

The image is a book cover for 'Social Psychology' by Robert A. Baron and Nyla R. Branscombe, Thirteenth Edition. It features a collage of three educational scenes. The top left shows a woman in an orange shirt pointing at a whiteboard with a red marker. The top right shows a group of four students (three women and one man) gathered around a laptop, looking at the screen with interest. The bottom section shows a close-up of a woman with dark curly hair smiling as she reads a yellow book. The entire cover is decorated with a pattern of overlapping circles in various shades of gray and yellow.

Pearson New International Edition

Social Psychology
Robert A. Baron Nyla R. Branscombe
Thirteenth Edition

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Glossary

- above average effect** The tendency for people to rate themselves as above the average on most positive social attributes.
- action identification** The level of interpretation we place on an action; low-level interpretations focus on the action itself, whereas higher-level interpretations focus on its ultimate goals.
- actor-observer effect** The tendency to attribute our own behavior mainly to situational causes but the behavior of others mainly to internal (dispositional) causes.
- additive tasks** Tasks for which the group product is the sum or combination of the efforts of individual members.
- affect** Our current feelings and moods.
- affective forecasts** Predictions about how we would feel about events we have not actually experienced.
- aggression** Behavior directed toward the goal of harming another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.
- anchoring and adjustment heuristic** A heuristic that involves the tendency to use a number of value as a starting point to which we then make adjustments.
- asynchronous forms of communication** Unlike face-to-face communication where there is no delay, asynchronous forms such as e-mail and other forms of text messaging give people a period of time during which they can think about their response before responding.
- attachment style** The degree of security experienced in interpersonal relationships. Differential styles initially develop in the interactions between infant and caregiver when the infant acquires basic attitudes about self-worth and interpersonal trust.
- attitude** Evaluation of various aspects of the social world.
- attitude similarity** The extent to which two individuals share the same attitudes.
- attitude-to-behavior process model** A model of how attitudes guide behavior that emphasizes the influence of attitudes and stored knowledge of what is appropriate in a given situation on an individual's definition of the present situation. This definition, in turn, influences overt behavior.
- attribution** The process through which we seek to identify the causes of others' behavior and so gain knowledge of their stable traits and dispositions.
- autobiographical memory** Concerned with memory of the ourselves in the past, sometimes over the life course as a whole.
- autokinetic phenomenon** The apparent movement of a single, stationary source of light in a dark room. Often used to study the emergence of social norms and social influence.
- automatic processing** This occurs when, after extensive experience with a task or type of information, we reach the stage where we can perform the task or process the information in a seemingly effortless, automatic, and non-conscious manner.
- availability heuristic** A strategy for making judgments on the basis of how easily specific kinds of information can be brought to mind.
- balance theory** The formulations of Heider and of Newcomb that specify the relationships among (1) an individual's liking for another person, (2) his or her attitude about a given topic, and (3) the other person's attitude about the same topic. Balance (liking plus agreement) results in a positive emotional state. Imbalance (liking plus disagreement) results in a negative state and a desire to restore balance. Nonbalance (disliking plus either agreement or disagreement) leads to indifference.
- bargaining (negotiation)** A process in which opposing sides exchange offers, counteroffers, and concessions, either directly or through representatives.
- body language** Cues provided by the position, posture, and movement of others' bodies or body parts.
- bona fide pipeline** A technique that uses priming to measure implicit racial attitudes.
- brainstorming** A process in which people meet as a group to generate new ideas freely.
- bullying** A pattern of behavior in which one individual is chosen as the target of repeated aggression by one or more others; the target person (the victim) generally has less power than those who engage in aggression (the bullies).
- catharsis hypothesis** The view that providing angry people with an opportunity to express their aggressive impulses in relatively safe ways will reduce their tendencies to engage in more harmful forms of aggression.
- central route to persuasion** Attitude change resulting from systematic processing of information presented in persuasive messages.
- classical conditioning** A basic form of learning in which one stimulus, initially neutral, acquires the capacity to evoke reactions through repeated pairing with another stimulus. In a sense, one stimulus becomes a signal for the presentation or occurrence of the other.
- close friendship** A relationship in which two people spend a great deal of time together, interact in a variety of situations, and provide mutual emotional support.
- cognitive dissonance** An internal state that results when individuals notice inconsistency between two or more attitudes or between their attitudes and their behavior.

- cohesiveness** The extent to which we are attracted to a social group and want to belong to it.
- cohesiveness** All forces (factors) that cause group members to remain in the group.
- collective guilt** The emotion that can be experienced when we are confronted with the harmful actions done by our ingroup against an outgroup. It is most likely to be experienced when the harmful actions are seen as illegitimate.
- collectivism** Groups in which the norm is to maintain harmony among group members, even if doing so might entail some personal costs.
- common ingroup identity model** A theory suggesting that to the extent individuals in different groups view themselves as members of a single social entity, intergroup bias will be reduced.
- common-bond groups** Groups that tend to involve face-to-face interaction and in which the individual members are bonded to each other.
- common-identity groups** Face-to-face interaction is often absent, and the members are linked together via the category as a whole rather than each other.
- communal approach** In the context of long-term relationships, a principle suggesting that each partner should try to meet the other's needs, and *not* seek to balance the benefits that each receives from the relationship.
- companionate love** Love that is based on friendship, mutual attraction, shared interests, respect, and concern for one another's welfare.
- compliance** A form of social influence involving direct requests from one person to another.
- conditioned stimulus** The stimulus that comes to stand for or signal a prior unconditioned stimulus.
- conditions of uncertainty** Where the "correct" answer is difficult to know or would take a great deal of effort to determine.
- conflict** A process in which individuals or groups perceive that others have taken or will soon take actions incompatible with their own interests.
- conformity** A type of social influence in which individuals change their attitudes or behavior to adhere to existing social norms.
- consensus** The extent to which other people react to some stimulus or even in the same manner as the person we are considering.
- consistency** The extent to which an individual responds to a given stimulus or situation in the same way on different occasions (i.e., across time).
- consummate love** In Sternberg's triangular model of love, a complete and ideal love that combines intimacy, passion, and decision (commitment).
- contact hypothesis** The view that increased contact between members of various social groups can be effective in reducing prejudice between them.
- cooperation** Behavior in which group members work together to attain shared goals.
- correlational method** A method of research in which a scientist systematically observes two or more variables to determine whether changes in one are accompanied by changes in the other.
- correspondence bias (fundamental attribution error)** The tendency to explain others' actions as stemming from dispositions even in the presence of clear situational causes.
- correspondent inference** A theory describing how we use others' behavior as a basis for inferring their stable dispositions.
- counterfactual thinking** The tendency to imagine other outcomes in a situation than the ones that actually occurred ("What might have been").
- cultures of honor** Cultures in which there are strong norms indicating that aggression is an appropriate response to insults to one's honor.
- cyberbullying** Bullying (repeated assaults against specific target persons) occurring in chatrooms and other Internet locations.
- deadline technique** A technique for increasing compliance in which target people are told that they have only limited time to take advantage of some offer or to obtain some item.
- debriefing** Procedures at the conclusion of a research session in which participants are given full information about the nature of the research and the hypothesis or hypotheses under investigation.
- deception** A technique whereby researchers withhold information about the purposes or procedures of a study from people participating in it.
- decision making** Processes involved in combining and integrating available information to choose one out of several possible courses of action.
- decision/commitment** In Sternberg's triangular model of love, these are the cognitive processes involved in deciding that you love another person and are committed to maintain the relationship.
- defensive helping** Help given to members of outgroups to reduce the threat they pose to the status or distinctiveness of one's own ingroup.
- deindividuation** A psychological state characterized by reduced self-awareness brought on by external conditions, such as being an anonymous member of a large crowd.
- dependent variable** The variable that is measured in an experiment.
- descriptive norms** Norms simply indicating what most people do in a given situation.
- diffusion of responsibility** A principle suggesting that the greater the number of witnesses to an emergency the less likely victims are to receive help. This is because each bystander assumes that someone else will do it.
- discrimination** Differential (usually negative) behaviors directed toward members of different social groups.
- dismissing attachment style** A style characterized by high self-esteem and low interpersonal trust. This is a conflicted

