

Social psychology

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.^[1] By this definition, *scientific* refers to the empirical method of investigation. The terms *thoughts*, *feelings*, and *behaviors* include all of the psychological variables that are measurable in a human being. The statement that others may be *imagined* or *implied* suggests that we are prone to social influence even when no other people are present, such as when watching television, or following internalized cultural norms.

Social psychologists typically explain human behavior as a result of the interaction of mental states and immediate social situations. In Kurt Lewin's conceptual formula, behavior can be viewed as a function of the person in the environment, $B = f(P, E)$.^[2] In general, social psychologists have a preference for laboratory based, empirical findings. Social psychology theories tend to be specific and focused, rather than global and general.

Social psychology is an interdisciplinary domain that bridges the gap between psychology and sociology. During the years immediately following World War II, there was frequent collaboration between psychologists and sociologists.^[3] However, the two disciplines have become increasingly specialized and isolated from each other in recent years, with sociologists focusing on "macro variables" (e.g. social structure) to a much greater extent. Nevertheless, sociological approaches to social psychology remain an important counterpart to psychological research in this area.

In addition to the split between psychology and sociology, there has been a somewhat less pronounced difference in emphasis between American social psychologists and European social psychologists. As a broad generalization, American researchers traditionally have focused more on the individual, whereas Europeans have paid more attention to group level phenomena.^[4] See Group dynamics.

History

The discipline of social psychology began in the United States at the dawn of the 20th century. The first published study in this area was an experiment in 1898 by Norman Triplett on the phenomenon of social facilitation.^[5] During the 1930s, many Gestalt psychologists, most notably Kurt Lewin, fled to the United States from Nazi Germany. They were instrumental in developing the field as something separate from the behavioral and psychoanalytic schools that were dominant during that time, and social psychology has always maintained the legacy of their interests in perception and cognition. Attitudes and small group phenomena were the most commonly studied topics in this era.

During WWII, social psychologists studied persuasion and propaganda for the U.S. military. After the war, researchers became interested in a variety of social problems, including gender issues and racial prejudice. Most notable, revealing, and contentious of them all were the Stanley Milgram shock experiments on obedience to authority. In the sixties, there was growing interest in new topics, such as cognitive dissonance, bystander intervention, and aggression. By the 1970s, however, social psychology in America had reached a crisis. There was heated debate over the ethics of laboratory experimentation, whether or not attitudes really predicted behavior, and how much science could be done in a cultural context (see Gergen, 1973).^[6] This was also the time when a radical situationist approach challenged the relevance of self and personality in psychology.



Social psychology reached maturity in both theory and method during the 1980s and 1990s. Careful ethical standards now regulate research, and greater pluralism and multiculturalism perspectives have emerged. Modern researchers are interested in a many phenomena, but attribution, social cognition, and the self-concept are perhaps the greatest areas of growth in recent years. Social psychologists have also maintained their applied interests with contributions in health and environmental psychology, as well as the psychology of the legal system.

Intrapersonal phenomena

Attitudes

In social psychology, attitudes are defined as learned, global evaluations of a person, object, place, or issue that influence thought and action.^[7] Put more simply, attitudes are basic expressions of approval or disapproval, favorability or unfavorability, or as Bem put it, likes and dislikes.^[8] Examples would include liking chocolate ice cream, being against abortion, or endorsing the values of a particular political party.

Social psychologists have studied attitude formation, the structure of attitudes, attitude change, the function of attitudes, and the relationship between attitudes and behavior. Because people are influenced by the situation, general attitudes are not always good predictors of specific behavior. For a variety of reasons, a person may value the environment and not recycle a can on a particular day. Attitudes that are well remembered and central to our self-concept, however, are more likely to lead to behavior, and measures of general attitudes do predict patterns of behavior over time.

