Exploring Social Psychology

NINTH EDITION

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Hope College

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Mc Graw Hill

EXPLORING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, NINTH EDITION

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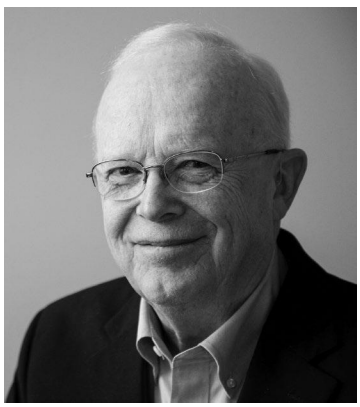

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Since receiving his Whitworth University BA and his University of Iowa PhD, David Myers has professed psychology at Michigan's Hope College. Hope College students have invited him to be their commencement speaker and voted him "outstanding professor."

With support from National Science Foundation grants, Myers's research has appeared in some three dozen scientific books and periodicals, including *Science,* the *American Scientist, Psychological Science,* and the *American Psychologist.*

He has also communicated psychological science through his articles appearing in four dozen magazines, from *Today's Education* to *Scientific American,* and through his 17 books, including *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils.*

Myers's research and writings have been recognized by the Gordon Allport Prize, by an "honored scientist" award from the Federation of Associations in the Brain and Behavioral Sciences, and by the Award for Distinguished Service on Behalf of Personality-Social Psychology.

He has chaired his city's Human Relations Commission, helped found a center for families in poverty, and spoken to hundreds of college and community groups. In recognition of his efforts to transform the way America provides assistive listening for people with hearing loss (see hearingloop.org), he has received awards from the American Academy of Audiology, the Hearing Loss Association of America, and the hearing industry.

David and Carol Myers have three children and one grandchild.

As Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, Jean M. Twenge has authored in more than 150 scientific publications on generational differences, cultural change, technology and well-being, social rejection, gender roles, self-esteem, and narcissism. Her research

Photo courtesy of Sandy Huffaker, Jr.

has been covered in *Time, Newsweek,* the *New York Times, USA Today, U.S. News and World Report,* and the *Washington Post;* she has been featured on *Today, Good Morning America, CBS This Morning, Fox and Friends, NBC Nightly News, Dateline NBC,* and National Public Radio.

She summarized this research for a broader audience in the books *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood; Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before;* and *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (coauthored with W. Keith Campbell). She has written for general audiences on several websites and magazines, including a piece for *The Atlantic* that was nominated for a National Magazine Award. She frequently gives talks and seminars on generational differences to audiences such as college faculty and staff, high school students and their parents, military personnel, camp directors, and corporate executives.

Dr. Twenge grew up in Minnesota and Texas. She holds a BA and MA from the University of Chicago and a PhD from the University of Michigan. She completed a postdoctoral research fellowship in social psychology at Case Western Reserve University. She lives in San Diego with her husband and three daughters.

Brief Contents

Contents

Preface

This is a book I (David) secretly wanted to write. I have long believed that what is wrong with all psychology textbooks (including those I have written) is their overlong chapters. Few can read a 40-page chapter in a single sitting without their eyes glazing and their mind wandering. So why not organize the discipline into digestible chunks—say forty 15-page chapters rather than fifteen 40-page chapters—that a student could read in a sitting, with a sense of completion?

Thus, when McGraw-Hill psychology editor Chris Rogers first suggested that I abbreviate and restructure my 15-chapter, 600-page *Social Psychology* into a series of crisply written modules, I said "Eureka!" At last a publisher willing to break convention by packaging the material in a form ideally suited to students' attention spans. By presenting concepts and findings in smaller bites, we also hoped not to overload students' capacities to absorb new information. And, by keeping *Exploring Social Psychology* slim, we sought to enable instructors to supplement it with other reading.

As the playful module titles suggest, my coauthor, Jean Twenge, and I have also broken with convention by introducing social psychology in an essay format. Each is written in the spirit of Thoreau's admonition: "Anything living is easily and naturally expressed in popular language." Our aim in the parent *Social Psychology,* and even more so here, is to write in a voice that is both solidly scientific and warmly human, factually rigorous and intellectually provocative. We hope to reveal social psychology as an investigative reporter might, by providing a current summary of important social phenomena, by showing how social psychologists uncover and explain such phenomena, and by reflecting on their human significance.

In selecting material, we have represented social psychology's scope, highlighting its scientific study of how we think about, influence, and relate to one another. We also emphasize material that casts social psychology in the intellectual tradition of the liberal arts.

By the teaching of great literature, philosophy, and science, liberal education seeks to expand our thinking and awareness and to liberate us from the confines of the present. Social psychology can contribute to these goals. Many undergraduate social psychology students are not psychology majors; most will enter other professions. By focusing on humanly significant issues such as belief and illusion, independence and interdependence, love and hate, we aim to present social psychology in ways that inform and stimulate all students.

The new ninth edition features updated coverage throughout. This includes, for example, the following:

- New organization of material on genes, culture, and gender
- More coverage of the role of technology in social interaction
- Updated statistics throughout
- New material on gender fluidity and transgender individuals
- New material on who is more likely to help
- Updated coverage of climate change and the social psychology of sustainability

The ninth edition of *Exploring Social Psychology* is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook® 2.0 for the new edition, which is an adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including:

- A full Test Bank of multiple-choice questions that test students on central concepts and ideas in each module
- An Instructor's Manual for each module with full module outlines, sample test questions, and discussion topics
- Lecture Slides for instructor use in class

Social Psychology
harnesses the power of data to improve the instructor and student course experiences:

BETTER DATA, SMARTER REVISION, IMPROVED RESULTS

For this new edition, data were analyzed to identify the concepts students found to be the most difficult, allowing for expansion upon the discussion, practice, and assessment of challenging topics. The revision process for a new edition used to begin with gathering information from instructors about what they would change and what they would keep. Using these reviews to provide guidance, authors would revise the material. But now, a new tool has revolutionized that model. McGraw-Hill Education authors now have access to student performance data to analyze and to inform their revisions. The data are anonymously collected from the many students who use SmartBook® 2.0, the adaptive learning system that provides students with individualized assessment of their own progress. Because virtually every text paragraph is tied to several questions that students answer while using SmartBook 2.0, the specific concepts with which students are having the most difficulty are easily pinpointed through empirical data in the form of a "heat map" report.

The Heat Map Story

STEP 1. Over the course of three years, data points showing concepts that caused students the most difficulty were anonymously collected from McGraw-Hill Connect® for Social Psychology's McGraw-Hill SmartBook 2.0 adaptive learning system.

STEP 2. Dave Myers and Jean Twenge were provided with data from SmartBook 2.0 that graphically illustrated "hot spots" in the text impacting student learning.

STEP 3. The authors used this "heat map" data to refine content and reinforce student comprehension in the new edition. Additional quiz questions and assignable activities were created for use in Connect to further support student success.

RESULT: With empirically based feedback at the paragraph and even sentence level, the authors developed the new edition using precise student data to pinpoint concepts that caused students to struggle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to the community of scholars who have guided and critiqued the evolution of this material through thirteen editions of *Social Psychology,* and thus through nine editions of *Exploring Social Psychology.* These caring colleagues, acknowledged individually in *Social Psychology,* 13th Edition, have enabled a better book than we, alone, could have created.

We are grateful not only to Chris Rogers, for venturing this book, but also to product developer Elisa Odoardi, editorial coordinator Emily Schlapp, and development editor Sarah Paratore, and the entire ansrsource development team for supporting us throughout the revision process.

At Hope College, Kathryn Brownson helped organize the *Social Psychology,* 13th Edition material into these modules and prepare them for production. Her leadership and editorial skill enriched this book and eased our task.

Finally, we pay tribute to two significant people. Were it not for the invitation of McGraw-Hill's Nelson Black, it surely never would have occurred to me [DM] to try my hand at text writing. Poet Jack Ridl, my Hope College colleague and writing coach, helped shape the voice you will hear in these pages.

To all in this supporting cast, we are indebted. Working with all these people has made our work a stimulating, gratifying experience.

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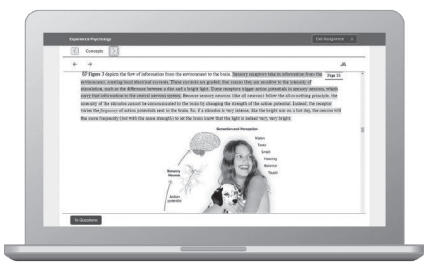

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- Jordan Cunningham, Eastern Washington University

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PART ONE

Introducing Social Psychology

"We cannot live for ourselves alone," remarked novelist Herman Melville, "for our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads." **Social psychologists** study those connections by scientifically exploring how we *think about, influence, and relate to one another.*

In the first two modules, we explain how we do that exploring—how we play the social psychology game. As it happens, the ways that social psychologists form and test ideas can be carried into life itself, enabling us to think smarter as we analyze everyday social thinking, social influences, and social relations.

