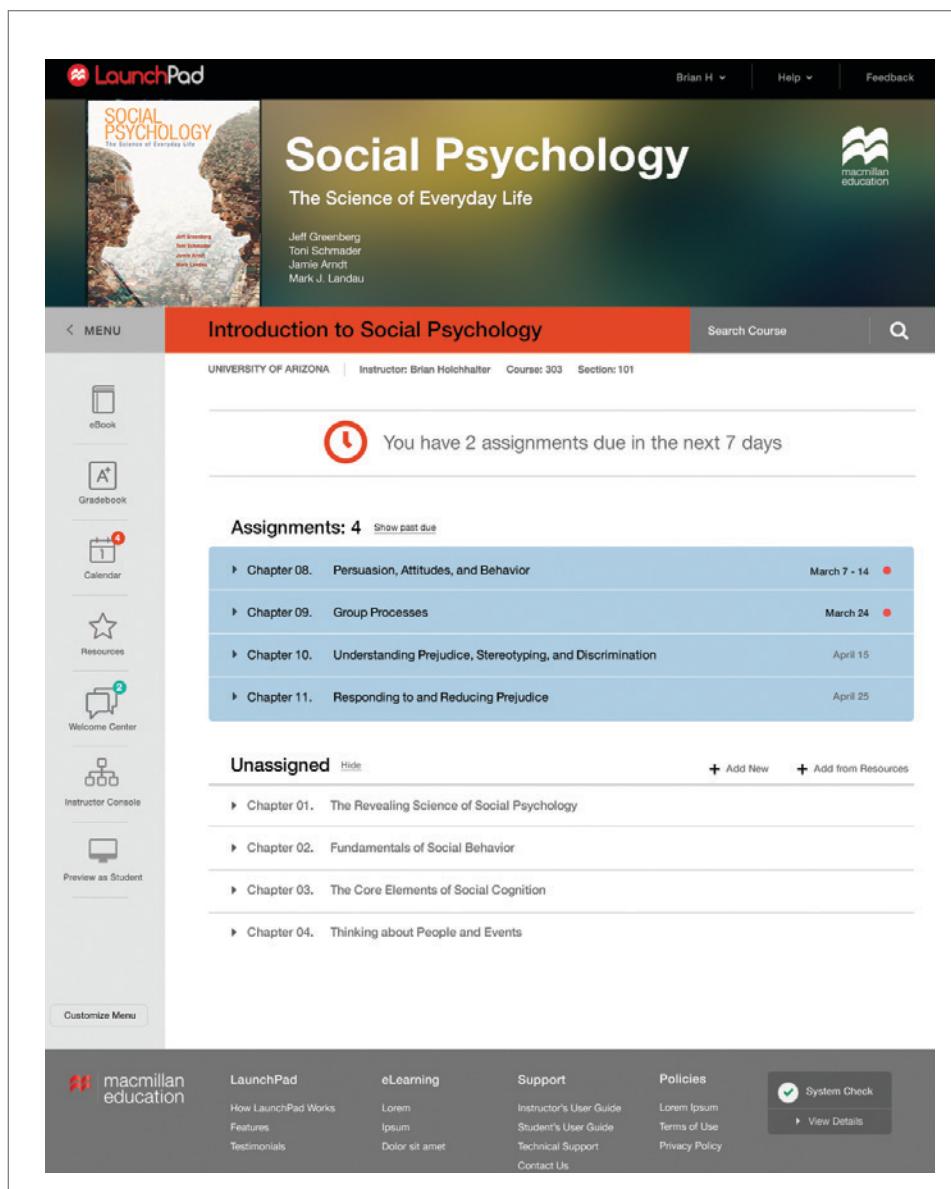
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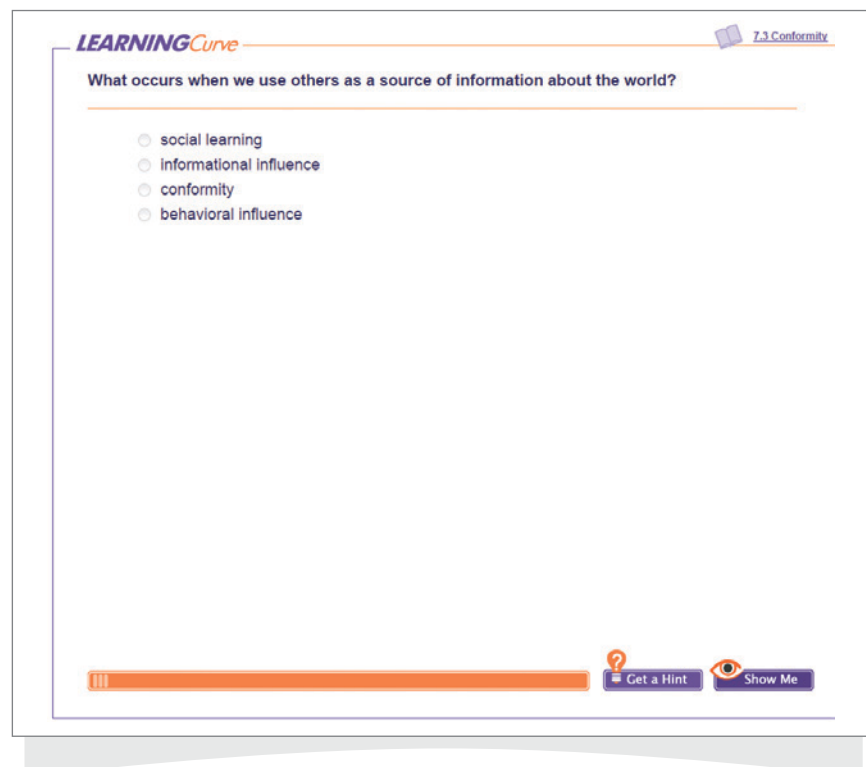
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The Revealing Science of Social Psychology

