

Introduction to Social Psychology

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Key concepts, theories, and research methods

1. What Is Social Psychology?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The scientific study of how people think, feel, and behave in the presence of (real or imagined) others.
Focus	Interaction between the individual and the social environment: attitudes, group processes, social influence, inter?group relations, self?concept, etc.
Goal	Explain and predict social behavior; apply findings to improve interpersonal and societal outcomes.
Scope	Micro?level (person?to?person) and macro?level (societal, cultural) phenomena.

2. Core Themes & Topics

Theme	Representative Topics	Typical Questions
Social Cognition	Schemas, heuristics, attribution, impression formation, self?serving bias.	How do we interpret others' actions?
Attitudes & Persuasion	Cognitive dissonance, elaboration likelihood model, foot?in?the?door, fear appeals.	When will a message change a belief?
Social Influence	Conformity, obedience, compliance, minority influence, social norms.	Why do people follow the crowd?
Group Dynamics	Social facilitation, groupthink, deindividuation, leadership, cohesion, intergroup conflict.	What makes groups perform better or worse?
Self & Identity	Self?esteem, self?concept, social identity theory, self?presentation, possible selves.	How do we define ourselves socially?
Interpersonal Relationships	Attraction, love, attachment, aggression, prosocial behavior, conflict resolution.	What predicts helping versus hurting?
Culture & Social Psychology	Individualism vs. collectivism, cultural norms, acculturation, cross?cultural comparisons.	How does culture shape cognition and behavior?

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3. Foundational Theories

Theory	Proposer(s)	Core Idea	Example
Attribution Theory	Fritz Heider, Harold Kelley	People infer causes of behavior (internal vs. external).	"She is late because she's lazy" (internal) vs. "Because traffic was bad" (external).
Cognitive Dissonance	Leon Festinger	Inconsistency between beliefs & actions creates discomfort ? attitude change or rationalization.	A smoker who knows smoking is harmful may downplay risks.
Social Identity Theory	Henri Tajfel & John Turner	Part of self?concept derives from group memberships; leads to in?group favoritism & out?group bias.	Sports fans cheering their team and disparaging rivals.
Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)	Petty & Cacioppo	Persuasion occurs via central (thoughtful) or peripheral (heuristic) routes depending on motivation & ability.	High?involvement product ads use detailed arguments; low? involvement ads rely on celebrity endorsement.
Social Learning Theory	Albert Bandura	Behavior learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement.	Children mimic aggressive behavior seen on TV.
Theory of Planned Behavior	Icek Ajzen	Intentions predict behavior; shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control.	Intention to recycle predicts actual recycling when facilities are accessible.

4. Research Methods

Method Strengths Limitations Typical Use

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