



# **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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# **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

*4th Edition*

**Eliot R. Smith, *Indiana University, Bloomington***  
**Diane M. Mackie, *University of California, Santa Barbara***  
**Heather M. Claypool, *Miami University, Oxford, Ohio***

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Eliot Smith** is Chancellor's Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University, Bloomington. His research interests range widely, including person perception, prejudice and intergroup relations, political and social opinions, and situated and embodied cognition. He has published more than 150 scientific articles and chapters on these and other topics, and his work has been supported by research grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Science Foundation. Professor Smith earned his B.A. and Ph.D. at Harvard University, and before moving to Bloomington held positions at the University of California, Riverside and at Purdue University. Besides this textbook, he has authored *Beliefs about Inequality* (with James Kluegel) as well as editing *Beyond Prejudice: Differentiated Reactions to Social Groups* (with Diane Mackie). Among his professional honors are the Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations award in 1998, the Thomas M. Ostrom Award for contributions to social cognition in 2004, the Society of Social and Personality Psychology's Theoretical Innovation Prize in 2005, and the International Social Cognition Network's award for the best paper in 2009. He has been chair of a grant review committee at the National Institute of Mental Health, Editor of *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, and is currently Editor of *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Attitudes and Social Cognition*. These positions have given him tremendous appreciation for the best work in every area of social psychology. Professor Smith is married to Pamela Grenfell Smith, a poet and storyteller. They take great joy in their grown-up children, who share their passions for world music, science fiction, and good cooking, but the big deal for them is their astonishingly accomplished grandchildren, Griffin James Hassett and Iona Beatrice Hassett.

**Diane Mackie** is Professor and Chair of Psychological and Brain Sciences at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she has been honored with a Distinguished Teaching Award and listed as one of "Ten Terrific Teachers" by UCSB students. Professor Mackie grew up in New Zealand, received her B.A. and M.A. at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and then worked as a researcher at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She received her Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Princeton University in 1984. These opportunities to become steeped in both European and North American traditions of social psychology are reflected in her interests in integrating different perspectives and approaches both in her research and in this textbook. The author of more than 100 articles, chapters, and books on persuasion, social influence, group interaction, and intergroup relations, Professor Mackie is also co-editor of *Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping*:



*Interactive Processes in Group Perception* (with David Hamilton) as well as *Beyond Prejudice: Differentiated Reactions to Social Groups* (with Eliot Smith). Reflecting her broad interests, Professor Mackie has served as Associate Editor for *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, as well as on the editorial boards of almost all major social psychological journals. Both the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have funded her research. Professor Mackie counts among her honors fellow status in the Association for Psychological Science, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. However, by far her greatest (and busiest) honor is being Mom to college freshman Alex and high school freshman Nico, the two coolest kids on the planet.

**Heather Claypool** is Professor of Psychology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Her research interests focus on how motivation, emotion, and mood influence and are influenced by cognitive processes. Specific topics of study have examined how processing ease (or fluency) shapes social perceptions and behaviors; how feelings of positivity trigger feelings of familiarity; and how feelings of belongingness and a lack of belongingness shape emotions, self-esteem, social perceptions, and social information processing. She has published more than 30 scientific articles and chapters on these and other topics, and her work has been supported by research grants from the National Science Foundation. Professor Claypool earned her Ph.D. at Purdue University in 2002 (where Eliot Smith served as one of her mentors), and then worked as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of California, Santa Barbara (with Diane Mackie). In 2003, she took a position at Miami University in Oxford, OH, where she continues on the faculty today. She has been an Associate Editor for *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, is currently an Associate Editor at *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and serves on the editorial boards of several other journals. She has also served as a panelist for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program. Professor Claypool is married to Eric Core, an engineer, and they share a love for travel, tennis, good food, and their two adorable cats, Abby and Murphy.

# PREFACE

“No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise!” claims *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’s* Mock Turtle. “Why, if a fish came to ME, and told me he was going on a journey, I should say ‘With what porpoise?’” So, you may wonder, what’s our “porpoise” in writing this social psychology textbook when there are many others? The answer is simple—we undertook this journey because we wanted to provide undergraduates the opportunity to share in our excitement about and our appreciation for the richness, variety, and interconnectedness of human social behavior in a more meaningful, unified, and logical way. The behaviors examined by social psychologists affect all of us every day in real life, so we wanted to equip our students to interpret and connect what they learn about in our text, applying it to the rest of their lives. While many books portray social behavior as a list of interesting but unrelated phenomena that are explained by numerous theories that are presented once (and then forgotten), we wanted to do something different. Our goal is to show students how all the topics that fall into the realm of “social psychology” are indeed related to one another in relevant and important ways. To do so, we decided to present social behavior and the science that studies it in a conceptually and thematically integrated approach. We want to show students the wonderfully diverse *what* of social behavior—but we also want to highlight the impressive (and sometimes surprising) orderliness and organization of the *how* and *why* of it.

## THREE TYPES OF INTEGRATION

1. **Integration of diverse topics using unifying principles:** Eight basic principles of social behavior, introduced in Chapter 1, emerge and re-emerge throughout the text.
  1. People construct their own social reality.
  2. Social environments pervasively influence people.
  3. Motivational principle #1: People strive for mastery.
  4. Motivational principle #2: People seek connectedness.
  5. Motivational principle #3: People value “me and mine.”
  6. Processing principle #1: Conservatism; established views are slow to change.
  7. Processing principle #2: Accessibility; the most readily available information has the most impact.
  8. Processing principle #3: Superficial or deep processing: People can process information to a greater or lesser extent.

