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## PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY – 1ST INTERNATIONAL EDITION

### CONTENTS

1. Introducing Social Psychology

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# Defining Social Psychology: History and Principles

### Learning Objectives

1. Define *social psychology*.
2. Review the history of the field of social psychology and the topics that social psychologists study.

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4. Describe and provide examples of the person-situation interaction.
5. Review the concepts of (a) social norms and (b) cultures.

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The field of social psychology is growing rapidly and is having an increasingly important influence on how we think about human behavior. Newspapers, magazines, websites, and other media frequently report the findings of social psychologists, and the results of social psychological research are influencing decisions in a wide variety of areas. Let's begin with a short history of the field of social psychology and then turn to a review of the basic principles of the science of social psychology.

## The History of Social Psychology

The science of social psychology began when scientists first started to systematically and formally measure the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of human beings (Kruglanski & Stroebe, 2011). The earliest social psychology experiments on group behavior were conducted before 1900 (Triplet, 1898), and the first social psychology textbooks were published in 1908 (McDougall, 1908/2003; Ross, 1908/1974). During the 1940s and 1950s, the social psychologists [Kurt Lewin](#) and [Leon Festinger](#) refined the experimental approach to studying behavior, creating social psychology as a rigorous scientific discipline. Lewin is sometimes known as “the father of social psychology” because he initially developed many of the important ideas of the discipline, including a focus on the dynamic interactions among people. In 1954, Festinger edited an influential book called *Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences*, in which he and other social psychologists stressed the need to measure variables and to use laboratory experiments to systematically test research hypotheses about social behavior. He also noted that it might be necessary in these experiments to deceive the participants about the true nature of the research.

Social psychology was energized by researchers who attempted to understand how the German dictator Adolf Hitler could have produced such extreme obedience and horrendous behaviors in his followers during the World War II. The studies on conformity conducted by Muzafir Sherif (1936) and Solomon Asch (1952), as well as those on obedience by Stanley Milgram (1974), showed the importance of conformity pressures in social groups and how people in authority could create obedience, even to the extent of leading people to cause severe harm to

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guards and prisoners in a simulated prison became so violent that the study  
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Social psychology quickly expanded to study other topics. John Darley and Bibb Latané (1968) developed a model that helped explain when people do and do not help others in need, and Leonard Berkowitz (1974) pioneered the study of human aggression. Meanwhile, other social psychologists, including Irving Janis (1972), focused on group behavior, studying why intelligent people sometimes made decisions that led to disastrous results when they worked together. Still other social psychologists, including Gordon Allport and Muzafir Sherif, focused on intergroup relations, with the goal of understanding and potentially reducing the occurrence of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Social psychologists gave their opinions in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court case that helped end racial segregation in American public schools, and social psychologists still frequently serve as expert witnesses on these and other topics (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). In recent years insights from social psychology have even been used to design anti-violence programs in societies that have experienced genocide (Staub, Pearlman, & Bilali, 2010).

The latter part of the 20th century saw an expansion of social psychology into the field of attitudes, with a particular emphasis on cognitive processes. During this time, social psychologists developed the first formal models of persuasion, with the goal of understanding how advertisers and other people could present their messages to make them most effective (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1963). These approaches to attitudes focused on the cognitive processes that people use when evaluating messages and on the relationship between attitudes and behavior. Leon Festinger's important cognitive dissonance theory was developed during this time and became a model for later research (Festinger, 1957).

