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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.

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.

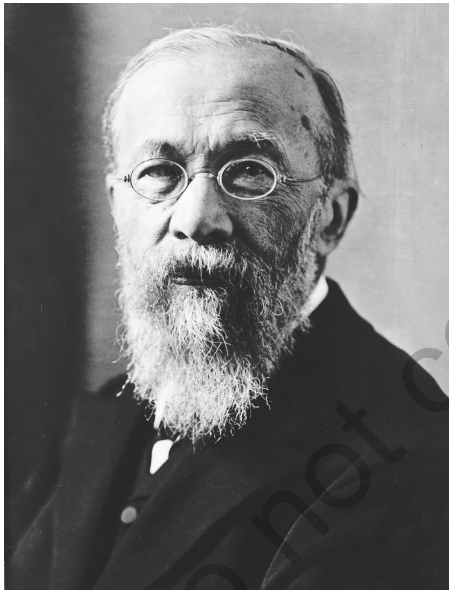### Scientific Thinking About Social Problems

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.

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

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

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.

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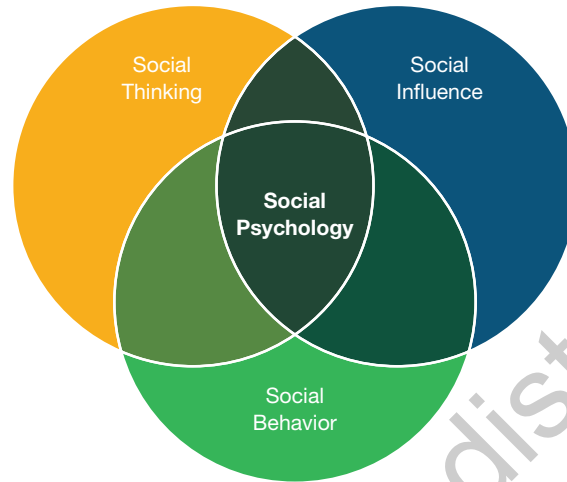
These three content domains within social psychology describe the thoughts and decisions people make about one another.

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
Sociologists	Surveys, demographic patterns of data	Group-level behaviors and social expectations	Group characteristics of aggressive behavior
Anthropologists	Detailed observations of people in a given culture	A discrete group of people over time	Cultural habits of aggression within a discrete setting
Clinical psychologists	Therapeutic interviews and tests	Individuals who have problematic thoughts or behaviors	Individual and interpersonal causes of aggression
Social psychologists	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.
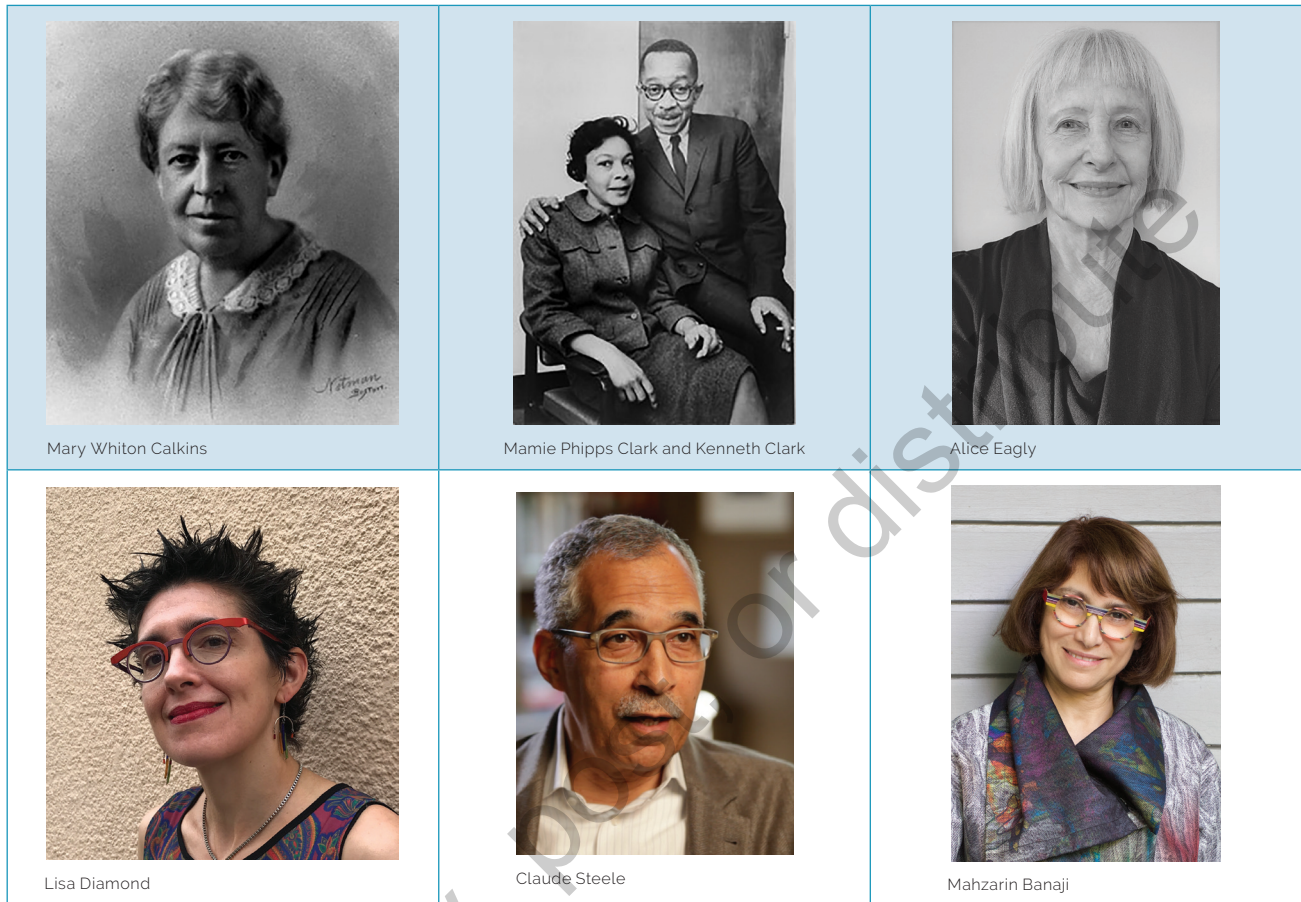
Intersectionality theory: The study of how multiple identity factors (such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status) combine to form how people are perceived and treated by others.

