

7th edition


# Social Psychology

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## What Is Social Psychology?

- At the heart of social psychology is **social influence**.
  - We are all influenced by other people

The scientific study of the way in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people.

- Others' influence is not always deliberate.
- We live in a social and cultural context.

[video](#)

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## The Power of Social Interpretation

Social psychology is:

- Less concerned with social situations in objective sense.
- More concerned with how people are influenced by their interpretation (**construal**) of social environments.

[Cubby](#)

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## Naïve Realism

- Naïve realism is the belief that we all perceive things "as they really are"
- Even if we realize others think differently, we believe we are objective and they are biased.
  - Are you a Cyclone or Hawkeye fan?
  - Have you ever discussed the outcome of a U of I vs. ISU game with someone who is a fan of the other team? Did you think they were biased?

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## How Else Can We Understand Social Influence?

Social psychologists use experiments to test assumptions, guesses, and ideas. The goal is to find objective answers.

Journalism and social criticism often oversimplify situations and discount the *power of the situation*.

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## Folk Wisdom

Although a great deal can be learned from "common sense" knowledge, there is at least one problem with relying entirely on such sources:

- They frequently disagree with one another, and there is no easy way of determining which of them is correct.
- Although Social Psych may seem like common sense, hindsight is 20/20.

Try It! – page 25

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## Folk Wisdom

- “out of sight is out of mind” or “absence makes the heart grow fonder”?
- “haste makes waste” or “he who hesitates is lost”?
- “many hands make light work” or “too many cooks spoil the broth”?
- “birds of a feather flock together” or “opposites attract”?

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## Social Psychology Compared with Personality Psychology

- Social psychologists do not focus on individual differences or personality.
- They explain social behavior in terms of the *power of the social situation* (as it is construed by the individual) to shape how one acts.

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## The Power of Social Influence

### Fundamental attribution error:

The tendency to explain our own and other people's behavior entirely in terms of personality traits, underestimating the power of social influence.

- (We especially do this with other people.)

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## Underestimating the Power of Social Influence

- When we underestimate the power of social influence, we gain a feeling of false security.
- Doing so gives the rest of us the feeling that we could never engage in the repugnant behavior shown by others.
  - “That would never happen to me. I'm not that kind of person.”
  - Essentially, I'm saying I'm not susceptible to social influence.

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## Underestimating the Power of Social Influence

- Ironically, this in turn increases our personal vulnerability to possibly destructive social influence by lulling us into lowering our guard.
- By failing to fully appreciate the power of the situation, we tend to:
  - Oversimplify complex situations which,
  - decreases our understanding of the true causes.
- And, we often blame the victim.
  - “It was her own fault she got involved in that situation.”

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## Underestimating the Power of Social Influence

- Aspects of the social situation that may seem minor can have powerful effects, overwhelming the differences in people's personalities.
  - Personality differences do exist and frequently are of great importance.
  - But social and environmental situations can be so powerful that they have dramatic effects on almost everyone.

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### Social Psychology

- In the late 1930s, several of psychologists emigrated to the United States to escape the Nazi regime.
- Among the émigrés was **Kurt Lewin**, generally considered the founding father of modern experimental social psychology.
  - the first scientist to stress the importance of taking the perspective of the people in any social situation to see how they construe this social environment

“If I were required to name the one person who has had the greatest impact on the field, it would have to be Adolph Hitler.”  
(Cartwright, 1979, p. 84)

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### Social Psychology

- After experiencing anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, Lewin was interested in exploring the causes and cures of prejudice and ethnic stereotyping.
- The question is not what kind of person would be a Nazi – it is was social influences contribute to a person being a Nazi.

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### For example...

- **Der Giftpilz** (The Poisonous Mushroom)
  - A children’s storybook published in Germany in 1938
  - Describes a boy, Franz, helping his mother pick wild mushrooms in the woods (a German tradition). She compares the good (edible) mushrooms to good people and the poisonous mushrooms to bad people - the Jews.
  - Franz’s mother repeatedly states that:
    - one Jew can destroy an entire people because the Jew is the Devil in human form
    - the Jew poses a deadly threat to the survival of the world
    - it is Germany’s duty to save humanity from destruction.

