CHAPTER 1 Understanding Social Behavior

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 introduces you to the field of social psychology. The Chapter begins with a definition of social psychology and a discussion of how social psychology helps you understand your immediate social world and the wider social world. The Chapter presents Kurt Lewin's classic model for explaining social behavior (highlighting the roles of situational and individual variables in social behavior) and expands upon it by adding information gleaned from more than 50 years of social psychological research. Social psychology is compared to other disciplines that concern themselves with social behavior (e.g., sociology, biology, and anthropology). The chapter points out how social psychology focuses on the individual as the principal unit of investigation and takes a bottom-up approach to explaining social behavior. A substantial segment of the chapter is devoted to discussing research in social psychology, with an emphasis on the distinction between experimental and correlational research. The two types of research are defined and contrasted. There is in-depth coverage of the correlation coefficient and discussions of other research-related topics (settings for research, basic and applied research, the role of theory, and what we learn from social psychological research). The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues in social psychological research.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Social psychology and the understanding of social behavior
- A Model for understanding social behavior
  - The social situation
  - Individual characteristics
- Expanding Lewin's Model

Social psychology and related fields

Research in social psychology
- Experimental research
  - Manipulating variables
  - The equivalence of groups
  - Controlling extraneous variables
  - Factorial experiments
  - Evaluating experiments
- Correlational research
- Settings for social psychological research
  - Laboratory research
  - Field research
- The role of theory in social psychological research
  - Theory and the research process
  - Theory and application
- What do we learn from research in social psychology?
  - Do social psychologists study the obvious?
  - Do exceptions mean research results are wrong?
- Ethics and social psychological research

Sandy Hook revisited

Chapter review

KEY TERMS

Social psychology: The scientific study of how individuals think about, interact with, and influence each other. (p. 3)

Social cognition: The general process we use to make sense out of social events, which may or may not include other people. (p. 5)

Social perception: The social processes by which we come to comprehend the behavior, the words and actions, of other people. (p. 5)

Scientific method: A method of developing scientific explanations involving four steps: identifying a phenomenon to study, developing a testable research hypothesis, designing a research study, and carrying out the research study. (p. 10)

Hypothesis: A tentative and testable statement about the relationship between variables. (p. 10)

Experimental research: Research involving manipulating a variable suspected of influencing behavior to see how that change affects behavior; results show causal relationships among variables. (p. 12)

Correlational research: Research that measures two or more dependent variables and looks for a relationship between them; causal relationships among variables cannot be established. (p. 16)

Independent variable: The variable that the researcher manipulates in an experiment. (p. 12)

Dependent variable: The measure the researcher assesses to determine the influence of the independent variable on the participants' behavior. (p. 12)

Experimental group: A group comprising participants who receive the experimental treatment in an experiment. (p. 12)

Control group: A group in an experiment comprising participants who do not receive the experimental treatment. (p. 12)

Random assignment: A method of assigning participants to groups in an experiment that involves each participant's having an equal chance of being in the experimental or control group. (p. 13)

Extraneous variable: Any variable not controlled by the researcher that could affect the results of a study. (p. 13)

Confounding variable: An extraneous variable in an experiment that varies systematically with the independent variable, making it difficult or impossible to establish a causal connection between the independent and dependent variables. (p. 13)

Factorial experiment: An experimental design in which two or more independent variables are manipulated, allowing for the establishment of a causal connection between the independent and dependent variables. (p. 14)

Interaction: When the effect of one independent variable in a factorial experiment changes over levels of a second, indicating a complex relationship between independent variables. (p. 14)

Positive correlation: The direction of a correlation in which the values of two variables increase or decrease in the same direction. (p. 16)

Negative correlation: The direction of a correlation in which the value of one variable increases whereas the value of a second decreases. (p. 16)

Correlation coefficient: A statistical technique used to determine the direction and strength of a relationship between two variables. (p. 16)

