

THIRD EDITION

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# APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Understanding and Addressing Social and Practical Problems

Jamie A. Gruman  
Frank W. Schneider  
Larry M. Coutts



# **Applied Social Psychology**

**Third Edition**

*To Solly, Tommi, and Michi*

—JAG

*To my wife Scottie and our loving parents in memory*

—FWS

*To Jacinthe, Sarah, and Juliane*

—LMC

**Applied Social Psychology**  
**Understanding and Addressing Social**  
**and Practical Problems**  
**Third Edition**

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# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>PART I FOUNDATIONS OF APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Defining the Field of Applied Social Psychology</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Frank W. Schneider, Jamie A. Gruman, and Larry M. Coutts</i>	
Social Psychology	3
<i>Defining Social Psychology</i>	4
<i>Social Psychology as a Science</i>	5
Applied Social Psychology	8
<i>Applied Social Psychology as a Science</i>	8
<i>The Role of Personal Values</i>	10
<i>Historical Context of Applied Social Psychology</i>	10
<i>A Problem Focus</i>	12
<i>Approaches to Applied Social Psychology</i>	16
<i>Social Influences on Behavior: The Power of the Situation</i>	17
<i>Levels of Analysis</i>	21
<i>The Need for a Broad Approach</i>	23
<i>Various Roles of Applied Social Psychologists</i>	24
Overview of Book	25
Summary	25
<b>2. Social Psychological Theory</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Michelle A. Krieger, Greg A. Chung-Yan, and Shelagh M. J. Towson</i>	
The Scientific Process	29
Theory in Social Psychology	31
<i>Functions of Social Psychological Theories</i>	31
<i>Characteristics of Social Psychological Theories</i>	31

Cognitive Dissonance Theory	33
<i>Description</i>	33
<i>Organization</i>	33
<i>Direction</i>	34
<i>Intervention</i>	37
<i>Summing Up Cognitive Dissonance Theory</i>	38
Theory of Planned Behavior	39
<i>Description</i>	39
<i>Organization</i>	41
<i>Direction</i>	41
<i>Intervention</i>	42
<i>Summing Up the Theory of Planned Behavior</i>	43
Summary	44
<b>3. Research Methods in Applied Social Psychology</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>Kenneth M. Cramer and Louise R. Alexitch</i>	
Methods of Data Collection	46
<i>Variables and Their Measurement</i>	46
<i>Self-Report Methods: The Special Case of Surveys</i>	47
<i>Observational Methods</i>	50
Research Designs	52
<i>True Experiments</i>	52
<i>Quasi-Experiments</i>	56
<i>Correlational Studies</i>	58
<i>Descriptive Studies</i>	60
Research Settings	61
Qualitative Research Methods	62
Research Ethics	64
Postscript	65
Summary	67
<b>4. Intervention and Evaluation</b>	<b>69</b>
<i>Adam Lodzinski, Michiko S. Motomura, and Frank W. Schneider</i>	
Design of Interventions	70
<i>Nature of Interventions</i>	70
<i>Key Tasks in Intervention Design and Delivery</i>	71
Evaluation of Interventions	74
<i>Reasons for Evaluating Interventions</i>	75
<i>Ineffective Interventions</i>	76
<i>Types of Evaluation</i>	78
<i>Importance of Research Design in Evaluating Interventions</i>	79
<i>Evidence-Based Interventions</i>	79
An Intervention Example: Reducing Alcohol Problems on Campus	80
<i>Identifying the Problem</i>	80
<i>Developing a Solution: Forming the Intervention Hypothesis</i>	81
<i>Goal Setting and Designing the Intervention</i>	82

<i>Implementing the Intervention</i>	82
<i>Evaluating the Intervention</i>	82
Incorporating Qualitative Methods to Design and Evaluate Interventions	84
<i>Further Applications of Social Norm Theory</i>	86
Other Interventions	86
<i>Examples of Other Interventions</i>	86
<i>Complex Problems Require Complex Solutions</i>	87
Influencing Social Policy	89
Intervention Issues	90
<i>Process Issues</i>	90
<i>Ethical Issues</i>	91
Summary	93

## **PART II APPLYING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO ARENAS OF LIFE** 95

### **5. Applying Social Psychology to Clinical and Counseling Psychology** 97

<i>Kenneth E. Hart and Phillip A. Ianni</i>	
The Origins of Psychological Disorders	100
<i>The Social Psychological Roots of Social Anxiety</i>	102
<i>A Social Psychological Model of Depression</i>	107
The Treatment and Prevention of Psychological Disorders	111
<i>Self-Presentation Theory: An Approach to Treating Social Anxiety</i>	112
<i>Hopelessness Theory Approach to Treating Depression</i>	114
The Diagnosis of Psychological Disorders	117
<i>Biases in Clinical Decision Making</i>	120
<i>Final Thoughts</i>	127
Summary	127

### **6. Applying Social Psychology to Sports Teams** 129

<i>Philip Sullivan, Deborah L. Feltz, and Lori Dithurbide</i>	
Team Dynamics	132
<i>Team Cohesion</i>	132
<i>Team Confidence</i>	139
<i>Effective Communication</i>	144
<i>Team Goal Setting</i>	147
Team Building	149
<i>Family Psychology Intervention</i>	149
<i>Communication Training Intervention</i>	150
Summary	152