Large amount of recent research on attitudes is on the distinction between traditional, self-report attitude measures and "implicit" or unconscious attitudes. For example, experiments using the Implicit Association Test have found that people often demonstrate bias against other races, even when their questionnaire responses reveal equal mindedness. One study found that explicit attitudes correlate with verbal behavior in interracial interactions, whereas implicit attitudes correlate with nonverbal behavior.^[9]

One hypothesis on how attitudes are formed, first advanced by Abraham Tesser (1983), is that strong likes and dislikes are rooted in our genetic make-up. Tesser speculates that individuals are disposed to hold certain strong attitudes as a result of inborn physical, sensory, and cognitive skills, temperament, and personality traits. Whatever disposition nature elects to give us, our most treasured attitudes are often formed as a result of exposure to attitude objects; our history of rewards and punishments; the attitude that our parents, friends, and enemies express; the social and cultural context in which we live; and other types of experiences we have. Obviously, attitudes are formed through the basic process of learning. Numerous studies have shown that people can form strong positive and negative attitudes toward neutral objects that are in some way linked to emotionally charged stimuli.^[10]

Attitudes are also involved in several other areas of the discipline, such as the following; conformity, interpersonal attraction, social perception, and prejudice.

Persuasion

The topic of persuasion has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Persuasion is an active method of influence that attempts to guide people toward the adoption of an attitude, idea, or behavior by rational or emotive means. Persuasion relies on "appeals" rather than strong pressure or coercion. Numerous variables have been found to influence the persuasion process, and these are normally presented in five major categories: *who* said *what* to *whom* and *how*.

1. The Communicator, including credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.
 2. The Message, including varying degrees of reason, emotion (such as fear), one-sided or two sided arguments, and other types of informational content.
 3. The Audience, including a variety of demographics, personality traits, and preferences.
 4. The Channel, including the printed word, radio, television, the internet, or face-to-face interactions.
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5. The Context, including the environment, group dynamics, pre-amble to the message

Dual process theories of persuasion (such as the elaboration likelihood model) maintain that the persuasive process is mediated by two separate routes. Persuasion can be accomplished by either superficial aspects of the communication or the internal logic and evidence of the message. Whether someone is persuaded by a popular celebrity or factual arguments is largely determined by the ability and motivation of the audience.

Persuasion attempts that rely on the mass media frequently result in failure. This is because people's attitudes and behaviors are often established habits that tend to be resistant to change. Communication campaigns are most likely to succeed when they use entertaining characters and messages, tailor the message to fit the audience, and repeat messages across relevant media channels.^[7] An example of a highly effective mass media campaign is the Got Milk campaign.

Social cognition

Social cognition is a growing area of social psychology that studies how people perceive, think about, and remember information about others. Much of the research rests on the assertion that people think about people differently from non-social targets^[11]. This assertion is widely supported by the existence of social cognitive deficits exhibited by people with Williams syndrome and autism^[12]. Person perception is the study of how people form impressions of others. The study of how people form beliefs about each other while interacting is known as interpersonal perception.

A major research topic in social cognition is attribution.^[13] Attributions are the explanations we make for people's behavior, either our own behavior or the behavior of others. We can ascribe the locus of a behavior to either internal or external factors. An *internal*, or dispositional, locus of causality involves factors within the person, such as ability or personality. An *external*, or situational, locus involves outside factors, such as the weather. A second element of attribution ascribes the cause of behavior to either stable or unstable factors. Finally, we also attribute causes of behavior to either controllable or uncontrollable factors.

Numerous biases in the attribution process have been discovered. The fundamental attribution error is the tendency to make dispositional attributions for behavior. The actor-observer effect is a refinement of this bias, the tendency to make dispositional attributions for other people's behavior and situational attributions for our own. The just-world phenomenon is the tendency to blame victims (a dispositional attribution) for their suffering. This is believed to be motivated by people's anxiety that good people, including themselves, could be victimized in an unjust world. Finally, the self-serving bias is the tendency to take credit for successes, and blame others for failure. Researchers have found that depressed individuals often lack this bias and actually have more realistic perceptions of reality.