In the 1970s and 1980s, social psychology became even more cognitive in orientation as social psychologists used advances in cognitive psychology, which were themselves based largely on advances in computer technology, to inform the field (Fiske & Taylor, 2008). The focus of these researchers, including Alice Eagly, Susan Fiske, E. Tory Higgins, Richard Nisbett, Lee Ross, Shelley Taylor, and many others, was on **social cognition**—*an understanding of how our knowledge about our social worlds develops through experience and the influence of these knowledge structures on memory, information processing, attitudes, and judgment*. Furthermore, the extent to which humans' decision making could be flawed due to both cognitive and

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Examples that we consider in this book include an interest in how social situations affect our health and happiness, the important roles of evolutionary experiences and cultures on our behavior, and the field of **social neuroscience**—*the study of how our social behavior both influences and is influenced by the activities of our brain* (Lieberman, 2010). Social psychologists continue to seek new ways to measure and understand social behavior, and the field continues to evolve. We cannot predict where social psychology will be directed in the future, but we have no doubt that it will still be alive and vibrant.

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## The Person and the Social Situation

Social psychology is the study of the dynamic relationship between individuals and the people around them. Each of us is different, and our individual characteristics, including our personality traits, desires, motivations, and emotions, have an important impact on our social behavior. But our behavior is also profoundly influenced by the social situation—*the people with whom we interact every day*. These people include our friends and family, our classmates, our religious groups, the people we see on TV or read about or interact with online, as well as people we think about, remember, or even imagine.

Social psychologists believe that human behavior is determined by both a person's characteristics and the social situation. They also believe that the social situation is frequently a stronger influence on behavior than are a person's characteristics.

Social psychology is largely the study of the social situation. Our social situations create **social influence**—*the process through which other people change our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and through which we change theirs*. Maybe you can already see how social influence affected Raoul Wallenberg's choices and how he in turn influenced others around him.

Kurt Lewin formalized the joint influence of person variables and situational variables, which is known as the *person-situation interaction*, in an important equation:

Behavior =  $f$ (person, social situation).

Lewin's equation indicates that the behavior of a given person at any given time is a function of (depends on) both the characteristics of the person and the influence of the social situation.

In Lewin's equation, *person* refers to the characteristics of the individual human being born with skills that allow them to successfully interact with others in their social world.

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Newborns are able to recognize faces and to respond to human voices, young children learn language and develop friendships with other children, adolescents become interested in sex and are destined to fall in love, most adults marry and have children, and most people usually get along with others.

People have these particular characteristics because we have all been similarly shaped through human evolution. The genetic code that defines human beings has provided us with specialized social skills that are important to survival. Just as keen eyesight, physical strength, and resistance to disease helped our ancestors survive, so too did the tendency to engage in social behaviors. We quickly make judgments about other people, help other people who are in need, and enjoy working together in social groups because these behaviors helped our ancestors to adapt and were passed along on their genes to the next generation (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2008; Barrett & Kurzban, 2006; Pinker, 2002). Our extraordinary social skills are primarily due to our large brains and the social intelligence that they provide us with (Herrmann, Call, Hernández-Lloreda, Hare, & Tomasello, 2007).

*The assumption that human nature, including much of our social behavior, is determined largely by our evolutionary past* is known as **evolutionary adaptation** (Buss & Kenrick, 1998; Workman & Reader, 2008). In evolutionary theory, **fitness** refers to *the extent to which having a given characteristic helps the individual organism to survive and to reproduce at a higher rate than do other members of the species who do not have the characteristic*. Fitter organisms pass on their genes more successfully to later generations, making the characteristics that produce fitness more likely to become part of the organisms' nature than are characteristics that do not produce fitness. For example, it has been argued that the emotion of jealousy has survived over time in men because men who experience jealousy are more fit than men who do not. According to this idea, the experience of jealousy leads men to protect their mates and guard against rivals, which increases their reproductive success (Buss, 2000).

Although our biological makeup prepares us to be human beings, it is important to remember that our genes do not really determine who we are. Rather, genes provide us with our human characteristics, and these characteristics give us the tendency to behave in a "human" way. And yet each human being is different from every other human being.

to protect and enhance the self and the people who are psychologically close. Increase Font Size relates to the social situation—the motivation to affiliate with, accept, and be accepted by others. We will refer to these two motivations as **self-concern** and **other-concern**, respectively.