2. **Integration of the social and the cognitive:** Social psychology branched off from other areas of psychology based on social psychologists' firm conviction that people's behavior depends on the cognitive processes through which they perceive and interpret social situations. But social psychologists are also aware that social motives, interpersonal relationships, and emotional attachments to group membership guide and direct everything people do. The intertwining of social processes with cognitive processes is the essential tension of human social behavior, and so we have made it a central theme of our book. To address the ways in which social behavior is similar or different across cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities, we have included many contributions from research beyond North America and Europe and included new *Social Psychology and Culture* boxes to highlight cultural differences and similarities.

**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE: AWARENESS OF PERSONAL MORTALITY AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL THREAT**

Even those not facing a life-threatening illness, but who are simply subtly reminded of their own mortality, may choose to self-affirm as a means to cope. According to **Terror Management Theory** (Solomon and others, 2000), such a reminder leads us to cope by reaffirming our most basic cultural worldviews, such as religious beliefs or views about what is most important in life. Indeed, thoughts of one's own death may spark a host of positive, prosocial behaviors (Vail, Juhl, Arndt, Vess, Routledge, & Rutjens, 2012). But they also have a more negative side, generating intolerance and rejection for the deviant, the defiant, and the just "different"—anyone who fails to conform to the cultural worldview (Solomon and others, 2000).

3. **Integration of the science of psychology and its applications in real life:** Historically, social psychology has simultaneously focused its efforts on advancing theories to explain behavior while addressing important social problems. In our book, we demonstrate how research helps scientists explain phenomena that impact our everyday lives. For example, we include:
- a discussion of polygraph usage next to a section on nonverbal cues to deception;
  - an overview of jury decision-making in the chapter on group influence;
  - a discussion of how stereotypes can create self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom;
  - an account of why advertising might have especially strong effects on children.

## TEXT ORGANIZATION AND PEDAGOGY

As people who care deeply about our field, we take pride in demonstrating social psychology's growth as a science and the accumulation of knowledge about social behavior. By showing students social psychology as an integrated whole, rather than as a list of topics that happen to share a label, our approach makes our field both easier to understand and more applicable to their daily lives. As the same principles emerge over and over among diverse topic areas, they serve as a useful organizing framework and a context for particular findings and theories.


After an introductory chapter and one focused on research methods, the main part of the book is organized into three broad topic areas: social perception (Chapters 3–6), social influence (Chapters 7–10), and social relations (Chapters 11–14). The section on social perception emphasizes the role of cognitive and motivational processes, but it also reinforces the idea that all such processes are socially influenced—even such basic and personal ideas as what we think about ourselves. The social influence chapters focus on the role of social processes, but stress that the effects of social processes are filtered through cognitive and motivational processes. For example, the amount of effort devoted to processing a persuasive argument may differ depending on whether it is delivered by a friend, a sales person, or a politician. The section on social relations illustrates the way social and cognitive processes are inextricably intertwined as they shape the ways we get to know and like other people, cooperate in groups, and help (or harm) others. While we have chosen to present the topics in this order, we recognize that this is not necessarily the way everyone would prefer to teach the course. Our integrated approach makes it easy for instructors to teach chapters in different sequences (some possibilities are described in the Instructor’s Manual), since we apply the same themes consistently throughout the chapters.

You may observe that we have no separate chapters on law, business, or education. This is because, as part of our integration, examples of applications to real-world topics are woven throughout our text to reinforce the fact that what social psychologists study applies to the world beyond their labs. Further, we operate with a broad definition of what is “applied,” considering not only major societal institutions like law and business, but also such topics as personal relationships and divorce, media violence and aggression, social support and health, cooperation in solving environmental problems, norms on eating and health, conflicts in international relations, and the effectiveness of advertising. These applications are easily spotted throughout the text as boxes labeled *Social Psychology in Practice*.

#### SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN PRACTICE: PERSEVERANCE IN THE COURTROOM

When legally inadmissible evidence is introduced in courtroom proceedings, it can be stricken from the official trial record. The judge may even instruct jurors to disregard it. Unfortunately, jurors cannot wipe the information from their minds as easily as the court reporter can expunge the record. In fact, research has found that inadmissible evidence does influence jurors’ deliberations and verdicts (Thompson, Fong, & Rosenhan, 1981). The same is true of discredited evidence. In one mock-trial study, for example, one group of participants saw minimal evidence against the defendant, and only 18% voted for conviction. A second group saw the same evidence plus an eyewitness identification of the defendant; in that group, 72% voted for conviction. A third group, after receiving all this information, learned that the eyewitness was legally blind and was not wearing his glasses at the time he claimed to have seen the defendant. This discrediting information had virtually no impact, however, reducing the conviction rate only to 68% (Loftus, 1974). The perseverance bias means that, as in this example, information may have effects that persist even after the information is found to be false.