If intuition and common sense were utterly trustworthy, we would be less in need of scientific inquiry and critical thinking. But the truth, as Module 2 relates, is that whether we are reflecting on research results or on everyday events, we readily succumb to a powerful *hindsight bias,* also called the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon.*

MODULE

1

Doing Social Psychology

There once was a man whose second wife was a vain and selfish woman. This woman's two daughters were similarly vain and selfish. The man's own daughter, however, was meek and unselfish. This sweet, kind daughter, whom we all know as Cinderella, learned early on that she should do as she was told, accept poor treatment and insults, and avoid doing anything to upstage her stepsisters and their mother.

But then, thanks to her fairy godmother, Cinderella was able to escape her situation for an evening and attend a grand ball, where she attracted the attention of a handsome prince. When the love-struck prince later encountered Cinderella back in her degrading home, he failed to recognize her.

Does this seem hard to believe? The folktale demands that we accept the power of the situation. In the presence of her oppressive stepmother, Cinderella was meek and unattractive. At the ball, Cinderella felt more beautiful—and walked and talked and smiled as if she were. In one situation, she cowered. In the other, she charmed.

French philosopher-novelist Jean-Paul Sartre (1946) would have had no problem accepting the Cinderella premise. We humans are "first of all beings in a situation," he wrote. "We cannot be distinguished from our situations, for they form us and decide our possibilities" (pp. 59–60, paraphrased).

FORMING AND TESTING THEORIES

As we social psychologists wrestle with human nature to pin down its secrets, we organize our ideas and findings into theories. A **theory** is *an integrated set of principles that explain and predict observed events.* Theories are a scientific shorthand.

In everyday conversation, theory often means "less than fact"—a middle rung on a confidence ladder from guess to theory to fact. Thus, people may dismiss Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as "just a theory." Indeed, noted Alan Leshner (2005), chief officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, "Evolution *is* only a theory, but so is gravity." People often respond that gravity is a fact—but the *fact* is that your keys fall to the ground when dropped. Gravity is the theoretical explanation that accounts for such observed facts.

To a scientist, facts and theories are apples and oranges. Facts are agreed upon statements about what we observe. Theories are *ideas* that summarize and explain facts. "Science is built up with facts, as a house is with stones," wrote French scientist Jules Henri Poincaré, "but a collection of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house" (1905, p. 101).

Theories not only summarize but also imply testable predictions, called **hypotheses.** Hypotheses serve several purposes. First, they allow us to *test* a theory by suggesting how we might try to falsify it. Second, predictions give *direction* to research and sometimes send investigators looking for things they might never have considered. Third, the predictive feature of good theories can also make them *practical.* A complete theory of aggression, for example, would predict when to expect aggression and how to control it. As pioneering social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951) declared, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

Consider how this works. Suppose we observe that people who loot property or attack others often do so in groups or crowds. We might therefore theorize that being part of a crowd, or group, makes individuals feel anonymous and lowers their inhibitions. How could we test this theory? Perhaps we could ask individuals in groups to administer punishing shocks to a hapless victim who wouldn't know which person was actually shocking him or her. Would these individuals, as our theory predicts, administer stronger shocks than individuals acting alone?

We might also manipulate anonymity: Would people deliver stronger shocks if they were wearing masks? If the results confirm our hypothesis, they might suggest some practical applications. Perhaps police brutality could be reduced by having officers wear large name tags and drive cars identified with large numbers, or by videotaping their arrests. Sure enough, all of these have become common practice in many cities.

But how do we conclude that one theory is better than another? A good theory

- effectively *summarizes many observations,* and
- *makes clear predictions* that we can use to
  - confirm or modify the theory,
  - generate new exploration, and
  - suggest practical applications.

When we discard theories, it is not usually because they have been proved false. Rather, like old cars, they are replaced by newer, better models.

CORRELATIONAL RESEARCH: DETECTING NATURAL ASSOCIATIONS

Let's now go backstage and see how social psychology is done. This glimpse behind the scenes should help you understand the findings discussed later. Understanding the logic of research can also help you think critically about everyday social events and better comprehend studies you see covered in the media.

Social psychological research can be *laboratory research* (a controlled situation) or **field research** (everyday situations). And it varies by method—whether **correlational** (asking whether two or more factors are naturally associated) or **experimental** (manipulating some factor to see its effect on another). If you want to be a critical reader of psychological research reported in the media, it helps to understand the difference between correlational and experimental research.

Activity 1.1

Let's first consider correlational research, which has both a major advantage (examining important variables in natural settings) and a major disadvantage (difficulty determining cause and effect). In search of possible links between wealth and health, Douglas Carroll and his colleagues (1994) ventured into Glasgow, Scotland's old graveyards and noted the life spans of 843 individuals. As an indication of wealth, they measured the height of the grave pillars, reasoning that height reflected cost and therefore affluence. As **Figure 1-1** shows, wealth (taller grave markers) predicted longer lives—a key indicator of health.

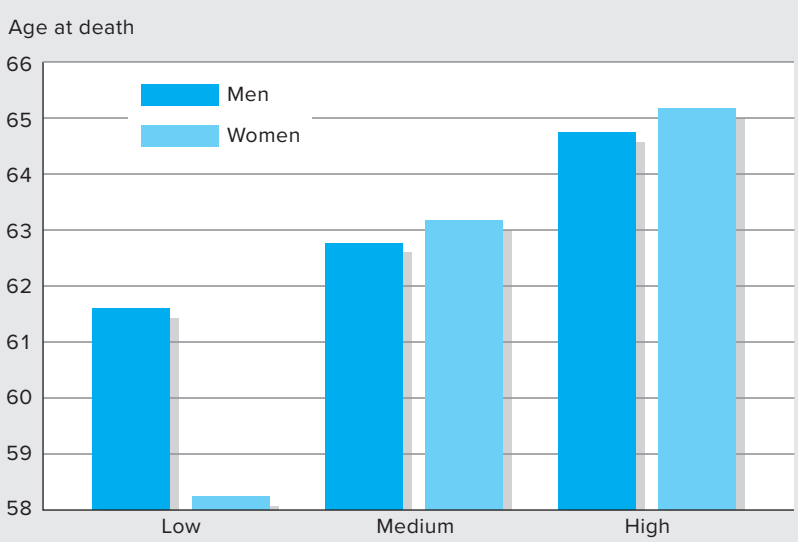

FIGURE 1-1
Correlating Wealth and Longevity. Tall grave pillars, indicating wealth, commemorated people who also tended to live longer. Source: Carroll, Smith, and Bennett (1994).

Data from other sources have confirmed the wealth–health correlation: Scottish postal-code regions with the least overcrowding and unemployment (the most affluent) also have the longest average lifespans. In the United States, income correlates with longevity (poor and lower-status people are more likely to die sooner). Another study followed 17,350 British civil service workers over 10 years. Compared with high-status administrators, lower-status administrators were 1.6 times more likely to have died. Even lower-status clerical workers were 2.2 times more likely to have died, and laborers were 2.7 times more likely (Adler et al., 1993, 1994). Across times and places, the wealth–health correlation seems reliable.

CORRELATION AND CAUSATION

The wealth–health question illustrates the most irresistible thinking error made by both amateur and professional social psychologists: When two factors such as wealth and health go together, it is tempting to conclude that one causes the other. Wealth, we might presume, somehow protects a person from health risks. But maybe it's the other way around: Perhaps healthy people are more likely to succeed economically, or people who live longer have more time to accumulate wealth. A third variable might also cause both health and wealth—for example, perhaps those of a certain race or religion are both healthier and more likely to become wealthy. In other words, correlations indicate a relationship, but that relationship is not necessarily one of cause and effect. Correlational research allows us to roughly *predict* one variable from another, but it cannot tell us whether one variable (such as wealth) *causes* another (such as health). When two variables (let's call them X and Y) are correlated with each other, there are three possibilities: X causes Y, Y causes X, or a third variable (Z) causes both.

The correlation–causation confusion is behind much muddled thinking in popular psychology. Consider another very real correlation—between self-esteem and academic achievement. Children with high self-esteem tend also to have high academic achievement. (As with any correlation, we can also state this the other way around: High achievers tend to have high self-esteem.) Why do you suppose that is true?

Some people believe self-esteem contributes to achievement. Thus, boosting a child's self-esteem may also boost school achievement. Believing so, 30 U.S. states have enacted more than 170 self-esteem–promoting statutes.

