



2025-26 FALL

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Faculty of Arts & Sciences

WEEK 1

INTRODUCING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



Implausible? The folktale demands that we accept the **power of the situation**. In the presence of her oppressive stepmother, Cinderella 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.

We humans are “**first of all beings in a situation**,” “We cannot be distinguished from our situations, for they form us and decide our possibilities” (1946)

Jean-Paul Sartre

The French philosopher-novelist



What is Social Psychology?

- It is the **scientific study** of how people **think** about, **influence**, and **relate** to one another.
- Compared with **sociology** (the study of people in groups and societies), social psychology focuses more on **individuals** and uses 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 the
scientific study of . . .**



Social thinking

- How we perceive ourselves and others
- What we believe
- Judgments we make
- Our attitudes

Social influence

- Culture
- Pressures to conform
- Persuasion
- Groups of people

Social relations

- Prejudice
- Aggression
- Attraction and intimacy
- Helping

What is social psychology?

- A field within psychology that strives to understand the social dynamics of everyday living.
- How do the actual, imagined, and implied
- presence of others influence us?
 - Cognitively (thoughts)
 - Affectively (emotions)
 - Behaviorally (actions)

What is social psychology?

- Three levels of analysis:
 - societal (economics, sociology) **BROAD**
 - individual (clinical, personality) **NARROW**
 - interpersonal **INTERMEDIATE**: situations (This is the level of analysis for Social Psychology)

Figure 1.1

Social psychology and some close scientific neighbours.

Social psychology draws on a number of subdisciplines in general psychology for concepts and methods of research. It also has fruitful connections with other disciplines, mostly in the social sciences.

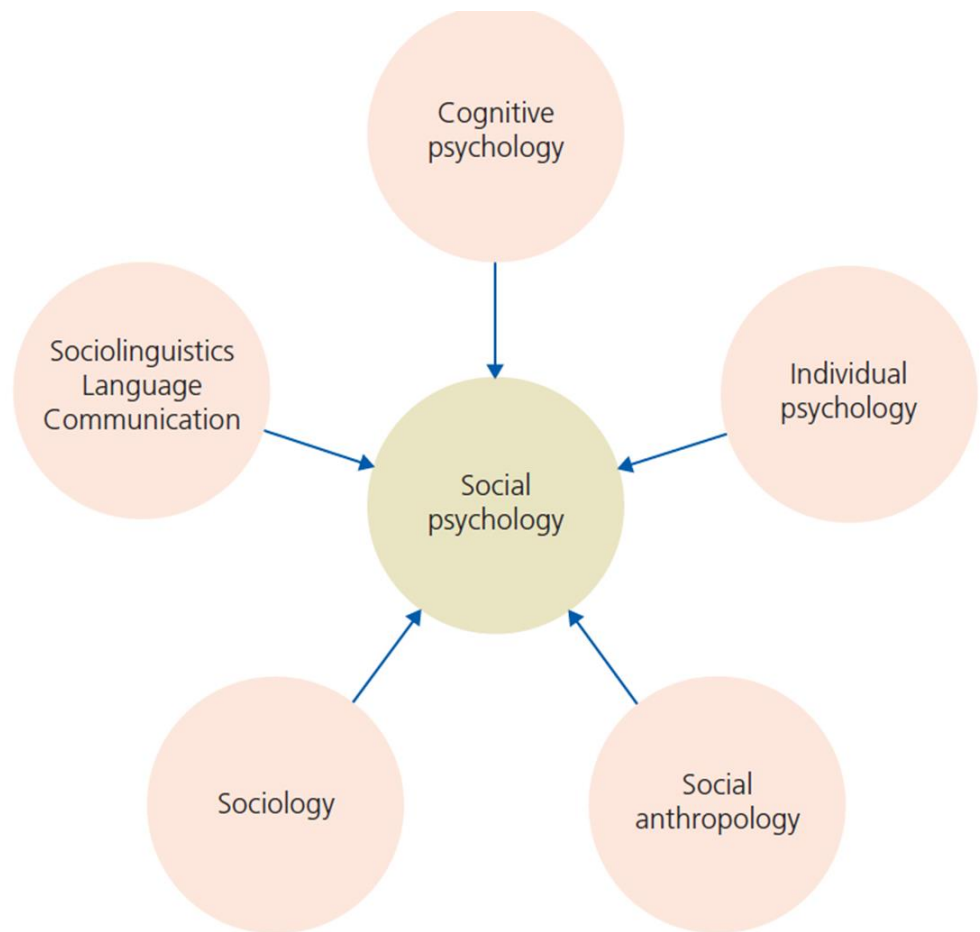


TABLE 1.2**Distinctions Between Social Psychology and Related Fields:
The Case of Research on Prejudice**

To see the differences between social psychology and related fields, consider an example of how researchers in each field might conduct a study of prejudice.

