

THOMAS HEINZEN ■ WIND GOODFRIEND

# SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

2E





# **Social Psychology**

Second Edition

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# Social Psychology

## Second Edition

**Thomas Heinzen**  
*William Paterson University*

**Wind Goodfriend**  
*Buena Vista University*



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
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Photo of Creation of Adam, fresco painted by Michelangelo (1475–1564), Sistine Chapel Ceiling (1508–1512) by Jörg Bittrner-Uhna



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# PREFACE

## TO STUDENTS

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We—Tom and Wind—*love* social psychology.

We’ve written this book with the sincere hope that you’ll love it too, from the first page to the last. We want you to really enjoy your reading homework, to look forward to each chapter, and to want to keep the book as a reference. We know that’s an ambitious goal, but we really think it can happen.

Here’s what we have learned after many years of teaching: Social psychology will surprise you. Some insights will be pleasant; others will be disturbing. That is why how you experience your life after social psychology will be different, deeper, and probably better for you—and for everyone around you. You will gain the most if you dare to bring the honest questions hidden in the back of your mind out into the open in front of the class. Ask your professor, ask each other. Engaging in the material with a scientific curiosity is how we got hooked on social psychology ourselves.

Parts of this book were written with the hope that they will remind you of some important themes and questions to keep in mind. The features focus on three things:

1. The scientific, research-based story of social psychology. The feature called Spotlight on Research Methods reminds you of important methodology and statistical terms by highlighting an important, innovative, or controversial study in each chapter.
2. The social psychology all around you. The feature called Social Psychology in Popular Culture emphasizes concepts and theories from the book that can be seen in movies, TV shows, and songs. We hope that when you’re relaxing with your favorite show, you can’t help but think, “Hey, we just talked about that in my social psych class!”
3. How social psychology applies to you. Every chapter takes you through a What’s My Score? feature, in which you can take a survey to see your own score on a variable developed by researchers. These surveys will help you see how various concepts relate to you, personally, and you’ll also gain a better understanding of how the concept is studied by social psychologists. If you really get passionate about the field, you might use these surveys in your own research studies someday!

The bottom line is that we hope you really engage in every chapter and idea in the following pages. Social psychology isn’t just a bunch of terms and theories—it’s every interaction you have, every day, with every other person in your life. What could be more interesting than that?

## TO INSTRUCTORS

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Thank you for helping us.

We received so many suggestions from helpful reviewers and people who used the first edition of this book. We’ve incorporated as many of those suggestions as possible here in the second edition, because we saw the wisdom in each idea. We were proud that the first edition won the prize for the “Most Promising New Textbook of 2019” by the Textbook Authors Association. But we knew it could be better, and we couldn’t have done that without your help.

## Our Features

We sincerely want students to love social psychology as much as we do. To that end, we've included many features that hopefully appeal to modern students. For example, each chapter features a discussion of how concepts can be seen in popular culture. Students who vaguely recognize cultural differences in relationships can rely on our discussion of *Crazy Rich Asians* to better understand individualism versus collectivism, stereotypes, and more. The halo effect is emphasized through *Queer Eye*. Institutional discrimination is analyzed in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Conformity is examined through *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. These features are fun ways to engage students in surprising, exciting ways.

We also create experiences through self-assessments (the What's My Score? feature) that introduce the depth of social psychology. Measuring their own need for cognition (Chapter 4) introduces a new way to experience self-reflection. Experiencing how the just world hypothesis is measured (Chapter 5) connects students to the impulse to blame the victim. Seeing how much their attitudes match those in a culture of honor (Chapter 11) helps them understand the concept and examine whether their beliefs are tied to aggressive tendencies. Again, each chapter provides a self-report scale to engage the students in an important concept. Experiencing social psychology is a deeper, more memorable way to learn.

Psychological literacy creates better citizens. We promote psychological literacy in several explicit ways when we encourage students to critically examine evidence and ask important questions about social phenomena. Every section of the book ends with a summary of main ideas, but—more important—we offer critical thinking questions. These can be used as discussion starters in class, or they can be the prompts for homework assignments given to students each week. Several are offered so that instructors or students can choose the questions of most interest to them.

Reminding students of the science behind social psychology is also an essential goal. Our Spotlight on Research Methods features, embedded in every chapter, remind students of important methodological and statistical terms. Students learn these in Chapter 2, but we don't want to isolate that chapter from the rest of the material. By using the terms repeatedly and explicitly highlighting them in the feature, we can scaffold learning and build a strong foundation of science.

## The Mini-Chapters

Response to the inclusions of applied mini-chapters in the first edition was extremely enthusiastic! We're happy to share that these have been updated along with the main text. First, we've added two completely new ones, one on careers relevant to social psychology and realistic without a doctorate degree, and another on the fascinating relationship between pets and their humans. For those interested, there's a third new option on the social psychology of the military (for custom orders).

The mini-chapters also now follow a consistent format, with only two sections per mini. Just like the main chapters have new consistency with three sections, having a standard structure for the mini provides a predictable, accessible experience for students. And the content of the minis has been updated as well—there are a total of 242 new references, not counting those in the custom military mini.

A quick word on how to use the minis: Of course, it's up to you, but we encourage allowing students to be involved in which minis are addressed. Wind allows her class to vote on which chapters are covered at the end of the semester, and essay responses to the critical thinking questions are submitted for extra credit. Involving students in the choice of which to cover empowers them and gets them even more excited about the material. You could also allow each student to choose one mini and write an essay about how it could apply to their future career choice. Finally, you don't have to wait until the end of the semester; you might assign minis throughout the semester as a way for students to see various applications of earlier theories.

How you use the minis in your own class is flexible, but we hope they provide a fun and customizable experience to every instructor.

## Changes in the Second Edition

Here's a bulleted list of some of the major changes you'll probably notice in the second edition, compared to the first:

- Every chapter has been revised to be in three sections, instead of varying from three to six. This way, students feel comfortable as they approach each chapter and know what to expect without feeling overwhelmed.
- Several of the popular culture features have been updated to focus on newer movies or TV series that students will know. *My Cousin Vinny*, *Remember the Titans*, and *Mean Girls* are gone, for example, and replaced by *Crazy Rich Asians*, *Mulan*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.
- More research has been added on cultural differences and on advances from neuropsychology throughout the book.
- Language and examples have been updated throughout to be even more sensitive to diversity and to be gender inclusive. For example, when discussing a fictional or theoretical person, the pronoun “they” is always used (instead of “he” or “she”) to avoid a false gender binary. Discussion of intersectionality now occurs several times as well, plus analysis of the social psychology of the #MeToo movement.
- Throughout, the glossary and marginal term definitions have been streamlined to be much shorter and accessible, but still accurate.
- Chapter 2 (Research Methods) now includes a hefty section on the importance of open science.
- Even more critical thinking and criticisms are discussed regarding the famous Zimbardo and Milgram studies in Chapter 7.
- In the main 12 chapters, well over 300 total new citations have been added. Of these, about two thirds were published in 2015 or later.
- Two brand-new mini-chapters have been added: “Social Psychology and Careers” and “Social Psychology of Humans and Their Pets.” We hope these provide fun and important perspectives on aspects of social life to which almost every student can relate.

If you're looking for more detail, here's a chapter-by-chapter list of major changes.

### Chapter 1

- Now in three major sections instead of four
- More discussion of intersectionality
- Updated list of people who have contributed to social psychology who are women and/or people of color
- List of “Big Questions” streamlined from 10 questions to 6
- Popular culture updates now include *Black Panther*, *Black Mirror*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*

### Chapter 2

- Now in three major sections instead of four
- Popular culture updates now include *21 Jump Street* as an example of participant observation
- A large new section has been added on the open science movement



### Chapter 3

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Popular culture updates now include *Get Out* and *Crazy Rich Asians*
- Example of a circus ringmaster has been removed, to be more animal rights friendly
- Clarity in definitions and examples for self-perception theory, self-discrepancy theory, self-expansion theory, and positive illusions
- More balanced approach to the discussion of elevated self-esteem
- Provided more accurate discussion of the mark test in animals
- Forty-seven new references to update research

### Chapter 4

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Provided a trigger warning for the opening example about military conflict
- Changed photo of woman trying to open door, to avoid gender stereotypes
- Updated examples students reported as confusing
- Clarified explanation of mental accessibility
- Corrected example of representativeness heuristic
- Added more to the explanation of the planning fallacy, to discuss examples of students running out of time for assignments

### Chapter 5

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Clarified discussion of micro-expressions
- Added discussion of Weiner's three-step model of attributions
- Added examples of culturemes
- Popular culture updates now include a discussion of *Queer Eye* and the halo effect. Also changed Kevin Spacey example to Helena Bonham Carter
- Photo of Hillary Clinton and Trump updated to reflect more recent politicians
- Nineteen new references to update research

### Chapter 6

- Now in three major sections instead of six
- In general, shortened the chapter to make it more approachable for students. Also rearranged concepts to flow better
- Lightened language regarding the famous Bob Kelly case to decrease possible student reactions to childhood sexual assault
- Popular culture updates now include a discussion of persuasion in *Moneyball*
- Seventeen new references to update research

## Chapter 7

- Now in three major sections instead of four
- Changed opening photo to avoid unintended messaging about college parties
- Popular culture updates now include a discussion of conformity in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*
- Emphasized current criticisms of the Stanford Prison Study (and changed from “Stanford Prison Experiment” to “Study”)
- More discussion of alternative explanations for the results of Milgram’s study
- Twenty-seven new references to update research

## Chapter 8

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Generally streamlined to make the chapter shorter and more accessible
- Removed reference to Sacajawea due to reviewer concerns
- Popular culture updates now discuss *The Avengers* instead of *Justice League*
- Added note of the failed replication of the Zajonc cockroach study
- Forty-seven new references to update research

## Chapter 9

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Popular culture updates removed *Remember the Titans* and *2 Broke Girls* and replaced them with *Mulan* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*
- Added discussion of institutional discrimination
- Clarified the discussion of the Clark doll studies for accuracy
- Added paragraph questioning the validity of jigsaw classrooms
- Sixty-three new references to update research

## Chapter 10

- Updated opening examples to discuss people working against anti-Semitic hate crimes in New York
- Shortened the chapter overall to make it more accessible to students
- Added discussions on neuropsychology and mirror neurons
- Added discussion of the social psychology of the #MeToo movement
- Added more on the dark triad
- Added a paragraph in the gender norms section regarding the false gender binary
- Thirty-five new references to update research

## Chapter 11

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Updated discussion on micro-aggressions

- Added the General Aggression Model
- Updated the discussion of the role of testosterone in aggression based on analysis provided by R. Sapolsky's book *Behave*
- Forty-four new references to update research

## Chapter 12

- Now in three major sections instead of five
- Generally shorter chapter, due to reviewer suggestions it was too long
- Added Sternberg's triangular theory of love
- Expanded discussion on cross-cultural differences in relationships, specifically regarding arranged marriages and marriage motives
- Reduced discussion of both attachment theory and interdependence theory
- Updated popular culture chapter opening to discuss Beyoncé and Jay-Z instead of Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt. Also replaced symmetry example of Denzel Washington with George Clooney and Kim Kardashian

## Teaching Resources

This text includes an array of instructor teaching materials designed to save you time and to help you keep students engaged. To learn more, visit [sagepub.com](http://sagepub.com) or contact your SAGE representative at [sagepub.com/findmyrep](http://sagepub.com/findmyrep).