Throughout the text, we remind students of concepts and principles we’ve addressed and how they apply in other contexts—and even preview when a theory has applications that they’ll read about in future chapters. At the end of each chapter, we devote space to *Concluding Comments*, which are our broader reflections on some of the larger issues raised by the chapters, on interrelations among the chapters, or on special aspects about how the principles play themselves out in that chapter.



Chapter 8 describes some of the many predictions that researchers have derived from cognitive dissonance theory and self-perception theory.

### HOT TOPICS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: IS FOLLOWING NORMS IN THE GENES?

Directives, environments, behavior, in-groups—we absorb these signals, learning—and being taught—over time what the relevant norms are and why we should follow them. There is little doubt that learning plays a role in acquiring a desire to follow norms. But because of their adaptive role in facilitating group living, humans may have evolved to give special attention to norms. Humans in our ancient past who followed norms likely would have been more likely to survive, and thus modern humans may be descendants of those norm-following relatives. Recent work offers some supportive evidence. In one set of studies, students in both America and the United Kingdom read about behaviors allegedly performed in an unfamiliar culture, whose norms they did not know and could not have previously learned. Part of the material was norm-related such as, “an unresolvable argument must be taken to the Ariki, as is dictated by custom.” Other information did not describe norms. When the students’ memory for the material was assessed, the norm-related information was better remembered than the norm-irrelevant information (O’Gorman, Wilson, & Miller, 2008). These researchers argue that these findings indicate an automatic readiness to perceive norm-relevant information, which may enable humans to pick up on norms and ultimately follow them. Other work suggests that people categorize others spontaneously as violators versus non-violators of moral norms, much as we spontaneously categorize others based on race, sex, and age. This again suggests that humans may come equipped with cognitive processes that facilitate the impact of norms (van Leeuwen, Park, & Penton-Voak, 2012).

Social psychology is a continuously evolving science. To highlight some new and important studies, we’ve included new *Hot Topics in Social Psychology* boxes.

To support students as they read through the text, we have incorporated several features with them in mind. Every chapter begins with a *Chapter Overview* so that they know what to expect to learn about in the chapter. Then, at the start of each new section within the chapter, we include a *Section Preview* (in blue text) to help them understand the materials the first time they read them. This allows students to distinguish the main

concepts in each section from the less important supporting details. In addition, all key terms are included in a marginal glossary, so students can easily find them. The key terms are also located in a glossary at the end of the text. Lastly, *Chapter Summaries* at the end of each chapter highlight the key terms and concepts discussed in the chapter while the *Chapter Themes* box outlines the key themes discussed in the chapter.

#### social psychology

the scientific study of the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others

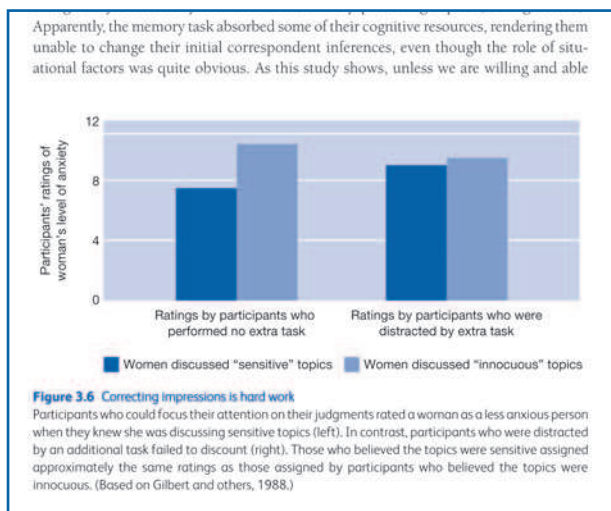
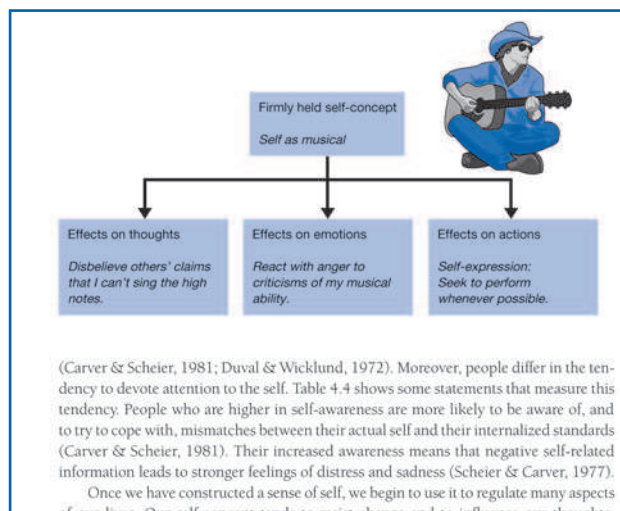
#### Growth and Integration

Since the 1950s and 1960s, social psychology has grown and flourished, moving to an integrated theoretical understanding of social and cognitive processes and to further applications of social-psychological theory to important applied problems.

Both basic and applied social psychology flourished in the United States during the prosperous 1950s and 1960s. Backed by expanding university enrollments and ger-



In line with our emphasis on the principles that underlie the diversity of behavior, explanations are often visually supported by graphs and flow-charts and study findings are visually summarized in easy-to-understand charts and graphs.