But other people, including psychologists William Damon (1995), Robyn Dawes (1994), Mark Leary (2012), Martin Seligman (1994, 2002), Roy Baumeister and John Tierney (2011), and one of us (Twenge, 2013, 2014), doubt that self-esteem is really "the armor that protects kids" from underachievement (or drug abuse and delinquency). Perhaps it is the other way around: Perhaps doing well builds self-esteem. Some studies suggest this is true; children who do well and are praised for it develop high self-esteem (Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990).

It is also possible that self-esteem and achievement correlate because both are linked to underlying intelligence, family social status, or parental behavior. In one study of over 2,000 people, the correlation between self-esteem and achievement evaporated when researchers mathematically removed the predictive power of intelligence and family status (Bachman & O'Malley, 1977; Maruyama et al., 1981). In another study, the correlation between self-esteem and delinquency disappeared when factors such as drug use by parents were controlled (Boden et al., 2008). In other words, low self-esteem and poor behavior are both caused by the same thing: an unfortunate home environment. Both may be symptoms of a bad childhood rather than being caused by each other.

The great strength of correlational research is that it tends to occur in real-world settings where we can examine factors such as race, gender, and social status—factors that we cannot manipulate in the laboratory. Its great disadvantage lies in the ambiguity of the results. This point is so important that even if it fails to impress people the first 25 times they hear it, it is worth repeating a 26th time: Knowing that two variables change together (correlate) enables us to predict one when we know the other, but correlation does not specify cause and effect.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH: SEARCHING FOR CAUSE AND EFFECT

The difficulty of determining cause and effect in correlational studies often prompts social psychologists to create laboratory simulations of everyday processes whenever this is feasible and ethical. These simulations are akin to aeronautical wind tunnels. Aeronautical engineers do not begin by observing how flying objects perform in various natural environments. The variations in both atmospheric conditions and flying objects are too complex. Instead, they construct a simulated reality in which they can manipulate wind conditions and wing structures. Due to their use of a simulated reality, experiments have two major advantages over correlational studies: random assignment and control.

Random Assignment: The Great Equalizer

Consider a research study finding that children who watched more violent TV shows were more likely to behave aggressively in later life (Huesmann et al., 2003). However, that's a correlational finding, so it's difficult to tell if violent TV shows cause aggression, children who are already aggressive watch more violent TV shows, or a third variable causes violent TV watching and later aggressive behavior. A survey researcher might measure and statistically control for some possible third variables and see if the correlations survive. But one can never control for all the factors that might distinguish people who love violent TV shows and those who don't. Maybe they differ in personality, intelligence, self-control—or in dozens of ways the researcher has not considered.

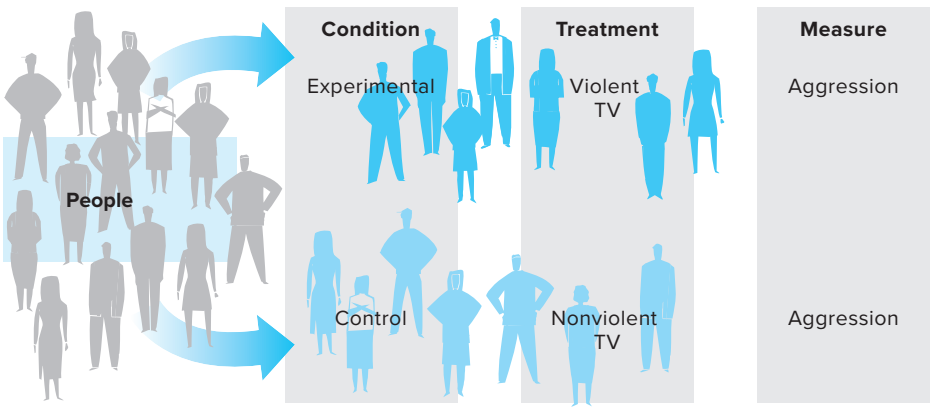

FIGURE 1-2
Random Assignment. Experiments randomly assign people either to a condition that receives the experimental treatment or to a control condition that does not. This gives the researcher confidence that any later difference is somehow caused by the treatment.

In one fell swoop, **random assignment** eliminates all such extraneous factors. For example, a researcher might randomly assign people to watch violent TV or nonviolent TV shows, and then measure their aggressive behavior. With random assignment, each person has an equal chance of viewing the violent TV or the nonviolent TV shows. Thus, the people in both groups would, in every conceivable way—family status, intelligence, education, initial aggressiveness, hair color—average about the same. Highly aggressive people, for example, are equally likely to appear in both groups. Because random assignment creates equivalent groups, any later difference in aggressive behavior between the two groups will almost surely have something to do with the only way they differ—whether or not they viewed violence **(Figure 1-2).**

Control: Manipulating Variables

Social psychologists experiment by constructing social situations that simulate important features of our daily lives. By varying just one or two factors (called **independent variables**) at a time, the experimenter pinpoints their influence. As the wind tunnel helps the aeronautical engineer discover principles of aerodynamics, so the experiment enables the social psychologist to discover principles of social thinking, social influence, and social relations.

How exactly is this done? Let's continue with the example of violent TV shows and aggression.

To study this question using an experimental method, Chris Boyatzis and colleagues (1995) showed some elementary schoolchildren, but not others, an episode of the most popular—and violent—children's television program of the 1990s, *Power Rangers.* Thus, the researchers controlled the situation by having some children do

one thing and other children not, an example of how researchers manipulate variables through *control.* Whether the children watched the *Power Rangers* show was the independent variable in this experiment.

Immediately after viewing the episode, the children who watched *Power Rangers* committed seven times as many aggressive acts as those who did not. The observed aggressive acts were the **dependent variable**—the outcome being measured—in this study. Such experiments indicate that television can be one cause of children's aggressive behavior.

Replication: Are the Results Reproducible?

A handful of unreliable findings, some from researchers who committed fraud by faking data, have raised concerns about the reproducibility of medical and psychological research. Although "mere replications" of others' research are unglamorous—they seldom make headline news—today's science is placing greater value on **replication** studies. Researchers must precisely explain their stimuli and procedures so that others can match them. Many now file their methods and their detailed data in a public, online, "open science" archive (Brandt et al., 2014; Miguel et al., 2014).

Additionally, teams of researchers have formed international collaborative efforts to replicate the results of published research papers. One such effort sought to replicate 100 studies published in three prominent psychology journals. About half of the replication studies produced effects similar in strength to the original study (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). Another replication effort (the "Many Labs" project) involving more studies on each question found more encouraging results, with 85% of studies replicating (Klein et al., 2014). More recent initiatives replicated 54% and 62% of prior studies (Camerer et al., 2018; Moshontz et al., 2018). Such replication forms an essential part of good science. Any single study provides some information—it's one estimate. Better is the aggregated data from multiple studies (Stanley & Spence, 2014): Replication = confirmation.

The Ethics of Experimentation

Our television example illustrates why experiments can raise ethical issues. Social psychologists would not, over long periods, expose one group of children to brutal violence. Rather, they briefly alter people's social experience and note the effects. Sometimes the experimental treatment is a harmless, perhaps even enjoyable, experience to which people give their knowing consent. Occasionally, however, researchers find themselves operating in a gray area between the harmless and the risky.

Social psychologists often venture into that ethical gray area when they design experiments that engage intense thoughts and emotions. Experiments do not need to have **mundane realism** (Aronson et al., 1985). That is, laboratory behavior need not be like everyday behavior, which is typically mundane,

or unimportant. But the experiment *should* have **experimental realism**—it should engage the participants. Experimenters do not want participants consciously play-acting or bored; they want to engage real psychological processes. An example of such engagement would be delivering electric shocks as part of an experiment on aggression. Forcing people to choose whether to give intense or mild electric shock to someone else can be a realistic measure of aggression. It functionally simulates real aggression, much as a wind tunnel simulates atmospheric wind.

Achieving experimental realism sometimes requires deceiving people with a plausible *cover story.* If the person in the next room is actually not receiving the shocks, the experimenter does not want the participants to know that. That would destroy the experimental realism. Thus, approximately one-third of social psychological studies in past decades used deception (Korn & Nicks, 1993; Vitelli, 1988), in which participants did not know the study's true purpose.

Researchers often walk a tightrope in designing experiments that will be involving yet ethical. To believe that you are hurting someone, or to be subjected to strong social pressure, may be temporarily uncomfortable. Such experiments raise the age-old question of whether ends justify means. Do the risks exceed those we experience in everyday life (Fiske & Hauser, 2014)? Social psychologists' deceptions are usually brief and mild compared with many misrepresentations in real life and in some TV reality shows. (One network reality TV series—*Joe Millionaire*—deceived women into competing for the hand of a handsome supposed millionaire, who turned out to be an ordinary laborer.)