## In Appreciation and Thanks

We thank reviewers for their detailed suggestions and corrections. We know we'll get better because (a) we enjoy getting better, and (b) reviewers will tell us how to get better. Good writing, like good science, grows through candid feedback. And for that, we have many people to thank.

The Textbook Author's Association has been a remarkable, unexpected resource. We encourage fellow teachers and future authors to use their many resources. Fortunately, there is a wealth of material about good writing. Two sources have been particularly helpful: *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser (1991) and the importance of storytelling in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* by William James (1899/1983).

Thank you also to the many people who adopted our first edition and offered excellent feedback on how to make it better. Specific thanks are due to a few people in particular who reached out personally. Major Drew Bond gave us a personal tour of West Point and gave us the idea to add a customizable mini-chapter on the military. Thanks to Brett Pelham, who corrected an example we used to have on heuristics. Amy Brown thoughtfully sent us a correction on one of our references.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Thomas Heinzen** is Professor Emeritus of William Paterson University of New Jersey. He describes his career as “mostly fun” because of the diverse opportunities within social psychology. Most applications have revolved around the social psychology of creativity including

- Individual differences among the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth
- Program Assessment for the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy
- Agent Orange health statistics for the New York State Commission on Vietnam Veterans
- Technology assessment related to distance learning for Public Service Training Program
- Tractor rollovers for the New York Center for Health and Medicine
- Documentations of problem-solving among pre-retirement New York State bureaucrats
- Documentations of problem-solving among the frail elderly living in nursing homes
- Applications of game design to curriculum development

Professor Heinzen invested in students’ lives by mentoring more than 60 student conference presentations. More recently, he created video games that teach critical thinking and the unwritten rules of college success.

He also has authored several books and published journal articles based on case studies, archival analyses, in-depth interviews, controlled experiments, and quasi-experimental designs. He has been elected a fellow of the Eastern Psychological Association (EPA), the American Psychological Association (APA, Division 1), and the Association for Psychological Science (APS).



**Wind Goodfriend** has been teaching psychology at Buena Vista University, a Midwestern liberal arts school for 15 years. Wind is a three-time Faculty of the Year award winner. She became Chair of Social Sciences in 2019. She also serves as the co-director of the gender studies program and volunteers as the chief research officer for the Institute for the Prevention of Relationship Violence. Wind has written 15 book chapters on psychology in pop culture, covering topics including *Game of Thrones*, *Wonder Woman*, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, and more. She has developed a wide variety of undergraduate courses including special topics classes such as Psychology of Colonialism, Psychology in Popular Film, and Relationship Violence. She received her B.A. from

Buena Vista University and both her Master’s and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Purdue University.



# 1

## An Introduction to Social Psychology

### Core Questions

- 1.1** What is social psychology?
- 1.2** What are some big questions within social psychology?
- 1.3** How can social psychology make my life better now?

### Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Explain social psychology's origin story and what social psychologists do now.
- 1.2** Analyze important questions about social thought and behavior.
- 1.3** Apply social psychological concepts to your own life and experiences.

- A man on the street is having a seizure, but no one else seems concerned. What would you do?
- Seven people, including you, around a table have been asked to say which of three lines matches the length of a fourth line. The correct answer is obvious: Line 2. But the first six people declare "Line 1." It's your turn to provide an answer. What would you do?



- You're being paid to participate in a scientific study about memory and learning. Your job is to press a switch that delivers electric shocks each time another participant makes a memory error. You're supposed to increase the shock level each time, but the highest levels are labeled "DANGER: SEVERE SHOCK." What would you do?

Social situations are powerful.

These scenes aren't from the popular reality television show *What Would You Do?* on ABC. They are real experiments in social psychology. So ... what would you do? If you are like most people, you probably answered, "I would help the man having a seizure even if no one else appeared concerned," "I would report the correct line no matter what other people said," and "I would never administer dangerous electric shocks to an innocent person." Your beliefs about yourself would probably be noble, flattering, and self-esteem enhancing. But there is a good chance that you would be wrong. Why? You probably underestimated the power of the immediate social situation.

In controlled experiments, a high percentage did *not* help the man who had a seizure (Darley & Latané, 1968). Many people *did* cave in to peer pressure when reporting the length of the line (Asch, 1956). And a frightening number of people delivered the highest possible level of electric shock—even when the other person (an actor who was secretly not really harmed) screamed in pain that he had a heart condition (Milgram, 1963, 1974).

Get ready for an exciting—but sometimes disturbing—ride of self-discovery as you enter the fascinating world of social psychology.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

**>> LO 1.1:** Explain social psychology's origin story and what social psychologists do now.

Someone is going to change your life.

That person could be a friend slipping away into substance abuse, a caring grandparent, a disappointing romantic partner, an inspiring teacher, a manipulative cult leader, or a frustrating coworker. Their influence may harm or help; they're all out there, waiting for someone just like you to cross their path.

**Social psychology** is the scientific study of how people influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Someone—and probably several people—will influence the curve of your life, just as you will influence others. Some social influences are obvious; a robber with a gun clearly wants to influence you to hand over your money.



Reuters/Claudio Cortes



D-Janous via Wikimedia Commons



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**Social psychology:** The scientific study of how people influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.



But many social influences are subtle; for example, advertisers try to influence you with earworms (melodies that get stuck in your head) and attractive models.

We can be influenced even when we are alone. We may change our clothes or choose what to post to Facebook because we worry about someone's opinion. One of our students persevered in college by imagining what it would mean to her own children if she were the first in her family to graduate from college. We also are subtly influenced by cultural expectations, social roles, and legal guidelines.

## The Origins of Social Psychology

If you love high stakes—epic stories such *The Avengers* or *Game of Thrones*—then you might love social psychology.

The birthing pains of social psychology were epic, violent, and real: World Wars I and II. Sigmund Freud was so “shocked and shaken by the carnage of the Great War” that he perceived a “cosmic struggle” between two dueling psychological forces: life and death (see Batson, 2012, pp. 243–244). Freud tried to provide epic answers, most plainly in his book about *Civilization and Its Discontents*. But his answers were often speculative and based on private observations. The early social psychologists wanted more testable, scientific answers to the questions about humanity that arose during and because of the world wars.

## Scientific Thinking About Social Problems

Let's go back even further in history. If there's a birthplace for scientific psychology, it's Germany about 150 years ago. In the late 1800s, Wilhelm Wundt started the first scientific laboratory there, specifically designed to apply the scientific method to human thought and experience. Wundt's persistent, pioneering research is why many consider him the “father of psychology.” He was also the first person to call himself a psychologist.

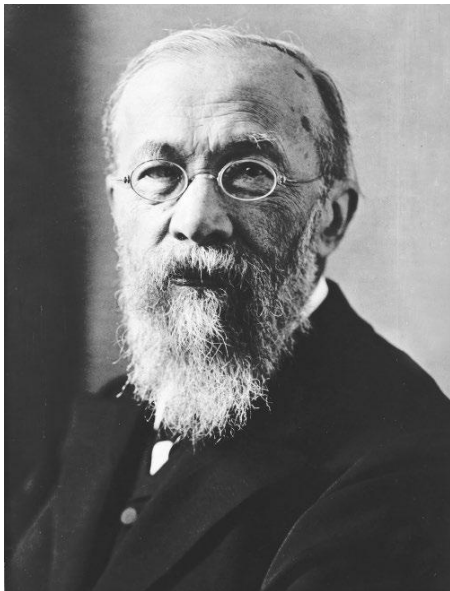
Both Wundt and Freud (who was in nearby Austria at about the same time) were asking questions about personality, individual perceptions, and how culture affects thought. Over the next few decades, most Europeans who considered themselves psychologists were interested in explaining abnormal behavior (like Freud) or in basic thought processes like sensory perceptions or memory (like Wundt). Just a few years later, most psychologists in the United States studied nonhuman animals (usually pigeons and rats) because their behavior was easier to observe and measure. Not many scholars were studying everyday social interactions like conformity, prejudice, or heroism.

## Social Conflicts and Private Curiosity

Fast forward to those two horrifying world conflicts, which changed the trajectory of psychology forever. The unanticipated, industrial destruction of 16 million people in the first “Great War” startled

even those who had organized the conflict. The failure to make peace at the Treaty of Versailles led directly to the deaths of 60 million more people only 20 years later during World War II. Clearly, humanity's self-knowledge had not kept up with its technological advances. It was a call to action within psychology: Researchers realized that studying rats in mazes or psychoanalysis wasn't enough. Social psychology emerged out of the emotional rubble produced by these two devastating world wars.

Those wars are now long behind us—but only in time. Their consequences continue to shape public policies and the story of social psychology. Modern social psychologists are worried about new conflicts rooted in old versions of authoritarianism. We also carry epic anxieties about global warming, environmental sustainability, mass



Weltanschauung zu Reclams Universum 1902

**Wilhelm Wundt**  
(1832–1920), now largely  
considered the “father of  
psychology.”

incarceration, legalized torture, cyberbullying, media violence, systematic prejudice, and false confessions of guilt.

Before you get too depressed, know that many social psychologists also are motivated by the more positive side of humanity. Researchers today have labs that study attraction and meaningful sexuality and love, cooperation, why and when strangers will help each other, the motivation to stand up to harmful conformity, and more. The crisscrossing threads holding all these diverse topics together include (a) a focus on the individual and (b) science-based methods.