## ONLINE RESOURCES ACCOMPANYING THE TEXT

As innovations in teaching and technology continue to change the way courses are being taught in classrooms around the world, our online resources have been designed to support you and your students as you use our book. The companion website for the text is located at <http://www.psypress.com/cw/smith>. There, both instructors and students will find a wealth of resources to help with the teaching and learning of the materials covered in the book.

For Instructors:

- Instructor's Manual (revised by Sara Crump of Baker University)
- Ideas for in-class activities
- Editable test bank of questions
- PowerPoint lecture slides with images from text
- Sample Syllabi
- Annotated web links to videos

For Students:

- Practice quizzes
- Chapter summaries
- Research activities
- Annotated web links to additional resources

## TO THE STUDENT: AN INTRODUCTION AND TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR COURSE

Have you ever wondered why some people seem willing to help a person in distress while others might blatantly ignore a person's cries for help? Or why another person's opinion can have such a huge impact on how you feel about yourself? Social psychology is a fascinating field that directly impacts your everyday existence. Our goal is to help you better understand your own and others' social behaviors—to get beyond the *what*, to the *how* and *why*. We do this by using an integrated approach in which we apply the same overarching principles that we introduce in Chapter 1 to all the topics that fall under the umbrella of the science of social psychology. By understanding just a few basic principles and seeing how they apply in different contexts, we hope you'll see how all social behavior is interrelated, and how social behaviors are all pieces of the same larger puzzle rather than a variety of separate puzzles. Therefore, we don't expect you to memorize lots of unrelated ideas; rather, we hope that our integrated approach helps you see, understand, remember, and apply these principles in your own life.

### Some Study Tips

Our combined years of experience teaching (and studying) bring some insights that we'd like to share with you. We have included a number of features within the text to support learning and best practices for studying (such as Chapter Overviews, Section Previews, and Chapter Summaries), and here is some additional advice that will help you study more effectively and be better active readers.

- Start by reading the chapter title and Chapter Overview. Then read the introductory paragraph and browse through the images in the chapter. This will give you a general sense of the chapter's content.
- Within a chapter, work on one section at a time—this isn't a novel, so you shouldn't read it like one. Pay attention to the Section Previews before you read each section. This should help make the key material in that section easier to understand and prevent you from getting bogged down in details.
- Keep an eye out for those basic principles we introduce in Chapter 1 of the text. This will help you connect materials throughout the chapter and make the story of social psychology more coherent across what might sometimes seem like unrelated topics. We will always use the same key words or phrases whenever an example of the principles in action arises.
- We include marginal references that refer you back to previous chapters or ahead to future chapters so you can see how concepts and principles relate to topics elsewhere in the text. This will help you see similarities between topics and chapters so you can link the new material to things you may have already learned about—or remind you to keep an eye out for a certain concept later in the text as you know you'll encounter it elsewhere.
- Key terms are always in blue boldface type and the definitions appear in the margins as well as all together at the end of the text for easy reference. As scientists,

psychologists use technical terms for precision in writing. Don't try to memorize the definitions on first reading; it is more important to first understand the gist of what you are reading. After you have finished reading through the chapter, read through the definitions again and then try to learn them and review them for your exam.

- Once you've finished reading the chapter's main sections, read the Concluding Comments, Chapter Themes, and Summary. If anything seems unfamiliar to you, go back to that section and re-read it.

Last, but not least, enjoy yourself! Ask questions! Think about all the social behaviors we still don't understand and how researchers might go about examining and explaining those behaviors. And then think about all you have learned in this book and how you can apply it to your everyday life—at school, at work, at home, and in your relationships.



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We have been lucky indeed to have worked with the many dedicated and talented people at Psychology Press. We began with the conviction that a textbook taking an integrated approach to social psychology could be written. We thank J. George Owen, good friend and incomparable next-door neighbor, for encouraging us in this process and Gün Semin for steering us toward Psychology Press. Rebecca Pearce has applied her wisdom and experience to shaping and improving this fourth edition.

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Heather Claypool joined us as a co-author for this fourth edition. She worked with Eliot during her Ph.D. studies and with Diane as a postdoctoral researcher, so she already knew our quirks and passions. She has brought fresh insights and novel ideas to this revision, as well as an endless supply of tennis examples, and she has Diane and Eliot's heartfelt gratitude for her many contributions. We would like to thank each other for the many benefits of co-authorship. Through our collaboration on each section and sometimes each sentence of the text, we believe we have accomplished a sort of integration through teamwork. We learned to respect and admire each other's different strengths and talents, to appreciate each other's different views of the field, and to blame each other when deadlines were missed! We also became much better friends in the process.

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# WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

WASN'T DELINQUENCY MASTERY  
 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY  
 ACCESSIBILITY SUPERFICIALITY DEPTH ME MINE  
 CONSERVATISM  
 CONNECTEDNESS PROCESSES

In the fall of 1951, Princeton University's undefeated football team played Dartmouth College in a particularly hard-fought game. The teams were long-term rivals, and the game started rough and went downhill from there. Penalties punctuated the game, and fights left players on both sides with serious injuries before Princeton finally won. One month later, two social psychologists asked Princeton and Dartmouth undergraduates to view a film of the game (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954). The responses were astonishing. Princeton fans and Dartmouth supporters reported seeing events so differently that they might have been watching different games. Princeton students saw a constant barrage of Dartmouth violence and poor sportsmanship, with Princeton players occasionally retaliating in self-defense. Dartmouth students rated the teams as equally aggressive but saw their battered team's infractions as understandable responses to brutal Princeton attacks. One Dartmouth alumnus who watched the film saw so few Dartmouth violations that he concluded he must have been sent an edited copy of the film.

