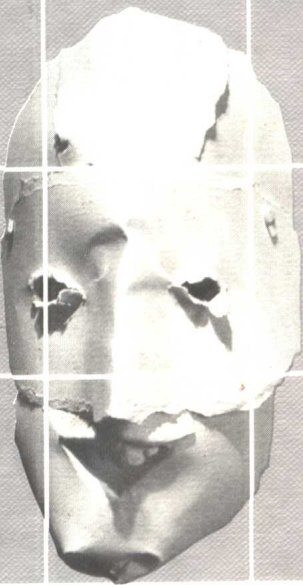
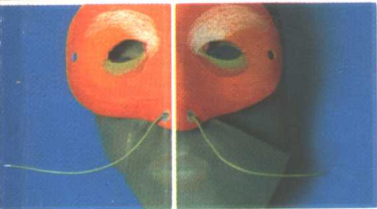
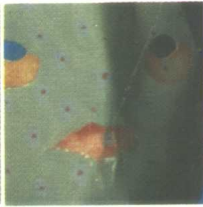
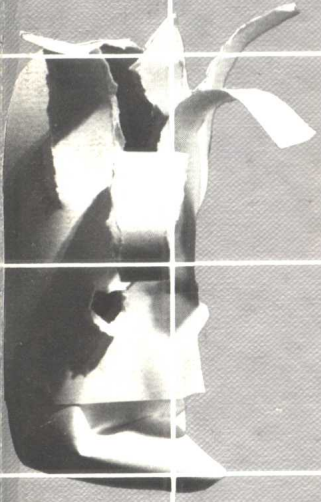


# SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**David G. Myers**



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# PSYCHOLOGY

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*To Peter,  
Andrew, and Laura*

## **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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# PREFACE

In all history human social behavior has been systematically and scientifically studied in but one century. That century is ours. Considering that we have barely begun, the results are, I believe, gratifying. Social psychologists have gleaned significant insights into belief and illusion, love and hate, conformity and independence. Although much mystery remains, we can now offer partial answers to such questions as: Will people act in new and better ways if we can first persuade them to adopt new attitudes? Do males and females differ? How? Why? When are people most likely to help another? What kindles social conflict, and what steps can be taken to transform closed fists into open arms? Learning even tentative answers to such questions can stimulate our minds. Moreover, becoming sensitive to the social forces at work upon us can help free us from susceptibility to unwanted manipulation. I hope that such will be among the benefits of studying social psychology.

When I was invited to write this book, I immediately envisioned a text that would present social psychology as an intellectual adventure. This text was to be at once solidly scientific and warmly human, factually rigorous and intellectually provocative. It would be reasonably comprehensive in its coverage of the discipline, yet it would also stimulate students' *thinking*. In short, this text would present social psychology as an investigative reporter might, providing an up-to-date summary of important phenomena of social thinking and social behavior, and of how such phenomena have been revealed and how

they are being explained. And it would cultivate students' abilities to think like competent social psychologists—to inquire, to analyze, to relate principles to everyday happenings.

To stimulate thinking, one must describe selected concepts concretely enough to give students some proficiency in working with the ideas. Students should understand the ideas well enough to trigger their own thinking—by relating them to other concepts and to their own experiences and observations. The time required to stimulate such thinking prohibits an exhaustive catalog of theory and research. But for the undergraduate who is being introduced to social psychology this is no great sacrifice. The introductory text prepares one not to be a social psychologist, but to understand the field and its relation to one's life. Those who gain an enduring interest in the discipline may then go on to further study.

But how does one select material for inclusion in a “reasonably comprehensive” introduction to the discipline? I sought to present theories and findings that are neither too esoteric for the typical undergraduate nor better suited to other psychology courses. I chose instead to present material that casts social psychology in the intellectual tradition of the liberal arts. By the teaching of great literature, philosophy, and science, liberal education seeks to expand people's thinking and awareness and to help free them from the confines of their current social environment. Social psychology can significantly contribute to these goals of liberal education. Many undergraduate social psychology students are not psychology majors; virtually all will enter professions other than social psychology. By focusing on humanly significant issues, one can present much of the fundamental content that preprofessional psychology students need, but in ways that are also stimulating and useful to all liberal arts students.

The book opens with a single chapter that introduces research methods, and forewarns students of how findings can seem obvious—once you know them—and of how social psychologists' values penetrate the discipline. The intent is to give students just enough to prepare them for what follows.

The remainder of the book is organized around its definition of social psychology: the scientific study of how people think about (Part Two, Social Thinking), influence (Part Three, Social Influence), and relate (Part Four, Social Relations) to one another.

Part Two on social thinking examines how we view ourselves and others. For example, Chapter 3 introduces attribution theory and then looks in greater depth at three concepts that are both intellectually provocative and theoretically controversial: the fundamental attribution error, the self-serving bias, and the benefits of self-efficacy.

