# Social Psychology Glossary

This glossary defines many of the key terms used in class lectures and assigned readings.

## A

*Altruism*—A motive to increase another's welfare without conscious regard for one's own self-interest.

*Availability Heuristic*—A cognitive rule, or mental shortcut, in which we judge how likely something is by how easy it is to think of cases.

*Attractiveness*—Having qualities that appeal to an audience. An appealing communicator (often someone similar to the audience) is most persuasive on matters of subjective preference.

*Attribution Theory*—A theory about how people explain the causes of behavior—for example, by attributing it either to "internal" dispositions (e.g., enduring traits, motives, values, and attitudes) or to "external" situations.

*Automatic Processing*—"Implicit" thinking that tends to be effortless, habitual, and done without awareness.

## B

*Behavioral Confirmation*—A type of self-fulfilling prophecy in which people's social expectations lead them to behave in ways that cause others to confirm their expectations.

*Belief Perseverance*—Persistence of a belief even when the original basis for it has been discredited.

*Bystander Effect*—The tendency for people to be less likely to help someone in need when other people are present than when they are the only person there. Also known as bystander inhibition.

## C

*Catharsis*—Emotional release. The catharsis theory of aggression is that people's aggressive drive is reduced when they "release" aggressive energy, either by acting aggressively or by fantasizing about aggression.

*Central Route to Persuasion*—Occurs when people are convinced on the basis of facts, statistics, logic, and other types of evidence that support a particular position.

*Cognitive Dissonance*—Discomfort or tension that arises from holding two or more psychologically incompatible thoughts at the same time. Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people are motivated to avoid or minimize cognitive dissonance whenever possible.

*Collectivism*—Giving priority to the goals and well-being of one's group (e.g., one's extended family or work group) over the welfare of the individual, and defining one's identity accordingly.

*Complementarity*—The popularly supposed tendency for people to choose friends or partners who are different from themselves and complete what they're missing (e.g., for a shy person to chose a highly social person as a romantic partner).

*Confirmation Bias*—A tendency to search for and weigh information that confirms one's preconceptions more strongly than information that challenges them.

*Conformity*—A change in one's behavior or belief in the direction shown by others.

*Controlled Processing*—"Explicit" thinking that tends to be deliberate, reflective, and conscious.

*Correlational Research*—The study of the naturally occurring relationships among variables.

*Counterfactual Thinking*—Imagining alternative scenarios and outcomes that might have happened, but didn't.

*Credibility*—Believability. The credibility of a communicator is typically based on how knowledgeable, experienced, and trustworthy the person is.

*Culture*—Enduring behaviors, ideas, attitudes, and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next.

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# D

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*Debriefing*—In social psychology, debriefing refers to an explanation that researcher gives participants after the data has been collected. Debriefing usually discloses any deception and often asks people about their perceptions and feelings.

*Deindividuation*—A loss of self-awareness that occurs when people are not seen or paid attention to as individuals (for example, when they become absorbed in a role that reduces their sense of individuality or accountability, or when they become part of a crowd or a mob).

*Demand Characteristics*—Cues in an experiment that tell the participant what behavior is expected.

*Dependent Variable*—A variable or outcome that is affected by, or dependent upon, an independent variable.

*Displacement*—The redirection of aggression to a target other than the source of one's anger or frustration. Generally, the new target is a safer or more socially acceptable target.

*Dispositional Attribution*—An explanation of someone's behavior that focuses on the person's traits and other personal characteristics.

*Dissonance*—See cognitive dissonance.

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# E

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*Embodied Cognition*—The mutual influence of bodily sensations on cognitive preferences and social judgments.

*Experimental Realism*—The degree to which an experiment absorbs, engages, and involves its participants.

*Experimental Research*—Studies that explore cause–effect relationships by manipulating one or more factors (independent variables) while controlling others (holding them constant).

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*False Consensus Effect*—The tendency to overestimate the commonality of one's opinions and one's undesirable or unsuccessful behaviors.

*False Uniqueness Effect*—The tendency to underestimate the commonality of one's abilities and one's desirable or successful behaviors.

*Field Research*—Research done in natural, real-life settings outside the laboratory.

*Framing*—The way a question or an issue is posed; framing can influence people's decisions and expressed opinions.

*Free Riders*—People who benefit from the group but give little in return.

*Frustration*—The blocking of goal-directed behavior.

*Fundamental Attribution Error*—The tendency for observers to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences upon others' behavior.

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# G

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*Groupthink*—A mode of thinking that people engage in when concurrence-seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive ingroup that it overrides realistic appraisals of alternative courses of action.

*Group Polarization*—Group-produced enhancement of members' preexisting tendencies; a strengthening of the members' average tendency, not a split within the group.

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# H

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*Heuristic*—A mental shortcut, or rule of thumb, that enables quick, efficient judgments.

*Hindsight Bias*—The tendency to exaggerate, after learning an outcome, one's ability to have foreseen how something turned out. Also known as the "I-knew-it-all-along" phenomenon

*Hypothesis* —A tentative explanation for an observation, phenomenon, or scientific problem that can be tested by further investigation.

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*Illusion of Control*—The perception of uncontrollable events as under to one's control or as more controllable than they are.

*Illusion of Transparency*—The illusion that our concealed emotions are easily detected by other people.

*Illusory Correlation*—The perception of a relationship between two things where none exists, or the perception of a stronger relationship than actually exists.

*Immune Neglect*—The tendency to underestimate the ability of one's "psychological immune system" to promote emotional healing after bad things happen.

*Impact Bias*—Overestimating the strength and duration of emotion-causing events (for example, overestimating how long it will take to recover emotionally from a romantic break-up, or much happiness will result from receiving an increase in salary).

*Independent Variable*—The experimental factor that a researcher manipulates in order to examine its effect on or relationship to another variable.

