



An Introduction to the Science of Social Psychology

Instructor Manual

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The Introduction to Social Psychology module is unusual among Noba modules in that it is not focused on a stand-alone topic. As the name suggests, it is intended to introduce people to the exciting science of social psychology. It focuses on two main themes: social psychology as a scientific process, and an overview of commonly taught social psychology topics. It is intended to serve as an introductory module and not as a replacement for topics such as “Research Methods in Social Psychology” that have more in-depth modules. Instead, this module focuses on making social psychology interesting and relevant to students. This instructor’s manual module provides some information to help you craft a class lesson for your students to help keep them interested and engaged in this material. The accompanying PowerPoint presentation provides material which includes content, activities, and a video. This instructor’s manual also contains other outside resources and information that may help you create a great unit of your course about culture.

Learning Objectives

Content Specific Learning Objectives:

- Define social psychology and understand how it is different from other areas of psychology.
- Understand “levels of analysis” and why this concept is important to science.
- List at least three major areas of study in social psychology.
- Define the “need to belong”.

Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)

- Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
- Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
- Interpret, design, and conduct basic psychological research (2.4)
- Incorporate sociocultural factors in scientific inquiry (2.5)
- Apply ethical standards to evaluate psychological science and practice (3.1)
- Interact effectively with others (4.3)

Abstract

The science of social psychology investigates the ways other people affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is an exciting field of study because it is so familiar and relevant to our day-to-day lives. Social psychologists study a wide range of topics that can roughly be grouped into 5 categories: attraction, attitudes, peace & conflict, social influence, and social cognition.

Class Design Recommendations

This material should be covered in a single 50- 75-minute class period. Please refer to the Noba PowerPoint and the Lecture Framework below for specific details.

- Warm-Up Activity: The good life
- What is social psychology?
 - The need to belong
 - Social stress
- Studying social psychology
 - Sub-fields of psychology
 - Levels of analysis

- Observation
- What is included in Social Psychology?
 - Attraction
 - Attitudes
 - Peace & Conflict
 - Social Influence
 - Social Cognition
- Wrap up: CAT: The Muddiest Point

Module Outline

- **Introduction of social psychology:** It is easy to generate extreme counter examples of people who live as loners, recluses and misanthropes. Examples include religious ascetics, such as the monks who lived in stone cells on the remote Irish island of Skellig Michael 1 thousand years ago. Other examples include perpetrators of violence such as Ted Kaczynski, the terrorist known as the “Unabomber.” Those examples are, however, the exception. We live in a world where people cluster together in cities, live in families, get married more often than not, and find joy in friendships. All people have a need to belong. Social psychology is such an exciting science because it is the science that researches exactly these relationships.
- **Studying social psychology:** The science of social psychology is interesting because of its complexity and real world relevance. Complex human interactions pose a challenge to researchers who want to investigate psychological phenomenon as they unfold in the social world. This is why these scientists have developed naturalistic observation, field experiments, and “Big data” to better capture topics in their naturalistic environment.
- One aspect of social psychology that might be interesting to your students (and perhaps you as well) is the idea of Sub-disciplines in psychology, of which social psychology is one. Because we are a field that parses apart topics—indeed, we even teach them in discrete courses—we can sometimes forget that many of these topics actually cross disciplinary boundaries. Take, for example, topics such as “family,” “language and language use” or “gender.” These are topics that span developmental, social, personality, and cognitive

science. It may be helpful to remind students that topics in social psychology are not always relegated entirely to this corner of psychology.