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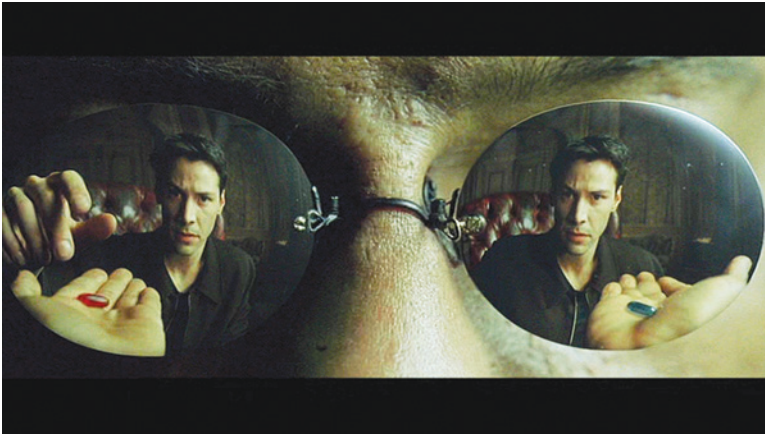
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New knowledge can be both liberating and useful. It broadens our appreciation of our life experiences and gives us more information for better decisions.

However, such newfound knowledge also comes at a cost. This theme is central to the classic sci-fi film *The Matrix* (Silver et al., 1999). In the film, the prophet Morpheus offers the protagonist, Neo, the choice between a blue pill and a red pill. If Neo takes the blue pill, he will stay inside a safe and familiar world, a computer program created for him that is the only reality he has ever known. But if he takes the red pill, Neo will be pulled out of that virtual reality into a more authentic and complex view of himself and the world around him.

