CHAPTER 1

Introduction

OUTLINE

I. What is Social Psychology?
   A. Defining Social Psychology
   B. Social Psychological Questions and Applications
   C. The Power of the Social Context: An Example of a Social Psychology Experiment
   D. Social Psychology and Related Fields: Distinctions and Intersections
   E. Social Psychology and Common Sense

II. From Past to Present: A Brief History of Social Psychology
   A. The Birth and Infancy of Social Psychology: 1880s-1920s
   B. A Call to Action: 1930s-1950s
   C. Confidence and Crisis: 1960s-Mid-1970s
   D. An Era of Pluralism: Mid-1970s-1990s

III. Social Psychology in a New Century
   A. Integration of Emotion, Motivation and Cognition
   B. Biological and Evolutionary Perspectives
   C. Cultural Perspective
   D. New Technologies

IV. Review

V. Key Terms

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: GUIDELINES FOR STUDY

You should be able to do each of the following by the conclusion of Chapter 1.

1. Define social psychology. Identify the kinds of questions that social psychologists try to answer.  
   (pp. 5-8)

2. Explain how social psychology differs from sociology and other fields of psychology. Assess the 
   limitations of the following statement: all social psychological findings are simply common sense.  
   (pp. 8-11)

3. Describe the early origins of social psychology and the state of the field up until 1950. Identify 
   when the field of social psychology became a distinct field of study, the various founders of the 
   field, and the historical event that inspired interest in and shaped the field of social psychology. 
   Explain the contributions made by Allport, Sherif, and Lewin. (pp. 11-13)

4. Describe the state of social psychology from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, and from the mid-70s to 
   the 1990s. Explain the various ways in which contemporary social psychology can be referred to 
   as “pluralistic.” (pp. 13-15)
5. Distinguish between different perspectives social psychologists use to understand human behavior. Define social cognition. Summarize the increasing effort in social psychology to develop an international and multicultural perspective. (pp. 15-18)

6. Explain how social psychology incorporates biological, evolutionary, and sociocultural perspectives of human behavior. Describe the role of new technologies such as PET and fMRI in the investigation of social behavior. (pp. 16-19)

MAJOR CONCEPTS: THE BIG PICTURE

Below are three basic issues or principles that organize Chapter 1. You should know these issues and principles well.

1. Social psychology is the scientific study of the way individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context. Social psychology often emphasizes the power of the situation in affecting people. Social psychology can be distinguished from other disciplines, including sociology, clinical psychology, personality psychology, and cognitive psychology; however, social psychology overlaps with each of these disciplines as well. Social psychology may at first appear to be common sense, but common sense often makes contradictory claims, and many of the findings in social psychology would not be predicted by common sense.

2. Social psychology has a relatively brief history. Early social psychology began in the late 1800s with research by Triplett on how the presence of others affects performance, and the field took root as several textbooks were written on social psychology in the early 1900s. From the 1930s to 1950s the field grew quickly as it tried to understand the horrors of World War II and Nazi Germany. Kurt Lewin was a particularly important figure who fled Nazi Germany for the United States during this period. The 1960s and early 1970s saw a rise in confidence and expansion of the field, but was also a time of questioning and debate. The late 1970s to the 1990s saw the birth of a new subfield, social cognition, and greater international and cultural perspectives in social psychology.

3. In the 21st century it appears that there will be several important new emphases in social psychology. The integration of emotion, motivation, and cognition, biological and evolutionary perspectives, sociocultural perspectives, and new technologies are all likely to shape the field in the near future.

KEY TERM EXERCISE: THE CONCEPTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Below are all of the key terms that appear in boldface in Chapter 1. To help you better understand these concepts, rather than just memorize them, write a definition for each term in your own words. After doing so, look at the next section where you’ll find a list of definitions from the textbook for each of the key terms presented in random order. For each of your definitions, find the corresponding textbook definition. Note how your definitions compare with those from the textbook.

Key Terms
1. social psychology
2. cross-cultural research
3. interactionist perspective
4. behavioral genetics
5. evolutionary psychology
6. social cognition
7. multicultural research
8. social neuroscience

Textbook Definitions
a. The study of how people perceive, remember, and interpret information about themselves and others.
b. A subfield of psychology that uses the principles of evolution to understand human social behavior.
c. The scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context.
d. Research designed to compare and contrast people of different cultures.
e. A subfield of psychology that examines the role of genetic factors on behavior.
f. Research designed to examine racial and ethnic groups within cultures.
g. An emphasis on how both an individual’s personality and environmental characteristics influence behavior.
h. The study of the relationship between neural and social processes.