- **Levels of analysis:** Students might roll their eyes when you bring up dependent and independent variables. “We’ve heard it,” they will say. But many students are less familiar with the intriguing idea of levels of analysis. It is easy to forget that fMRI studies, and huge social surveys, and Facebook behavior are all looking at the same phenomena, but at different levels of analysis. When you slow down when you see a police officer giving speeding tickets, for instance, this is a phenomena that happens at many levels. You have a physiological reaction, a behavioral reaction, you may be influenced by the presence of other passengers or drivers, and you have an emotional reaction. Each of these happens simultaneously. As researchers, we often drill down on just one or two of these but it can be helpful to remember that they all exist.
- **What is included in social psychology?**
 - *Attraction:* Attraction is a topic that is of universal interest. Traditionally aged high school and college students are in a life period in which the development of attraction and romantic relationships are important. Even non-traditionally aged students will find this topic relevant. Attraction is an excellent opportunity to bring levels of analyses to life with a real world research topic. A large portion of attraction operates at the biological level. Evolutionary forces, hormonal reactions, and cultural universals in facial attractiveness all point to underlying biological mechanisms of attraction. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to conclude that we are all just a bundle of biological urges with no individual variation and no personal choice. Cultural factors and personal experience also influence attraction, mate choice, and mating behaviors and rituals.
 - *Attitudes:* Attitudes have been, traditionally, among the most covered areas of social psychology in courses by that name. Instructors typically focus on stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination as three topics that have received research attention. In today’s political environment these topics will often engage students. Even so, it is a delicate matter to teach attitudes from a scientific, rather than political point of view. Western liberal thought encourages us to “celebrate diversity” and “individuality.” This line of thinking may mean that some students have their hackles raised by mention of social categories, group identity, using nations as proxies for culture, or of the discussion of cultural similarities rather than differences. Instructors should be sensitive to the fact that there is often a divide between a political and a scientific understanding of the social world.
 - In this introductory module the purpose of introducing attitudes is not to teach topics

such as prejudice (that will come later in the course) but to introduce them as legitimate topics of scientific inquiry.

- *Peace & Conflict*: When considering the classic studies in social psychology many of them are related to topics *other* than peace and conflict. In some ways, peace and conflict represent the important but more often overlooked corner of social psychology; at least in terms of the space devoted to various topics in courses on the subject. Peace and conflict studies are an important field of study with many potential applications for promoting justice, reconciliation, and peace. At the heart of most peace and conflict studies is the idea of group identity (us versus them). This plays out in ethnic and religious conflicts, in political brinksmanship, and in community violence such as gang violence. This topic is a wonderful opportunity to emphasize psychology's power to inform social issues.
- *Social Influence*: Social influence, along with attitudes, is the other "famous" face of social psychology. Traditionally, courses on the topic include attention to conformity, obedience, and persuasion. In a world full of advertising, peer pressure, increasing social connectedness through social media, the idea of social influence is more important than ever. Students are likely to underestimate their own susceptibility to social influence relative to the susceptibility of others (eg. "ads don't work on me but they work on other people."). Because channels of influence are so ubiquitous this topic can be one of special relevance to students.
- *Social Cognition*: Social cognition, because of its difficult name, can be a harder topic for students to understand. Social cognition is the process of using social information to make judgments and/or decisions. Social cognition includes making judgments of people's motivations and personalities based on roles, behaviors or other information. Social cognition can be an automatic process. It is a process in which we all engage and which helps us to navigate a complex social world even though it sometimes leads to inaccurate judgments.

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Difficult Terms

Blind to the research hypothesis

Conformity
Culture of honor
Discrimination
Fundamental attribution error
Hypothesis
Levels of analysis
Prejudice
Research confederate
Social attribution
Social cognition
Social influence
Stereotyping
Stigmatized group

Lecture Frameworks

Overview: This material can be presented with a combination of direct instruction, discussion, and activities. The suggested warm up activity gets students to think about culture by considering their own culture from an outsider's point of view. Time and again in this unit, students are asked to reflect on their own cultural experiences. This is a way to make the content relevant to daily life and to increase understanding of the core research and concepts.