Field of Study	Example of How a Researcher in the Field Might Study Prejudice
Sociology	Measure how prejudice varies as a function of social or economic class
Clinical psychology	Test various therapies for people with antisocial personalities who exhibit great degrees of prejudice
Personality psychology	Develop a questionnaire to identify men who are very high or low in degree of prejudice toward women
Cognitive psychology	Manipulate exposure to a member of some category of people and measure the thoughts and concepts that are automatically activated (<i>A study of prejudice in this field would, by definition, be at the intersection of cognitive and social psychology.</i>)
Social psychology	Manipulate various kinds of contact between individuals of different groups and examine the effect of these manipulations on the degree of prejudice exhibited

What is Social Psychology?

- Social psychology is still a **young science**.
- The **first social psychology experiments** were reported more than a century ago (1898).
- The **first social psychology texts** appeared just after 1900 (Smith, 2005).
- **Until the 1930s** social psychology did not assume its **current form**.
- **Until World War II** it did not begin to emerge as the **vibrant field it is today**.

Defining Social Psychology

- Social psychology is the scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context.
- Like other sciences, social psychology relies on the systematic approach of the scientific method.
- Distinctive characteristics of social psychology include a focus on the individual as well as a broad perspective on a variety of social contexts and behaviors.
- The “socialness” of social psychology varies, as social psychologists sometimes examine how nonsocial factors affect social thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and sometimes study how social factors influence nonsocial thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Social Psychological Questions and Applications

- Social psychologists study a large variety of fascinating questions about people and their social worlds. The scope and relevance of these questions to so many important aspects of our lives make social psychology applicable to many careers and interests.

The Power of the Social Context: An Example of a Social Psychology Experiment

- In one experiment that illustrates the power of the social context, participants’ judgments of a political candidate’s performance in a debate were influenced more by the reactions of other people to some remarks made by the candidate than by the remarks themselves.

Social Psychology and Related Fields: Distinctions and Intersections

- Social psychology is related to a number of different areas of study, including sociology, clinical psychology, personality psychology, and cognitive psychology. Important work is being done at the intersection of social psychology and each of these fields.

- Social psychology tends to focus on individuals, whereas sociology tends to focus on groups. In addition, social psychology is less likely than sociology to study the relation between broad societal variables and people’s behaviors and is more likely to use experimentation.
- In contrast to clinical psychology, social psychology focuses not on disorders but rather on the more typical ways that individuals think, feel, behave, and interact.
- Personality psychology focuses on differences between individuals that remain relatively stable across a variety of situations; social psychology focuses on how social factors affect most individuals, regardless of their different personalities.
- Cognitive and social psychologists share an interest in mental processes such as thinking, learning, remembering, and reasoning, but social psychologists focus on the relevance of these processes to social behavior.

Social Psychology and Common Sense

- Many social psychological theories and findings appear to be like common sense. One problem with common sense, however, is that it may offer conflicting explanations and provide no way to test which is correct. Another problem is that common sense is often oversimplified and therefore misleading.

What is Social Psychology?

- Social psychology studies our thinking, influence, and relationships by asking questions that have intrigued us all:
- **How Much of Our Social World Is Just in Our Heads?** Our social behavior varies not just with the objective situation but also with **how we construe** it. Social beliefs can be **self-fulfilling**.

What is Social Psychology?

- **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**.
- **Stanley Milgram** (1974) wondered. So he set up a situation where people were ordered to administer increasing levels of **electric shock** to someone who was having difficulty learning a series of words.

What is Social Psychology?

- **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?)
- **What situations trigger people to be helpful or greedy?**

From Past to Present: A Brief History of Social Psychology

The Birth and Infancy of Social Psychology: 1880s–1920s

- Early research by Triplett and Ringelmann established an enduring topic in social psychology: how the presence of others affects an individual's performance.
- The first social psychology textbooks in 1908 and 1924 began to give the emerging field of social psychology its shape.