Perhaps these findings are not really so astonishing if you consider that fans of opposing teams hardly ever agree on the impartiality of the umpiring. Similarly, partisan observers of political debates almost always proclaim their own candidate "the winner," and proud parents at the school music contest often disagree with the judges' decision. Yet consider the profound questions that these findings raise. If the world is objectively "out there" for all to see, how can observers reach such different conclusions about what seems to be the same event? Why do we so often end up seeing exactly what we expected to see, and how then can we decide what "really" happened? Can the same innocent feelings of belonging that make us see our team, our candidate, or our child in such positive terms also produce biased judgments, unfair decisions, and unequal treatment of others?

Thirty years after Hastorf and Cantril's study, researchers at Vanderbilt University asked two groups of students to consider the difficult issue of whether convicted criminals should be given probation as an alternative to imprisonment (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987). One group of students had a special reason to be concerned with the issue: They had been led to believe that the probation policy might soon be introduced in their area. For the other group, the issue was merely academic—the policy was not

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### ■ A Definition of Social Psychology

The Scientific Study . . .  
 . . . of the Effects of Social and Cognitive Processes  
 . . .  
 . . . on the Way Individuals Perceive, Influence, and Relate to Others

### ■ Historical Trends and Current Themes in Social Psychology

Social Psychology Becomes an Empirical Science  
 Social Psychology Splits from General Psychology Over What Causes Behavior  
 The Rise of Nazism Shapes the Development of Social Psychology  
 Growth and Integration

### ■ How the Approach of This Book Reflects an Integrative Perspective

Two Fundamental Axioms of Social Psychology  
 Three Motivational Principles  
 Three Processing Principles  
 Common Processes, Diverse Behaviors

### ■ Plan of the Book

being considered for their community. The researchers told the students that, to help them make up their minds, they would hear a tape of a local candidate speaking in favor of the issue at a political rally. What the students did not know was that the researchers had actually prepared four quite different tapes. On one tape, the candidate put forward compelling evidence in support of probation while an enthusiastic audience warmly applauded his words. On a second, the same effective presentation elicited scattered hisses, boos, and heckling from the audience. A third tape had the candidate giving rambling, specious, and disjointed arguments, which were met with enthusiastic applause from the audience. And on the fourth tape, the weak arguments were greeted by boos and hissing.

When the researchers polled the students whose interest in the probation issue was merely academic, the impact of the audience's taped response was clear. Students in this group who heard the audience greet the candidate's position with enthusiasm adopted the position themselves, and those who heard the audience voice disdain rejected the candidate's position. A completely different pattern of responses emerged among students who expected the issue to affect their community. These students focused on the content of the speech. They were swayed if they heard the candidate give cogent arguments but remained unpersuaded if the arguments were weak—regardless of the applause or hisses of the taped audience. Why were the reactions of other people so compelling to some students and so unimportant to others? Why did some participants “go with the flow” while others considered the issues carefully? Did some students care less than others about being right, or were all of the students trying to take different paths to the “truth?”

Like the Vanderbilt students, we are all bombarded daily by attempts to persuade us: advertising campaigns, paid political messages, even the cajoling of friends and family. Consider the last time you were persuaded by one of these attempts. What approach was used by the person who persuaded you? Did that person present you with the hard facts, or did he or she play on your emotions? If you were told that “everyone else” had already joined the parade, would you be more likely to go along or more likely to rebel? Or would it depend on the issue?

Questions like those raised by these studies lure social psychologists into their labs every day in search of reliable answers. Social psychology offers a special perspective on human behavior, because the social aspects of human behavior—the ways that people's thoughts and actions are affected by other people—can be both powerful and puzzling. Our goal in this book is to give you some insight into how people act, and why they act the way they do, by introducing you to some of the many questions social psychologists ask about social behavior, the ways they go about answering those questions, and the answers they have found. We know that you will find these questions intriguing and hope that the often surprising conclusions will make you want to delve more deeply into these compelling issues.

Our first step will be to provide a definition of social psychology: to chart out the territory we will be covering and to give you a glimpse of what makes the terrain so fascinating. We next describe how social psychology developed its special perspective on human behavior. Like other fields of human inquiry, contemporary social psychology is a product of its own history and of the history of the societies in which it developed. With a quick survey of the past behind us, we then map out the territory ahead. The final part of the chapter provides a sneak preview of the material we cover in the rest of

this book. To help you find your way with confidence, we point out some signposts and landmarks to look for along the route.

## A DEFINITION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**Social psychology** is the scientific study of the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others. Notice that social psychology is defined as a science, that social psychologists are as keenly interested in underlying social and cognitive processes as they are in overt behavior, and that the central concern of social psychology is how people understand and interact with others. Let us consider each of these components in turn.

### **social psychology**

the scientific study of the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others

## The Scientific Study . . .


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Social psychologists, like other scientists, gather knowledge systematically by means of scientific methods. These methods help to produce knowledge that is less subject to the biases and distortions that often characterize common-sense knowledge.