- Warm-up Activity: The good life: The purpose of this slide is to facilitate an activity to get students thinking about the concept of social psychology. See below in 'Activities/ Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
- Direct Instruction of What is Social Psychology: There are multiple slides associated with this portion of the lesson.
 - First, define social psychology. This is an opportunity to point out the ways in which some topics bridge sub-disciplines. This is also an opportunity to introduce the concept of "need to belong." All humans have a psychological need for belongingness. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - Next, explore the importance of relationships by illustrating how stressful it is to have problematic relationships. The table illustrates the 10 most stressful life events, many of which are social events. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.

- Direct Instruction “studying social psychology”: Here, instructors highlight the fact that social psychology is a science. It is rooted in observation of interesting or confusing social phenomena and attempts to gain a better understanding by employing the scientific method. It is not, at heart, a political mode of inquiry even though the application of research findings may have political or social impact. There are two main points in this section:
 - Levels of analysis. Here, instructors introduce the concept of “levels of analysis” in research. Many students find this concept to be revelatory. See below in ‘Activities/Demonstrations’ and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - Observation. Because social psychology is focused, in part but not in whole, on interactions and other group settings, this area of psychology lends itself to observation as a means of study. Unlike self-report, lab studies, and even field experiments, observation has the advantage of being entirely naturalistic. Here, you can engage students in the idea of social psychology research by pointing out that observation comes naturally. That, in fact, we all act as amateur social psychologists arriving at conclusions about our own social worlds through informal observation. See below in ‘Activities/Demonstrations’ and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
- Direct Instruction of “what is included in social psychology”: In many ways, this is the core of this lesson. It is here that students will be exposed to specific research and concepts from the psychological study of the social world.
 - *Attraction*: Because attraction intersects with gender politics, cultural norms, and other social factors students might walk into class with a number of strongly held opinions about the topic. This is an opportunity to expose them to scientific inquiry and the types of insights that are borne out of the empirical method. You can emphasize that both genetic/biological and cultural/learned processes influence what people consider attractive. For biological perspectives it is often easiest to focus on the narrow domain of facial attractiveness because there is such high cross-cultural agreement about attractive faces: average, symmetrical, etc. See below in ‘Activities/Demonstrations’ and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - *Attitudes*: The most commonly covered topics in social psychology, with regards to attitudes, are: stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. These attitudes and behaviors are anchored in the natural psychological process of categorization generally, and in the creation of in-group and out-group categories specifically. See below in ‘Activities/Demonstrations’ and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - *Peace and conflict*. You can introduce basic concepts to students here, focusing especially

on in-group and out-group identity. You can explain how out-group membership is often used to understand potential threats to in-group values, resources, or safety. Because this phenomenon plays out daily in geopolitical life it can be a terrific way to show students how relevant this area of study is to real life. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.

- *Social influence.* We live in a world that is saturated with ads. They appear on-line, on television, in magazines, and around town. They are everywhere. You can provoke an engaged discussion by asking students to report the extent to which they believe that they are influenced by advertisements. Many students believe that ads work on other people but not on them. Have them consider whether they have ever A) described a funny TV commercial to a friend (isn't that a form of influence?), B) seen a movie preview and thought "wow! That look's good. I'd like to see that." From there, you can expand to all the ways that we succumb to social influence—following the orders of people in positions of authority (parents, instructors, emergency personnel, etc), peer pressures, etc. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - *Social cognition.* Social Cognition is the term for how we think about the social world. There are a number of topics that are commonly taught including, but not limited to, heuristics. The purpose is not to teach an entire unit on social cognition but to introduce your students to the idea that all of us think about the social world. One common way we do this is by "telling stories" in our heads based on incomplete information. For example, we attribute emotions, motivations, and even personality traits to other people using very little information. We do this with other drivers on the road, other people in line at the grocery store, people we pass while hiking— virtually everyone. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
- **Cool Down Activity:** In One-Minute paper: This activity is an opportunity for students to reflect on their own learning. See below in 'Activities/Demonstrations' and in the Noba PowerPoint for more details.
 - **CAT: Muddiest Point:** This activity is a classroom assessment technique (CAT), which will help you assess your students' understanding of the material.