Heuristics are cognitive short cuts. Instead of weighing all the evidence when making a decision, people rely on heuristics to save time and energy. The availability heuristic occurs when people estimate the probability of an outcome based on how easy that outcome is to imagine. As such, vivid or highly memorable possibilities will be perceived as more likely than those that are harder to picture or are difficult to understand, resulting in a corresponding cognitive bias. Numerous other biases have been found by social cognition researchers. The hindsight bias is a false memory of having predicted events, or an exaggeration of actual predictions, after becoming aware of the outcome. The confirmation bias is a type of bias leading to the tendency to search for, or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions.

Another key concept in social cognition is the assumption that reality is too complex to easily discern. As a result, we tend to see the world according to simplified schemas or images of reality. Schemas are generalized mental representations that organize knowledge and guide information processing. Schemas often operate automatically and unintentionally, and can lead to biases in perception and memory. Expectations from schemas may lead us to see something that is not there. One experiment found that people are more likely to misperceive a weapon in the hands of a black man than a white man.^[14] This type of schema is actually a stereotype, a generalized set of beliefs about a particular group of people (Ultimate attribution error). Stereotypes are often related to negative or preferential

attitudes (prejudice) and behavior (discrimination). Schemas for types of events (e.g. going to a restaurant, doing laundry) are known as *scripts*.

Self-concept

Self-concept is a term referring to the whole sum of beliefs that people have about themselves. However, what specifically does self-concept consist of? According to Hazel Markus (1977), the self-concept is made up of cognitive molecules called self-schema; which is a belief that people have about themselves which guides the processing of self-relevant information. Self-schemas are to an individual's total self-concept as a hypothesis is to a theory, or a book is to a library. A good example to use is body weight self-schema; people who regard themselves as over or underweight, or for those whom body image is a conspicuous aspect of the self-concept, are considered *schematic* with respect to weight. For these people a range of otherwise mundane events – grocery shopping, new clothes, eating out, or going to the beach – can trigger thoughts about the self. In contrast, people who do not regard their weight as an important part of their lives are *a-schematic* on that attribute.^[15]

It is rather clear that the self is a special object of our attention. Whether you are mentally focused on a memory, a conversation, a foul smell, the song that is stuck in your head, or this sentence, conscious is like a spotlight. This spotlight can shine on only one object at a time, but it can switch rapidly from one object to another and process the information out of awareness. In this spotlight the self is front and center. The ABC's of the self are: affect, behavior, and cognition. A cognitive question: How do individuals become themselves, build a self-concept, and uphold a stable sense of identity? An affective (or emotional) question: How do people evaluate themselves, enhance their self image, and maintain a secure sense of identity? A behavioral question: How do people regulate their own actions and present themselves to others according to interpersonal demands?^[16]

Affective forecasting is the process of prediction of how one would feel in response to future emotional events. Studies done by Timothy Wilson and Daniel Gilbert (2003), have shown that people overestimate the strength or reaction, to positive and negative life events, than they actually felt when the event did occur.^[17]

There are many theories on the perception of our own behavior. Daryl Bem's (1972) self-perception theory claims that when internal cues are difficult to interpret, people gain self-insight by observing their own behavior.^[18] Leon Festinger's (1954), social comparison theory is that people evaluate their own abilities and opinions by comparing themselves to others when they are uncertain of their own ability or opinions.^[19] There is also the facial feedback hypothesis; that changes in facial expression can lead to corresponding changes in emotion.^[20]

The fields of social psychology and personality have merged over the years, and social psychologists have developed an interest in self-related phenomena. In contrast with traditional personality theory, however, social psychologists place a greater emphasis on cognitions than on traits. Much research focuses on the self-concept, which is a person's understanding of his or her self. The self-concept is often divided into a cognitive component, known as the *self-schema*, and an evaluative component, the *self-esteem*. The need to maintain a healthy self-esteem is recognized as a central human motivation in the field of social psychology.