University ethics committees review social psychological research to ensure that it will treat people humanely and that the scientific merit justifies any temporary deception or distress. Ethical principles developed by the American Psychological Association (2017), the Canadian Psychological Association (2017), and the British Psychological Society (2009) mandate investigators to:

- Tell potential participants enough about the experiment to enable their **informed consent.**
- Be truthful. Use deception only if essential and justified by a significant purpose and not about aspects that would "influence their willingness to participate."
- Protect participants (and bystanders, if any) from harm and significant discomfort.
- Treat information about the individual participants confidentially.
- Debrief participants. Fully explain the experiment afterward, including any deception. The only exception to this rule is when the feedback would be distressing, such as by making participants realize they have been stupid or cruel.

The experimenter should be sufficiently informative and considerate that people leave feeling at least as good about themselves as when they came in. Better yet, the participants should be compensated by having learned something (Sharpe & Faye, 2009). When treated respectfully, few participants mind being deceived (Epley & Huff, 1998; Kimmel, 1998). Indeed, say social psychology's advocates, professors provoke far greater anxiety and distress by giving and returning course exams than researchers provoke in their experiments.

GENERALIZING FROM LABORATORY TO LIFE

As the research on television and violence illustrates, social psychology mixes everyday experience and laboratory analysis. Throughout this book, we do the same by drawing our data mostly from the laboratory and our examples mostly from life. Social psychology displays a healthy interplay between laboratory research and everyday life. Hunches gained from everyday experience often inspire laboratory research, which deepens our understanding of the experience.

This interplay appears in the children's television experiment. What people saw in everyday life suggested correlational research, which led to experimental research. Network and government policymakers, those with the power to make changes, are now aware of the results. In many areas, including studies of helping, leadership style, depression, and self-efficacy, effects found in the lab have been mirrored by effects in the field, especially when the laboratory effects have been large (Mitchell, 2012). "The psychology laboratory has generally produced psychological truths rather than trivialities," noted Craig Anderson and colleagues (1999).

We need to be cautious, however, in generalizing from laboratory to life. Although the laboratory uncovers basic dynamics of human existence, it is still a simplified, controlled reality. It tells us what effect to expect of variable X, all other things being equal—which in real life they never are. Moreover, as you will see, the participants in many experiments are college students. Although that may help you identify with them, college students are hardly a random sample of all humanity (Henry, 2008a, 2008b). And most participants are from WEIRD (*W*estern, *E*ducated, *I*ndustrialized, *R*ich, and *D*emocratic) cultures that represent but 12% of humanity (Henrich et al., 2010). Would we get similar results with people of different ages, educational levels, and cultures? That is always an open question.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish between the *content* of people's thinking and acting (for example, their attitudes) and the *process* by which they think and act (for example, *how* attitudes affect actions and vice versa). The content varies more from culture to culture than does the process. People from various cultures may hold different opinions yet form them in similar ways.

Although our behaviors may differ, we are influenced by the same social forces. Beneath our surface diversity, we are more alike than different.

CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER

social psychology The scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another.

theory An integrated set of principles that explain and predict observed events.

hypothesis A testable proposition that describes a relationship that may exist between events.

field research Research done in natural, real-life settings outside the laboratory.

correlational research The study of the naturally occurring relationships among variables.

experimental research Studies that seek clues to cause–effect relationships by manipulating one or more factors (independent variables) while controlling others (holding them constant).

random assignment The process of assigning participants to the conditions of an experiment such that all persons have the same chance of being in a given condition. (Note the distinction between random *assignment* in experiments and random *sampling* in surveys. Random assignment helps us infer cause and effect. Random sampling helps us generalize to a population.)

independent variable The experimental factor that a researcher manipulates.

dependent variable The variable being measured, so called because it may depend on manipulations of the independent variable.

replication Repeating a research study, often with different participants in different settings, to determine whether a finding could be reproduced.

mundane realism Degree to which an experiment is superficially similar to everyday situations.

experimental realism Degree to which an experiment absorbs and involves its participants.

informed consent An ethical principle requiring that research participants be told enough to enable them to choose whether they wish to participate.

MODULE

2

Did You Know It All Along?

Anything seems commonplace, once explained.

Dr. Watson to Sherlock Holmes

Social psychology is everybody's business. For centuries, philosophers, novelists, and poets have observed and commented on social behavior. Every day, people observe, interpret, and influence others' actions. Thus, it should not surprise us that many of this book's conclusions will already have occurred to people. So, does social psychology simply formalize what most folks already know?

Writer Cullen Murphy (1990) took that view: "Day after day social scientists go out into the world. Day after day they discover that people's behavior is pretty much what you'd expect." Nearly a half-century earlier, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (1949) reacted with similar scorn to social scientists' studies of American World War II soldiers. Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (1949) reviewed those studies and offered a sample with interpretive comments:

1. Better-educated soldiers adjusted less easily than did less-educated soldiers. (Intellectuals were less prepared for battle stresses than were street-smart people.)
2. Southern soldiers coped better with the hot South Seas island climate than did Northern soldiers. (Southerners are more accustomed to hot weather.)

3. White low-ranking soldiers were more eager for promotion than were Black low-ranking soldiers. (Years of oppression take a toll on achievement motivation.)
4. Southern Blacks preferred Southern to Northern White officers. (Southern officers were more experienced and skilled in interacting with Blacks.)

As you read those findings, did you agree that they were basically common sense? If so, you may be surprised to learn that Lazarsfeld went on to say, "Every one of these statements is the direct opposite of what was actually found." In reality, the studies found that less-educated soldiers adapted more poorly. Southerners were not more likely than Northerners to adjust to a tropical climate. Blacks were more eager than Whites for promotion, and so forth. "If we had mentioned the actual results of the investigation first [as Schlesinger experienced], the reader would have labeled these 'obvious' also."

One problem with common sense is that we invoke it after we know the facts. Events are far more "obvious" and predictable in hindsight than beforehand. When people learn the outcome of an experiment, that outcome suddenly seems unsurprising—much less surprising than it is to people who are simply told about the experimental procedure and the possible outcomes (Slovic & Fischhoff, 1977). After more than 800 investigations of this tendency to retrofit our prior expectations, **hindsight bias** (also called the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon*) has become one of psychology's best-established phenomena (Roese & Vohs, 2012).

Activity 2.1

Likewise, in everyday life, we often do not expect something to happen until it does. *Then* we suddenly see clearly the forces that brought the event about and feel unsurprised. Moreover, we may also misremember our earlier view (Blank et al., 2008; Nestler et al., 2010). Errors in judging the future's foreseeability and in remembering our past combine to create hindsight bias.

Thus, after elections or stock market shifts, most commentators find the turn of events unsurprising: "The market was due for a correction." "2016 was a 'change election,' so it makes sense that Donald Trump won." As Danish philosopher–theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1844) put it, life must be lived forwards, but "can only be understood backwards."

If hindsight bias is pervasive, you may now be feeling that you already knew about this phenomenon. Indeed, almost any conceivable result of a psychological experiment can seem like common sense—*after* you know the result.

You can demonstrate the phenomenon yourself. Take a group of people and tell half of them one psychological finding and the other half the opposite result. For example, tell half as follows:

> Social psychologists have found that, whether choosing friends or falling in love, we are most attracted to people whose traits are different from our own. There seems to be wisdom in the old saying "Opposites attract."

Tell the other half:

> Social psychologists have found that, whether choosing friends or falling in love, we are most attracted to people whose traits are similar to our own. There seems to be wisdom in the old saying "Birds of a feather flock together."

Ask the people first to explain the result. Then ask them to say whether it is "surprising" or "not surprising." Virtually all will find a good explanation for whichever result they were given and will say it is "not surprising."

Indeed, we can draw on our stockpile of proverbs to make almost any result seem to make sense. If a social psychologist reports that separation intensifies romantic attraction, John Q. Public responds, "You get paid for this? Everybody knows that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'" Should it turn out that separation *weakens* attraction, John will say, "My grandmother could have told you, 'Out of sight, out of mind.'"

Karl Teigen (1986) must have had a few chuckles when he asked University of Leicester students to evaluate actual proverbs and their opposites. When given the proverb "Fear is stronger than love," most rated it as true. But so did students who were given its reversed form, "Love is stronger than fear." Likewise, the genuine proverb "He that is fallen cannot help him who is down" was rated highly; but so too was "He that is fallen can help him who is down." Our favorites, however, were two highly rated proverbs: "Wise men make proverbs and fools repeat them" (authentic) and its made-up counterpart, "Fools make proverbs and wise men repeat them."

Hindsight bias creates a problem for many psychology students. Sometimes results are genuinely surprising (for example, that Olympic *bronze* medalists take more joy in their achievement than do silver medalists). More often, when you read the results of experiments in your textbooks, the material seems easy, even obvious. When you later take a multiple-choice test on which you must choose among several plausible conclusions, the task may become surprisingly difficult. "I don't know what happened," the befuddled student later moans. "I thought I knew the material."

