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CHAPTER

INTRODUCING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

DID YOU EVER WONDER?



Source: U.S. Department of Defense/photo by Tech. Sgt. Prentice Colter.

If you read a magazine or watch the news on television, you'll encounter varied acts of human behaviour. The following stories received much attention in the media in the past few years:

- Peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2018, after a 20-year conflict
- In 2018, decriminalization of homosexuality in India
- Reactions to mistreatment of Uighur Muslims in China in 2019



These example stories illustrate a range of human behaviours, from misperception to prosocial behaviour to compassion to aggression. But what do you really learn about the people in these media reports? How well do you understand what drives their behaviour? How accurately could you predict their behaviour in the future? This chapter explores these questions, and other similar questions, to help us understand how we think about people in the social world and, in turn, the impact of the social world on our attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour. In addition, you'll find out . . .

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Why do university students often fail to ask questions during class?



Why do soldiers sometimes mistreat prisoners?



Why having family dinner could be related to better grades among teenagers?



Why should parents be more worried about car seats than kidnappers?

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WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

What social psychology is

How social psychology has evolved over time

Whether social psychology is really just common sense

How social psychology is connected to other fields

How social psychology applies across cultures and subcultures

PREVIEW

The “**Did You Ever Wonder . . . ?**” questions all address real-world issues that are examined by social psychologists—and this book therefore explores these and other issues that relate to how people interact in the social world, influence it as well as are influenced by it. This chapter first defines social psychology and the specific topics that are examined in this area, or sub-discipline, of psychology. Next, you’ll learn about how social psychology has evolved over time and how it connects to other disciplines and, finally, this field’s reliance on foundation in the scientific method and the impact of culture on both theory and research in social psychology.

WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

John Donne, the 16th-century English poet, wrote:

“No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main . . .”
Donne, *No Man Is an Island*

Four hundred years later, these words still ring true, though we might now say “person” or “human” rather than “man.” Our lives are connected by hundreds of threads, and our survival and well-being depend on these connections. Social psychology is the study of understanding our social connections to each other—how they influence and are influenced by what we think, feel, and do.

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are influenced by factors in the social world. Social psychologists study how people explain their own and other people’s behaviour (e.g., attributions), how they influence others (e.g., persuasion), and how they connect with others (e.g., attraction). A classic and widely used definition of social psychology was given by Gordon W. Allport in 1954 as follows: “an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feelings and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings” (p. 5).

We can understand and present any phenomenon through many ways such as an artistic perspective, a documentary approach, folk wisdom, or a scientific inquiry. All these capture different aspects of social psychology. For example, Angie Thomas, a contemporary African American author, examines police brutality, race relations, and systemic oppression in her book *The Hate U Give*. Her approach, although valid and intelligent, lacks scientific value and method. It is one person’s fictional account and therefore reflects only one person’s perspective rather than being a

systematic observation. Similarly, British documentary filmmaker Orlando von Einsiedel examines violence and altruism of the Syrian Civil Defense in movies such as *The White Helmets*. His movie, although powerful and informative, lacks the objectivity and systematic observation that is required in scientific inquiry. Religious beliefs, in turn, offer explanations for many things (from how the universe was created to why a person suffers pain), but these are based on a doctrine that gives explanations that one must simply believe—they are not amenable to scientific tests or objective verification.

USING THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Social psychology provides an alternative perspective to these approaches to explain a phenomenon by using scientific inquiry, which involves the following: a commitment to collecting accurate and error-free information; a commitment to objectivity and collecting bias-free data; and a commitment to verifying information empirically. To meet these commitments, social psychologists follow the **scientific method**, a research method for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, and evaluating and integrating previous knowledge. Social psychologists form an educated guess, called a **hypothesis**, about the relationship between events and examine the accuracy of the hypothesis by collecting data through observation and/or experimentation, to determine whether the hypothesis is supported by the data (i.e., whether the initial guess was a good one). You will read more about research methods in Module. Social psychology therefore uses the scientific method to evaluate hypotheses as other scientific fields, such as biology, chemistry, and physics.

This research process helps us find objective answers to questions about why people think, feel, and behave as they do.

In some cases, this research leads us to quite surprising conclusions. If, for example, I told you that competitors who receive a bronze medal (third place) are happier than those who receive a silver medal (second place), you might be quite puzzled. But this is exactly the finding of considerable research on errors we make in social cognition, as you'll learn in Chapter 4. Similarly, although it is often assumed that children from upper-class families face fewer problems than those from low-income backgrounds, some research suggests exactly the opposite: one study found that adolescents from high-income communities actually report significantly more anxiety and depression than do those from inner-city, low-income communities (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). Moreover, adolescents from high-income communities have also reported higher rates of substance abuse for alcohol and cigarettes, as well as for marijuana and other illegal drugs. Using the scientific method is crucial as it allows researchers to test whether our beliefs are actually correct.

In other cases, hypothesis testing simply leads researchers to accept findings that one would expect to find it true. For example, a widely accepted finding in **social psychology** is that men are more interested in casual sex than women are (you'll read more about this in Chapter 13). This is unsurprising as it conforms with socially recognized gender stereotypes (which are discussed in Chapter 10).

Based on Gordon W. Allport's classic definition, we could now say that social psychology is a scientific study of the way in which a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the real, imagined, or implied presence of others. As an introduction to social psychology, this book will therefore focus on three distinct, but inter-related topics that social psychologists address:

- How we think about ourselves
- How we think, feel, and act in the social world
- How our attitudes and behaviour shape the social world (imagined or real)

These three topics are highlighted in The Big Picture at the end of each chapter to help you see how each chapter's topics relate to these three broad themes and contribute to an understanding of the big picture of social psychology. Let's now examine each of these topics in turn.

scientific method – a technique for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, and/or correcting previous knowledge

hypothesis – a testable prediction about the conditions under which an event will occur

social psychology – A scientific study of the way in which a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the real, imagined, or implied presence of others

HOW WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES

self-perception – how we think about ourselves

Social psychology examines how we think about ourselves, or **self-perception**, and, in particular, how our views of ourselves depend on our sociocultural environment. Many first year students attending university feel rather good about themselves. They may have been one of the smartest, or most athletic, or most artistic members of their high school class. However, they quickly realize that in the university environment, the comparison group is different. Once you are surrounded by hundreds, or thousands, of people who themselves were the smartest, or most athletic, or most artistic, members of their own high school class, you may not feel quite as good about yourself as you did back in high school. Similarly, you may feel quite confident about your own appearance. But after skimming through a *Cosmopolitan* or *Maxim* magazine, you may feel rather insecure. These are just some of the ways in which factors in the social world influence how we think about ourselves.

self-presentation – how people work to convey certain images of themselves to others

Social psychology also examines **self-presentation**, or how we present our ideas about ourselves to others. We use many strategies to convey impressions about ourselves to others—the car we drive, the clothes or jewellery we wear, even the model of our cell phone, or the size of our television. Even the casual references we make in conversations—where we are going on vacation, parties we've attended, and items we've bought—convey information about our habits, interests, and resources.

HOW WE THINK, FEEL, AND ACT IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

social perception – how people form impressions of and make inferences about other people and events in the social world

Social psychology also examines how people form impressions and make inferences about other people and events in the social world, a process called **social perception**. We form these impressions easily and frequently—we decide why our favourite hockey team won the game, why a grade on a test was lower than we expected, and why our best friend's dating relationship probably would not last.

social cognition – how we think about the social world, and in particular how we select, interpret, and use information to make judgments about the world

A particular type of social perception, **social cognition**, describes how we think about others and the social world. At times, we see the world accurately. For example, you might assume that expensive restaurants serve better food than do cheap restaurants—and this is a pretty good rule of thumb (or heuristic). But in some cases, we tend to make errors in our judgments about people and events. For example, many people are more afraid of air travel than road travel. In reality, every year, the number of people who die in car accidents is greater than that in airplane accidents, suggesting that our fear of air travel isn't well founded.

social influence – the impact of other people's attitudes and behaviours on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour

Another central issue examined by social psychologists is **social influence**—the impact of other people's attitudes and behaviour, or even their mere presence, on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. In some cases, social influence is very direct: advertising messages are a good example of deliberate efforts to influence our attitudes and behaviour. In other cases, however, social influence is very subtle. We are, for example, less likely to help a person in need if we are in a large group than if we are alone with the person, in part because we don't feel personally responsible for helping when there are others around us.



