



EIGHTH EDITION

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

JOHN D. DELAMATER, DANIEL J. MYERS,
AND JESSICA L. COLLETT

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

E I G H T H E D I T I O N

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

JOHN D. DELAMATER DANIEL J. MYERS JESSICA L. COLLETT



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

When revising a textbook, the authors always seek to build on the strengths of the prior editions, introducing new material reflecting developments in the field and changes in our larger society, while maintaining thorough coverage of the subject covered by the book. As in past editions, we seek to cover the full range of phenomena of interest to social psychologists. Not only do we address intrapsychic processes in detail, but cover social interaction and group processes, as well as larger-scale phenomena, such as intergroup conflict and social movements. Our goal in writing this book is, as it has always been, to describe contemporary social psychology and to present the theoretical concepts and research findings that make up this broad and fascinating field. We have drawn on work by a wide array of social psychologists, including those with sociological and psychological perspectives, drawing on both classic works and more recent studies. Throughout the book we have used the results of empirical research—surveys, experiments, observational and qualitative studies, and meta-analyses—to illustrate this wide range of social psychological ideas.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John D. DeLamater, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, received his education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Michigan. He earned

his Ph.D. in Social Psychology in 1969. He has been teaching the undergraduate course in social psychology since 1970, and graduate courses and seminars in the area since 1981. He leads a seminar on teaching for graduate students, and has won several teaching awards, including the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching. He is the co-editor of the *Handbook of Social Psychology, 2nd edition*, published by Springer. His research and writing are focused on the effects of life-course transitions on sexuality. He has published papers on the effects of having a child, of dual-career couples, of divorce, and influences on sexual desire and sexual behavior among men and women over 45. His current research is concerned with sexual behavior in later life, including the influence of hormones on sexual desire and sexual behavior.

Daniel J. Myers is Professor of Sociology and Vice President and Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. He was educated at the Ohio State University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he received his Ph.D. in Sociology in 1997. He has taught courses on social psychology, statistics and research methods, and protest, and he received the University of Notre Dame's highest honor for teaching, The Rev. Charles E. Sheedy Award, in 2007. He has also developed a teacher training practicum for graduate teaching assistants at the University of Notre Dame. His research focuses on race and protest, the diffusion of social phenomena, urban poverty, and negotiation strategies in small groups.

Jessica L. Collett is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. This very book, although a much earlier edition, inspired her own interest in social psychology during her time as an undergraduate at Winthrop University. After Winthrop, she went on to study social psychology at the University of Arizona, where she received her Ph.D. in Sociology in 2006. She is an award-winning instructor who regularly teaches social psychology at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as courses on social inequality and socialization and the life course. Her research focuses on small group processes, self and identity, and the connection between the two.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

The last edition of the text, the seventh, was a radically consolidated and streamlined text that we hoped would better fit the introductory social psychology courses taught by the many users. However, in soliciting feedback for the most recent edition, we found that many users longed for the extended text and wanted us to move back to a format closer to that of earlier editions. In response to reviewer concerns, we moved the “Research Methods” appendix back to the core of the text (now Chapter 2), split the chapter on altruism and aggression into two chapters again (Chapters 10 and 11), and reintroduced a chapter on “Emotions” (Chapter 5).

The eighth edition also contains updated research, data, and examples throughout the book, new boxes providing research updates and “test yourself” opportunities, and an increased emphasis on diverse populations and their experiences. As in the past, we have made a special effort to incorporate research that reports differences among participants who vary on race, gender, and

sexual orientation, but of course are limited by what is available, and point out these limitations.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Instructors who have used previous editions of the text will notice the most radical change in the first chapter of the book. Although the theories outlined in the previous edition were classics, they did not reflect the dominant perspectives in social psychology today. The revised introduction includes cognitive and evolutionary perspectives, as well as dual-process theories and evolutionary perspectives from psychology, as well as symbolic interaction, group processes, and social structure and personality from sociology. This introduction to the theoretical perspectives in social psychology and the subsequent chapter’s overview of research methods provide the groundwork for all that follows.