The I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon can have unfortunate consequences. It is conducive to arrogance—an overestimation of our own intellectual powers. Moreover, because outcomes seem like they should have been predictable, we are more likely to blame decision makers for what are in retrospect "obvious" bad choices than to praise them for good choices, which also seem "obvious."

Starting *after* the 9/11 terror attack and working backward, signals pointing to the impending disaster seemed obvious. A U.S. Senate investigative report listed the missed or misinterpreted clues (Gladwell, 2003): The CIA knew that al Qaeda operatives had entered the country. An FBI agent sent a memo to headquarters that began by warning "the Bureau and New York of the possibility of a coordinated effort by Osama bin Laden to send students to the United States to attend civilian aviation universities and colleges." The FBI ignored that accurate warning and failed to relate it to other reports that terrorists were planning to use planes as weapons. The president received a daily briefing titled "Bin Laden Determined to

Strike Inside the United States" and stayed on vacation. "The dumb fools!" critics using hindsight said. "Why couldn't they connect the dots?"

But what seems clear in hindsight is seldom clear on the front side of history. The intelligence community is overwhelmed with "noise," with rare shreds of useful information buried in piles of useless information. Analysts must thus decide which to pursue, and only when a lead is pursued does it stand a chance of being connected to another lead. In the six years before 9/11, the FBI's counterterrorism unit could never have pursued all 68,000 uninvestigated leads. In hindsight, the few useful ones are now obvious.

We blame not only others, but also ourselves for "stupid mistakes"—perhaps for not having handled a person or a situation better. Looking back, we see how we should have handled it. "I should have known how busy I would be at the semester's end and started that paper earlier." "I should have realized sooner that he was not to be trusted." But sometimes we are too hard on ourselves. We forget that what is obvious to us *now* was not nearly so obvious at the time.

Physicians who are told both a patient's symptoms and the cause of death (as determined by autopsy) sometimes wonder how an incorrect diagnosis could have been made. Other physicians, given only the symptoms, do not find the diagnosis nearly so obvious (Dawson et al., 1988). Would juries be slower to assume malpractice if they were forced to take a foresight rather than a hindsight perspective?

What do we conclude—that common sense is usually wrong? Sometimes it is. At other times, conventional wisdom is right—or it falls on both sides of an issue: Does happiness come from knowing the truth, or from preserving illusions? From being with others, or from living in peaceful solitude? Opinions are a dime a dozen. No matter what we find, there will be someone who foresaw it. (Mark Twain jested that the biblical Adam was the only person who, when saying something, knew that nobody had said it before.) But which of the many competing ideas best fit reality? Research can specify the circumstances under which a commonsense truism is valid.

The point is not that common sense is predictably wrong. Rather, common sense usually is right—*after the fact.* We therefore easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we know and knew more than we do and did. And that is precisely why we need science to help us sift reality from illusion and genuine predictions from easy hindsight.

CONCEPT TO REMEMBER

hindsight bias The tendency to exaggerate, after learning an outcome, one's ability to have foreseen how something turned out. Also known as the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon.*

PART TWO

Social Thinking

This book unfolds around its definition of social psychology: the scientific study of how we *think about* (Part Two), *influence* (Part Three), and *relate to* (Part Four) one another.

These modules on social thinking examine the interplay between our sense of self and our social worlds, for example, by showing how self-interest colors our social judgments.

Succeeding modules explore the amazing and sometimes rather amusing ways we form beliefs about our social worlds. We have quite remarkable powers of intuition (or what social psychologists call *automatic information processing*), yet in at least a half-dozen ways, our intuition often fails us. Knowing these ways not only beckons us to humility, but also can help us sharpen our thinking, keeping it more closely in touch with reality.

We will explore the links between attitudes and behaviors: Do our attitudes determine our behaviors? Do our behaviors determine our attitudes? Or does it work both ways?

Finally, we will apply these concepts and findings to clinical psychology, by showing where clinical intuition may go astray but also how social psychologists might assist a clinician's explanation and treatment of depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

MODULE

3

Self-Concept: Who Am I?

No topic in psychology today is more heavily researched than the self. In 2016, the word *self* appeared in 26,016 book and article summaries in *PsycINFO* (the online archive of psychological research)—25 times more than it appeared in 1970.

AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORLDS: OUR SENSE OF SELF

Try this: Complete the sentence "I am _____" in five different ways. Your answers provide a glimpse of your **self-concept.**

The most important aspect of yourself is your self. The elements of your self-concept, the specific beliefs by which you define yourself, are your **self-schemas** (Markus & Wurf, 1987). *Schemas* are mental templates by which we organize our worlds. Our *self*-schemas—our perceiving ourselves as athletic, overweight, smart, or anything else—powerfully affect how we perceive, remember, and evaluate other people and ourselves. If being an athlete is one of your self-schemas, then you will tend to notice others' bodies and skills, will quickly recall sports-related experiences, and will welcome information that is consistent with your self-schema as an athlete (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984). Because birthdays are often central pieces of information within self-schemas, if your friend's birthday is close to yours, you'll be more likely to remember it (Kesebir & Oishi, 2010). The self-schemas that make up our self-concepts help us organize and retrieve our experiences.

Activity 3.1

Our sense of self is central to our lives—so much so that we tend to see ourselves on center stage and to overestimate the extent to which others notice us. Because of this **spotlight effect,** we intuitively overestimate the extent to which others' attention is aimed at us.

Timothy Lawson (2010) explored the spotlight effect by having college students change into a sweatshirt emblazoned with "American Eagle" before meeting a group of peers. Nearly 40% were sure the observers would remember what the shirt said, but only 10% actually did. Most observers did not even notice when the students changed sweatshirts after leaving the room for a few minutes. In another experiment, even embarrassing clothes, such as a T-shirt with singer Barry Manilow on it, provoked only 23% of observers to notice—many fewer than the 50% estimated by the students sporting the 1970s warbler on their chests (Gilovich et al., 2000).

What's true of our dorky clothes and bad hair is also true of our emotions: our anxiety, irritation, disgust, deceit, or attraction to someone else (Gilovich et al., 1998). Fewer people notice than we presume. Keenly aware of our own emotions, we often have an illusion that they are transparent to others. The same goes for our social blunders and public mental slips. But research shows that what we agonize over, others may hardly notice and soon forget (Savitsky et al., 2001). The more self-conscious we are, the more we believe this *illusion of transparency* (Vorauer & Ross, 1999).

SELF AND CULTURE

How did you complete the "I am _____" statement? Did you give information about your personal traits, such as "I am honest," "I am tall," or "I am outgoing"? Or did you also describe your social identity, such as "I am a Pisces," "I am a MacDonald," or "I am a Muslim"?

For some people, especially those in industrialized Western cultures, **individualism** prevails. Identity is self-contained. Becoming an adult means separating from parents, becoming self-reliant, and defining one's personal, *independent self.* One's identity—as a unique individual with particular abilities, traits, values, and dreams—remains fairly constant.

Western culture assumes your life will be enriched by believing in your power of personal control. Western literature, from *The Iliad* to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* celebrates the self-reliant individual. Movie plots feature rugged heroes who buck the establishment. Songs proclaim "I Gotta Be Me," declare that "The Greatest Love of All" is loving oneself (Schoeneman, 1994), or state without irony that "I Am a God" or "I Believe the World Should Revolve Around Me." Individualism flourishes when people experience affluence, mobility, urbanism, economic prosperity, and mass media, and when economies shift away from manufacturing and toward information and service industries (Bianchi, 2016; Grossmann & Varnum, 2015; Triandis, 1994). Such changes are occurring worldwide and, as we might therefore expect, individualism is increasing globally (Santos et al., 2017).

Most cultures native to Asia, Africa, and Central and South America place a greater value on **collectivism,** by respecting and identifying with the group. In these cultures, people are more self-critical and focus less on positive self-views (Heine et al., 1999). Malaysians, Indians, Koreans, Japanese, and traditional Kenyans such as the Maasai, for example, are much more likely than Australians, Americans, and the British to complete the "I am" statement with their group identities (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). When speaking, people using the languages of collectivist countries say "I" less often (Kashima & Kashima, 1998, 2003). Compared with U.S. church websites, Korean church websites place more emphasis on social connections and participation and less on personal spiritual growth and self-betterment (Sasaki & Kim, 2011).