- and somewhat insecure style in which the individual feels that he or she deserves a close relationship but is frustrated because of mistrust of potential partners. The result is the tendency to reject the other person at some point in the relationship to avoid being the one who is rejected.
- distinctiveness** The extent to which an individual responds in the same manner to different stimuli or events.
- distraction conflict theory** A theory suggesting that social facilitation stems from the conflict produced when individuals attempt, simultaneously, to pay attention to the other people present and to the task being performed.
- distributive justice (fairness)** Refers to individuals' judgments about whether they are receiving a fair share of available rewards—a share proportionate to their contributions to the group or any social relationship.
- door-in-the-face technique** A procedure for gaining compliance in which requesters begin with a large request and then, when this is refused, retreat to a smaller one (the one they actually desired all along).
- downward social comparison** A comparison of the self to another who does less well than or is inferior to us.
- drive theories (of aggression)** Theories suggesting that aggression stems from external conditions that arouse the motive to harm or injure others. The most famous of these is the frustration-aggression hypothesis.
- ego-depletion** The lowered capacity to exert subsequent self-control following earlier efforts to exert self-control. Performance decrements are typically observed when people's ego strength has been depleted by prior efforts at self-control.
- ego-depletion** When our capacity to self-regulate has been reduced because of prior expenditures of limited resources.
- elaboration-likelihood model (ELM)** A theory suggesting that persuasion can occur in either of two distinct ways, differing in the amount of cognitive effort or elaboration the message receives.
- empathic joy hypothesis** The view that helps respond to the needs of a victim because they want to accomplish something, and doing so is rewarding in and of itself.
- empathy** Emotional reactions that are focused on or oriented toward other people and include feelings of compassion, sympathy, and concern.
- empathy-altruism hypothesis** The suggestion that some prosocial acts are motivated solely by the desire to help someone in need.
- entitativity** The extent to which a group is perceived as being a coherent entity.
- essence** Typically some biologically based feature that is used to distinguish one group and another; frequently can serve as justification for the differential treatment of those groups.
- evaluation apprehension** Concern over being evaluated by others. Such concern can increase arousal and so contribute to social facilitation effects.
- evolutionary psychology** A new branch of psychology that seeks to investigate the potential role of genetic factors in various aspects of human behavior.
- excitation transfer theory** A theory suggesting that arousal produced in one situation can persist and intensify emotional reactions occurring in later situations.
- experimentation (experimental method)** A method of research in which one or more factors (the independent variables) are systematically changed to determine whether such variations affect one or more other factors (dependent variables).
- explicit attitudes** Consciously accessible attitudes that are controllable and easy to report.
- fear appeals** Attempting to change people's behaviors by use of a message that induces fear.
- fearful-avoidant attachment style** A style characterized by low self-esteem and low interpersonal trust. This is the most insecure and least adaptive attachment style.
- feeling rules** Expectations about the appropriate emotions to display or express.
- foot-in-the-door technique** A procedure for gaining compliance in which requesters begin with a small request and then, when this is granted, escalate to a larger one (the one they actually desired all along).
- forewarning** Advance knowledge that one is about to become the target of an attempt at persuasion. Forewarning often increases resistance to the persuasion that follows.
- frustration-aggression hypothesis** The suggestion that frustration is a very powerful determinant of aggression.
- fundamental attribution error (correspondence bias)** The tendency to overestimate the impact of dispositional cues on others' behavior.
- gender stereotypes** Stereotypes concerning the traits possessed by females and males and that distinguish the two genders from each other.
- general aggression model (GAM)** A modern theory of aggression suggesting that aggression is triggered by a wide range of input variables that influence arousal, affective stages, and cognitions.
- glass ceiling** Barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified females from advancing to top-level positions.
- glass cliff** When women and minorities are seen as better leaders because of their ability to manage crises. They are more likely to be selected as leader when the situation contains more risk.
- glass cliff effect** Choosing women for leadership positions that are risky, precarious, or when the outcome is more likely to result in failure.
- group** A collection of people who are perceived to be bonded together in a coherent unit to some degree.
- group polarization** The tendency of group members to shift toward a more extreme position than initially held by those individuals as a result of group discussion.

- groupthink** The tendency of the members of highly cohesive groups to assume that their decisions can't be wrong, that all members must support the group's decisions strongly, and that information contrary to it should be ignored.
- habit** Repeatedly performing a specific behavior so responses become relatively automatic whenever that situation is encountered.
- heuristic processing** Processing of information in a persuasive message that involves the use of simple rules of thumb or mental shortcuts.
- heuristics** Simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a rapid manner and seemingly effortless manner.
- hooliganism** Negative stereotype about how people behave in crowds at sporting events, especially applied to incidents involving England's soccer fans.
- hostile aggression** Aggression in which the prime objective is inflicting some kind of harm on the victim.
- hypocrisy** Publicly advocating some attitudes or behavior and then acting in a way that is inconsistent with these attitudes or behavior.
- hypothesis** An as yet unverified prediction concerning some aspect of social behavior or social thought.
- ideology** The philosophical and political values that govern a group.
- illusion of truth effect** The mere repetition of information creates a sense of familiarity and more positive attitudes.
- implementation plan** A plan for how to implement our intentions to carry out some action.
- implicit associations** Links between group membership and trait associations or evaluations that the perceiver may be unaware of. They can be activated automatically based on the group membership of a target.
- implicit attitudes** Unconscious associations between objects and evaluative responses.
- implicit personality theories** Beliefs about what traits or characteristics tend to go together.
- implicit self-esteem** Feelings about the self of which we are not consciously aware.
- impression formation** The process through which we form impressions of others.
- impression management (self-presentation)** Efforts by individuals to produce favorable first impressions on others.
- incidental feelings** Those feelings induced separately or before a target is encountered; as a result, those feelings are irrelevant to the group being judged but can still affect judgments of the target.
- independent variable** The variable that is systematically changed (i.e., varied) in an experiment.
- individualism** Groups where the norm is to stand out and be different from others; individual variability is expected and disagreement among members is tolerated.
- information overload** Instances in which our ability to process information is exceeded.
- informational social influence** Social influence based on the desire to be correct (i.e., to possess accurate perceptions of the social world).
- informed consent** A procedure in which research participants are provided with as much information as possible about a research project before deciding whether to participate in it.
- ingratiation** When we try to make others like us by conveying that we like them; praising others to flatter them.
- injunctive norms** Norms specifying what ought to be done; what is approved or disapproved behavior in a given situation.
- instrumental aggression** Aggression in which the primary goal is not to harm the victim but rather attainment of some other goal—for example, access to valued resources.
- instrumental conditioning** A basic form of learning in which responses that lead to positive outcomes or which permit avoidance of negative outcomes are strengthened.
- intergroup comparisons** Judgments that result from comparisons between our group and another group.
- interpersonal trust** An attitudinal dimension underlying attachment styles that involves the belief that other people are generally trustworthy, dependable, and reliable as opposed to the belief that others are generally untrustworthy, undependable, and unreliable. This is the most successful and most desirable attachment style.
- intimacy** In Sternberg's triangular model of love, the closeness felt by two people—the extent to which they are bonded.
- intragroup comparisons** Judgments that result from comparisons between individuals who are members of the same group.
- introspection** To privately contemplate "who we are." It is a method for attempting to gain self knowledge.
- introspection illusion** Our belief that social influence plays a smaller role in shaping our own actions than it does in shaping the actions of others.
- job satisfaction** Attitudes individuals hold concerning their jobs.
- kin selection theory** A theory suggesting that a key goal for all organisms—including human beings—is getting our genes into the next generation; one way in which individuals can reach this goal is by helping others who share their genes.
- less-leads-to-more effect** The fact that offering individuals small rewards for engaging in counterattitudinal behavior often produces more dissonance, and so more attitude change, than offering them larger rewards.
- lineup** A procedure in which witnesses to a crime are shown several people, one or more of whom may be suspects in a case, and asked to identify those that they recognize as the person who committed the crime.
- linguistic style** Aspects of speech apart from the meaning of the words employed.
- loneliness** The unpleasant emotional and cognitive state based on desiring close relationships but being unable to attain them.
- love** A combination of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors that often play a crucial role in intimate relationships.