Technology also has helped social psychologists create thousands of small answers to a few big questions. For example, driving simulators enable us to safely study attempts at mental multitasking while driving. It's a precise, relatively small question, but it helps us understand how humans think. Likewise, software using online surveys captures the strength of beliefs or reactions to images on a computer screen, measured in milliseconds. It's another precise, relatively small applied question that helps us understand basic research about how attitudes can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

You can see the importance of this kind of work when you remember how much time people spend on social media, a world in which images appear on screens for only seconds as people scroll. Virtual reality is increasingly used to monitor how people respond to different social situations, such as practice job interviews, where technology can control social variables such as the sex or race of the person sitting across from you.

Modern social psychologists are trying, through applied and basic research, to equip individuals with the psychological tools they need to walk intelligently—even courageously—deeper into the 21st century.



MediaNews Group/Orange County Register via Getty Images / Contributor

**Applied and basic research join forces in studies using driving simulators. As applied research, driving simulators help us understand the dangers of so-called multitasking (e.g., trying to drive while texting). As basic research, driving simulators help us understand how humans swiftly organize incoming sensations and perceptions from a social world.**

## Content Domains: Social Thinking, Social Influence, and Social Behavior

The content domains of social psychology are represented in Figure 1.1: social thinking, social influence, and social behavior. The circles in this Venn diagram overlap because we usually experience them as a blend. That is why the first three sections of this book explore each area separately but reunite them in a fourth section of mini-chapters. Each mini-chapter describes how social psychologists apply social psychology to particular social problems.

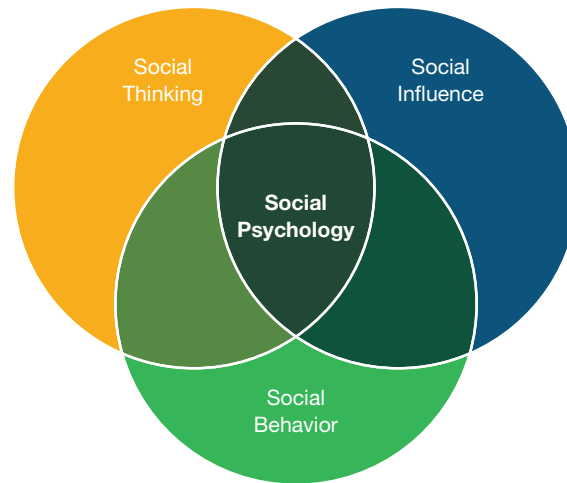
For example, the first section on social thinking examines how we define the self and make judgments about other people. The second section investigates three consequences of social influence: conformity, prejudice, and persuasion. The third section focuses on social behaviors such as helping, aggression, and romantic relationships. The mini-chapters at the end of the book explore how they intersect with economic decisions, environmental sustainability, criminal justice, and much more.

## The Content Domains Represent Career Opportunities

There are at least three reasons why these content domains have turned social psychology into such a popular college course. First, social psychology satisfies some of our curiosity about everyday social interactions. Second, doing social psychology develops marketable skills (described in the mini-chapters). Third, social psychology helps you become a social problem solver. Satisfying curiosity, building marketable skills, and supporting social problem solving are impressive accomplishments for such a young

FIGURE 1.1

These three content domains within social psychology describe the thoughts and decisions people make about one another.



science. By “young,” we mean that scientific social psychology is only about 100 years old, give or take a few decades (see Farr, 1996).

Professional organizations suggest a discipline’s relevance. The American Psychological Association has a separate division for social and personality psychology. In addition, there are two additional, independent professional organizations: the Society for Personality and Social Psychology and the Society of Experimental Social Psychology. Their conferences are crowded, and there are dozens of textbooks just on social psychology (including this one!). About 185 schools in just the United States offer graduate degrees in social psychology. Perhaps this “young” discipline has finally reached its adolescence.

Social psychologists are active around the world, thanks in part to our ability to communicate and share ideas and data electronically. It is an exciting time to engage with social psychology, both personally and professionally. Who knows? You may want to explore the many career paths available to social psychologists. We will alert you to career opportunities in every chapter, but almost all of them can be categorized as social problem solving. If you hope to solve complex social problems, then you are going to need some strategies and methods that you can rely on.

### Distinguishing Among Similar Academic Fields

Academic disciplines are distinguished by their methods and observations (see Table 1.1). What distinguishes social psychology from similar fields?

**Sociologists** usually explore large social behaviors at a group level, using surveys and demographic data. **Anthropologists** focus on how culture and behavior change over time with methods that rely on “thick” (detailed) observations, sometimes made from inside the culture. **Clinical psychologists** focus on mental illnesses or problematic thoughts and behaviors, often working with people predefined as being in a specific population of interest (e.g., people suffering from severe depression).

However, no single discipline has “methodology rights” to any one approach. When social psychology is at its best, it uses multiple methods of scientific approach to answer questions, including a blend of qualitative data (such as interviews with individual people) with quantitative data (such as experiments; see Brannen, 1995). You’ll learn more about research methods in Chapter 2.

**Sociology:** The study of human society and social behavior at the group level.

**Anthropology:** The study of culture and human behavior over time.

**Clinical or counseling psychology:** A subfield of psychology that helps people who have maladaptive or problematic thoughts and behaviors.



TABLE 1.1

## Different Ways of Asking and Answering Research Questions

	PREFERRED METHODS	FOCUS OF OBSERVATIONS	EXAMPLE: THE STUDY OF AGGRESSION
<b>Sociologists</b>	Surveys, demographic patterns of data	Group-level behaviors and social expectations	Group characteristics of aggressive behavior
<b>Anthropologists</b>	Detailed observations of people in a given culture	A discrete group of people over time	Cultural habits of aggression within a discrete setting
<b>Clinical psychologists</b>	Therapeutic interviews and tests	Individuals who have problematic thoughts or behaviors	Individual and interpersonal causes of aggression
<b>Social psychologists</b>	Controlled experiments and observations	Everyday people in individual or group settings	Experiments testing the causes and control of aggression

For example, almost all social sciences have tried to understand human aggression. (Understanding aggression can lead to psychology careers in policing, criminal justice, forensic psychology, and civil and marriage dispute mediation.) Table 1.1 describes how each discipline tends to rely on slightly different methods to make their distinctive observations.

- A sociologist is most likely to study aggression by creating or consulting demographic data regarding long-term patterns.
- A cultural anthropologist will usually make “thick,” detailed observations of how children’s aggressive behaviors are influenced by the culture of a particular town or village.
- A clinical psychologist may use interviews to understand aggression at a personal or small group level—and then test therapeutic interventions.
- A social psychologist is more likely to invent a way to (temporarily and safely!) manipulate aggression in an experiment, focusing on individual reactions to group or environmental pressures.

Of course, sociologists and anthropologists also conduct experiments, and psychologists can’t get started without observing something! Multiple methods create a blend of research approaches that can increase or refine confidence in the validity of our observations and conclusions. For example, both Solomon Asch (who studied conformity in the line-matching experiments) and Stanley Milgram (who studied obedience in the electric shock experiments) included qualitative interviews with participants who did not conform that helped researchers understand how and why they were able to resist negative influences. Studies that explore healthy, adaptive behaviors are now called **positive psychology**, the scientific study of human strengths and virtues.

## Social Psychology Is Personal: Kurt Lewin's Story

You probably would have liked Kurt Lewin (see Marrow, 1969), the man now considered the pioneer or “father of social psychology.”

Lewin was known to miss an occasional class when he was teaching at the University of Iowa. The reason? He was deeply involved in listening to students at a local café. Perhaps Lewin fit the stereotype of the passionate but absentminded professor. His vision for psychology could be summed up in just two words: **action research**, the application of scientific principles to social problem solving.

### Positive psychology:

The scientific study of human strengths, virtues, positive emotions, and achievements.

**Action research:** The application of scientific principles to social problem solving in the real world.



**Kurt Lewin (1890–1947),** whom some consider the “father of social psychology.”

It is difficult today to appreciate how deeply World War I shocked the world. The killing had become industrialized, but the dying was still personal. Kurt Lewin’s brother died in the war; Kurt himself was wounded and awarded the Iron Cross. When the Nazis rose to power, Lewin urged his mother to flee with him to America, because they were Jewish and feared the consequences of increasing anti-Semitism. She refused, confident that Germany would honor a mother who had lost one son and claimed a second as a wounded war hero. Sadly, she was wrong: She disappeared, probably into one of the concentration camps.

As a Jewish World War II immigrant to the United States, Lewin studied the dynamics that allowed a Hitler to rise to power—and a Holocaust to happen. He was recognizing one of social psychology’s central insights: the power of the situation. Lewin organized his insights into what became a simple but famous equation:

Lewin’s equation:  $B = f(P, E)$ .

Lewin proposed that every person’s behavior (B) is a function ( $f$ ) of both P, the individual person, and E, their immediate environment (Lewin, 1936). In other words, our individual choices and actions are partially based on who we are—factors like our personality and how we were raised—and partially

based on the immediate situation. Social psychologists still use those two criteria to predict behavior.

Kurt Lewin’s warm, collaborative approach to teaching and learning probably would have astonished Wilhelm Wundt and Sigmund Freud. Lewin encouraged everyone to “express different (and differing) opinions [and] never imposed either discipline or loyalty on his students and colleagues” (Marrow, 1969, p. 27). British psychologist Eric Trist described Lewin as having “a sense of musical delight in ideas.” Lewin once became so distracted during a conversation that Trist had to push him onto a moving train so he wouldn’t miss it (Marrow, 1969, p. 69).

Lewin unfortunately died in 1947, only a few years after the end of World War II. However, the effects of war on Lewin’s pioneering work are reflected in many of the chapter contents of this and every other social psychology textbook: aggression, prejudice, persuasion, and prosocial behavior. His work, as well as other research that followed in his footsteps, is also influential in the world of business and management. Lewin used scientific methods to apply those two factors, P and E, to socially relevant topics—and he inspired many others to follow his lead.

## Social Psychologists Value Diversity

We routinely experience diversity as beautiful, even awe-inspiring.

Diversity is a field of wildflowers, each adding to the total view in a unique and essential way. Just as diversity often produces what we regard as beautiful, shutting the door on social diversity sometimes appears (from our present perspective) ugly and embarrassing. For psychology to be a complete study of human behavior, both the participants in our studies and the researchers designing them must come from diverse backgrounds.







Robert Guthrie (1976/2004) examined psychology’s history of diversity—and the lack of it—in a book (colorfully!) titled *Even the Rat Was White*. And diversity is a richer, more complicated reality than calculating which ethnic or gender group people belong to. **Intersectionality theory** recognizes that our sense of self, our identity, is based on many “developmental and contextual antecedents of identity” (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019, p. 232), including self-definition.

