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DEFINING THE FIELD OF APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the field of applied social psychology. Before reviewing some of the contributions of the field in various domains of life (e.g., education,

health, sports), it is important to define the field of applied social psychology, including placing it in the context of its parent field, social psychology. We begin by considering a series of social interactions described to one of the chapter authors by friends who live in a city in the

U.S. Midwest. The interactions occurred in early fall of 2010. The events were similar to those that commonly occur in people's lives—a first-time meeting of two couples, the development of friendship between the couples, and a party hosted by one of the couples—and as most social interactions do, they reflected a great variety of social psychological phenomena. These phenomena enable us to illustrate first the focus of the science of social psychology and then the focus of applied social psychology, which we define as a branch of social psychology.

A family moved in across the street from Ken and Kim (all names altered). They first met their new neighbors when the husband (Scott) came across the street with jumper cables to help Ken start his car. Ken thought that Scott seemed quite friendly. After the car was started, Ken and Kim invited Scott and his wife Jen in for coffee. The couples liked each other right away, discovering they had many interests in common. Over the following weeks a strong friendship began to develop as they spent more and more time together. The two men took in a number of sports events, and Ken interested Scott in taking up kayaking. The two women began to go to garage sales and flea markets. The couples agreed with each other's parenting practices and began to watch the other couple's children on occasion.

Kim suggested to Ken that they introduce their new friends to some of their other friends. So they invited Scott and Jen and three other couples to a pizza and game night at their home. The evening began very well. There was lively conversation and lots of laughter with Scott and Jen readily joining in. However, the pleasant atmosphere quickly evaporated when the conversation turned to the ongoing controversy over the proposal to build a mosque within a few blocks of the site of the World Trade Center disaster. The discussion became increasingly loud and heated as sharp differences of opinion emerged. One of the group, named Russ, forcefully advanced the position that the location of the mosque should be moved farther away from the site of the disaster out of respect for the memory of the victims and sensitivity for their loved ones. As Russ argued his position, Ken began to worry because he knew that Russ had temper control problems. Meanwhile,

Scott strongly disagreed with Russ, believing the mosque should be built as planned as a sign of America's commitment to religious freedom and because it would give an international face to moderate and peaceful Islam. When Scott raised the possibility that negative attitudes toward Arabs may underlie opposition to the proposed location, Russ became enraged and yelled, "I don't have negative attitudes toward Arabs; I just love my country," and then he pointed at Scott and called him "an un-American loser." That triggered louder voices and more accusations about prejudice and racism. Ken and Kim's friendly get-together was clearly in danger of falling apart. Several people tried to settle down the people who were arguing, but unfortunately no matter what they tried, nothing worked. Soon the party ended with Russ and Scott refusing to shake hands and all guests leaving for home.

Defining Social Psychology

So, what about the above series of interactions helps to define the field of social psychology? For one thing, the events were rich in social psychological phenomena. Drawing on the definitions in several social psychology textbooks (e.g., Myers, Spencer, & Jordon, 2009), **social psychology** may be defined as the science that seeks to understand how people think about, feel about, relate to, and influence one another. Given this definition, you should be able to identify many examples of social psychological subject matter in the interactions involving Ken, Kim, and their friends by looking for instances of thinking about others, feeling about others, relating to others, and influencing others. Scott *related* to Ken by helping with his car. Ken *thought* Scott seemed friendly. Ken and Kim invited (*related to*) Scott and Jen into their home. The couples liked each other (*feelings*), and they subsequently *related* to each other by spending time together, including going to various events. Ken *influenced* Scott to take up kayaking. The couples agreed with (*thoughts*) each other's parenting practices and helped (*related to*) each other by watching each other's children. Ken was *influenced* by Kim to have the party. In the

beginning, the party went well with the partygoers relating positively in lively conversation, but then things turned for the worse. . . .