- low-ball procedure** A technique for gaining compliance in which an offer or deal is changed to make it less attractive to the target person after this person has accepted it.
- magical thinking** Thinking involving assumptions that don't hold up to rational scrutiny—for example, the belief that things that resemble one another share fundamental properties.
- matching hypotheses** The idea that although we would prefer to obtain extremely attractive romantic partners, we generally focus on obtaining ones whose physical beauty is about the same as our own.
- mediating variable** A variable that is affected by an independent variable and then influences a dependent variable. Mediating variables help explain why or how specific variables influence social behavior or thought in certain ways.
- mere exposure** By having seen before, but not necessarily remembering having done so, attitudes toward an object can be formed.
- metaphor** A linguistic device that relates or draws a comparison between one abstract concept and another dissimilar concept.
- meta-stereotypes** Beliefs about how one's group is viewed by another group; these are often negative.
- microexpressions** Fleeting facial expressions lasting only a few tenths of a second.
- minimal groups** When we are categorized into different groups based on some "minimal" criteria we tend to favor others who are categorized in the same group as ourselves compared to those categorized as members of a different group.
- modern racism** More subtle beliefs than blatant feelings of superiority. It consists primarily of thinking minorities are seeking and receiving more benefits than they deserve and a denial that discrimination affects their outcomes.
- mood congruence effects** The fact that we are more likely to store or remember positive information when in a positive mood and negative information when in a negative mood.
- mood dependent memory** The fact that what we remember while in a given mood may be determined, in part, by what we learned when previously in that mood.
- moral disengagement** No longer seeing sanctioning as necessary for perpetrating harm that has been legitimized.
- multicultural perspective** A focus on understanding the cultural and ethnic factors that influence social behavior.
- need for affiliation** The basic motive to seek and maintain interpersonal relationships.
- negative interdependence** A situation where if one person obtains a desired outcome, others cannot obtain it.
- negative-state relief model** The proposal that prosocial behavior is motivated by the bystander's desire to reduce his or her own uncomfortable negative emotions or feelings.
- noncommon effects** Effects produced by a particular cause that could not be produced by any other apparent cause.
- nonverbal communication** Communication between individuals that does not involve the content of spoken language. It relies instead on an unspoken language of facial expressions, eye contact, and body language.
- normative focus theory** A theory suggesting that norms will influence behavior only to the extent that they are focal for the people involved at the time the behavior occurs.
- normative social influence** Social influence based on the desire to be liked or accepted by other people.
- norms** Rules or expectations within a group concerning how its members should (or should not) behave.
- obedience** A form of social influence in which one person simply orders one or more others to perform some action(s).
- objectification of females** Regarding them as mere bodies that exist for the pleasure of others.
- objective scales** Those with measurement units that are tied to external reality so that they mean the same thing regardless of category membership (e.g., dollars earned, feet and inches, chosen or rejected).
- observational learning** A basic form of learning in which individuals acquire new forms of behavior as a result of observing others.
- optimistic bias** Our predisposition to expect things to turn out well overall.
- optimum level of well-being theory** A theory suggesting that for any specific task, there is an optimum level of subjective well-being. Up to this point, performance increases, but beyond it, performance on the task declines.
- overconfidence accuracy** The tendency to have more confidence in the accuracy of our own judgments than is reasonable.
- passion** In Sternberg's triangular model of love, the sexual motives and sexual excitement associated with a couple's relationship.
- passionate love** An intense and often unrealistic emotional response to another person. When this emotion is experienced, it is usually perceived as an indication of true love, but to outside observers it appears to be infatuation.
- peripheral route to persuasion** Attitude change that occurs in response to peripheral persuasion cues, which is often based on information concerning the expertise or status of would-be persuaders.
- perseverance effect** The tendency for beliefs and schemas to remain unchanged even in the face of contradictory information.
- personal happiness** Refers to subjective well-being, which involves global life satisfaction, satisfaction with specific life domains, frequent positive feelings, and relatively few negative feelings.
- personal-versus-social identity continuum** At the personal level, the self is thought of as a unique individual, whereas at the social identity level, the self is seen as a member of a group.
- persuasion** Efforts to change others' attitudes through the use of various kinds of messages.