### Intersectionality

**theory:** The study of how multiple identity factors (such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status) combine to form how people are perceived and treated by others.

TABLE 1.2

Many important social psychologists have been women and/or people of color.

 <p>Mary Whiton Calkins</p>	 <p>Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth Clark</p>	 <p>Alice Eagly</p>
 <p>Lisa Diamond</p>	 <p>Claude Steele</p>	 <p>Mahzarin Banaji</p>

That means that people aren't perceived as a single social category; we're all a combination of our ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, and so on. Intersectionality theory studies how we're affected by the combination of all of these variables as we're simultaneously judged on all of them by others. A gay Black man will be treated differently than a heterosexual Asian woman—and both will be treated differently if they are wearing expensive, designer clothes. Exactly how all of these variables combine is the focus of intersectionality research.

The positive effects of diversity on social psychology are demonstrated by some of the pioneering scholars who are women, people of color, and people who are differently abled. They will continue to push social psychology beyond its original European American, heteronormative boundaries (see Table 1.2). Their stories also demonstrate how much is lost by ignoring the beauty of diversity. Consider just a few examples:

- Mary Whiton Calkins was born during the American Civil War. She fought hard to study psychology at Harvard—despite a formal policy blocking women from enrolling. She became the first female president of the American Psychological Association *and* of the American Philosophical Association. She published four books and over 100 research papers—and reset expectations about what women could achieve within psychology.



- One of Kurt Lewin's students, Beatrice Ann Wright, died as recently as 2018 (at the age of 100; see Wright, 1983). She is credited with establishing research on people who are differently abled through her book *Physical Disability—A Psychosocial Approach*. She applied Lewin's concept of interactions between the person and the environment to understand the experience of physical disabilities. She was honored with a lifetime achievement award by the American Psychological Association.

- Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth Clark were a married African American couple who played an important role in social justice. Mamie Clark's master's thesis started the basic research that influenced one of the most famous decisions by the Supreme Court. The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (see Benjamin & Crouse, 2002) established a legal justification for the desegregation of public schools. She and her husband were the first African Americans to earn PhDs in Psychology from Columbia University. Their "doll studies" vividly demonstrated the harmful effects of internalized racism on children (you can search YouTube for the visual record of some of their interviews with children). Kenneth Clark became the first African American president of the American Psychological Association. This research is described in more detail in Chapter 9: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination.

- One of the most famous field studies about group prejudice was conducted by Muzafer Sherif, who was born in Turkey in 1906. In the same year that William Golding (1954) published *Lord of the Flies*, Sherif, his wife Carolyn, and their research team brought young boys to a "summer camp" run by psychologists. They created situations that first produced group prejudices—and then other situations that reduced conflict and transformed those prejudices into a pleasant summer camp experience (see Chapter 9).

- Alice Eagly has also devoted her research to reducing prejudice, with a particular focus on sexism. Her theoretical model (described in Chapter 9) continues to inspire applied research. For example, social role theory is being used to engage more girls and women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers.

- Lisa Diamond has devoted her career to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) issues, including the fluidity of gender and sexual orientation. Her research emphasizes that people's gender and sexual identity can change over time and that these changes can be so powerful that they can happen to people even when they resist the changes because of socialized prejudice.

- Both Claude Steele and Mahzarin Banaji explore how culture and stereotypes affect people of color. Steele, an African American professor who served as the provost at the University of California, Berkeley, introduced the idea of stereotype threat. He designed clever experiments that helped explain how stereotypes and anxiety influenced students of color to perform worse on some college-level tests. Banaji is also interested in how stereotypes and prejudice can influence all of us without our awareness. She helped to develop one of the most controversial tests to measure prejudice in the field of social psychology (see Chapter 9).

Across its history, many social psychologists have been motivated by a desire to use science to help solve social problems. This enduring commitment led the field to a more inclusive, diverse, and yes—even a more beautiful understanding of the human experience.

### THE MAIN IDEAS

- Social psychology is a subfield of psychology that scientifically studies how people influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Social psychology can be broken up into topics focused on social thinking, social influence, and social behavior, and each topic has concepts that can be applied to everyday people in the real world.

- Kurt Lewin is considered by many to be the “father of social psychology,” and he believed individual behaviors are determined by both someone’s personality and by the social situation or environment.
- Many other important social psychologists have been women, people of color, people who are differently abled, people of various sexual orientations, and other variables representing the valuable diversity in our world.

### CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

- If World War II and the Holocaust had never happened, would psychology be where it is today? Would social psychology exist or be as popular if the world hadn’t been inspired to understand the events leading up to and ending that war? What other topics might be considered more important?
- Lewin suggested that behavior is determined by both personality and the given social situation or environment. Which do you think is more influential? When you consider your own behavior across a variety of situations (such as in class, at a religious event, or when you’re hanging out with friends), is your behavior fairly consistent due to a strong personality, or do you change how you act to better fit in with what’s expected, given the environment?
- Can you identify another field (not psychology) where major progress or innovative thinking came from scholars who represented diverse backgrounds? For example, what scientific, literary, or other important ideas would be missing without women, people of color, LGBTQ people, people who are differently abled, and so on?

## WHAT ARE SOME BIG QUESTIONS WITHIN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

### >> LO 1.2: Analyze important questions about social thought and behavior.

After the two world wars, social psychology stabilized into a core of basic and applied researchers with a big two-part mission: (1) to understand how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by other people and (2) to apply those insights to social problems. That big mission is made slightly more manageable by organizing the wide variety of topics in social psychology into the big questions listed in Figure 1.2.

These questions explore (1) nature and nurture, (2) how we explain why good people sometimes do things (and vice versa), (3) how humans think about social information, (4) why we live in groups, (5) why prejudice persists, and (6) whether science is the best way to learn about social behavior. These six questions convey the philosophical reach that, day by day, motivates many social psychologists. Individual studies may only examine a small, specific piece of the larger puzzle, but social psychologists are slowly putting those pieces together.

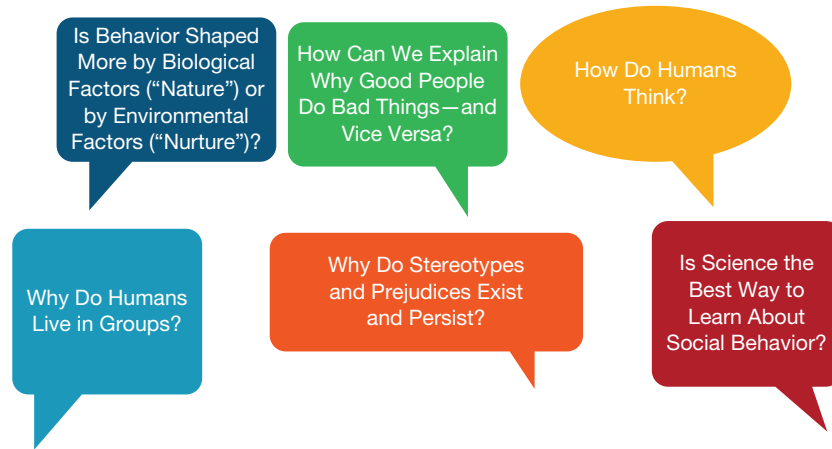
### Big Question 1: Is Behavior Shaped More by Biological Factors (“Nature”) or by Environmental Factors (“Nurture”)?

Behavior is influenced by nature *and* nurture.

You will encounter the “nature versus nurture” debate whenever you try to explain behavior, but it seems especially salient for exceptional behavior. Were brilliant mechanics, exceptional athletes, sharp scholars, creative programmers, and creative

FIGURE 1.2

Social psychology's big questions motivate researchers and provide a framework for understanding what social psychologists do.



artists born that way (nature) or did their experience and training shape what they became (nurture)? The nature-nurture debate applies to the ordinary rest of us, too.

I [Tom] was a solid "C" student in high school, with a few exceptions—but then I excelled in college and graduate school. Did the change occur because my brain and hormones had developed post-adolescence? Or was the change because of psychological motivation to move past the boring, unpleasant jobs from my earlier life?

**Nature** refers to influences from biology or physiology, such as genetics and hormones. They are often (but not always) beyond our control. On the other hand, **nurture** refers to influences that come from our life circumstances, experiences, and environment. Many psychologists describe the "nature" versus "nurture" debate as a **false dichotomy**, the presentation of two opposing and mutually exclusive options that disregard any alternative explanations.

In almost every case, *both* nature and nurture influence behavior—what psychologists call an **interaction**. For example, physically attractive people may be naturally beautiful. But a temporary bad complexion or a life-changing car crash could alter their good looks—and remove many of the advantages of being beautiful (see Chapter 5).

Kurt Lewin, the observant World War I trench soldier with "a musical delight in ideas," understood how nature and nurture

interacted within social psychology. Behavior (B) is a function (*f*) of *both* the personality and biology (P) that you were born with (nature) and the environment (E) that you live in (nurture).

## Big Question 2: How Can We Explain Why Good People Do Bad Things—and Vice Versa?

You are complicated; we all are.

Two men walked into a busy convenience store in northern New Jersey, a state with strict gun laws. They each carried a large gun, prominently displayed. They bought breakfast sandwiches and coffee and made small talk with the cashier. They both wore



Louis Requena/MLB via Getty Images

The Hall of Fame baseball player Roberto Clemente played for the Pittsburgh Pirates for 18 seasons. He died in 1972 in a plane crash during one of his many humanitarian missions throughout the Caribbean. Was Clemente born to be an exceptional humanitarian and athlete—or is there more to his story?



a T-shirt that declared: “I Carry Guns to Protect YOU From Bad People.” After they left, a young woman, probably of high school age, spoke up. “How do I know,” she asked the room, “whether they were good people or bad people?”

In social psychology, questions about who (or what) is good and bad are not reserved for preachers and extremist radio talk shows. Social psychologists explore what many call “good” and “evil” by creating controlled experiments that explore the situations that reliably produce prosocial behaviors that help others (Chapter 10) and aggressive behaviors that are intended to harm others (Chapter 11). The more pressing question social psychologists can answer is how we all justify our actions using our own personal perspectives, politics, culture, and social norms. It is how we explain our own complicated “goodness” and “badness” to the most important audience of all—to ourselves.

This big question is also a practical question. What would happen to a society without laws and social punishments? Would humans become pure altruists and create communities of self-sacrifice for the greater good (like honeybees)? Or would we become lonely sexual competitors willing to stab rivals through the neck (like hummingbirds)? Or are we both?