The remainder of the book is divided into four substantive sections. Section 1 focuses on individual social behavior. It includes chapters on socialization, self and self-presentation, emotions, social perception and cognition, and attitudes. Section 2 is concerned with social interaction, the core of social psychology. Each of the chapters in this section discusses how persons interact with others and how they are affected by this interaction. These chapters cover such topics as communication, social influence and persuasion, altruism and prosocial behavior, aggression, and interpersonal attraction. Section 3 provides extensive coverage of groups. It includes chapters on group cohesion, conformity, and intergroup conflict, as well as an overview of the dominant research focuses in the social psychological student of groups today, including status characteristics and expectation states theory, decision-making

in groups, social exchange, and distributive and procedural justice. Section 4 considers the relations between individuals and the wider society. These chapters examine the impact of social structure on the individual, especially on physical and mental health; deviant behavior; and collective behavior and social movements.

EASE OF USE

Although we have attempted to present the material in this book in a logical sequence that will appeal to many instructors, there are, of course, many different ways in which an instructor can organize an introductory course in social psychology. Therefore, we have written each chapter as a self-contained unit. Later chapters do not presume that the student has read earlier ones (although we insert appropriate cross-references to allow students to easily find related material in other chapters). This compartmentalization enables instructors to assign chapters in any sequence.

Chapters share a standard format. To make the material interesting and accessible to students, each chapter's introductory section poses four to six focal questions. These questions establish the issues discussed in the chapter. The remainder of the chapter consists of four to six major sections, each addressing one of these issues. A summary at the end of each chapter reviews the key points. Thus, each chapter poses several key questions about a topic and then considers these questions in a framework that enables students to easily learn the major ideas.

In addition, the text includes several learning aids. Tables emphasize the results of important studies. Figures illustrate important social psychological processes. Photographs dramatize essential ideas from the text. Boxes in each chapter highlight in-

teresting or controversial issues and studies and also discuss the applications of social psychological concepts in daily life. Some boxes are identified as "Research Update"; these boxes have been updated by including the latest research. Other boxes are identified as "Test Yourself"; these contain a questionnaire that the student can complete to find out his or her standing on the measure of interest. Key terms appear in bold and are listed alphabetically at the end of each chapter. A glossary of key terms appears at the end of the book.

A major new feature in the eighth edition is an emphasis on developing critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is an important goal of a quality education; it refers to the ability to use cognitive skills and strategies to increase the probability of a desirable outcome. Diane Halpern is an expert on critical thinking and developing these skills, and we drew heavily on her writings. Critical thinking is logical, rational, and free of self-deception. As the student learns about social psychology, they will learn that there are a number of important ways in which our everyday thinking is biased, and ways in which we engage in self-deception. Developing critical thinking skills and using them in daily life should lead the student to make better decisions and therefore lead a better life.

At the end of each chapter there is a section called Critical Thinking Skill. Each teaches a particular skill with an application to social psychology, and will have applications throughout the student's life. Let's get going!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our thanks to reviewers for the eighth edition, especially the 10 anonymous colleagues who gave us extensive feedback on the seventh edition. As we noted above,

their careful evaluation led directly to several major changes in this edition.

Throughout the writing of the various editions of this book, many colleagues have reviewed chapters and provided useful comments and criticisms. We express sincere appreciation to these reviewers of the previous editions: Annelise Ayers, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Abdallah Badahdah, University of North Dakota; Robert F. Bales, Harvard University; Philip W. Blumstein, University of Washington; Lisa Boyd, University of Notre Dame; Marilyn B. Brewer, University of California at Los Angeles; Peter Burke, University of California at Riverside; Brad Bushman, Iowa State University; Peter L. Callero, Western Oregon State College; Bella DePaulo, University of Virginia; Donna Eder, Indiana University; Nancy Eisenberg, Arizona State University; Glen Elder, Jr., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Gregory Elliott, Brown University; Rebecca Fahrlander, University of Nebraska at Omaha; Richard B. Felson, State University of New York–Albany; John H. Fleming, University of Minnesota; Jeremy Freese, Northwestern University; Irene Hanson Frieze, University of Pittsburgh; Jim Fultz, Northern Illinois University; Viktor Gecas, Washington State University; Russell G. Geen, University of Missouri; Christine Grella, University of California at Los Angeles; Allen Grimshaw, Indiana University; Elaine Hatfield, University of Hawaii–Manoa; John Hewitt, University of Massachusetts; George Homans, Harvard University; Judy Howard, University of Washington; Pamela M. Hunt, Kent State University; Michael Inbar, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Julia Jacks, University of North Carolina; Dale Jaffe, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Edward Jones, Princeton University; Lewis Killian, University of Massachusetts; Melvin Kohn, National Institute of Mental Health and Johns Hopkins University;

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We also thank the many students who used the previous editions and who provided us with feedback about the book; we applied this feedback to improve the presentation, pace, and style of the new edition.