- physical attractiveness** The combination of characteristics that are evaluated as beautiful or handsome at the positive extreme and as unattractive at the negative extreme.
- planning fallacy** The tendency to make optimistic predictions concerning how long a given task will take for completion.
- playing hard to get** A technique that can be used for increasing compliance by suggesting that a person or object is scarce and hard to obtain.
- pluralistic ignorance** When we collectively misunderstand what attitudes others hold and believe erroneously that others have different attitudes than us.
- pluralistic ignorance** Refers to the fact that because none of the bystanders respond to an emergency, no one knows for sure what is happening and each depends on the others to interpret the situation.
- politicized collective identity** Recognizing shared grievances and engaging in a power struggle on behalf of one's devalued group.
- possible selves** Image of how we might be in the future—either a “dreaded” potential to be avoided or “desired” potential that can be strived for.
- prejudice** Negative emotional responses based on group membership.
- preoccupied attachment style** A style characterized by low self-esteem and high interpersonal trust. This is a conflicted and somewhat insecure style in which the individual strongly desires a close relationship but feels that he or she is unworthy of the partner and is thus vulnerable to being rejected.
- priming** A situation that occurs when stimuli or events increase the availability in memory or consciousness of specific types of information held in memory.
- procedural justice** Judgments concerning the fairness of the procedures used to distribute available rewards among group members.
- proportion of similarity** The number of specific indicators that two people are similar divided by the number of specific indicators that two people are similar plus the number of specific indicators that they are dissimilar.
- prosocial behavior** Actions by individuals that help others with no immediate benefit to the helper.
- prototype** Summary of the common attributes possessed by members of a category.
- provocation** Actions by others that tend to trigger aggression in the recipient, often because they are perceived as stemming from malicious intent.
- proximity** In attraction research, the physical closeness between two individuals with respect to where they live, where they sit in a classroom, where they work, and so on. The smaller the physical distance, the greater the probability that the two people will come into repeated contact experiencing repeated exposure to one another, positive affect, and the development of mutual attraction.
- punishment** Procedures in which aversive consequences are delivered to individuals when they engage in specific actions.
- random assignment of participants to experimental conditions** A basic requirement for conducting valid experiments. According to this principle, research participants must have an equal chance of being exposed to each level of the independent variable.
- reactance** Negative reactions to threats to one's personal freedom. Reactance often increases resistance to persuasion and can even produce negative attitude change or opposite to what was intended.
- realistic conflict theory** The view that prejudice stems from direct competition between various social groups over scarce and valued resources.
- recategorization** Shifts in the boundaries between our ingroup (“us”) and some outgroup (“them”). As a result of such recategorization, people formerly viewed as outgroup members may now be viewed as belonging to the ingroup and consequently are viewed more positively.
- reference groups** Groups of people with whom we identify and whose opinions we value.
- relationships** Our social ties with other persons, ranging from casual acquaintance or passing friendships, to intense, long-term relationships such as marriage or lifetime friendships.
- repeated exposure effect** Zajonc's finding that frequent contact with any mildly negative, neutral, or positive stimulus results in an increasingly positive evaluation of that stimulus.
- representativeness heuristic** A strategy for making judgments based on the extent to which current stimuli or events resemble other stimuli or categories.
- repulsion hypothesis** Rosenbaum's provocative proposal that attraction is not increased by similar attitudes but is simply decreased by dissimilar attitudes. This hypothesis is incorrect as stated, but it is true that dissimilar attitudes tend to have negative effects that are stronger than the positive effects of similar attitudes.
- risk averse** We weigh possible losses more heavily than equivalent potential gains. As a result, we respond more negatively to changes that are framed as potential losses than positively to changes that are framed as potential gains.
- roles** The set of behaviors that individuals occupying specific positions within a group are expected to perform.
- salience** When someone or some object stands out from its background or is the focus of attention.
- schemas** Mental frameworks centering on a specific theme that help us to organize social information.
- schism** Splintering of a group into distinct factions following an ideological rift among members.
- secure attachment style** A style characterized by high self-esteem and high interpersonal trust. This is the most successful and most desirable attachment style.

- selective avoidance** A tendency to direct attention away from information that challenges existing attitudes. Such avoidance increases resistance to persuasion.
- self-affirmation** Refers to the tendency to respond to a threat to one's self-concept by affirming one's competence in another area (different from the threat).
- self-construal** How we characterize ourselves, which can vary depending on what identity is salient at any given moment.
- self-control** Achieved by refraining from actions we like and instead performing actions we prefer not to do as a means of achieving a long-term goal.
- self-deprecating** Putting ourselves down or implying that we are not as good as someone else.
- self-esteem** The degree to which we perceive ourselves positively or negatively; our overall attitude toward ourselves. It can be measured explicitly or implicitly.
- self-evaluation maintenance model** This perspective suggests that to maintain a positive view of ourselves, we distance ourselves from others who perform better than we do on valued dimensions and move closer to others who perform worse than us. This view suggests that doing so will protect our self-esteem.
- self-promotion** Attempting to present ourselves to others as having positive attributes.
- self-regulation** Limited capacity to engage our willpower and control our own thinking and emotions.
- self-serving bias** The tendency to attribute positive outcomes to internal causes (e.g., one's own traits or characteristics) but negative outcomes or events to external causes (e.g., chance, task difficulty).
- self-verification perspective** Theory that addresses the processes by which we lead others to agree with our views of ourselves; wanting others to agree with how we see ourselves.
- shifting standards** When we use one group as the standard but shift to use another group as the comparison standard when judging members of a different group.
- similarity-dissimilarity effect** The consistent finding that people respond positively to indications that another person is similar to themselves and negatively to indications that another person is dissimilar from themselves.
- singlism** Negative stereotyping and discrimination directed toward people who are single.
- social capital** The number of social ties each person has to others; typically these are connections people can draw on for knowledge, assistance, or other social goods.
- social cognition** The manner in which we interpret, analyze, remember, and use information about the social world.
- social comparison** The process through which we compare ourselves to others to determine whether our view of social reality is, or is not, correct.
- social comparison theory** Festinger (1954) suggested that people compare themselves to others because for many domains and attributes there is no objective yardstick to evaluate ourselves against, and other people are therefore highly informative.
- social dilemmas** Situations in which each person can increase their individual gains by acting in one way, but if all (or most) people do the same thing, the outcomes experienced by all are reduced.
- social embeddedness** Having a sense of that you know other persons because you know their reputations, often by knowing other people they know too.
- social exclusion** Conditions in which individuals feel that they have been excluded from some social group.
- social identity theory** Addresses how we respond when our group identity is salient. Suggests that we will move closer to positive others with whom we share an identity but distance from other ingroup members who perform poorly or otherwise make our social identity negative.
- social identity theory** A theory concerned with the consequences of perceiving ourselves as a member of a social group and identifying with it.
- social influence** Efforts by one or more persons to change the behavior, attitudes, or feelings of one or more others.
- social learning** The process through which we acquire new information, forms of behavior, or attitudes from other people.
- social learning view (of prejudice)** The view prejudice is acquired through direct and vicarious experiences in much the same manner as other attitudes.
- social loafing** Reductions in motivation and effort when individuals work in a group compared to when they work individually.
- social networks** Composed of individuals with whom we have interpersonal relationships and interact with on a regular basis.
- social norms** Rules indicating how individuals are expected to behave in specific situations.
- social perception** The process through which we seek to know and understand other people.
- social support** Drawing on the emotional and task resources provided by others as a means of coping with stress.
- staring** A form of eye contact in which one person continues to gaze steadily at another regardless of what the recipient does.
- status** The individual's position or rank within the group.
- stereotype threat** Can occur when people believe that they might be judged in light of a negative stereotype about their group or that, because of their performance, they may in some way confirm a negative stereotype of their group.
- stereotypes** Beliefs about social groups in terms of the traits or characteristics that they are believed to share. Stereotypes are cognitive frameworks that influence the processing of social information.
- stress** Our response to events that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, our physical or psychological functioning.
- subjective scales** Response scales that are open to interpretation and lack an externally grounded referent, including scales labeled from good to bad or weak to strong. They