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.

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

Mary Whiton Calkins

Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth Clark

Alice Eagly

Lisa Diamond

Claude Steele

Mahzarin Banaji

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 bad 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.
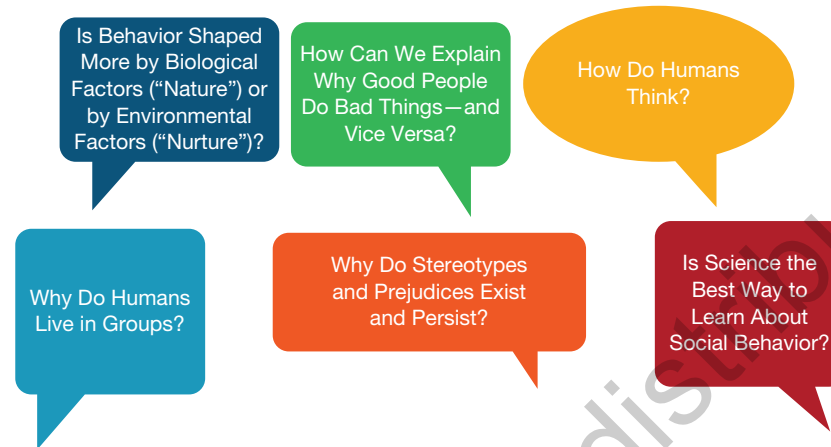
Big Question 1: Is Behavior Shaped More by Biological Factors ("Nature") or by Environmental Factors ("Nurture")?

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.

Is Behavior Shaped More by Biological Factors ("Nature") or by Environmental Factors ("Nurture")?

How Can We Explain Why Good People Do Bad Things—and Vice Versa?

How Do Humans Think?

Why Do Humans Live in Groups?

Why Do Stereotypes and Prejudices Exist and Persist?

Is Science the Best Way to Learn About Social Behavior?

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).

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?

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

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.

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?

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

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.

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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.

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.

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

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

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FIGURE 1.3

The psychological path from stereotyping to social conflict.

Stereotyping ⟶ Prejudice ⟶ Discrimination ⟶ Social Injustice ⟶ Social Conflict

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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 & Trafinow, 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.

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.

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?

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?