Self-efficacy beliefs are cognitions that are associated with the self-schema. These are expectations that performance on some task will be effective and successful. Social psychologists also study such self-related processes as self-control and self-presentation.

People develop their self-concepts by varied means, including introspection, feedback from others, self-perception, and social comparison. By comparison to relevant others, people gain information about themselves, and they make inferences that are relevant to self-esteem. Social comparisons can be either "upward" or "downward," that is, comparisons to people who are either higher in status or ability, or lower in status or ability. Downward comparisons are often made in order to elevate self-esteem.

Self-perception is a specialized form of attribution that involves making inferences about oneself after observing one's own behavior. Psychologists have found that too many extrinsic rewards (e.g. money) tend to reduce intrinsic motivation through the self-perception process, a phenomenon known as overjustification. People's attention is

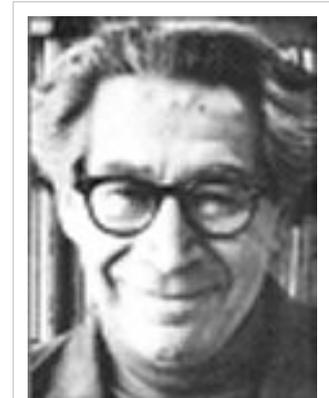
directed to the reward and they lose interest in the task when the reward is no longer offered.^[21] This is an important exception to reinforcement theory.

Cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is a feeling of unpleasant arousal caused by noticing an inconsistency among one's cognition.^[22] These contradictory cognitions may be attitudes, beliefs, or one's awareness of his or her behavior. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, or by justifying or rationalizing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.^[22] Cognitive dissonance theory is one of the most influential and extensively studied theories in social psychology.

Cognitive dissonance theory was originally developed as a theory of attitude change, but it is now considered to be a theory of the self-concept by many social psychologists. Dissonance is strongest when a discrepancy has been noticed between one's self-concept and one's behavior, e.g. doing something that makes one ashamed. This can result in self-justification as the individual attempts to deal with the threat. Cognitive dissonance typically leads to a change in attitude, a change in behavior, a self-affirmation, or a rationalization of the behavior.

An example of cognitive dissonance is smoking. Smoking cigarettes increases the risk of cancer, which is threatening to the self-concept of the individual who smokes. Most of us believe ourselves to be intelligent and rational, and the idea of doing something foolish and self-destructive causes dissonance. To reduce this uncomfortable tension, smokers tend to make excuses for themselves, such as "I'm going to die anyway, so it doesn't matter."



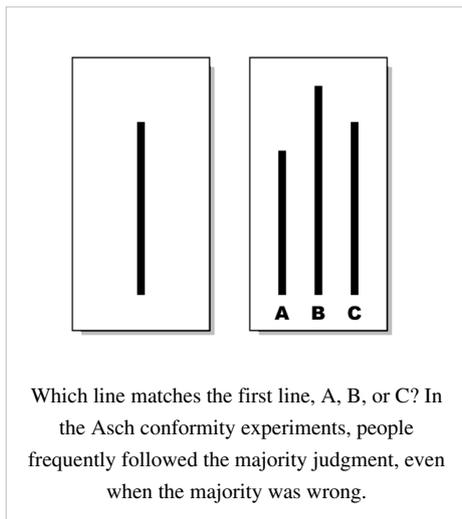
Leon Festinger, seminal theorist in the area of cognitive dissonance.

Interpersonal phenomena

Social influence

Social influence refers to the way people affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others. Like the study of attitudes, it is a traditional, core topic in social psychology. In fact, research on social influence overlaps considerably with research on attitudes and persuasion. Social influence is also closely related to the study of group dynamics, as most of the principles of influence are strongest when they take place in social groups.

Conformity is the most common and pervasive form of social influence. It is generally defined as the tendency to act or think like other members of a group. Group size, unanimity, cohesion, status, and prior commitment all help to determine the level of conformity in an individual. Conformity is usually viewed as a negative tendency in American culture, but a certain amount of conformity is not only necessary and normal, but probably essential for a community to function.