A Call to Action: 1930s–1950s

- Social psychology began to flourish because the world needed an explanation for the violence of war and solutions to it.
- Sherif's work laid the foundation for later studies of social influence, and the legacy of Kurt Lewin is still evident throughout much of social psychology.
- The 1940s and 1950s saw a burst of activity in social psychology that firmly established it as a major social science.

Confidence and Crisis: 1960s–Mid-1970s

- Stanley Milgram's experiments demonstrated individuals' vulnerability to the destructive commands of authority.
- While social psychology was expanding in many new directions, there was also intense debate about the ethics of research procedures, the validity of research results, and the generalizability of conclusions drawn from research.

An Era of Pluralism: Mid-1970s–1990s

- During the 1970s, social psychology began to take a pluralistic approach to its research methods, views on human behavior, and development of international and multicultural perspectives; this approach continues today.

Social Psychology in a New Century

- Several exciting themes and perspectives are helping to shape the beginning of social psychology's second century.

Integration of Emotion, Motivation, and Cognition

- Researchers are becoming more interested in how emotion, motivation, and cognition can operate together in influencing individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- A great deal of recent social psychological research has explored the automatic versus controllable nature of a number of processes, such as stereotyping.

Biological and Evolutionary Perspectives

- Biological perspectives, including perspectives based on neuroscience, genetics, and evolutionary principles, are being applied to the study of social psychological issues such as gender differences, relationships, and aggression.

Cultural Perspectives

- Increasing numbers of social psychologists are evaluating the universal generality or cultural specificity of their theories and findings by examining similarities and differences across cultures as well as between racial and ethnic groups within cultures.

- For example, in one experiment Canadian participants chose more desirable than undesirable traits as characteristic of themselves, whereas Japanese participants chose a balance of desirable and undesirable traits.

New Technologies

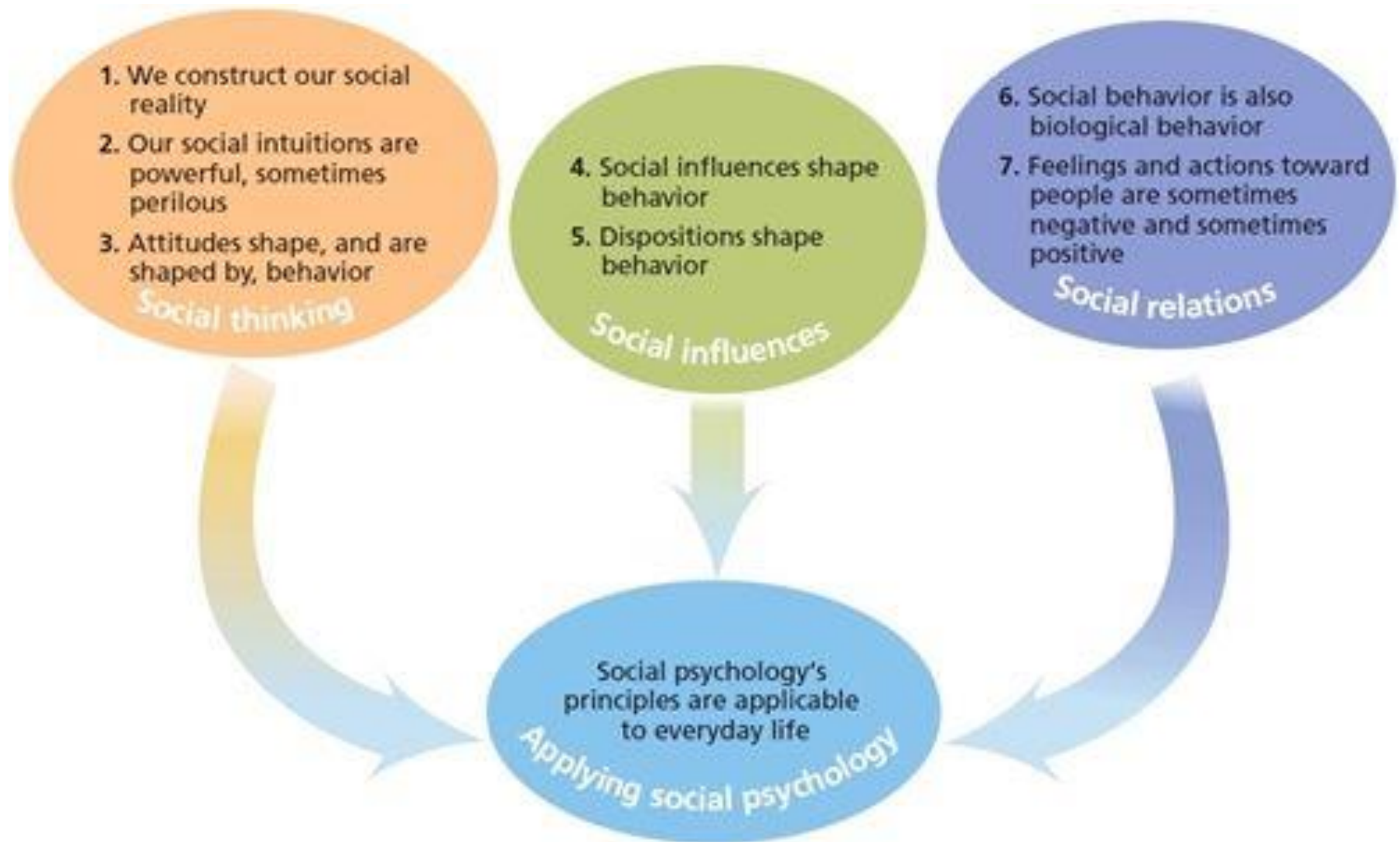
- Advances in technology, such as improved brain-imaging techniques, have given rise to groundbreaking research in social psychology.
- Virtual reality technology enables researchers to test questions that otherwise would be impractical, impossible, or unethical.
- The Internet has fostered communication and collaboration among researchers around the world, enabled researchers to study participants from diverse populations, and inspired researchers to investigate whether various social psychological phenomena are similar or different online versus offline.
- As rapidly advancing technologies change how individuals communicate and access information, the ways that they interact are also likely to change. The social psychology of the next era will explore these issues.