### Big Question 3: How Do Humans Think?

We all have two different ways of thinking.

You probably have some big decisions on your personal horizon. What are you going to do for a career after you graduate? Where will you live? Will you get married? What about children? For every major decision in your life, you’ll have to weigh what your instincts or “gut” tells you to do right along with what your logical, thoughtful, practical mind tells you. This book covers a lot of decisions we make, including whether we hold prejudices, how we decide to commit to a relationship partner, and more. All of these decisions are interesting individually, but a larger system of understanding how we think in general is called social cognition (see Chapter 4).

The study of social cognition explains why decision-making humans rely on two thinking systems. One system is fast and intuitive; the other is slower and logical. You can apply some logic to your career decisions by estimating your job choices and future earnings at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (see <https://www.bls.gov/mwe/>). But some careers will just “feel right” and you will be tempted to “go with your gut.” Is logic the way to go? On the other hand, can you really trust your intuition?

### Big Question 4: Why Do Humans Live in Groups?

We are social animals.

Our social impulse may explain why we use solitary confinement (in prison) to punish people and use social events (like college graduation ceremonies) as rewards. An evolutionary perspective in psychology offers explanations in terms of how living in groups increases our chances of meeting, mating, and safely delivering our genes into the next generation. A functioning group improves our survival skills, teaches us how to share resources, and socializes us to help others. Groups also help us develop our self-identity, usually through comparisons of our own situation to the people we see around us (Chapter 3).

On the other hand, group decisions aren’t always better. Group interactions may encourage a shift in group opinions that lead to more dangerous decisions, a mob



AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo

**Movie antagonists are more interesting when the question of whether they are “good” or “bad” is complicated. In the blockbuster movie *Black Panther* the antagonist feels justified in taking over the country Wakanda because he was orphaned and abandoned by the royal family. In addition, he believes he can lead Wakanda toward a future in which they help other children in need. Are his motives really that bad?**

**Nature:** Influences on our thoughts and behaviors from biology or physiology, such as genetics and hormones.

**Nurture:** Influences on our thoughts and behaviors from our life circumstances, how we were raised, experiences, and our environment.

**False dichotomy:** A situation presented as two opposing and mutually exclusive options when there may really be additional options or a compromise.

**Interactions:** The combination of several influences on an outcome, such as the influence of both personality and environment on behavior.



© istockphoto.com/dimarik

Computers now allow even isolated people to connect to each other. Our motivation to stay connected to loved ones is part of our social nature.

#### Replication crisis:

A recent concern in psychology that the results of some studies aren't found again when scientists try to repeat them.

mentality. Groups can also stumble into a conspiracy of silence that prevents the most thoughtful, skeptical members of a group from voicing their true opinions. In addition, when people submerge their individuality in groups, they may experience a feeling of anonymity and behave as if there are no consequences. Some group members might become lazy by coasting on the work of others. Chapter 8 focuses on how these group dynamics influence decisions and outcomes, in both positive and negative ways.

Cultural norms may be the most subtle yet powerful form of social influence at the group level. It is difficult to appreciate our own cultural assumptions until we spend time in a different culture, because they are so imbedded into how we grew up and see the world now. It would be a mistake to say that culture influences people in definite, predestined ways—but it would also be a mistake to deny the influence of culture at all. Social psychological research has explored important cultural differences across a wide variety of specific contexts, so we'll discuss those studies throughout the entire book.

### Big Question 5: Why Do Stereotypes and Prejudices Exist and Persist?

You can understand why stereotyping has attracted so much attention from social psychologists. Figure 1.3 displays the psychological path from stereotyping to social

conflict. People experiencing social injustice won't put up with it forever.

Many social psychologists oppose social injustice, and the obvious place to dispel it is at the beginning: stereotyping. There's only one problem: Humans can't stop stereotyping—and probably would not be happy if we could. It seems to be an automatic instinct. Chapter 4 describes why stereotyping evolved in the first place, and Chapter 9 describes the types and consequences of stereotyping. Theories about stereotyping allow us to ask more specific questions: Why is it a basic human tendency to group and label people into different categories? Do particular stereotypes pop up across different parts of the world and different cultures? Why does stereotyping persist?

### Big Question 6: Is Science the Best Way to Learn About Social Behavior?

This is a good news/bad news question; we give you the bad news first.

Social psychologists felt terrible when some of us discovered what was called the **replication crisis**. Some of the classic studies we all thought were foundations of the field were brought into question when scientists who tried to re-do the studies found different results. Everything we thought we knew seemed to be turned upside

FIGURE 1.3

The psychological path from stereotyping to social conflict.

Stereotyping → Prejudice → Discrimination → Social Injustice → Social Conflict

down as people both inside and outside of the field questioned the validity of social psychology's theories and conclusions. The crisis seemed to develop in three stages (see Earp & Trafimow, 2015).

First, a few years ago, some well-known social psychologists were caught cheating (by their students!). Those scientists had simply made up their data or manipulated it by doing things like only keeping results that confirmed their theories in efforts to make a name for themselves. It was outright fraud, but we won't name names; they are already embarrassed, and some of them got fired.

Second, an investigation revealed a research culture that rewarded original studies but offered few rewards for replicating someone else's research. That means that once a single study has found an interesting result, not that many people make sure the result is solid by trying to find it again (the very definition of replication).

Third, few replications suggest that our literature may be stocked with so many **false positives** (also called **Type I errors**) that we don't know what to believe. False positives happen when the analyses of the study imply a finding exists when it might not really be there or might be so weak that it's hard to tell if it really has much of an effect on actual behavior.

The good news is that there is a way to fix the problem. Science, as a tool of discovery, doesn't care about human vanity, ego, or greed. The answer to the replication crisis is twofold. First, people who conduct replications or "re-dos" of other people's work should be praised for their contribution to science. Second, scholars in the field need to change some of their practices to make their process more open and honest, such as being willing to share their raw data with the public (so that others can check their work). You'll read more about these fixes, called "open science," in Chapter 2.

And there is more good news. Most of the everyday work in social psychology is quantitative. However, there is a growing recognition that qualitative studies, especially case studies, have shaped psychology's story in fundamental ways (see Rolls, 2013). We'll highlight several of these throughout the book.

Social psychology—just like any field of study—is made up of humans, doing our best. We sometimes make mistakes, but we learn from them and make the next step of progress even better.

We focus your critical attention on the methods used by social psychologists in three ways. First, an entire chapter (Chapter 2) is devoted to helping you understand the research methods and statistical analyses most often used in social psychology. This chapter will serve as a foundation for your understanding. We reinforce that understanding with our second emphasis: In the later chapters, each time a methods or statistics terms is used, we put it in *italics* to help you notice it. We also mark methods discussions with an icon in the margin that looks like little gears turning, a reminder that our theories are based on scientific studies. Finally, each chapter highlights the detailed and clever methods used in one particular study. In all these ways, we hope to remind you of the science behind social psychology.



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**Do particular stereotypes pop up across different parts of the world and different cultures? Why does stereotyping persist?**

**False positives:** An error in which scientists believe a finding exists when it really doesn't, because of weak or incorrect statistics.

**Type I error:** See *false positives*.



### THE MAIN IDEAS

- One way to think about important topics in psychology is to consider the “big questions” asked by the field.
- This book provides evidence on both sides of these questions, but research is still needed to fully understand the complicated nature of human social experiences.
- Social psychology asks these questions because they are interesting from a philosophical or academic perspective but also because they actually affect people’s everyday lives.

### CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

- Go back to each of the big questions asked in this section. Think about times in your own life when you’ve thought or behaved in a way that seems to confirm one side of the debate or the other. Now, try to identify a time in your life that confirms the *other* side of the question. Do you think your behaviors in general provide support for answers to these questions? What about when you think of other people’s behaviors?
- Many popular books and movies focus on utopias (perfect societies) or dystopias (malfunctioning societies). Examples of dystopias are *Lord of the Flies*, *Black Mirror*, and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Why do people like this kind of story? Is it because it makes us feel good—our society is better by comparison—or because it serves as a warning, reminding us of what society could become?
- Which of the big questions posed here is the most interesting to you, personally, and why?

## HOW CAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY MAKE MY LIFE BETTER NOW?

### >> LO 1.3: Apply social psychological concepts to your own life and experiences.

At the risk of sounding like a late-night television infomercial, “Would you like to study less, learn more, and earn higher grades?” Here’s how to do it.

Any personal application of social psychology will make the information more interesting and memorable (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). For example, at the beginning of this chapter, we asked, “What would you do?” in different situations. Did you just read the words? That’s not studying; that’s reading. Studying social psychology is easier if you mentally engage by imagining what you would do if you (a) saw someone have a seizure, (b) experienced peer pressure in the line experiment, or (c) were ordered to deliver an electric shock. You’ve got a great imagination; use it. Here are three other tricks of the trade.

### Apply Each Topic to Your Own Life

Use the Table of Contents.

The chapter titles will tell you which ones you can most easily apply to your life. For example, most of us are very interested in romantic attraction, sexuality, and dating partners. If that interests you, then pay special attention to Chapter 12. If you have been the victim—or the perpetrator—of stereotypes and prejudice, then you’ll be excited about Chapter 9. You’ve been manipulated by peer pressure in some way, so take advantage of what you learn about social influence in Chapter 7. Our personal interests connect us to much bigger ideas, so use what you learn in Chapter 2 to develop your own hypotheses in every chapter.

You can be creative as you explore social psychology. For example, why do so many high school students in the cafeteria separate themselves into the same sorts of groups? Do you have a hypothesis? Do you know how you'd actually go out and test this hypothesis (ethically, of course)? If you find yourself quietly people-watching and then thinking, "I wonder why . . .," then you might be in line for a career connected to social psychology.

## Use the Self-Report Scales to Compare Yourself to Others

Do you like quizzes about yourself on Facebook or BuzzFeed?

Those are fun, for sure—but they're not exactly scientific. Fill out the surveys and questionnaires you'll find in every chapter, starting with Chapter 2. You will probably enjoy the self-report scales in each chapter because (a) reading the items and jotting down the numbers will clarify the underlying concept, helping you learn and remember it, and (b) you will learn a little bit more about yourself. In Chapter 3, for example, you will experience one way that social psychologists measure self-esteem. Scoring each item will help you understand how researchers think—and the relative importance of self-esteem to your own life.

## Critically Analyze Your Opinions After Each Section

Ask yourself difficult-to-answer questions.