Part Three explores social influence. By appreciating the cultural sources of our attitudes, and by learning the nature of conformity, persuasion, and group influence, we can better recognize subtle social forces at work upon us.

Part Four considers both unpleasant and pleasant aspects of social



relations—aggression and altruism, prejudice and attraction, conflict and peacemaking.

The concluding section (Part Five) describes the application of social psychology to environmental issues and to courtroom judgments. Not only these chapters, but nearly all the later chapters in the text apply principles discussed in earlier chapters.

Several other features are also worthy of note. Formal definitions appear in the text margin—when and where students need them and where they may easily be reviewed for study purposes. To communicate the human side of social psychology, all chapters present “Behind the Scenes” personal reflections by selected investigators. Finally, the *Teacher’s Resource and Test Manual* contains a package of teaching ideas, including ready-to-use class demonstrations for each chapter. It also includes two separate categories of test questions—the usual “basic-knowledge questions” that test students’ retention of chapter content, and also “application questions” that test students’ ability to relate concepts to novel situations.

## IN APPRECIATION

Although only one person’s name appears on the cover of this book, the truth is that many people—a whole community of scholars—have invested themselves in it. None of these people agrees with everything I have written nor should any of them be held responsible. Yet their suggestions helped make this a better book than it would otherwise have been.

Mark Snyder, Elaine Hatfield, and Charles Kiesler consulted on the organization of the book and the content of selected chapters. The opportunity to meet and work with these esteemed colleagues added significantly to the pleasure of my work.

Several individuals read all or virtually all of the manuscript. Reflecting upon their comments heightened my respect for the professional competence and commitment of each of them: Martin Bolt, Calvin College; Ranald Hansen, Oakland University; William Ickes, University of Missouri at St. Louis; Edward E. Jones, Princeton University; Martin Kaplan, Northern Illinois University; Teru L. Morton, University of Hawaii; Tom Tyler, Northwestern University; and Kipling Williams, Drake University.

Other professional colleagues willingly provided expert reviews of selected chapters or sections. Their constructive criticisms and suggestions averted numerous errors. I am grateful to each of these people: Anthony Doob, University of Toronto; Bert Hodges, Gordon College; Chester A. Insko, University of North Carolina; Billy Van Jones, Abilene Christian College; Norbert Kerr, Michigan State University; David L. McMillen, Mississippi State University; Darren Newton, University of Virginia; Paul Paulus,

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Were it not for the initiative and encouragement of Nelson Black of McGraw-Hill, it never would have occurred to me to write this book. Alison Meersschaert, McGraw-Hill senior editor, guided me throughout the project and sustained me with her unfailing enthusiasm. She is a true pro, and now a valued friend.

Finally, my hidden coauthor is my friend and writing coach, poet-essayist Jack Ridl. His fingerprints are on nearly every paragraph.

To each one of these persons, I am in debt. Collectively, they made writing this book a stimulating, gratifying experience.

**David G. Myers**

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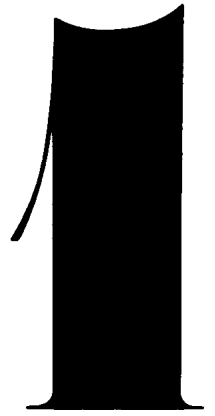
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# INTRODUCTION





# Introducing Social Psychology



What is social psychology? Let's consider some down-to-earth examples of the kinds of occurrences and questions that fascinate social psychologists:

David Rosenhan (1973) and seven of his friends and Stanford University colleagues conducted a controversial test of some mental health workers' clinical insights. Each made an appointment with a mental hospital admissions office and complained of "hearing voices," saying "empty," "hollow," and "thud." Apart from this single complaint and giving false names and vocations, they truthfully answered all questions about their life histories and emotional states. Yet, seven of the eight were diagnosed as schizophrenic (the eighth was said to be suffering a manic-depressive psychosis). Once admitted, they exhibited no further symptoms. The clinicians nevertheless managed to "discover" the sources of the pseudopatients' problems after analyzing their life histories. One person's schizophrenia was said to be the result of childhood mixed emotions regarding his parents. Moreover, while the pseudopatients were hospitalized—for nineteen days on the average—their normal behaviors, such as note taking, were often overlooked or misinterpreted to fit the staff's preconceptions based on the diagnostic labels.



Why are mental health workers vulnerable to this type of misjudgment? More generally, what determines the impressions we form of ourselves and of others?

President John F. Kennedy, like most other American presidents, enjoyed the support of a bright and loyal group of advisers who collaborated in his decision making. One of their first major decisions was to approve a Central Intelligence Agency plan to invade Cuba. The high morale of the group fostered a sense that the plan couldn't fail. Since no one sharply disagreed with the idea, there appeared to be consensus support for the plan. After the resulting fiasco in Cuba's Bay of Pigs (the small band of U.S.-trained and U.S.-supplied Cuban refugee invaders was easily captured and soon linked to the American government), Kennedy was heard wondering aloud, "How could we have been so stupid?" Reflecting on the group's decision making, Arthur Schlesinger, a member of the Kennedy inner circle, later reproached himself in his book *A Thousand Days* "for having kept so silent in the cabinet room. I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one's impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the discussion" (1965, p. 255).