Finally, we express thanks to the professionals at Westview who contributed to the process of turning the manuscript into a book. Catherine Craddock, acquisitions editor, worked with us at every stage. Christine Marra oversaw the transformation of manuscript into printed pages. Our appreciation to them all. Although this book benefited greatly from feedback and criticisms, the authors accept responsibility for any errors that may remain.



INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

- Why are some people more effective leaders than others?
- What makes people fall in and out of love?
- Why can people cooperate so easily in some situations but not in others?
- What effects do major life events like graduating from college, getting married, or losing a job have on physical or mental health?
- Why do some people conform to norms and laws while others do not?
- What causes conflict between groups? Why do some conflicts subside and others progress until there is no chance of reconciliation?
- Why do people present different images of themselves in various social situations, both in person and online?
- What causes harmful or aggressive behavior? What motivates helpful or altruistic behavior?
- Why are some people more persuasive and influential than others?
- Why do stereotypes persist even in the face of contradictory evidence?

Perhaps questions such as these have puzzled you, just as they have perplexed others through the ages. You might wonder about these issues simply because you want to better understand the social world around you. Or you might want answers for practical reasons, such as increasing your effectiveness in day-to-day relations with others.

Answers to questions such as these come from various sources. One such source is personal experience—things we learn from everyday interaction. Answers obtained by this means are often insightful, but they

are usually limited in scope and generality, and occasionally they are even misleading. Another source is informal knowledge or advice from others who describe their own experiences to us. Answers obtained by this means are sometimes reliable, sometimes not. A third source is the conclusions reached by philosophers, novelists, poets, and men and women of practical affairs who, over the centuries, have written about these issues. Often their answers have filtered down and become commonsense knowledge. We are told, for instance, that joint effort is an effective way to accomplish large jobs (“Many hands make light work”) and that bonds among family tend to be stronger than those among friends (“Blood is thicker than water”). These principles reflect certain truths and may sometimes provide guidelines for action.

Although commonsense knowledge may have merit, it also has drawbacks, not the least of which is that it often contradicts itself. For example, we hear that people who are similar will like one another (“Birds of a feather flock together”) but also that persons who are dissimilar will like each other (“Opposites attract”). We are told that groups are wiser and smarter than individuals (“Two heads are better than one”) but also that group work inevitably produces poor results (“Too many cooks spoil the broth”). Each of these contradictory statements may hold true under particular conditions, but without a clear statement of when they apply and when they do not, aphorisms provide little insight into relations among people. They provide even less guidance in situations in which we must make decisions. For example, when facing a choice that entails risk, which guideline should we use—“Nothing ventured, nothing gained” or “Better safe than sorry”?

If sources such as personal experience and commonsense knowledge have only limited value, how are we to attain an un-

derstanding of social interactions and relations among people? One solution to this problem—the one pursued by social psychologists—is to obtain accurate knowledge about social behavior by applying the methods of science. That is, by making systematic observations of behavior and formulating theories that are subject to testing, we can attain a valid and comprehensive understanding of human social relations.

One goal of this book is to present some of social psychologists' major findings from systematic research. In this chapter, we lay the foundation for this effort by addressing the following questions:

1. What exactly is social psychology? What are the core concerns of the field of social psychology?
2. What are the broad theoretical perspectives that prevail in social psychology today? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective? How do these perspectives relate to one another?

WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

A Formal Definition

We define **social psychology** as the systematic study of the nature and causes of human social behavior. This definition has three main components. First, social psychology's primary concern is human social behavior. This includes many things—individuals' activities in the presence of others and in particular situations, the processes of social interaction between two or more persons, and the relationships among individuals and the groups to which they belong. Importantly, in this definition, behavior moves beyond action to also include

affect (emotion) and cognition (thoughts). In other words, social psychologists are not only interested in what people do, but also what individuals feel and think (Fine, 1995).