**Critical thinking** requires deeper processing, which is its own reward. It's the ability to analyze, apply, and explore ideas in new and open-minded ways. And deep processing also makes it easier to remember information for an exam (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). We need the next generation of critical thinkers, you (!), to harness the science of social psychology in a variety of careers to fulfill its two great missions: (1) to understand how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by other people and (2) to apply those insights to social problems.

The social problems are out there, waiting for you.

### THE MAIN IDEAS

- Being able to personally relate to theoretical ideas and to critically analyze them also makes them easier to remember later.
- This book offers several opportunities for readers to apply concepts to themselves, including self-report scales to measure certain topics.
- Social psychology can only progress when new thinkers approach topics with scientific thinking and friendly skepticism.

### CITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

- Social psychology claims to provide insight into important topics that apply to real people's lives. However, most findings in the field are published in academic journals that only other scientists read. How can social psychologists do a better job of sharing their research with everyday people or with people or organizations that could use the research findings to actually improve the world?



Ralph Morse/The LIFE Images Collection via Getty Images/Getty Image

**Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman once stated, "I would rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be questioned." Science requires us to have healthy skepticism but to go beyond simply criticizing others by offering ways to create new knowledge and advances in our own field of study.**

**Critical thinking:**  
The ability to analyze, apply, and explore ideas in new and open-minded ways.

- The beginning of this book discussed a reality show called *What Would You Do?* in which people are put into situations that are manipulated and then recorded without their knowledge to appear later on TV. What are the ethical implications of this type of program? Once people learn that they were essentially “tricked,” do you think they can learn from the experience? Do you think that participants in social psychology research studies can do the same thing—learn from the experience?
- Again, look over the Table of Contents of this book. Do you think there are important topics that are missing? Are there aspects of the social experience that you think social psychology needs to address or spend more time studying?

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### What Is Social Psychology?

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It includes the study of

- (1) social thinking, such as how we define the “self” and how we perceive the world;
- (2) social influence, such as how we can persuade other people, why we conform, and the dynamics of stereotypes and prejudice; and
- (3) social behavior, such as helping, aggression, and romantic relationships.

All these areas of social psychology can be applied to a variety of settings.

Social psychology also can be understood by comparing it to similar but different academic fields. It has some similarities, but also important differences, from fields such as sociology, anthropology, and clinical and/or counseling psychology. Social psychology studies “everyday” thoughts and behaviors throughout life, including both negative behaviors (such as discrimination or aggression) and positive behaviors (such as helping or cooperation).

One of social psychology's pioneers was the German World War I veteran Kurt Lewin, whom many people consider the “father of social psychology.” Lewin was a Jewish man greatly influenced by both World Wars I and II. When he immigrated to the United States, he devoted his academic career to understanding social dynamics. Lewin famously suggested that each person's social behaviors are influenced by both personality and the social environment. Many other influential social psychologists followed in his footsteps. Some of these later social psychologists were women, people of color, or differently abled in some way that helps us recognize the inherent value of diversity.

### What Are Some Big Questions Within Social Psychology?

Social psychologists use the scientific method to obtain many small answers to a few big questions. No single research study can find a single or simple answer to these questions, but each study helps us understand one more piece of the puzzle. Seven of the most important big questions in social psychology are as follows:

1. Are we shaped more by personal, biological factors (“nature”) or by environmental factors (“nurture”)?
2. How can we explain why good people do bad things—and vice versa?
3. How do humans think?
4. Why do humans live in groups?
5. Why do stereotypes and prejudices exist and persist?
6. Is science the best way to learn about social behavior?



### How Can Social Psychology Make My Life Better Now?

You will enjoy and learn more from each chapter by imagining how you can apply it to your own life. To help, each chapter has a feature called What's My Score? Here, you can fill out a survey that measures where you fall on one of the variables discussed in that chapter. If you are honest on these surveys, it will help you gain insight into how the topics discussed might affect your choices and actions.

In addition, each section of every chapter ends with critical thinking questions. Your understanding will grow into permanent knowledge as you evaluate your opinion of different theories. Social psychology is the most fun when you start doing it, so try to design some way to test your own ideas. Perhaps you are the next famous social psychologist who will be included in books like this one.

### CRITICAL THINKING, ANALYSIS, AND APPLICATION

- As we learn more and more about social psychology, will the field continue to grow in numbers, or will people stop studying it once we have more answers? Do you think spending your life as a social psychologist would be a worthwhile endeavor, or are there more important ways to spend your career?
- Consider the six big questions covered in this chapter and put them in order of importance. Which would you say is the most essential and urgent question that social psychologists should be studying, and which is less important? Justify your order of importance with historical or personal evidence.
- Do you think that every academic discipline, job, and career benefit from having diverse kinds of people involved? What are some of the advantages of providing opportunities for traditionally minority or marginalized people in any job or field of study?
- What aspects of your own social world do you think would benefit from further analysis by social psychologists? Which chapters of this book sound like the most interesting or intriguing? Which topics are you most excited to study?



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# 2

## Research Methods

### Core Questions

- 2.1** How do social psychologists design studies?
- 2.2** How do experiments work in social psychology?
- 2.3** How can I recognize trustworthy research?

### Learning Objectives

- 2.1** Describe the scientific method, methods of descriptive data collection, and correlations.
- 2.2** Understand the strengths and weaknesses of experiments and how their results are analyzed.
- 2.3** Explain why reliability, validity, random sampling, ethics, and open science signal good research.

Like all sciences, social psychology usually moves like snail: steady but slow. It is slow, in part, because what social psychologists study is usually often invisible—and therefore difficult to measure. For example, prejudice, persuasion, altruism, and romantic love are all scientific **constructs**, theoretical ideas that cannot be directly observed. Although the scientific process is slow, social psychology is growing fast. It is growing fast because so many students are attracted to Kurt Lewin’s vision of an applied science.

Perhaps social psychology’s popularity explains why so many passengers were carrying long plastic or cardboard tubes on a recent plane ride. The plane was full of people presenting at a conference sponsored by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), which happens at the end of every winter. The tubes contained rolled-up posters summarizing the most cutting-edge research in the field. This chapter describes how all those professional established scientists, graduate students, and even a few undergraduates created those studies—and it invites you to join us.

## HOW DO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS DESIGN STUDIES?

### >> LO 2.1: Describe the scientific method, methods of descriptive data collection, and correlations.

The working world is full of designers.

We have fashion designers, graphic designers, architectural designers, cookware designers, landscape designers, and game designers. To become a clear-thinking social psychologist, you must become a research designer. Although there are guidelines, designing research is also an art that you can develop with experience—just like a fashion or a landscape designer.

The purpose of a research project often determines its design. The purpose of **basic science** is to increase understanding, create testable theories, and predict social behavior. Basic research strives to understand a given phenomenon more. The purpose of **applied science** is to translate those theories into applied problem solving or social action. Applied research is used to make the world better in some tangible way, like reducing aggression or increasing self-esteem.

Both are important. Basic research is important because, as social psychology’s pioneer Kurt Lewin famously recognized, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory” (see Bedeian, 2016; Lewin, 1951, p. 169). Applied science is where theory wrestles with reality—but with the understanding that reality always wins. If a theory does not describe reality, then the theory has to change. Figure 2.1 displays the four phases of the scientific method used in both basic and applied research.

This section answers the core question “How do social psychologists design studies?” by

- (1) describing the scientific method,
- (2) comparing descriptive research designs, and
- (3) explaining correlations.

### Apply the Scientific Method

The whole **scientific method** is greater than the sum of its parts.

The parts of the scientific method include hypothesis generation, types of designs, procedural techniques, and measurement tools that are slightly different in every science. But the whole of the scientific method is an attitude based on healthy skepticism, the belief that evidence is the most trustworthy way to know about something. Healthy skepticism also implies a stubborn, Galileo-like refusal to believe something just because an authority says so. When opinion meets data, the data win.

**Constructs:** Theoretical ideas that cannot be directly observed, such as attitudes, personality, attraction, or how we think.

**Basic science:** Research that increases understanding and theory within a field like psychology.

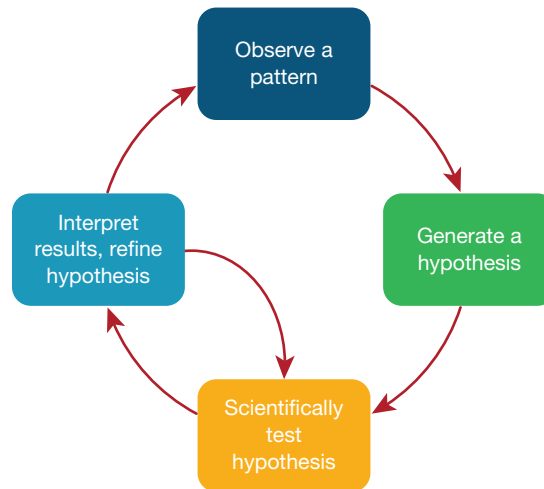
**Applied science:** Research that translates theory into applied problem solving or social action.

**Scientific method:** A systematic way of creating knowledge by observing, forming a hypothesis, testing a hypothesis, and interpreting the results.



FIGURE 2.1

The scientific method includes these basic elements.



Most research stories cycle through the same four phases. This pattern of research, shown in Figure 2.1, is repeated with endless variations. You will grow accustomed to this rhythm: observation, hypothesis, testing, and interpretation of the results.

- *Phase 1: Observe a pattern of behavior.* Imagine that you are in a coffee shop quietly observing other customers. You notice that men frequently interrupt people during conversations—and that seems to be especially true when their conversation partner is a woman. Welcome aboard; you started the scientific journey when your curiosity prompted you to ask, “Is this a pattern?” (By the way, this exact observation was tested in coffee shops and drugstores back in 1975 by Zimmerman and West.) Phase 1 of the scientific method begins when we observe what we think is a reliable pattern of behavior. Of course, Phase 1 doesn’t always start with literal observation in this way. It can also start with observation of studies already done on a topic, when you notice something that could be added to this line of research to enhance understanding.

- *Phase 2: Generate a hypothesis.* A formal **hypothesis** specifies what you believe will happen when you test your observations. It’s an educated guess in the form of a statement. You might hypothesize that (1) men interrupt more than women do in general, and (2) men interrupt women more than they interrupt other men. Hypotheses are never stated as questions (such as, “Who interrupts more, men or women?”). They start as statements of what you think is going to happen, so that you can either reject the idea as wrong, gain support that you’re right, or realize that the answer is more complicated than you originally thought.