## Self-Concern

The most basic tendency of all living organisms, and the focus of the first human motivation, is the desire to protect and enhance our own life and the lives of the people who are close to us. Humans are motivated to find food and water, to obtain adequate shelter, and to protect themselves from danger. Doing so is necessary because we can survive only if we are able to meet these fundamental goals.

The desire to maintain and enhance the self also leads us to do the same for our relatives—those people who are genetically related to us. Human beings, like other animals, exhibit **kin selection**—strategies that favor the reproductive success of one's relatives, sometimes even at a cost to the individual's own survival. According to evolutionary principles, kin selection occurs because behaviors that enhance the fitness of relatives, even if they lower the fitness of the individual himself or herself, may nevertheless increase the survival of the group as a whole.



Figure 1.2 The evolutionary principle of kin selection leads us to be particularly caring of and helpful to those who share our genes.

Source: “Happy family” ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Happy\\_family\\_%281%29.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Happy_family_%281%29.jpg)) by Catherine Scott used under the CC-BY-SA 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>).

In addition to our kin, we desire to protect, improve, and enhance the well-being of our **ingroup**—those we view as being similar and important to us and with whom we share close social



preferred to be doing something more beneficial for yourself, such as study wouldn't have helped strangers in this way, but you did it for your friends because you felt close to and cared about them. The tendency to help the people we feel close to, even if they are not related to us, is probably due in part to our evolutionary past: the people we were closest to were usually those we were related to.

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## Other-Concern

Although we are primarily concerned with the survival of ourselves, our kin, and those who we feel are similar and important to us, we also desire to connect with and be accepted by other people more generally—the goal of *other-concern*. We live together in communities, we work together in work groups, we may worship together in religious groups, and we may play together on sports teams and through clubs. Affiliating with other people—even strangers—helps us meet a fundamental goal: that of finding a romantic partner with whom we can have children. Our connections with others also provide us with opportunities that we would not have on our own. We can go to the grocery store to buy milk or eggs, and we can hire a carpenter to build a house for us. And we ourselves do work that provides goods and services for others. This mutual cooperation is beneficial both for us and for the people around us. We also affiliate because we enjoy being with others, being part of social groups, and contributing to social discourse (Leary & Cox, 2008).

What the other-concern motive means is that we do not always put ourselves first. Being human also involves caring about, helping, and cooperating with other people. Although our genes are themselves “selfish” (Dawkins, 2006), this does not mean that individuals always are. The survival of our own genes may be improved by helping others, even those who are not related to us (Krebs, 2008; Park, Schaller, & Van Vugt, 2008). Just as birds and other animals may give out alarm calls to other animals to indicate that a predator is nearby, humans engage in altruistic behaviors in which they help others, sometimes at a potential cost to themselves.

In short, human beings behave *morally* toward others—they understand that it is wrong to harm other people without a strong reason for doing so, and they display compassion and even altruism toward others (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010; Turiel, 1983). As a result, negative behaviors toward others, such as bullying, cheating, stealing, and aggression, are unusual, unexpected, and socially disapproved. Of course this does not mean that people are always

behaviors. But the fundamental human motivation of other-concern does not mean that violence are the exception rather than the rule of human behavior.

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Sometimes the goals of self-concern and other-concern go hand in hand. When we fall in love with another person, it is in part about a concern for connecting with someone else but is also about self-concern—falling in love makes us feel good about ourselves. And when we volunteer to help others who are in need, it is in part for their benefit but also for us. We feel good when we help others. At other times, however, the goals of self-concern and other-concern conflict. Imagine that you are walking across campus and you see a man with a knife threatening another person. Do you intervene, or do you turn away? In this case, your desire to help the other person (other-concern) is in direct conflict with your desire to protect yourself from the danger posed by the situation (self-concern), and you must decide which goal to put first. We will see many more examples of the motives of self-concern and other-concern, both working together and working against each other, throughout this book.



Figure 1.3 Other-concern is a fundamental part of the behavior of humans and many animals.