Activities & Demonstrations

- **Warm up Activity—The good life:** The purpose of this slide is to facilitate an activity to get students thinking about the concept of social psychology.
 - Materials: Paper and pen
 - Time: 5 minutes at the beginning of class.
 - Directions: Have students write down “10 things that you think are very important in life.” Next, have them count the number that fall into each category: social, material, achievement. They will have to make some private judgments. Some might consider “health” an achievement, for example, while others consider it “material.” Have the students create a fraction $X/10$ to indicate the number of social items. In the subsequent large class debrief you can create a public tally by asking “how many of you had only 1 social item out of ten” (using clickers or a show of hands for responses). Then move to 2 of 10, 3 of 10 and so forth.
 - *Discussion Questions:* During the large class discussion try to highlight the similarities in values regarding social relationships. Point out how many students emphasized relationships as important aspects of the good life.
- **What is social psychology—“need to belong” Activity:** To help students understand why the study of social psychology is so important the instructor can point out the “need to belong” as a universal psychological need. To illustrate this point, the instructor might choose to challenge students to:
 - Time: 5 minutes including discussion
 - Materials: pen and paper for notes
 - Directions:
 - Generate an example of someone who does not have the need to belong (students sometimes mention monks or similar aesthetics but in nearly all cases these people are part of formal religious orders bound together by explicit rules and rituals. They might also mention the rare instance of recluses. While it is true that there are rare cases of people who live in isolation there is little evidence that these people function well or enjoy high well-being).
 - Generate an example of a human invention or work that did not require more than one person (typically, even in the cases of individual authorship or invention people need others to help manufacture the work or its parts, or to distribute the work). (5 minutes) Ask students to discuss the following questions as a large group:

- **What is social psychology—social stress activity:**
 - *Time:* 10 minutes
 - *Instructions:* Have students break into small groups and count how many of these 10 are evidence of the need for social relationships. Students might disagree in their specific number. Some will see “fired from work” as having a social dimension (someone did the firing!) while others will make the case that “fired from work” is not primarily a social stressor (being unemployed is primarily stressful because of the lack of income security and the shift in personal identity). Regardless of the specific number the take home message of this discussion will almost certainly be that many of the most stressful life events involve being disconnected from others in one way or another. This is evidence of the need to connect. Note: not all possible life events are listed here. Notable exceptions include “death of a child” and “crime victim”.
- **Studying Social Psychology—levels of analysis Activity:**
 - *Time:* 5 minutes
 - *Instructions:* “Imagine you and your best friend were driving down the road. You are driving slightly over the speed limit when you see a police car parked by the side of the road using radar to ticket speeders. Apply each level of analysis of research to this event.”

Example responses:

- **Culture:** Local standards differ for what speeds are deemed safe, for the amount of fines, and for how aggressively speed limits are enforced
- **Relationships:** The presence of the passenger might have an effect (such as pointing out the police or distracting the driver)
- **Behavior:** the driver’s response (such as slowing down)
- **Thoughts/Feelings:** The driver’s interpretation of the event (feeling guilty, feeling relieved, etc.)
- **Physiology:** sweating, increased heart rate and blood pressure, release of cortisol or adrenaline.

NOTE: You can conduct this activity as a reflection, with each student writing his or her own ideas; or as a partner or small groups exercise. If you choose to structure this as small group discussions make certain to debrief group ideas with the class as a whole. This will give you

the opportunity to highlight possible agreements and disagreements between groups.