The two major motives in conformity are *normative* influence, the tendency to conform in order to gain social acceptance, and avoid social rejection or conflict, as in peer pressure; and *informational* influence, which is based on the desire to obtain useful information through conformity, and thereby achieve a correct or appropriate result. Minority influence is the degree to which a smaller faction within the group influences the group during decision making. Note that this refers to a minority position on some issue, not an ethnic minority. Their influence is primarily informational and depends on consistent adherence to a position, degree of defection from the majority, and the status and self-confidence of the minority members. Reactance is a tendency to assert oneself by doing the opposite of what is expected. This phenomenon is also known as *anticonformity* and it appears to be more common in men than in women.

There are two other major areas of social influence research. Compliance refers to any change in behavior that is due to a request or suggestion from another person. The Foot-in-the-door technique is a compliance method in which the persuader requests a small favor and then follows up with a larger favor, e.g. asking for the time, and then asking for ten dollars. A related trick is the Bait and switch.^[23] The third major form of social influence is obedience. This is a change in behavior that is the result of a direct order or command from another person.

A different kind of social influence is the self-fulfilling prophecy. This is a prediction that, in being made, actually causes itself to become true. For example, in the stock market, if it is widely believed that a crash is imminent, investors may lose confidence, sell most of their stock, and actually cause the crash. Likewise, people may expect hostility in others and actually induce this hostility by their own behavior.

Group dynamics

A group can be defined as two or more individuals that are connected to each another by social relationships.^[24] Groups tend to interact, influence each other, and share a common identity. They have a number of emergent qualities that distinguish them from aggregates:

- Norms - implicit rules and expectations for group members to follow, e.g. saying thank you, shaking hands.
- Roles - implicit rules and expectations for specific members within the group, e.g. the oldest sibling, who may have additional responsibilities in the family.
- Relations - patterns of liking within the group, and also differences in prestige or status, e.g. leaders, popular people.

Temporary groups and aggregates share few or none of these features, and do not qualify as true social groups. People waiting in line to get on a bus, for example, do not constitute a group.

Groups are important not only because they offer social support, resources, and a feeling of belonging, but because they supplement an individual's self-concept. To a large extent, humans define themselves by the group memberships which form their social identity. The shared social identity of individuals within a group influences intergroup behavior, the way in which groups behave towards and perceive each other. These perceptions and behaviors in turn define the social identity of individuals within the interacting groups. The tendency to define oneself by membership of a group leads to intergroup discrimination, which involves favorable perceptions and behaviors directed towards the in-group, but negative perceptions and behaviors directed towards the out-group.^[25] Intergroup discrimination leads to prejudice and stereotyping, while the processes of social facilitation and group polarization encourage extreme behaviors towards the out-group.

Groups often moderate and improve decision making, and are frequently relied upon for these benefits, such as committees and juries. A number of group biases, however, can interfere with effective decision making. For example, group polarization, formerly known as the "risky shift," occurs when people polarize their views in a more extreme direction after group discussion. More problematic is the phenomenon of groupthink. This is a collective thinking defect that is characterized by a premature consensus or an incorrect assumption of consensus, caused by members of a group failing to promote views which are not consistent with the views of other members. Groupthink occurs in a variety of situations, including isolation of a group and the presence of a highly directive leader. Janis offered the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion as a historical case of groupthink.^[26]

Groups also affect performance and productivity. Social facilitation, for example, is a tendency to work harder and faster in the presence of others. Social facilitation increases the likelihood of the *dominant response*, which tends to improve performance on simple tasks and reduce it on complex tasks. In contrast, social loafing is the tendency of individuals to slack when working in a group. Social loafing is common when the task is considered unimportant and individual contributions are not easy to see.^[27]

Social psychologists study group-related (collective) phenomena such as the behavior of crowds. An important concept in this area is deindividuation, a reduced state of self-awareness that can be caused by feelings of anonymity. Deindividuation is associated with uninhibited and sometimes dangerous behavior. It is common in crowds and mobs, but it can also be caused by a disguise, a uniform, alcohol, dark environments, or online anonymity.