Learning about social psychology will be like swallowing that red pill. As a blue-pill, you live day to day, absorbed in a world of classes, jobs, relationships, sports, parties, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. When you think of the future, perhaps you're thinking about grad school or starting your career. Maybe you're involved in student government or environmentalism, or supporting the troops, or helping fight poverty. This is the "programmed" world in which we all live, established by our culture and internalized by us through the socialization process. Though each of us plays a unique role within this reality, we're both part of it and constrained by it. Social psychology, like the red pill, can take you outside the ordinary reality you live in to a more enlightened and sometimes more disturbing vantage point, one that reveals



In the film *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers Neo the choice of either the blue pill, which maintains his current view of reality, or the red pill, which like social psychology, provides a more revealing and complex view. Which would you choose? Why?

[© Warner Bros/Photofest]

Social psychology The scientific study of the causes and consequences of people's thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding themselves and other people.

that each of us is a complex but fragile and vulnerable animal with certain propensities and capacities, striving to satisfy basic needs and desires within the cultural matrix. Although no one can live for long outside the comfort of their culturally constructed reality, by taking an occasional foray beyond it, we can better comprehend many of the events we care about within the ordinary reality in which we generally reside.

Social psychology is the scientific study of the causes and consequences of people's thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding themselves and other people. It is a set of concepts and discoveries that can fundamentally expand and enrich your understanding of yourself, of those in your social sphere, and of events in the world around you. In this first chapter, we'll start with the historic origins of the field and some broad perspectives and core assumptions social psychologists utilize to study human behavior in a social context. We'll then consider the ways in which all of us, as intuitive scientists, flip through our encyclopedic knowledge of culture to draw inferences about human behavior. However, because this intuitive approach can be limited and biased, we'll turn to the discerning eye and sharp tools of science to isolate and understand human behavior.

The Roots of Social Psychology

Every human being has wondered, at one time or another, about him- or herself and the social world, so we are all amateur social psychologists at heart. Although social psychology is a relatively young field, the concerns this science addresses go back to the dawning days of humankind. The very earliest discovered written texts, such as the 5,000-year-old Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, focused on basic questions about what it means to be human and how humans come to behave the way they do. Since then, philosophers, poets, playwrights, and novelists all have attempted to delineate the psychological forces responsible for human social behavior. However, it wasn't until the twentieth century that these questions were put under the lens of scientific inquiry.

Although modern social psychology is sometimes characterized in textbooks and elsewhere as a field full of hundreds of small, largely disconnected theories about various aspects of social behavior, the field's origins were influenced by several broad perspectives. Let's briefly consider these influential ideas.

An Instinct-based View of Human Behavior

In 1855, the British sociologist Herbert Spencer extended Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection from the biological to the social realm. Spencer argued that social behavior is the result of the same evolutionary processes that produce physical characteristics such as body size and eye color. For example, Spencer felt that societies evolve just as organisms do, becoming larger, more complex, and more differentiated over time. Spencer's evolutionary view of human activity heavily influenced William McDougall when he published the very first social psychology textbook, *An Introduction*



to *Social Psychology*, in 1908. This textbook proposed that most human behavior was instinctively determined, just as it is for spiders that spin webs and beavers that build dams, and consequently unlearned and uninfluenced by experience. McDougall's (1923) conception of instinctual human behavior stood in sharp contrast to what would become the two most dominant schools of thought in academic psychology during the first half of the 20th century: psychoanalysis and behaviorism.

Webs created by spiders and humans: How much behavior is instinctual?

[Left: Maryna Pleshkun/Shutterstock; right: © Joe Baraban/Alamy]

Psychoanalytic Theory: The Hidden Desires That Guide Behavior

Inspired partly by Darwin's concept of the "struggle for existence," Sigmund Freud claimed that human behavior was directed primarily by aggressive and sexual drives (Freud, 1920/1961a). Aggressive behavior is critical for warding off predators and effectively competing for scarce resources; sexual behavior is critical for reproducing and perpetuating genes. But, because unbridled aggression and sexuality undermine the communal order necessary for very social human animals to survive, Freud proposed that human beings' desires for sex and aggression are kept unconscious by repression, until they are transformed in ways that allow them to be consciously expressed in a socially acceptable fashion. This is the basis for Freud's psychoanalytic theory that human behavior is directed by bodily desires excluded from consciousness to appease social forces. Consequently, a substantial proportion of human mental activity is unconscious, and what we are conscious of is rarely a direct reflection of the motivational underpinnings of what we're doing, because the true intent of our behavior is generally hidden from us.