Historical Roots of Social Psychology

- Three major theoretical perspectives have influenced today's social psychology:
- Psychoanalytic theory
- Behaviorism
- Gestalt psychology

Historical Roots of Social Psychology

- **Psychoanalytic Theory:** Freud's theory emphasizing unconscious motivation.
- **Behaviorism:** analysis of learning that focuses on observed behavior.
- **Gestalt Psychology:** Theory that people form coherent and meaningful perceptions based on the whole, not individual parts.



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 similar situations because **we think differently.**

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?).
- Thinking, memory, and attitudes all operate on **two levels**:
 - one **conscious and deliberate**,
 - the other **unconscious and automatic**.
- “**Dual processing**,” today’s researchers call it. **We know more than we know we know.**

Social Influences Shape Our Behavior

- **We are social animals** (Aristotle). 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 people became instruments of the Holocaust.
- Other situations may elicit **great generosity and compassion**. After the earthquake catastrophe (6 Feb. 2023), several cities were overwhelmed with donations of food, clothing, and help from eager volunteers.

Social Influences Shape Our Behavior

- **Our cultures help define our situations:**
 - Whether you prefer a slim or 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**.
- **Our attitudes and behavior are shaped by external social forces.**

Culture shapes social behaviour

- **Culture:** All ideas, symbols, preferences, and material objects people share
 - Shapes people's view of reality and of themselves
 - Significantly influences individual's social behavior
- Cultural belief systems of individualism and collectivism

Individualism

- belief in the value of personal identity, uniqueness, and freedom

- Westernized White cultures

A philosophy of life focusing on individual needs over group needs.

- Preference for loosely knit social relationships
- Desire to be relatively autonomous of other's influence
- First seen in sixteenth century when people became more geographically mobile
- Expanded greatly in late 19th and early 20thcenturies due to increased industry and urbanization

Collectivism

- emphasis on loyalty to the family, adherence to group norms, and harmonious social relations

- African, Asian, Latin and Eastern cultures

A philosophy of life stressing the priority of group needs over individual needs.

- Preference for tightly knit social relationships
- Willingness to submit to the influence of group
- Identity is given to you by the group
- Approximately 70% of world's population lives in a collectivist orientation
- Older of the two philosophies: most protection for people who live in threatening environments

Personal Attitudes and Dispositions Also Shape Behavior

- **Internal forces** also matter. We are **not passive**. **Our inner attitudes affect our behavior.**
- **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.**

Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Cultures

Collectivist

Identity is based in the social system and given by one's group.

People are socialized to be emotionally dependent on organizations and institutions.

Personal and group goals are generally consistent; and when inconsistent, group goals get priority.

People explain others' social behavior as being more determined by social norms and roles than by personal attitudes.

Emphasis is on belonging to organizations, and membership is the ideal.