Second, social psychologists are not satisfied to simply document the nature of social behavior; instead, they want to explore the causes of such behavior. This differentiates social psychology from a field like journalism. Journalists describe what people do. Social psychologists are not only interested in what people do but also want to understand why they do it. In social psychology, causal relations among variables are important building blocks of theory, and in turn, theory is crucial for the prediction and control of social behavior.

Third, social psychologists study social behavior in a systematic fashion. Social psychology is a social science that employs the scientific method and relies on formal research methodologies, including experimentation, structured observation, and sample surveys. These research methods are described in detail in Chapter 2.

Core Concerns of Social Psychology

Another way to answer the question “What is social psychology?” is to describe the topics that social psychologists actually study. Social psychologists investigate human behavior, of course, but their primary concern is human behavior in a social context. There are five core concerns, or major themes, within social psychology: (1) the impact that one individual has on another; (2) the impact that a group has on its individual members; (3) the impact that individual members have on the groups to which they belong; (4) the impact that one group has on another group; (5) the impact of social context and social structure on groups and individuals. The five core concerns are shown schematically in Figure 1.1.

BOX 1.1 Test Yourself: Is Social Psychology Simply Common Sense?

Because social psychologists are interested in a wide range of phenomena from our everyday lives, students sometimes claim that social psychology is common sense. Is it? Eight of the following common sense statements are true. The other eight are not. Can you tell the difference?

1. **T F** When faced with natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, people panic and social organization disintegrates.
2. **T F** Physically attractive individuals are usually seen as less intelligent than physically unattractive individuals.
3. **T F** The reason people discriminate against minorities is prejudice; unprejudiced people don't discriminate.
4. **T F** Individuals who attended an Ivy League school end up earning more money than those who declined an offer of admission from an Ivy League school and chose to attend a less selective school.
5. **T F** Attractive people are more likely to have prestigious jobs and happier marriages than are less attractive people.
6. **T F** People tend to overestimate the extent to which other people share their opinions, attitudes, and behavior.
7. **T F** Rather than "opposites attract," people are generally attracted to those similar to themselves.
8. **T F** "Putting on a happy face" (that is, smiling when you are really not happy) will not make you feel any different on the inside.
9. **T F** People with few friends tend to live shorter, less healthy lives than do people with lots of friends.
10. **T F** We tend to view people in the groups and social categories that we belong to as more diverse and different from each other than we believe people in other groups are.
11. **T F** Parental disapproval for a relationship (for example, Romeo and Juliet) increases the chance that the partners will stay together.
12. **T F** If people tell a lie for a reward, they are more likely to come to believe the lie if they are given a small reward rather than a large reward.
13. **T F** Women with children are seen as the least desirable job candidates in most fields, while men with children are seen as the most desirable.
14. **T F** Most people would disobey an authority who orders them to hurt a stranger.
15. **T F** The more often we see something—even if we don't like it at first—the more we grow to like it.
16. **T F** The more certain a crime victim is about their account of events, the more accurate the report they provide to the police.

True: 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, & 15.

Impact of Individuals on Individuals. Individuals are affected by others in many ways. In everyday life, interactions with others may significantly influence a person's understanding of the social world. Much

of this happens simply by observation. Through listening to others and watching them, an individual learns how she should act, what she should think, and how she should feel.