Field study: A descriptive research strategy in which the researcher makes unobtrusive observations of the participants without making direct contact or interfering in any way. (p. 18)

Field survey: A descriptive research strategy in which the researcher directly approaches participants and asks them questions. (p. 18)

Field experiment: A research setting in which the researcher manipulates one or more independent variables and measures behavior in the participant's natural environment. (p. 18)

Theory: A set of interrelated propositions concerning the causes for a social behavior that helps organize research results, make predictions about the influence of certain variables, and give direction to future social research. (p. 19)

Basic research: Research that has the principal aim of empirically testing a theory or a model. (p. 20)

Applied research: Research that has a principal aim to address a real-world problem. (p. 20)

Hindsight bias: Also known as the "I-knew-it-all-along" phenomenon; shows that with the benefit of hindsight, everything looks obvious. (p. 20)

Informed consent: An ethical research requirement that participants must be informed of the nature of the study, the requirements for participation, any risks or benefits associated with participating in the study, and the right to decline or withdraw from participation with no penalty. (p. 22)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of Chapter 1, you should be able to:

1. Define social psychology and know how it relates to other disciplines that focus on social behavior.

   Before your introduction to additional chapters, you should acknowledge the importance of examining social behavior within greater cultural and historical contexts. You also should be prepared to apply social psychological findings, introduced throughout subsequent chapters, to contemporary and historical events.

   Describe how social psychologists (as opposed to how a layperson or a scientist of other disciplines) explain social behavior.

   Social psychology focuses on the individual within his or her social situation. You should understand how the issues addressed by social psychologists contrast with the questions posed by related fields, such as sociology, biology, and anthropology.

2. Discuss the differences between social psychology and other disciplines that also study social behavior.

   You will understand that a biologist explains social behavior with genetics. Anthropologists focus on the physical and cultural aspects of human development. You will also learn that personality psychologists rely primarily on internal characteristics to explain behavior, and place less emphasis on the social environment. Social psychology focuses mainly on the social environment. You will also learn that sociology is another social science that deals with social behavior. History is another discipline that looks at social behavior. Historians look at how large economic, political and technological forces affect social behavior. You will also learn that whereas social psychology takes a bottom-up view, sociology takes a top-down view.

3. Discuss how research is used in social psychology.

   You should understand that like other sciences, social psychology involves applying the scientific method to answering social psychological questions. You should be able to discuss the steps involved in the scientific method and how research hypotheses are formed and tested. You should also understand the basic difference between experimental and correlational research.

4. Discuss how a social psychological experiment is constructed and tell the difference between a one-factor and factorial experiment.

   You should understand the difference between an independent and a dependent variable and that the basic experiment consists of an experimental and control group. You should be able to discuss the defining qualities of experimental research, the experimental and control group, random assignment, and extraneous and confounding variables. You should also understand that a one-factor experiment includes only one independent variable and that a factorial experiment includes two more independent variables. You should also be able to define and give an example of an interaction between independent variables. Finally, you should also understand how to critically analyze a social psychological research study.

5. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of laboratory research and field research.

   You should be able to articulate the defining qualities of a laboratory study. You should understand that you can exercise a great deal of control over the conditions under which a laboratory is conducted, controlling extraneous variables. You will understand that this increases the internal validity of the study, but may reduce external validity.

   You should know that social psychological is also conducted in the participant's natural environment (field research) You should understand the difference between a field study, field survey and field experiment. You should also understand that research done in the field increases external validity, but may reduce internal validity and that there are ethical concerns when doing a field experiment.

6. Explain the role of theory in social psychology.

   First, you should be able to define theory and distinguish it from related concepts such as "hypotheses," "research," and "phenomena." Emphasized are the roles of theory as an organizer of research findings and a foundation on which subsequent hypotheses can be generated and tested. Many, if not most, research studies are driven by theory, attempting to explain a small piece of a larger set of related behaviors (called "basic research"). Last, you must understand that theoretical explanations for a set of behaviors may fade out quickly, or survive for years, depending on the amount of existing empirical support.