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/nazprop.html>

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### Where Construals Come From: Basic Human Motives

How an individual construes a situation is largely shaped by two basic human motives:

- the need to be accurate
- the need to feel good about ourselves

At times, these motives tug in opposite directions.

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### The Self-Esteem Approach: The Need to Feel Good About Ourselves

- Most people have a strong need to maintain reasonably high **self-esteem**
- Given the choice between distorting the world in order to feel good about themselves and representing the world accurately, people often distort.

**Self-Esteem**  
People’s evaluations of their own self-worth; the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent, and decent.

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### Justifying Past Behavior

- Acknowledging major deficiencies in ourselves is very difficult, even when the cost is seeing the world inaccurately.
  - When we distort, we cannot learn from our mistakes. (because we are denying)
- People put a slightly different spin on the existing facts, one that puts themselves in the best possible light.
  - When you’re late, are you irresponsible or laid back?


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### Suffering and Self-Justification

- People are motivated to maintain a positive picture of themselves, in part by justifying their past behavior, and
- Under certain specifiable conditions, this leads people to do or think things that at first glance might seem surprising or paradoxical.

If I stupidly suffered in order to join this pathetic fraternity, how do I explain my behavior? It convince myself:

- Either the fraternity is really great **OR**
- What I had to do to get in really wasn't that bad.



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### Social Cognition

The social cognition perspective views people as amateur sleuths doing their best to understand and predict their social world..

**Social Cognition**  
 How people think about themselves and the social world; more specifically, how people select, interpret, remember, and use social information to make judgments and decisions.

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### Expectations About the Social World

- Actually, individuals typically act on basis of incompletely and inaccurately interpreted information.
- Our expectations can even change the *nature* of the social world.
- Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968) found that a teacher who expects certain students to do well may cause those students to do better – *self-fulfilling prophecy*


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### Social Psychology and Social Problems


Why study social influence?

1. We are curious.
2. Some social psychologists contribute to the solution of social problems.

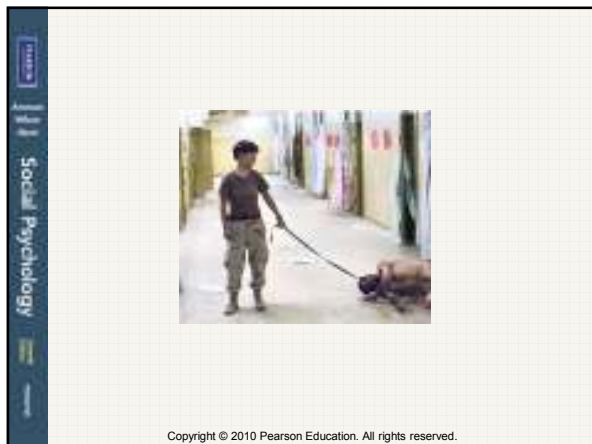
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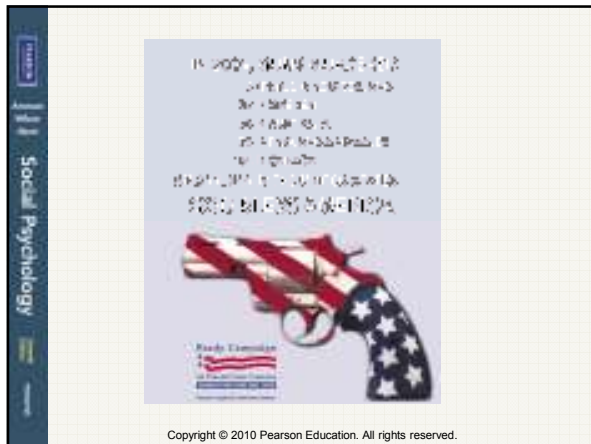


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## Social Psychology and Social Problems

When recommending interventions to deal with serious social problems, it is imperative to act on the basis of scientifically grounded theories about human construal and behavior.

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