

SEVENTH EDITION

EXPLORING Social Psychology



DAVID G. MYERS

Exploring Social Psychology

SEVENTH EDITION



David G. Myers

Hope College

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EXPLORING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, SEVENTH EDITION

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About the Author



Since receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, David Myers has spent his career at Michigan's Hope College, where he is professor of psychology and has taught dozens of social psychology sections. Hope College students have invited him to be their commencement speaker and have voted him "outstanding professor."

With support from National Science Foundation grants, Myers's scientific articles have appeared in some three dozen scientific books and periodicals, including *Science*, the *American Scientist*, *Psychological Science*, and the *American Psychologist*.

He also communicates psychological science to the general public. His writings have appeared in four dozen magazines, from *Today's Education* to *Scientific American*. His 17 books include *The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*.

Myers's research and writings have been recognized by the Gordon Allport Prize, by an "honored scientist" award from the Federation of Associations in the Brain and Behavioral Sciences, and by the Award for Distinguished Service on Behalf of Personality-Social Psychology.

He has chaired his city's Human Relations Commission, helped found a thriving assistance center for families in poverty, and spoken to hundreds of college and community groups. In recognition of his efforts to transform the way America provides assistive listening for people with hearing loss (see hearingloop.org), he received the 2011 American Academy of Audiology Presidential Award.

Myers bikes to work year-round and plays pickup basketball. David and Carol Myers are parents of two sons and a daughter, and have one granddaughter.



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Preface



This is a book I secretly wanted to write. I have long believed that what is wrong with all psychology textbooks (including those I have written) is their overlong chapters. Few can read a 40-page chapter in a single sitting without their eyes glazing and their mind wandering. So why not organize the discipline into digestible chunks—say forty 15-page chapters rather than fifteen 40-page chapters—that a student could read in a sitting, with a sense of completion?

Thus, when McGraw-Hill psychology editor Chris Rogers first suggested that I abbreviate and restructure my 15-chapter, 600-page *Social Psychology* into a series of crisply written 10-page modules, I said “Eureka!” At last a publisher willing to break convention by packaging the material in a form ideally suited to students’ attention spans. By presenting concepts and findings in smaller bites, we also hoped not to overload students’ capacities to absorb new information. And, by keeping *Exploring Social Psychology* slim, we sought to enable instructors to supplement it with other reading.

As the playful module titles suggest, I have also broken with convention by introducing social psychology in an essay format. Each is written in the spirit of Thoreau’s admonition: “Anything living is easily and naturally expressed in popular language.” My aim in the parent *Social Psychology*, and even more so here, is to write in a voice that is both solidly scientific and warmly human, factually rigorous and intellectually provocative. I hope to reveal social psychology as an investigative reporter might, by providing a current summary of important social phenomena, by showing how social psychologists uncover and explain such phenomena, and by reflecting on their human significance.

In selecting material, I have represented social psychology’s scope, highlighting its scientific study of how we think about, influence, and relate to one another. I also

emphasize material that casts social psychology in the intellectual tradition of the liberal arts. By the teaching of great literature, philosophy, and science, liberal education seeks to expand our thinking and awareness and to liberate us from the confines of the present. Social psychology can contribute to these goals. Many undergraduate social psychology students are not psychology majors; most will enter other professions. By focusing on humanly significant issues such as belief and illusion, independence and interdependence, love and hate, one can present social psychology in ways that inform and stimulate all students.

This new seventh edition features updated coverage throughout:

- New and updated material on growing individualism within cultures examines changes in American, Chinese, and Indian cultures.
- Enhanced material on predicting one's own behavior.
- Revised discussions of aggression with new information on the effect of video games and poor diet on aggression.
- Expanded coverage of psychology and climate change, with discussions of the psychological effects of and public opinion about climate change.

In addition, the seventh edition features technology components designed to assist both professor and student. Icons throughout the text guide the student to the Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/myersesp7e) to gather more information on each module by viewing excerpts from the Social Connection video modules, participating in interactive exercises, and taking module quizzes to test their knowledge. The Social Connection video modules, produced by Frank Vattano at Colorado State University, enrich classic experiments by re-creating or providing footage from classic experiments, seasoned with interviews of leading social psychologists.

A comprehensive teaching package is also available on the Online Learning Center. The acclaimed *Instructor's Resource Manual* has been revised by Diane Willard to reflect changes in the seventh edition text. The OLC also includes a Test Bank, which has been revised by Alisha Janowsky to include a higher concentration of conceptual questions, and a set of PowerPoint slides (by Diane Willard) for classroom use. All instructors' resources are password-protected.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I remain indebted to the community of scholars who have guided and critiqued the evolution of this material through ten editions of *Social Psychology*. These caring colleagues, acknowledged individually therein, have enabled a better book than I, alone, could have created.

I am grateful not only to Chris Rogers, for venturing this book, but also to editor Philip Zimbardo for his encouragement. As my friendship with Phil has grown, I have come to admire his gifts as one of psychology's premier communicators.

Others on the McGraw-Hill team also played vital roles. Psychology editor Nancy Welcher commissioned this new edition and editorial coordinator Adina Lonn, developmental editor Janice Wiggins-Clarke, and managing editor Penina Braffman Greenfield supported us throughout the revision process.