7. Discuss what we learn from social psychological research.

   You will be able to discuss the issue of whether social psychologists study the obvious. You will understand how the hindsight bias may increase your perception that social psychological findings are obvious and therefore the research that uncovered them was not necessary. You will learn that just because there are exceptions to social psychological findings, that does not invalidate the results. Social psychologists focus on differences between groups of individuals in research and not on any single participant.

8. Discuss the importance of ethical standards in social psychological research.

   You need to be aware of the regulation of research involving human subjects (e.g., American Psychological Association guidelines, university review boards), particularly the requirement of informed consent, and the safeguards employed to ensure subjects' anonymity and reduce their likelihood of enduring psychological and/or physical effects of experimental manipulations (e.g., debriefing).

KEY QUESTIONS

These questions appear at the beginning of the chapter. As you read the text answer these questions as a way to learn the material

1. What is social psychology?

2. How do social psychologists explain social behavior?

3. How does social psychology relate to other disciplines that study social behavior?

4. How do social psychologists approach the problem of explaining social behavior?

5. What is experimental research, and how is it used?

6. What is correlational research?

7. What is the correlation coefficient, and what does it tell you?

8. Where is social psychological research conducted?

9. What is the role of theory in social psychology?

10. What can we learn from social psychological research?

11. What ethical standards must social psychologists follow when conducting research?

PRACTICE TESTS

Multiple-Choice Questions

Choose the alternative that best completes the stem of each question.

1. According to your text, social psychology is the scientific study of
   - **a.** how large groups interact with each other.
   - **b.** how large groups think and feel about each other.
   - **c.** how individuals think and feel about, interact with, and influence each other.
   - **d.** how individuals interact with and influence each other, but not how they think and feel about each other.

2. Which of the following represents Lewin's model for social behavior?
   - **a.** behavior = *f*(social situation × individual characteristics)
   - **b.** behavior = *f*(social situation + individual characteristics)
   - **c.** behavior = *f*(individual – characteristics)
   - **d.** behavior = *f*(social ÷ situation)
   - **e.** none of the above

3. According to your text, the factors external to the individual that affect behavior comprise _____.
   - **a.** culture
   - **b.** individual characteristics
   - **c.** the social situation
   - **d.** social cognition

4. The process by which we make sense out of people's behavior, involving inferring motives and attributing motives for observed behavior, is
   - **a.** social perception
   - **b.** social cognition
   - **c.** social evaluation
   - **d.** none of the above

5. According to your text, Lewin's original model for social psychology has been expanded to take into account

a. social cognition and object perception.
b. social cognition and social perception.
c. top-down and bottom-up processing
d. automatic and controlled processing

6. According to your text, _____ directly causes social behavior.

a. social perception
b. social influence
c. social cognition
d. an intention to behave in a certain way

7. According to your text, social psychologists are most interested in studying

a. large group behavior
b. individual behavior
c. personality characteristics
d. the effects of culture on social behavior

8. According to your text, a difference between social psychology and sociology is that sociology

a. focuses on societal causes for behavior.
b. takes a top-down approach.
c. takes a bottom-up approach.
d. both a and b
e. both a and c

9. Which of the following was NOT listed in your text as a feature of the scientific method?

a. identifying a phenomenon to study
b. critically analyzing all other studies on a phenomenon
c. forming a testable research hypothesis
d. designing and carrying out a research study

10. A tentative and testable statement about the relationship between variables is known as a(n)

a. hypothesis.
b. theory.
c. model.
d. idea.

11. Rico carries out a study of whether individuals help male or female victims. He has either a male or female confederate drop a pile of books in front of a passerby on the stairs near her campus library.