Social psychology examines not only the impact of people's attitudes and behaviour but also the impact of a person's perception of other people's attitudes and behaviour. In other words, people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are influenced not only by what other people think or do but also by what they imagine other people think or do. Let's take an example that occurs frequently in university classes. Imagine that your professor finishes a section of the lecture and asks whether anyone has a question. You might have a question to ask about the material that was just presented, but when you look around the room, you notice that no one else has a hand raised. You then decide not to ask your question because you fear looking stupid for being the only person to ask a question. In this case, you assume that no other students have questions and therefore believe that they must have understood all the material. This perception of their knowledge—whether it is accurate or not—influences your behaviour. Our beliefs about the social world can influence our attitudes and behaviour even when these beliefs are inaccurate, as the following Health Connections box shows.

Social psychology also examines the impact of events (including thoughts, which are cognitive events) on our attitudes and behaviours. Have you ever noticed that when you are in a bad mood you are more likely to act rudely? Would you believe that just feeling really hot can lead you to



HEALTH CONNECTIONS

Why University Students Don't Always Practice Safe Sex Although They Know They Should

To help you make connections between research in social psychology and real-world issues, in each chapter there are Connections boxes that show how principles in social psychology relate to education, law, health, business, the media, or the environment. In Chapter 5 you will read more about the link between attitudes and behaviour: although attitudes do help predict behaviour, they do not guarantee future actions. This is important when it comes to, for example, promoting healthy behaviour such as having protected sex. Intentions to use a condom do not always translate into actual condom use, and researchers have attempted to establish some of the reasons. According to the data produced in a study by Tara MacDonald of Queens University and Michaela Hynie of York University (2008), a high proportion of young Canadian adults are aware of the possible negative consequences of having unprotected sex, including the risk of pregnancy or contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Almost a decade later, Collado, Johnson, Loya, Johnson, and Yi (2017) reported a similar finding that knowledge of the potential negative consequences of unprotected sex often fails to lead to actual condom use. Collado and colleagues (2017) examined factors that increased the likelihood of using condoms. Participants were college students ($N = 260$) from a large Mid-Atlantic public university in the United States. The study found that college students, especially males, did not always use condoms, and knowledge about HIV was not always the deciding factor in engaging in sexual activity. In other words, when the sexual partner was perceived to be highly attractive, people were more willing to have sex, and take chances with getting pregnant, and/or contracting HIV and/or STI. However, if a person believed that their potential sexual partner was very likely to have an STI, they were more likely to use protection, a condom, if they were to have sex with that person. In addition, people were more concerned about what sexual disease or infection their sexual partner may pose and were less concerned about the potential of sharing their own HIV or STI with another person. It was also found that females who were educated on sexual diseases and risk perceptions were more likely to delay sexual activity and had a lower likelihood of engaging in

sexual activity that could result in pregnancy, HIV, or STI. Overall, males were more willing to engage in sexual activity and risk getting HIV and/or an STI than females (Collado et al., 2017).

Similarly, Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, and Peterson (2016) conducted a literature review that aimed to explore how college students perceived and understood sexual consent. The results indicated that those who are ambivalent about having sex but engage in sex tend not to take responsibility. In other words, they view sex as something that happened to them rather than it was planned. Consequently, ambivalent individuals who have sex tend not to use condoms. Perhaps this is a reflection of having mixed feelings about sex and the possible consequences attached to sex (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). The study also noted that people generally acknowledge two types of consent. (1) The traditional consent is based on the assumption that no resistance is defined as consent. In terms of heterosexual relations, the traditional consent tends to place most of the responsibility of explicitly stating that one does not consent on women and, therefore, problematic. (2) The affirmative consent is based on the notion that until consent is verbally expressed it cannot be assumed. These findings highlight implications in relation to the guidelines of consent, especially when it comes to understanding how someone with mixed feelings about sex give affirmative consent (Muehlenhard et al., 2016).



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behave more aggressively, or that smelling a cinnamon bun baking could make you to be nicer to others? We'll examine these and other ways in which aspects of the social world influence how we feel, how we think, and even how we behave.

HOW OUR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR SHAPE THE SOCIAL WORLD

Finally, social psychology also examines how our attitudes and behaviours can shape the social world. Through the process called **self-fulfilling prophecy**, people's expectations about someone else's traits influence how they act toward that person. In turn, these actions elicit the behaviour that is expected. The self-fulfilling prophecy therefore leads people to confirm whatever beliefs they have and makes it very difficult for these beliefs to be disconfirmed.

self-fulfilling prophecy – the process by which people's expectations about a person lead them to elicit behaviour that confirms these expectations

HOW HAS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY EVOLVED OVER TIME?

Social psychology is a relatively new field in the discipline of psychology. It was first established as a unique discipline only at the start of the 20th century, with the publication of the first textbook in social psychology written by Floyd Allport (1924). Early research in social psychology was heavily influenced by three major factors: behaviourism, Gestalt psychology, and historical events. Subsequently, in the late 20th century, social psychology saw the more number of studies on cultural context and the importance of culture in human experience. It is important to note that social psychology is deeply rooted in the intellectual and cultural environment of North American and European societies.

BEHAVIOURISM

In the early 20th century, many psychologists believed that for psychology to be truly scientific, it should only focus on measurable phenomena. As thoughts and feelings are unobservable, and therefore (it was argued) unmeasurable, psychologists focused on the impact of positive and negative events on behaviour. Known as **behaviourism**, this discipline described people's behaviour as being determined in a very straightforward way. Behaviour that was followed by a reward, it was argued, would continue, which is referred to as conditioning. Behaviour that was followed by punishment would not continue. This perspective was very influential in much of the early work on understanding animal behaviour. For example, using a reward to reinforce target behaviours, renowned American behaviourist B. F. Skinner trained pigeons to turn in a circle, nod, and “play” the piano.

The behaviourist approach is still influential in social psychology today. As you'll learn in Chapter 5, the social learning perspective describes how people form attitudes and behaviour through both receiving reinforcements for their own attitudes and behaviour and watching other people's attitudes and behaviour. Children who watch movies in which actors are smoking are more likely to form positive attitudes toward smoking (as you'll learn in Chapter 5), children whose parents show prejudice toward people form negative attitudes about others (as you'll learn in Chapter 10), and children who watch aggressive cartoons are more likely to behave aggressively (as you'll learn in Chapter 11).

Although the behaviourist approach clearly explains some behaviour, it ignores the role of people's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, and therefore is too simplistic to explain other behaviours. Giving a child a reward for reading a book, for example, can actually backfire and reduce his or her interest in reading—because the child then sees reading as driven only by the prospect of a reward and not as driven by the pure enjoyment of reading. This is one example of how people's interpretation of their behaviour matters, as you'll learn in Chapter 2.

GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

In part due to the limitations inherent in the behaviourist approach, other psychologists in the early 1900s examined the influence of people's *perceptions* of objects and events in the world, not simply their objective appearance. This sub-discipline, called **Gestalt psychology**, which means “whole form,” emerged from Germany. Gestalt psychology emphasized the importance of looking at the whole object and how it appeared in people's minds, as opposed to looking at specific objective parts of the object. For example, in the classic *Dog Picture* shown in the photo here, people don't recognize the dog by individually identifying all of its parts (head, ears, nose, and so on). In fact, if you look at a small enough area of the picture and ignore the rest, it is very difficult to determine that these seemingly random marks are part of a dog. In contrast, when you look at the picture all together, you simply perceive the dog as a single object all at once.