Relations with others

Social psychologists are interested in the question of why people sometimes act in a prosocial way (helping, liking, or loving others), but at other times act in an antisocial way (hostility, aggression, or prejudice against others).

Aggression can be defined as any behavior that is intended to harm another human being. *Hostile* aggression is accompanied by strong emotions, particularly anger. Harming the other person is the goal. *Instrumental* aggression is only a means to an end. Harming the person is used to obtain some other goal, such as money. Research indicates that there are many causes of aggression, including biological factors like testosterone and environmental factors, such as social learning. Immediate situational factors such as frustration are also important in triggering an aggressive response.

Although violence is a fact of life, people are also capable of helping each other, even complete strangers in emergencies. Research indicates that altruism occurs when a person feels empathy for another individual, even in the absence of other motives.^[28] However, according to the bystander effect, the probability of receiving help in an emergency situation drops as the number of bystanders increases. This is due to both conformity and diffusion of responsibility, the tendency for people to feel less personally responsible when other people are around.^[29]

Interpersonal attraction

A major area in the study of people's relations to each other is interpersonal attraction. This refers to all of the forces that lead people to like each other, establish relationships, and in some cases, fall in love. Several general principles of attraction have been discovered by social psychologists. For example, physical proximity tends to increase attraction, whereas long distances make relationships difficult to form and maintain. Even very small differences in distance—such as the case of a next door neighbor versus someone who lives down the block—can make a significant difference in friendship patterns. Familiarity, or "mere exposure," also increases attraction, influencing people even if the familiarity is not consciously noticed. One of the most important factors in interpersonal attraction is similarity: the more similar two people are in attitudes, background, and other traits, the more probable it is that they will like each other.^[30] Contrary to popular opinion, opposites do not usually attract.

Physical attractiveness is an important element of romantic relationships, particularly in the early stages characterized by high levels of passion. Later on, similarity and other compatibility factors become more important, and the type of love people experience shifts from *passionate* to *companionate*. Robert Sternberg has suggested that there are actually three components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment.^[31] When two people experience all three, they are said to be in a state of consummate love; this condition is relatively rare and difficult to maintain for a long period of time.

According to social exchange theory, relationships are based on rational choice and cost-benefit analysis. If one partner's costs begin to outweigh his or her benefits, that person may leave the relationship, especially if there are good alternatives available. This theory is similar to the minimax principle proposed by mathematicians and economists. With time, long term relationships tend to become communal rather than simply based on exchange.

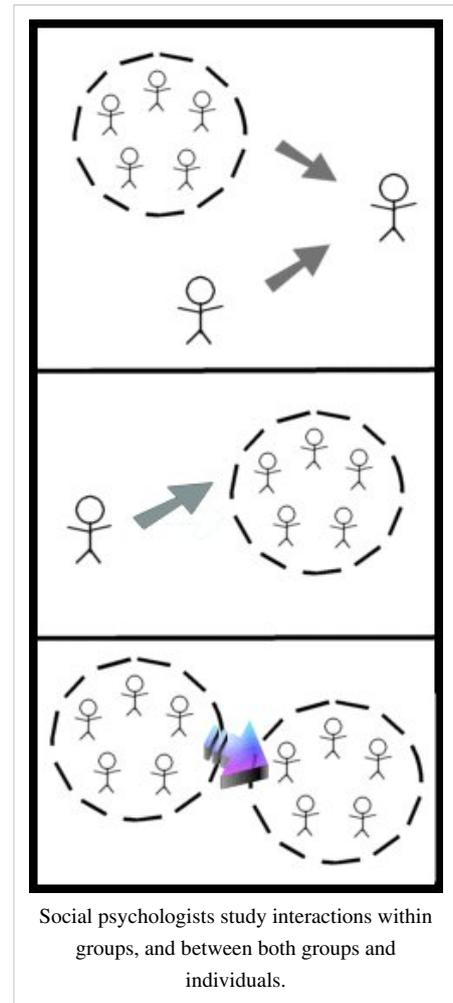
Research

Methods

Social psychology is an empirical science that attempts to answer questions about human behavior by testing hypotheses, both in the laboratory and in the field. Careful attention to sampling, research design, and statistical analysis is important, and results are published in peer reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Social psychology studies also appear in general science journals such as *Psychological Science* and *Science*.