*Individualism*—Giving priority to one's own goals over group goals and defining one's identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications.

*Informed Consent*—An ethical principle requiring that research participants be told enough about a study to choose whether they wish to participate.

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*Learned Helplessness*—The sense of hopelessness and resignation learned when a human or animal sees repeated bad events as uncontrollable.

*Locus of Control*—The extent to which people perceive outcomes as internally controllable by their own efforts or as externally controlled by chance or outside forces.

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*Matching Phenomenon*—The tendency for people to choose partners who match them in level of physical attractiveness and other traits.

*Mere-Exposure Effect*—The tendency for novel stimuli to be liked more or rated more positively after the rater has been repeatedly exposed to them.

*Mirror-Image Perceptions*—Reciprocal views of each other often held by parties in conflict; for example, each may view itself as moral and peace-loving and the other as evil and aggressive.

*Misattribution*—Mistakenly attributing the cause of a behavior to the wrong source.

*Misinformation Effect*—Incorporating inaccurate information into one's memory of an event after witnessing the event and receiving misleading information about it.

*Mundane Realism*—The degree to which an experiment is superficially similar to everyday situations.

## N

*Need to Belong* —A motivation to bond with others in relationships that provide ongoing, positive interactions.

*Non-Zero-Sum Game*—A game, interaction, negotiation, or other situation in which one side's gain is not necessarily the other side's loss. In a non-zero-sum game, both sides can win with cooperation or lose as a result of competition.

## O

*Obedience*—Acting in accord with a direct order.

*Overconfidence Phenomenon*—The tendency to be more confident than correct—to overestimate the accuracy of one's beliefs.

## P

*Peripheral Route to Persuasion*—Occurs when people are convinced by incidental cues, such as a speaker's attractiveness, rather than by facts, statistics, logic, or evidence.

*Persuasion*—The process by which a message induces change in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.

*Physical-Attractiveness Stereotype*—An assumption that physically attractive people possess other socially desirable traits as well: What is beautiful is good.

*Planning fallacy*—The tendency to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task or project.

*Possible Selves*—Images of what we dream of or dread becoming in the future.

*Postdecisional Dissonance*—A type of cognitive dissonance generated by a decision that one has made.

*Predecisional Dissonance*—A type of cognitive dissonance that arises before one makes a decision and that may influence the choice being made.

*Priming*—Activating particular associations in memory.

*Proximity*—Geographical nearness. Proximity (or, more precisely, "functional distance") powerfully predicts how much people like and befriend one another.

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# R

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*Random Assignment*—The process of assigning participants to the conditions of an experiment such that all persons have the same chance of being in a given condition. (Note the distinction between random assignment in experiments and random sampling. Random assignment helps us infer cause and effect. Random sampling helps us generalize to a population.)

*Random Sampling*—A procedure in which every element in a population has an equal chance of being selected.

*Reciprocity Norm*—An expectation that people will help, not hurt, others who have helped them.

*Regression Toward the Average*—The statistical tendency for extreme scores or extreme behavior to return toward one's average.

*Representativeness Heuristic*—The tendency to presume, sometimes despite contrary odds, that someone or something belongs to a particular group if resembling (being representative of) a typical member.

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# S

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*Self-Concept*—What we know and believe about ourselves.

*Self-Esteem*—A person's overall self-evaluation or sense of self-worth.

*Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*—A belief that leads to its own fulfillment.

*Self-Handicapping*—Protecting one's self-image with behaviors that create a handy excuse for later failure.

*Self-Monitoring*—Being attuned to the way one presents oneself in social situations and adjusting one's performance to create the desired impression.

*Self-Presentation*—The act of expressing oneself and behaving in ways designed to create a favorable impression or an impression that corresponds to one's ideals.

*Self-Schema*—Beliefs about self that organize and guide the processing of self-relevant information.

*Self-Serving Attributions*—A form of self-serving bias; the tendency to attribute positive outcomes to oneself and negative outcomes to other factors.

*Self-Serving Bias*—The tendency to perceive oneself more favorably than other people do or than is warranted by evidence.

*Self-Efficacy*—A sense that one is competent and effective (different from self-esteem, which is one's sense of self-worth; a sharpshooter in the military might feel high self-efficacy and low self-esteem).

*Situational Attribution*—An explanation of someone's behavior that focuses on environmental factors.

*Sleeper Effect*—A delayed impact of a message that occurs when an initially discounted message becomes effective after we forget the reason for discounting it.

*Social Comparison*—Evaluating one's opinions and abilities by comparing oneself to others.

*Social-Exchange Theory*—The theory that human interactions are transactions that aim to maximize one's rewards and minimize one's costs.

*Social Learning Theory*—A theory that we learn social behavior by observing and imitating and by being rewarded and punished.

*Social Loafing*—The tendency for people to exert less effort when they pool their efforts toward a common goal than when they are individually accountable.

*Social Neuroscience*—An interdisciplinary field that explores the neural bases of social and emotional processes and behaviors, and how these processes and behaviors affect our brain and biology.

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

*Social-Responsibility Norm*—An expectation that people will help those who need it.

*Social Trap*—A situation in which the conflicting parties, by each rationally pursuing its self-interest, become caught in mutually destructive behavior. Examples include the Prisoner's Dilemma and the Tragedy of the Commons.

*Spontaneous Trait Inference*—An effortless, automatic inference of a trait after exposure to someone's behavior.

*Spotlight Effect*—The belief that others are paying more attention to our appearance and behavior than they really are.

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# T
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*Terror Management Theory*—Proposes that people protect themselves emotionally (for example, by clinging to their cultural worldviews and prejudices) when reminded of their mortality.

*Theory*—An integrated set of principles that explain and predict observed events.