Behaviorism: Behavior Is Shaped by Experience

In direct opposition to psychoanalysis, early behaviorists such as John Watson (1930) argued that only overt behavior can be directly observed and measured and that phenomena such as feelings, wishes, unconscious processes, and consciousness are unobservable fictions that psychologists had invented to explain behavior. The behaviorists also argued that most of the supposedly instinctual behaviors studied by McDougall and his colleagues were substantially modified by experience, suggesting the possibility that they might be learned, rather than innate, responses. The behaviorists also bemoaned the difficulty of deciding what qualified as an instinct and were incredulous when at one point the list of alleged instincts exceeded 6,000! Behaviorists instead proposed that human behavior is predominantly determined by the nature of experiences in response to the demands of the environment. In simplified form, the argument of these theorists was that, in a particular environment, behaviors followed by desirable outcomes would be likely to reoccur, whereas behaviors that are followed

by undesirable outcomes would not. As John Watson (1930) put it: “Give me a dozen healthy infants, well formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant—chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors” (p. 82). These behaviorist ideas persuaded many early 20th-century research psychologists to confine their investigations to readily observable behavior.

The Emergence of Modern Social Psychology

So what, then, causes human behavior? Is it instinct, as the McDougalls of the world argued? Is it the unconscious drives emphasized by Freud and his psychoanalyst disciples? Or is it experience via responses to the environment, as Watson avowed? And how do we sort out the role, if any, of unconscious and conscious mental processes in all of this? Social psychology emerged as a new field that would come to address these very questions. Its birth was sparked by two important and integrative books published in the 1920s.

In 1922, John Dewey published *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, a seminal work that set the agenda for a mature social psychology. Dewey felt strongly that human behavior is determined by both instinct (nature) and experience (nurture) and that the key is to identify the complex interaction between nature and nurture. He also insisted that both unconscious and conscious processes are important determinants of human activity. Further, Dewey optimistically asserted that understanding the psychological underpinnings of human behavior would allow humans to influence what happens to us in the future by injecting informed reason into the mix of human instinct and environmentally determined experience. He thus saw humankind as a work in progress into which we can have at least some conscious input that may have monumental effects on human evolution. Dewey also stressed the uniquely existential concerns of human beings: How do self-conscious, finite creatures find meaning in an unfathomably large universe of seemingly infinite possibilities?

The other influential book of the 1920s was Floyd Allport’s *Social Psychology*, published in 1924. Allport tried to integrate into the study of consciousness the experimental techniques of behaviorism, the advances learned from psychoanalysis, and the ideas from evolutionary theory. Like Dewey, Allport was interested in how humans can apply what we learn about ourselves to promote constructive individual and social change. *Social Psychology* became the classic text in the field for decades and inspired a burst of empirical research that culminated in the 1931 publication of *Experimental Social Psychology*, by Gardner and Lois Murphy. Besides promoting the promise of experimental approaches to studying social psychological phenomena, this husband-and-wife team stressed the fundamental role of culture in determining human activities and emphasized the need for social psychologists to investigate carefully the nature and function of culture.

Another important development in social psychology stemmed from World War II and the desire to understand how individuals in a society could nearly annihilate a portion of their population. Events on the scale of the Holocaust demanded explanation, and social psychologists began testing theories of power and social influence, an interest that would also be fueled by the political activism that dominated the late 1960s. As research in social psychology grew in the 1950s and sixties, the field’s concern with understanding important social problems and unsavory forms of behavior contributed to a shift in focus from broad conceptions of human social behavior to relatively specific, topic-based theories about particular phenomena, an emphasis still prominent today.