- *Phase 3: Test the hypothesis.* You can do this in a wide variety of ways, which are described in the rest of this chapter. In this case, you’d probably use discreet observation techniques to watch people’s behaviors in public places (like the coffee shop). But there are a lot of other options, and we’ll cover those soon. And remember that a single study showing a pattern probably isn’t enough to be really confident that your hypothesis was right; you need replication to build that confidence.

- *Phase 4: Interpret the results and refine your hypothesis.* If you found that your hypothesis was totally wrong, you might need to start all over at Phase 1. Or, you might realize that your hypothesis is true some of the time but not all of the time. In that case, you refine the hypothesis and test it again.

**Hypothesis:** A specific statement made by a researcher about the expected outcome of a study.

Imagine that we found support for the basic idea that, overall, men are indeed more likely than women to interrupt someone. Consider the following possible new, refined hypotheses:

- Women with more assertive personalities are more likely to interrupt others, compared to women with less assertive personalities.
- Men are less likely to interrupt women they find physically attractive, compared to women they don't find attractive.
- Men interrupt others more in friendly or informal settings, compared to formal settings such as at work.
- Men from cultures with more traditional gender roles are more likely to interrupt women than are men from more egalitarian cultures.

Any scientific data story can only unfold if our observations are as objective as possible, our hypotheses are specific, our tests are fair, and the results are properly interpreted. Any individual research study is a very small piece of a very big puzzle. Importantly, the methods and procedure chosen for any given study will have important implications for what conclusions can safely be drawn. Every completed study brings us a tiny bit closer to understanding the complicated world of social interaction.

## Begin With a Descriptive Design

Many research projects begin with a descriptive design.

There are a lot of choices when it comes to choosing a way to gather data for a study, and we won't cover all of them here (it's not a research methods book). We'll start with three options that typically fall into the category of descriptive designs. **Descriptive designs** define, explain, and clarify patterns of people or events that happen without experimenter intervention.

The idea is that they would have happened anyway, and the researcher's study helps us describe those observations in a more detailed way. Imagine you are trying to understand how, when, and why some first-year college students drop out before their second year—and who is more likely to drop out compared to others. Here are three ways we could try to answer that question using descriptive designs.

### Archival Data

**Archival data** are stored information that were originally gathered for a different purpose but can now be used to test hypotheses.

For example, most colleges and universities collect (and store) lots of information about their students. It includes application information (like high school GPA and hometowns), courses taken at that college, how long it took to graduate, what students majored in, and more. This is a lot of information, and patterns could be hypothesized and tested regarding whether certain types of students drop out more or less.

There are many sources of archival data. Newspapers may report quotations from people who witnessed important events like natural disasters—and those quotations could be analyzed. Census data might be used to track patterns such as how many people of a certain socioeconomic status are married, cohabiting, or live alone. Facebook profiles and posts are used by social psychologists to study how people reveal personal information about themselves. Police records contain data that can reveal patterns of reported domestic violence or other crimes.

Archival data are a rich source of information that might be waiting quietly for someone to analyze and reveal patterns of human behavior.

### Naturalistic Observation

Another option is scientific surveillance.

#### Descriptive

**designs:** Methods of gathering data that define, explain, and clarify patterns that happen without experimenter intervention.

**Archival data:** Stored information that was originally created for some other purpose that can later be used to test hypotheses, such as census or college records.

This descriptive design is usually called **naturalistic observation**, or watching people in their natural environments and recording their behaviors with a preset coding system, based on your hypothesis. By “natural,” we don’t mean in a cornfield or a forest but where the behavior normally occurs (such as a coffee shop). To find out what kinds of conversations college students have about dropping out, we might go to campus locations where we think we might overhear such conversations. This might be places like dorm lounges, academic success offices, free tutoring spots, or maybe even campus bars.

You may already notice that systems of data collection can sometimes overlap. If you decided to observe people’s behaviors over several hours of videos that had to be created as security surveillance, you’d be using both naturalistic observation and archival data. You might also be using your critical thinking skills as you start to wonder about two important questions regarding naturalistic observation.

First, is naturalistic observation ethical? Video surveillance may have issues regarding the taped people’s privacy (see Bhatia et al., 2019). For example, video surveillance is being developed in order to track unvaccinated individuals who, unknown to themselves, may be carrying a highly contagious, airborne disease into an international airport and then onto other countries.

Even without videos, observing people and using them for your own research purposes may be unethical because they haven’t given consent to be part of your study. For this reason, companies, colleges, and universities always run their study ideas through an objective ethics committee before they engage in any research endeavors (this is described more later in the chapter). That said, most laws support the idea that if people are out in public, they are giving up their right to privacy.

A second question you might be thinking is, “If people realize they’re being observed, wouldn’t they change their behaviors?” If that thought occurred to you, then congratulations—that is a legitimate scientific concern. **Reactivity** occurs when people’s behavior changes when they know that they’re being watched. They might become more polite, or try to show off, or say nice things about their boss, or do anything else they think makes them look like better people. When that happens, your study will have problems because the behavior you’re trying to observe is no longer natural and authentic.

One possible solution to this problem is **participant observation**, which is when researchers go undercover and pretend to be part of the natural environment so that no one notices them. They might pretend to be a substitute teacher in a school, a maintenance worker at a park, or a member of a cult. In this way, hopefully the patterns

#### Naturalistic

**observation:** Watching and recording people’s behaviors where they would have happened anyway, but for research purposes.

**Reactivity:** When people change their behavior because they realize they’re being observed.

#### Participant observation:

A technique used during naturalistic observation where scientists covertly disguise themselves as people belonging in an environment.

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Allstar Picture Library / Alamy Stock Photo

In the movie *21 Jump Street*, two young police officers go undercover pretending to be high school students, so they can bust a new drug that’s hitting the community. In *Imperium*, Daniel Radcliffe’s character works for the FBI and infiltrates a White supremacist group, pretending to be racist. If any of them had been social psychologists doing research with this undercover technique, it would have been called participant observation.



they observe and record will reflect genuine social interactions. The more authentic the behavior being observed, the better it is for research.

## Descriptive Surveys

Sometimes the simplest way to collect data works best: Just ask.

Research surveys ask people to honestly report their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Often surveys include **self-report scales**, which ask people to respond to several items on a range (such as from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The researcher later sums or averages the responses to items and assigns that participant a score on a given variable. College administrators might ask current students to complete satisfaction scales as a way of trying to predict who might drop out versus make it all the way to graduation.

Creating a good survey is not as easy as it looks. Too few questions mean you won't get the information you desire. Too many questions mean participants will get bored, quit, or just make up information to get it over with. But when done well, there are many advantages to the survey method. Surveys

- (a) are relatively inexpensive,
- (b) can reach hundreds of people relatively quickly,
- (c) can assess personal information in ways that may not be possible through naturalistic observations, and
- (d) attract participants from anywhere in the world (especially if the survey is online). That's good because it means we can get a wide diversity of participants.

However, self-report surveys have a big problem: **social desirability**. This occurs when participants provide inaccurate information—they fudge their answers—in order to impress or please the researcher or simply because they don't want to admit something. For example, would you tell the truth if asked whether you've ever mistreated a romantic partner, cheated on a test, stolen something, or used illegal drugs? Do not despair! The What's My Score? feature describes one way to circumvent this problem when collecting data through surveys.

**Self-report scale:** A survey where participants give information about themselves by responding to several items along the same theme.

**Social desirability:** The tendency for participants to provide dishonest responses so that others have positive impressions of them or because they don't want to admit something.

### WHAT'S MY SCORE?

## Measuring Social Desirability

Social desirability damages the quality of self-report scales when participants answer in a way that they think makes them look good. One creative way around this problem is to include a measure of how willing participants are to be honest. Most people *have* done many of the bad behaviors listed in this scale. So, if research participants don't admit to any of them, then they are probably changing their answers on other parts of the survey to look good.

Instructions: Listed below are several statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Please read each item and decide whether the statement is true or false as it pertains to you personally.

Circle "T" for true statements and "F" for false statements.

T F 1. Before voting, I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.

T F 2. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.

T F 3. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.

T F 4. I am always careful about my manner of dress.

T F 5. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.

(Continued)

(Continued)

T F 6. I like to gossip at times.

T F 7. I can remember playing sick to get out of something.

T F 8. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.

T F 9. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.

T F 10. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

T F 11. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

T F 12. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.

Scoring: Give yourself 1 point if you said TRUE for Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, or 11. Then, give yourself 1 point if you said FALSE for Items 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, or 12. The more points you have, the more you are trying to manage your impression—in other words, you have a higher score on social desirability.

Source: Crowne and Marlowe (1960).

## Understand Correlational Analyses

For many students (including your authors), the **correlational analysis** was a door-opening experience into the surprisingly pleasant world of statistics.

A correlation starts with two pieces of information from each participant. Each piece of information is a number that represents where that person falls on a range, or continuum, for two variables of interest. For example, you can ask people (1) how many hours they study each week and (2) their grade point average (GPA). The obvious hypothesis: More studying is associated with higher grades.

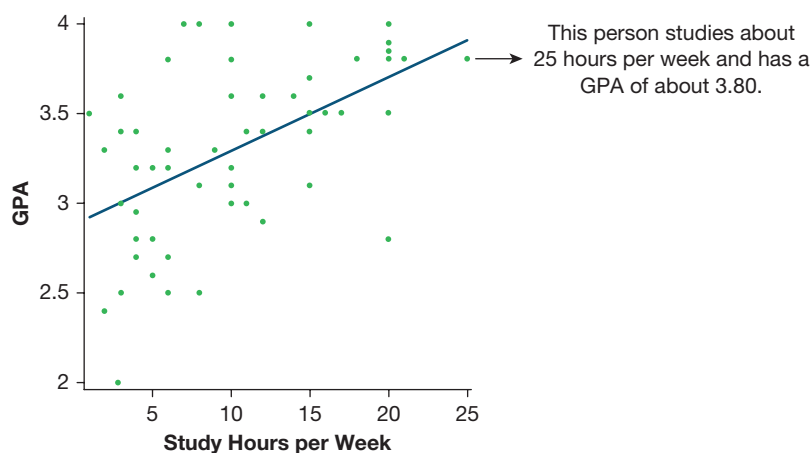
Figure 2.2 tells a beautifully nuanced yet easy-to-understand story. The pattern of dots flows upward and to the right, so the general theme is that more hours spent studying each week is associated with higher grades. And each individual dot is also

### Correlational analysis:

A statistic testing if two continuous variables are systematically associated with each other.