ANSWERS FOR KEY TERM EXERCISE
Answers for the key terms exercise are listed below.

1. c  
2. d  
3. g  
4. e  
5. b  
6. a  
7. f  
8. h
PRACTICE QUIZ: TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHAPTER

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Kattie and Ernest both study human behavior. Kattie is a social psychologist, and Ernest is a journalist. Based on the definition of social psychology, one can assume that an important difference between Kattie and Ernest is likely to be that
   a. Kattie uses statistics, whereas Ernest does not.
   b. Kattie uses the scientific method to study people, whereas Ernest does not.
   c. Kattie studies various groups of people, whereas Ernest studies various individuals.
   d. Kattie is interested in how people behave toward each other, whereas Ernest is interested in people’s attitudes toward each other.

2. Jeannette is a psychologist who specializes in neuroscience. Jeannette studies the effects that drinking alcohol has on the brain. Carmen is a social psychologist, and also is interested in the effects of alcohol. Compared to Jeannette, Carmen is more likely to
   a. apply the principles of the scientific method in her research on alcohol.
   b. examine the effects of alcohol from an applied research perspective.
   c. conduct experiments on the effects of alcohol.
   d. focus on the effects of alcohol on social behavior.

3. A major difference between social psychologists and sociologists is that social psychologists tend to focus on ________ while sociologists tend to focus on _______.
   a. prejudice; culture
   b. aggression; violence
   c. the individual level; the group level
   d. social cognition; political attitudes

4. Social psychology started to become established as a distinct field of study
   a. in the late seventeenth century.
   b. in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.
   c. in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.
   d. in the mid-1950s.

5. Which of the following is least consistent with the ideas of Kurt Lewin?
   a. Behavior is a function of the person and the environment.
   b. Social psychologists should concentrate on basic research rather than on applied research, which represents the “selling out” of social psychology.
   c. Social psychologists should integrate research from personality psychology into their own theories and research.
   d. The behavior of different people may vary even if they are placed in the exact same social situation.

6. Personality psychologists are generally more interested than social psychologists in
   a. how people think, feel, and behave.
   b. understanding the underlying causes of behavior.
   c. the scientific approach to psychology.
   d. differences between individuals that are stable across situations.
7. Constantine and Chad are interested in social cognition. Therefore, they should be most inclined to conduct a study in which
   a. personality factors are combined with social factors.
   b. people’s interpretations of information about other people are examined.
   c. the level of analysis is the social group, rather than the individual.
   d. an applied, rather than a basic, approach is taken.

8. The German immigrant who made a major contribution to the development of social psychology by helping to establish principles like “behavior is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment” was
   a. Allport.
   b. Dollard.
   c. Bandura.
   d. Lewin.

9. In the 1960s and early 1970s, social psychology experienced a period of
   a. expansion and debate.
   b. introspection and stagnation.
   c. pluralism and development.
   d. foundation and reform.

10. Asch, Festinger, and Heider were three influential theorists of the 1950s that developed basic theories about
    a. attraction and aggression.
    b. attitudes and person perception.
    c. the self and health.
    d. helping and business.

11. Leroy is a social psychologist and Barney is a clinical psychologist. If they both study aggression, Leroy is more likely than Barney to
    a. examine the situational determinants of aggression in an experiment.
    b. develop therapeutic techniques to control people’s aggression.
    c. develop theories about what leads people to be aggressive.
    d. develop a questionnaire to measure which people are most likely to be aggressive.

12. Many of the strong disagreements that occurred during the period of “Confidence and Crisis” were a reaction to the predominant use of
    a. archival methods.
    b. unobtrusive measures.
    c. the interactionist perspective.
    d. laboratory experiments.

13. Of the following individuals, the one who is credited as being one of the founders of social psychology is
    a. Norman Triplett.
    b. Kenneth Gergen.
    c. David Sears.
    d. Harry Triandis.

14. Martha is a cognitive psychologist and Valerie is a social psychologist. Martha is less likely than Valerie to be interested in
    a. reasoning about risky decisions.
    b. how quickly people can learn new tasks.
    c. the thinking required to solve a problem.
    d. how social interactions affect memory for people.
15. Which one of the following is not a characteristic of social psychology?
   a. A broad perspective
   b. A focus on the individual
   c. The frequent use of experiment methodology
   d. A focus on observation of behaviors

16. Unlike common sense, social psychological theories are
   a. always accurate.
   b. put to the test.
   c. based on educated guesses.
   d. always hard to anticipate.