We want you to recognize that one can do a similar analysis with virtually any kind of social situation. Those processes exemplified in the above social interactions—thinking and feeling about others, relating to and influencing them—are precisely the kinds of processes that comprise the subject matter of social psychology, and thus are what social psychologists focus on in their research. We also can see where the examples of social psychological processes in those interactions can be related to broader areas of social psychological concern and investigation, such as helping behavior (e.g., Scott helping with Ken’s car), friendship formation (e.g., relationship between the two couples), person perception (e.g., Ken’s view of Russ as having a volatile temper), and interpersonal conflict (e.g., altercation among group members).

Social Psychology as a Science

So, those are the kinds of phenomena that social psychology—as a science—seeks to understand. Do not pass lightly over the phrase “as a science” because the fact that social psychology is a science is fundamental to its meaning. The *essence of science* involves (a) a set of research methods that in combination make up what is known as the scientific method, and (b) a foundation of core values.

Scientific method and core values. The research methods (e.g., correlational, experimental) that fall under the scientific method are those that depend on **empirical tests**, that is, the use of systematic observation to evaluate propositions and ideas. An empirical test of an idea (e.g., people are happier in sunny weather) entails a research study that is (a) set up in such a way as to allow for the idea to be either refuted or supported, and (b) conducted so that what is done can be readily evaluated and replicated by other researchers (Cozby, 2009).

Undergirding and guiding research methods is a set of *core values* (Baron, Branscombe, & Byrne, 2008; Heiman, 2002). The following are some of the most important values that are absolutely essential for scientists to adhere to in their work:

- *Accuracy*: precise, error-free measurement and collection of information (i.e., data)
- *Objectivity*: minimization of bias in data collection and proposition testing
- *Skepticism*: refusing to believe findings and conclusions without rigorous verification
- *Open-mindedness*: readiness to accept as valid evidence that which may be inconsistent with one’s initial, and perhaps strongly held, beliefs or theories
- *Ethics*: acceptance of the absolute importance of ethical behavior in conducting research

Adherence to the first four values is necessary to ensure that findings of research validly reflect the phenomenon under study. The fifth value, ethics, also pertains to the validity of findings (e.g., researchers should not wittingly alter or misrepresent their results), but also encompasses the need to safeguard the dignity and well-being of research participants.

Scientific understanding. Thus, to seek an understanding of social psychological phenomena, social psychologists, as scientists, are guided by certain core values and rely on research strategies that fall under the scientific method. But, what is meant by “understanding”? In science, including social psychology, *understanding* involves the accomplishment of four goals: description, prediction, determining causality, and explanation (Cozby, 2009). We define these goals and illustrate them by considering the possible influence that having a pet has on the adjustment of the elderly.

The goal of **description** entails identifying and reporting the details and nature of a phenomenon, often distinguishing between the classes or types of the phenomenon and recording its frequency of occurrence. In the case of the adjustment of the elderly, a researcher might distinguish

between emotional adjustment and social adjustment and then measure and record the incidence of older persons in the community who fit this classification. The researcher could also find out whether or not each elderly person has a pet, perhaps listing information about the kind and number of pets. Achieving accurate descriptions of phenomena is one aspect of understanding. Understanding also entails prediction.

The **prediction** form of understanding requires knowing what factors are systematically related (i.e., correlated) to the phenomenon of interest. In our example, if research showed that there is a relationship between adjustment and having a pet—those who have a pet tend to be better adjusted—we would understand that adjustment in the elderly can be predicted in general by the presence or absence of a pet. This relationship would represent an important insight and lead us to consider the third form of understanding: ascertaining whether or not there is a causal relationship between having a pet and adjustment.

Determining causality between two factors means determining that changes in one factor produce (i.e., cause) changes in the other factor. Just because two factors are related does not necessarily mean that they are causally related. For instance, having a pet might have no effect whatsoever on the adjustment of the elderly even though a relationship may exist. A third factor could be responsible for the existence of the relationship. For instance, physical health could influence both how well-adjusted people feel and whether they have a pet (because it is easier to care for a pet if one is healthy). So, it is important not to be misled by a common tendency among people to assume that if two things are correlated, a causal relationship necessarily exists.

