Reading 1.1
Introducing Social Psychology

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Social Psychology
Professor Scott Plous
Wesleyan University

coursera

Social
Psychology

Introducing Social Psychology

There once was a man whose second wife was a vain and self-ish woman. This woman's two daughters were similarly vain and selfish. The man's own daughter, however, was meek and unselfish. This sweet, kind daughter, whom we all know as Cinderella, learned early on that she should do as she was told, accept ill treatment and insults, and avoid doing anything to upstage her stepsisters and their mother.

But then, thanks to her fairy godmother, Cinderella was able to escape her situation for an evening and attend a grand ball, where she attracted the attention of a handsome prince. When the love-struck prince later encountered Cinderella back in her degrading home, he failed to recognize her.

Implausible? The folktale demands that we accept the power of the situation. In the presence of her oppressive stepmother, Cinder-ella was humble and unattractive. At the ball, Cinderella felt more beautiful—and walked and talked and smiled as if she were. In one situation, she cowered. In the other, she charmed.

The French philosopher-novelist Jean-Paul Sartre (1946) would have had no problem accepting the Cinderella premise. We humans are "first of all beings in a situation," he wrote. "We cannot be distin-guished from our situations, for they form us and decide our possibili-ties" (pp. 59–60, paraphrased).

WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

Define social psychology and explain what it does.

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

Social psychology is a science that studies the influences of our situations, with special attention to how we view and affect one another. More precisely, it is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another (Figure 1.1).
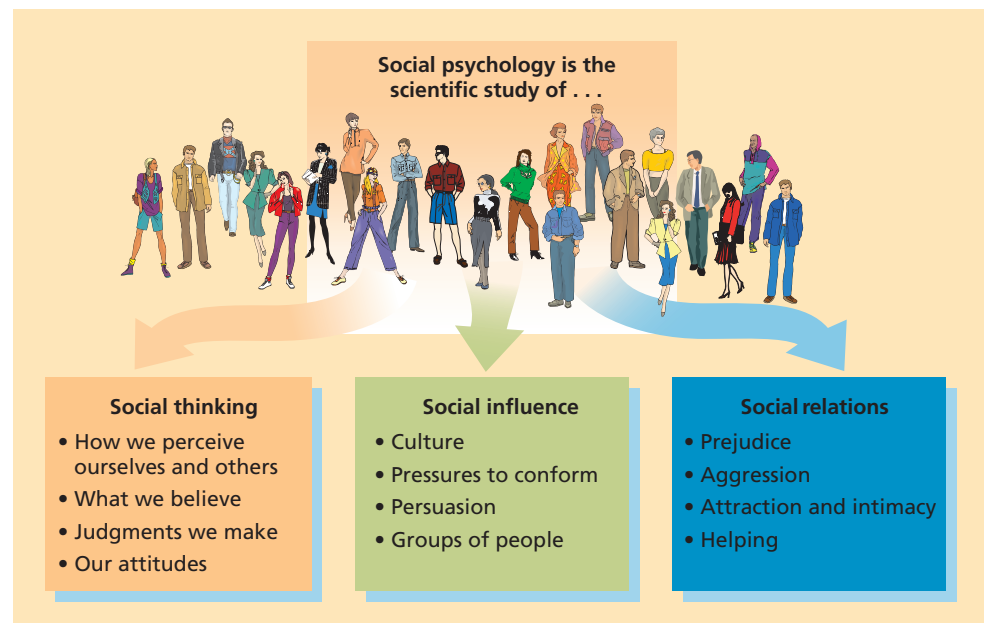
Social psychology lies at psychology's boundary with sociology. Compared with sociology (the study of people in groups and societies), social psychology focuses more on individuals and does more experimentation. Compared with personality psychology, social psychology focuses less on individuals' differences and more on how individuals, in general, view and affect one another.

Social psychology is still a young science. The first social psychology experiments were reported barely more than a century ago, and the first social psychology texts did not appear until approximately 1900 (Smith, 2005). Not until the 1930s did social psychology assume its current form. Not until World War II did it begin to emerge as the vibrant field it is today. And not until the 1970s and beyond did social psychology enjoy accelerating growth in Asia—first in India, then in Hong Kong and Japan, and, recently, in China and Taiwan (Haslam & Kashima, 2010).

Social psychology studies our thinking, influences, and relationships by asking questions that have intrigued us all. Here are some examples:

Throughout this book, sources for information are cited parenthetically. The complete source is provided in the reference section that begins on page R-1.

- *Does our social behavior depend more on the objective situations we face or how we construe them?* Social beliefs can be self-fulfilling. For example, happily married people will attribute their spouse's acid remark ("Can't you ever put that where it belongs?") to something external ("He must have had a frustrating day"). Unhappily married people will attribute the same remark to a mean disposition ("Is he ever hostile!") and may respond with a counterattack. Moreover, expecting hostility from their spouse, they may behave resentfully, thereby eliciting the hostility they expect.

- *Would people be cruel if ordered?* How did Nazi Germany conceive and implement the unconscionable slaughter of 6 million Jews? Those evil acts occurred partly because thousands of people followed orders. They put the prisoners on trains, herded them into crowded "showers," and poisoned

FIGURE :: 1.1
Social Psychology Is . . .

Social psychology is the scientific study of . . .

Social thinking	Social influence	Social relations
• How we perceive ourselves and others • What we believe • Judgments we make • Our attitudes	• Culture • Pressures to conform • Persuasion • Groups of people	• Prejudice • Aggression • Attraction and intimacy • Helping

them with gas. How could people engage in such horrific actions? Were those individuals normal human beings? Stanley Milgram (1974) wondered. So he set up a situation in which people were ordered to administer increasing levels of electric shock to someone who was having difficulty learning a series of words. As discussed in Chapter 6, nearly two-thirds of the participants fully complied.

- *To help? Or to help oneself?* As bags of cash tumbled from an armored truck one fall day, $2 million was scattered along a Columbus, Ohio, street. Some motorists stopped to help, returning $100,000. Judging from the $1,900,000 that disappeared, many more stopped to help themselves. (What would you have done?) When similar incidents occurred several months later in San Francisco and Toronto, the results were the same: Passersby grabbed most of the money (Bowen, 1988). What situations trigger people to be helpful or greedy? Do some cultural contexts—perhaps villages and small towns—breed greater helpfulness?

These questions all deal with how people view and affect one another. And that is what social psychology is all about. Social psychologists study attitudes and beliefs, conformity and independence, love and hate.

Tired of looking at the stars, Professor Mueller takes up social psychology.
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WHAT ARE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY'S BIG IDEAS?

Identify and describe the central concepts behind social psychology.

In many academic fields, the results of tens of thousands of studies, the conclusions of thousands of investigators, and the insights of hundreds of theorists can be boiled down to a few central ideas. Biology offers us natural selection and adaptation. Sociology builds on concepts such as social structure and organization. Music harnesses our ideas of rhythm, melody, and harmony.

Similarly, social psychology builds on a short list of fundamental principles that will be worth remembering long after you have forgotten most of the details. My short list of "great ideas we ought never to forget" includes these (Figure 1.2), each of which we will explore further in chapters to come.

We Construct Our Social Reality

We humans have an irresistible urge to explain behavior, to attribute it to some cause, and therefore to make it seem orderly, predictable, and controllable. You and I may *react* differently to a situation because we *think* differently. How we react to a friend's insult depends on whether we attribute it to hostility or to a bad day.

A 1951 Princeton–Dartmouth football game provided a classic demonstration of how we construct reality (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; see also Loy & Andrews, 1981). The game lived up to its billing as a grudge match; it was rough and dirty. A Princeton All-American was gang-tackled, piled on, and finally forced out of the game with a broken nose. Fistfights erupted, and there were further injuries on both sides. The whole performance hardly fit the Ivy League image of gentility.

Not long afterward, two psychologists, one from each school, showed films of the game to students on each campus. The students played the role of scientist–observer, noting each infraction as they watched and who was responsible for it.
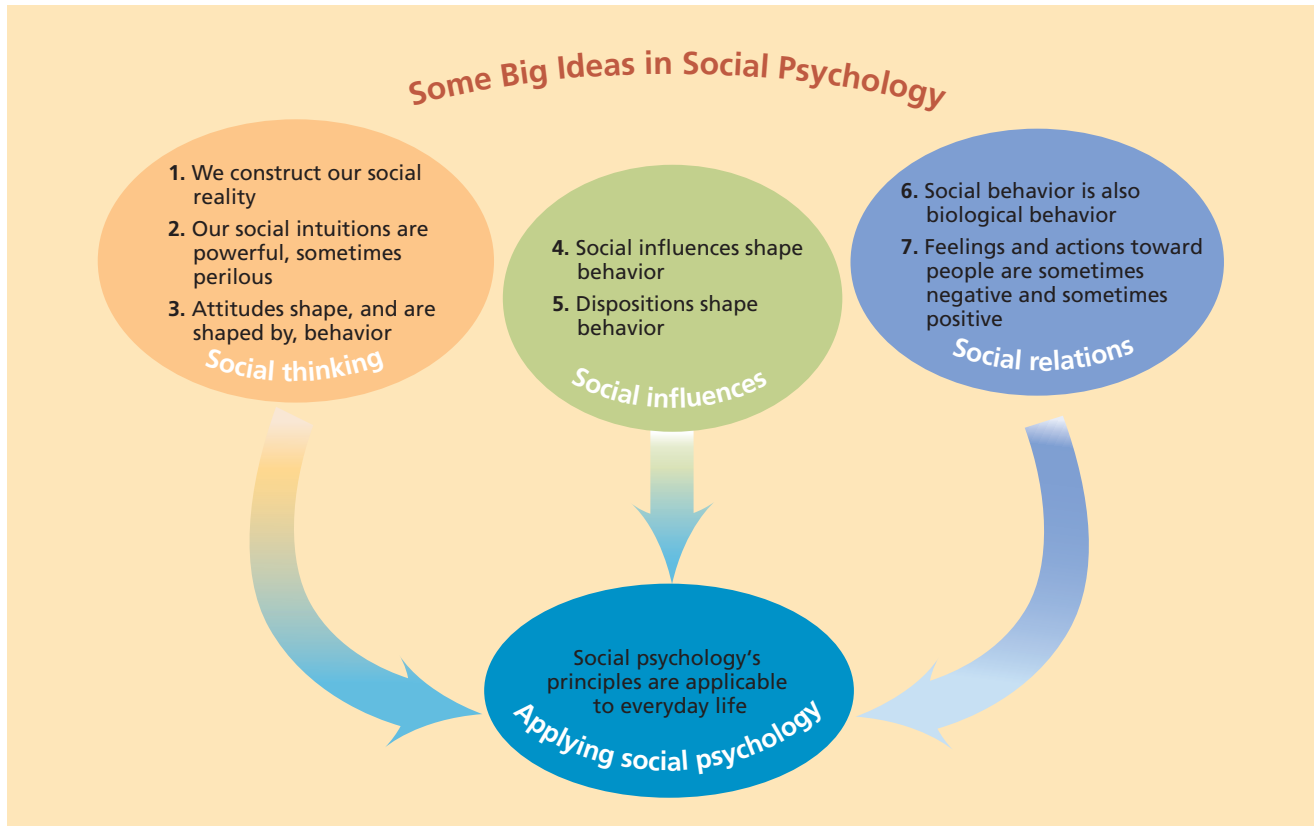
FIGURE :: 1.2

Some Big Ideas in Social Psychology

But they could not set aside their loyalties. The Princeton students, for example, saw twice as many Dartmouth violations as the Dartmouth students saw. The conclusion: There *is* an objective reality out there, but we always view it through the lens of our beliefs and values.