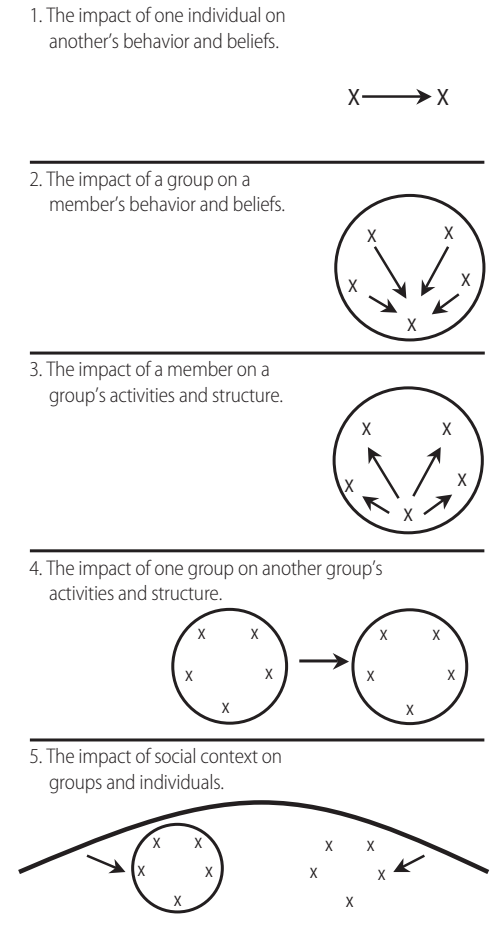


FIGURE 1.1 The Core Concerns of Social Psychology

Sometimes this influence is more direct. A person might persuade another to change his beliefs about the world and his attitudes toward persons, groups, or other objects. Suppose, for example, that Mia tries to persuade Ashley that all nuclear power plants are dangerous and undesirable and, therefore, should be closed. If successful, Mia's persuasion attempt could change Ashley's beliefs and perhaps affect her future actions (picketing nuclear power plants, advocating non-nuclear sources of power, and the like).

Beyond influence and persuasion, the actions of others often affect the outcomes individuals obtain in everyday life. A per-

son caught in an emergency situation, for instance, may be helped by an altruistic bystander. In another situation, one person may be wounded by another's aggressive acts. Social psychologists have investigated the nature and origins of both altruism and aggression as well as other interpersonal activity such as cooperation and competition.

Also relevant here are various interpersonal sentiments. One individual may develop strong attitudes toward another (liking, disliking, loving, hating) based on who the other is and what he or she does. Social psychologists investigate these issues to discover why individuals develop positive attitudes toward some but negative attitudes toward others.

Impact of Groups on Individuals. Social psychology is also interested in the influence groups have on the behavior of their individual members. Because people belong to many different groups—families, work groups, seminars, and clubs—they spend many hours each week interacting with group members. Groups influence and regulate the behavior of their members, typically by establishing norms or rules. Group influence often results in conformity, as group members adjust their behavior to bring it into line with group norms. For example, college fraternities and sororities have norms—some formal and some informal—that stipulate how members should dress, what meetings they should attend, whom they can date and whom they should avoid, and how they should behave at parties. As a result of these norms, members behave quite similarly to one another.

Groups also exert substantial long-term influence on their members through socialization, a process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, values, and skills required of group members. Socialization processes are meant to ensure that group members will be adequately trained to play

roles in the group and in the larger society. Although we are socialized to be members of discrete groups (sororities and fraternities, families, postal workers), we are also socialized to be members of social categories (woman, Latino, working class, American). Outcomes of socialization vary, from language skills to political and religious beliefs to our conception of self.

Impact of Individuals on Group. A third concern of social psychology is the impact of individuals on group processes and products. Just as any group influences the behavior of its members, these members, in turn, may influence the group itself. For instance, individuals contribute to group productivity and group decision making. Moreover, some members may provide leadership, performing functions such as planning, organizing, and controlling, necessary for successful group performance. Without effective leadership, coordination among members will falter and the group will drift or fail. Furthermore, individuals and minority coalitions often innovate change in group structure and procedures. Both leadership and innovation depend on individuals' initiative, insight, and risk-taking ability.

Impact of Groups on Groups. Social psychologists also explore how one group might affect the activities and structure of another group. Relations between two groups may be friendly or hostile, cooperative or competitive. These relationships, which are based in part on members' identities and may entail group stereotypes, can affect the structure and activities of each group. Of special interest is intergroup conflict, with its accompanying tension and hostility. Violence may flare up, for instance, between two street gangs disputing territorial rights or between racial groups competing for scarce jobs. Conflicts of this type affect the interpersonal relations be-

tween groups and within each group. Social psychologists have long studied the emergence, persistence, and resolution of intergroup conflict.