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Of course, you have been studying social behavior all your life. Everyone uses common sense and “street smarts” to make sense of the social world they inhabit because we all want to make good friends, reach mutually satisfying decisions, raise children properly, hire the best personnel, and live in peace and security rather than in conflict and fear. How does the social psychologist’s approach differ from our everyday approaches? The answer is found in methods, not goals. Although scientific researchers and common-sense observers share many goals—both wish to understand, predict, and influence people’s thoughts and behavior—their methods for achieving those goals differ greatly.

As common-sense observers, people often reach conclusions about social behavior based on limited samples from their own or others’ experiences. Therefore common-sense knowledge is sometimes inconsistent, even contradictory. You may have heard, for example, that “opposites attract,” and also the reverse, that “birds of a feather flock together.” As scientists, on the other hand, social psychologists study social behavior systematically, seeking to avoid the misconceptions and distortions that so often afflict our common-sense knowledge. Of course, even scientific knowledge is not infallible. The history of science shows that some findings from individual studies cannot be confirmed by further observation, and many conclusions proposed as scientific truths are eventually overturned by new insights. But as you will see in Chapter 2, scientific conclusions are sounder and more resistant to challenge than common-sense knowledge because they are based on systematic methods of gathering information and are constructed with an awareness of the possibility of error.



This blue text is a brief preview of the section that follows. For advice on how you can use it to improve your efficiency in studying the text, turn back to the “To the Student” section in the Preface, pages xxx–xxxi.



## . . . of the Effects of Social and Cognitive Processes . . .

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The presence of other people, the knowledge and opinions they pass on to us, and our feelings about the groups to which we belong all deeply influence us through social processes, whether we are with other people or alone. Our perceptions, memories, emotions, and motives also exert a pervasive influence on us through cognitive processes. Effects of social and cognitive processes are not separate but inextricably intertwined.

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### social processes

the ways in which input from the people and groups around us affect our thoughts, feelings, and actions

### cognitive processes

the ways in which our memories, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and motives influence our understanding of the world and guide our actions

A first date, a classroom presentation, a job interview, a problem-solving session with co-workers: What do these situations have in common? Each is a situation in which others observe us or interact with us, influencing our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. We try to make a good impression, to live up to the standards of the people we care about, to cooperate or compete with others as appropriate. These examples show the operation of social processes. **Social processes** are the ways in which our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by the people around us, the groups to which we belong, our personal relationships, the teachings of our parents and culture, and the pressures we experience from others.

**Cognitive processes**, on the other hand, are the ways in which our memories, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and motives guide our understanding of the world and our actions. Note that emotion and motivation are intrinsic parts of every cognitive process, just as are memory and thought. Modern social psychology rejects the misleading opposition—dating back to ancient Greek philosophers—between pure, “rational” thought and irrational emotions. Cognitive processes affect every aspect of our lives, because the content of our thoughts, the goals toward which we strive, and the feelings we have about people and activities—all the ways we act and react in the social world—are based on what we believe the world is like.

Though we have defined them separately, in reality, social and cognitive processes are inextricably intertwined. To illustrate their intimate connections, consider these two points.

First, social processes affect us even when others are not physically present: We are social creatures even when alone. Faced with an important decision, we often stop to think about the possible reactions of absent friends, relatives, or fellow group members, and these thoughts can also influence us. Even during many of our most private activities—writing a term paper, practicing a musical instrument, exercising, or showering—we are motivated by our concern for what others think of us. Think about the last time you rode an elevator in which you were the only passenger. We bet you stood facing the doors, just as you would have if other people had been physically present. Because our group memberships become part of who we are, they influence us even when other group members are absent. Whether other supporters are present or not, we rise to the defense of our party’s political platform and feel elated about our sports team’s victory. We react in this way because our party or our team has become a basic part of our identity. In cases like these, by considering the group in the individual, social psychologists examine how people are affected by their knowledge of what is expected of them, that is, by their knowledge about the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that are considered appropriate for members of their group.

Second, the social processes that affect us even when others are physically present depend on how we interpret those others and their actions, and therefore on the operation of cognitive processes. The impact of other people's arguments or comments in a group discussion depends on how we think and feel about those people and their statements: Is the argument strong and compelling, or shaky and questionable? Is the person who makes a particular comment genuinely trying to help the group arrive at the right answer or just seeking to dominate others by belittling their ideas? By studying the individual in the group, researchers gain insights into how people are affected by others who are physically present, whether they offer friendly hugs or scornful glares, provide trustworthy information or try to deceive, lead by example or wait for someone to follow. But in all these cases, the way others affect us depends on our own thoughts and feelings.

Whether we are alone or together with others, then, both social and cognitive processes operate together to affect everything we think, feel, and do.



**Photo 1.1 Group influence far from the group.** These soccer players of Moroccan descent are celebrating a goal scored in a 2012 match in Germany. Although engaged in a sporting competition, and away from their homeland, they so thoroughly accept their Muslim faith that they stop and pray after the goal. For all of us, beliefs, attitudes, and practices endorsed by the groups to which we belong strongly affect our thoughts, feelings, and actions, even when we are far away from other group members.