Identifying the cause(s) of phenomena is a very important component of understanding. If research were to establish that having a pet does indeed lead to improvements in adjustment (i.e., causes better adjustment), there could be clear-cut practical implications in terms of providing help to the elderly. But, pursuit of understanding does not end with the

establishment of causation. Understanding also involves explanation, the fourth goal.

Explanation pertains to establishing *why* a phenomenon or relationship occurs. We may understand that one factor causes another factor without knowing exactly why the effect occurs. If having a pet does lead to improvements in the adjustment of the elderly (and this does seem to be the case [Beck & Katcher, 1996]), what is the explanation? Is it because having a pet reduces loneliness, because it increases feelings of security, because it gives the elderly person a chance to feel needed by nurturing a living thing, or because of some other factor?

Social psychological understanding: The formation of intergroup attitudes. Let us further illustrate social psychology's approach to understanding social psychological phenomena by considering the formation of intergroup attitudes. An attitude may be defined as "a person's overall evaluation of persons (including oneself), objects, and issues" (Petty & Wegener, 1998, p. 323). Thus, an *intergroup attitude* refers to a person's overall evaluation of members of a group to which the person does not belong. One major area of research in the study of attitudes focuses on understanding how attitudes are formed (i.e., how people come to possess their attitudes). Let us focus specifically on intergroup attitudes and consider a small portion of the research that sheds some light on how negative intergroup attitudes develop in people. Note that this is essentially a question of causality. We expect that you are sensitive to the serious social and political consequences that can stem from the existence of negative attitudes (and relations) between various groups (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, national) in the world. Recall the furor that erupted at Ken and Kim's party when one person simply implied that another person possessed negative attitudes toward Arabs.

One approach that social psychologists have taken in the study of the formation of intergroup attitudes is to examine the role of various agents of socialization. This research indicates that children tend to take on the attitudes of

important people around them (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) and that at least part of the explanation is that these people influence the development of such attitudes through the basic principles of learning, such as instrumental conditioning, classical conditioning, and observation (e.g., Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010; Oskamp, 1991). For instance, Castelli, De Dea, and Nesdale (2008) showed that when White preschool-age children observed a White adult nonverbally convey uneasiness toward a Black person, they subsequently expressed more negative attitudes toward Black targets.

So, intergroup attitudes are learned partly from others. But, as is the case with many social psychological phenomena, multiple factors must be recognized when exploring the determinants of intergroup attitudes. Another influential factor that is a salient part of people's lives is the media (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010). For instance, news reports about terrorism have been linked to increased prejudice toward Arabs (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009). It is especially noteworthy that social psychologists also have found that people's attitudes toward other groups may be influenced by the simple fact that they see themselves as members of a particular group. When people view themselves as belonging to one group (e.g., Americans), that group is referred to as the *in-group*; nonmembers of the *in-group* (e.g., non-Americans) are called the *out-group*. Many investigations confirm the existence of a very robust phenomenon called **in-group/out-group bias**, which means that in-group members tend to evaluate and relate to the in-group favorably and to the out-group less favorably (or unfavorably). This might not seem particularly surprising. What is remarkable, however, is that in-group/out-group bias is such a basic social psychological phenomenon that it can show up even in a situation where there is just the slightest differentiation between the in-group and the out-group. In many laboratory experiments, Tajfel and his colleagues (e.g., Tajfel & Billig, 1974) and others (e.g., Allen & Wilder, 1975) divided participants—all strangers—into two groups on the basis of trivial criteria

(e.g., those who underestimate and those who overestimate the number of dots on slides). Across experiments, participants consistently assigned more favorable rewards and traits to in-group members than to out-group members (see also Paladino & Castelli, 2008). Relatedly, Lyons, Kenworthy, and Popan (2010) recently provided evidence linking negative attitudes and behaviors toward Arab immigrants among Americans to their degree of identification with their national in-group (i.e., being American). So, we know that simply being a member of a group contributes to the development of negative attitudes toward other groups. We also have a glimpse of some social psychological factors that were potentially relevant to whether or not Russ, in fact, did harbor negative attitudes toward Arabs (as intimated by Scott). These factors include the levels of ethnic tolerance, especially toward Arabs, of his significant other; his exposure to media reports about threatening acts associated with Arabs; and the strength of his national identity.