- are said to be subjective because they can take on different meanings depending on the group membership of the person being evaluated.
- subliminal conditioning** Classical conditioning of attitudes by exposure to stimuli that are below individuals' threshold of conscious awareness.
- subtype** A subset of a group that is not consistent with the stereotype of the group as a whole.
- superordinate goals** Those that can only be achieved by cooperation between groups.
- superordinate goals** Goals that both sides to a conflict seek and that tie their interests together rather than driving them apart.
- survey method** A method of research in which a large number of people answer questions about their attitudes or behavior.
- symbolic social influence** Social influence resulting from the mental representation of others or our relationships with them.
- systematic observation** A method of research in which behavior is systematically observed and recorded.
- systematic processing** Processing of information in a persuasive message that involves careful consideration of message content and ideas.
- TASS model** The traits as situational sensitivities model. A view suggesting that many personality traits function in a threshold-like manner, influencing behavior only when situations evoke them.
- teasing** Provoking statements that call attention to the target's flaws and imperfections.
- terror management** Our efforts to come to terms with certainty of our own death and its unsettling implications.
- that's-not-all technique** A technique for gaining compliance in which requesters offer additional benefits to target people before they have decided whether to comply with or reject specific requests.
- theory of planned behavior** An extension of the theory of reasoned action, suggesting that in addition to attitudes toward a given behavior and subjective norms about it, individuals also consider their ability to perform the behavior.
- theory of reasoned action** A theory suggesting that the decision to engage in a particular behavior is the result of a rational process in which behavioral options are considered, consequences or outcomes of each are evaluated, and a decision is reached to act or not to act. That decision is then reflected in behavioral intentions, which strongly influence overt behavior.
- thin slices** Refers to small amounts of information about others we use to form first impressions of them.
- threat** It primarily concerns fear that our group interests will be undermined or our self-esteem is in jeopardy.
- tokenism** Tokenism can refer to hiring based on group membership. It can concern a numerically infrequent presence of members of a particular category or it can refer to instances where individuals perform trivial positive actions for members of out-groups that are later used as an excuse for refusing more meaningful beneficial actions for members of these groups.
- transactional justice** Refers to the extent to which people who distribute rewards explain or justify their decisions and show respect and courtesy to those who receive the rewards.
- triangular model of love** Sternberg's conceptualization of love relationships.
- type A behavior pattern** A pattern consisting primarily of high levels of competitiveness, time urgency, and hostility.
- type B behavior pattern** A pattern consisting of the absence of characteristics associated with the type A behavior pattern.
- unconditioned stimulus** A stimulus that evokes a positive or negative response without substantial learning.
- unpriming** Refers to the fact that the effects of the schemas tend to persist until they are somehow expressed in thought or behavior and only then do their effects decrease.
- unrequited love** Love felt by one person for another who does not feel love in return.
- upward social comparison** A comparison of the self to another who does better than or is superior to us.
- zero-sum outcomes** Those that only one person or group can have. So, if one group gets them, the other group can't.

Social Psychology: The Science of the Social Side of Life

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Social Psychology

The Science of the
Social Side of Life



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CHAPTER OUTLINE



“LIFE,” NOBEL PRIZE–WINNING AUTHOR ERNEST HEMINGWAY OFTEN SAID, “is a moveable feast.” What he meant by these words (which he also used as the title of his memoirs) is this: life, like a feast, offers something for everyone, all tastes and preferences. And, like a feast, life presents many options, spreading an ever-shifting mixture of experiences before us—some filled with delight and joy, whereas others entail loss and sorrow.

Now, please take a small step back from the “moveable feast” that is *your* life, and consider the following question: “What is the most important or central aspect of it—the part most intimately linked to your hopes, plans, dreams, and happiness?” Is it your work, either in school or in a job? Your hobbies? Your religious or political beliefs? All these are important parts of our lives, but we believe that if you think about this question more deeply, you will conclude that in fact, the most important aspect of your life is other people: your family, friends, boyfriend, girlfriend, roommates, classmates, professors, boss, coworkers, sports teammates—all the people you care about and with whom you interact. Do you still have lingering doubts on this score? Then try, for a moment, to imagine life in total isolation from others, as shown in movies such as *WALL-E*—the story of an intelligent robot left entirely alone on a deserted planet Earth (Figure 1). Would such a life, lived in total isolation, with no attachments to other people, no love, and no groups to which you belong, have any meaning? Would it even be worth living? While there are no firm answers to such questions, we do know that many people find the thought of such an isolated existence to be disturbing. Still have doubts? Then try to remember the last time your cell phone wasn’t working or you lost access to Facebook, Twitter, or other social networks. How did it feel to be out of contact? Not pleasant, we’re sure; and that’s why it isn’t surprising when we walk across campus and see many people texting and talking into their cell phones. Social contact is a central aspect of our lives, and in a very basic sense, defines who we are and the quality of our existence.

So now, get ready for an exciting journey, because the social side of life is the focus of this entire text. And we promise that the scope of this journey will be very broad indeed. But what precisely *is* social psychology? Basically, it’s the branch of psychology that studies all aspects of our social existence—everything from attraction, love, and helping on the one hand, to prejudice, exclusion, and violence on the other—plus everything in between. In addition, of course, social psychologists also investigate how groups influence us, as well as the nature and role of social

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Pixar Animation Studios/Walt Disney Pictures/Newscom



FIGURE 1 Would Life in Isolation Be Worth Living?

Can you imagine what it would be like to live entirely alone, having no contact with others? In the film "WALL-E," an intelligent (and very human) robot faced this situation—and clearly, he didn't like it.

thought—how we think about other people, and how this affects every aspect of our relations with them. Have you ever asked yourself questions such as:

Why do people fall in—and out—of love?

How can we get others to do what we want—to influence them in the ways we desire?

How do we know ourselves—our greatest strengths, our weaknesses, our deepest desires, and our strongest needs?

Why do we sometimes sacrifice our own interests or even welfare in order to help others?

And why do we sometimes withhold such help, even when it is strongly needed?

Why do we sometimes lose our tempers and say or do things we later regret? And more generally, why are anger, aggression, and even violence so common between individuals, groups, or even entire countries?



If you have ever considered questions like these—and many others relating to the social side of life—you have come to the right place, because they are the ones addressed by social psychology, and ones we examine in this text. Now, though, you may be

thinking, “That’s a pretty big territory; does the field of social psychology really cover *all* this?” As you will soon see, it does, so we are not exaggerating: social psychology truly does investigate the entire span of social existence—a true rainbow of human social experience—but with the individual as the focus.

At this point, we hope we have whetted your appetite for the “moveable feast” that will follow, so we’d like to plunge right in and begin addressing topics and questions like the ones mentioned above. Before doing so, though, we feel it’s important to provide you with some background information about the scope, nature, and methods of our field. This information will be useful to you in reading the entire book (as well as in your course), and in understanding how social psychologists go about answering fascinating questions about the social side of life, so it is crucial that we provide it here. To be efficient and hold these tasks to a minimum, we’ll proceed as follows.

First, we present a more formal definition of social psychology—what it is and what it seeks to accomplish. Second, we’ll describe several current trends in social psychology. These are reflected throughout this text, so knowing about them at the start will help you recognize them and understand why they are important. Third, we examine some of the methods used by social psychologists to answer questions about the social side of life. A working knowledge of these basic methods will help you to understand how social psychologists add to our understanding of social thought and social behavior, and will also be useful to you outside the context of this course. Then, we provide you with an overview of some of the special features in this text—features we think you will find helpful in many ways.