**FIGURE 2.2**

In this graph, each dot represents one person. For each person, study hours per week fall on the x-axis, and grade point average (GPA) falls on the y-axis. By looking at the general pattern, we can determine whether the two variables are correlated.



a personal story. People in the upper left get high grades without studying very much; people in the lower right get low grades but study a great deal.

Correlations in which both variables move in the same direction are called “positive” correlations. Here, as studying goes up, grades go up—or as studying goes down, grades go down. So studying and grades have a positive correlation. If the two variables move in opposite directions—as one goes up, the other goes down—it’s called a “negative” correlation. You might hypothesize a negative correlation between partying and grades: More partying means lower grades.

Correlations will always be represented as a number that ranges from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ . You already know what the sign (positive or negative) means. The number represents how closely each dot on the graph follows the pattern, or how close the dots are to the line. If they are all *exactly* on the line, then the association between the two variables is perfect, and the number will be  $1.00$  (either positive or negative). As the number gets closer to zero (from either direction), the dots start to spread out. That means there’s more variation, and the association isn’t as strong.

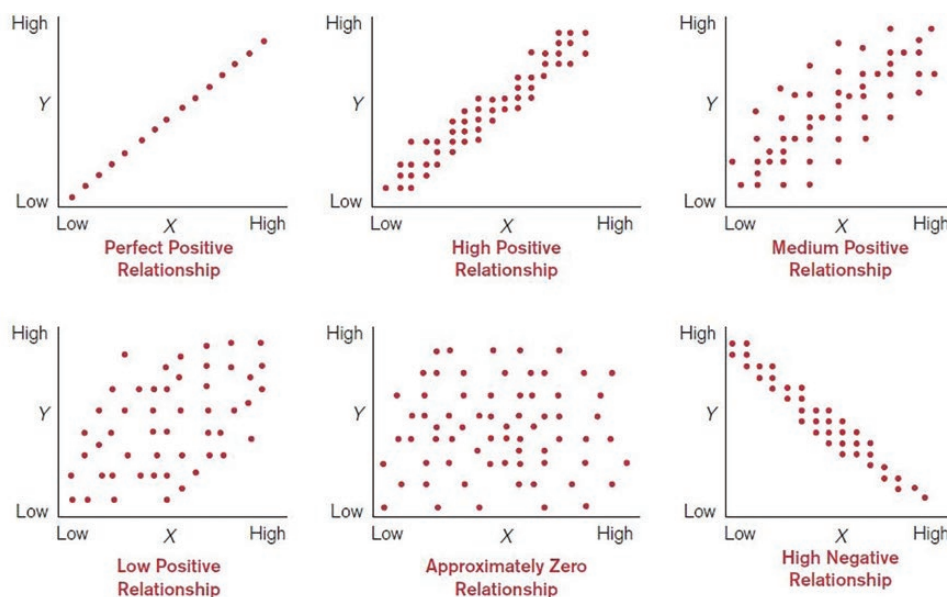
How to think about correlation numbers and graphs is summarized for you in Figure 2.3.

Caution! Correlation does not imply causation.

While it is *possible* that some correlations show causal relationships, be careful. The correlation could be caused by a third variable. In the case of a student who spends many hours studying and has a very good GPA, both of these outcomes might have been caused by the student’s (1) motivation to do well, (2) level of pressure from parents, (3) amount of enjoyment of class subjects, or (dare we hope) (4) the skill and engagement of a fine professor.

**FIGURE 2.3**

**Correlations always range from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ . The sign (positive or negative) indicates whether the two variables move in the same direction or in opposite directions. The number (from  $0.0$  to  $1.0$ ) tells you how well each data point fits onto a general pattern. If a correlation is zero, it means there is no pattern or association between the two variables.**



## SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN POPULAR CULTURE

## ▶ Correlation and Causation in *Harry Potter*



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Most people are familiar with the Harry Potter series of books and movies, in which a young boy discovers he's a wizard and attends a boarding school to learn

spells. In the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005), Harry first gets the chance to learn the magical power of "apparition," or the ability to disappear and reappear in a different location. Harry's first apparition lesson is an example of his awareness that correlation does not imply causation.

Harry describes his apparition teacher's appearance and how that appearance might be linked to the ability to disappear:

He was oddly colorless, with transparent eyelashes, wispy hair, and an insubstantial air, as though a single gust of wind might blow him away. Harry wondered whether constant disappearances and reappearances had somehow diminished his substance, or whether his frail build was ideal for anyone wishing to vanish. (p. 382)

Harry doesn't know whether having a wispy appearance caused his teacher to have a greater apparition ability—or whether his talent at apparition has caused him to appear wispy. While Harry suspects there's a correlation or association between the two things, he knows that without more information, he can't know which is the cause and which is the effect. It's also possible that the association is merely a coincidence or that both are caused by something else. Without logical research designs, the secrets of apparition may remain unknown to Muggles (nonmagical folks) and wizards alike.

A weird example about ice cream will help you understand the "third variable" problem. There is usually a correlation between amount of ice cream sold per year in any given city and the number of people in that city who drown that year. Is ice cream consumption causing drowning or vice versa? Probably not. It's more likely that a third variable explains the correlation: heat. Towns that have hotter temperatures (such as Miami, Florida, and Austin, Texas) probably sell more ice cream. In addition, more people swim in these towns, also due to the heat (which unfortunately sometimes leads to more drownings). So, while it might look like the two variables of ice cream and drownings are related, both are actually caused by something else.

Even if there is a causal relationship, we might not know which is the cause and which is the effect. Think about the controversial idea that watching violence on TV causes children to act more violently in real life. The correlation seems to be real, but the causal relationship may go in the other direction. Maybe children inclined to be violent already are attracted to TV violence. Simple correlations are only clues. But they are a provocative way to begin engaging with research designed to solve social problems.



### THE MAIN IDEAS

- The scientific method, which is used by social psychologists who conduct research, includes (1) observing a pattern, (2) generating a hypothesis, (3) scientifically testing the hypothesis, and (4) interpreting results so that the hypothesis can be refined and tested again.
- Three ways to gather descriptive data are (1) archival data, (2) naturalistic observation, and (3) surveys.
- Correlations test whether two continuous variables (or variables that have scores along a range) are associated with each other in a systematic way.

### CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

- Think about the classrooms you've been inside recently. Consider the physical aspects of the room (such as size, type of desks, color, art on the walls, and so on). Then consider how people choose to sit in the room during classes (such as whether they prefer the front or back row, how much they spread out, what kinds of people tend to sit together, and so on). Generate three hypotheses about how either the physical environment or the social environment shapes learning.
- Imagine that you want to do a study on how companies support leadership within their organizations. First, describe how you might conduct the study using archival data; then, how you'd do it with naturalistic observation. Finally, describe how you would conduct the study differently if you decided to give people who work there a survey. What kinds of questions would you ask? How would you get people to fill it out honestly?
- Describe two positive correlations you think are true in your own life, and identify two negative correlations you see in your own life. Then, choose one of those correlations and discuss whether you think there is a causal relationship between the two variables or whether a third variable drives what appears to be an association.

## HOW DO EXPERIMENTS WORK IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

### >> LO 2.2: Understand the strengths and weaknesses of experiments and how their results are analyzed.

If the most famous book about experimental designs were going for a big audience in the self-help market, then it might be called *How to Think Clearly*. However, the helpful book written by Donald Campbell and Julian Stanley (1966) had a less dramatic title: *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*.

The original target market for this groundbreaking book was the unruly world of education research. Campbell and Stanley (1966, p. 2) wanted to calm things down and remind researchers that experimentation takes time, replications, and multiple methods. They organized the world of experimental research design into three categories:

- (1) preexperimental designs,
- (2) quasi-experiments, and
- (3) true experiments.

### Preexperimental Designs

Main strength: everyone is treated equally. Main weakness: no comparison group.

The simplest experimental design is called a **preexperiment**. Here, a single group of people is tested to see if some kind of experience or treatment had an effect. Imagine a college is interested in making sure new students succeed, especially in their first year. The faculty design a class all incoming students have to take that's called something like "Freshman Seminar" or "University Success." The college requires every new student to take this class, then tracks that group's success through outcomes like their GPA at the end of the semester.

You can see that with preexperiments, because everyone is treated exactly the same, we avoid ethical concerns that might come up in research designs in which different groups are formed. For example, if the college required half of the incoming students to take the class and told the other half of students they weren't allowed to take the class, one of the groups might be at a disadvantage. This problem becomes even more clear when we think of research in areas like mental health interventions. If we design a new therapy to decrease anxiety, giving it to everyone who suffers from anxiety sounds the most fair.

But the problem with preexperiments also then becomes clear: Once we see results, can we really know any changes were because of the treatment? If grades in that year's incoming class are particularly good, how do we know they weren't just smarter than last year's class? And if anxiety decreases, was it the therapy—or something else that happened, like a change in the culture? We can be more confident that an experience or treatment has the effect we think it does when we use the next two research designs.

## Quasi-Experiments

Main strength: enables comparison between groups. Main weakness: may not control alternative explanations.

Sometimes we want to compare groups that exist naturally. We might want to study people who have survived natural disasters (like tornadoes or hurricanes) compared to those who have never been in one. We might want to compare people who have served time in prison to those who haven't, people in the military versus civilians, athletes versus nonathletes, people who drink coffee versus those who don't . . . and so on.

**Quasi-experiments** compare outcomes between or among groups that are naturally occurring. For example, when comparing whether men or women are most likely to interrupt in a conversation, we use two groups (men and women) that existed regardless of our study. There are often extremely interesting questions that can only be asked through quasi-experiments, because people are already in their respective groups. We can now compare one group to another—which was impossible with preexperiments.

But here's the weakness: Even if we find a difference, we can't really be sure *why* that difference exists. In our interruption study, if one group interrupts more, is it because of genetics? Hormones? How boys versus girls are raised in our culture? Descriptive research (explained in the section above), preexperiments, and quasi-experiments all suffer from the same downfall: **confounding variables**.

Confounding variables are factors or issues that offer alternative explanations to why our results came out like they did, which limit our ability to ever say "Variable X caused changes in Variable Y." None of the methods of data collection described so far let us make claims about *causality*, because they all have confounding variables. The only way around confounding variables is a true experiment.

## True Experiments

Main strength: controls (most) confounding variables. Main weakness: usually requires more time and effort.

**Preexperiment:** A research design in which a single group of people is tested to see whether a treatment has an effect.

**Quasi-experiment:** A research design where outcomes are compared across different groups that occur naturally.

**Confounding variables:** Alternative explanations for why results came out as they did, which limit a researcher's ability to claim a causal relationship between variables in a study.