Experimental methods involve the researcher altering a variable in the environment and measuring the effect on another variable. An example would be allowing two groups of children to play violent or nonviolent videogames, and then observing their subsequent level of aggression during free-play period. A valid experiment is controlled and uses random assignment.

Correlational methods examine the statistical association between two naturally occurring variables. For example, one could correlate the amount of violent television children watch at home with the number of violent incidents the



children participate in at school. Note that this study would *not* prove that violent TV causes aggression in children. It's quite possible that aggressive children choose to watch more violent TV.

Observational methods are purely descriptive and include naturalistic observation, "contrived" observation, participant observation, and archival analysis. These are less common in social psychology but are sometimes used when first investigating a phenomenon. An example would be to unobtrusively observe children on a playground (with a videocamera, perhaps) and record the number and types of aggressive actions displayed.

Whenever possible, social psychologists rely on controlled experimentation. Controlled experiments require the manipulation of one or more independent variables in order to examine the effect on a dependent variable. Experiments are useful in social psychology because they are high in internal validity, meaning that they are free from the influence of confounding or extraneous variables, and so are more likely to accurately indicate a causal relationship. However, the small samples used in controlled experiments are typically low in external validity, or the degree to which the results can be generalized to the larger population. There is usually a trade-off between experimental control (internal validity) and being able to generalize to the population (external validity).

Because it is usually impossible to test everyone, research tends to be conducted on a sample of persons from the wider population. Social psychologists frequently use survey research when they are interested in results that are high in external validity. Surveys use various forms of random sampling to obtain a sample of respondents that are representative of a population. This type of research is usually descriptive or correlational because there is no experimental control over variables. However, new statistical methods like structural equation modeling are being used to test for potential causal relationships in this type of data.

Regardless of which method is used, it is important to evaluate the research hypothesis in light of the results, either confirming or rejecting the original prediction. Social psychologists use statistics and probability testing to judge their results, which define a significant finding as less than 5% likely to be due to chance. Replications are important, to ensure that the result is valid and not due to chance, or some feature of a particular sample.

Ethics

The goal of social psychology is to understand cognition and behavior as they naturally occur in a social context, but the very act of observing people can influence and alter their behavior. For this reason, many social psychology experiments utilize deception to conceal or distort certain aspects of the study. Deception may include false cover stories, false participants (known as confederates or stooges), false feedback given to the participants, and so on.

The practice of deception has been challenged by some psychologists who maintain that deception under any circumstances is unethical, and that other research strategies (e.g. roleplaying) should be used instead. Unfortunately, research has shown that role-playing studies do not produce the same results as deception studies and this has cast doubt on their validity. In addition to deception, experimenters have at times put people into potentially uncomfortable or embarrassing situations (e.g. the Milgram experiment, Stanford prison experiment), and this has also been criticized for ethical reasons.

To protect the rights and well-being of research participants, and at the same time discover meaningful results and insights into human behavior, virtually all social psychology research must pass an ethical review process. At most colleges and universities, this is conducted by an ethics committee or Institutional Review Board. This group examines the proposed research to make sure that no harm is done to the participants, and that the benefits of the study outweigh any possible risks or discomforts to people taking part in the study.