Gestalt psychology was in sharp contrast to behaviourism as it focused on how people interpret their surroundings and the cognitive processing that was involved in people's interpretations. A key idea in Gestalt psychology is that we sometimes experience more than what is supplied by our

behaviourism – a theory of learning that describes people's behaviour as acquired through conditioning

Gestalt psychology – a theory that proposes objects are viewed holistically

sensory perception. For example, if we see a series of images in quick succession, we perceive a moving image, not a series of static ones. We also organize our perceptual experience. For instance, in Figure 1.1 (a), we see three horizontal lines of stars, rather than 14 vertical groups of three. In Figure 1.1 (b), we tend to perceive a diagonal line of Os in a field of Xs. We do this not only with diagrams but also with all our sensory experience. Organizing our experience is how we make sense of our world.

Kurt Lewin, who is often considered the founder of modern social psychology (as well as the sub-disciplines of organizational and applied psychology), was trained in the Gestalt approach. Born in Poland, Lewin served in the German army during World War I. Following a war injury, he attended the University of Berlin and received a PhD in 1916. Lewin initially worked within the schools of behavioural psychology, and then in the Gestalt school of psychology, but his largely Jewish reading group was forced to disband when Hitler came into power in Germany in 1933. Lewin then moved to the United States, where his commitment to applying psychology to society's problems led to the development of the M.I.T. Research Center for Group Dynamics. Lewin had a keen sense of the importance of perception in determining attitudes and behaviour, and he proposed one of the earliest theories in cognitive social psychology. His research focused on the role of social perception in influencing people's behaviour, the nature of group dynamics, and the factors contributing to stereotyping and prejudice (you'll learn more about his work on these topics in Chapters 8 and 9).



Melissa Kieselburg

This picture is a classic example of the Gestalt perspective: without having first seen the whole picture, it is virtually impossible to recognize the object by looking only at a specific part of the picture. When you look at the picture all together, it is quite easy to recognize that these individual pieces together form a picture of a dog.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

A notable psychologist, Mamie Phipps Clark (1917–1983), is recognized for her research on racial identity, self-esteem, and child development. Originally majoring in mathematics and physics, she switched to psychology after meeting her husband, Kenneth Clark, a noted social psychologist. Together with Kenneth, Mamie published a number of studies—the most notable one being the Clark Doll Test, in which they presented African American children with two dolls that looked alike—the only difference was that one doll was white and the other one was black. They asked the children many questions about the dolls, including which one they preferred to play with and which one resembled them. Surprisingly, Clark and Clark (1940) found that not only African American children were more likely to label the black doll as “bad” and the white doll as “nice,” but they also found that the children thought they shared resemblance with the white doll. This particular study, among others, went on to provide support for the harmful effects of segregation based on skin

FIGURE 1.1 EXAMPLES OF HOW OUR MIND ORGANIZES ITS EXPERIENCE



colour, which influenced the U.S. Supreme court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, a historic case that made racial segregation in public education unconstitutional.



Similarly, Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist who began his work in the late 1960s, was deeply affected by the events in Nazi Germany. Although many people blamed these events on the “cruel and evil” German people, Milgram wondered whether the people themselves were less to blame for the atrocities of Nazi Germany than the situations. While a professor at Yale University, Milgram conducted a series of experiments demonstrating the powerful role of authority in leading to obedience. This research, which was greeted by much controversy when its results were first published, is one of the most famous studies in social psychology, and has been used to explain many real-world events, including mistreatment of prisoners during times of war. You’ll read about Milgram’s research on the power of authority in leading to obedience in Chapter 7.

In part because early theory and research in social psychology was sparked by truly horrific events, such as the Holocaust, much of the early work in social psychology focused on explaining behaviour that might be regarded as problematic, such as aggression, stereotyping and prejudice, and misplaced obedience to authority. However, research in social psychology has also increasingly focused on positive behaviour, such as altruism, attraction, and leadership. In fact, **positive psychology**, which is a new sub-discipline within social psychology, was established in 1998 to focus specifically on people’s virtues and strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The roots of positive psychology are in humanistic psychology, which has a focus on individual potential and fulfilment. Positive psychology is not about finding what is wrong with an individual or treating mental illness, but rather aiming to improve and fulfill normal lives. Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi are two prominent researchers in this sub-discipline. They argue that psychology should be about human strength as well as weakness, building strength in the lives of normal people and nurturing talent. Researchers in this field examine the traits that are associated with life satisfaction and that are predictors of healthy human functioning (Table 1.1). Researchers then design interventions to improve well-being.

Social psychologists continue to be interested in examining, and solving, real-world issues, including decreasing prejudice and discrimination, helping communities regulate the use of natural resources, and improving group decision-making.

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology has its roots in Western Europe and the United States; therefore psychological knowledge reflects cultural traditions in these regions of the world. It has been argued that psychology is largely culture-bound, not only in terms of its origin but also in terms of its concepts and its research findings, which represent only a particular and small part of the world (Berry, 2013; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Psychology has been criticized for being culture blind as it has largely ignored the influence of culture on human emotion, cognition, and behaviour (Berry, 2013). In fact, psychological knowledge from many parts of the world including most African nations, most Arab countries, South America, Russia, India, China, and first nations in Americas and Pacific regions is missing (Berry, 2013).

Cultural psychology examines how culture shapes people by focusing on the processes that people become encultured in their own culture (Cohen, 2015). Cultural psychologists study how certain beliefs, attitudes, values, and particular patterns of behaviour have developed in a culture. Sternberg (2014) has argued that various cultures have different ways of seeing and evaluating people and interpreting their behaviours, goals, and intelligence. What is highly valued in one culture may be devalued, or looked down on, in another.

Cultural and cross-cultural research not only identify cultural differences but also highlight cultural similarities—both are equally important. By identifying cultural differences, we can recognize the diversity of human behaviour, thought processes, and emotional expressions. For example, if intelligence is defined and understood differently across cultures, our theoretical framework of

positive psychology – a recent branch of psychology that studies individuals’ strengths and virtues

intelligence should be modified and expanded to include these cultural variations. On the other hand, by identifying cultural similarities, shared psychological mechanisms are established. This highlights the universality and the commonality of a certain psychological process, which helps with developing a global psychology (Berry, 2013; Wang, 2017).

As you read subsequent chapters, you will notice that although many cultural and cross-cultural psychological research are described and discussed, they are far fewer than social psychological research that are conducted in the West. This is a reflection of the discipline that psychology is still mostly produced in the West and made available to the rest of the world. Local psychology is generally not valued, misrepresented, and not shared in the West. The outcome of the current state of affair is that we have a limited knowledge of human psychology.

IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY REALLY JUST COMMON SENSE?

This focus on practical, real-world issues is one of the earliest tenets of social psychology, in part because early research in this field was prompted by horrific real-world events, such as Nazi Germany. In fact, Kurt Lewin (1951), the founder of modern social psychology, saw the inherent connection between social psychological theory and application to the real world as one of its greatest strengths: “There is nothing so practical as a good theory” (p. 169). Unfortunately, this ready application of social psychological theories and research to daily life can also be a curse, in that people may view social psychology as simply “common sense.” In truth, we rely too heavily on this notion of common sense as we tend to assume things to be more commonplace than they really are. Common to whom is the first question. The answer is generally limited to the “us” of the group that we see ourselves as being part of, as Chapter 9 on social identity will show. The context of the situation is another limitation on how common something is. Is it common sense that completing an assignment (i.e., doing what you are told) shows a degree of moral integrity and self-discipline? If your assignment is writing an essay, it may; if your assignment is torturing a prisoner, it probably doesn’t. Do too many cooks spoil the broth or do many hands make light the work? Both are statements of “common sense,” but they are entirely contradictory. (Chapter 8 presents research on social facilitation and inhibition that will show just how limiting the context can be in answering such a question.) Let’s now examine the biases that lead people to see the field of social psychology in this simplistic, “common sense” way, and the importance of thinking critically to combat such tendencies.