We are all intuitive scientists. We explain people's behavior, usually with enough speed and accuracy to suit our daily needs. When someone's behavior is consistent and distinctive, we attribute that behavior to his or her personality. For example, if you observe someone who makes repeated snide comments, you may infer that this person has a nasty disposition, and then you might try to avoid the person.

Our beliefs about ourselves also matter. Do we have an optimistic outlook? Do we see ourselves as in control of things? Do we view ourselves as relatively superior or inferior? Our answers influence our emotions and actions. *How we construe the world, and ourselves, matters.*

Our Social Intuitions Are Often Powerful but Sometimes Perilous

Our instant intuitions shape our fears (Is flying dangerous?), impressions (Can I trust him?), and relationships (Does she like me?). Intuitions influence presidents in times of crisis, gamblers at the table, jurors assessing guilt, and personnel directors screening applicants. Such intuitions are commonplace.

Indeed, psychological science reveals a fascinating unconscious mind—an intuitive backstage mind—that Freud never told us about. More than psychologists realized until recently, thinking occurs offstage, out of sight. Our intuitive capacities are revealed by studies of what later chapters will explain: "automatic processing," "implicit memory," "heuristics," "spontaneous trait inference," instant emotions, and nonverbal communication. Thinking, memory, and attitudes all operate on two levels—one

conscious and deliberate, the other unconscious and automatic. Today's researchers call it "dual processing." We know more than we know we know. We think on two levels—"intuitive" and "deliberate" (Kruglanski & Gigerenzer, 2011). A book title by Nobel laureate psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) captures the idea: We do *Think-ing, Fast and Slow.*

Intuition is huge, but intuition is also perilous. For example, as we cruise through life, mostly on automatic pilot, we intuitively judge the likelihood of things by how easily various instances come to mind. We carry readily available mental images of plane crashes. Thus, most people fear flying more than driving, and many will drive great distances to avoid risking the skies. Actually, we are many times safer (per mile traveled) in a commercial plane than in a motor vehicle (in the United States, air travel was 170 times safer between 2005 and 2007, reports the National Safety Council [2010]).

Even our intuitions about ourselves often err. We intuitively trust our memories more than we should. We misread our own minds; in experiments, we deny being affected by things that do influence us. We mispredict our own feelings—how bad we'll feel a year from now if we lose our job or our romance breaks up, and how good we'll feel a year from now, or even a week from now, if we win our state's lottery. And we often mispredict our own future. When selecting clothes, people approaching middle age will still buy snug ("I anticipate shedding a few pounds"); rarely does anyone say, more realistically, "I'd better buy a relatively loose fit; people my age tend to put on pounds."

Our social intuitions, then, are noteworthy for both their powers and their perils. By reminding us of intuition's gifts and alerting us to its pitfalls, social psychologists aim to fortify our thinking. In most situations, "fast and frugal" snap judgments serve us well. But in others, in which accuracy matters—such as when needing to fear the right things and spend our resources accordingly—we had best restrain our impulsive intuitions with critical thinking. *Our intuitions and unconscious information processing are routinely powerful and sometimes perilous.*

Social Influences Shape Our Behavior

We are, as Aristotle long ago observed, social animals. We speak and think in words we learned from others. We long to connect, to belong, and to be well thought of. Matthias Mehl and James Pennebaker (2003) quantified their University of Texas students' social behavior by inviting them to wear microcassette recorders and microphones. Once every 12 minutes during their waking hours, the computer-operated recorder would imperceptibly record for 30 seconds. Although the observation period covered only weekdays (including class time), almost 30 percent of the students' time was spent in conversation. Relationships are a big part of being human.

As social creatures, we respond to our immediate contexts. Sometimes the power of a social situation leads us to act contrary to our expressed attitudes. Indeed, powerfully evil situations sometimes overwhelm good intentions, inducing people to agree with falsehoods or comply with cruelty. Under Nazi influence, many decent people became instruments of the Holocaust. Other situations may elicit great generosity and compassion. After a major earthquake and tsunami in 2011, Japan was overwhelmed with offers of assistance.

The power of the situation is also dramatically evident in varying attitudes regarding same-sex relationships. Tell me whether you live in Africa or the Middle East (where most oppose such relationships) or in western Europe, Canada, or Australia/New Zealand, and I will make a reasonable guess as to what your attitude is about these relationships. I will become even more confident in my guess if I know your educational level, the age of your peer group, and the media you watch. Our situations matter.

Our cultures help define our situations. For example, our standards regarding promptness, frankness, and clothing vary with our culture.

- Whether you prefer a slim or a voluptuous body depends on when and where in the world you live.
- Whether you define social justice as equality (all receive the same) or as equity (those who earn more receive more) depends on whether your ideology has been shaped more by socialism or by capitalism.
- Whether you tend to be expressive or reserved, casual or formal, hinges partly on your culture and your ethnicity.
- Whether you focus primarily on yourself—your personal needs, desires, and morality—or on your family, clan, and communal groups depends on how much you are a product of modern Western individualism.

Social psychologist Hazel Markus (2005) sums it up: "People are, above all, malleable." Said differently, we adapt to our social context. *Our attitudes and behavior are shaped by external social forces.*

Personal Attitudes and Dispositions Also Shape Behavior

Internal forces also matter. We are not passive tumbleweeds, merely blown this way and that by the social winds. Our inner attitudes affect our behavior. Our political attitudes influence our voting behavior. Our smoking attitudes influence our susceptibility to peer pressure to smoke. Our attitudes toward the poor influence our willingness to help them. (As we will see, our attitudes also follow our behavior, which leads us to believe strongly in those things we have committed ourselves to or suffered for.)

Personality dispositions also affect behavior. Facing the same situation, different people may react differently. Emerging from years of political imprisonment, one person exudes bitterness and seeks revenge. Another, such as South Africa's Nelson Mandela, seeks reconciliation and unity with his former enemies. *Attitudes and personality influence behavior.*

Social Behavior Is Biologically Rooted

Twenty-first-century social psychology is providing us with ever-growing insights into our behavior's biological foundations. Many of our social behaviors reflect a deep biological wisdom.

Everyone who has taken introductory psychology has learned that nature and nurture together form who we are. As the area of a rectangle is determined by both its length and its width, so do biology and experience together create us. As *evolutionary psychologists* remind us (see Chapter 5), our inherited human nature predisposes us to behave in ways that helped our ancestors survive and reproduce. We carry the genes of those whose traits enabled them and their children to survive and reproduce. Our behavior, too, aims to send our DNA into the future. Thus, evolutionary psychologists ask how natural selection might predispose our actions and reactions when dating and mating, hating and hurting, caring and sharing. Nature also endows us with an enormous capacity to learn and to adapt to varied environments. We are sensitive and responsive to our social context.

If every psychological event (every thought, every emotion, every behavior) is simultaneously a biological event, then we can also examine the neurobiology that underlies social behavior. What brain areas enable our experiences of love and contempt, helping and aggression, perception and belief? Do extraverts, as some research suggests, require more stimulation to keep their brain aroused? When shown a friendly face, do socially secure people, more than shy people, respond in a brain area concerned with reward? How do brain, mind, and behavior function together as one coordinated system? What does the timing of brain events reveal about how we process information? Such questions are asked by those in **social neuroscience** (Cacioppo & others, 2010; Klein & others, 2010).

Social neuroscientists do not reduce complex social behaviors, such as helping and hurting, to simple neural or molecular mechanisms. Their point is this: To understand social behavior, we must consider both under-the-skin (biological) and between-skins (social) influences. Mind and body are one grand system. Stress hormones affect how we feel and act: A testosterone dose decreases trust, oxytocin increases it (Bos & others, 2010). Social ostracism elevates blood pressure. Social support strengthens the disease-fighting immune system. *We are bio-psycho-social organisms.* We reflect the interplay of our biological, psychological, and social influences. And that is why today's psychologists study behavior from these different levels of analysis.

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's Principles Are Applicable in Everyday Life

Social psychology has the potential to illuminate your life, to make visible the subtle influences that guide your thinking and acting. And, as we will see, it offers many ideas about how to know ourselves better, how to win friends and influence people, how to transform closed fists into open arms.

Scholars are also applying social psychological insights. Principles of social thinking, social influence, and social relations have implications for human health and well-being, for judicial procedures and juror decisions in courtrooms, and for influencing behaviors that will enable an environmentally sustainable human future.

As but one perspective on human existence, psychological science does not answer life's ultimate questions: What is the meaning of human life? What should be our purpose? What is our ultimate destiny? But social psychology does give us a method for asking and answering some exceedingly interesting and important questions. *Social psychology is all about life—your life: your beliefs, your attitudes, your relationships.*

The rest of this chapter takes us inside social psychology. Let's first consider how social psychologists' own values influence their work in obvious and subtle ways. And then let's focus on this chapter's biggest task: glimpsing how we *do* social psychology. How do social psychologists search for explanations of social thinking, social influence, and social relations? And how might you and I use these analytical tools to think smarter?