Impact of Social Context on Individuals and Groups. Social psychologists realize that individuals' behavior is profoundly shaped by the situations in which they find themselves. If you are listening to the radio in your car and your favorite song comes on, you might turn the volume up and sing along loudly. If you hear the same song at a dance club, you are less inclined to sing along but instead might head out to the dance floor. If your social psychology professor kicks off the first day of class by playing the song, chances are you won't sing or dance. In fact, you might give your fellow students a quizzical look. Your love for the song has not changed, but the social situation shapes your role in the situation (clubgoer, student) along with the expected behaviors based on that role. These contextual factors influence your reaction to the music.

These reactions are based, in part, on what you have learned through your interactions with others and through socialization in groups, the social influences discussed in the previous sections. However, as we grow and develop, the rules, belief systems, and categorical distinctions that have profound influence on our everyday lives seem to separate from these interactions. We forget that these things that appear natural were actually socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Sociology, Psychology, or Both?

Social psychology bears a close relationship to several other fields, especially sociology and psychology.

Sociology is the scientific study of human society. It examines social institutions (family, religion, politics), stratification within

society (class structure, race and ethnicity, gender roles), basic social processes (socialization, deviance, social control), and the structure of social units (groups, networks, formal organizations, bureaucracies).

In contrast, psychology is the scientific study of the individual and of individual behavior. Although this behavior may be social in character, it need not be. Psychology addresses such topics as human learning, perception, memory, intelligence, emotion, motivation, and personality.

Social psychology bridges sociology and psychology. In the mid-twentieth century, early in the history of social psychology, sociologists and psychologists worked closely together in departments and on research. In fact, top programs offered degrees in “Social Relations” or “Social Psychology” rather than Sociology or Psychology. However, over time, the interests of sociological social psychologists and psychological social psychologists have diverged somewhat. There is less collaboration today than there was early on, and most students get degrees in one of the two disciplines with a specialization or concentration in social psychology. That said, many still see the two areas as interdisciplinary.

Both sociologists and psychologists have contributed to social psychological knowledge. Sociological social psychologists use surveys, experiments, and observational techniques to gather data. These investigators are most interested in the relationship between individuals and the groups to which they belong. They emphasize such processes as socialization, conformity and deviance, social interaction, self-presentation, within-group processes, leadership, and cooperation and competition. Social psychologists working in the psychological tradition rely heavily on laboratory experimental methodology but increasingly use surveys and questionnaires. They are much less likely than sociological social psycholo-

gists to use observational methods outside the laboratory. Their primary concern is how social stimuli (often other persons) affects an individual’s behavior and internal states. They emphasize such topics as the self, person perception and attribution, attitudes and attitude change, personality differences in social behavior, social learning and modeling, altruism and aggression, and interpersonal attraction.

Thus, sociologically oriented and psychologically oriented social psychologists differ in their outlook and emphasis. As we might expect, this leads them to formulate different theories and to conduct different programs of research. Yet these differences are best viewed as complementary rather than as conflicting. Social psychology as a field is richer for the differing contributions of both approaches.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Yesterday at work, Warren reported to his boss that he would not be able to complete an important project on schedule. To Warren’s surprise, the boss became enraged and told him to complete the task by the following Monday—or else! Warren was not entirely sure what to make of this behavior, but he decided to take the threat seriously.

That evening, talking with his girlfriend, Madison, Warren announced that he would have to work overtime at the office, so he could not go with her to a party on Friday evening as originally planned. Madison immediately got mad at Warren—she definitely wanted to go, she did not want to go alone, and he had promised several times to come along—and threw a paperweight at him. By now, Warren was distressed and a little perplexed.

Reflecting on these two events, Warren noticed they had some characteristics in

common. To explain the behavior of his boss and his girlfriend, he formed a general proposition: "If you fail to deliver on promises made to another, he or she will get mad at you." He was happy with this simple formulation until the next day, when the car behind him at the stoplight started honking. He looked up and realized the light had turned green. As he moved forward, the car behind him passed him and the driver gave him an angry look. Warren thought about this event and concluded that his original theory needed some revision. Although he had not promised the driver behind him anything, the driver had become angry and aggressive because of Warren's actions. His new theory included a chain of propositions: "If someone's goals are blocked, he or she will become frustrated. If someone is frustrated, he or she will become aggressive. If someone is aggressive, he or she will lash out at either the source of the frustration or a convenient surrogate."