Rico notes how long it takes the passerby to help. This is an example of _____ research.

a. experimental
b. correlational
c. laboratory
d. unethical

12. In the previous question, the gender of the confederate is the _____ variable whereas the time it took the passerby to help is the _____ variable.

a. independent; control
b. correlational; dependent
c. dependent; independent
d. independent; dependent

13. In an experiment, the group of subjects that is exposed to the experimental treatment is called the _____ group.

a. independent
b. experimental
c. control
d. extraneous

14. The _____ group in an experiment provides a baseline of behavior without a treatment and serves as a comparison group.

a. control
b. experimental
c. correlational
d. dependent
e. none of the above

15. When conducting his experiment, Jim makes sure that each and every subject has an equal chance of appearing in each group in his experiment. Jim is using

a. selective assignment.
b. random assignment.
c. random sampling.
d. none of the above.

16. An unwanted variable that varies systematically with your independent variable in an experiment is called a(n)

a. extraneous variable.
b. correlational variable.
c. external variable.
d. confounding variable.

17. In a factorial experiment

a. two or more dependent variables are included.
b. two or more independent variables are included.
c. both experimental and correlational variables are included.
d. two or more extraneous variables are controlled.

18. If the effect of one independent variable changes over levels of a second, a(n) _____ is present.

a. interaction
b. main effect
c. confounding
d. none of the above

19. Research in which two or more variables are measured to see if there is a relationship between them is called _____ research.

a. experimental
b. field
c. correlational
d. controlled

20. The _____ is used to evaluate the strength and direction of a relationship between variables.

a. interaction
b. analysis of variance
c. average score
d. correlation coefficient

21. Which of the following represents the strongest correlation between two variables?

a. $r = -.65$
b. $r = -.87$
c. $r = .72$
d. $r = 0$

22. Dr. Jones observes that the better mood a subject reports, the more that subject helped someone in distress. This illustrates a _____ correlation.

a. negative
b. positive
c. neutral
d. none of the above

23. A negative correlation exists if the value of

a. one variable increases and that of another stays the same.
b. two variables do not systematically vary.
c. two variables change in the same direction.
d. two variables change in the opposite direction.

24. According to your text, a laboratory experiment will result in reasonably high levels of

a. internal validity.
b. external validity.
c. content validity.
d. none of the above

25. In a _____, the researcher makes unobtrusive observations of her subjects without making contact with them in any way.

a. field survey
b. field experiment
c. field study
d. field observation

26. Dr. Ames approaches individuals in a shopping mall and asks them their opinions on health-care reform. This illustrates a

a. field survey.
b. field study.
c. laboratory study.
d. field experiment.

27. In an experiment on the effects of noise on aggression, Dr. Yueng has a confederate run a lawn mower near a sidewalk (noise condition) or stand near a nonrunning lawn mower (no-noise condition). another confederate bumps into a subject on the sidewalk. Dr. Yueng records whether the subject responds aggressively to the bump. The research technique used here is a

a. laboratory experiment.
b. correlational study.
c. field experiment.
d. field survey.

28. A(n) _____ is a set of interrelated statements about the causes of a particular phenomenon.

a. theory
b. hypothesis
c. model
d. idea

29. Amy reads a research article and says that she knew about the results all along. However, when asked to guess the results of another experiment before reading it, she cannot. This illustrates the

a. foresight bias.
b. confirmation bias.
c. hindsight bias.
d. none of the above.

30. The ethical requirement that subjects for an experiment must be told the nature of the experiment prior to participating is called

a. debriefing.
b. informed consent.
c. deception avoidance.
d. none of the above.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

31. _____ is the scientific study of how individuals thing about, interact with, and influence each other.

32. According to your text, social psychologists use _____ to learn about social behavior.

33. _____ is the general process we use to make sense out of our social world.

34. _____ is the specific process involving making inferences about the motives of others.

35. According to your text, social psychology takes a(n) _____ perspective on social behavior, whereas other disciplines like sociology take a(n)_____ perspective.

36. In _____ research you manipulate a variable you suspect influences behavior and see how that change affects behavior.