During the 1970s and eighties, a cognitive revolution took hold in most of psychology. Social psychology was also swept up in this shift toward understanding the mental processes that underlie behavior. Most social psychologists began to embrace the metaphor of the human being as an information processor, a concept from which the

social cognition perspective emerged. **Social cognition** is the way that an individual understands his or her own social world. The **social cognition perspective** focuses on how people perceive, remember, and interpret events and individuals in their social world, including themselves. This focus remains strong to the present day and has expanded to include newer techniques to measure the neural underpinnings of thought and emotion.

Toward an Integrated Perspective on Human Behavior

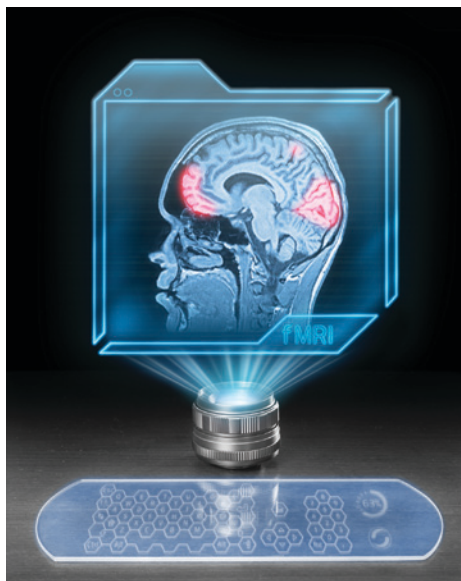
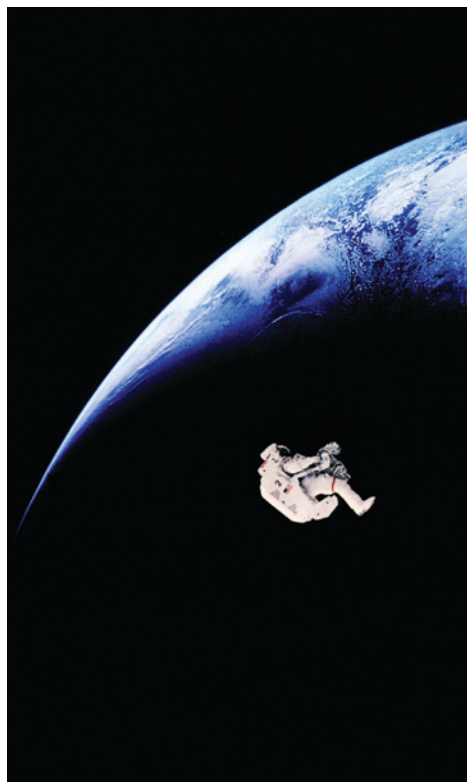
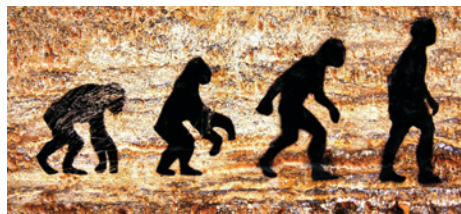
Since the early 1990s, four trends that hark back to the roots of the field have combined forces with the *social cognition perspective*, leading to a renewed focus on answering the core questions from the field's origins.

The first, the **evolutionary perspective**, is a reinvigorated effort to view humans as a species of animal and their social behavior as a consequence of particular evolutionary adaptations. The evolutionary perspective emphasizes that humans are animals and as such, subject to the same physical laws and evolutionary processes as all other forms of life. This suggests that a proper understanding of human activity

Social cognition The way an individual understands his or her own social world.

Social cognition perspective A view that focuses on how people perceive, remember, and interpret events and individuals, including themselves, in their social world.

Evolutionary perspective A view that humans are a species of animal and that their social behavior is a consequence of particular evolved adaptations.



There are five influential perspectives in social psychology: cognitive, evolutionary, cultural, neuroscience, and existential (depicted clockwise from top left).