As we consider social psychology's approach to understanding the development of negative intergroup attitudes, let us recognize one more causal factor—competition. Around 1950, Muzafer Sherif and his research team took the investigation of intergroup relations into the field where they studied the role of competition between groups (Sherif, 1966b; Sherif & Sherif, 1953, 1969). The researchers conducted an ingenious series of 3-week experiments with 11- and 12-year-old boys at isolated camp settings. The investigations were conducted in weeklong phases. During Phase 1—group formation—the boys were divided into two groups of approximately 10 each. Each group lived in a separate cabin and, as arranged by the experimenters, engaged in a series of appealing activities that required cooperative interdependence (e.g., camping, building a rope bridge). Members of each group soon developed a sense of “we-feeling” as their group developed a definite role structure (e.g., leaders, followers) and set of norms (e.g., expectations about how things should be done). During Phase 2—group conflict—the researchers investigated conditions that resulted in negative

intergroup attitudes and behavior. They implemented a series of competitions (e.g., tug-of-war, skits) in which only the victorious group of boys won a prize. By the end of the week, the relations between the two groups had deteriorated to a very antagonistic situation involving strongly negative stereotypes (e.g., “sneaky,” “stinkers”) and behavior (e.g., name-calling, food fights, damage to property).

In all of the preceding examples of research on intergroup attitudes, we can see that the social psychologists focused on furthering the understanding of one or more of the following: how people think about, feel about, relate to, and influence each other. All of the research reviewed fits under social psychology’s umbrella. Now let us look under the applied social psychology umbrella.

APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Sherif’s (1966b) field research on intergroup relations involved a third phase. During this phase—reduction of conflict—the researchers developed and evaluated an intervention strategy to improve the relations between the groups of boys. The strategy was designed in accordance with Sherif’s understanding of the existing research literature on the determinants of positive attitudes and relations among groups that are divided along racial, political, and industrial lines (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). The strategy was based on the idea that groups in conflict would experience improved relations if they cooperate in the attainment of **superordinate goals**, that is, goals that are highly appealing to both groups, but that can be attained only through their cooperative effort. During this phase, the groups of boys were introduced to a series of superordinate goals (e.g., pulling together on a rope to start a broken-down truck that had been on its way to get food). Over the course of several days, hostile interaction between the groups declined considerably and friendships began to cross group boundaries. Since this early work of Sherif, the utility of superordinate goals in

contributing to the reduction of conflict between a wide variety of groups has been well established (e.g., Kelly & Collett, 2008).

In Sherif’s research on breaking down the barriers between the groups of boys, we have an example of the *use of social psychology to effect positive social change*. Notice how his emphasis shifted from trying to understand the causes of a social problem—intergroup antagonism—to trying to come up with a strategy for doing something about the problem. This concern with contributing to positive change brings us more fully into the area of social psychology that focuses on application—applied social psychology.

Applied social psychology refers to the branch of social psychology that draws on social psychological theories, principles, methods, and research evidence to contribute to (a) the understanding of social and practical problems, and (b) the development of intervention strategies for improving the functioning of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and societies with respect to social and practical problems. In this definition, *functioning* is broadly viewed as encompassing how well people perform or operate with respect to any one of many criteria, including emotional and social adjustment, physical health, and performance in school, work, or athletics.

In our view, it is *the concern with the development of intervention strategies* that is unique to applied social psychology and sets it apart as a branch of social psychology. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on the meaning and focus of applied social psychology, and in so doing defines its position in the context of its parent field, social psychology.