- **Studying Social Psychology—observation activity:**

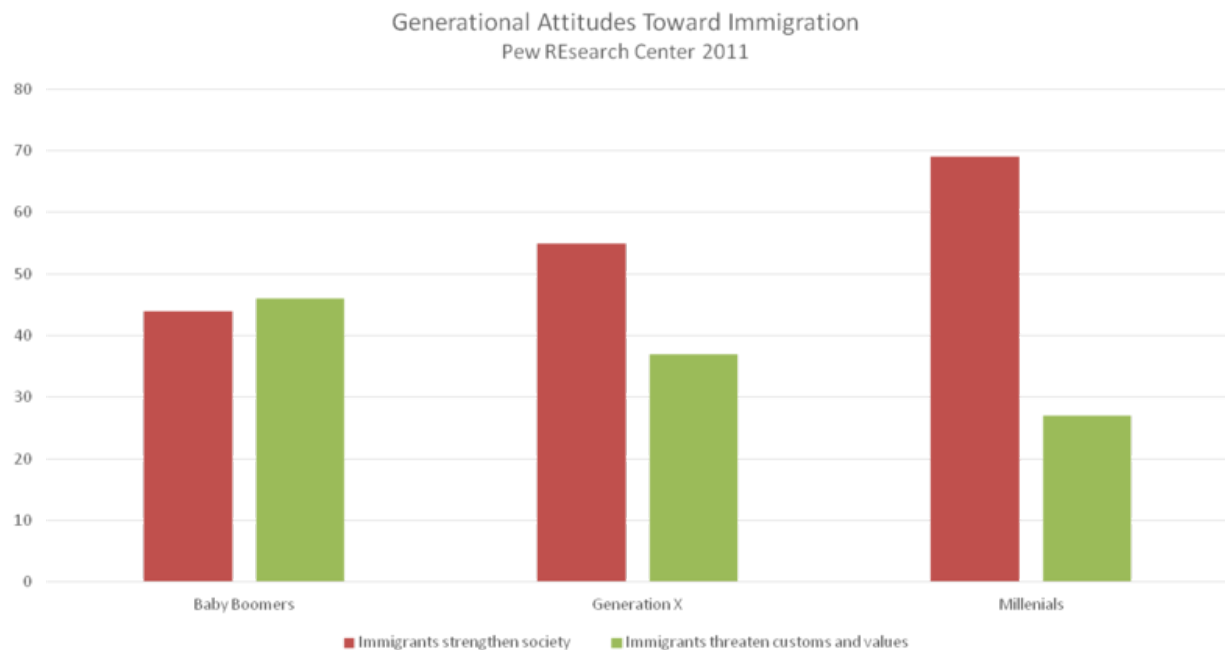
- *Time:* 5-8 minutes
- *Instructions:* Here, you can have students describe— either in written form or in pairs— what they have noticed about the social environment of this particular class as compared with their other classes. Prompt them to consider any identifiable patterns of behavior. How do the students behave and treat each other? How does the instructor interact with the group? What similarities and differences do they notice between this class and their other courses? What do they attribute those differences to? Instructor factors? Size of class? Area of study? You can use the debrief to point out that they cannot help but make on-going evaluations of interaction through observation.