[Clockwise, from top left: © John Lund/Blend Images/Corbis; livinglegend/Shutterstock; © Christine Wong/ImageZoo/Corbis; Stepan Kapl/Shutterstock; Rob Atkins/Getty Images]

Cultural perspective A view that focuses on the influence of culture on thought, feeling, and behavior.

Cultural animals Humans are animals who view reality through a set of symbols provided by the culture in which they are raised.

Existential perspective A view that focuses on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences of basic aspects of the human condition such as the knowledge of mortality, the desire for meaning, and the precarious nature of identity.

Neuroscience perspective The study of the neural processes that occur during social judgment and behavior. Neuroscience involves assessments of brain waves, brain imaging, and cardiovascular functioning.

requires recognizing uniquely human adaptations in addition to those we share with other creatures.

The second, the **cultural perspective**, is a rediscovery of the importance of culture as a determinant of thinking and behavior. It emphasizes the central role of culture in just about everything people do. Social psychologists, perhaps not surprisingly given the “social” in social psychology, have always viewed humans as fundamentally social creatures biologically constructed to exist in proximity to, and to coordinate with, other members of their own species. Dogs, bees, ants, termites, and many other life forms are also social creatures, but humans stand apart. Unlike any other species, humans are **cultural animals**: Only humans create their own symbolic conception of reality. This creation is *culture*. Culture gives meaning to life, and it is taken to be an absolute representation of reality by those who share the same cultural background despite the fact that it is often clear, even to the casual observer, that people from different cultures can have radically different beliefs about the nature of reality.

The third, the **existential perspective**, is a return to examining basic questions about existence and human nature, regarding matters such as meaning, identity, the body, and free will. Social psychologists are increasingly using an existential perspective to examine human behavior, devoting considerable attention to understanding the basic nature of the self and the core human motives; the needs for meaning and social connections; and the ways in which people cope with the often harsh realities of mortal life, the limits of the physical body, the possibilities of trauma and loss, and the inevitability of death.

The fourth, the social **neuroscience perspective**, is gaining increased momentum as technological advances enable us to understand better what is going on inside the brain when people engage in social thought and behavior. Social neuroscience utilizes assessments of brain-wave amplitudes after exposure to specific events and the flow of oxygen to different areas of the brain to examine the neural processes that occur during social judgment and behavior. In so doing, researchers can enhance knowledge of the role of various cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes in social phenomena.

SECTION review | The Roots of Social Psychology

Social psychology is a relatively young science, though humans have long been amateur social psychologists at heart.

Roots

- In the mid-1880s, Herbert Spencer extended Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection to argue that social behavior of humans is the result of the same evolutionary processes.
- Freud claimed that human behavior is driven by aggressive and sexual drives that are largely hidden from our conscious experience.
- Behaviorists argued that only overt behavior can be directly observed and measured. They discounted the study of such things as feelings, wishes, and consciousness.
- The stage for modern social psychology was set by the integrative efforts of John Dewey, Floyd Allport, and Gardner and Lois Murphy.

Perspectives of modern social psychology

- The social cognition perspective focuses on how we perceive, remember, and interpret events and people.
- The evolutionary perspective is a reinvigorated view of humans as a species of animal and of social behavior as a consequence of evolutionary adaptations.
- The cultural perspective underscores the effect of culture on thinking and behavior.
- The existential perspective focuses on basic human concerns such as mortality, meaning, and connection.
- The neuroscience perspective focuses on understanding how biological systems influence, and are influenced by, social processes.

The Four Core Assumptions of Social Psychology

I am human and let nothing human be alien to me.

—Terence, ancient Roman playwright (195/185–159 BC)

The central question that social psychologists attempt to answer is, *Why do people behave the way they do?* From this very general question, we can derive more specific ones that focus on problems we would like to remedy. Why can't people get along with each other better? Why do people care so much about what others think of them? Why do people sometimes conform but other times struggle to stand out from the crowd? Why do people so often make bad choices? How is it possible that the same species that created the Sistine Chapel, the Taj Mahal, *Moby Dick*, penicillin, the Underground Railroad, democracy, and the Red Cross also produced slavery, the Crusades, concentration camps, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the events of September 11, 2001?