THE “I KNEW IT ALL ALONG” PROBLEM

If I told you that scientific research suggests that “opposites attract,” you’d probably believe me. But you’d have had the same confidence, and agreement with the statement, if I’d said the reverse—“birds of a feather flock together.” Similarly, if I told you, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” that would probably sound quite plausible. But once again, so would the opposite expression, “out of sight, out of mind.”

These examples illustrate a bias that people fall prey to frequently—the **hindsight bias**. Hindsight bias, or the “I knew it all along” phenomenon, refers to people’s tendency to believe, once they’ve learned the outcome of something, that that particular outcome was obvious. Unfortunately, this bias can lead people to see social psychology as little more than common sense because once they’ve heard something, they see it as obvious (Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2001; Slovic & Fischhoff, 1977). What they don’t recognize is that the exact opposite statement would also have sounded believable.

Here’s an example of this problem. If I offered to pay you either \$20 or \$1 to perform the same behaviour, which reward would make you like that behaviour more? The behaviourist tradition believed that people would like engaging in behaviour that was reinforced with a big reward

hindsight bias – the tendency to see a given outcome as inevitable once the actual outcome is known

more than behaviour that was reinforced with a small reward—and you’d probably agree with this principle (surely you’d rather receive \$20 than \$1). But the results of a classic experiment on the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance revealed the reverse; at least in some cases, people who receive \$1 for engaging in a behaviour report liking that behaviour more than those who receive \$20. You’ll learn more about this experiment by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) in Chapter 5.



RESEARCH FOCUS ON GENDER

Understanding Gender Differences in Sexual Behaviour

To help you examine how research in social psychology contributes to our understanding of gender differences and similarities, most chapters will feature a Research Focus on Gender section that examines a particular gender-related issue in depth. For example, using the sexual economic theory, it has been suggested that economic principles can explain many of the often-noted gender differences in sexual behaviour (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). According to this view, men are interested in buying sex because sex is largely a no-cost proposition for men. For women, on the other hand, the potential cost of sex is high (pregnancy, child-rearing, or even death from childbirth), and women are interested in using sex to gain other resources. This view of sex as a resource that is “bought” by men and “sold” by women explains many gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviour, including the significant gender imbalance in prostitution (women just aren’t as interested in paying for sex), the tendency for men to desire sex at earlier stages of relationships than women, and men’s greater interest in one-night stands. Opponents of this theory on sexual behaviour have pointed out limitations and faulty assumptions of the sexual economics (Rudman, 2017). This theory states that women are responsible for repressing female sexuality. This implies that women are more sexist than men, which has not been found true across several studies conducted around the world (Rudman, 2017). Furthermore, the theory asserts that women are more likely to endorse a sexual double standard regarding women’s attitude. However, this finding is based on attitudes collected between 1966 and 1977 (Rudman, 2017). More recent research has revealed that although most respondents did not show a double standard, men “lost respect for women who had a lot of sex” far more than women did, indicating that gender differences do exist regarding societal attitudes toward male and female sexuality (Allison & Risman, 2013). Therefore, there is a double standard that condemns premarital sexuality for women but not for men.

EMPHASIS ON CRITICAL THINKING

The focus on the scientific method in social psychology means that you should carefully and critically examine research findings presented in this (or any) book, and especially those that are presented in the media. In other words, don’t just casually believe what you read or hear, but really think about the information and whether there exist alternative explanations for a phenomenon.

Imagine that you learn there is an association between wealth and happiness (research indicates that there is, but only up to a point). Why is this? Do happy people make more money, or does having more money make people happier? Which is true? You need to carefully examine the factors that lead to this association. One possibility is that happy people engage in certain behaviours that lead to greater success in their work—such as getting along better with colleagues or persisting through difficulties—which in turn leads to more financial success. But another, equally likely, possibility is that making more money leads to greater happiness. Still another possibility is that some other factor altogether—perhaps optimism or social support—leads to both happiness and income. We can say that happiness and income correlate (or co-occur), but not that one causes the other; more data are required before we could say that.



Let's take another example. A study published in *The Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* reported that adolescents who frequently had dinner with their families reported lower levels of smoking, drinking, drug use, and depressive thoughts. They also had better grades (Eisenberg, Olson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Bearinger, 2004). The media reported this study widely and urged parents to have dinner with their kids as a way of preventing drug use and increasing grades. This led to further studies to verify the results. In one other study of 21,400 children between ages 5 and 15, however, no significant relationship between family meal frequency and academic or behavioural outcomes was found (Miller, Waldfogel, & Han, 2012). Subsequently, Harrison and colleagues (2015) conducted a review of 1,783 articles and reported that overall empirical studies indicate fewer depressive symptoms, increased school success, and even decreased disordered eating are associated with frequent family dinner (Harrison et al., 2015). It's also important to keep in mind that correlation is not causation; although these studies have found that frequent family meals are associated with positive outcomes, it does not necessarily mean that shared meals are the reason for these outcomes.

Furthermore, it may be that families who eat dinner together frequently are simply closer than other families. Attentive parents may have more opportunities to learn about their children and recognize warning signs of unhealthy behaviours. If families spend more time together and are closer, children may share more with their parents. This pre-existing closeness could be what leads to more positive outcomes while frequently eating together may be a product of a tight-knit family dynamic.

Along this line of reasoning, a study examined the benefits of family meals (Meier & Musick, 2014). Using two years' worth of responses from a U.S. national survey, Meier and Musick used measures of adolescent well-being (delinquency, depression, and substance abuse) and its connection to quality of family relationships with 17,977 youths (grades 7 to 12). Results indicated that family dinners are not associated with positive outcomes if parent-child relationships are weak, but positive outcomes such as decreased delinquency and fewer symptoms of depression are present in stronger relationships (Meier & Musick, 2014). This study illustrates that there are other measures within the family dynamic that are associated with positive outcomes while also demonstrating that family meals may also provide some benefits, but under particular circumstances.

This is also related to another important concept to consider: the first or most obvious answer may not always be the *best* answer. Although there may be an association between having family dinner on a regular basis and positive outcomes, it's important to think of alternative or underlying explanations.

Another possibility is that simply spending time with children is associated with better outcomes, regardless of when it is. Research might show that parents who spend more time with their children each day, or each week, have children who have better grades and healthier behaviour. In this case, it would be the amount of time that would influence these behaviours, not whether that time was during dinner.

Still another possibility is that children who engage in unhealthy behaviour and show poor academic performance are less interested or willing to eat dinner with their families. Perhaps children who are "acting out" in some way refuse to eat dinner with their parents, even if their parents are home during the dinner hour. This example illustrates the



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Research shows that having regular family dinners is associated with positive outcomes for children.

principle of reverse causality, in which two factors are related in precisely the opposite direction than is hypothesized.

In short, all we can say is that eating a family dinner correlates with higher grades, and it shows an inverse correlation (when one increases, the other decreases) with smoking, drinking, drug use, and depressive thoughts. Based on this information, we are not able to say which of these factors or (variables) causes any of the others.

To help you learn how to critically examine information, Module will describe various methods for conducting research in social psychology as well as various factors that influence research findings and the conclusions that can be drawn from them. You are encouraged to question the results of research studies that are discussed throughout the chapters. Think carefully—this is an opportunity to sharpen your critical thinking skills.