### **7. Applying Social Psychology to the Media** 155

<i>David R. Ewoldsen and Beverly Roskos</i>	
How Does Media Violence Affect Us?	157
<i>The Consequences of Viewing Media Violence</i>	159
<i>Imitation of Violence</i>	162



<i>Media Violence and Aggressive Thoughts</i>	166
<i>Media Violence and Fear</i>	169
What Happens When We Watch Pornography?	171
<i>Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Nonviolent Pornography</i>	173
<i>Effects of Exposure to Embedded Violent Sexual Material</i>	175
<i>Reducing the Harmful Effects of Exposure to Violent Sexual Material</i>	176
Does Political News Coverage Affect Us?	180
<i>How the Media Influence Our Thoughts</i>	180
<i>Effects of Negative Media Coverage of the Government</i>	184
Summary	188
<b>8. Applying Social Psychology to Health</b>	<b>189</b>
<i>Kathryn D. Lafreniere and Kenneth M. Cramer</i>	
Health Psychology Defined	191
<i>The Biopsychosocial Model</i>	193
<i>Social Variables and Health</i>	194
Promoting Health and Preventing Illness	194
<i>Persuasion and Social Influence in Media Health Coverage</i>	195
<i>Health Literacy: Evaluating Health-Related Information</i>	
<i>on the Internet</i>	199
<i>Family, Peer, and School Influences</i>	200
Changing Health Behavior	203
<i>Health Belief Model</i>	203
<i>Theory of Planned Behavior</i>	205
<i>Transtheoretical Model</i>	207
Stress, Coping, and Social Support	211
<i>Stress and Coping</i>	211
<i>Social Support</i>	215
Summary	219
<b>9. Applying Social Psychology to Education</b>	<b>221</b>
<i>Louise R. Alexitch</i>	
Intrapersonal Processes: Increasing Success, Reducing Failure	222
<i>What Factors Affect Student Performance?</i>	223
<i>How Can Student Performance Be Improved?</i>	229
Interpersonal Processes: Teachers and Students Interacting	237
<i>Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement</i>	237
<i>Students Interacting With Other Students</i>	241
<i>When Interactions Turn Ugly: Aggression in School</i>	244
Summary	250
<b>10. Applying Social Psychology to Organizations</b>	<b>253</b>
<i>Larry M. Coutts and Jamie A. Gruman</i>	
The Individual in an Organizational Context	256
<i>Making Sense of Others in the Work Environment</i>	256

<i>Job Satisfaction: Antecedents and Consequences</i>	262
Interpersonal Processes in Organizations	271
<i>Communication</i>	271
<i>Group Decision Making</i>	277
Summary	285
<b>11. Applying Social Psychology to the Criminal Justice System</b>	<b>287</b>
<i>David M. Day and Stéphanie B. Marion</i>	
The Crime and the Criminal	289
<i>The Social Psychology of a Crime</i>	289
<i>The Origins of Criminal Behavior</i>	291
The Response of the Criminal Justice System	297
<i>The Police Investigation</i>	297
<i>The Courtroom</i>	306
<i>The Prison Setting</i>	310
Summary	318
<b>12. Applying Social Psychology to the Community</b>	<b>321</b>
<i>Kathryn D. Lafreniere, Stewart Page, and Charlene Y. Senn</i>	
What Is Community Psychology?	322
<i>Defining Community Psychology</i>	322
<i>Origins of Community Psychology</i>	323
<i>Community Psychology Values and Approaches</i>	324
Sense of Community	327
<i>Life in the City</i>	327
<i>The Internet as a Community and Source of Help</i>	329
Diversity Versus Prejudice and Stigmatization	333
<i>The Importance of Diversity</i>	334
<i>Research on Stigmatization</i>	335
<i>The Media and Stigmatization</i>	337
Bringing About Social Change	338
<i>Social Action and Activism</i>	339
<i>Using Research to Influence Social Change</i>	341
<i>Activism in Research</i>	344
<i>Influencing Policy</i>	345
<i>Changing Structural or Social Barriers</i>	347
Summary	349
<b>13. Applying Social Psychology to the Environment</b>	<b>351</b>
<i>Robert Gifford</i>	
Resource Dilemmas	353
<i>A Family of Dilemmas</i>	354
<i>What Is a Resource Dilemma?</i>	355
<i>Studying Resource Dilemmas</i>	358
<i>Strategies for Inducing Pro-Environment Behavior</i>	361