Trust is placed in group decisions.

Individualist

Identity is based in the individual and achieved by one's own striving.

People are socialized to be emotionally independent of organizations and institutions.

Personal and group goals are often inconsistent, and when inconsistent, personal goals get priority.

People explain others' social behavior as being more determined by personal attitudes than by social norms and roles.

Emphasis is on individual initiative, individual achievement, and leadership is the ideal.

Trust is placed in individual decisions.

Social Behavior Is Biologically Rooted

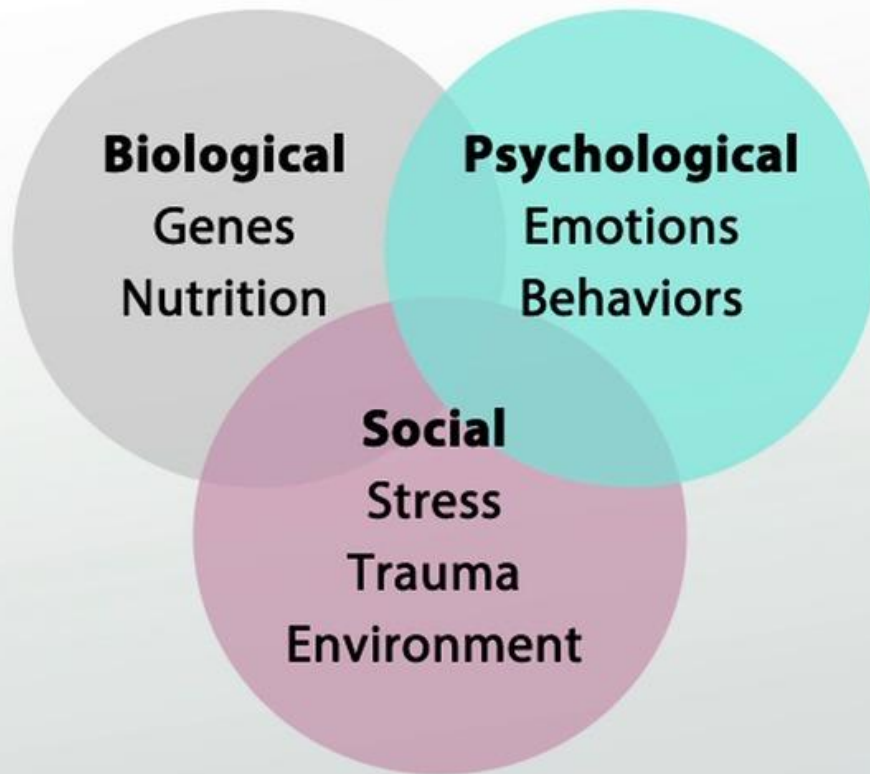
- Many of our **social behaviors** reflect a deep **biological wisdom**.
- **Nature** and **nurture** together form who we are.
- We carry the genes of our ancestors who survived and reproduced.
- Nature also endows us with an enormous **capacity to learn and to adapt** to varied environments. We are **sensitive** and **responsive** to our **social context**.

Social Behavior Is Biologically Rooted

- 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?
- How do **brain, mind, and behavior function together** as one **coordinated system**?

We are bio-psycho-social organisms

WHAT IS THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL?



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.
- It **offers many ideas** about how to know ourselves better, how to win friends and influence people.
- **Social psychology is all about life**—your life: your beliefs, your attitudes, your relationships.

Social Psychology's Big Ideas

- How we construe our social worlds
- How our social intuitions guide and sometimes deceive us
- 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