37. In _____ research you measure two or more dependent variables and look for a relationship between them.

38. A statistical test known as the _____ provides us with two important pieces of information: the degree of relationship between variables and the direction of the relationship.

39. You cannot _____ from correlational research, regardless of the size of the relationship between variables.

40. _____ research is conducted in a controlled environment created by the researcher

41. In a _____ , the researcher makes unobtrusive observations of the participants without making direct contact or interfering in any way.

42. The principal aim of _____ research is to empirically test a theory or a model.

43. The principal aim of _____ research is to address a real-world problem.

44. A _____ is a set of interrelated statements attempting to describe and explain a phenomenon.

45. Just because an exception exists to a social psychological research finding, _____ .

Answers

Multiple Choice

#	Correct	Page in Text
1	c	3
2	a	4
3	c	4
4	a	5
5	b	6
6	d	6–7
7	b	9
8	d	9
9	b	10–11
10	a	10
11	a	12
12	d	12
13	b	12
14	a	12
15	b	13
16	d	13
17	b	14
18	a	16
19	c	16
20	d	16
21	b	16
22	b	16
23	d	16
24	a	17
25	c	18
26	a	18
27	c	18
28	a	19
29	c	20
30	b	22

#	Correct Answer	Page in Text
31	social psychology	3
32	the scientific method	3
33	social cognition	5
34	social perception	5
35	bottom-up; top-down	9
36	experimental	12
37	correlational	16
38	correlational coefficient	16
39	draw a causal inference	16
40	laboratory	17
41	field study	18
41	basic	20
42	applied	20
44	theory	19
45	it does not mean the results are wrong	21

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT/OBSERVATION

Social psychology is based on studying social phenomena in a scientific manner. most of us rely on some "commonsense" interpretations that are off-the-cuff explanations for social behavior based on what we believe to be true of the world. These include statements such as "opposites attract" or "out of sight, out of mind." Of course, there are competing beliefs, or adages, also. For example, opposites may attract, but "birds of a feather flock together." If it is true that when you are out of sight, you are out of mind, then why is it that "absence makes the heart grow fonder"?

Social psychologists have in fact examined some of these cultural adages, or homilies, experimentally. We will discuss them in some of the later chapters in the textbook. For now, you might generate some ideas by simply considering each of these adages. For example, is it possible that out of sight and absence makes the heart grow fonder might both be true? Perhaps one is an accurate description of the state of affairs under some circumstances and the other works in other situations. Think of your own life and your relationships. When did one adage hold true and when did the other? Does it depend on the depth of the relationship? What other factors might be involved?

When you think of groups of friends or other voluntary organizations, do birds of a feather flock together? Does it depend on what they "flocking" together for? Common sense sometimes says that "opposites attract" in the context of love relationships - for example, if someone is an independent individual, then perhaps the perfect partner is someone who is dependent. Now consider dating or married couples. Is it your observation that opposites attract?

INTERNET ACTIVITY

TAKING PART IN A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

In days past, the only way one could participate in a social psychological experiment was to go physically to a certain lace and take part in the experiment. The Internet has changed all that. Now, anyone with access to a computer can be a participant in a social psychological study. You can find a wide range of experimental and correlational research studies on the Internet. One rich source for these studies is the Web site for the American Psychological Society. Or, you can type in the search term "social psychology experiments" and hunt around for a study to take part in.

For this exercise, you are to find and participate in an on-line social psychological study. You may choose either an experimental or a correlational study. After you have completed the study, answer the following questions:

What was the main goal of the study?

Was an informed consent form used? If so, how did you complete it?

If the study was an experiment , what were the independent and dependent variables? How were the independent variables manipulated? How was the dependent variable collected?

If the study was correlational (e.g., a questionnaire), which variables do you think were going to be used to predict the values of others?

Was there any debriefing done? If so, what was it?

What, if any, opportunity were you given to ask questions and/or obtain a copy of the results of the study?