Throughout this book, a brief summary will conclude each major section. I hope these summaries will help you assess how well you have learned the material in each section.

SUMMING UP: What Are Social Psychology's Big Ideas?

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another. Its central themes include the following:

- How we construe our social worlds
- How our social intuitions guide and sometimes deceiveus

- How our social behavior is shaped by other people, by our attitudes and personalities, and by our biology
- How social psychology's principles apply to our everyday lives and to various other fields of study

HOW DO HUMAN VALUES INFLUENCE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

Identify the ways that values penetrate the work of social psychologists.

Social psychology is less a collection of findings than a set of strategies for answering questions. In science, as in courts of law, personal opinions are inadmissible. When ideas are put on trial, evidence determines the verdict.

But are social psychologists really that objective? Because they are human beings, don't their *values*—their personal convictions about what is desirable and how people ought to behave—seep into their work? If so, can social psychology really be scientific?

There are two general ways that values enter psychology: the obvious and the subtle.

Obvious Ways Values Enter Psychology

Values enter the picture when social psychologists *choose research topics.* These choices typically reflect social history (Kagan, 2009). It was no accident that the study of prejudice flourished during the 1940s as fascism raged in Europe; that the 1950s, a time of look-alike fashions and intolerance of differing views, gave us studies of conformity; that the 1960s saw interest in aggression increase with riots and rising crime rates; that the feminist movement of the 1970s helped stimulate a wave of research on gender and sexism; that the 1980s offered a resurgence of attention to psychological aspects of the arms race; and that the 1990s and the early twenty-first century were marked by heightened interest in how people respond to diversity in culture, race, and sexual orientation. Susan Fiske (2011a) suggests that we can expect future research to reflect today's and tomorrow's issues, including immigration, income inequality, and aging.

Values differ not only across time but also across cultures. In Europe, people take pride in their nationalities. The Scots are more self-consciously distinct from the English, and the Austrians from the Germans, than are similarly adjacent Michiganders from Ohioans. Consequently, Europe has given us a major theory of "social identity," whereas American social psychologists have focused more on individuals—how one person thinks about others, is influenced by them, and relates to them (Fiske, 2004; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1984). Australian social psychologists have drawn theories and methods from both Europe and North America (Feather, 2005).

Values also influence the types of people who are attracted to various disciplines (Campbell, 1975a; Moynihan, 1979). At your school, do the students majoring in the humanities, the arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences differ noticeably from one another? Do social psychology and sociology attract people who are—for example— relatively eager to challenge tradition, people more inclined to shape the future than preserve the past? And does social science study enhance such inclinations (Dambrun & others, 2009)? Such factors explain why, when psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2011) asked approximately 1000 social psychologists at a national convention about their politics, 80 to 90 percent raised their hands to indicate they were "liberal." When he asked for those who were "conservative,"

three hands raised. (Be assured that most topics covered in this text—from "How do our attitudes influence our behavior?" to "Does TV violence influence aggressive behavior?"—are not partisan.)

Finally, values obviously enter the picture as the *object* of social psychological analysis. Social psychologists investigate how values form, why they change, and how they influence attitudes and actions. None of that, however, tells us which values are "right."

Not-So-Obvious Ways Values Enter Psychology

We less often recognize the subtle ways in which value commitments masquerade as objective truth. What are three not-so-obvious ways values enter psychology?

THE SUBJECTIVE ASPECTS OF SCIENCE

Scientists and philosophers agree: Science is not purely objective. Scientists do not simply read the book of nature. Rather, they interpret nature, using their own mental categories. In our daily lives, too, we view the world through the lens of our preconceptions. Whether we see a moving light in the sky as a flying saucer or see a face in a pie crust depends on our perceptual set. While reading these words, you have been unaware that you are also looking at your nose. Your mind blocks from awareness something that is there, if only you were predisposed to perceive it. This tendency to prejudge reality based on our expectations is a basic fact about the human mind.

Because scholars at work in any given area often share a common viewpoint or come from the same **culture,** their assumptions may go unchallenged. What we take for granted—the shared beliefs that some European social psychologists call our **social representations** (Augoustinos & Innes, 1990; Moscovici, 1988, 2001)—are often our most important yet most unexamined convictions. Sometimes, however, someone from outside the camp will call attention to those assumptions. During the 1980s, feminists and Marxists exposed some of social psychology's unexamined assumptions. Feminist critics called attention to subtle biases—for example, the political conservatism of some scientists who favored a biological interpretation of gender differences in social behavior (Unger, 1985). Marxist critics called attention to competitive, individualist biases—for example, the assumption that conformity is bad and that individual rewards are good. Marxists and feminists, of course, make their own assumptions, as critics of academic "political correctness" are fond of noting. Social psychologist Lee Jussim (2005), for example, argues that progressive social psychologists sometimes feel compelled to deny group differences and to assume that stereotypes of group difference are never rooted in reality but always in racism.

In Chapter 3, we will discuss more ways in which our preconceptions guide our interpretations. As those Princeton and Dartmouth football fans remind us, what guides our behavior is less the situation-as-it-is than the situation-as-we-construe-it.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS CONTAIN HIDDEN VALUES

Implicit in our understanding that psychology is not objective is the realization that psychologists' own values may play an important part in the theories and judgments they support. Psychologists may refer to people as mature or immature, as well adjusted or poorly adjusted, as mentally healthy or mentally ill. They may talk as if they were stating facts, when they are really making *value judgments.* The following are examples:

DEFINING THE GOOD LIFE   Values influence our idea of how best to live. The personality psychologist Abraham Maslow, for example, was known for his sensitive descriptions of "self-actualized" people—people who, with their needs for survival, safety, belonging, and self-esteem satisfied, go on to fulfill their human potential. He described, among other individuals, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Few readers noticed that Maslow, guided by his own values, selected his sample of self-actualized people himself. The resulting description of self-actualized

"SCIENCE DOES NOT SIMPLY DESCRIBE AND EXPLAIN NATURE; IT IS PART OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURE AND OURSELVES; IT DESCRIBES NATURE AS EXPOSED TO OUR METHOD OF QUESTIONING."
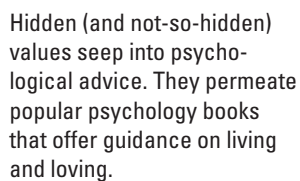
—WERNER HEISENBERG, *PHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY,* 1958

culture
The enduring behaviors, ideas, attitudes, and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next.

social representations
A society's widely held ideas and values, including assumptions and cultural ideologies. Our social representations help us make sense of our world.

Hidden (and not-so-hidden) values seep into psychological advice. They permeate popular psychology books that offer guidance on living and loving.

personalities—as spontaneous, autonomous, mystical, and so forth—reflected Maslow's personal values. Had he begun with someone else's heroes—say, Napoleon, Alexander the Great, and John D. Rockefeller—his resulting description of self-actualization would have differed (Smith, 1978).

PROFESSIONAL ADVICE   Psychological advice also reflects the advice giver's personal values. When mental health professionals advise us how to get along with our spouse or our co-workers, when child-rearing experts tell us how to handle our children, and when some psychologists advocate living free of concern for others' expectations, they are expressing their personal values. (In Western cultures, those values usually will be individualistic—encouraging what feels best for "me." Non-Western cultures more often encourage what is best for "we.") Unaware of those hidden values, many people defer to the "professional." But professional psychologists cannot answer questions of ultimate moral obligation, of purpose and direction, and of life's meaning.

FORMING CONCEPTS   Hidden values even seep into psychology's research-based *concepts.* Pretend you have taken a personality test and the psychologist, after scoring your answers, announces: "You scored high in self-esteem. You are low in anxiety. And you have exceptional ego-strength." "Ah," you think, "I suspected as much, but it feels good to know that." Now another psychologist gives you a similar test, which asks some of the same questions. Afterward, the psychologist informs you that you seem defensive, for you scored high in "repressiveness." "How could this be?" you wonder. "The other psychologist said such nice things about me." It could be because all these labels describe the same set of responses (a tendency to say nice things about oneself and not to acknowledge problems). Shall we call it high self-esteem or defensiveness? The label reflects the judgment.

LABELING   Value judgments, then, are often hidden within our social psychological language—but that is also true of everyday language:

- Whether we label a quiet child as "bashful" on "cautious," as "holding back" or as "an observer," conveys a judgment.
- Whether we label someone engaged in guerrilla warfare a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter" depends on our view of the cause.
- Whether we view wartime civilian deaths as "the loss of innocent lives" or as "collateral damage" affects our acceptance of such.
- Whether we call public assistance "welfare" or "aid to the needy" reflects our politicalv iews.
- When "they" exalt their country and people, it is nationalism; when "we" do it, it is patriotism.
- Whether someone involved in an extramarital affair is practicing "open marriage" or "adultery" depends on one's personal values.
- "Brainwashing" is social influence we do not approve of.
- "Perversions" are sex acts we do not practice.

As these examples indicate, values lie hidden within our cultural definitions of mental health, our psychological advice for living, our concepts, and our psychological labels. Throughout this book, I will call your attention to additional examples of hidden values. The point is never that the implicit values are necessarily bad. The point is that scientific interpretation, even at the level of labeling phenomena, is a human activity. It is therefore inevitable that prior beliefs and values will influence what social psychologists think and write.

Should we dismiss science because it has its subjective side? Quite the contrary: The realization that human thinking always involves interpretation is precisely why we need researchers with varying biases to undertake scientific analysis. By constantly checking our beliefs against the facts, we restrain our biases. Systematic observation and experimentation help us clean the lens through which we see reality.

SUMMING UP: How Do Human Values Influence Social Psychology?

- Social psychologists' values penetrate their work in obvious ways, such as their choice of research topics and the types of people who are attracted to various fields of study.

- They also do this in subtler ways, such as their hidden assumptions when forming concepts, choosing labels, and giving advice.

- This penetration of values into science is not a reason to fault social psychology or any other science. That human thinking is seldom dispassionate is precisely why we need systematic observation and experimentation if we are to check our cherished ideas against reality.

I KNEW IT ALL ALONG: IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY SIMPLY COMMON SENSE?