Source: “Formosan macaque” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Formosan\\_macaque.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Formosan_macaque.jpg)) by [KaurJmeb](#) used under the CC-BY-SA 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>). “Old couple in a busy street” (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/damiel/19475138/>) by [Geir Halvorsen](#) used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 Generic (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>). “Elderly Care” (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/76039842@N07/7645318536/in/photostream/>) by [Mark Adkins](#) used under the CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>). “Piggy Back” (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cazatoma/4928209598/>) by [Tricia J](#) used under the CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/>).



When people are asked to indicate the things they value the most, they usually list relationships with other people as the most important—often more so than money, power, or status (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fiske & Haslam, 1996). When we work together on a class project, volunteer at a homeless shelter, or serve on a jury in a courtroom trial, we count on others to work with us to get the job done. We develop social bonds with those people, and we expect that they will come through to help us meet our goals. The importance of others shows up in every aspect of our lives—other people teach us what we should and shouldn't do, what we should and shouldn't think, and even what we should and shouldn't like and dislike.

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In addition to the people with whom we are currently interacting, we are influenced by people who are not physically present but who are nevertheless part of our thoughts and feelings. Imagine that you are driving home on a deserted country road late at night. No cars are visible in any direction, and you can see for miles. You come to a stop sign. What do you do? Most likely, you stop at the sign, or at least slow down. You do so because the behavior has been internalized: even though no one is there to watch you, others are still influencing you—you've learned about the rules and laws of society, what's right and what's wrong, and you tend to obey them. We carry our own personal social situations—our experiences with our parents, teachers, leaders, authorities, and friends—around with us every day.

An important principle of social psychology, one that will be with us throughout this book, is that although individuals' characteristics do matter, the social situation is often a stronger determinant of behavior than is personality. When social psychologists analyze an event such as the Holocaust, they are likely to focus more on the characteristics of the situation (e.g., the strong leader and the group pressure provided by the other group members) than on the characteristics of the perpetrators themselves. As an example, we will see that even ordinary people who are neither bad nor evil in any way can nevertheless be placed in situations in which an authority figure is able to lead them to engage in evil behaviors, such as applying potentially lethal levels of electrical shock (Milgram, 1974).

In addition to discovering the remarkable extent to which our behavior is influenced by our social situation, social psychologists have discovered that we often do not recognize how important the social situation is in determining behavior. We often wrongly think that we and others act entirely on our own accord, without any external influences. It is tempting to assume that the people who commit extreme acts, such as terrorists or members of suicide cults, are unusual or extreme

There is perhaps no clearer example of the powerful influence of the social Increase Font Size found in research showing the enormous role that others play in our physical and mental health. *fC* (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener, Tamir, & Scollon, 2006).

## Social Psychology in the Public Interest

### How the Social Situation Influences Our Mental and Physical Health

In comparison with those who do not feel that they have a network of others they can rely on, people who feel that they have adequate social support report being happier and have also been found to have fewer psychological problems, including eating disorders and mental illness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener, Tamir, & Scollon, 2006).

People with social support are less depressed overall, recover faster from negative events, and are less likely to commit suicide (Au, Lau, & Lee, 2009; Bertera, 2007; Compton, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2005; Skärsäter, Langius, Ågren, Häagström, & Dencker, 2005). Married people report being happier than unmarried people (Pew, 2006), and overall, a happy marriage is an excellent form of social support. One of the goals of effective psychotherapy is to help people generate better social support networks because such relationships have such a positive effect on mental health.

In addition to having better mental health, people who have adequate social support are more physically healthy. They have fewer diseases (such as tuberculosis, heart attacks, and cancer), live longer, have lower blood pressure, and have fewer deaths at all ages (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996). Sports psychologists have even found that individuals with higher levels of social support are less likely to be injured playing sports and recover more quickly from injuries they do receive (Hardy, Richman, & Rosenfeld, 1991). These differences appear to be due to the positive effects of social support on physiological functioning, including the immune system.