CONDUCTING ETHICALLY SOUND RESEARCH

Several classical studies in social psychology (e.g., Milgram's experiment on obedience, 1974; Zimbardo's Stanford Prison study, 1971) have been criticized for unethical practices. Participants in these studies were subjected to harmful circumstances and psychological discomfort. However, since the late 20th century, ethical principles have been largely established to protect research participants. In North America, all universities have a research ethics board that reviews research proposals to ensure participants do not experience unnecessary stress and their rights are protected. The guidelines of ethical protection for participants is governed by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Code of Ethics, which ensures that researchers are operating under four main principles: (1) Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples, (2) Responsible Caring, (3) Integrity in Relationships, and (4) Responsibility to Society (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). These principles are used as tools in ethical problem-solving and decision-making in psychological research. Furthermore, these ethical considerations warrant that each study meets ethical requirements for human participation and no lasting physical and psychological harms are imposed on research participants (see Table 1.1 for examples).

Table 1.1 Concepts in Context: CPA Code of Ethics

CONCEPT	CODE OF ETHICS
CONSENT	Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples Principle I ensures researchers are obtaining informed consent from independent individuals and groups (e.g. participants fully understand what they are agreeing to participate in) willingly. All potential risks must be outlined for the participant to review and understand before consenting. This principle also allows participants to have the right to withdraw or refuse to participate at any time during the study.
DEBRIEFING	Principle II: Responsible Caring Principle II instructs researchers to debrief participants immediately after a study is complete if deception (or incomplete disclosure) is used to offset any potential harm, clarify any aspect of the study, address concerns or re-establish trust that has been lost, or inform participants of how their contribution fits into the bigger picture of the research.
DECEPTION	Principle III: Integrity in Relationships Principle III outlines the responsibility of researchers to not use deception in ways that would influence a participant's ability to properly give informed consent. An example of deception includes leading the participant to believe they are participating in a study about X while they are really participating in a study about Y.
EDUCATION	Principle IV: Responsibility to Society Principle IV informs researchers of their responsibility to conduct work in a way that supports the well-being of people in society. An example of education would be to actively participate and engage in continued education and professional growth of themselves, as well as students, colleagues, and members of other disciplines.

Source: Canadian Psychological Association (2017). *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*. Retrieved from https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Ethics/CPA_Code_2017_4thEd.pdf.

HOW IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY CONNECTED TO OTHER FIELDS?

As described at the beginning of this chapter, social psychology examines how people think about themselves; how people think, feel, and act in the social world; and how people's attitudes and behaviour shape the social world. But these, and related, questions are also examined in different sub-disciplines in the larger field of psychology and in other disciplines outside of psychology.

LINKS TO SUB-DISCIPLINES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology is closely connected to several sub-disciplines in the field of psychology, including personality psychology, clinical psychology, and cognitive psychology.

PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY. Personality psychologists focus on the role of *individual differences*, meaning the aspects of people's personality that make them different from other people, in explaining how different people feel and behave in distinct ways. We often use personality descriptions to describe other people in our social world—my friend Darren is extroverted, my co-worker Deirdra is arrogant, my boss Duane is neurotic.

Whereas personality psychologists emphasize how people's individual differences influence their attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour, social psychologists emphasize the role of the situation. For example, if you observe a person driving very aggressively, you might immediately judge that person's personality negatively ("She's a careless person" or "She only thinks about herself"). A social psychologist, on the other hand, would try to examine the role of situational factors in producing that behaviour; perhaps the person is late for a job interview, or she may be taking a sick child to the hospital. When you consider the situation (the woman was taking her sick child to the hospital), that might influence your attitude toward the aggressive driver. Do you still judge her personality as careless or self-centred? Our preference for explanations (or attributions) of events based on personality or for explanations based on situational factors varies according to our cultural background. It has been found that people from individualistic cultures tend to give more emphasis to personality as an explanation for behaviour as they see the individual as stable/fixed (and the environment as changeable), whereas people from collectivistic backgrounds tend to give greater weight to situational explanations and holistic perspectives for behaviour as they see the environment as stable/fixed (and the self as changeable) (Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Social psychologists examine how different people react to different situations in distinct ways. This part of social psychology focuses on the interaction of aspects of personality, such as self-esteem, need for cognition, and prosocial orientation, in influencing behaviour in a given situation. Issues of personality will be addressed throughout this book as they overlap with social psychology. For example, in Chapter 6 you'll read about how different people are persuaded by different types of advertising messages, and in Chapter 12 you'll read about how people with high levels of empathy are more likely to donate money to someone in need.

One area of research that combines social and personality psychology is the connection between trauma and coping. Many studies have shown that social support (i.e., the support of friends, family, and other social networks) is important in helping people cope with trauma. For example, Georgian researchers studying posttraumatic growth examined the role of personality factors and social support in war-experienced children and adolescents (experiencing the 2008 Russo-Georgian War). Results indicated a link between personality factors (extraversion and conscientiousness) and situational variables (social support) with posttraumatic growth in children and adolescents (Panjikidze, Beelmann, Martskvishvili, & Chitashvili, 2019). In other words, personality and social support influenced the growth among this particular sample.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY. Clinical psychology is probably the best-known field within the larger field of psychology. When people think about the field of psychology, they often think about the role of clinical psychologists in diagnosing and treating mental health problems. Clinical psychology focuses on understanding and treating people with psychological disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, and phobias.

Social psychology also examines issues that are highly relevant for clinical psychology. Some social psychologists examine how the presence of very thin female models in the media can influence women's attitudes about their own bodies and thereby contribute to eating disorders (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, you'll learn why people who blame their failures on themselves are at greater risk of experiencing depression than those who blame their failures on other people. Other social psychologists examine strategies for promoting better psychological and physical health, including ways of reducing rates of smoking (Chapter 5), strategies for increasing condom use (Chapter 6), and methods for increasing relationship satisfaction (Chapter 13).

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY. Cognitive psychology examines mental processes, including thinking, remembering, learning, and reasoning. For example, a cognitive psychologist might examine why people are more likely to buy a \$200 sweater that is on sale for \$50 than an identical sweater that is simply priced at \$50, why some people have higher IQ than others, and why we sometimes "remember" things as having happened when they never actually did.



The *social cognitive perspective* is a combination of social psychology and cognitive psychology. This perspective refers to how we think about ourselves and the social world, with a particular focus on how we make judgments and decisions about our social environment. In some cases, our thoughts can lead us to make good, accurate decisions. In other cases, however, our thinking can lead us astray. For example, which of the following poses the greatest threat to children's safety: kidnapping by strangers or car accidents? Although many parents worry more about the former event, far more children are killed in motor vehicle accidents each year (often because they are not wearing a seatbelt or riding in a car seat) than are abducted by a kidnapper.

LINKS TO OTHER FIELDS

Social psychology is a distinct field within psychology, but it also shares a number of features with disciplines other than psychology. This section examines the links between social psychology and philosophy, sociology, biology, anthropology, and economics.

PHILOSOPHY. In the development of North American and European thought, the influence of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato is still evident (Leahey, 2004). The word *psychology* derives from the Greek words for study and spirit/soul. In the Western tradition, the Greeks were the first to write about the link between thought, emotions, and behaviour in trying to explain people's actions. For example, Democritus, who lived around 400 BCE, suggested that our behaviour is essentially determined by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. It is easy to recognize in this suggestion that the principles of reward and punishment are central to behaviourism.

Contemporary philosophy can be described as a humanistic discipline that considers existential questions such as the meaning of life, ethics, human nature, and values. While there may be some overlap in the questions that philosophers and social psychologists address (e.g., Why do we love?), their methods for answering such questions are very different. Philosophers use analytical methods such as logic, while social psychologists rely on empirical and scientific methods. Of course, philosophical conclusions might be the basis for a hypothesis that social psychologists can then test using the scientific method.