Explore how social psychology's theories provide new insight into the human condition.

Many of the conclusions presented in this book may already have occurred to you, for social psychological phenomena are all around you. We constantly observe people thinking about, influencing, and relating to one another. It pays to discern what a facial expression predicts, how to get someone to do something, or whether to regard another as friend or foe. For centuries, philosophers, novelists, and poets have observed and commented on social behavior.

Does this mean that social psychology is just common sense in fancy words? Social psychology faces two contradictory criticisms: first, that it is trivial because it documents the obvious; second, that it is dangerous because its findings could be used to manipulate people.

Chapter 7 explores the second criticism. Here, let's examine the first objection.

Do social psychology and the other social sciences simply formalize what any amateur already knows intuitively? Writer Cullen Murphy (1990) took that view: "Day after day social scientists go out into the world. Day after day they discover that people's behavior is pretty much what you'd expect." Nearly a half-century earlier, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1949), reacted with similar scorn to social scientists' studies of American World War II soldiers. Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (1949) reviewed those studies and offered a sample with interpretive comments, a few of which I paraphrase:

1. Better-educated soldiers suffered more adjustment problems than did less-educated soldiers. (Intellectuals were less prepared for battle stresses than were street-smart people.)

2. Southern soldiers coped better with the hot South Sea Island climate than did Northern soldiers. (Southerners are more accustomed to hot weather.)

3. White privates were more eager for promotion than were Black privates.
    (Years of oppression take a toll on achievement motivation.)
4. Southern Blacks preferred Southern to Northern White officers. (Southern
    officers were more experienced and skilled in interacting with Blacks.)

As you read those findings, did you agree that they were basically common sense? If so, you may be surprised to learn that Lazarsfeld went on to say, *"Every one of these statements is the direct opposite of what was actually found."* In reality, the studies found that less-educated soldiers adapted more poorly. Southerners were not more likely than northerners to adjust to a tropical climate. Blacks were more eager than Whites for promotion, and so forth. "If we had mentioned the actual results of the investigation first [as Schlesinger experienced], the reader would have labeled these 'obvious' also."

One problem with common sense is that we invoke it after we know the facts. Events are far more "obvious" and predictable in hindsight than beforehand. Experiments reveal that when people learn the outcome of an experiment, that outcome suddenly seems unsurprising—much less surprising than it is to people who are simply told about the experimental procedure and the possible outcomes (Slovic & Fischhoff, 1977).

Likewise, in everyday life we often do not expect something to happen until it does. *Then* we suddenly see clearly the forces that brought the event about and feel unsurprised. Moreover, we may also misremember our earlier view (Blank & others, 2008; Nestler & others, 2010). Errors in judging the future's foreseeability and in remembering our past combine to create **hindsight bias** (also called the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon*).

Thus, after elections or stock market shifts, most commentators find the turn of events unsurprising: "The market was due for a correction." After the 2010 Gulf oil disaster, it seemed obvious—in hindsight—that BP employees had taken some shortcuts and ignored warnings, and that government oversight was lax. As the Danish philosopher–theologian Søren Kierkegaard put it, "Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards."

If hindsight bias is pervasive, you may now be feeling that you already knew about this phenomenon. Indeed, almost any conceivable result of a psychological experiment can seem like common sense—*after* you know the result.

You can demonstrate the phenomenon yourself. Take a group of people and tell half of them one psychological finding and the other half the opposite result. For example, tell half as follows:

> Social psychologists have found that, whether choosing friends or falling in love, we are most attracted to people whose traits are different from our own. There seems to be wisdom in the old saying "Opposites attract."

Tell the other half:

> Social psychologists have found that, whether choosing friends or falling in love, we are most attracted to people whose traits are similar to our own. There seems to be wisdom in the old saying "Birds of a feather flock together."

> Ask the people first to explain the result. Then ask them to say whether it is "surprising" or "not surprising." Virtually all will find a good explanation for whichever result they were given and will say it is "not surprising."

Indeed, we can draw on our stockpile of proverbs to make almost any result seem to make sense. If a social psychologist reports that separation intensifies romantic attraction, John Q. Public responds, "You get paid for this? Everybody knows that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'" Should it turn out that separation *weakens* attraction, John will say, "My grandmother could have told you, 'Out of sight, out of mind.'"

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.*

Karl Teigen (1986) must have had a few chuckles when he asked University of Leicester (England) students to evaluate actual proverbs and their opposites. When given the proverb "Fear is stronger than love," most rated it as true. But so did students who were given its reversed form, "Love is stronger than fear." Likewise, the genuine proverb "He that is fallen cannot help him who is down" was rated highly; but so too was "He that is fallen can help him who is down." My favorites, however, were two highly rated proverbs: "Wise men make proverbs and fools repeat them" (authentic) and its made-up counterpart, "Fools make proverbs and wise men

focus
ON   I Knew It All Along

Cullen Murphy (1990), managing editor of the *Atlantic,* faulted "sociology, psychology, and other social sciences for too often merely discerning the obvious or confirming the commonplace." His own casual survey of social science findings "turned up no ideas or conclusions that can't be found in *Bartlett's* or any other encyclopedia of quotations." Nevertheless, to sift through competing sayings, we need research. Consider some dueling proverbs:

Is it more true that . . .
- We should keep our eye on the prize.
- Too many cooks spoil the broth.
- The pen is mightier than the sword.
- You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
- Blood is thicker than water.
- He who hesitates is lost.
- Forewarned is forearmed.

Or that . . .
- We should keep our nose to the grindstone.
- Two heads are better than one.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- You're never too old to learn.

- Many kinfolk, few friends.
- Look before you leap.
- Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.

repeat them." For more dueling proverbs, see "Focus On: I Knew It All Along."

The hindsight bias creates a problem for many psychology students. Sometimes results are genuinely surprising (for example, that Olympic *bronze* medalists take more joy in their achievement than do silver medalists). More often, when you read the results of experiments in your textbooks, the material seems easy, even obvious. When you later take a multiple-choice test on which you must choose among several plausible conclusions, the task may become surprisingly difficult. "I don't know what happened," the befuddled student later moans. "I thought I knew the material."

The I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon can have unfortunate consequences. It is conducive to arrogance—an overestimation of our own intellectual powers. Moreover, because outcomes seem as if they should have been foreseeable, we are more likely to blame decision makers for what are in retrospect "obvious" bad choices than to praise them for good choices, which also seem "obvious."

Starting *after* the morning of 9/11 and working backward, signals pointing to the impending disaster seemed obvious. A U.S. Senate investigative report listed the missed or misinterpreted clues (Gladwell, 2003): The CIA knew that al Qaeda operatives had entered the country. An FBI agent sent a memo to headquarters that began by warning "the Bureau and New York of the possibility of a coordinated effort by Osama bin Laden to send students to the United States to attend civilian aviation universities and colleges." The FBI ignored that accurate warning and failed to relate it to other reports that terrorists were planning to use planes as weapons. The president received a daily briefing titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike Inside the United States" and stayed on holiday. "The dumb fools!" it seemed to hindsight critics. "Why couldn't they connect the dots?"

But what seems clear in hindsight is seldom clear on the front side of history. The intelligence community is overwhelmed with "noise"—piles of useless information surrounding the rare shreds of useful information. Analysts must therefore be selective in deciding which to pursue, and only when a lead is pursued does it stand a chance of being connected to another lead. In the 6 years

before 9/11, the FBI's counterterrorism unit could never have pursued all 68,000 uninvestigated leads. In hindsight, the few useful ones are now obvious.

In the aftermath of the 2008 world financial crisis, it seemed obvious that government regulators should have placed safeguards against the ill-fated bank lending practices. But what was obvious in hindsight was unforeseen by the chief American regulator, Alan Greenspan, who found himself "in a state of shocked disbelief" at the economic collapse.

We sometimes blame ourselves for "stupid mistakes"—perhaps for not having handled a person or a situation better. Looking back, we see how we should have handled it. "I should have known how busy I would be at the semester's end and started that paper earlier." But sometimes we are too hard on ourselves. We forget that what is obvious to us *now* was not nearly so obvious at the time.

Physicians who are told both a patient's symptoms and the cause of death (as determined by autopsy) sometimes wonder how an incorrect diagnosis could have been made. Other physicians, given only the symptoms, do not find the diagnosis nearly so obvious (Dawson & others, 1988). Would juries be slower to assume malpractice if they were forced to take a foresight rather than a hindsight perspective?

What do we conclude—that common sense is usually wrong? Sometimes it is. At other times, conventional wisdom is right—or it falls on both sides of an issue: Does happiness come from knowing the truth, or from preserving illusions? From being with others, or from living in peaceful solitude? Opinions are a dime a dozen. No matter what we find, there will be someone who foresaw it. (Mark Twain jested that Adam was the only person who, when saying a good thing, knew that nobody had said it before.) But which of the many competing ideas best fit reality? Research can specify the circumstances under which a commonsense truism is valid.

The point is not that common sense is predictably wrong. Rather, common sense usually is right—*after the fact.* We therefore easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we know and knew more than we do and did. And that is precisely why we need science to help us sift reality from illusion and genuine predictions from easy hindsight.

> **"IT IS EASY TO BE WISE AFTER THE EVENT."**
>
> —SHERLOCK HOLMES, IN ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S STORY "THE PROBLEM OF THOR BRIDGE"

> **"EVERYTHING IMPORTANT HAS BEEN SAID BEFORE."**
>
> —PHILOSOPHER ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD (1861–1947)

SUMMING UP: I Knew It All Along: Is Social Psychology Simply Common Sense?

- Social psychology is criticized for being trivial because it documents things that seem obvious.
- Experiments, however, reveal that outcomes are more "obvious" *after* the facts are known.

- This *hindsight bias* (the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon*) often makes people overconfident about the validity of their judgments and predictions.

RESEARCH METHODS: HOW DO WE DO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

Examine the methods that make social psychology a science.

We have considered some of the intriguing questions social psychology seeks to answer. We have also seen how subjective, often unconscious, processes influence social psychologists' work. Now let's consider how social psychologists go about doing research.