In his own way, Warren had started to do informally the same thing social psychologists do more elaborately and systematically. Starting from some observations regarding social behavior, Warren attempted to formulate a theory to explain the observed facts. As the term is used here, a **theory** is a set of interrelated propositions that organizes and explains a set of observed phenomena. Theories usually pertain not just to some particular event but rather to whole classes of events. Moreover, as Warren's example indicates, a theory goes beyond mere observable facts by postulating causal relations among variables. In other words, it describes not only what people do but also why they do it. If a theory is valid, it enables its user to explain the phenomena under consideration and to make predictions about events not yet observed.

In social psychology, no single theory explains all phenomena of interest; rather,

the field includes many different theories. Many of these theories are discussed in this book. **Middle-range theories** identify the conditions that produce specific social behavior. One such theory is the frustration-aggression hypothesis, not unlike Warren's theory above, which describes the connection between blocked goals, frustration, and aggression. However, social psychology also includes **theoretical perspectives**. Broader in scope than middle-range theories, theoretical perspectives offer general explanations for a wide array of social behaviors in a variety of situations. These general explanations are rooted in explicit assumptions about human nature. Theoretical perspectives serve an important function for the field of social psychology. By making certain assumptions regarding human nature, a theoretical perspective establishes a vantage point from which we can examine a range of social behaviors. Because any perspective highlights certain features and downplays others, it enables us to "see" more clearly certain aspects or features of social behavior. The fundamental value of any theoretical perspective lies in its applicability across many situations; it provides a frame of reference for interpreting and comparing a wide range of social situations and behaviors.

Social psychology can be organized into a number of distinct theoretical perspectives. For sociologists who study social psychology, these theoretical perspectives are situated in three traditions—symbolic interactionism, group processes, and social structure and personality. James House (1977) referred to these as the three "faces" of social psychology, each with a unique perspective and emphasis. These faces as well as related theoretical perspectives are explained below. Also below is an introduction to theoretical perspectives that have dominated psychological social psychology

over the last twenty years: cognitive theories (including both the dual-process model of information processing and social identity theory) and evolutionary theory.

Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical perspective that guided much of the early work of sociological social psychologists—and that is still important today—is symbolic interactionism (Charon, 1995; Stryker, 1980, 1987). Although it is sometimes called **symbolic interaction theory**, symbolic interactionism is actually a perspective that guides the development of more specific theories. The basic premise of symbolic interactionism is that human nature and social order are products of symbolic communication among people. Society (from cultures to institutions to ourselves) is produced and reproduced through our interactions with others by means of language and our interpretation of that language. There are three main premises of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969):

1. We act toward things on the basis of their meanings.
2. Meanings are not inherent but are negotiated in interaction with others.
3. Meanings can be modified and changed through interaction.

People can communicate successfully with one another only to the extent that they ascribe similar meanings to objects. An object's meaning for a person depends not so much on the properties of the object itself but on what the person might do with the object. In other words, an object takes on meaning only in relation to a person's plans. Consider an empty glass bottle. Standing alone, a bottle has no meaning. The meaning of the bottle comes from how you plan to use it. If there is liquid in it, it becomes a



According to symbolic interactionism, we derive the meaning of objects from how we (or others) plan to use those objects. The same bottle can be a vessel for liquid, waste, a vase, a weapon, or a game piece. Depending on how people intend to use the table the bottle is on, its meaning can also vary—from a table, to a desk, to a seat, to a place to lie down for a nap. © Tamas Panczel, Eross/Shutterstock

vessel for a beverage. Placed in the recycling bin, it becomes waste. But if someone pulls it out of the recycling and puts flowers in it, it becomes a vase. Use it in a bar fight, it might be a weapon. Placed on its side at the center of a table filled with people, it becomes a game-piece for Spin the Bottle. We learn the meanings of things—whether bottles or smiles or pieces of linen and cotton printed with black and green ink—through interaction with others. These meanings can change and shift over time based on social interaction.

Negotiating Meanings. Symbolic interaction theory views humans as proactive and goal seeking. People formulate plans of action to achieve their goals. Many plans, of course, can be accomplished only through