Typically, social psychologists try to answer these broad questions by focusing on more specific inquiries into aspects of human behavior. Where do stereotypes of groups come from? How do stereotypes affect the ways people who believe them view members of the stereotyped group? What information do people use to infer the causes of another person's behavior? How well does a person's image of herself match the image that others have of her? Does violent content in the mass media encourage violent behavior in viewers? If so, how? Does the nature of people's attachment to their parents play a role in their adult romantic relationships? Political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, philosophers, poets, and novelists all attempt to address some of these questions. However, each discipline approaches them from a particular perspective based on some core assumptions. Such assumptions help define a particular field and distinguish it from others. Contemporary social psychology is based on four core assumptions.

1. Behavior Is a Joint Product of the Person and the Situation

One core assumption is based on an idea proposed by Kurt Lewin (1936), who is generally considered the father of modern social psychology: Any given behavior is determined by the combined influences of individual features of the person and specific aspects of the situation.

To grasp Lewin's idea fully, we first need to appreciate that a person's immediate environment profoundly influences how he or she thinks, feels, and acts in social life. This idea of the power of the situation—sometimes referred to as the “great lesson of social psychology” (Jones & Nisbett, 1971)—means that certain situations elicit pretty much the same behavior from people, regardless of how those people differ from each other. Look around at the other students in your social psych class. Some of them are very extraverted and talkative, whereas others are quieter and more reserved. And yet all of them are quiet while the instructor lectures. Why? Because the situation tells them, in a classroom, this is how you behave. In fact, situations can be so powerful that they lead people to do things they normally would never do. This was vividly demonstrated in Stanley Milgram's (1974) famous studies of obedience. As we'll discuss in more detail in chapter 7, participants in these studies were remarkably compliant when ordered by an authoritative experimenter to administer what appeared to be potentially lethal electrical shocks to an innocent victim.

And yet, each of us is a unique individual, with a constellation of personality traits, values, attitudes, and beliefs about the world that sets us apart from every other person. Because of the unique genetic makeup that we inherit from our biological parents and even more because of the lessons we have learned from the vast array of experience we have had over the course of our lives, we develop

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The field of personality psychology is focused largely on describing traits and documenting their influence on behavior. And the field finds, in fact, that people show a good deal of consistency in behavior across diverse situations that reflect their unique ways of adapting to the world. There is also a high level of consistency in behavior and traits across the lifespan. For example, Costa and McCrae (1994) have shown that behavior observed in the first years of life is associated with related behavioral tendencies in early, middle, and late adulthood. Dispositions powerfully guide how we think, feel, and act in social life. If we go back to your social psych class, chances are that one or two students *are* talking while the instructor lectures—their dispositional extraversion overrides the power of the situation. And even in the classic Milgram study, 35 percent of the participants refused to continue shocking the victim prior to the final command to do so.

Now that we've recognized the power of the situation and the influence of the person's dispositions, we might be tempted to argue about which is more important than the other in determining people's behavior. And indeed, for many years psychologists have debated the relative importance of the roles played by individual differences in personality, attitudes, and values on the one hand and situational forces on the other. But following Lewin's lead, most social psychologists focus on understanding how personality dispositions and situational factors *interact* to determine our thoughts, feelings, and actions. In other words, the focus is on what types of situations lead particular types of persons to behave in specific ways. Therefore, throughout this book, we'll consider the influence of the person's situation, his or her unique personality, attitudes, and values, and the ways in which these factors interact.

2. Behavior Depends on a Socially Constructed View of Reality

A second assumption of social psychology is that virtually all human thoughts, feelings, and actions involve and are influenced by other people and thus are social in nature. Throughout life, we routinely encounter and interact with other people. But even when we're completely alone, people routinely occupy and consequently help to shape our thoughts. As a result, our view of reality is shaped by our connections to others.