In their quest for insight, social psychologists propose *theories* that organize their observations and imply testable *hypotheses* and practical predictions. To test a hypothesis, social psychologists may do research that predicts behavior using *correlational* studies, often conducted in natural settings. Or they may seek to explain behavior by conducting *experiments* that manipulate one or more factors under controlled conditions. Then they may explore ways to apply their findings to improve people's everyday lives.

We are all amateur social psychologists. People-watching is a universal hobby. As we observe people, we form ideas about how human beings think about, influence, and relate to one another. Professional social psychologists do the same, only more systematically (by forming theories) and painstakingly (often with experiments that create miniature social dramas that pin down cause and effect).

Forming and Testing Hypotheses

We social psychologists have a difficult time thinking of anything more fascinating than human existence. As we wrestle with human nature to pin down its secrets, we organize our ideas and findings into theories. A **theory** is *an integrated set of principles that explain and predict* observed events. Theories are a scientific shorthand.

In everyday conversation, "theory" often means "less than fact"—a middle rung on a confidence ladder from guess to theory to fact. Thus, people may dismiss Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as "just a theory." Indeed, notes Alan Leshner (2005), chief officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, "Evolution *is* only a theory, but so is gravity." People often respond that gravity is a fact—but the *fact* is that your keys fall to the ground when dropped. Gravity is the *theoretical explanation* that accounts for such observed facts.

To a scientist, facts and theories are apples and oranges. Facts are agreed-upon statements about what we observe. Theories are *ideas* that summarize and explain facts. "Science is built up with facts, as a house is with stones," wrote the French scientist Jules Henri Poincaré, "but a collection of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house."

Theories not only summarize but also imply testable predictions, called **hypotheses**. Hypotheses serve several purposes. First, they allow us to *test* a theory by suggesting how we might try to falsify it. Second, predictions give *direction* to research and sometimes send investigators looking for things they might never have thought of. Third, the predictive feature of good theories can also make them *practical.* A complete theory of aggression, for example, would predict when to expect aggression and how to control it. As the pioneering social psychologist Kurt Lewin declared, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

Consider how this works. Say we observe that people who loot, taunt, or attack often do so in groups or crowds. We might therefore theorize that being part of a crowd, or group, makes individuals feel anonymous and lowers their inhibitions. How could we test this theory? Perhaps (I'm playing with this theory) we could devise a laboratory experiment that simulates aspects of execution by electric chair. What if we asked individuals in groups to administer punishing shocks to a hapless victim without

theory
An integrated set of principles that explain and predict observed events.

hypothesis
A testable proposition that describes a relationship that may exist between events.

knowing which member of the group was actually shocking the victim? Would these individuals administer stronger shocks than individuals acting alone, as our theory predicts?

We might also manipulate anonymity: Would people deliver stronger shocks if they were wearing masks? If the results confirm our hypothesis, they might suggest some practical applications. Perhaps police brutality could be reduced by having officers wear large name tags and drive cars identified with large numbers, or by videotaping their arrests—all of which have, in fact, become common practice in many cities.

But how do we conclude that one theory is better than another? A good theory

- effectively *summarizes many observations,* and
- *makes clear predictions* that we can use to
  - confirm or modify the theory,
  - generate new exploration, and
  - suggest practical applications.

When we discard theories, usually it is not because they have been proved false. Rather, like old cars, they are replaced by newer, better models.

Correlational Research: Detecting Natural Associations

Let's now go backstage and see how social psychology is done. This glimpse behind the scenes should be just enough for you to appreciate findings discussed later. Understanding the logic of research can also help us think critically about everyday social events.

Social psychological research varies by location. It can take place as *laboratory research* (a controlled situation) or as **field research** (everyday situations). And it varies by method—whether **correlational** (asking whether two or more factors are naturally associated) or **experimental** (manipulating some factor to see its effect on another). If you want to be a critical reader of psychological research reported in the media, it will pay you to understand the difference between correlational and experimental research.

Let's first consider the advantages of correlational research (often involving important variables in natural settings) and its major disadvantage (ambiguous interpretation of cause and effect). As we will discuss in Chapter 14, today's psychologists relate personal and social factors to human health. In search of possible links between socioeconomic status and health, Douglas Carroll, George Davey Smith, and Paul Bennett (1994) ventured into Glasgow, Scotland's old graveyards. As a measure of health, they noted from grave markers the life spans of 843 individuals. As an indication of status, they measured the height of the grave pillars, reasoning that height reflected cost and therefore affluence. As Figure 1.3 shows, taller grave markers were related to longer lives, for both men and women.

Carroll and colleagues report that other researchers, using contemporary data, have confirmed the status–longevity correlation. Scottish postal-code regions having the least overcrowding and unemployment also have the greatest longevity. In the United States, income correlates with longevity (poor and lower-status people are more at risk for premature death). In today's Britain, occupational status correlates with longevity. One study followed 17,350 British civil service workers over 10 years. Compared with top-grade administrators, those at the professional-executive grade were 1.6 times more likely to have died. Clerical workers were 2.2 times and laborers 2.7 times more likely to have died (Adler & others, 1993, 1994). Across times and places, the status-health correlation seems reliable.

CORRELATION AND CAUSATION

The status–longevity question illustrates the most irresistible thinking error made by both amateur and professional social psychologists: When two factors such as

field research
Research done in natural, real-life settings outside the laboratory.

correlational research
The study of the naturally occurring relationships among variables.

experimental research
Studies that seek clues to cause–effect relationships by manipulating one or more factors (independent variables) while controlling others (holding them constant).
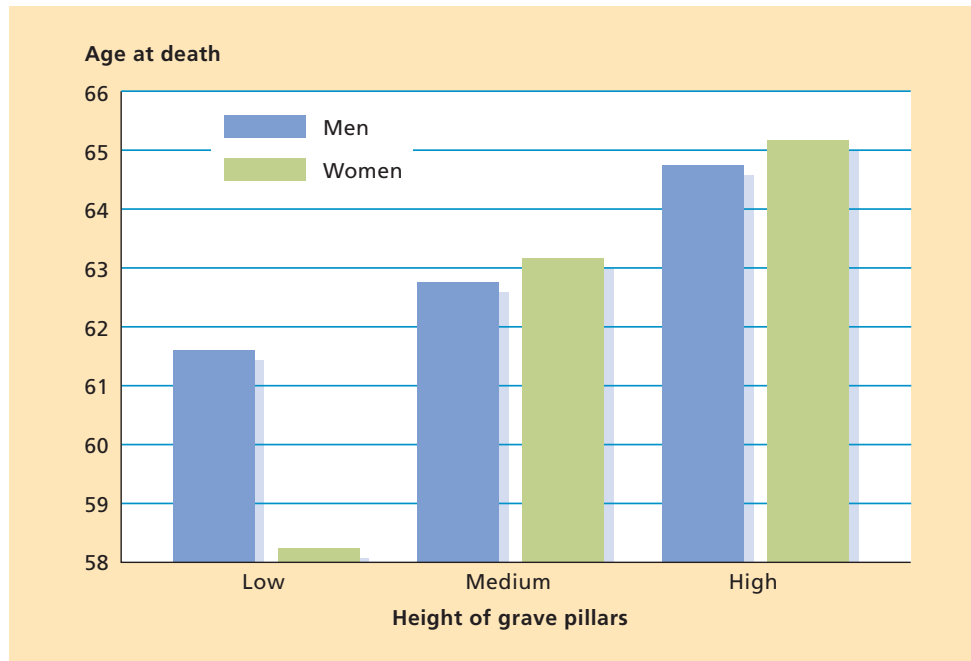
Age at death

Correlating Status and Longevity

Tall grave pillars commemorated people who also tended to live longer.

status and health go together, it is tempting to conclude that one is causing the other. Status, we might presume, somehow protects a person from health risks. But might it be the other way around? Could it be that health promotes vigor and success? Perhaps people who live longer simply have more time to accumulate wealth (enabling them to have more expensive grave markers). Or might a third variable, such as diet, be involved (did wealthy and working-class people tend to eat differently)? Correlations indicate a relationship, but that relationship is not necessarily one of cause and effect. Correlational research allows us to *predict*, but it cannot tell us whether changing one variable (such as social status) will *cause* changes in another (such as health).

The correlation–causation confusion is behind much muddled thinking in popular psychology. Consider another very real correlation—between self-esteem and academic achievement. Children with high self-esteem tend also to have high academic achievement. (As with any correlation, we can also state this the other way around: High achievers tend to have high self-esteem.) Why do you suppose that is true(Figure1.4)?

Some people believe a "healthy self-concept" contributes to achievement. Thus, boosting a child's self-image may also boost school achievement. Believing so, 30 U.S. states have enacted more than 170 self-esteem-promoting statutes.

But other people, including psychologists William Damon (1995), Robyn Dawes (1994), Mark Leary (1999), Martin Seligman (1994, 2002), and Roy Baumeister with John Tierney (2011), doubt that self-esteem is really "the armor that protects kids" from underachievement (or drug abuse and delinquency). Perhaps it is the other way around: Perhaps problems and failures cause low self-esteem. Perhaps self-esteem often reflects the reality of how

Commemorative markers in Glasgow Cathedral graveyard.
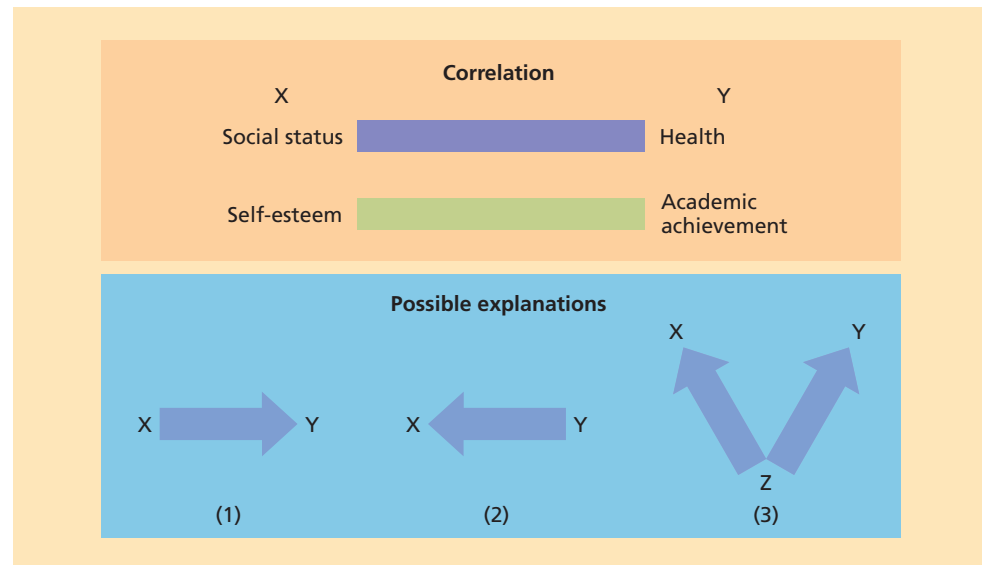
things are going for us. Perhaps self-esteem grows from hard-won achievements. Do well and you will feel good about yourself; goof off and fail and you will feel like a dolt. A study of 635 Norwegian schoolchildren showed that a (legitimately earned) string of gold stars by one's name on the spelling chart and accompanying praise from the admiring teacher can boost a child's self-esteem (Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990). Or perhaps, as in a study of nearly 6,000 German seventh-graders, the traffic between self-esteem and academic achievements runs both ways (Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2006).