How are we affected by our participation in groups? Or, to broaden the question, to what extent and in what ways do other people influence our attitudes and actions? And how might we as individuals resist unwanted social pressure, or even get a group to consider our point of view?

*Fuzz*, an ABC television movie filmed in Boston, depicted teenagers setting derelicts on fire for kicks. Two nights after the broadcast, some Boston teenagers who had viewed the movie forced Evelyn Wagler to douse herself with gasoline and then set her afire, burning her fatally.

What stimulates violent behavior? Are the media a significant force in shaping our behavior and attitudes toward other people? Beyond this, how do stereotyped impressions originate, and why, even in this "enlightened" era, does prejudice persist? On the brighter side, how do we come to help, to like, and sometimes even to love particular persons? And how can just and amiable social relations be encouraged?

What are the common threads running through these questions? As diverse as they are, they all deal with how people view and affect one another. And that is what social psychology is all about. As we shall see, social psychologists attempt to answer such questions by using the scientific method. They aim to study attitudes and beliefs, conformity and independence, love and hate. So, to put it formally, we might say that *social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another*.

Social psychology is still a very young science. We keep reminding people of this, partly as an excuse for our incomplete answers to some of the questions raised above. But it is true. The first social psychology experiments were not reported until the late 1800s and no book on social psychology was published before this century. Not until the 1930s did social psychology assume its current form, and not until after World War II did it begin to emerge as the vibrant field it is today. In just the last fifteen years the number of social

Social psychology: *The scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another.*



psychology periodicals has more than doubled. More and more, social psychologists are applying their concepts and methods to social concerns such as energy conservation, health, and courtroom decision making.

But what *are* the concepts and methods of social psychology? What distinguishes social psychology from other fields that also explore human nature?

## SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE OTHER DISCIPLINES

Although social psychologists are keenly interested in how people think about, influence, and relate to one another, they are not the only people with these interests. Sociologists, personality psychologists, and even novelists and philosophers are also curious about these matters. The academic disciplines are seldom sharply defined. Where does physics leave off and chemistry begin? Such divisions are overlapping. Nevertheless, let us briefly consider the similarities and differences between social psychology and some of these related fields.

Social psychology is often confused with sociology. True, sociologists and social psychologists do share some common interests—for example, in studying how people behave in groups. Moreover, social psychology is really a subfield of both its parent disciplines, sociology and, especially, psychology (it is *not* a grand synthesis of the two fields). So the confusion is understandable.

Although there is no distinct demarcation between social psychology and the rest of sociology, their subject matters and methods do differ. Most sociologists study the structure and functioning of *groups*, from small groups to very large groups (societies). The social psychologist is usually interested in the *individual*—how a person thinks about other people, is influenced by them, relates to them. Thus while social psychologists, like other sociologists, are interested in groups, they generally want to ascertain how groups affect individual people, or, sometimes, how an individual can affect a group. For example, while many sociologists might be interested in how the racial attitudes of middle class people as a group differ from those of lower socioeconomic classes, the social psychologist would be more interested in how racial attitudes develop within the typical individual. For instance, does merely labeling people as members of some group—football players, blacks, sorority women, the aged—lead one to overestimate both the similarity of people within the groups and the differences between the groups? (The answer, by the way, turns out to be yes.)

Although sociologists and social psychologists use some of the same research methods, social psychologists rely much more heavily upon experiments in which they manipulate a factor such as social pressure to see what

### Social Psychology and Sociology



The social psychologist is usually interested in the individual within the group. (Erika Stone/Peter Arnold, Inc.)

effect it has. The complexity of the problems most sociologists deal with makes experimentation difficult, so they will often use surveys to study, say, the relationship between people's socioeconomic class and their racial attitudes. Obviously, ethical considerations also preclude sociologists' experimenting with such factors as people's economic levels. One just doesn't manipulate someone's long-term economic well-being to see its effect on racial attitudes. A social psychologist, however, might very briefly induce some people to feel frustrated to see how this experience affects their attitudes toward other people.

Social psychology also differs from two areas closely related to sociology: "social work" and "social problems." Social psychologists are eager to see their principles applied to problems such as crime and marital breakdown, but the problems themselves are not the primary focus of social psychology.

### **Social Psychology and Personality Psychology**

Since social psychology and personality psychology both focus upon the individual person, they, too, are closely related. Indeed, the American Psychological Association has found it so difficult to separate these two areas that it has included them in the same journals (the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*). Their difference lies, first, in the *social* character of social psychology. Personality psychologists give greater attention to our private internal functioning. Second,