## ... on the Way Individuals Perceive, Influence, and Relate to Others

Social psychology focuses on the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others. Understanding these processes can help us comprehend why people act the way they do and may also help solve important social problems.

Social psychology seeks to understand the social behavior of individuals, a focus that distinguishes it from sociology, political science, and other social sciences. The cognitive and social processes we have just described affect individuals as they perceive, influence, and relate to others. Consequently, these processes shape all forms of social behavior, including some that are significant concerns in today's world. Here are some examples of social behaviors that are important concerns and some questions social psychologists might ask about them.

- **Why do many marriages end in divorce?** A social psychologist might study divorce as an outcome of the social and cognitive processes of conflict in marriages. The research might focus on questions like the following: How do couples interpret events that put the relationship under stress? What alternatives to the relationship do they believe they have? What types of actions in the course of an argument determine whether one partner storms angrily out of the house or allow the couple

to kiss and make up after a fight? Whereas sociologists might study the effects of unemployment on divorce rates in a society, social psychologists might instead examine the ways that being unemployed causes conflict and divorce, by affecting how the partners think about their relationship or how they try to influence one another.

- ***How do salespeople sell products?*** Have you ever found yourself leaving a store carrying an item that was different from what you entered the store to buy, wondering how you were manipulated into purchasing it? A social psychologist would be interested in knowing the social and cognitive processes that induced you to make the purchase. For example, how can a sales pitch expertly play on the consumer's needs, desires, or feelings of guilt or obligation? Did the salesperson subtly hint that the product you asked about was unfashionable or outdated, while pushing a newer (and more expensive) item instead? In contrast, an economist might study whether TV advertisements or in-store promotions produce more total sales.
- ***What causes outbreaks of ethnic violence?*** An historian or journalist might document the unique events that sparked a particular conflict. To the social psychologist, however, intergroup hostility stems from fundamental aspects of the ways people think about and interact with members of different groups. These include both competition for concrete resources (like jobs and political clout) and people's attitudes, emotions, and actions toward their own and other social groups. Social psychologists would ask whether the ways people categorize individuals into groups, the stereotypes they form about others, their preferences for people "just like them," or their feelings of power or powerlessness contribute to intergroup hostility.

Thus, social psychology seeks an understanding of the reasons people act the way they do in social situations. Such an understanding helps us explain events in our own lives: that disastrous first date, the successful job interview, the loneliness of being the new kid on the block, the hesitation we feel before making a major decision. It also helps us comprehend the factors that contribute to the complex events of our times: crime and violence, ethnic unrest and civil war, the spread of pandemic diseases, the destruction of the global environment. And if we understand how people are influenced by social and cognitive processes, we can begin developing solutions for such pressing social problems (Walton, 2014). For example, knowing that stereotypes and prejudice about members of other religious groups may have contributed to violent conflict in the Middle East or Northern Ireland suggests that changing those beliefs might help to prevent recurrences. In fact, social-psychological research has been instrumental in exposing workplace discrimination (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991) and investigating why innocent people sometimes confess to crimes they did not commit (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). It has suggested policies to increase people's feelings of security and self-worth in their close relationships (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2010) and to improve classroom environments and performance for minority students (Walton & Cohen, 2011). It has also been influential in developing programs to reduce tensions in situations of intense intergroup conflict (Gross, Halperin, & Porat, 2013). Thus the social-psychological perspective invites us not only to understand but also to act on that understanding.

## HISTORICAL TRENDS AND CURRENT THEMES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

How did social psychology come to develop its particular point of view? Like any field of knowledge, social psychology is a product of its past. The current focus of its research reflects historical events of the 20th and 21st centuries, changing societal concerns, and developments in other scientific fields, as well as changes in the techniques social psychologists have used in their research. This brief survey of the field's history will place the field in context and serve as a partial explanation for where social psychology stands today.

### Social Psychology Becomes an Empirical Science


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Soon after the emergence of scientific psychology in the late 19th century, researchers began considering questions about social influences on human thought and action.

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From the time of the ancient Greeks, the study of the human condition was considered to be the domain of philosophy. Like social psychologists today, early philosophers recognized the impact that other people can have on individual behavior. Plato, for example, speculated about the “crowd mind,” arguing that even the wisest individuals, if assembled into a crowd, might be transformed into an irrational mob. Through the ages, philosophers continued to theorize about the workings of the human mind—and they still do—but the development of social psychology had to await the emergence of its parent discipline, the science of psychology. This new field was born in the late 19th century, when a few researchers in Germany, impressed by laboratory methods being used by physiologists, began to employ experimental techniques to understand mental processes like sensation, memory, and judgment.

The experimental investigation of social-psychological issues began soon afterward, as researchers in North America, Britain, and France began systematically measuring how behavior is influenced by the presence of others. A study published in 1898 by an American researcher, Norman Triplett, is sometimes cited as the first research study in social psychology (G. W. Allport, 1954a). Triplett, having noticed that swimmers and cyclists performed better when competing against their rivals than when practicing by themselves, wondered whether the presence of other people has a generally beneficial effect on performance. To find out, he asked school children to wind fishing line onto reels as quickly as possible, with and without others present. Sure enough, the children's performance improved in the presence of others. This interesting finding, however, appeared to contradict a conclusion that Max Ringelmann, a French agricultural engineer, had reached in an even earlier study conducted in the 1880s. Ringelmann found that when people worked together to pull on a rope or push on a cart, they put less effort into the task than when they worked alone (Ringelmann, 1913). The study of group effects on performance still continues today, and we now know that Ringelmann's and Triplett's results are not necessarily inconsistent. As you will see in Chapter 11, the presence of others often facilitates performance when individual contributions are easily identified, but it reduces performance when people are “lost in a crowd.”