Of course, pigeonholing cultures as solely individualist or collectivist oversimplifies, because within any culture individualism varies from person to person (Oyserman et al., 2002a, 2002b). There are individualist Chinese and collectivist Americans, and most people behave communally at some times and individualistically at others (Bandura, 2004). Individualism–collectivism also varies across a country's political views and regions. Conservatives tend to be economic individualists ("don't tax or regulate me") and moral collectivists ("legislate against immorality"). Liberals tend to be economic collectivists ("let's pass universal health care") and moral individualists ("keep your laws off my body"). In the United States, Native Hawaiians and people living in the Deep South are more collectivistic than are those in states in the West such as Oregon and Montana (Plaut et al., 2002; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). The rich are more individualistic than the poor, males more than females, Whites more than non-Whites, and San Franciscans more than Bostonians (Kraus et al., 2012; Markus & Conner, 2013; Plaut et al., 2012). In China, people living in areas that grow rice (which requires more collective cooperation) are more collectivistic than those in areas that grow wheat (Talhelm et al., 2014). Despite individual and subcultural variations, researchers continue to regard individualism and collectivism as genuine cultural variables (Schimmack et al., 2005).

Growing Individualism Within Cultures

Cultures can also change over time, and many seem to be growing more individualistic. One way to see this is using the Google Books Ngram Viewer, which shows the usage of words and phrases in the full text of 5 million books since the 1800s (try it yourself; it's online and free). In the 2000s, compared to previous decades, books published in the United States used the word *get* more and *give* less (Greenfield, 2013), and used *I, me,* and *you* more and *we* and *us* a little less (Twenge et al., 2013) **(Figure 3-1).** This pattern of increasing individualism also appears in books in eight other languages worldwide (Yu et al., 2016).

Popular song lyrics also became more likely to use *I* and *me* and less likely to use *we* and *us* between 1980 and 2007 (DeWall et al., 2011), with the norm shifting from the sappy love song of the 1980s ("Endless Love," 1981) to the self-celebration of the 2000s (Justin Timberlake single-handedly bringing "Sexy Back," 2006).

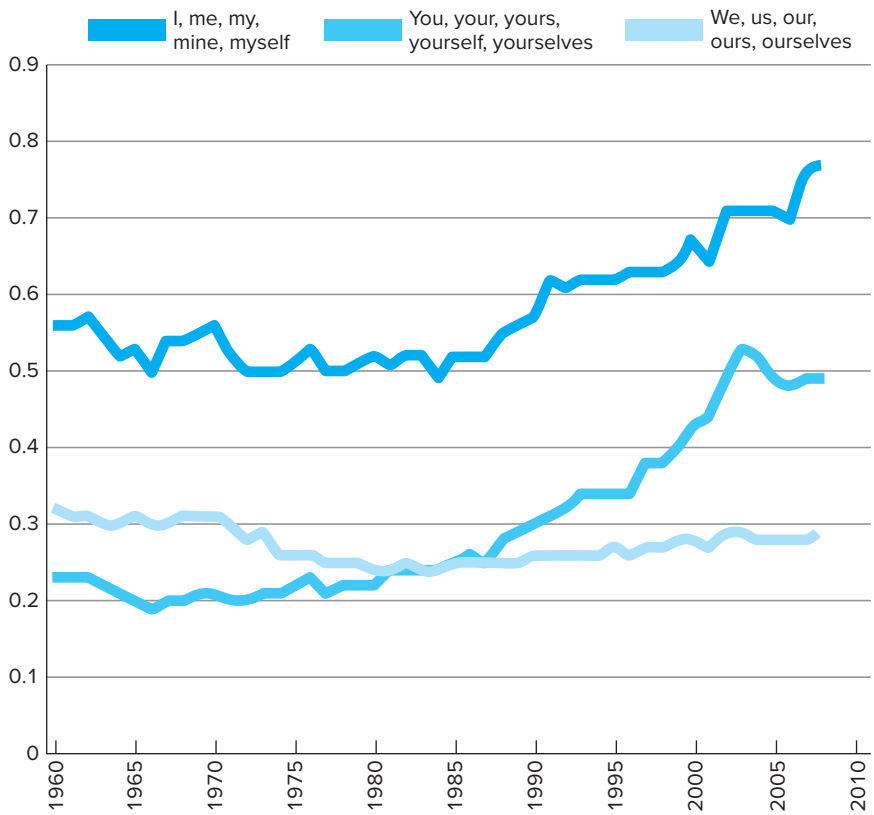

FIGURE 3-1
Increasing individualism. In the Google Books database, American books in the 2000s (vs. those from the 1960s and 1970s) used *I, me, my, mine,* and *myself* and *you, your, yours, yourself,* and *yourselves* more often. Source: Twenge et al., 2012.

Even your name might show the shift toward individualism: American parents are now less likely to give their children common names and more likely to help them stand out with an unusual name. Although nearly 20% of boys born in 1990 received one of the 10 most common names, less than 8% received such a common name by 2016, with the numbers similar for girls (Twenge et al., 2016a). Today, you don't have to be the child of a celebrity to have a name as unique as North, Suri, or Apple.

Americans and Australians, most of whom are descended from those who struck out on their own to emigrate, are more likely than Europeans to give their children uncommon names. Parents in the western United States and Canada, descended from independent pioneers, are also more likely than those in the more established east to give their children uncommon names (Varnum & Kitayama, 2011). The more individualistic the time or the place, the more children receive unique names.

These changes demonstrate a principle that goes deeper than a name: the interaction between individuals and society. Did the culture focus on uniqueness

first and cause the parents' name choices, or did individual parents decide they wanted their children to be unique, thus creating the culture? A similar chicken-and-egg question applies to song lyrics: Did a more self-focused population listen to more self-focused songs, or did listening to more self-focused songs make people more self-focused? The answer, though not yet fully understood, is probably both (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

If you grew up in a Western culture, you were probably told to "express yourself"—through writing, the choices you make, the products you buy, and perhaps through your tattoos or piercings. When asked about the purpose of language, American students were more likely to explain that it allows self-expression, whereas Korean students focused on how language allows communication with others. American students were also more likely to see their choices as expressions of themselves and to evaluate their personal choices more favorably (Kim & Sherman, 2007). The individualized latté—"decaf, single shot, skinny, extra hot"—that seems just right at a North American coffee shop would seem strange in Seoul, noted Heejung Kim and Hazel Markus (1999). In Korea, people place less value on expressing their uniqueness and more on tradition and shared practices (Choi & Choi, 2002). Korean advertisements tend to feature people together, whereas American advertisements highlight personal choice or freedom (Markus, 2001; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008).

Collectivistic cultures also promote a greater sense of belonging and more integration between the self and others. When Chinese participants were asked to think about their mothers, a brain region associated with the self became activated—an area that lit up for Western participants only when they thought about themselves (Zhu et al., 2007). *Inter*dependent selves have not one self but many selves: self-with-parents, self-at-work, self-with-friends (Cross et al., 1992). As **Figure 3-2** and **Table 3-1** suggest, the interdependent self is embedded in social memberships.

Activity 3.2

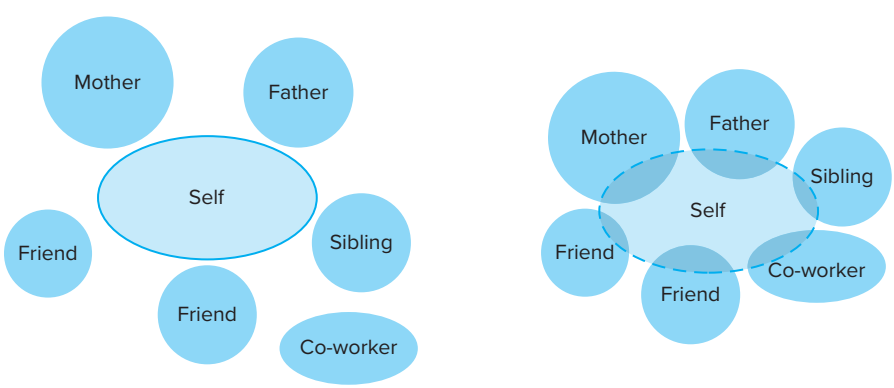

FIGURE 3-2
Self-construal as independent or interdependent. The independent self acknowledges relationships with others. But the interdependent self is more deeply embedded in others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

TABLE 3-1 SELF-CONCEPT: INDEPENDENT OR INTERDEPENDENT

	Independent (Individualistic)	*Interdependent (Collectivist)*
Identity is	Personal, defined by individual traits and goals	Social, defined by connections with others
What matters	Me—personal achievement and fulfillment; my rights and liberties	We—group goals and solidarity; our social responsibilities and relationships
Disapproves of	Conformity	Egotism
Illustrative motto	"To thine own self be true"	"No one is an island"
Cultures that support	Individualistic Western	Collectivistic Asian and developing nations

Conversation is less direct and more polite (Holtgraves, 1997), and people focus more on gaining social approval (Lalwani et al., 2006). In a collectivistic culture, the goal of social life is to harmonize with and support one's communities, not—as it is in more individualistic societies—to enhance one's individual self and make independent choices.