SOCIOLOGY. Sociology examines general rules and theories about groups, ranging from very small groups to large societies, and specifically how such groups affect people's attitudes and

behaviour. Sociologists are likely to focus on broad group-level variables such as culture, social class, and ethnicity. For example, a sociologist might examine why rates of homicide in Canada are much lower than in the United States.

Similarly, social psychologists study how individual people behave in groups, as well as how one's group or culture can influence a person's behaviour. However, social psychologists are more likely to focus on the effects of immediate and specific variables, such as mood, temperature, and other people, on attitudes and behaviour, and to examine the influence of the group on the individual, not simply broader trends of the group behaviour.

BIOLOGY. Biology examines the structure, function, growth, origin, and evolution of living things. Biologists examine how species evolve over time, the role of genes in influencing traits and attributes, and how individuals grow and develop over time. The link between social psychology and biology has received greater attention in recent years as research in social psychology has examined the role of biology in influencing such factors as aggression, altruism, and attraction. The sub-discipline of *evolutionary psychology* examines how biological factors can influence people's behaviour; it proposes that certain types of behaviour are “selected for” and hence have survived over time. In Chapter 11, you'll learn how evolutionary pressures influence rates of aggression, and why, from an evolutionary perspective, men tend to show higher levels of aggression than do women. Chapter 12 examines the influence of evolutionary pressures on choices people make about who to help—why, in an emergency, we favour young people over the elderly, and genetically close relatives (siblings, children, and parents) over more distant relations (cousins, aunts and uncles, and grandparents). In Chapter 13, you'll read about how evolutionary psychologists explain gender differences in preferences for different characteristics in a dating partner, as well as why men and women may find their jealousy triggered by different types of infidelity.

The influence of biology on people's thoughts and feelings is also studied within the sub-discipline of **social neuroscience**, an interdisciplinary field that emerged in the early 1990s. This field examines how factors in the social world influence activity in the brain, as well as how neural processes influence attitudes and behaviour (Falk & Scholz, 2018; Influx et al., 2019; Weisz & Zaki, 2018). This increased focus on the role of the brain in influencing people's attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour is driven in part by the increasing availability of new techniques for studying brain activity, including positron emission tomography and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Both techniques measure blood flow to particular areas of the brain, which is believed to reflect activity.

social neuroscience – a sub-discipline of social psychology examining how factors in the social world influence activity in the brain, as well as how neural processes influence attitudes and behaviour

Due to technological advances, an increasing number of social psychologists are investigating the interaction between brain activity and experiences in the social world. For example, in Chapter 10 you'll learn that different parts of the brain are activated when people are looking at faces of their own ethnicity or a different ethnicity (Hart et al., 2000). In Chapter 12 you'll learn that different parts of the brain are activated in situations of romantic rejection (Fisher, Brown, Aron, Strong, & Mashek, 2010). Given the growing importance of social neuroscience in social psychology, each chapter in this book describes a specific research study that uses such techniques. The following Research Focus on Neuroscience describes a study showing that physical and social pain both activate the same part of the brain.



RESEARCH FOCUS ON NEUROSCIENCE

How Rejection Looks in the Brain

To help you understand how the rapidly growing field of neuroscience contributes to our knowledge about social psychological theories, most chapters will feature a Research Focus on Neuroscience box that presents an in-depth look at a particular research study in neuroscience. For example, one compelling study of how techniques in neuroscience can help psychologists understand social



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The technique used for fMRI imaging measures the blood oxygen level in a given part of the brain, based on the fact that a higher level of blood oxygen is a sign of greater activity. Imagine that you are picking up a stack of heavy books, or groceries, in your arms. This muscular activity would lead to a greater flow of blood oxygen to the part of the brain responsible for moving your arms (Cacioppo et al., 2003).

processes comes from research conducted by Chen, Wagner, Kelley, and Heatherton (2015). The researchers examined the medial prefrontal cortex to understand self-construal changes during acculturation. A total of 29 Chinese graduate students underwent an fMRI session two months after their arrival in the United States and a second fMRI session after a six-month interval. During these sessions, participants were asked to engage in trait-judgment tasks and then complete the self-construal scale. Researchers found that six months later, changes in the brain could be found for interdependent self-construal, but not for independent; differentiation in trait judgment was present in the posterior cingulate cortex/precuneus for immigrants with less interdependent self-construal over time, compared to those who became more

interdependent. This finding suggests that social processes (e.g., acculturation) can have a neurological basis (Chen et al., 2015).

ANTHROPOLOGY. Anthropology examines the concept of culture, and specifically the role of culture in influencing people's attitudes and behaviour. For example, anthropologists may study the social significance of food in different cultures, the impact of culture on gender differences, and how cultures vary in their interpretations of the links between health and illness.

Social psychology originated in Western cultures, and much of the early research was therefore conducted by Western researchers using people living in Western cultures. However, in the last two decades, social psychologists have shown more interest in examining the impact of culture on people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. For example, anthropologists were among the first to discuss the relative importance of the group or the individual in different cultures, or of post-Confucian values in East Asia (e.g., Benedict, 1989; Wright, 1960). These differences were then later identified and measured by Hofstede (1980, 2001), Schwartz (1994), and other social psychologists, including the research group called the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) led by Canadian researcher Michael Harris Bond. The impact of culture on theory and research in social psychology is described in detail in each chapter. For example, you'll learn about the impact of culture on rates of aggression (Chapter 11), frequency of helping behaviour (Chapter 12), and definitions of love (Chapter 13).

ECONOMICS. Economics studies how people make trade-offs between scarce resources and how they choose between various alternatives. For example, an economist might examine how people choose between two different jobs, or the factors that lead a person to spend money now rather than save it for the future. Economists also examine why people make choices that do not maximize their well-being—such as giving money to charitable causes instead of using it for themselves—and why people make cognitive errors. For example, they'll examine why a person may choose a medical treatment when the treatment is presented as benefiting the number of years of life to be gained but the person may reject the treatment if it's presented in terms of years lost if the treatment is not used.

In particular, **behavioural economics** applies research on social, cognitive, and emotional biases to understand how people make economic decisions (Ariely & Norton, 2007; Thaler, 1980). In 2002, psychologist Daniel Kahneman of Princeton University received the Nobel Prize in Economics in large part due to his focus on issues at the intersection of psychology and economics, including fairness in the marketplace (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986a, 1986b, 1990). Expanding on Kahneman's research, Richard H. Thaler was awarded the 2017 Nobel Memorial

behavioural economics – the study of how social, cognitive, and emotional factors influence economic decisions

Prize in Economic Sciences for his work on the predictable effects of bias in economic decision-making (Earl, 2018). His notable contributions include combining economics with psychology, turning what was once a small, controversial area of the field to an established part of economics—his work has been hailed as “making economics more human” (Quran, 2017).

Social psychologists also focus on how people make particular choices as well as the costs and benefits of various alternatives. In Chapter 8, you’ll learn how people make decisions that will benefit themselves rather than their broader group. In Chapter 12, you’ll learn about the cost–benefit analysis that people perform before they decide to help a person in need. In Chapter 13, you’ll learn that physically attractive people experience many benefits that others do not, including higher starting salaries and bigger raises.

HOW DOES SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY APPLY ACROSS CULTURES AND SUBCULTURES?

Most of the early research in social psychology was conducted almost entirely by researchers in Western cultures, such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and Western Europe. These researchers studied people and events in their own country, largely for convenience, and assumed that their general findings would apply equally well to people and events across different cultures. However, more recent research reveals that culture can have a dramatic impact on how people think about themselves and the social world (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; Taras et al., 2014). This **sociocultural perspective** describes people’s behaviour and mental processes as being shaped in part by their social and/or cultural context. This section examines the distinctions between different types of cultures and how culture can have an impact on findings and theories in social psychology.

sociocultural perspective – a perspective describing people’s behaviour and mental processes as being shaped in part by their social and/or cultural context

INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES

Individualism/Collectivism is a value dimension that was proposed by Geert Hofstede (2001), a Dutch psychologist. Hofstede (1980) proposed that countries can be categorized based on four dimensions: Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance (social hierarchy), Masculinity/Femininity (task vs. person orientation), and Uncertainty Avoidance. These dimensions were developed based on a large research project of IBM employees in 40 countries. Hofstede (2001, 2010) subsequently added 64 more countries and two more dimensions (Long-Term Orientation and Indulgence vs. Self-restraint) to the aforementioned four dimensions.