It is also possible that self-esteem and achievement correlate because both are linked to underlying intelligence and family social status. That possibility was raised in two studies—one a nationwide sample of 1,600 young American men and the other of 715 Minnesota youngsters (Bachman & O'Malley, 1977; Maruyama & others, 1981). When the researchers mathematically removed the predictive power of intelligence and family status, the relationship between self-esteem and achievement evaporated.

Correlations quantify, with a coefficient known as *r*, the degree of relationship between two factors—from −1.0 (as one factor score goes up, the other goes down) through 0 to +1.0 (the two factors' scores rise and fall together). Scores on self-esteem and depression tests correlate negatively (about −.6). Identical twins' intelligence scores correlate positively (above +.8). The great strength of correlational research is that it tends to occur in real-world settings where we can examine factors such as race, gender, and social status (factors that we cannot manipulate in the laboratory). Its great disadvantage lies in the ambiguity of the results. This point is so important that even if it fails to impress people the first 25 times they hear it, it is worth repeating a twenty-sixth time: *Knowing that two variables change together (correlate) enables us to predict one when we know the other, but correlation does not specify cause and effect.*

Advanced correlational techniques can, however, suggest cause–effect relationships. *Time-lagged* correlations reveal the *sequence* of events (for example, by indicating whether changed achievement more often precedes or follows changed self-esteem). Researchers can also use statistical techniques that extract the influence of "confounded" variables, as when the correlation between self-esteem *and* achievement evaporated after extracting intelligence and family status. Recall our earlier mention of a *third variable,* such as diet. Thus, the Scottish research team wondered whether the status–longevity relationship would survive their removing the effect of cigarette smoking, which is now much less common among those of higher status. It did, which suggested that some other factors, such as

Even exit polls require a random (and therefore representative) sample of voters.

increased stress and decreased feelings of control, may also account for poorer people's earlier mortality.

SURVEY RESEARCH

How do we measure variables such as status and health? One way is by surveying representative samples of people. If survey researchers want to describe a whole population (which for many psychology surveys is not the aim), then they will obtain a *representative* group by taking a **random sample**—*one in which every person in the population being studied has an equal chance of inclusion.* With this procedure any subgroup of people—blondes, joggers, liberals—will tend to be represented in the survey to the extent that they are represented in the total population.

Whether we survey people in a city or in a whole country, 1,200 randomly selected participants will enable us to be 95 percent confident of describing the entire population with an error margin of 3 percentage points or less. Imagine a huge jar filled with beans, 50 percent red and 50 percent white. Randomly sample 1,200 of these, and you will be 95 percent certain to draw out between 47 percent and 53 percent red beans—regardless of whether the jar contains 10,000 beans or 100 million beans. If we think of the red beans as supporters of one presidential candidate and the white beans as supporters of the other candidate, we can understand why, since 1950, the Gallup polls taken just before U.S. national elections have diverged from election results by an average of less than 2 percent. As a few drops of blood can speak for the whole body, so can a random sample speak for a population.

Bear in mind that polls do not literally *predict* voting; they only *describe* public opinion at the moment they are taken. Public opinion can shift. To evaluate surveys, we must also bear in mind four potentially biasing influences: unrepresentative samples, question order, response options, and question wording.

UNREPRESENTATIVE SAMPLES   How closely the sample represents the population under study matters greatly. In 1984, columnist Ann Landers accepted a letter writer's challenge to poll her readers on the question of whether women find affection more important than sex. Her question: "Would you be content to be held close and treated tenderly and forget about 'the act'?" Of the more than 100,000 women who replied, 72 percent said yes. An avalanche of worldwide publicity followed. In response to critics, Landers (1985, p. 45) granted that "the sampling may not be representative of all American women. But it does provide honest—valuable—insights from a cross section of the public. This is because my column is

random sampling
Survey procedure in which every person in the population being studied has an equal chance of inclusion.

SRC's Survey Services Laboratory at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research has interviewing carrels with monitoring stations. Staff and visitors must sign a pledge to honor the strict confidentiality of all interviews.
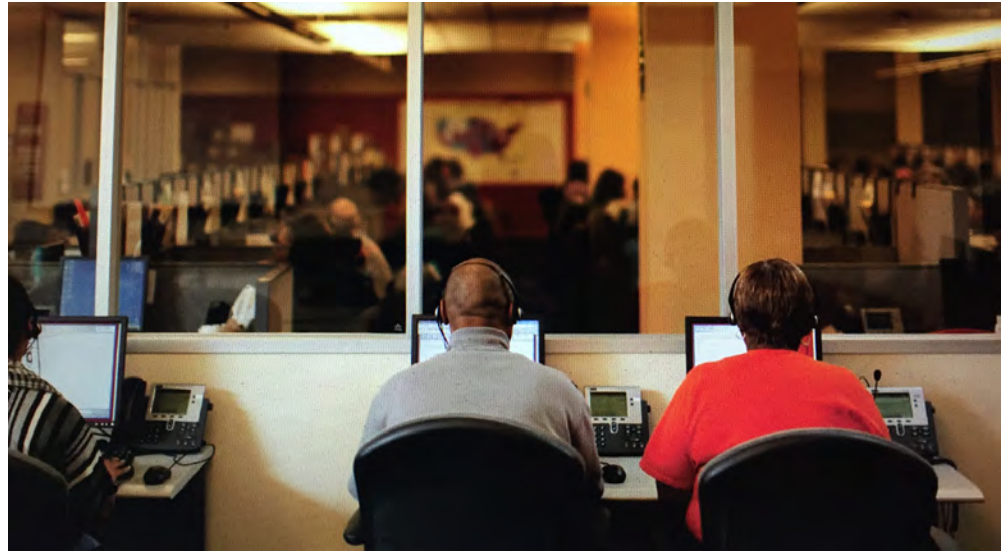
read by people from every walk of life, approximately 70 million of them." Still, one wonders, are the 70 million readers representative of the entire population? And are the 1 in 700 readers who took the trouble to reply to the survey representative of the 699 in 700 who did not?

The importance of representativeness was effectively demonstrated in 1936 when a weekly newsmagazine, *Literary Digest,* mailed a postcard presidential election poll to 10 million Americans. Among the more than 2 million returns, Alf Landon won by a landslide over Franklin D. Roosevelt. When the actual votes were counted a few days later, Landon carried only two states. The magazine had sent the poll only to people whose names it had obtained from telephone books and automobile registrations—thus ignoring the millions of voters who could afford neither a telephone nor a car (Cleghorn, 1980).

ORDER OF QUESTIONS   Given a representative sample, we must also contend with other sources of bias, such as the order of questions in a survey. Americans' support for civil unions of gays and lesbians rises if they are first asked their opinion of gay marriage, compared with which civil unions seem a more acceptable alternative (Moore, 2004a, 2004b).

RESPONSE OPTIONS   Consider, too, the dramatic effects of the response options. When Joop van der Plight and co-workers (1987) asked English voters what percentage of Britain's energy they wished came from nuclear power, the average preference was 41 percent. They asked other voters what percentage they wished came from (1) nuclear, (2) coal, and (3) other sources. The average preference for nuclear power among these respondents was 21 percent.

WORDING OF QUESTIONS   The precise wording of questions may also influence answers. One poll found that only 23 percent of Americans thought their government was spending too much "on assistance to the poor." Yet 53 percent thought the government was spending too much "on welfare" (*Time,* 1994). Likewise, most people favor cutting "foreign aid" and *increasing* spending "to help hungry people in other nations" (Simon, 1996).

Survey questioning is a very delicate matter. Even subtle changes in the tone of a question can have marked effects (Krosnick & Schuman, 1988; Schuman & Kalton, 1985). "Forbidding" something may be the same as "not allowing" it. But in 1940, 54 percent of Americans said the United States should "forbid" speeches against democracy, and 75 percent said the United States should "not allow" them. Even when people say they feel strongly about an issue, a question's form and wording may affect their answer.

Order, response, and wording effects enable political manipulators to use surveys to show public support for their views. Consultants, advertisers, and physicians can have similar disconcerting influences upon our decisions by how they **frame** our choices. No wonder the meat lobby in 1994 objected to a new U.S. food labeling law that required declaring ground beef, for example, as "30 percent fat," rather than "70 percent lean, 30 percent fat." To 9 in 10 college students, a condom seems effective if its protection against the AIDS virus has a "95 percent success rate." Told that it has a "5 percent failure rate," only 4 in 10 students say they find it effective (Linville & others, 1992).

Framing research also has applications in the definition of everyday default options:

- *Opting in or out of organ donation.* In many countries, people decide, when renewing their drivers' license, whether they want to make their body available for organ donation. In countries where the default option is *yes* but one can "opt out," nearly 100 percent of people choose to be donors. In the United States, Britain, and Germany, where the default option is *no* but one can "opt in," approximately 1 in 4 choose to be donors (Johnson & Goldstein, 2003).

- *Opting in or out of retirement savings.* For many years, American employees who wanted to defer part of their compensation to a 401(k) retirement plan had to elect to lower their take-home pay. Most chose not to do so. A 2006 pension law, influenced by framing research, reframed the choice. Now companies are given an incentive to enroll their employees automatically in the plan and to allow them to opt out (and to raise their take-home pay). The choice was preserved. But one study found that with the "opt out" framing, enrollments soared from 49 to 86 percent (Madrian & Shea, 2001).