The Built Environment	368
<i>Social Design</i>	369
<i>Defensible Space</i>	376
Epilogue	381
Summary	381
<b>14. Applying Social Psychology to Diversity</b>	<b>383</b>
<i>Catherine T. Kwanter and Sherry Bergeron</i>	
Societies: Cultural Diversity	385
<i>Hofstede's Cultural Taxonomy</i>	385
<i>Schwartz's Values Framework</i>	390
<i>Social Axioms Approach</i>	391
Demographics: Personal Diversity	393
<i>Gender</i>	393
<i>Ethnic Background</i>	397
<i>Social Class</i>	398
Consequences of Diversity: Opportunities and Challenges	399
<i>Creativity and Innovation</i>	400
<i>Problem Solving</i>	401
<i>Prejudice and Discrimination</i>	401
<i>Conflict</i>	404
<i>Theories of Conflict</i>	405
<i>Conflict Management and Resolution</i>	408
Summary	413
<b>PART III APPLYING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO ONE'S OWN LIFE</b>	<b>415</b>
<b>15. Applying Social Psychology to Personal Relationships</b>	<b>417</b>
<i>Ann L. Weber and Jennifer Dobson</i>	
The Need to Be Close	420
Attraction	421
<i>Proximity and Familiarity</i>	422
<i>Physical Attractiveness</i>	423
Attachment	427
<i>Infant Attachment</i>	427
<i>Adult Attachment Styles</i>	428
<i>Assess Your Attachment Style</i>	428
<i>Applying Attachment Lessons</i>	429
The Selection Process	430
<i>The T-Shirt Study</i>	430
<i>Selection Process Lessons and Applications</i>	432
Conclusion: The Science of Closeness	433
Summary	433

<b>16. Applying Social Psychology to the Classroom</b>	<b>435</b>
<i>Randolph A. Smith</i>	
Cognitive Errors and Student–Teacher Relations	436
<i>Fundamental Attribution Error</i>	437
<i>Belief Perseverance</i>	440
<i>Social Categorization</i>	443
Self-Perceptions and Their Academic Consequences	445
<i>Self-Handicapping</i>	445
<i>Self-Serving Bias</i>	448
<i>Overjustification Effect</i>	450
Conclusion: Social Psychology in the Classroom	452
Summary	452
<b>17. Applying Social Psychology to the Good Life: Balancing Optimism and Pessimism</b>	<b>453</b>
<i>Jamie A. Gruman, Kenneth E. Hart, and Phillip A. Ianni</i>	
Introduction to Positive Social Psychology	454
Optimism	456
<i>Introduction to Optimism–Pessimism</i>	456
<i>Self-Assessment of Optimism–Pessimism</i>	457
<i>The Social Psychology of Optimism</i>	459
<i>The Benefits of Optimism</i>	463
<i>Positive Coaching Exercises</i>	464
Pessimism	468
A Balanced View of Optimism and Pessimism	469
Broadening the Perspective on Well-Being	471
Summary	472
<b>References</b>	<b>473</b>
<b>Author Index</b>	<b>529</b>
<b>Subject Index</b>	<b>555</b>
<b>About the Editors</b>	<b>589</b>
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>591</b>



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# PREFACE

This textbook serves as an introduction to **applied social psychology**, which is the branch of the field of social psychology that focuses on understanding social and practical problems and on developing intervention strategies directed at the amelioration of such problems. As editors of this third edition, as with the first two editions, we have two main objectives. One objective is to produce a text for a course in applied social psychology that is compatible with the interests and abilities of students at the advanced undergraduate level. The second main objective is to share with students the promise of applied social psychology and our excitement about the field. That excitement can be traced to a considerable extent to our mutual involvement in the graduate program in applied social psychology at the University of Windsor: Frank Schneider was a co-founder of the program, Jamie Gruman earned his doctorate from the program, and Larry Coutts served as a faculty member in the program. Our excitement also stems from an awareness of the mounting evidence of the applicability of social psychological theory and knowledge to the improvement of the functioning of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and societies with respect to a wide variety of social and practical problems.

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## REACTIONS TO EARLIER EDITIONS

Not long after the publication of the first edition our initial vision for the book began to be confirmed by two formal reviews of the book (Boon, 2005; Simpson, 2005) and by the rate of its adoption as a text. Both reviewers had high praise for the book, including how well we were able to maintain consistency of writing style and organization despite the involvement of many authors. An unanticipated reward for us was the pedagogical impact the book had on the reviewers themselves. One reviewer wrote,

I have a renewed enthusiasm for my field and a much deeper appreciation of the range of situations in which social psychological theory and research may be, and indeed have been, applied, and a fuller understanding of the opportunities, perhaps even the obligation, that I have, as a social psychologist, to do research that positively impacts the world. (Boon, 2005, p. 251)

The second reviewer wrote,

“This is a refreshing, well-written, inspirational text that suggests that psychology is indeed making progress in making the world a better place. Reading it has revitalized my desire to redirect my formal experimental social psychology training to solve practical problems.” (Simpson, 2005)

We also were encouraged by the number of instructors who adopted the book for courses in applied social psychology and related courses (applied psychology, special topics in social psychology, etc.), as well as by the feedback from the psychology editor at SAGE that *Applied Social Psychology* was regarded as among their more successful books. Moreover, we were pleased to learn of the book's adoption in a number of graduate courses, including applied social psychology and the social bases of behavior. We were also delighted to learn that the book is used around the globe. One indication of its global impact was a review of the second edition in the *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology* (Team JIAAP, 2014).

## ORGANIZATION

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As with the two earlier editions, the book maintains a balance between social psychological theory, research, and application. The book is formally divided into three parts.