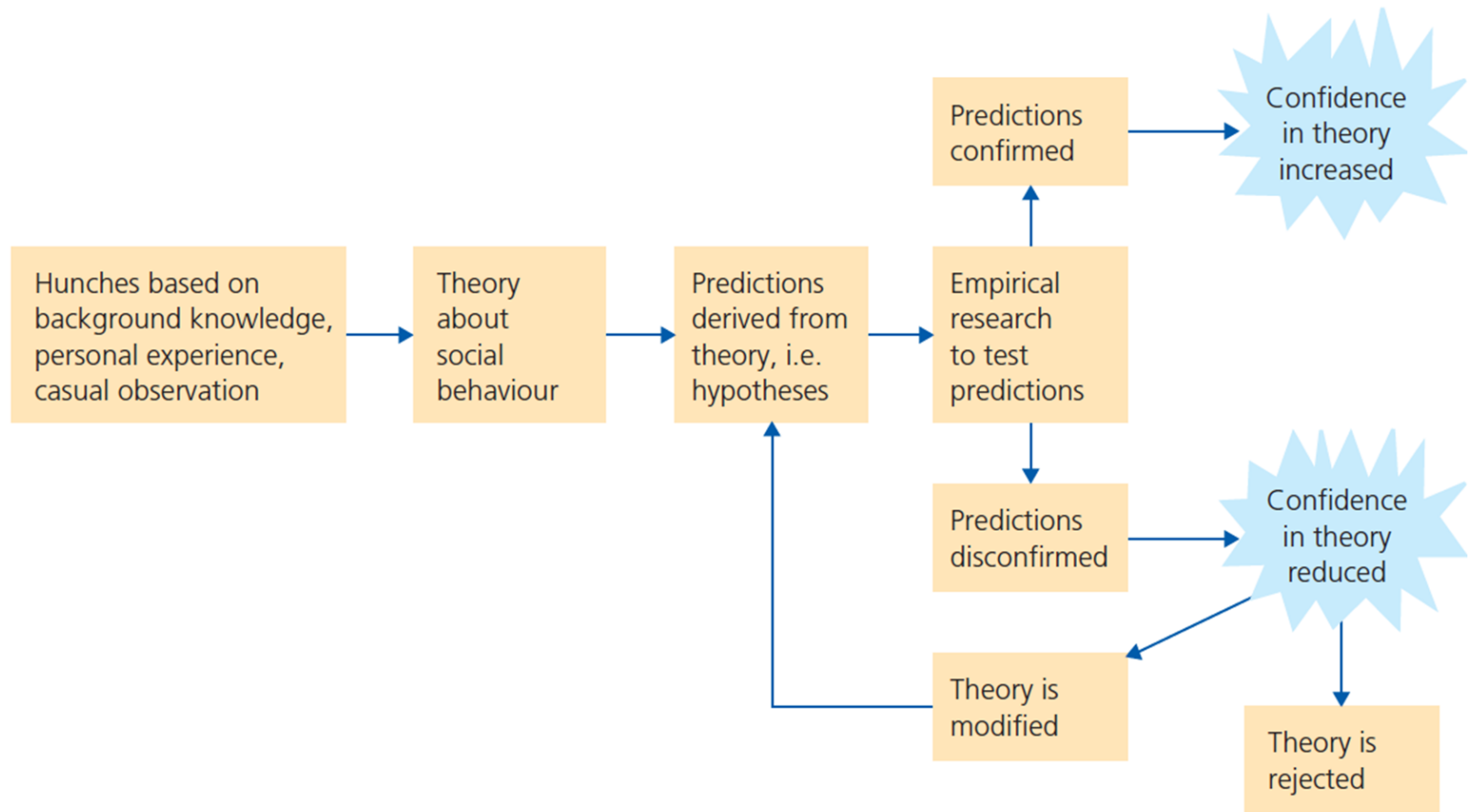


Figure 1.2

How social psychologists use the scientific method.

Methods in Social Psychology

- **Scientific method:** A set of procedures used to gather, analyze, and interpret information.
 - Reduces error
 - Leads to dependable generalizations
- Four broad goals of research:
 - Description
 - Causal analysis
 - Theory building
 - Application

Research Participants

- Select a sample that ideally represents the population of interest
- Random sampling is the best way to do that
- Biases:
 - College students are over-represented
 - Males are over-represented
 - Ethnic minority groups are under-represented

Concepts in Research

- **Independent variable:** the variable that is systematically manipulated
- **Dependent variable:** the variable whose changes are considered to be the result of the changes in the independent variable, the “measured variable”
- **Random assignment:** the subjects are placed in experimental conditions on the basis of chance
- **Operational definition:** the specific procedure used to measure or manipulate a variable.