Imagine, for example, a student named Carly who lives alone and is startled from sleep by the piercing sound of her alarm clock. She awakens to thoughts of the Western civilization class she has in an hour and what a bore Professor Drone is. She worries a bit about an upcoming exam and whether she is smart enough to do well in the class. Gazing at the clock, Carly thinks of her younger sister Jen, who gave it to her the day she left for college. Then she wonders why she let her friend Megan talk her into taking an 8 a.m. class with her. As she gets out of bed, Carly notices the Monet painting of a bridge in a garden on the calendar hanging from her closet door. She opens Pandora on her tablet and hears an old Kanye West song. Then Carly lays out her clothes, thinking about what would be the right look for her lunch date with Dwayne. She jumps in the shower and starts singing the new Miley Cyrus single—quietly, so Nick, her neighbor in the next apartment, won't be disturbed. So in the course of a mere half hour alone with her thoughts, Carly's inner world has been populated by internal representations of eight other people: Professor Drone, her sister Jen, her friend Megan, Claude Monet, Kanye West, her lunch date Dwayne, Miley Cyrus, and her neighbor Nick.

These and many other people fundamentally shape the way Carly views the world and her place in it. Take, for example, her insecurity about her Western civilization class. How does she know if she is smart enough? Certainly her current grade in the class provides some information. But that grade is feedback from the instructor. In addition, on receiving a grade, most students wonder how everyone else did.

In 1954, Leon Festinger pointed out that looking to others—our social comparisons—is essential to how we understand ourselves. We get a sense of the right or wrong way to act, what is good or bad, and what is true or not true by examining what other people do or say. Whether it's Carly's aptitude for history or her choice of appropriate attire for a lunch date, her knowledge and consequent behavior are products of the social reality in which she lives.



Are you tall? For many judgments we make about ourselves, we rely on social comparisons with others.
[Zurjeta/Shutterstock]

3. Behavior Is Strongly Influenced by Our Social Cognition

If our very view of reality is shaped by our social connections with others, then the third assumption, that *social cognition* shapes behavior, should come as no surprise. This assumption is based on the work of another pioneering figure in social psychology, Fritz Heider (1958), who emphasized the important role people's causal explanations of others' actions play in determining their behavior. For example, in March 2003, President George W. Bush launched an invasion of Iraq. Some Americans believed he did this to avert a terrorist threat or to promote freedom in the Middle East. Others believed Bush wanted to gain access to Iraqi oil or seek revenge against Saddam Hussein. Each individual American's understanding of the president's motives for this action likely played a significant role in how each American felt about Bush and voted in the 2004 election. Because people—the president; our parents, friends, or lovers; or even the salespeople who try to sell us products—play such a major role in our daily existence, we spend a great deal of time and energy thinking about them, trying to understand them, and struggling to make sense of what they say and do. The way each individual understands other people, whether the understanding is accurate or not, has a powerful influence on that individual's social behavior.

4. The Best Way to Understand Social Behavior Is to Use the Scientific Method

The final core assumption of social psychology, also inspired by Kurt Lewin, is that science is the best way to understand the causes and consequences of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of social life. As we noted earlier, many fields attempt to understand human affairs, including anthropology, economics, sociology, history, humanities, philosophy, and sociology. Social psychology can be distinguished most clearly from these other pursuits by greater emphasis on the **scientific method**, and especially the use of experiments, as a way of developing, testing, and refining theories to understand the determinants of social behavior. The field developed as a way of refining intuitive thinking, to help us get closer to the truth by providing more accurate conceptions of the way the world really is. The scientific method provides the basis for how social psychologists accumulate knowledge regarding the determinants of human thoughts, feelings, and actions. However, before we describe the specifics of the scientific method, we need a brief overview of how people intuitively come to comprehend the world around them and the people who inhabit that world. These insights are important because they help to explain why social psychologists rely so heavily on the scientific method for understanding the causes and consequences of social behavior.

Scientific method The process of developing, testing, and refining theories to understand the determinants of social behavior.