Social Psychology: An Overview

Providing a definition of almost any field is a complex task. In the case of social psychology, this difficulty is increased by two factors: the field’s broad scope and its rapid rate of change. As you will see, social psychologists truly have a wide range of interests. Yet, despite this fact, most focus mainly on the following task: understanding how and why individuals behave, think, and feel as they do in social situations—ones involving the actual presence of other people, or their symbolic presence. Accordingly, we define social psychology *as the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior, feelings, and thought in social situations*. Another way to put this is to say that *social psychology investigates the ways in which our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by the social environments in which we live—by other people or our thoughts about them* (e.g., we imagine how they would react to actions we might perform). We’ll now clarify this definition by taking a closer look at several of its key aspects.

Social Psychology Is Scientific in Nature

What is *science*? Many people seem to believe that this term refers only to fields such as chemistry, physics, and biology—ones that use the kind of equipment shown in Figure 2. If you share that view, you may find our suggestion that social psychology is a scientific discipline somewhat puzzling. How can a field that seeks to study the nature of love, the causes of aggression, and everything in between be scientific in the same sense as chemistry, physics, or computer science? The answer is surprisingly simple.

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



FIGURE 2 What Is Science, Really?

Many people seem to believe that only fields that use sophisticated equipment like that shown (left) can be viewed as scientific. In fact, though, the term science simply refers to adherence to a set of basic values (e.g., accuracy, objectivity) and use of a set of basic methods that can be applied to almost any aspect of the world around us—including the social side of life. In contrast, fields that are not scientific in nature (right) do not accept these values or use these methods.

social thought. For this reason, it makes sense to describe it as scientific in orientation. In contrast, fields that are not scientific make assertions about the world, and about people, that are not put to the careful test and analysis required by the values listed above. In such fields—ones like astrology and aromatherapy—intuition, faith, and unobservable forces are considered to be sufficient (see Figure 2) for reaching conclusions—the opposite of what is true in social psychology.

“But why adopt the scientific approach? Isn’t social psychology just common sense?” Having taught for many years, we can almost hear you asking this question. And we understand why you might feel this way; after all, each of us has spent our entire lives interacting with other people and thinking about them, so in a sense, we are all amateur social psychologists. So, why don’t we just rely on our own experience and intuition as a basis for understanding the social side of life? Our answer is straightforward: Because such sources provide an inconsistent and unreliable guide to understanding social behavior and social thought. Why? In part because our own experiences are unique and may not provide a solid foundation for answering general questions such as “Why do we sometimes go along ‘with the group’ even if we disagree with what it is doing?” “How can we know what other people are thinking or feeling at any given time?” In addition, common sense often provides inconsistent and contradictory ideas about various aspects of social life. For instance, consider the statement “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Do you agree? Is it true that when people are separated from those they love, they miss them and so experience increased longing for them? Many people would agree. They would answer “Yes, that’s right. Let me tell you about the time I was separated from...” But now consider the statement “Out of sight, out of mind.” How about this one? Is it true? When people are separated from those they love, do they quickly find another romantic interest? (Many popular songs suggest that this so—for instance, in the song “Love the One You’re With” written and recorded by Stephen Stills, he suggests that if you can’t be with the person you love, you should love the person you are with.) As you can see, these two views—both suggested by common sense and popular culture—are contradictory. The same is true for many other informal observations about human behavior—they seem

be considered scientific in nature. Four of these are most important:

Accuracy: A commitment to gathering and evaluating information about the world (including social behavior and thought) in as careful, precise, and error-free a manner as possible.

Objectivity: A commitment to obtaining and evaluating such information in a manner that is as free from bias as humanly possible.

Skepticism: A commitment to accepting findings as accurate only to the extent they have been verified over and over again.

Open-mindedness: A commitment to changing one’s views—even views that are strongly held—if existing evidence suggests that these views are inaccurate.

Social psychology, as a field, is deeply committed to these values and applies them in its efforts to understand the nature of social behavior and

plausible, but often the opposite conclusion seems equally possible. How about these: “Two heads are better than one” and “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” One suggests that when people work together, they perform better (e.g., make better decisions). The other suggests that when they work together, they may get in each other’s way so that performance is actually reduced. Here’s one more: Is it “Familiarity breeds content” (as we come to know others better, we tend to like them more—we feel more comfortable with them), or is it “Familiarity breeds contempt” (as we come to know others better, we tend to like them less). Common sense suggests that “more is more” where liking is concerned—the more familiar we are with others, the more we tend to like them, and there is some support for this view. On the other hand, though, research findings indicate that sometimes, the more we know about others (the better we come to know them), the less we like them (Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2006). Why? Because as we learn more about others we recognize more ways in which we are dissimilar to them, and this growing awareness of dissimilarity causes us to notice yet more ways in which we are dissimilar, which leads to disliking.

We could continue, but by now, the main point should be clear: Common sense often suggests a confusing and inconsistent picture of human behavior. This doesn’t mean that it is necessarily wrong; in fact, it often does offer intriguing clues and insights. But it doesn’t tell us when various principles or generalizations hold—when, for instance, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder” and when it leads to “Out of sight, out of mind.” Only a scientific approach that examines social behavior and thought in differing contexts can provide that kind of information, and this is one basic reason why social psychologists put their faith in the scientific method: it yields much more conclusive evidence. In fact, as we’ll soon see, it is designed to help us determine not just which of the opposite sets of predictions mentioned above is correct, but also when and why one or the other might apply.

But this is not the only reason for being suspicious of common sense. Another one relates to the fact that unlike Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* fame, we are not perfect information-processing machines. On the contrary, as we’ll note over and over again, our thinking is subject to several types of biases that can lead us badly astray. Here’s one example: Think back over major projects on which you have worked in the past (writing term papers, cooking a complicated dish, painting your room). Now, try to remember two things: (1) your initial estimates about how long it would take you to complete these jobs and (2) how long it actually took. Is there a gap between these two numbers? In all likelihood there is because most of us fall victim to the *planning fallacy*—a strong tendency to believe that projects will take less time than they actually do or, alternatively, that we can accomplish more in a given period of time than is really true. Moreover, we fall victim to this bias in our thought over and over again, despite repeated experiences that tell us “everything takes longer than we think it will.” Why are we subject to this kind of error? Research by social psychologists indicates that part of the answer involves a tendency to think about the future when we are estimating how long a job will take. This prevents us from remembering how long similar tasks took in the past and that, in turn, leads us to underestimate the time we will need now (e.g., Buehler, Griffin, & Ross, 1994). This is just one of the many ways in which we can—and often do—make errors in thinking about other people (and ourselves). Because we are prone to such errors in our informal thinking about the social world, we cannot rely on it—or on common sense—to solve the mysteries of social behavior. Rather, we need scientific evidence; and providing such evidence is, in essence, what social psychology is all about.