**Part 1: Foundations of Applied Social Psychology** includes four chapters that provide readers with bases for understanding the processes by which applied social psychologists develop theories, acquire knowledge, and design and evaluate interventions. Chapter 1 defines the field of applied social psychology and places the field in a historical and intellectual context. Chapter 2 defines and illustrates the nature of theory and the processes of theory development. Chapter 3 reviews basic research designs and data collection methods used by applied social psychologists. Chapter 4 defines and illustrates the steps involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmatic interventions.

**Part 2: Applying Social Psychology to Arenas of Life** consists of 10 chapters that examine how social psychological theory and research evidence have been applied to understanding and addressing social and practical problems in different topic areas: clinical/counseling (Chapter 5), sports teams (Chapter 6), media (Chapter 7), health

(Chapter 8), education (Chapter 9), organizations (Chapter 10), criminal justice (Chapter 11), community (Chapter 12), environment (Chapter 13), and diversity (Chapter 14).

**Part 3: Applying Social Psychology to One's Own Life** consists of 3 chapters that examine how individuals can draw on social psychological theory and evidence to improve their own lives (i.e., "personal interventions") with respect to selected areas of functioning: interpersonal relationships (Chapter 15), the classroom (Chapter 16), and well-being (Chapter 17).

The book is most appropriate for students with some course work in psychology. However, students with little or no formal background in psychology, including those in allied fields (e.g., sociology, communication studies) should feel comfortable in reading the book because of the instructional approach that it takes. In particular, the instructional features come in the first four chapters which systematically review the basic processes of applied social psychology.

## FEATURES

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- Central role of intervention strategies. The content and emphases are guided by the assumption that at the core of applied social psychology is the development and implementation of intervention strategies directed at the improvement of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and societies.
- Personal interventions. The book is unique among applied social psychology books in having chapters that focus on personal uses of social psychology that help to underscore the personal relevance and utility of the field.
- Focuses on research and intervention. The chapters in Part 2 include at least one *Focus on Research* and one *Focus on Intervention*, which are boxed sections that review in greater detail and depth research studies and social psychologically based interventions, respectively.
- Culture capsules. The chapters in Parts 2 and 3 include a *Culture Capsule* that reports empirical data that serve to illustrate that theoretical principles, research findings, and/or intervention

practices that are well established in the North American context do not necessarily hold true or prove effective in other cultural contexts.

- Other pedagogical elements. All chapters include an opening outline, highlighting of key terms, and a final summary. Also, chapters in Parts 2 and 3 begin with a vignette that sets the stage for the content that follows.

## NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

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- Content has been updated in all chapters resulting in over 270 new citations.
- Consistent with the growth in popularity of qualitative research methods, new detailed examples of research using qualitative methods have been added to *all* content chapters.
- Chapter 1 incorporates a new discussion of the different approaches adopted in the field of applied social psychology.
- Chapter 2 includes an entirely new section drawing on the *Theory of Planned Behavior* to explain the nature of social psychological theory.
- Chapter 3 incorporates an expanded discussion of qualitative research methods and notes where examples of specific methods can be found in the text.
- Chapter 4 includes a detailed example of incorporating qualitative methods to design and evaluate interventions.
- Chapter 6 introduces the concept of shared mental models in teams.
- Chapter 7 presents an updated account of video games and aggression, and how the Internet influences the way we consume news media.
- Chapter 8 includes a new section on health literacy and how people evaluate health claims on the Internet.
- Chapter 9 presents new material on procrastination, bullying, and cyberbullying, new Focus on Research and Focus on Intervention sections, and an expanded discussion of intrinsic motivation and goals.
- Chapter 10 includes new material on persuasiveness in communication.
- Chapter 11 incorporates an elaborated discussion of false confessions.
- Chapter 12 includes a new discussion of virtual sense of community, introduces the concept of intersectionality, and includes a new section on activism in research.

- Chapter 13 includes an expanded discussion on how to effectively craft messages to promote environmentally friendly behavior.
- Chapter 14 contains a new section on the social axioms approach to cultural analysis.
- Chapter 16 includes an expanded discussion of cognitive errors and tendencies.
- Chapter 17 includes an expanded discussion of optimism and pessimism, positive social psychology, and introduces a balance framework for conceptualizing how social phenomena promote “the good life.”
- In sum, new sections and/or substantially revised sections permeate the entire book.

## IN APPRECIATION

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We greatly appreciate the contributions of the many individuals who helped us accomplish this revision. We certainly extend our gratitude to the contributing authors who sustained their commitment to our vision for the book by agreeing to revise their chapters for a third edition. SAGE commissioned reviews of the second edition in preparation for the revision. We were very impressed with the reviewers’ thoughtful comments and suggestions and drew on many of their ideas to improve the new edition. We thank Reid Hester, our initial editor, who encouraged us to produce a third edition of the book, and Lara Parra who took over from Reid and saw the book to completion. Special thanks go out to Morgan Shannon, her editorial assistant, whose professionalism and timeliness made managing this large project much easier. We would also like to thank the faculty in the applied social psychology area of the University of Guelph for offering valuable insight into recent developments in the field and changes to the book that might best improve it. In particular, we thank Drs. Paula Barata, Benjamin Giguère, Ian Newby-Clark, and Kieran O’Doherty. We would especially like to thank Dr. Jennifer Dobson, who stepped up to assist with much of the research, writing, and administrative details involved with this revision. Her experience teaching applied social psychology using the text in addition to her keen judgment allowed her to offer valuable suggestions about