17. Each of the following is true about the current period of pluralism in social psychology except that
   a. laboratory experiments have been discontinued and replaced by unobtrusive studies that take advantage of archival or correlational techniques.
   b. there are important variations in the aspects of human behavior being emphasized.
   c. the “socialness” of social psychology has increased owing to the influence of European social psychologists.
   d. cross-cultural research is being conducted more extensively than in previous periods.

18. In the 21st century, all of the following are likely to be emphasized in social psychology except
   a. biological and evolutionary perspectives.
   b. new technologies.
   c. the separation of emotion, motivation, and cognition.
   d. sociocultural perspectives.

19. Who was credited with the creation of social psychology as a distinct field of study?
   a. McDougall
   b. Ross
   c. Allport
   d. All of the above are correct

20. The 1950s saw a major contribution to the field of social psychology by which of the following individuals?
   a. Gordon Allport for publishing *The Nature of Prejudice*
   b. Solomon Asch for studies in conformity
   c. Leon Festinger for two theories on how people learn about themselves and about how attitudes can be changed
   d. All of the above are correct

21. __________ is the scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context.
   a. Social psychology
   b. Cognitive psychology
   c. Clinical psychology
   d. Behavioral psychology

22. An emphasis on how both an individual’s personality and environmental characteristics influence the social environment best describes the
   a. evolutionary perspective.
   b. behavioral perspective.
   c. psychoanalytic perspective.
   d. interactionist perspective.
23. The study of the relationship between neural and social processes is best represented by the
   a. social neuroscience perspective.
   b. behavioral perspective.
   c. evolutionary perspective.
   d. cross-cultural perspective.

Essay Questions

24. Provide a definition of social psychology and note how it is different from other similar fields.

25. Describe three periods in the history of social psychology and note two major characteristics of
   each period.

26. Explain two major differences between common sense understandings and social psychological
   theories.

27. Discuss the recent findings by Fein et al., 2007, on the effects of social context.
ANSWERS TO THE PRACTICE QUIZ

Multiple-Choice Questions: Correct Answers and Explanations

1. b. Kattie uses the scientific method to study people, whereas Ernest does not. Social psychology is the scientific study of the way individuals think, feel, desire, and act in social situations. Social psychologists, therefore, apply the scientific method of systematic observation, description, and measurement in their research; journalists, in contrast, can and do use other methods. Journalists, like social psychologists, often use statistics in their work. The level of analysis for social psychologists typically is the individual, not the group. Social psychologists are interested in people’s attitudes as well as their behaviors.

2. d. focus on the effects of alcohol on social behavior. An important distinction between social psychology and other sub-disciplines within psychology is social psychology’s focus on social behavior and social situations. But someone specializing in neuroscience should be no less likely than a social psychologist to apply the scientific method of systematic observation, description, and measurement in her research; to take an applied research perspective by attempting to increase the understanding of naturally occurring events and to find solutions to practical problems; and to conduct experiments.

3. c. the individual level; the group level. This distinction is one important way that social psychologists and sociologists tend to differ. Both social psychologists and sociologists are likely to study prejudice, culture, aggression, violence, and political attitudes. They will tend to focus on different aspects of these topics, but both groups of social scientists study them. Social cognition is a subfield of social psychology which studies how people perceive, remember, and interpret information about themselves and others.

4. c. in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The first research article in social psychology (by Triplett) was published at the end of the nineteenth century, and the field began to be a distinct discipline with the publication of the first three textbooks in social psychology, from 1908 to 1924.

5. b. Social psychologists should concentrate on basic research rather than on applied research, which represents the “selling out” of social psychology. Lewin showed a persistent interest in the application of social psychology, such as in his research on how to promote more economical and nutritious eating habits, so Lewin would not have warned against applied research. Lewin proposed that behavior is a function of the person and the environment. By emphasizing both the person and the environment, Lewin advocated what today is known as the interactionist perspective, which combines personality psychology and social psychology. Lewin proposed that even if people are placed in the exact same social situation, their behavior will vary to the extent that they perceive and interpret the situation differently.

6. d. differences between individuals that are stable across situations. Personality psychologists are usually quite interested in studying differences between individuals that are stable across situations. Although some social psychologists might be interested in some individual differences, they are usually less interested in this problem than personality psychologists. Both personality and social psychologists are interested in how people think, feel, and behave; understanding the underlying causes of behavior; and the scientific approach to psychology.

7. b. people’s interpretations of information about other people are examined. Social cognition is the study of how people perceive, remember, and interpret information about themselves and others. Social cognition research is no more likely than other forms of research...
within social psychology to combine personality factors with social factors, or to take an applied (research whose goal is to increase the understanding of naturally occurring events or to find solutions to practical problems), rather than a basic (research whose goal is to increase the understanding of human behavior, often by testing hypotheses based on a theory), approach. The level of analysis of most research within social psychology, including social cognition, is the individual rather than the group.