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

The lesson of framing research is told in the story of a sultan who dreamed he had lost all his teeth. Summoned to interpret the dream, the first interpreter said, "Alas! The lost teeth mean you will see your family members die." Enraged, the sultan ordered 50 lashes for this bearer of bad news. When a second dream interpreter heard the dream, he explained the sultan's good fortune: "You will outlive your whole clan!" Reassured, the sultan ordered his treasurer to go and fetch 50 pieces of gold for this bearer of good news. On the way, the bewildered treasurer observed to the second interpreter, "Your interpretation was no different from that of the first interpreter." "Ah yes," the wise interpreter replied, "but remember: What matters is not only what you say, but how you say it."

A young monk was once rebuffed when asking if he could smoke while he prayed. Ask a different question, advised a friend: Ask if you can pray while you smoke (Crossen, 1993).

Experimental Research: Searching for Cause and Effect

The difficulty of discerning cause and effect among naturally correlated events prompts most social psychologists to create laboratory simulations of everyday processes whenever this is feasible and ethical. These simulations are akin to aeronautical wind tunnels. Aeronautical engineers do not begin by observing how flying objects perform in various natural environments. The variations in both atmospheric conditions and flying objects are too complex. Instead, they construct a simulated reality in which they can manipulate wind conditions and wing structures.

CONTROL: MANIPULATING VARIABLES

independent variable
The experimental factor that a researcher manipulates.

Like aeronautical engineers, social psychologists experiment by constructing social situations that simulate important features of our daily lives. By varying just one or two factors at a time—called **independent variables**—the experimenter pinpoints their influence. As the wind tunnel helps the aeronautical engineer discover principles of aerodynamics, so the experiment enables the social psychologist to discover principles of social thinking, social influence, and social relations.

To illustrate the laboratory experiment, consider two experiments that typify research from upcoming chapters on prejudice and aggression. Each experiment suggests possible cause–effect explanations of correlational findings.

CORRELATIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES OF PREJUDICE AGAINST THE OBESE   People often perceive the obese as slow, lazy, and sloppy (Roehling & others, 2007; Ryckman & others, 1989). Do such attitudes spawn discrimination? In hopes of finding out, Steven Gortmaker and colleagues (1993) studied 370 obese 16- to 24-year-old women. When they restudied them 7 years later, two-thirds of the women were still obese and were less likely to be married and earning high salaries than a comparison group of approximately 5,000 other women. Even after correcting for any differences in aptitude test scores, race, and parental income, the obese women's incomes were $7,000 a year below average.

Note: Obesity correlated with marital status and income.

Correcting for certain other factors makes it look as though discrimination might explain the correlation between obesity and lower status. But we cannot be sure. (Can you think of other possibilities?) Enter social psychologists Mark Snyder and Julie Haugen (1994, 1995). They asked 76 University of Minnesota male students to have a get-acquainted phone conversation with 1 of 76 female students. Unknown to the women, each man was shown a photo *said* to picture his conversational partner. Half were shown an obese woman (not the actual partner); the other half were shown a normal-weight woman. Later analysis of just the women's side of the conversation revealed that *they spoke less warmly and happily if they were presumed obese.* Clearly, something in the men's tone of voice and conversational content induced the supposedly obese women to speak in a way that confirmed the idea that obese women are undesirable. The men's prejudice and discrimination were having an effect. Recalling the effect of the stepmother's behavior, perhaps we should call this the "Cinderella effect."

Whom the men were shown—a normal or an overweight woman—was the independent variable.

CORRELATIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES OF TV VIOLENCE VIEWING   As a second example of how experiments clarify causation, consider the correlation between television viewing and children's behavior. *The more violent television children watch, the more aggressive they tend to be.* Are children learning and reenacting what they see on the screen? As I hope you now recognize, this is a correlational finding. Figure 1.4 reminds us that there are two other cause–effect interpretations. (What are they?)

Social psychologists have therefore brought television viewing into the laboratory, where they control the amount of violence the children see. By exposing children to violent and nonviolent programs, researchers can observe how the

amount of violence affects behavior. Chris Boyatzis and colleagues (1995) showed some elementary schoolchildren, but not others, an episode of the most popular—and violent—children's television program of the 1990s, *Power Rangers.* Immediately after viewing the episode, the viewers committed seven times as many aggressive acts per 2-minute interval as the nonviewers. The observed aggressive acts we call the **dependent variable.** Such experiments indicate that television can be one cause of children's aggressive behavior.

So far we have seen that the logic of experimentation is simple: By creating and controlling a miniature reality, we can vary one factor and then another and discover how those factors, separately or in combination, affect people. Now let's go a little deeper and see how an experiment is done.

Every social psychological experiment has two essential ingredients. We have just considered one—*control.* We manipulate one or more independent variables while trying to hold everything else constant. The other ingredient is *random assignment.*

Does viewing violence on TV or in other media lead to imitation, especially among children? Experiments suggest that it does.

dependent variable
The variable being measured, so called because it may depend on manipulations of the independent variable.

RANDOM ASSIGNMENT: THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Recall that we were reluctant, on the basis of a correlation, to assume that obesity *caused* lower status (via discrimination) or that violence viewing *caused* aggressiveness (see Table 1.1 for more examples). A survey researcher might measure and statistically extract other possibly pertinent factors and see if the correlations survive. But one can never control for all the factors that might distinguish obese from non-obese, and viewers of violence from nonviewers. Maybe viewers of violence differ in education, culture, intelligence—or in dozens of ways the researcher has not considered.

TABLE :: 1.1   Recognizing Correlational and Experimental Research

	Can Participants Be Randomly Assigned to Condition?	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Are early-maturing children more confident?	No → Correlational		
Do students learn more in online or classroom courses?	Yes → Experimental	Take class online or in classroom	Learning
Do school grades predict vocational success?	No → Correlational		
Does playing violent video games increase aggressiveness?	Yes → Experimental	Play violent or nonviolent game	Aggressiveness
Do people find comedy funnier when alone or with others?	(you answer)		
Do higher-income people have higher self-esteem?	(you answer)		

FIGURE :: 1.5
Random Assignment

Experiments randomly assign people either to a condition that receives the experimental treatment or to a control condition that does not. This gives the researcher confidence that any later difference is somehow caused by the treatment.
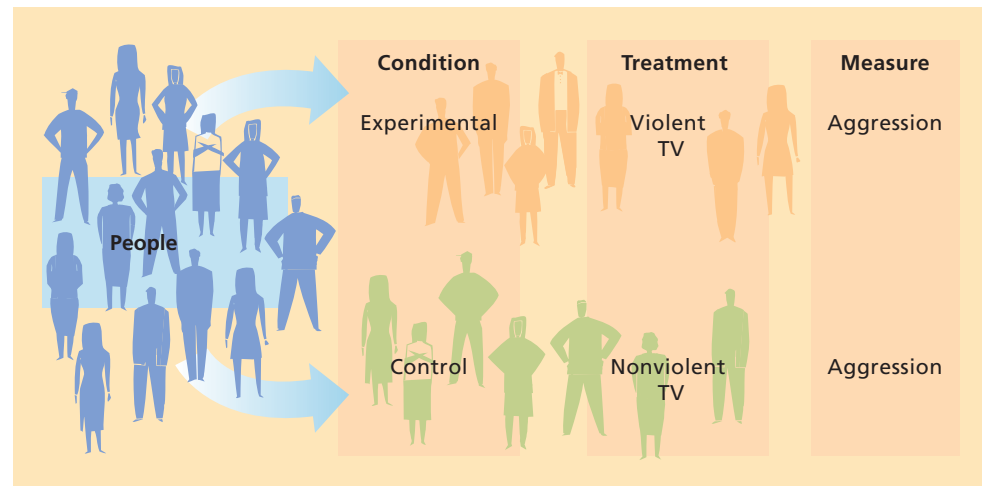
random assignment

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* in surveys. Random assignment helps us infer cause and effect. Random sampling helps us generalize to a population.)

mundane realism

Degree to which an experiment is superficially similar to everyday situations.

experimental realism

Degree to which an experiment absorbs and involves its participants.

deception

In research, an effect by which participants are misinformed or misled about the study's methods and purposes.

In one fell swoop, **random assignment** eliminates all such extraneous factors. With random assignment, each person has an equal chance of viewing the violence or the nonviolence. Thus, the people in both groups would, in every conceivable way—family status, intelligence, education, initial aggressiveness, hair color—average about the same. Highly intelligent people, for example, are equally likely to appear in both groups. Because random assignment creates equivalent groups, any later aggression difference between the two groups will almost surely have something to do with the only way they differ—whether or not they viewed violence (Figure 1.5).

THE ETHICS OF EXPERIMENTATION

Our television example illustrates why some conceivable experiments raise ethical issues. Social psychologists would not, over long periods, expose one group of children to brutal violence. Rather, they briefly alter people's social experience and note the effects. Sometimes the experimental treatment is a harmless, perhaps even enjoyable, experience to which people give their knowing consent. Occasionally, however, researchers find themselves operating in a gray area between the harmless and the risky.

Social psychologists often venture into that ethical gray area when they design experiments that engage intense thoughts and emotions. Experiments need not have what Elliot Aronson, Marilynn Brewer, and Merrill Carlsmith (1985) called **mundane realism.** That is, laboratory behavior need not be like everyday behavior, which is typically mundane, or unimportant. But the experiment *should* have **experimental realism**—it should engage the participants. Experimenters do not want their people consciously play-acting or ho-humming it; they want to engage real psychological processes. An example of such engagement would be delivering electric shocks as part of an experiment on aggression. Forcing people to choose whether to give intense or mild electric shock to someone else can be a realistic measure of aggression. It functionally simulates real aggression.

Achieving experimental realism sometimes requires deceiving people with a plausible cover story. If the person in the next room actually is not receiving the shocks, the experimenter does not want the participants to know that. That would destroy the experimental realism. Thus, approximately one-third of social psychological studies (though a decreasing number) have used **deception** (Korn & Nicks, 1993; Vitelli, 1988).