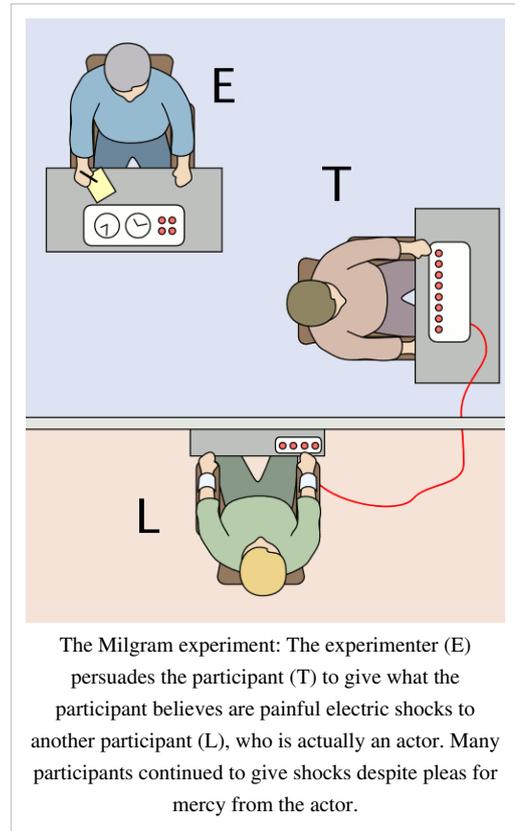
Furthermore, a process of informed consent is often used to make sure that volunteers know what will happen in the experiment and understand that they are allowed to quit the experiment at any time. A debriefing is typically done at the conclusion of the experiment in order to reveal any deceptions used and generally make sure that the participants are unharmed by the procedures. Today, most research in social psychology involves no more risk of harm than can be expected from routine psychological testing or normal daily activities.

Famous experiments

The Asch conformity experiments demonstrated the power of conformity in small groups with a line estimation task that was designed to be extremely easy.^[32] On over a third of the trials, participants conformed to the majority, even though the majority judgment was clearly wrong. Seventy-five percent of the participants conformed at least once during the experiment.

Muzafer Sherif's Robbers' Cave Experiment divided boys into two competing groups to explore how much hostility and aggression would emerge. Sherif's explanation of the results became known as realistic group conflict theory, because the intergroup conflict was induced through competition over resources.^[33] Inducing cooperation and [superordinate goals] later reversed this effect.

In Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance experiment, participants were asked to perform a boring task. They were divided into 2 groups and given two different pay scales. At the end of the study, some participants were paid \$1 to say that they enjoyed the task and another group of participants was paid \$20 to say the same lie. The first group (\$1) later reported liking the task better than the second group (\$20). Festinger's explanation was that people justified their lies by changing their previously unfavorable attitudes about the task.^[34]



One of the most infamous experiments in social psychology was the Milgram experiment, which studied how far people would go to obey an authority figure. Following the events of The Holocaust in World War II, the experiment showed that normal American citizens were capable of following orders from an authority even when they believed they were causing an innocent person to suffer.^[35]

Albert Bandura's Bobo doll experiment demonstrated how aggression is learned by imitation.^[36] This was one of the first studies in a long line of research showing how exposure to media violence leads to aggressive behavior in the observers.

In the Stanford prison experiment, by Philip Zimbardo, a simulated exercise between student prisoners and guards showed how far people would follow an adopted role. In just a few days, the "guards" became brutal and cruel, and the prisoners became miserable and compliant. This was an important demonstration of the power of the immediate social situation, and its capacity to overwhelm normal personality traits.^[37]

Academic journals

- Asian Journal of Social Psychology
- Basic and Applied Social Psychology
- British Journal of Social Psychology
- European Journal of Social Psychology
- Journal of Applied Social Psychology
- Journal of Experimental Social Psychology
- Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
- Journal of Social Psychology
- Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
- Personality and Social Psychology Review

- Social Psychology

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External links

- Social Psychology Network (<http://www.socialpsychology.org>)
- Introduction to Social Psychology (<http://www.wilderdom.com/psychology/social/Introduction.html>)
- Social Psychology - basics (<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/socpsy.html>)

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