A special “thank you” goes to Jean Twenge, San Diego State University, for her contribution to Modules 3 (Self-Concept: Who Am I?), 4 (Self-Serving Bias), and 24 (The Nature and Nurture of Aggression). Drawing on her extensive knowledge of and research on the self and cultural changes, Professor Twenge updated and revised this material for *Social Psychology*, 11th edition.

Here at Hope College, Kathryn Brownson helped digest the *Social Psychology*, 11th edition material into these modules and prepare them for production. As in all of my published social psychology books with McGraw-Hill, I again pay tribute to two significant people. Were it not for the invitation of McGraw-Hill’s Nelson Black, it surely never would have occurred to me to try my hand at text writing. Poet Jack Ridl, my Hope College colleague and writing coach, helped shape the voice you will hear in these pages.

To all in this supporting cast, I am indebted. Working with all these people has made my work a stimulating, gratifying experience.

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PART ONE



Introducing Social Psychology

“We cannot live for ourselves alone,” remarked the novelist Herman Melville, “for our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads.” Social psychologists study those connections by scientifically exploring how we *think about*, *influence*, and *relate* to one another.



Video
1.1

In the first two modules I explain how we do that exploring, how we play the social psychology game. As it happens, the ways that social psychologists form and test ideas can be carried into life itself, enabling us to think smarter as we analyze everyday social thinking, social influences, and social relations.

If intuition and common sense were utterly trustworthy, we would be less in need of scientific inquiry and critical thinking. But the truth, as Module 2 relates, is that whether we are reflecting on research results or everyday events, we readily succumb to a powerful hindsight bias, also called the *I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon*.

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MODULE

1



Doing Social Psychology

There once was a man whose second wife was a vain and selfish 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, Cinderella was meek 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 distinguished from our situations, for they form us and decide our possibilities” (pp. 59–60, paraphrased).

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 THEORIES

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 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). 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 1-1 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

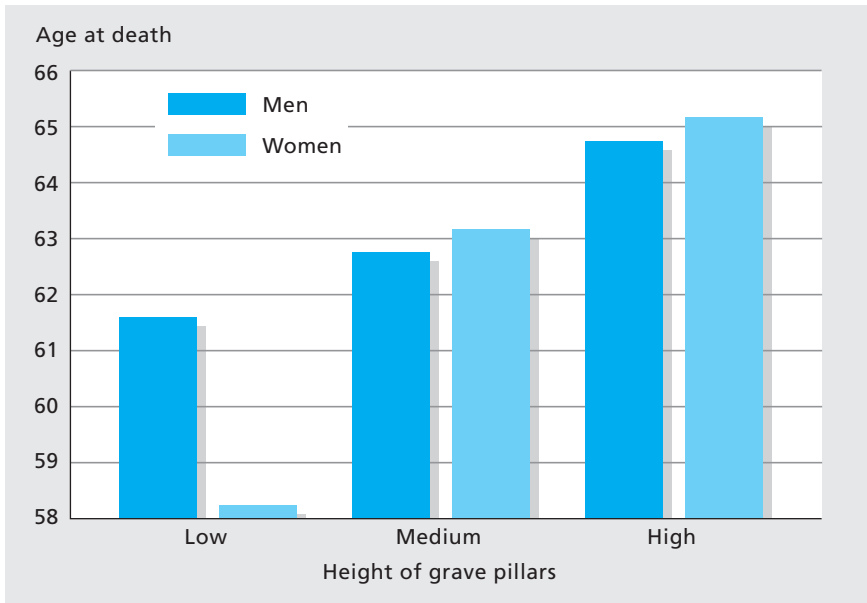


FIGURE 1-1

Correlating status and longevity. Tall grave pillars commemorated people who also tended to live longer.

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 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?

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 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.

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.*

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

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 an experiment that offers a cause–effect explanation of 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.

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*.

Random Assignment: The Great Equalizer

We were reluctant, on the basis of a correlation, to assume that violence viewing *caused* aggressiveness. 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 viewers of violence from nonviewers. Maybe viewers of violence differ in education, culture, intelligence—or in dozens of ways the researcher has not considered.

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 1-2).

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

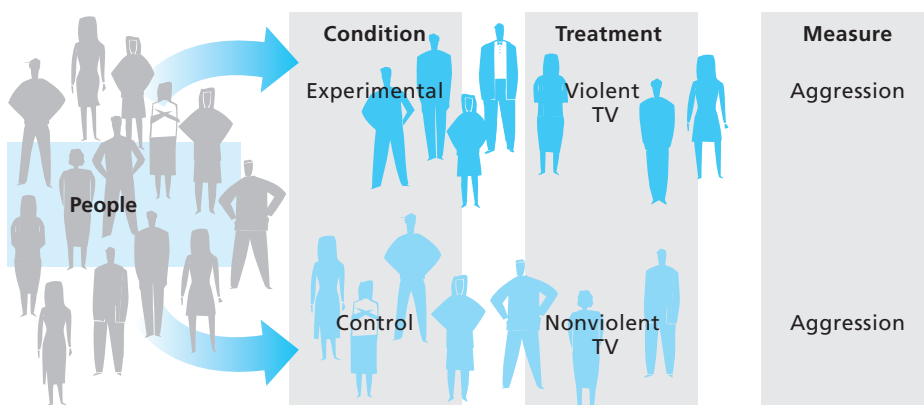


FIGURE 1-2

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.