8. d. **Lewin.** Kurt Lewin was the psychologist who made this classic statement. He was a very important figure in social psychology who fled Nazi Germany and came to the United States in the 1930s. Allport was another important psychologist from the early 1900s whose works included a seminal book on *The Nature of Prejudice*. Bandura and Dollard were two influential theorists who made important contributions to the study of aggression.

9. a. **expansion and debate.** This is the period that the book called “Confidence and Crisis.” During this time there was a lot of new research and an expansion of research into new topic areas. However, this was also a time of intense discussion and debate about the use of experiments in the field. Although there was some introspection during this period it was not a period of stagnation. Pluralism emerged on a larger scale after this period, so although it was a period of development, pluralism and development does not seem to be the best answer. Finally, this period is probably best characterized as a period of building on the foundation rather than the foundational period, so although there were some reform movements during this period, foundation and reform is probably not the best answer either.

10. b. **attitudes and person perception.** In the 1950s Festinger developed his theory of cognitive dissonance and social comparison theory, both of which are important for understanding attitudes. Asch and Heider each developed theories that were seminal in our understanding of person perception. Heider’s balance theory has some relevance to attraction, but none of these theorists did extensive research on aggression. Festinger’s social comparison theory has some important insight for the understanding of the self, but none of the theorists studied or theorized about health. Finally, none of these theorists did research on helping or business.

11. a. **examine the situational determinants of aggression in an experiment.** Social psychologists are often interested in the situational determinants of behavior. They are more likely to be interested in this aspect of a topic than clinical psychologists. Clinical psychologists are more likely to develop therapeutic techniques to control people’s aggression than social psychologists. Both groups of psychologists might be interested in developing theories about what leads people to be aggressive, and developing a questionnaire to measure which people are most likely to be aggressive.

12. d. **laboratory experiments.** The dominant research method in social psychology up to the period of “Confidence and Crisis” was the laboratory experiment. Many people questioned the ethics and validity of this research strategy. Archival research, which involves the use of existing records of human behavior, has never been a predominant research strategy in social psychology. Unobtrusive measures, involving assessments of behavior that do not interfere with a subject’s spontaneous and natural reactions, were not used predominantly during this period; their use can help researchers avoid some of the criticisms raised at the time about laboratory experiments. Finally, the interactionist perspective, which combines personality and social psychology, was neither predominant at the time nor seen as a controversial practice.

13. a. **Norman Triplett.** Triplett published the first research article in social psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. The work of the other three social psychologists has been much more recent, extending from the 1970s through the present. Gergen played an important role in the 1961–1975 period of “Confidence and Crisis” by arguing that the theories being tested in the social psychology laboratory were historically and culturally limited. In 1986 Sears argued for the
advantages of moving beyond convenience samples in social psychological research and including subjects from a variety of backgrounds. And in Chapter 1 Triandis’s work is cited as an example of the increase in work on multiculturalism.

14. d. **how social interactions affect memory for people.** The investigation of reasoning about risky decisions, how quickly people can learn new tasks, and the thinking required to solve a problem are all topics that a cognitive psychologist might be interested in. How social interactions affect memory for people, however, is a topic that social psychologists are more likely to investigate. In particular, this topic is more likely to be studied by a psychologist interested in social cognition—the study of how people perceive, remember, and interpret information about themselves and others.

15. d. **A focus on observation of behaviors.** Social psychologists sometimes study topics by observing behaviors, but this is not a focus or a characteristic of social psychology per se. Conversely, a broad perspective, a focus on the individual, and the frequent use of experiment methodology are all characteristics of social psychology.

16. b. **put to the test.** Because social psychology is a scientific study, its theories are tested. Common sense ideas on the other hand are often contradictory and taken at face value without being tested. Social psychological theories are not always correct, sometimes they are proven wrong. And although social psychological findings are often hard to anticipate, they are not always so. Finally, social psychological theories are often based on educated guesses, but common sense ideas often are as well.

17. a. **laboratory experiments have been discontinued and replaced by unobtrusive studies that take advantage of archival or correlational techniques.** Laboratory experiments continue to be used in social psychology; other approaches, however, are used as well. Each of the other statements is true.

18. c. **the separation of emotion, motivation, and cognition.** It seems that in the 21st century the integration rather than the separation of emotion, motivation, and cognition is likely to be emphasized. Biological and evolutionary perspectives, new technologies, and sociocultural perspectives are all topics that are likely to see extensive research scrutiny in the next century as well.