Culture and Self-Esteem

In collectivist cultures, self-esteem tends to be malleable (context specific) rather than stable (enduring across situations). In one study, four in five Canadian students agreed that they remained essentially the same person in different situations, compared with only one in three Chinese and Japanese students (Tafarodi et al., 2004).

For those in individualistic cultures, self-esteem is more personal and less relational. If Westerners' personal identity is threatened, they will feel angrier and sadder than when their collective identity is threatened (Gaertner et al., 1999).

So when, do you suppose, are university students in collectivist Japan and individualist United States most likely to report positive emotions such as happiness and elation? For Japanese students, happiness comes with positive social engagement—with feeling close, friendly, and respectful. For American students, it more often comes with disengaged emotions—with feeling effective, superior, and proud (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Conflict in collectivist cultures often takes place between groups; individualist cultures breed more conflict (and crime and divorce) between individuals (Triandis, 2000).

When Shinobu Kitayama (1999), after 10 years of teaching and researching in America, visited his Japanese alma mater, Kyoto University, graduate students were "astounded" when he explained the Western idea of the individualistic self. "I persisted in explaining this Western notion of self-concept—one that my American students understood intuitively—and finally began to persuade them that, indeed, many Americans do have such a disconnected notion of self. Still, one of them, sighing deeply, said at the end, 'Could this *really* be true?'"

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

"Know thyself," admonished an ancient Greek oracle. We certainly try. We readily form beliefs about ourselves, and we in Western cultures don't hesitate to explain why we feel and act as we do. But how well do we actually know ourselves?

"There is one thing, and only one in the whole universe which we know more about than we could learn from external observation," noted C. S. Lewis (1952, pp. 18–19). "That one thing is [ourselves]. We have, so to speak, inside information; we are in the know." Indeed. Yet sometimes we *think* we know, but our inside information is wrong. That is the unavoidable conclusion of some fascinating research.

Predicting Our Behavior

Consider two examples of how people's self-predictions can err:

Movie watching. Netflix used to invite users to predict what films they later wanted to watch. What they actually later watched, however, were lower-brow films. So Netflix stopped asking people what they wanted to watch and instead tried to predict their preferences based on similar users' preferences. It worked—they watched more movies (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017).

Dating and romance future. Inevitably, dating couples are optimistic about how long their relationship will last. Their friends and family often know better, report Tara MacDonald and Michael Ross (1997). Among University of Waterloo students, their roommates were better predictors of whether the couples' romances would survive than the couples were. So if you're in love and want to know whether it will last, don't listen to your heart—ask your roommate. Medical residents weren't very good at predicting whether they would do well on a surgical skills exam, but peers in the program predicted each other's performance with startling accuracy (Lutsky et al., 1993). Observers predicted psychology students' exam grades better than the students themselves—mostly because they relied on past performance rather than the student's overly optimistic hopes for acing the test (Helzer & Dunning, 2012).

One of the most common errors in behavior prediction is underestimating how long it will take to complete a task (called the **planning fallacy**). The Big Dig freeway construction project in Boston was supposed to take 10 years and actually took 20 years. The Sydney Opera House was supposed to be completed in 6 years; it took 16. Less than one-third of couples engaged to be married completed their wedding planning as quickly as they expected, and only 4 of 10 sweethearts bought a planned Valentine's Day gift by their self-imposed deadline (Min & Arkes, 2012). College students writing a senior thesis paper finished 3 weeks later than their "most realistic" estimate—and a week later than their "worst-case scenario" estimate (Buehler et al., 2002). However, friends and teachers were able to predict how late these papers would be. Just as you should ask your friends how long your relationship is likely to survive, if you want to know

when you will finish your term paper, ask your roommate or your mom. You could also do what Microsoft does: Managers automatically add 30% onto a software developer's estimate of completion—and 50% if the project involves a new operating system (Dunning, 2006).

So, how can you improve your self-predictions? The best way is to be more realistic about how long tasks took in the past. Apparently, people underestimate how long something will take because they misremember previous tasks as taking less time than they actually did (Roy et al., 2005). Another useful strategy: Estimate how long each step in the project will take. Engaged couples who described their wedding-planning steps in more detail more accurately predicted how long the process would take (Min & Arkes, 2012).

Predicting Our Feelings

Many of life's big decisions involve predicting our future feelings. Would marrying this person lead to lifelong contentment? Would entering this profession make for satisfying work? Would going on this vacation produce a happy experience? Or would the likelier results be divorce, job burnout, and holiday disappointment?

Sometimes we know how we will feel—if we fail that exam, win that big game, or soothe our tensions with a half-hour jog. We know what exhilarates us and what makes us anxious or bored. Other times we may mispredict our responses. Asked how they would feel if asked sexually harassing questions on a job interview, most women studied by Woodzicka and LaFrance (2001) said they would feel angry. When actually asked such questions, however, women more often experienced fear.

Studies of "affective forecasting" reveal that people have greatest difficulty predicting the *intensity* and the *duration* of their future emotions (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). People mispredict how they would feel some time after a romantic breakup, receiving a gift, losing an election, winning a game, and being insulted (Gilbert & Ebert, 2002; Loewenstein & Schkade, 1999). Some examples:

- When young men are sexually aroused by erotic photographs, then exposed to a passionate date scenario in which their date asks them to "stop," they admit that they might not stop. If not shown sexually arousing pictures first, they are less likely to say they might be sexually aggressive. When not aroused, they easily mispredict how they will feel and act when aroused—which can lead to unexpected professions of love during lust, to unintended pregnancies, and to repeat offenses among sex abusers who have sincerely vowed "never again."
- Hungry shoppers are more likely to impulse buy ("Those doughnuts would be delicious!") than shoppers who have just enjoyed a quarter-pound blueberry muffin (Gilbert & Wilson, 2000). When you are hungry, you mispredict how gross those deep-fried doughnuts will seem when you are sated. When stuffed, you may underestimate how yummy those doughnuts might be—a purchase whose appeal quickly fades when you've eaten one or two.

- When natural disasters such as hurricanes occur, people predict that their sadness will be greater if more people are killed. But after Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, students' sadness was similar when it was believed that 50 people had been killed to when they believed 1,000 had been killed (Dunn & Ashton-James, 2008). What *did* influence how sad people felt? Seeing pictures of victims. No wonder poignant images of disasters on television have so much influence on us.
- People overestimate how much their well-being would be affected both by bad events (a romantic breakup, failing to reach an athletic goal [Eastwick et al., 2007; van Dijk et al., 2008]) and good events (warmer winters, weight loss, more television channels, more free time). Even extreme events, such as winning a state lottery or suffering a paralyzing accident, impact long-term happiness less than most people suppose.

Our intuitive theory seems to be: "We want. We get. We are happy." If that were true, this module would have fewer words. In reality, noted Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson (2000), we often "miswant." People who imagine an idyllic desert island holiday with sun, surf, and sand may be disappointed when they discover "how much they require daily structure, intellectual stimulation, or regular infusions of Pop Tarts." We think that if our candidate or team wins, we will be delighted for a long while. But study after study reveals the emotional traces of such good tidings evaporate more rapidly than we expect.

We are especially prone to impact bias after *negative* events. Let's make this personal. Gilbert and Wilson invite you to imagine how you might feel a year after losing your nondominant hand. Compared with today, how happy would you be?

You may have focused on what the calamity would mean: no clapping, no shoe tying, no competitive basketball, no speedy keyboarding. Although you likely would forever regret the loss, your general happiness some time after the event would be influenced by "two things: (a) the event, and (b) everything else" (Gilbert & Wilson, 2000). In focusing on the negative event, we discount the importance of everything else that contributes to happiness and thus overpredict our enduring misery. "Nothing that you focus on will make as much difference as you think," wrote researchers David Schkade and Daniel Kahneman (1998).

Moreover, say Wilson and Gilbert (2003), people neglect the speed and the power of their *coping mechanisms,* which include rationalizing, discounting, forgiving, and limiting emotional trauma. Because we are unaware of the speed and strength of our coping, we adapt to disabilities, romantic breakups, exam failures, layoffs, and personal and team defeats more readily than we would expect. Ironically, as Gilbert and colleagues report (2004), major negative events (which activate our psychological defenses) can be less enduringly distressing than minor irritations (which don't activate our defenses). We are, under most circumstances, amazingly resilient.

The Wisdom And Illusions Of Self-Analysis

To a striking extent, then, our intuitions are often dead wrong about what has influenced us and what we will feel and do. But let's not overstate the case. When the causes of our behavior are conspicuous and the correct explanation fits our intuition, our self-perceptions will be accurate (Gavanski & Hoffman, 1987). When the causes of behavior are obvious to an observer, they are usually obvious to us as well. Overall, the correlation between predicted feelings and actual feelings was .28—a significant but far from perfect link (Mathieu & Gosling, 2012).