Social Psychology Focuses on the Behavior of Individuals

Societies differ greatly in terms of their views concerning courtship and marriage, yet it is still individuals who fall in love. Similarly, societies vary greatly in terms of their overall levels of violence, yet it is still individuals who perform aggressive actions or refrain from

doing so. The same argument applies to virtually all other aspects of social behavior, from prejudice to helping: the actions are performed by, and the thoughts occur in, the minds of individuals, although they may, of course, be strongly influenced by other people. Because of this basic fact, the focus in social psychology is strongly on individuals. Social psychologists realize, of course, that we do not exist in isolation from social and cultural influences—far from it. Much social behavior occurs in group settings, and these can exert powerful effects on us. But the field’s major interest lies in understanding the factors that shape the actions and thoughts of individuals in social settings.

Social Psychology Seeks to Understand the Causes of Social Behavior and Thought

In a key sense, the heading of this section states the most central aspect of our definition. What it means is that social psychologists are primarily interested in understanding the many factors and conditions that shape the social behavior and thought of individuals—their actions, feelings, beliefs, memories, and inferences concerning other people. Obviously, a huge number of variables play a role in this regard. Most, though, fall under the four major headings described below.

THE ACTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF OTHER PEOPLE Imagine the following events:

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

You are in a hurry and notice that you are driving faster than you usually do—above the speed limit, in fact. Suddenly, up ahead, you see the blinking lights of a state trooper who is in the process of pulling another driver over to the side of the road.

Will these actions by other people have any effect on your behavior and thoughts?

Absolutely. Depending on your own personality, you may blush with pleasure when you see someone looking at you in a “let’s get to know each other better” kind of

way, and then, perhaps, go over and say “hello.” And when you spot the state trooper’s blinking light, you will almost certainly slow down—a lot! Instances like these, which occur hundreds of times each day, indicate that other people’s behavior often has a powerful impact upon us (see Figure 3).

In addition, we are also often affected by others’ appearance. Be honest: Don’t you behave differently toward highly attractive people than toward less attractive ones? Toward very old people compared to young ones? Toward people who belong to racial and ethnic groups different from your own? And don’t you sometimes form impressions of others’ personalities and traits from their appearance? Your answer to these questions is probably yes because we do often react to the others’ visible

AF archive/Alamy



Bonnie Kamin/PhotoEdit



FIGURE 3 Reacting to the Actions of Other People

As shown in these scenes, the behavior of other people often exerts powerful effects on our own behavior and thought.

characteristics, such as their appearance (e.g., McCall, 1997; Twenge & Manis, 1998). In fact, research findings (e.g., Hassin & Trope, 2000) indicate that we cannot ignore others' appearance even when we consciously try to do so and, as you probably already guess, it plays an important role in dating and romantic relationships (e.g., Burriss, Roberts, Welling, Puts, & Little, 2011). So despite warnings to avoid "judging books by their covers," we are often strongly affected by other people's appearance—even if we are unaware of such effects and might deny their existence. Interestingly, research findings indicate that relying on others' appearance as a guide to their characteristics is not always wrong; in fact, they can be relatively accurate, especially when we can observe others behaving spontaneously, rather than in posed photos (Nauman, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009).

COGNITIVE PROCESSES Suppose that you have arranged to meet a friend, and this person is late. In fact, after 30 minutes you begin to suspect that your friend will never arrive. Finally, she or he does appear and says, "Sorry...I forgot all about meeting you until a few minutes ago." How will you react? Probably with annoyance. Imagine that instead, however, your friend said, "I'm so sorry to be late. There was a big accident, and the traffic was tied up for miles." Now how will you react? Probably with less annoyance—but not necessarily. If your friend is often late and has used this excuse before, you may be suspicious about whether this explanation is true. In contrast, if this is the first time your friend has been late, or if your friend has never used such an excuse in the past, you may accept it as true. In other words, your reactions in this situation will depend strongly on your memories of your friend's past behavior and your inferences about whether her or his explanation is really true. Situations like this one call attention to the fact that cognitive processes play a crucial role in social behavior and social thought. We are always trying to make sense out of the social world, and this basic fact leads us to engage in lots of social cognition—to think long and hard about other people—what they are like, why they do what they do, how they might react to our behavior, and so on (e.g., Shah, 2003). Social psychologists are well aware of the importance of such processes and, in fact, social cognition is one of the most important areas of research in the field (e.g., Fiske, 2009; Killea & Johnson, 1998; Swann & Gill, 1997).

ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES: IMPACT OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD Are people more prone to wild impulsive behavior during the full moon than at other times (Rotton & Kelley, 1985)? Do we become more irritable and aggressive when the weather is hot and steamy than when it is cool and comfortable (Bell, Greene, Fisher, & Baum, 2001; Rotton & Cohn, 2000)? Does exposure to a pleasant smell in the air make people more helpful to others (Baron, 1997) and does that occur on baseball playing fields as well in crowded and largely unconditioned sections of cities (Larrick, Timmerman, Carton, & Abrevaya, 2011)? Research findings indicate that the physical environment does indeed influence our feelings, thoughts, and behavior, so these variables, too, certainly fall within the realm of modern social psychology.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS Is social behavior influenced by biological processes and genetic factors? In the past, most social psychologists would have answered no, at least to the genetic part of this question. Now, however, many have come to believe that our preferences, behaviors, emotions, and even attitudes are affected, to some extent, by our biological inheritance (Buss, 2008; Nisbett, 1990; Schmitt, 2004), although social experiences too have a powerful effect, and often interact with genetic factors in generating the complex patterns of our social lives (e.g., Gillath, Shaver, Baek, & Chun, 2008).

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

evolutionary psychology
A new branch of psychology that seeks to investigate the potential role of genetic factors in various aspects of human behavior.

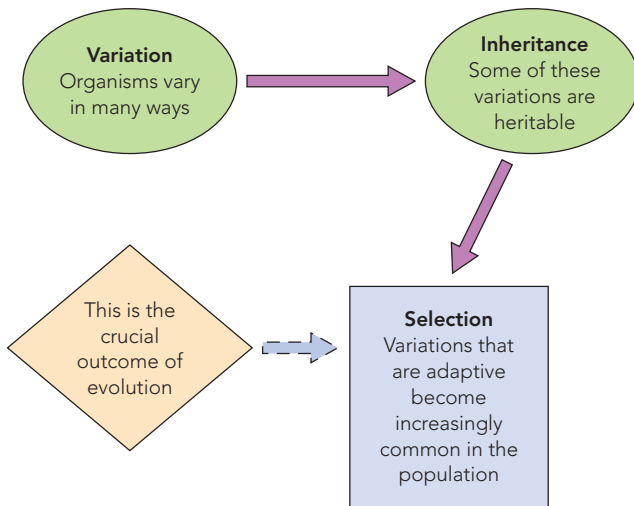


FIGURE 4 Evolution: An Overview

As shown here, evolution involves three major components: variation, inheritance, and selection.

part of our biological inheritance? Through the process of evolution, which, in turn, involves three basic components: *variation*, *inheritance*, and *selection*. Variation refers to the fact that organisms belonging to a given species vary in many different ways; indeed, such variation is a basic part of life on our planet. Human beings, as you already know, come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and vary on what sometimes seems to be an almost countless number of dimensions.