Concepts in Research

- **External validity:** extent to which results of a study generalize to other populations and settings
- **Internal validity:** extent to which cause-and-effect conclusions can be drawn
- **Replication:** No study is ever perfect, results should be replicated; meaning the study must be repeated
- **Meta-Analysis:** quantitative approach to summarizing results of many studies

Methods of Data Collection

- **Self-Report** – people are asked about their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, preferences
- **Observational Research** – direct observation or recording of information
- **Archival Research** – analyze existing data collected for other purposes
- **Internet Research** – could be self report, observational, or archival; but over the net

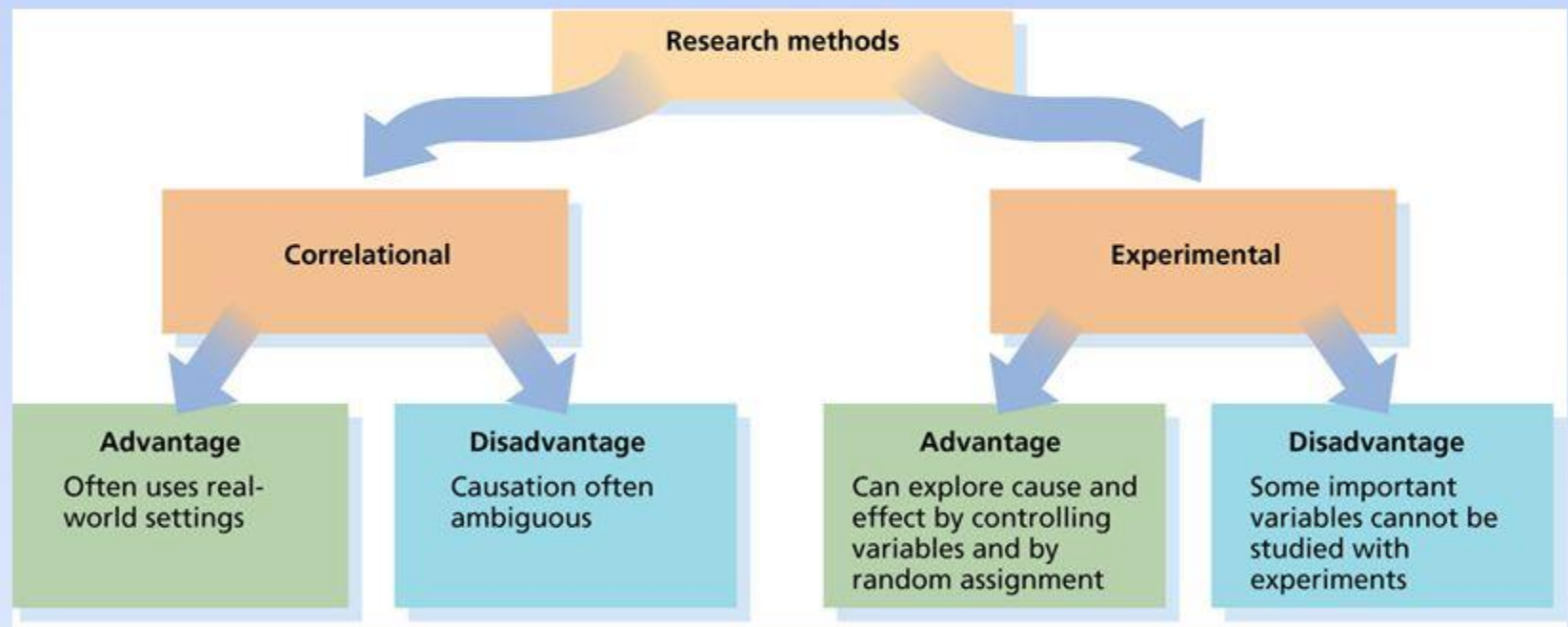
Sources of Bias

- **Experimenter bias:** caused by unintentional acts by the researcher to influence the participants to behave in a certain way
- **Subject bias:** caused by participant's motives and goals, wanting to fulfill the role of a “good subject”
 - Demand characteristics: aspects of research that make people aware that they are being studied and this can bias their behavior

Research Methods: How We Do Social Psychology

- Social psychologists **organize their ideas** and findings into **theories**.
- Most social-psychological research is either **correlational** or **experimental**.
- When possible, social psychologists prefer to **conduct experiments** that explore cause and effect. **By constructing a miniature reality that is under their control.**
- In creating experiments, social psychologists sometimes stage situations that **engage people's emotions**.