We are unaware of much that goes on in our minds. Perception and memory studies show that we are more aware of the *results* of our thinking than of its process. Creative scientists and artists often cannot report the thought processes that produced their insights, although they have superb knowledge of the results.

Timothy Wilson (1985, 2002) offered a bold idea: Analyzing why we feel the way we do can actually make our judgments less accurate. In nine experiments, Wilson and colleagues (1989, 2008) found that the attitudes people consciously expressed toward things or people usually predicted their subsequent behavior reasonably well. Their attitude reports became useless, however, if participants were first asked to *analyze* their feelings. For example, dating couples' level of happiness with their relationship accurately predicted whether they would still be dating several months later. But participants who first listed all the reasons why their relationship was good or bad before rating their happiness were misled—their happiness ratings were useless in predicting the future of the relationship! Apparently, the process of dissecting the relationship drew attention to easily verbalized factors that were not as important as harder-to-verbalize happiness. We are often "strangers to ourselves," Wilson concluded (2002).

Such findings illustrate that we have a **dual attitude system,** said Wilson and colleagues (2000). Our automatic *implicit,* unconscious attitudes regarding someone or something often differ from our consciously controlled, *explicit* attitudes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Nosek, 2007). When someone says they make decisions by "trusting my gut," they're referring to their implicit attitudes (Kendrick & Olson, 2012). Although explicit attitudes may change with relative ease, noted Wilson, "implicit attitudes, like old habits, change more slowly." With repeated practice, however, new habitual attitudes can replace old ones.

This research on the limits of our self-knowledge has two practical implications. The first is for psychological inquiry. *Self-reports are often untrustworthy.* Errors in self-understanding limit the scientific usefulness of subjective personal reports.

The second implication is for our everyday lives. Even if people report and interpret their experiences with complete honesty, that does not mean their reports are true. Personal testimonies are powerfully persuasive. But they may also be wrong. Keeping this potential for error in mind can help us feel less intimidated by others and become less gullible.

CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER

self-concept What we know and believe about ourselves.

self-schema Beliefs about self that organize and guide the processing of self-relevant information.

spotlight effect The belief that others are paying more attention to one's appearance and behavior than they really are.

individualism The concept of giving priority to one's own goals over group goals and defining one's identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications.

collectivism Giving priority to the goals of one's groups (often one's extended family or work group) and defining one's identity accordingly.

planning fallacy The tendency to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task.

dual attitude system Differing implicit (automatic) and explicit (consciously controlled) attitudes toward the same object. Verbalized explicit attitudes may change with education and persuasion; implicit attitudes change slowly, with practice that forms new habits.

MODULE

4

Self-Serving Bias

Most of us have a good reputation with ourselves. In studies of self-esteem, even low-scoring people respond in the mid-range of possible scores. (Someone with low self-esteem responds to statements such as "I have good ideas" with a qualifying adjective, such as "somewhat" or "sometimes.") In a study including 53 nations, the average self-esteem score was above the midpoint in every country (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). One of social psychology's most provocative yet firmly established conclusions is the potency of **self-serving bias**—a tendency to perceive oneself favorably.

Activity 4.1

EXPLAINING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EVENTS

Many dozens of experiments have found that people accept credit when told they have succeeded. They attribute the success to their ability and effort, but they attribute failure to external factors, such as bad luck or the problem's inherent "impossibility" (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Wang et al., 2017). Similarly, in explaining their victories, athletes commonly credit themselves, but they attribute losses to something else: bad breaks, bad referee calls, or the other team's super effort or dirty play (Grove et al., 1991; Lalonde, 1992; Mullen & Riordan, 1988). And how much responsibility do you suppose car drivers tend to accept for their accidents? On insurance forms, drivers have described their accidents by writing, "An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished"; "As I reached an intersection, a hedge sprang up, obscuring my vision, and I did not see the other car"; and "A pedestrian hit me and went under my car" (*Toronto News,* 1977).

Self-serving explanations contribute to marital discord, worker dissatisfaction, and bargaining impasses (Kruger & Gilovich, 1999). Small wonder that divorced people usually blame their partner for the breakup (Gray & Silver, 1990), or that managers often blame poor performance on workers' lack of ability or effort while workers

blame external factors such as excessive workload or difficult co-workers (Imai, 1994; Rice, 1985). Small wonder, too, that people evaluate pay raises as fairer when they receive a bigger raise than most of their coworkers (Diekmann et al., 1997).

We help maintain our positive self-images by associating ourselves with success and distancing ourselves from failure. For example, "I got an A on my econ test" versus "The prof gave me a C on my history exam." Blaming failure or rejection on something external, even another's prejudice, is less depressing than seeing oneself as undeserving (Major et al., 2003). Most people will, however, acknowledge their distant past failings—those by their "former" self, noted Anne Wilson and Michael Ross (2001). Describing their old precollege selves, University of Waterloo students offered nearly as many negative as positive statements. When describing their present selves, they offered three times more positive statements. "I've learned and grown, and I'm a better person today," most people surmise. Chumps yesterday, champs today.

Ironically, we are even biased against seeing our own bias. People claim they avoid self-serving bias themselves but readily acknowledge that others commit this bias (Pronin et al., 2002). This "bias blind spot" can have serious consequences during conflicts. If you're negotiating with your roommate over who does household chores, and you believe your roommate has a biased view of the situation, you're much more likely to become angry (Pronin & Ross, 2006). Apparently, we see ourselves as objective and everyone else as biased.

CAN WE ALL BE BETTER THAN AVERAGE?

Self-serving bias also appears when people compare themselves with others. If the sixth-century BC Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu was right that "at no time in the world will a man who is sane over-reach himself, over-spend himself, over-rate himself," then most of us are a little insane. On *subjective, socially desirable,* and *common dimensions,* most people see themselves as better than the average person. Compared with people in general, most people see themselves as more ethical, more competent at their job, friendlier, more intelligent, better looking, less prejudiced, healthier, and even more insightful and less biased in their self-assessments. Even men convicted of violent crimes rated themselves as more moral, kind, and trustworthy than most people (Sedikides et al., 2014). (See "Focus On: Self-Serving Bias—How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways.")

Activity 4.2

Focus On: Self-Serving Bias—How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways

"The one thing that unites all human beings, regardless of age, gender, religion, economic status, or ethnic background," noted columnist Dave Barry (1998), "is that deep down inside, we all believe that we are above average drivers."

We also believe we are above average on most any other subjective and desirable trait. Among the many faces of self-serving bias are these:

- *Ethics.* Most businesspeople see themselves as more ethical than the average businessperson (Baumhart, 1968; Brenner & Molander, 1977). One national survey asked, "How would you rate your own morals and values on a scale from 1 to 100 (100 being perfect)?" Of respondents, 50% rated themselves 90 or above; only 11% said 74 or less (Lovett, 1997).
- *Professional competence.* In one survey, 90% of business managers rated their performance as superior (French, 1968). In Australia, 86% of people rated their job performance as above average, and only 1% as below average (Headey & Wearing, 1987). Most surgeons believe *their* patients' mortality rate to be lower than average (Gawande, 2002).
- *Virtues.* In the Netherlands, most high school students rate themselves as more honest, persistent, original, friendly, and reliable than the average high school student (Hoorens, 1993, 1995). Most people also see themselves as more likely than others to donate blood, give to charity, and give one's bus seat to a pregnant woman (Klein & Epley, 2017).
- *Voting.* When asked if they would vote in an upcoming election, 90% of students said they would, but guessed that only 75% of their peers would vote. The actual result? Sixty-nine percent voted (Epley & Dunning, 2006). We are better at predicting others' socially desirable behaviors than our own.
- *Intelligence.* Most people perceive themselves as more intelligent, better looking, and much less prejudiced than their average peer (Public Opinion, 1984; Watt & Larkin, 2010; Wylie, 1979). When someone outperforms them, people tend to think of the other as a genius (Lassiter & Munhall, 2001).
- *Health.* Los Angeles residents view themselves as healthier than most of their neighbors, and most college students believe they will outlive their actuarially predicted age of death by approximately 10 years (Larwood, 1978; Snyder, 1978).
- *Attractiveness.* Is it your experience, as it is mine [DM], that most photos of you seem not to do you justice? In one experiment, researchers showed people a lineup of faces—one their own, the others being their face morphed into those of less and more attractive faces (Epley & Whitchurch, 2008). When asked which was their actual face, people tended to identify an attractively enhanced version of their face.
- *Driving.* Most drivers—even most drivers who have been hospitalized for accidents—believe themselves to be safer and more skilled than the average driver (Guerin, 1994; McKenna & Myers, 1997; Svenson, 1981). Dave Barry was right.