As you will see in Chapters 2, 3 and 9, all these topics are still being actively researched today.

For the first social psychologists, this puzzle was just one among many questions about how people influence one another. Early researchers also tackled questions about how facial expressions and body movements reveal people's feelings, how people conform to the suggestions of others, and the role that experimenters might play in influencing the outcomes of research (Haines & Vaughan, 1979). The first two textbooks bearing the name Social Psychology both appeared in 1908. One of these, by psychologist William McDougall, argued that all social behavior stems from innate tendencies or instincts, an idea that was popular throughout psychology at the time. The other, by sociologist E. A. Ross, took up the theme that was soon to become social psychology's central concern: that people are heavily influenced by others, whether those others are physically present or not.

### Social Psychology Splits from General Psychology Over What Causes Behavior

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Throughout much of the 20th century, North American psychology was dominated by behaviorism, but social psychologists maintained an emphasis on the important effects of thoughts and feelings on behavior.

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Although it arrived on the coattails of general psychology, social psychology soon developed an identity distinct from that of its parent discipline. Early in the 20th century, North American psychology as a whole became dominated by the behaviorist viewpoint. This perspective, exemplified by the work of John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, denied the scientific validity of explanations for behavior that invoke mental events like thoughts, feelings, and emotions. For radical behaviorists, a legitimate science of human activity could be based only on the study of observable behavior as influenced by observable environmental stimuli.

Most social psychologists, however, resisted the behaviorist view that thoughts and feelings had no place in scientific explanations. They accepted the behaviorists' argument that the ultimate goal of science is to explain behavior, but their studies showed that behavior could not be explained without taking into account people's thoughts and feelings. Social psychologists learned that individuals often hold divergent views of, and react in different ways to, the same object or idea, be it a football game, a political candidate, or capitalism. Such findings could be explained only by differences in individuals' attitudes, personality traits, impressions of others, group identifications, emotions, goals, and so forth (F. H. Allport, 1924). Behaviorists were certainly right in their belief that external stimuli can influence behavior. However, social psychologists maintained that the effect of any stimulus depends on how individuals and groups interpret it. Right from the start, then, social psychology was distinctive in its conviction that understanding and measuring people's perceptions, beliefs, and feelings are essential to understanding their overt behavior (E. E. Jones, 1985).

## The Rise of Nazism Shapes the Development of Social Psychology

In the 1930s and 1940s, many European social psychologists fled to North America, where they had a major influence on the field's direction. Significant questions generated by the rise of Nazism and the Second World War shaped research interests during this period.

It has been said that the one person who has had the most impact on the development of social psychology in North America is Adolf Hitler (Cartwright, 1979). Ironic though this observation is, it contains important elements of truth. In fact, both the events that precipitated the Second World War and the war itself had a dramatic and lasting impact on social psychology.

As Nazi domination spread across Europe in the 1930s, a number of psychologists fled their homelands to continue distinguished scientific careers in North America. One result was that the major growth in social psychology was concentrated in North America for the next few decades. In addition, this influx of European researchers consolidated social psychology's special emphasis on how people interpret the world and how they are influenced by others. Most European researchers were trained not in the behaviorist tradition that was prominent in North America but in Gestalt theory, which sought to understand the rules underlying the organization of perception. This school of thought took for granted the role cognitive processes play in our interpretations of the social world. Around the same time, researchers became increasingly impressed by anthropologists' accounts of the pervasiveness of cultural influences on people's thoughts and behavior. It fell to social psychologists to identify the mechanisms by which such influences occurred, and they soon developed techniques to perform realistic studies of complex social influences in the laboratory. Muzafer Sherif's (1936) elegant experiments, for example, showed that a social group can influence even a person's perception and interpretation of physical reality, as you will see in Chapter 9.

But the war's effect on social psychology went beyond bringing a new group of skilled researchers to North America. Revelations of Nazi genocide led a horrified world to ask questions about the roots of prejudice (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). How could people feel and act on such murderous hatred for Jews, homosexuals, and members of other groups? These questions still resonate today as the world contemplates ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Syria, and "gay bashing" on streets around the world.

Conditions created by the Second World War also drew social psychologists to the search for solutions to immediate practical problems. With food in short supply and rationing in full swing, the U.S. government asked social psychologists how to convince civilians to change their eating habits: to eat less steak and more kidneys and liver, to drink more milk, and to feed their babies cod-liver oil and orange juice (Lewin, 1947). Social psychologists were also called on to help the military maintain troop morale, improve the performance of aircraft and tank crews (Stouffer, 1949), and teach troops to resist enemy propaganda—and even to brush their teeth regularly (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

Social psychologists flocked to applied research willingly, realizing that they would be able to develop and test general theories of behavior even as they solved practical problems. As we will see in Chapter 10, Kurt Lewin (1947) found that active participation