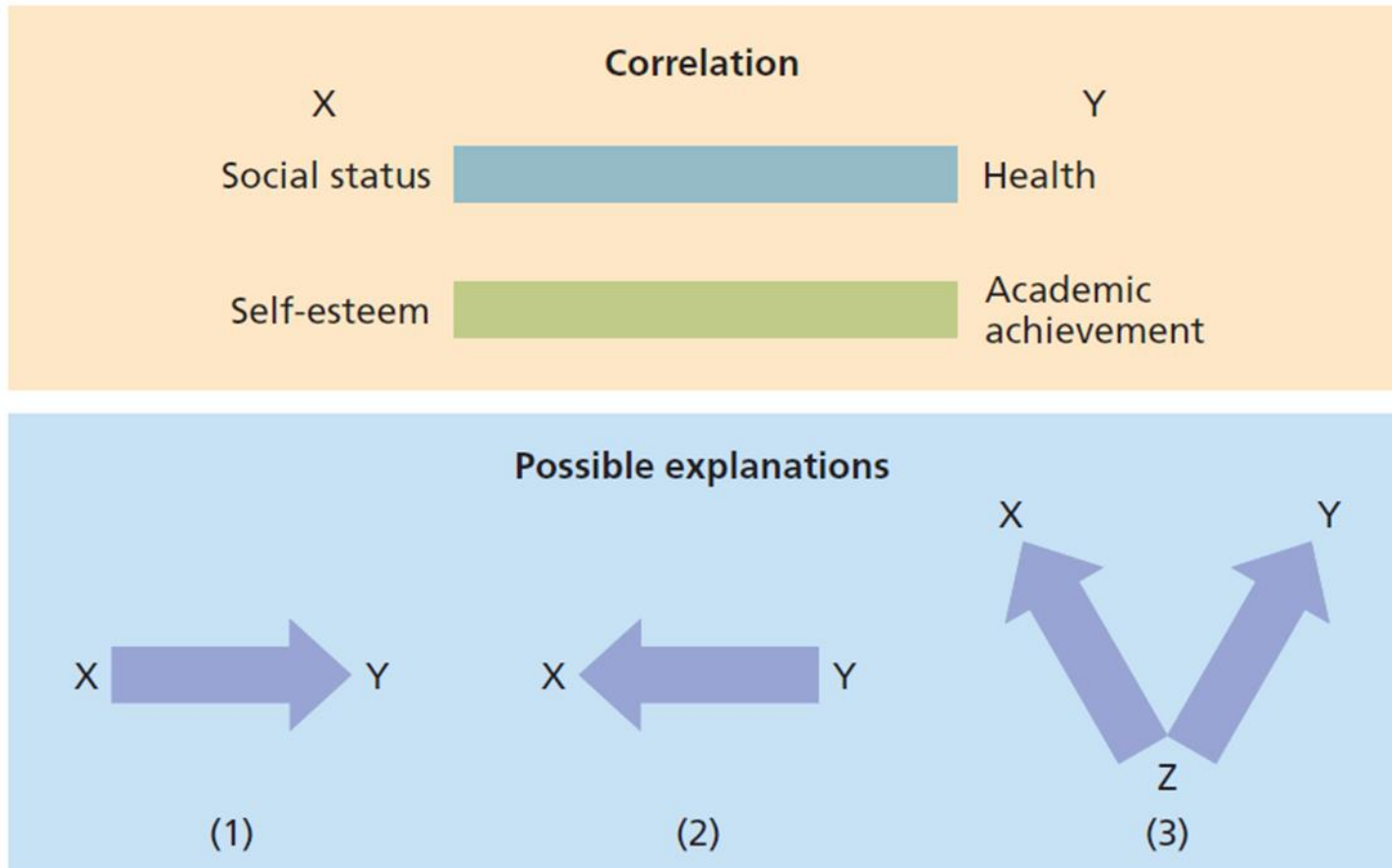
Two Methods of Doing Research: Correlational and Experimental



Correlational Research

- **Correlational research:** involves testing the association between two or more factors, i.e., variables
- Advantages:
 - Study real-life complex problems (earthquake, death of spouse)
 - Efficient and economic
- Disadvantages:
 - Reverse causality
 - Third variable

Correlation and Causation



Experimental Research

- **Experimental research:** randomly assigns people to conditions, varies treatment in each condition, and measures effect on responses
 - examine and conclude about cause-effect relationships

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)		

Field experiments

- Field experiments are run in naturalistic settings and usually participants are not aware they are being studied
 - generally more spontaneous, natural responses; more external validity
 - minimize suspicion of participants
 - less control over extraneous variables: threat to internal validity
 - sometimes random assignment not possible

Laboratory experiments

- Laboratory experiments are run in artificial, controlled settings
 - better control of experimental manipulations
 - random assignment is possible
- removes preexisting differences between groups
 - some degree of artificiality, external validity problems

Ethical principles

- 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.
- 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.

Generalizing from Laboratory to 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.
- 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!