19. d. **all of the above are correct.** Credit for this creation goes to the writers of the first three textbooks in social psychology: the English psychologist William McDougall (1908) and two Americans, Edward Ross (1908) and Floyd Allport (1924). Allport’s book in particular, with its focus on the interaction of individuals and their social context and its emphasis on the use of experimentation and the scientific method, helped establish social psychology as the discipline it is today. These authors announced the arrival of a new approach to the social aspects of human behavior.

20. d. **all of the above are correct.** Gordon Allport (1954) published *The Nature of Prejudice*, a book that continues to inspire research on stereotyping and prejudice more than a half century later. Solomon Asch (1951) demonstrated how willing people are to conform to an obviously wrong majority. Leon Festinger (1954, 1957) introduced two important theories—one concerning how people try to learn about themselves by comparing themselves to other people, and one about how people’s attitudes can be changed by their own behavior. These individuals are just a sample of a long list of landmark contributions made during the 1950s.

21. a. **Social psychology.** There are many approaches to understanding how people think, feel, and behave. We can learn about human behavior from novels, films, history, and philosophy to name just a few possibilities. What makes social psychology different from these artistic and
humanistic endeavors is that social psychology is a science. It applies the scientific method of systematic observation, description, and measurement to the study of the human condition.

22. **interactionist perspective.** Lewin’s conviction that both internal and external factors affect behavior helped create a unified view that was distinct from the other major psychological paradigms during his lifetime: psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on internal motives and fantasies, and behaviorism, with its focus on external rewards and punishments. Lewin’s position was an early version of what today is known as the interactionist perspective. This approach combines personality psychology (stressing internal, psychological differences among individuals) with social psychology (stressing differences among external situations).

23. **social neuroscience perspective.** Social psychologists have been concerned with physiological influences and responses for many years. A particularly exciting recent development is the emergence of the subfield of social neuroscience, the study of the relationship between neural and social processes. Social neuroscience is part of a flourishing set of research that explores how the social world affects the brain and biology, and vice versa. Recent research has investigated such issues as how a person’s likelihood of acting aggressively may be influenced by their neurological responses to social rejection, and gender differences in neuroendocrine reactivity in response to stress.

**Answers to Essay Questions: Sample Essays**

24. Social psychology can be defined as the scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in regard to other people and how individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are affected by other people. Social psychology is different from sociology in that it focuses on the individual level rather than the group level of analysis. Social psychology is different from clinical psychology in that it is primarily concerned with the typical ways that people think, feel, and behave and is less concerned with people who have psychological difficulties and disorders. Social psychology is different from personality psychology in that it is less concerned with individual differences between people that are consistent across situations. Finally, social psychology is different from cognitive psychology in that it is more concerned with how thinking, learning, remembering, and reasoning are relevant to social behavior.

25. Early social psychology began in the late 1800s. This period had two defining characteristics – the beginning of research, with a study by Triplett on how the presence of others affects performance, and the defining of the field, as several textbooks were written on social psychology in the early 1900s. From the 1930s to 1950s, the field grew quickly as it tried to understand the horrors of World War II and Nazi Germany. Kurt Lewin was a particularly important figure who fled Nazi Germany for the United States during this time. This period can be characterized as a period with foundational theories and groundbreaking experiments. The 1960s and early 1970s saw a rise in confidence and expansion of the field, but was also a time of questioning and debate. This period can thus best be characterized as a time of expansion and debate. The late 1970s to the 1990s saw the birth of a new subfield, social cognition, and greater international and cultural perspectives in social psychology. This period can be seen as a time of pluralism and redefinition.

26. Many people think the findings of social psychology are just common sense, but social psychology differs from common sense in two important ways. First, social psychology, unlike common sense, puts its ideas to the test. This scientific approach is the chief difference between social psychology and common sense. Second, common sense is often contradictory and thus can appear to explain everything. For example, common sense suggests that birds of a feather flock together and that opposites attract. So if people are attracted to similar others common sense appears to be true and if people are attracted to dissimilar others common sense also appears to be true. It is no wonder that social psychological findings appear to be common sense at times,
whatever occurs could be predicted by one version of common sense in this example. By contrast social psychological theories should make non-contradictory predictions.

27. The main point of these results from a social psychological standpoint is that the students’ judgments were influenced more by other people’s reactions to what Reagan said (that is, whether or not the audience appeared to laugh) than by the content of what he said (that is, whether or not the one-liners were edited out of the tape). Additionally, it is important to note that these “other people” were not in the room with the students; they were simply sounds on a videotape recorded many years before. These findings demonstrate that the “social context” can be very subtle, and yet can have very powerful effects on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.