Inheritance refers to the fact that some of these variations can be passed from one generation to the next through complex mechanisms that we are only now beginning to fully understand. Selection refers to the fact that some variations give the individuals who possess them an “edge” in terms of reproduction: they are more likely to survive, find mates, and pass these variations on to succeeding generations. The result is that over time, more and more members of the species possess these variations. This change in the characteristics of a species over time—immensely long periods of time—is the concrete outcome of evolution. (See Figure 4 for a summary of this process.)

Social psychologists who adopt the evolutionary perspective suggest that this process applies to at least some aspects of social behavior. For instance, consider the question of mate preference. Why do we find some people attractive? According to the evolutionary perspective, because the characteristics they show—symmetrical facial features; well-toned, shapely bodies; clear skin; lustrous hair—are associated with “good genes”—they suggest that the people who possess them are likely to be healthy and vigorous, and therefore good mates (e.g., Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Tesser & Martin, 1996). For instance, these characteristics—the ones we find attractive—indicate that the people who show them have strong immune systems that protect them from many illnesses (e.g. Burriss et al., 2011; Li & Kenrick, 2006). Presumably, a preference for characteristics associated with good health and vigor among our ancestors increased the chances that they would reproduce successfully; this, in turn, contributed to our preference for people who possess these aspects of appearance.

Here’s another example, and one that is perhaps a bit more surprising. When asked to indicate the characteristics in potential romantic partners that they find desirable, both genders—but especially women—rate a sense of humor high on the list (e.g., Buss, 2008). Why? From an evolutionary point of view, what is it about humor that makes it a desirable characteristic in others? One possibility is that a sense of humor signals high intelligence, and this tends to make humorous people attractive—after all, they have good genes (e.g., Griskevicius et al., in press). But another possibility is that a sense of humor signals something else: interest in forming new relationships. In other words, it is a sign that the humorous person is available—and interested. Research by Li et al. (2009) found that people are more likely to use humor and laugh at humor by others when they find these people attractive than when they do not, and that they perceived people who used humor during speed dating sessions as showing more romantic interest than ones who did not (see Figure 5).

Other topics have been studied from the evolutionary perspective (e.g., helping others; aggression; preferences for various ways of attracting people who are already in a relationship). Here, however, we wish to emphasize the fact that the evolutionary perspective does not suggest that we inherit specific patterns of social behavior; rather, it contends that we inherit tendencies or predispositions that may be apparent in our overt actions, depending on the environments in which we live. Similarly, this perspective does not suggest that we are “forced” or driven by our genes to act in specific ways. Rather, it merely suggests that because of our genetic inheritance, we have tendencies to behave in certain ways that, at least in the past, enhanced the chances that our ancestors would survive and pass their genes

on to us. These tendencies can be—and often are—overridden by cognitive factors and the effects of experience (i.e., learning; Pettijohn & Jungeberg, 2004). For instance, what is viewed as attractive changes over time and is often very different in diverse cultures (e.g., overweight women are particularly desirable in Nigeria but less so in contemporary North America). So yes, genetic factors play some role in our behavior and thought, but they are clearly only one factor among many that influence how we think and act.

The Search for Basic Principles in a Changing Social World

One key goal of science is the development of basic principles that are accurate regardless of when or where they are applied or tested. For instance, in physics, Einstein's equation $e = mc^2$ is assumed to be true everywhere in the universe, and at all times—now, in the past, and in the future. Social psychologists, too, seek such basic principles. While they don't usually develop elegant mathematical expressions or equations, they do want to uncover the basic principles that govern social life. For instance, they'd like to determine what factors influence attraction, helping, prejudice, first impressions of other people, and so on. And the research they conduct is designed to yield such knowledge—basic principles that will be true across time and in different cultures.

On the other hand, they recognize the fact that cultures differ greatly and that the social world in which we live is constantly changing—in very important ways. For instance, even today, cultures vary greatly with respect to when and where people are expected to “dress up” rather than dress casually. While casual is acceptable in almost all contexts in the United States, more formal “dressy” attire is still expected in other cultures. This is a relatively trivial example, but the same point applies to more important aspects of social life, too: Should teenagers be allowed to date and meet without adult supervision? At what age should marriage occur? Are “gifts” to public officials acceptable or illegal bribes (see Figure 6)? At what age should people retire, and how should they be treated after they do? Cultures differ tremendously in these and countless other ways, and this complicates the task of establishing general principles of social behavior and social thought.

In addition, the social world is changing—and very rapidly, too. Because of social networks, cell phones, online dating, and many other changes, people now meet potential romantic partners in different ways than in the



FIGURE 5 Humor: An Important “Plus” in Dating

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

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FIGURE 6 Cultures Differ in Many Ways—Including Their Views About Bribes

In some cultures, it is considered acceptable—or even essential—to offer gifts (bribes?) to public officials. In others, such actions will land you in jail!

EPA/Raminder Pal Singh/Landov

past when, typically, they were introduced by friends or met at dances arranged by their schools, churches, or other social organizations. Does this mean that the foundations of attraction are different today than in the past? Social psychologists believe that despite these changes, the same basic principles apply: Physical attractiveness is still a basic ingredient in romance, and although influence is now exerted in many ways not possible in the past (e.g., pop-ads on the Internet), the basic principles of persuasion, too, remain much the same (Goel, Mason, & Watts, 2010). In short, although the task of identifying basic, accurate principles of social behavior and social thought is complicated by the existence of huge cultural differences and rapid changes in social life, the goals of social psychological research remain within reach: uncovering basic, accurate facts about the social side of life that do apply in a wide range of contexts and situations.



KEYPOINTS

- Social psychology is the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior and thought in social situations.
- It is scientific in nature because it adopts the values and methods used in other fields of science.
- Social psychologists adopt the scientific method because “common sense” provides an unreliable guide to social behavior, and because our personal thought is influenced by many potential sources of bias.
- Social psychology focuses on the behavior of individuals, and seeks to understand the causes of social behavior and thought, which can involve the behavior and appearance of others, social cognition, environmental factors, cultural values, and even biological and genetic factors.
- Social psychology seeks to establish basic principles of social life that are accurate across huge cultural differences and despite rapid and major changes in social life.
- Important causes of social behavior and thought include the behavior and characteristics of other people, cognitive processes, emotions, cultures, and genetic factors.

Social Psychology: Summing Up

In sum, social psychology focuses mainly on understanding the causes of social behavior and social thought—on identifying factors that shape our feelings, behavior, and thought in social situations. It seeks to accomplish this goal through the use of scientific methods, and it takes careful note of the fact that social behavior and thought are influenced by a wide range of social, cognitive, environmental, cultural, and biological factors.

The remainder of this text is devoted to describing some of the key findings of social psychology. This information is truly fascinating, so we’re certain that you will find it of interest—after all, it is about *us* and the social side of our lives! We’re equally sure, however, that you will also find the outcomes of some research surprising, and that it will challenge many of your ideas about people and social relations. So please get ready for some new insights. We predict that after reading this text, you’ll never think about the social side of life in quite the same way as before.

Social Psychology: Advances at the Boundaries

Textbooks, unlike fine wine, don’t necessarily improve with age. So, to remain current, they must keep pace with changes in the fields they represent. Making certain that this text is current, in the best sense of this term, is one of our key goals, so you can be sure that what’s presented here provides a very contemporary summary of our current