- **What is included in Social Psychology—Attraction activity:**

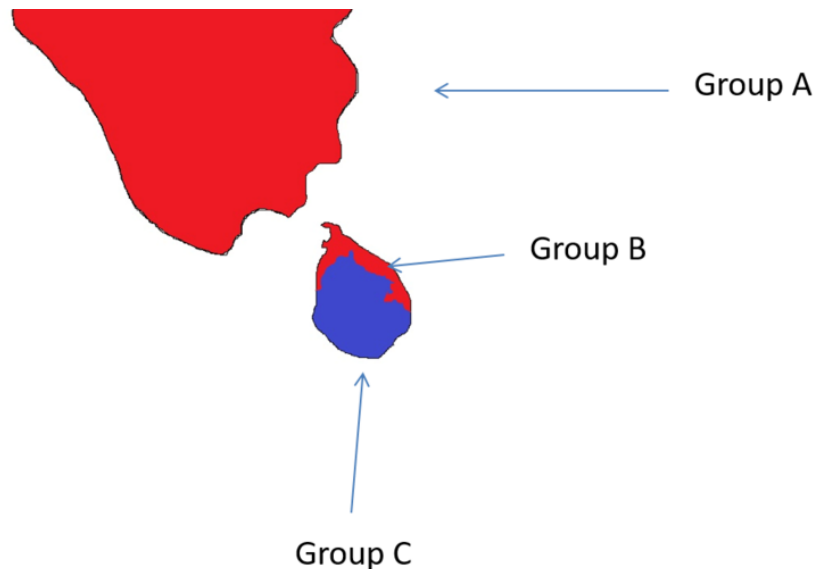
- *Option # 1– Let's Face It (5 minutes):* Introduce the idea of attraction by pointing out that it is a universal phenomenon with both biological and psychological influences. Have students choose the most attractive image from among the 3 faces pictured in this slide. Which face is the best looking? You can then use clickers or a show of hands to tally the votes for each of the three. The face on the left is the actual image of a person. The face on the right is a digitally morphed version that makes the face further from average and the middle image is the most average (digitally averaged with many other faces). The middle face should get most, perhaps not all, of the votes. You can point out to students that there are biological factors (markers for good genes, genetic and mate fitness) as well as social factors (learned cultural preferences) that play into attractiveness.
- *Option # 2– Remember when (10 minutes):* In this activity, students pair together and interview each other regarding a time that they felt an attraction to another person. This could be a current romantic partner, but it could also include a fleeting instant of attraction toward a stranger they passed on the street. Students should feel safe to use any example they want without concern that they need to identify the individual to whom they were attracted. The point of the exercise, instead, is to have the student describe the attraction (eg. "I was sitting across from him on the train and I noticed his clothes, his style, his muscular arms and he smiled at me"). The "interviewer" should note any specifics regarding the attraction (eg. "Clothes, muscles, smile"). In the larger group, you can tally answers to create common categories of attraction and note any group leanings or individual differences.
- *Option # 3– Opposites attract (5-8 minutes):* Here, you can point out to students the

many sayings related to attraction such as “birds of a feather flock together” (people of shared interests will like one another and “opposites attract” (people of different temperaments will be attracted to one another). These two examples are, obviously, at odds with one another. This is an illustration of the many lay theories about attraction. In this activity have your students identify their own intuitions concerning attraction. Consider using the following prompts and debrief afterward:

- -- What do you believe about first impressions?
 - -- What differences in attraction, if any, do you believe exist between people in the first year of their relationship and those in their 20th year?
 - -- Do you believe attraction is similar across cultures? Why or why not?
- **What is included in Social Psychology—Attitudes activity:**



- **What is included in social Psychology—Peace and Conflict activity:**
- **Us and Them:** Have students look at the “map” and have them imagine a hypothetical



scenario. It shows an island next to a large landmass. The colored regions indicate cultural groups. The first red group is Group A (they speak language 1) and the Second red group is Group B (they also speak language 1 but live in a different country). The blue group is Group C (and they speak language 2). This is an interesting instance in which Group C is the majority population of their island nation. They run the government and hold most of the good jobs. Group B is the minority and they complain about a lack of fairness. However, group C sees itself as a minority since Group B is so closely culturally and economically aligned with Group A, in the neighboring country. Group C tries to protect itself and its culture through its laws and business positions. In small groups:

- -- Have students offer opinions about which group (B or C) they consider the minority, and why.
- -- Have students offer possible solutions to this conflict.
- -- Feel free to add specific elements regarding laws (eg. Immigration and work), religion (differing religions), or resources (Group B lives in a resource rich area of the nation) that would complicate matters.
- -- Have students relate major themes of this discussion to current politics.

This map is based on the Tamil and Sinhalese conflict in South India and Sri Lanka but is not meant to be an accurate map or scenario. Although this is based on a real world conflict it need not be taught in the context of actual events, dates, or people. For more information on this conflict see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War...