The opposite of social support is the feeling of being excluded or ostracized. Feeling that others are excluding us is painful, and the pain of rejection may linger even longer than physical pain. People who were asked to recall an event that caused them

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Fitness, & Newton, 2008). When people are threatened with social exclusion, they subsequently express greater interest in making new friends, increase their desire to work cooperatively with others, form more positive first impressions of new potential interaction partners, and even become more able to discriminate between real smiles and fake smiles (Bernstein, Young, Brown, Sacco, & Claypool, 2008; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007).

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Because connecting with others is such an important part of human experience, we may sometimes withhold affiliation from or ostracize other people in order to attempt to force them to conform to our wishes. When individuals of the Amish religion violate the rulings of an elder, they are placed under a *Meidung*. During this time, and until they make amends, they are not spoken to by community members. And people frequently use the “silent treatment” to express their disapproval of a friend’s or partner’s behavior. The pain of ostracism is particularly strong in adolescents (Sebastian, Viding, Williams, & Blakemore, 2010).

The use of ostracism has also been observed in parents and children, and even in Internet games and chat rooms (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). The silent treatment and other forms of ostracism are popular because they work. Withholding social communication and interaction is a powerful weapon for punishing individuals and forcing them to change their behaviors. Individuals who are ostracized report feeling alone, frustrated, sad, and unworthy and having lower self-esteem (Bastian & Haslam, 2010).

Taken together, then, social psychological research results suggest that one of the most important things you can do for yourself is to develop a stable support network. Reaching out to other people benefits those who become your friends (because you are in their support network) and has substantial benefits for you.

## Social Influence Creates Social Norms

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people around us, often without really being aware that we are doing so. So when a young child adopts the beliefs and values of his or her parents, or when someone starts to like jazz music, without really being aware of it, because a roommate plays a lot of it. In other cases, social influence is anything but subtle; it involves one or more individuals actively attempting to change the beliefs or behaviors of others, as is evident in the attempts of the members of a jury to get a dissenting member to change his or her opinion, the use of a popular sports figure to encourage children to buy certain products, or the messages that cult leaders give to their followers to encourage them to engage in the behaviors required of the group.

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One outcome of social influence is the development of **social norms**—*the ways of thinking, feeling, or behaving that are shared by group members and perceived by them as appropriate* (Asch, 1955; Cialdini, 1993). Norms include customs, traditions, standards, and rules, as well as the general values of the group. Through norms, we learn what people actually do (“people in the United States are more likely to eat scrambled eggs in the morning and spaghetti in the evening, rather than vice versa”) and also what we should do (“do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) and shouldn’t do (“do not make racist jokes”). There are norms about almost every possible social behavior, and these norms have a big influence on our actions.

## Different Cultures Have Different Norms

The social norms that guide our everyday behaviors and that create social influence derive in large part from our culture. A **culture** represents *a group of people, normally living within a given geographical region, who share a common set of social norms, including religious and family values and moral beliefs* (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Matsumoto, 2001). The culture in which we live affects our thoughts, feelings, and behavior through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission (Mesoudi, 2009). It is not inappropriate to say that our culture defines our lives just as much as our evolutionary experience does.

Cultures differ in terms of the particular norms that they find important and that guide the behavior of the group members. Social psychologists have found that there is a fundamental difference in social norms between Western cultures (including the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand) and East Asian cultures (including China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, India, and Southeast Asia). Norms in Western cultures are primarily oriented toward **individualism**—*cultural norms, common in Western societies, that focus primarily on*

them. Children in Western cultures feel special about themselves—they enjoy getting good grades on their projects and the best grade in the class (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997). Adults in Western cultures are oriented toward promoting their own individual success, frequently in comparison with (or even at the expense of) others. When asked to describe themselves, individuals in Western cultures generally tend to indicate that they like to “do their own thing,” prefer to live their lives independently, and base their happiness and self-worth on their own personal achievements. In short, in Western cultures the emphasis is on self-concern.