Experimenters also seek to hide their predictions lest the participants, in their eagerness to be "good subjects," merely do what is expected or, in an ornery mood, do the opposite. Small wonder, says Ukrainian professor Anatoly Koladny, that only 15 percent of Ukrainian survey respondents declared themselves "religious" while under Soviet communism in 1990 when religion was oppressed by the

government—and that 70 percent declared themselves "religious" in post-communist 1997 (Nielsen, 1998). In subtle ways, too, the experimenter's words, tone of voice, and gestures may call forth desired responses. Even search dogs trained to detect explosives and drugs are more likely to bark false alerts in places where their handlers have been misled into thinking such illegal items are located (Lit & others, 2011). To minimize such **demand characteristics**—cues that seem to "demand" certain behavior—experimenters typically standardize their instructions or even use a computer to present them.

Researchers often walk a tightrope in designing experiments that will be involving yet ethical. To believe that you are hurting someone, or to be subjected to strong social pressure, may be temporarily uncomfortable. Such experiments raise the age-old question of whether ends justify means. The social psychologists' deceptions are usually brief and mild compared with many misrepresentations in real life and in some of television's reality shows. (One network reality TV series deceived women into competing for the hand of a handsome supposed millionaire, who turned out to be an ordinary laborer.)

University ethics committees review social psychological research to ensure that it will treat people humanely and that the scientific merit justifies any temporary deception or distress. Ethical principles developed by the American Psychological Association (2010), the Canadian Psychological Association (2000), and the British Psychological Society (2009) mandate investigators to do the following:

- Tell potential participants enough about the experiment to enable their **informed consent.**
- Be truthful. Use deception only if essential and justified by a significant purpose and not "about aspects that would affect their willingness to participate."
- Protect participants (and bystanders, if any) from harm and significant discomfort.
- Treat information about the individual participants confidentially.
- **Debrief** participants. Fully explain the experiment afterward, including any deception. The only exception to this rule is when the feedback would be distressing, such as by making participants realize they have been stupid or cruel.

The experimenter should be sufficiently informative *and* considerate that people leave feeling at least as good about themselves as when they came in. Better yet, the participants should be compensated by having learned something (Sharpe & Faye, 2009). When treated respectfully, few participants mind being deceived (Epley & Huff, 1998; Kimmel, 1998). Indeed, say social psychology's advocates, professors provoke far greater anxiety and distress by giving and returning course exams than researchers provoke in their experiments.

Generalizing from Laboratory to Life

As the research on children, television, and violence illustrates, social psychology mixes everyday experience and laboratory analysis. Throughout this book, we do the same by drawing our data mostly from the laboratory and our illustrations mostly from life. Social psychology displays a healthy interplay between laboratory research and everyday life. Hunches gained from everyday experience often inspire laboratory research, which deepens our understanding of our experience.

This interplay appears in the children's television experiment. What people saw in everyday life suggested correlational research, which led to experimental research. Network and government policymakers, those with the power to make changes, are now aware of the results. The consistency of findings on television's effects—in the lab and in the field—is true of research in many other areas, including studies of helping, leadership style, depression, and self-efficacy. The effects

demand characteristics
Cues in an experiment that tell the participant what behavior is expected.

informed consent
An ethical principle requiring that research participants be told enough to enable them to choose whether they wish to participate.

debriefing
In social psychology, the postexperimental explanation of a study to its participants. Debriefing usually discloses any deception and often queries participants regarding their understandings and feelings.

one finds in the lab have been mirrored by effects in the field. "The psychology laboratory has generally produced psychological truths rather than trivialities," note Craig Anderson and colleagues (1999).

We need to be cautious, however, in generalizing from laboratory to life. Although the laboratory uncovers basic dynamics of human existence, it is still a simplified, controlled reality. It tells us what effect to expect of variable *X*, all other things being equal—which in real life they never are. Moreover, as you will see, the participants in many experiments are college students. Although that may help you identify with them, college students are hardly a random sample of all humanity (Henry, 2008a, 2008b). And most participants are from WEIRD (*W*estern, *E*ducated, *I*ndustrialized, *R*ich, and *D*emocratic) cultures that represent but 12 percent of humanity (Henrich & others, 2010). Would we get similar results with people of different ages, educational levels, and cultures? That is always an open question.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish between the *content* of people's thinking and acting (for example, their attitudes) and the *process* by which they think and act (for example, *how* attitudes affect actions and vice versa). The content varies more from culture to culture than does the process. People from various cultures may hold different opinions yet form them in similar ways. Consider the following:

- College students in Puerto Rico have reported greater loneliness than do collegians on the U.S. mainland. Yet in the two cultures the ingredients of loneliness have been much the same—shyness, uncertain purpose in life, and low self-esteem (Jones & others, 1985).
- Ethnic groups differ in school achievement and delinquency, but the differences are "no more than skin deep," report David Rowe and colleagues (1994). To the extent that family structure, peer influences, and parental education predict achievement or delinquency for one ethnic group, they do so for other groups.

Although our behaviors may differ, we are influenced by the same social forces. Beneath our surface diversity, we are more alike than different.

SUMMING UP: Research Methods: How Do We Do Social Psychology?

- Social psychologists organize their ideas and findings into *theories*. A good theory will distill an array of facts into a much shorter list of predictive principles. We can use those predictions to confirm or modify the theory, to generate new research, and to suggest practical application.

- Most social–psychological research is either *correlational* or *experimental*. Correlational studies, sometimes conducted with systematic survey methods, discern the relationship between variables, such as between amount of education and amount of income. Knowing two things are naturally related is valuable information, but it is not a reliable indicator of what is causing what—or whether a third variable is involved.

- When possible, social psychologists prefer to conduct experiments that explore cause and effect. By constructing a miniature reality that is under their control, experimenters can vary one thing and then another and discover how those things, separately or in combination, affect behavior. We *randomly assign* participants to an experimental condition, which receives the experimental treatment, or to a control condition, which does not. We can then attribute any resulting difference between the two conditions to the *independent variable* (Figure1.6).

- In creating experiments, social psychologists sometimes stage situations that engage people's emotions. In doing so, they are obliged to follow professional ethical guidelines, such as obtaining people's *informed consent*, protecting them from harm, and fully disclosing afterward any temporary deceptions. Laboratory experiments enable social psychologists to test ideas gleaned from life experience and then to apply the principles and findings to the real world.
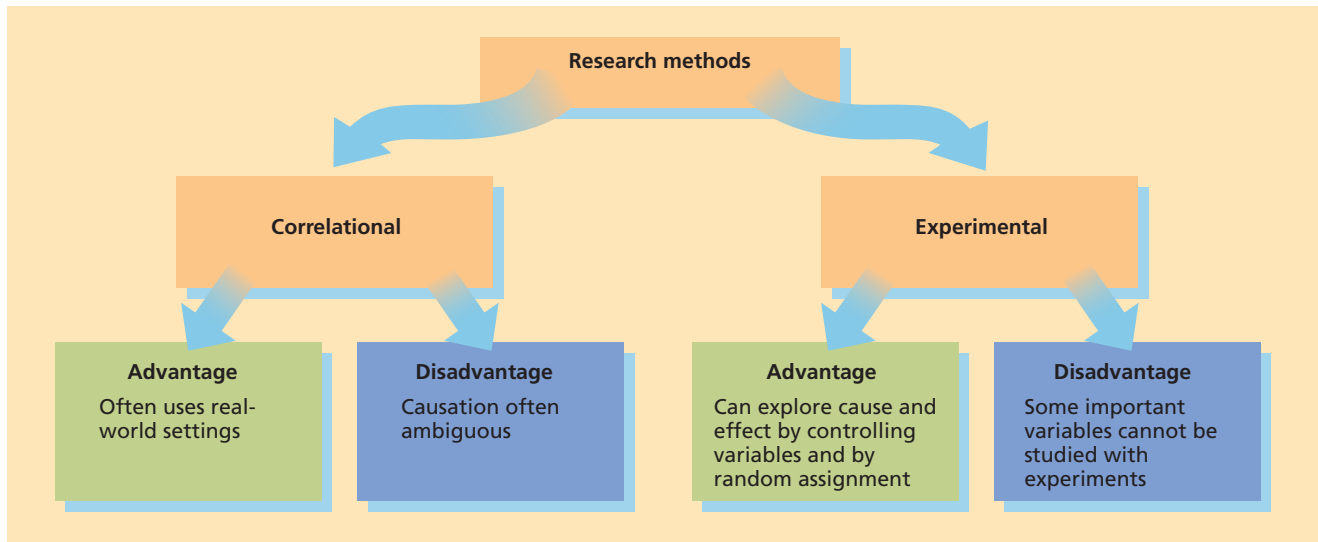
FIGURE **::** 1.6
Two Methods of Doing Research: Correlational and Experimental

POSTSCRIPT:
Why I Wrote This Book

I write this text to offer social psychology's powerful, hard-wrought principles. They have, I believe, the power to expand your mind and enrich your life. If you finish this book with sharpened critical thinking skills and with a deeper understanding of how we view and affect one another—and why we sometimes like, love, and help one another and sometimes dislike, hate, and harm one another—then I will be a satisfied author and you, I trust, will be a rewarded reader.

I write knowing that many readers are in the process of defining their life goals, identities, values, and attitudes. The novelist Chaim Potok recalls being urged by his mother to forgo writing: "Be a brain surgeon. You'll keep a lot of people from dying; you'll make a lot more money." Potok's response: "Mama, I don't want to keep people from dying; I want to show them how to live" (quoted by Peterson, 1992, p. 47).

Many of us who teach and write psychology are driven not only by a love for giving psychology away but also by wanting to help students live better lives—wiser, more fulfilling, more compassionate lives. In this we are like teachers and writers in other fields. "Why do we write?" asks theologian Robert McAfee Brown. "I submit that beyond all rewards . . .*we write because we want to change things. We write because we have this [conviction that we] can make a difference. The 'difference' may be a new perception of beauty, a new insight into self-understanding, a new experience of joy, or a decision to join the revolution*" (quoted by Marty, 1988). Indeed, I write hoping to do my part to restrain intuition with critical thinking, refine judgmentalism with compassion, and replace illusion with understanding.

I conclude each chapter with a brief reflection on social psychology's human significance.