Individualism/Collectivism has received considerable attention in cross-cultural research. This dimension focuses on the degree that people are integrated into groups including family and their community. In individualistic societies, individual privacy, individual freedom, and expression of one’s own idea are emphasized. Similarly, independence, self-reliance, and autonomy are valued (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Moleiro, 2018; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012). In individualistic cultures, the values and goals of individuals are preferred over the values and goals of groups. One’s dreams and personal enjoyment are given emphasis over fulfilling duties and conforming to the norms. Groups tend to be seen as destructive forces that pressure and limit individuals. According to Hofstede’s data (2001), the most individualistic nations in the world are, in order, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Netherlands and Hungary tie at the fifth place.

Individualism/Collectivism – A value dimension that focuses on the degree that people are integrated into groups including family and their community

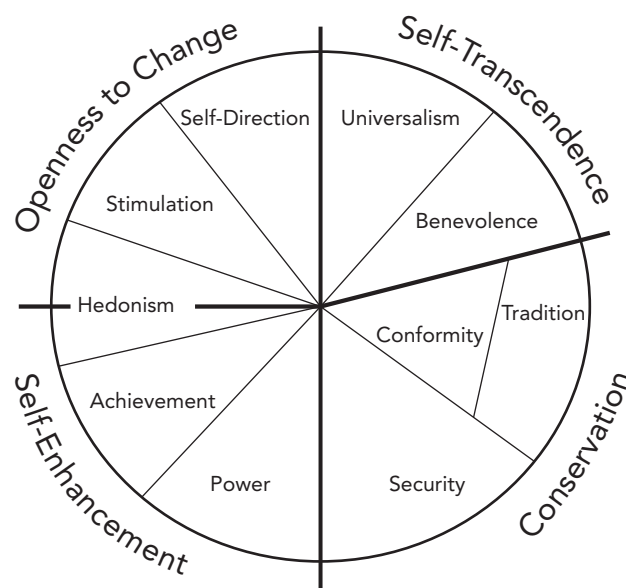
Collectivism, in contrast, is more collectivistic in their orientation, and is focused on interdependence, harmony, cooperation, and social identity (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Moleiro, 2018; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012). In these cultures, the self is viewed as fundamentally integrated with one’s relationships and social group, and people focus on maintaining interdependence with others. One’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are all influenced by those of one’s group. In many collectivistic cultures, a desire for independence is seen as unnatural and immature, and people may even fear being separated and different from others. Asserting one’s unique needs and

desires interrupts feelings of group solidarity and harmony, and hence people are willing to sacrifice their own particular wants in favour of the group. According to Hofstede's value dimension (2001), the five most collectivistic nations in the world are, in order, Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, and Columbia. Note that although Japan and China are highly collectivistic nations relative to North America and many European countries, they are considerably more individualistic.

Another prominent researcher who has examined universal values that are recognized across cultures is Shalom Schwartz, an Israeli social psychologist. The Theory of Basic Human Values proposes 10 basic values that reflect human motivations and influence actions (Schwartz, 2012). Values are defined as goals and beliefs that motivate actions. Data from 82 countries indicate the universalities of these values. Schwartz (2012) proposed a circular structure for these values indicating that some values are compatible with each other while others conflictual. Below is the list of 10 values and their meaning. As you see in Figure 1.2, the closer two values, the more similar they are in terms of the basic motivation (e.g., Power and Achievement). However, the more distant they are, the more conflictual the underlying motivations (e.g., Hedonism vs. Tradition).

1. Self-Direction = autonomous action
2. Stimulation = novelty within life
3. Hedonism = personal enjoyment
4. Achievement = success emphasized due to one's abilities
5. Power = social status
6. Security = stability or harmony of society
7. Conformity = aligning with the status quo
8. Tradition = acceptance of social values and norms
9. Benevolence = preservation of in-group relationships
10. Universalism = understanding to uphold the welfare of every individual

FIGURE 1.2 THEORETICAL MODEL OF RELATIONS AMONG 10 MOTIVATIONAL TYPES OF VALUES



Source: Schwartz (2012). <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1116&context=orpc>.

Table 1.2 Differences Between Views of the Self in Individualistic and Collectivistic Societies

INDEPENDENT SELF (CHARACTERISTIC OF INDIVIDUALISTIC SOCIETIES)	INTERDEPENDENT SELF (CHARACTERISTIC OF COLLECTIVISTIC SOCIETIES)
Be unique	Belong, fit in
Express self	Occupy one's proper place
Realize internal attributes	Engage in appropriate action
Promote own goals	Promote others' goals
Be direct: "Say what's on your mind"	Be indirect: "Read other's mind"

Source: Markus, H., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224–253.

Culture values influence how people see and act in the social world, and even how people see themselves. This includes the way people describe themselves or express their individual identity (Bochner, 1994; Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, & Rettek, 1995). Below is a comparison between two types of self that are identified cross culturally.

Abdukeram, Mamat, Kuo, and Wu (2015) examined cultural variability in the self-concept among two ethnic groups in China, the Han and Uyghur. A total of 982 teenagers were recruited to complete the study and were asked to answer the Twenty Statements Test. The responses were broken down into three categories: private, relational, and collective. The results indicated that among the Han Chinese participants, the relational aspect, like maintaining personal relationships, was more important than the private and collective self-concept. However, the Uyghur participants regarded the collective aspect, such as social identity, as more important than the private and relational self-concept. The findings highlight that cultures are heterogeneous and differences exist within them.

Collectivistic and individualistic concepts are distinguished in Table 1.2.

It is important to recognize that the distinction between independent and interdependent self-construal is not merely a difference between self that is expressed differently in Western versus Eastern cultures. Cross-cultural psychologists (Becker et al., 2018; Vignoles et al., 2016) revisited the self-construal concept and proposed a seven-factor model of self-construal with a new scale to capture the complexity of the concept. The seven factors are difference versus similarity; self-containment versus connection to others; self-direction versus receptiveness to influence; self-reliance versus dependence on others; consistency versus variability; self-expression versus harmony; and self-interest versus commitment to others.

Data was collected from over 7,000 adults from 55 cultural groups in 33 countries. It was found that independence and interdependence did indeed differ depending on whether one lived in an individualistic or a collectivistic nation. In addition, the socioeconomic development and religious heritage influenced characteristics of self. For example, those with Muslim and Catholic heritage were found to report a similar emphasis on consistency. However, the two groups differed significantly as those with Muslim heritage emphasized harmony and similarity, while those with Catholic heritage emphasized self-expression and differences (Vignoles et al., 2016). This pattern of findings indicates that it is not accurate to characterize self as independent or interdependent rather it is more accurate to identify which form of independent and interdependent self exists in different cultural contexts (Vignoles et al., 2016).

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE

Cross-cultural research—research examining similar theories and findings across different cultures—sometimes reveals that people across different cultures see the world in largely the same way. For example, people in different cultures share views about attractive facial characteristics: prominent cheekbones, thin eyebrows, and big eyes (Cunningham et al., 1995; Langlois et al., 2000; Muñoz-Reyes, Iglesias-Julios, Pita, & Turiegano, 2015).