changes, and implement many of those changes. Jennifer's contributions cannot be overstated and are partly recognized with an authorship of one of the chapters. Finally, we'd like to thank all of the instructors around the globe who have chosen to use and continue to use this book in their courses. It is because of your continued willingness to select this book from among all of those available that a third edition was warranted and has allowed

this text to be born anew. We hope this third edition lives up to your expectations of it as the "go to" textbook on applied social psychology.

*Jamie A. Gruman*

*Frank W. Schneider*

*Larry M. Coutts*

# **PART I**

---

## **FOUNDATIONS OF APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**



# 1

## DEFINING THE FIELD OF APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

FRANK W. SCHNEIDER

JAMIE A. GRUMAN

LARRY M. COUTTS

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

#### Social Psychology

*Defining Social Psychology*

*Social Psychology as a Science*

#### Applied Social Psychology

*Applied Social Psychology as a Science*

*The Role of Personal Values*

*Historical Context of Applied Social*

*Psychology*

*A Problem Focus*

*Approaches to Applied Social Psychology*

*Social Influences on Behavior: The Power of the Situation*

*Levels of Analysis*

*The Need for a Broad Approach*

*Various Roles of Applied Social Psychologists*

Overview of Book

Summary

### SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the field of applied social psychology. Before reviewing some of the contributions of the field in various domains of life (e.g., education,

health, sports), it is important to define the field of applied social psychology, including placing it in the context of its parent field, social psychology. We begin by considering a series of social interactions described to one of the chapter authors by friends who live in a city in the

U.S. Midwest. The interactions occurred in early fall of 2010. The events were similar to those that commonly occur in people's lives—a first-time meeting of two couples, the development of friendship between the couples, and a party hosted by one of the couples—and as most social interactions do, they reflected a great variety of social psychological phenomena. These phenomena enable us to illustrate first the focus of the science of social psychology and then the focus of applied social psychology, which we define as a branch of social psychology.

A family moved in across the street from Ken and Kim (all names altered). They first met their new neighbors when the husband (Scott) came across the street with jumper cables to help Ken start his car. Ken thought that Scott seemed quite friendly. After the car was started, Ken and Kim invited Scott and his wife Jen in for coffee. The couples liked each other right away, discovering they had many interests in common. Over the following weeks a strong friendship began to develop as they spent more and more time together. The two men took in a number of sports events, and Ken interested Scott in taking up kayaking. The two women began to go to garage sales and flea markets. The couples agreed with each other's parenting practices and began to watch the other couple's children on occasion.

Kim suggested to Ken that they introduce their new friends to some of their other friends. So they invited Scott and Jen and three other couples to a pizza and game night at their home. The evening began very well. There was lively conversation and lots of laughter with Scott and Jen readily joining in. However, the pleasant atmosphere quickly evaporated when the conversation turned to the ongoing controversy over the proposal to build a mosque within a few blocks of the site of the World Trade Center disaster. The discussion became increasingly loud and heated as sharp differences of opinion emerged. One of the group, named Russ, forcefully advanced the position that the location of the mosque should be moved farther away from the site of the disaster out of respect for the memory of the victims and sensitivity for their loved ones. As Russ argued his position, Ken began to worry because he knew that Russ had temper control problems. Meanwhile,

Scott strongly disagreed with Russ, believing the mosque should be built as planned as a sign of America's commitment to religious freedom and because it would give an international face to moderate and peaceful Islam. When Scott raised the possibility that negative attitudes toward Arabs may underlie opposition to the proposed location, Russ became enraged and yelled, "I don't have negative attitudes toward Arabs; I just love my country," and then he pointed at Scott and called him "an un-American loser." That triggered louder voices and more accusations about prejudice and racism. Ken and Kim's friendly get-together was clearly in danger of falling apart. Several people tried to settle down the people who were arguing, but unfortunately no matter what they tried, nothing worked. Soon the party ended with Russ and Scott refusing to shake hands and all guests leaving for home.

## Defining Social Psychology

So, what about the above series of interactions helps to define the field of social psychology? For one thing, the events were rich in social psychological phenomena. Drawing on the definitions in several social psychology textbooks (e.g., Myers, Spencer, & Jordon, 2009), **social psychology** may be defined as the science that seeks to understand how people think about, feel about, relate to, and influence one another. Given this definition, you should be able to identify many examples of social psychological subject matter in the interactions involving Ken, Kim, and their friends by looking for instances of thinking about others, feeling about others, relating to others, and influencing others. Scott *related* to Ken by helping with his car. Ken *thought* Scott seemed friendly. Ken and Kim invited (*related to*) Scott and Jen into their home. The couples liked each other (*feelings*), and they subsequently *related* to each other by spending time together, including going to various events. Ken *influenced* Scott to take up kayaking. The couples agreed with (*thoughts*) each other's parenting practices and helped (*related to*) each other by watching each other's children. Ken was *influenced* by Kim to have the party. In the

beginning, the party went well with the partygoers *relating* positively in lively conversation, but then things turned for the worse. . . .