- **What is included in Social Psychology—Social Influence activity:**
 - Debating- Everywhere in life we see conversational attempts to sway people's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Yelp and Amazon reviews, dinner table arguments, and political debates are all examples of ways we try to change another person's mind. Play the 2 and a half minute clip of this CNN debate between two commentators. It is not entirely important that the students know who is being debated (US Republican Michele Bauchman) or the specifics of the policies being discussed. Instead, the students should focus on the methods of persuasion.
 - -- Which commentator do they find more compelling? Why?
 - -- What do they notice in terms of the strategies each commentator uses to sway the audience (responses might include humor, smiling, agreement with the other person, predicting what their opponent will say, attacking their opponent's character, etc).
 - -- After a brief discussion, reveal to your students that the commentators– Mary Matalin and James Corville– are married to one another. How does this affect their perception of the debate?
 - URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mN-84kj77Q>
- **What is included in Social Psychology—Social Cognition activity:**



- Have your students consider the image of the two people. Ask them to write down the answers these two questions and then discuss in the large group:
 - What is the relation of these two people to one another?
 - What are they doing?

Debriefing points:

1. Relationship agreement versus disagreement; it is likely that there will be a relatively high degree of agreement. Most people will say they are boyfriend/girlfriend, lovers or otherwise romantically involved. Some may believe they are friends. It is noteworthy that most people will NOT say that they are siblings, mother and son, parole officer and parolee, etc. Let the students indicate the information they used to arrive at their conclusions. Common sources of information include: age, dress, hand position (touching), and proximity.
2. Activity agreement versus disagreement; It is likely that there will be more disagreement here because the nature of their interaction is somewhat ambiguous. They may be showing affection/sharing intimacy with one another. Then again, they may be planning a bank robbery. She may be breaking up with him. The more alternative scenarios that are generated the more students should realize this important fact: we rush to closure on an explanatory story.

You can ask students to share examples of times that made a social assumption and were proven wrong, or right. Have them discuss how they think this cognitive habit helps us even though it can lead to erroneous guesses.

- **CAT: Muddiest Point:** This activity is a classroom assessment technique (CAT), which will help you assess your students' understanding of the material. CATs also often help students remember the material (Angelo & Cross, 1993).
 - Time: 5 minutes
 - Materials: A piece of paper for students to turn in their responses.
 - Directions:
 - Ask students what their muddiest point is.

Discussion Points

- Social psychology is the science of every day relationships and so it is especially relevant to your own life. Researchers focus on how the presence of others influences thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Researchers also investigate relationships—how they happen, their quality, how they end, and the impacts they have.

Outside Resources

Web: A collection of links on the topic of peace psychology

<https://www.socialpsychology.org/peace.htm>

Web: A great resource for all things social psychology, all in one place - Social Psychology Network

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/>

Web: A list of profiles of major historical figures in social psychology

<https://www.socialpsychology.org/social-figures.htm>

Web: A review of the history of social psychology as well as the topics of interest in the field

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_psychology

Web: A succinct review of major historical figures in social psychology

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-psychology.html>

Web: An article on the definition and areas of influence of peace psychology

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_psychology

Web: Article describing another way of conceptualizing levels of analysis in social psychology

<http://psych.colorado.edu/~oreilly/cecn/node11.html>

Web: Extended list of major historical figures in social psychology

<http://www.sparknotes.com/psychology/psych101/majorfigures/characters.html>

Web: History and principles of social psychology

<https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/defining-social-psychology-history-and-principles/>

Web: Links to sources on history of social psychology as well as major historical figures

<https://www.socialpsychology.org/history.htm>

Web: The Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict and Violence

<http://www.peacepsych.org/>

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/202/An%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Science%20of%20Social%20Psychology.pptx?1511809683.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award- winning university teachers.

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