In other cases, findings from research in Western cultures differ dramatically from those in other cultures. For example, the personality traits associated with attractiveness vary considerably across different cultures. In the United States “what is beautiful is good,” whereas in Korea “what is beautiful is honest.” As mentioned earlier in the chapter, research conducted in Western cultures also commonly finds that people tend to focus on the role of the person in influencing behaviour more than on the role of the situation. As you’ll learn in detail in Chapter 3, the fundamental attribution error explains why if we notice a car following too closely behind us or driving too fast, we tend to make a personal or dispositional attribution for this behaviour (“That driver is a jerk!”), and not a situational attribution (“That driver must be in a hurry”).

AN EXAMPLE OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN DEFINING SUCCESS

A boat docked in a tiny Mexican village. An American tourist complimented the Mexican fisherman on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them.

“Not very long,” answered the fisherman.

“But then, why didn’t you stay out longer and catch more?” asked the American.

The Mexican explained that his small catch was sufficient to meet his needs and those of his family.

The American asked, “But what do you do with the rest of your time?”

“I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, and take a siesta with my wife. In the evenings, I go into the village to see my friends, have a few drinks, play the guitar, and sing a few songs . . . I have a full life.”

The American interrupted, “I have an MBA from Harvard and I can help you! You should start by fishing longer every day. You can then sell the extra fish you catch. With the extra revenue, you can buy a bigger boat.”

“And after that?” asked the Mexican.

“With the extra money that the larger boat will bring, you can buy a second one and a third one and so on until you have an entire fleet of trawlers. Instead of selling your fish to a middleman, you can then negotiate directly with the processing plants and maybe even open your own plant. You can then leave this little village and move to Mexico City, Los Angeles, or even New York City! From there you can direct your huge new enterprise.”

“How long would that take?” asked the Mexican.

“Twenty, perhaps twenty-five years,” replied the American.

“And after that?”

“Afterward? Well, my friend, that’s when it gets really interesting,” answered the American, laughing. “When your business gets really big, you can start selling stocks and make millions!”

“Millions? Really? And after that?” said the Mexican.

“After that you’ll be able to retire, live in a tiny village near the coast, sleep late, play with your children, catch a few fish, take a siesta with your wife, and spend your evenings drinking and enjoying yourself with your friends.”

This story illustrates differences in how different cultures define success—is success gaining financial wealth or spending time with family and friends? People in individualistic cultures are more likely to define success in terms of individual accomplishments, such as acquiring great wealth, whereas those in collectivistic cultures are more likely to define success in terms of interpersonal relationships.

Although the tendency toward making a fundamental attribution error was assumed to be a general perceptual bias common to all people, cross-cultural research indicates that this bias is not commonly seen across all cultures. In fact, in many collectivistic cultures, people focus more on the role of the situation in influencing behaviour than on the role of the person (Brewer & Chen,

2007; Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). It turns out that the fundamental attribution error is not so fundamental after all and is actually quite culture-specific. This is just one example of how the knowledge we gain from studying one culture may not apply equally well to a different culture and of how important it is for researchers to test theories across different cultures instead of simply assuming that people in different cultures will all respond in the same way.

SUBCULTURE AND OTHER SOCIAL OR DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Other research on culture examines differences between people who live in the same country but in different subcultures within that country. These subcultures, or different groups, could be based, for example, on region, socioeconomic status, or religion (Hynie, Crooks, & Barragan, 2011; Kashima, Kokubo, Boxall, Yamaguchi, & Macrae, 2004; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006).

Carole Peterson of Memorial University and her colleagues compared the subcultures of Canadian children of European versus Chinese descent (Peterson, Wang, & Hou, 2009). As our understanding of who we are depends in part on our memories of ourselves, Peterson examined these children's early memories to determine differences in the two groups' perceptions of themselves. The researchers coded the memories into categories according to their content (e.g., family interactions, solitary play) and found that two of the three most frequent categories recalled by the children of Chinese descent involved a group. Conversely, two of the three most frequent categories for the children of European descent were of individual experiences. Although the children were all born in Canada, the greater emphasis on individualism in Canadian culture did not have a great impact on the children of Chinese descent.

CRITIQUES OF THE MAINSTREAM

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM. This text provides an overview of what is primarily mainstream social psychology. However, there are always dissenting voices in any discipline (if scientists always agreed, science would not advance) and this is the case in psychology too. Some psychologists even refer to themselves as critical psychologists, thereby setting themselves in opposition to the mainstream view of psychology as a science (e.g., Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2006; Hepburn, 2003). One of the strongest and most influential critiques of the mainstream is **social constructionism**.

The basic idea of social constructionism is that knowledge and reality are relative to, or related to, the social circumstances and environment they come from. In other words, reality is not absolute. Instead, it is socially constructed and exists in a particular social situation, and it is only understandable within the terms of that social situation. Still another way of saying this is that we only understand experiences of reality in relation to the concepts and categories that we have available. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) put it, "what is real to a Tibetan monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman" (p. 15). There are "hard" and "soft" versions of social constructionism (Averill, 1985). The soft version acknowledges that some psychological phenomena can be tested using a scientific approach, even though some of our reality is socially constructed.

Jeffrey Aguinaldo (2008) provides an example of scientific social psychological research that has a social constructionist perspective. He studied how health of gay men is socially constructed and interpreted, while also exploring the constructions of gay oppression as a determinant of health (Aguinaldo, 2008). Using the thematic analysis technique, Aguinaldo (2008) analyzed literature from many health professionals that discussed different aspects of gay men's experiences with the health system. Results from the qualitative study found many themes, including that gay oppression is understood as a psychological concept, internalized homophobia is an important factor for health problems among gay men, and that health care professionals encourage gay men to work through these issues on an individual level.

Social constructionism – the view that there is no absolute reality and that our knowledge and what we understand to be reality are socially constructed

An important point the study highlighted was that gay oppression has yet to be treated as a social phenomenon. By focusing on practices that are individualistic, we ignore the social and structural patterns that could influence a person, or group of individuals. Social constructionism approach allows for a better understanding of the ways ideas are created, and what narratives and accounts are prioritized.

WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

This chapter has described the nature of social psychology, including the topics addressed within this field, how it has evolved over time, and how it is connected to other fields.

1. What social psychology is

This section examined the definition of social psychology, and the topics addressed within this discipline. These topics include how we think about ourselves; how we think, feel, and act in the social world; and how our attitudes and behaviour shape the social world.

2. How social psychology evolved over time

This section described how the field of social psychology has evolved over time. This discipline was heavily influenced by behaviourism, Gestalt psychology, and historical events.

3. Whether social psychology is really just common sense.

This section examined whether social psychology is just “common sense.” You learned about the “I knew it all along” problem, and the importance of using the scientific method to test theories and hypotheses within this field. This section also described how to use critical thinking to test information you are given.

4. How social psychology is connected to other fields

This section examined how social psychology is connected to fields within and outside of psychology. First, it described the connection between social psychology and other fields within psychology, including personality psychology, clinical psychology, and cognitive psychology. Next, you learned how social psychology is connected to fields outside of psychology, including sociology, biology, anthropology, and economics.

5. How social psychology applies across cultures and subcultures

This section examined the impact of culture on theory and research in social psychology. You learned about the impact of culture as well as the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. You also learned the Theory of Basic Human Values that proposes 10 values reflecting human motivations that influence actions.

Key Terms

behavioural economics 18

behaviourism 8

Gestalt psychology 8

hindsight bias 11

hypothesis 5

Individualism/Collectivism 19

positive psychology 10

scientific method 5

self-fulfilling prophecy 7

self-perception 6

self-presentation 6

social cognition 6

social constructionism 23

social influence 6

social neuroscience 17

social perception 6

social psychology 5

sociocultural perspective 19

Questions for Review

1. Describe three distinct issues examined by social psychology.
2. How have historical events influenced theory and research in social psychology?
3. Describe the “I knew it all along” phenomenon, and one strategy for critically examining information.
4. How is social psychology connected to two disciplines within psychology, and two disciplines outside of psychology?
5. Describe the major distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.