We want you to recognize that one can do a similar analysis with virtually any kind of social situation. Those processes exemplified in the above social interactions—thinking and feeling about others, relating to and influencing them—are precisely the kinds of processes that comprise the subject matter of social psychology, and thus are what social psychologists focus on in their research. We also can see where the examples of social psychological processes in those interactions can be related to broader areas of social psychological concern and investigation, such as helping behavior (e.g., Scott helping with Ken’s car), friendship formation (e.g., relationship between the two couples), person perception (e.g., Ken’s view of Russ as having a volatile temper), and interpersonal conflict (e.g., altercation among group members).

## Social Psychology as a Science

So, those are the kinds of phenomena that social psychology—as a science—seeks to understand. Do not pass lightly over the phrase “as a science” because the fact that social psychology is a science is fundamental to its meaning. The *essence of science* involves (a) a set of research methods that in combination make up what is known as the scientific method, and (b) a foundation of core values.

**Scientific method and core values.** The research methods (e.g., correlational, experimental) that fall under the scientific method are those that depend on **empirical tests**, that is, the use of systematic observation to evaluate propositions and ideas. An empirical test of an idea (e.g., people are happier in sunny weather) entails a research study that is (a) set up in such a way as to allow for the idea to be either refuted or supported, and (b) conducted so that what is done can be readily evaluated and replicated by other researchers (Cozby, 2009).

Undergirding and guiding research methods is a set of *core values* (Baron, Branscombe, & Byrne, 2008; Heiman, 2002). The following are some of the most important values that are absolutely essential for scientists to adhere to in their work:

- *Accuracy*: precise, error-free measurement and collection of information (i.e., data)
- *Objectivity*: minimization of bias in data collection and proposition testing
- *Skepticism*: refusing to believe findings and conclusions without rigorous verification
- *Open-mindedness*: readiness to accept as valid evidence that which may be inconsistent with one’s initial, and perhaps strongly held, beliefs or theories
- *Ethics*: acceptance of the absolute importance of ethical behavior in conducting research

Adherence to the first four values is necessary to ensure that findings of research validly reflect the phenomenon under study. The fifth value, ethics, also pertains to the validity of findings (e.g., researchers should not wittingly alter or misrepresent their results), but also encompasses the need to safeguard the dignity and well-being of research participants.

**Scientific understanding.** Thus, to seek an understanding of social psychological phenomena, social psychologists, as scientists, are guided by certain core values and rely on research strategies that fall under the scientific method. But, what is meant by “understanding”? In science, including social psychology, *understanding* involves the accomplishment of four goals: description, prediction, determining causality, and explanation (Cozby, 2009). We define these goals and illustrate them by considering the possible influence that having a pet has on the adjustment of the elderly.

The goal of **description** entails identifying and reporting the details and nature of a phenomenon, often distinguishing between the classes or types of the phenomenon and recording its frequency of occurrence. In the case of the adjustment of the elderly, a researcher might distinguish

between emotional adjustment and social adjustment and then measure and record the incidence of older persons in the community who fit this classification. The researcher could also find out whether or not each elderly person has a pet, perhaps listing information about the kind and number of pets. Achieving accurate descriptions of phenomena is one aspect of understanding. Understanding also entails prediction.

The **prediction** form of understanding requires knowing what factors are systematically related (i.e., correlated) to the phenomenon of interest. In our example, if research showed that there is a relationship between adjustment and having a pet—those who have a pet tend to be better adjusted—we would understand that adjustment in the elderly can be predicted in general by the presence or absence of a pet. This relationship would represent an important insight and lead us to consider the third form of understanding: ascertaining whether or not there is a causal relationship between having a pet and adjustment.

**Determining causality** between two factors means determining that changes in one factor produce (i.e., cause) changes in the other factor. Just because two factors are related does not necessarily mean that they are causally related. For instance, having a pet might have no effect whatsoever on the adjustment of the elderly even though a relationship may exist. A third factor could be responsible for the existence of the relationship. For instance, physical health could influence both how well-adjusted people feel and whether they have a pet (because it is easier to care for a pet if one is healthy). So, it is important not to be misled by a common tendency among people to assume that if two things are correlated, a causal relationship necessarily exists.

Identifying the cause(s) of phenomena is a very important component of understanding. If research were to establish that having a pet does indeed lead to improvements in adjustment (i.e., causes better adjustment), there could be clear-cut practical implications in terms of providing help to the elderly. But, pursuit of understanding does not end with the

establishment of causation. Understanding also involves explanation, the fourth goal.

**Explanation** pertains to establishing *why* a phenomenon or relationship occurs. We may understand that one factor causes another factor without knowing exactly why the effect occurs. If having a pet does lead to improvements in the adjustment of the elderly (and this does seem to be the case [Beck & Katcher, 1996]), what is the explanation? Is it because having a pet reduces loneliness, because it increases feelings of security, because it gives the elderly person a chance to feel needed by nurturing a living thing, or because of some other factor?