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Norms in the East Asian cultures, on the other hand, are more focused on other-concern. *These norms indicate that people should be more fundamentally connected with others and thus are more oriented toward interdependence, or collectivism.* In East Asian cultures, children are taught to focus on developing harmonious social relationships with others, and the predominant norms relate to group togetherness, connectedness, and duty and responsibility to their family. The members of East Asian cultures, when asked to describe themselves, indicate that they are particularly concerned about the interests of others, including their close friends and their colleagues. As one example of these cultural differences, research conducted by Shinobu Kitayama and his colleagues (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004) found that East Asians were more likely than Westerners to experience happiness as a result of their connections with other people, whereas Westerners were more likely to experience happiness as a result of their own personal accomplishments.



Figure 1.4 People from Western cultures are, on average, more individualistic than people from Eastern cultures, who are, on average, more collectivistic.

Sources: “Family playing a board game”

([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family\\_playing\\_a\\_board\\_game\\_%28%29.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family_playing_a_board_game_%28%29.jpg)) by Bill Branson in the public domain ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_domain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_domain)). “West Wittering Wonderful As Always” (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gareth1953/7976359044/sizes/l/>) by Gareth Williams used under CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>).

Other researchers have studied other cultural differences, such as variations in orientations toward time. Some cultures are more concerned with activities and relationships that are focused on the present, while others are more concerned with activities and relationships that are focused on the future.

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speed in downtown locations and the speed with which postal clerks complete their work was fastest in Western countries (but also in Japan) and slowest in economically undeveloped countries. It has also been argued that there are differences in the extent to which people in different cultures are bound by social norms and customs, rather than being free to express their own individuality without regard to considering social norms (Gelfand et al., 1996). And there are also cultural differences regarding personal space, such as how close individuals stand to each other when talking, as well as differences in the communication styles individuals employ.

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It is important to be aware of cultures and cultural differences, at least in part because people with different cultural backgrounds are increasingly coming into contact with each other as a result of increased travel and immigration, and the development of the Internet and other forms of communication. In Canada, for instance, there are many different ethnic groups, and the proportion of the population that comes from minority (non-White) groups is increasing from year to year. Minorities will account for a much larger proportion of the total new entries into the Canadian workforce over the next decades. Roughly 21% of the Canadian population is foreign-born, which is easily the highest among G8 countries. By 2031, visible minorities are projected to make up 63% of the population of Toronto and 59% of Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2011). Although these changes create the potential for greater cultural understanding and productive interaction, they may also produce unwanted social conflict. Being aware of cultural differences and considering their influence on how we behave toward others is an important part of a basic understanding of social psychology and a topic that we will return to frequently in this book.

### Key Takeaways

- The history of social psychology includes the study of attitudes, group behavior, altruism and aggression, culture, prejudice, and many other topics.
- Social psychologists study real-world problems using a scientific approach.
- Thinking about your own interpersonal interactions from the point of view of social psychology can help you better understand and respond to them.
- Social psychologists study the person-situation interaction: how characteristics of the person and characteristics of the social situation interact to determine behavior.

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- The social situation creates social norms—shared ways of thinking and behaving.
- Cultural differences—for instance, in individualistic versus collectivistic orientations—guide our everyday behavior.

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### Exercises and Critical Thinking

1. Go to the website <http://www.socialpsychology.org> and click on two of the “psychology headlines from around the world” presented on the right-hand side of the page. Read through the two articles and write a short (120 words) summary of each.
2. Consider a recent situation from your personal experience in which you focused on an individual and a cause of his or her behaviour. Could you reinterpret their behavior using a situational explanation?
3. Go to the website <http://www.socialpsychology.org/social-figures.htm> and choose one of the important figures in social psychology listed there. Prepare a brief (250 word) report about how this person contributed to the field of social psychology.

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