***Social psychological understanding: The formation of intergroup attitudes.*** Let us further illustrate social psychology's approach to understanding social psychological phenomena by considering the formation of intergroup attitudes. An attitude may be defined as "a person's overall evaluation of persons (including oneself), objects, and issues" (Petty & Wegener, 1998, p. 323). Thus, an *intergroup attitude* refers to a person's overall evaluation of members of a group to which the person does not belong. One major area of research in the study of attitudes focuses on understanding how attitudes are formed (i.e., how people come to possess their attitudes). Let us focus specifically on intergroup attitudes and consider a small portion of the research that sheds some light on how negative intergroup attitudes develop in people. Note that this is essentially a question of causality. We expect that you are sensitive to the serious social and political consequences that can stem from the existence of negative attitudes (and relations) between various groups (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, national) in the world. Recall the furor that erupted at Ken and Kim's party when one person simply implied that another person possessed negative attitudes toward Arabs.

One approach that social psychologists have taken in the study of the formation of intergroup attitudes is to examine the role of various agents of socialization. This research indicates that children tend to take on the attitudes of

important people around them (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) and that at least part of the explanation is that these people influence the development of such attitudes through the basic principles of learning, such as instrumental conditioning, classical conditioning, and observation (e.g., Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010; Oskamp, 1991). For instance, Castelli, De Dea, and Nesdale (2008) showed that when White preschool-age children observed a White adult nonverbally convey uneasiness toward a Black person, they subsequently expressed more negative attitudes toward Black targets.

So, intergroup attitudes are learned partly from others. But, as is the case with many social psychological phenomena, multiple factors must be recognized when exploring the determinants of intergroup attitudes. Another influential factor that is a salient part of people's lives is the media (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010). For instance, news reports about terrorism have been linked to increased prejudice toward Arabs (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009). It is especially noteworthy that social psychologists also have found that people's attitudes toward other groups may be influenced by the simple fact that they see themselves as members of a particular group. When people view themselves as belonging to one group (e.g., Americans), that group is referred to as the in-group; nonmembers of the in-group (e.g., non-Americans) are called the out-group. Many investigations confirm the existence of a very robust phenomenon called **in-group/out-group bias**, which means that in-group members tend to evaluate and relate to the in-group favorably and to the out-group less favorably (or unfavorably). This might not seem particularly surprising. What is remarkable, however, is that in-group/out-group bias is such a basic social psychological phenomenon that it can show up even in a situation where there is just the slightest differentiation between the in-group and the out-group. In many laboratory experiments, Tajfel and his colleagues (e.g., Tajfel & Billig, 1974) and others (e.g., Allen & Wilder, 1975) divided participants—all strangers—into two groups on the basis of trivial criteria

(e.g., those who underestimate and those who overestimate the number of dots on slides). Across experiments, participants consistently assigned more favorable rewards and traits to in-group members than to out-group members (see also Paladino & Castelli, 2008). Relatedly, Lyons, Kenworthy, and Popan (2010) recently provided evidence linking negative attitudes and behaviors toward Arab immigrants among Americans to their degree of identification with their national in-group (i.e., being American). So, we know that simply being a member of a group contributes to the development of negative attitudes toward other groups. We also have a glimpse of some social psychological factors that were potentially relevant to whether or not Russ, in fact, did harbor negative attitudes toward Arabs (as intimated by Scott). These factors include the levels of ethnic tolerance, especially toward Arabs, of his significant other; his exposure to media reports about threatening acts associated with Arabs; and the strength of his national identity.

As we consider social psychology's approach to understanding the development of negative intergroup attitudes, let us recognize one more causal factor—competition. Around 1950, Muzafer Sherif and his research team took the investigation of intergroup relations into the field where they studied the role of competition between groups (Sherif, 1966b; Sherif & Sherif, 1953, 1969). The researchers conducted an ingenious series of 3-week experiments with 11- and 12-year-old boys at isolated camp settings. The investigations were conducted in weeklong phases. During Phase 1—group formation—the boys were divided into two groups of approximately 10 each. Each group lived in a separate cabin and, as arranged by the experimenters, engaged in a series of appealing activities that required cooperative interdependence (e.g., camping, building a rope bridge). Members of each group soon developed a sense of “we-feeling” as their group developed a definite role structure (e.g., leaders, followers) and set of norms (e.g., expectations about how things should be done). During Phase 2—group conflict—the researchers investigated conditions that resulted in negative



intergroup attitudes and behavior. They implemented a series of competitions (e.g., tug-of-war, skits) in which only the victorious group of boys won a prize. By the end of the week, the relations between the two groups had deteriorated to a very antagonistic situation involving strongly negative stereotypes (e.g., “sneaky,” “stinkers”) and behavior (e.g., name-calling, food fights, damage to property).

In all of the preceding examples of research on intergroup attitudes, we can see that the social psychologists focused on furthering the understanding of one or more of the following: how people think about, feel about, relate to, and influence each other. All of the research reviewed fits under social psychology’s umbrella. Now let us look under the applied social psychology umbrella.

## APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Sherif’s (1966b) field research on intergroup relations involved a third phase. During this phase—reduction of conflict—the researchers developed and evaluated an intervention strategy to improve the relations between the groups of boys. The strategy was designed in accordance with Sherif’s understanding of the existing research literature on the determinants of positive attitudes and relations among groups that are divided along racial, political, and industrial lines (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). The strategy was based on the idea that groups in conflict would experience improved relations if they cooperate in the attainment of **superordinate goals**, that is, goals that are highly appealing to both groups, but that can be attained only through their cooperative effort. During this phase, the groups of boys were introduced to a series of superordinate goals (e.g., pulling together on a rope to start a broken-down truck that had been on its way to get food). Over the course of several days, hostile interaction between the groups declined considerably and friendships began to cross group boundaries. Since this early work of Sherif, the utility of superordinate goals in

contributing to the reduction of conflict between a wide variety of groups has been well established (e.g., Kelly & Collett, 2008).

In Sherif’s research on breaking down the barriers between the groups of boys, we have an example of the *use of social psychology to effect positive social change*. Notice how his emphasis shifted from trying to understand the causes of a social problem—intergroup antagonism—to trying to come up with a strategy for doing something about the problem. This concern with contributing to positive change brings us more fully into the area of social psychology that focuses on application—applied social psychology.

**Applied social psychology** refers to the branch of social psychology that draws on social psychological theories, principles, methods, and research evidence to contribute to (a) the understanding of social and practical problems, and (b) the development of intervention strategies for improving the functioning of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and societies with respect to social and practical problems. In this definition, *functioning* is broadly viewed as encompassing how well people perform or operate with respect to any one of many criteria, including emotional and social adjustment, physical health, and performance in school, work, or athletics.

In our view, it is *the concern with the development of intervention strategies* that is unique to applied social psychology and sets it apart as a branch of social psychology. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on the meaning and focus of applied social psychology, and in so doing defines its position in the context of its parent field, social psychology.

## Applied Social Psychology as a Science

As a branch of social psychology, applied social psychology is by definition a science, accordingly it relies on the scientific method, and is guided by the core values of science. Moreover, applied social psychologists likewise

are motivated by the aforementioned goals of science: description, prediction, determining causality, and explanation. However, they are distinguished from other social psychologists by also having a strong interest in what may be regarded as the fifth goal of science: control (Christensen, 2004; Goodwin, 2003). In science, **control** means being able to manipulate conditions that will cause changes in a phenomenon. Thus, once scientific research has identified the causes of a phenomenon, the potential for scientific control will have been established. Returning to the example of pets and adjustment, once researchers determine that having a pet frequently improves adjustment in older people, a “pets visit nursing home” program might be implemented as an intervention strategy. Another example is that once the basic principles of attribution theory were formulated, clinical psychologists began to use them to develop interventions designed to alleviate depression (see Chapter 5).

Although their ultimate goal is to effect positive change—to improve the functioning of people—applied social psychologists themselves may conduct research that helps them to understand the nature and causes of phenomena that concern them. This is seen in Sherif’s (1966b) research on how competition can negatively affect intergroup relations. As another example, applied social psychologists who are interested in reducing bullying among schoolchildren (see Chapter 9) may investigate the correlates or causes of such antisocial behavior with a view toward using the results of their research to develop effective intervention strategies. However, it is often the case that they will draw on knowledge accumulated by other researchers who may or may not be interested in the direct application of research findings. That is, many social psychologists are very interested in conducting research that will enhance our understanding of social problems, but in their own work do not address how that understanding can be applied. Regardless of the origin of the research evidence, interventions that applied social psychologists are involved in developing,

such as bullying reduction strategies, will have solid scientific bases to them.

Thus, just as research studies designed to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon are guided by the researchers’ understanding of the existing theory and research evidence, so too are intervention strategies designed by applied social psychologists based on existing theory and knowledge. Furthermore, applied social psychologists’ responsibility does not stop with careful science-based design of intervention strategies, but rather extends for both scientific and ethical reasons to the evaluation of the consequences of the interventions. The scientific obligation stems from our responsibility to test the theoretical rationales and hypotheses underlying intervention strategies. The ethical obligation stems essentially from the need to ensure not only that the intended beneficiaries of interventions gain from them, but also that they (or others) do not experience unintended negative consequences. We return to the design and evaluation of intervention strategies in Chapter 4.

Another ethical implication of applied social psychology further elaborates on the idea of negative consequences. What if there are social psychological findings which can be implemented and which might produce some desirable immediate outcomes, but which might also have longer-term outcomes that could be undesirable? For example, research has shown that when subtle cues of being watched are present in the environment, people’s behavior may improve. In one interesting study, researchers examined how much money people would contribute to an “honesty box” to pay for the milk they put into their tea or coffee when a banner placed in clear view of the beverages depicted either flowers or a set of eyes. The results revealed that people paid on average 2.76 times more when the banner depicted eyes (Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts, 2006). Based on findings like these, some people suggest that individuals in certain professions, like policing, should wear body cameras to encourage good behavior. For example, in 2015 the mayor of London initiated a plan to deploy 20,000 body cameras on police officers