Applied Social Psychology as a Science

As a branch of social psychology, applied social psychology is by definition a science, accordingly it relies on the scientific method, and is guided by the core values of science. Moreover, applied social psychologists likewise

are motivated by the aforementioned goals of science: description, prediction, determining causality, and explanation. However, they are distinguished from other social psychologists by also having a strong interest in what may be regarded as the fifth goal of science: control (Christensen, 2004; Goodwin, 2003). In science, **control** means being able to manipulate conditions that will cause changes in a phenomenon. Thus, once scientific research has identified the causes of a phenomenon, the potential for scientific control will have been established. Returning to the example of pets and adjustment, once researchers determine that having a pet frequently improves adjustment in older people, a “pets visit nursing home” program might be implemented as an intervention strategy. Another example is that once the basic principles of attribution theory were formulated, clinical psychologists began to use them to develop interventions designed to alleviate depression (see Chapter 5).

Although their ultimate goal is to effect positive change—to improve the functioning of people—applied social psychologists themselves may conduct research that helps them to understand the nature and causes of phenomena that concern them. This is seen in Sherif’s (1966b) research on how competition can negatively affect intergroup relations. As another example, applied social psychologists who are interested in reducing bullying among schoolchildren (see Chapter 9) may investigate the correlates or causes of such antisocial behavior with a view toward using the results of their research to develop effective intervention strategies. However, it is often the case that they will draw on knowledge accumulated by other researchers who may or may not be interested in the direct application of research findings. That is, many social psychologists are very interested in conducting research that will enhance our understanding of social problems, but in their own work do not address how that understanding can be applied. Regardless of the origin of the research evidence, interventions that applied social psychologists are involved in developing,

such as bullying reduction strategies, will have solid scientific bases to them.

Thus, just as research studies designed to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon are guided by the researchers’ understanding of the existing theory and research evidence, so too are intervention strategies designed by applied social psychologists based on existing theory and knowledge. Furthermore, applied social psychologists’ responsibility does not stop with careful science-based design of intervention strategies, but rather extends for both scientific and ethical reasons to the evaluation of the consequences of the interventions. The scientific obligation stems from our responsibility to test the theoretical rationales and hypotheses underlying intervention strategies. The ethical obligation stems essentially from the need to ensure not only that the intended beneficiaries of interventions gain from them, but also that they (or others) do not experience unintended negative consequences. We return to the design and evaluation of intervention strategies in Chapter 4.

Another ethical implication of applied social psychology further elaborates on the idea of negative consequences. What if there are social psychological findings which can be implemented and which might produce some desirable immediate outcomes, but which might also have longer-term outcomes that could be undesirable? For example, research has shown that when subtle cues of being watched are present in the environment, people’s behavior may improve. In one interesting study, researchers examined how much money people would contribute to an “honesty box” to pay for the milk they put into their tea or coffee when a banner placed in clear view of the beverages depicted either flowers or a set of eyes. The results revealed that people paid on average 2.76 times more when the banner depicted eyes (Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts, 2006). Based on findings like these, some people suggest that individuals in certain professions, like policing, should wear body cameras to encourage good behavior. For example, in 2015 the mayor of London initiated a plan to deploy 20,000 body cameras on police officers

(New Scientist, 2015). But, what happens when based on the idea of improving people's behavior, everyone starts wearing body cameras—your teachers, your parents, your friends? What psychological consequences occur among people who know that their every action is being recorded and potentially stored for future review? Might this have a detrimental effect on people's levels of spontaneity, security, or well-being? This example highlights the broad ethical implications of research and application in applied social psychology.

The Role of Personal Values

As we have noted, in conducting research, scientists are guided by a universally agreed on set of core values. We must also recognize the role of personal values in the conduct and application of science. Although one of the core values of science is objectivity, it is widely recognized that the individual's personal values influence many decisions that he or she makes as a scientist. For example, a social psychologist's concerns about racial injustice in society may lead him or her to choose as an area of research one that focuses on the causes of prejudice and discrimination and also to search for evidence that implicates certain political groups or institutions in the perpetuation of prejudice in society.

As social psychologists become involved in implementing control—developing strategies to change people's lives—personal values take on added importance (Mayo & La France, 1980; Sapsford & Dallos, 1998). In contributing to the development of an intervention, the applied social psychologist has determined that a problem exists. However, the determination of what constitutes a social problem cannot ever be purely objective. When someone breaks a leg while skiing, a physical problem unequivocally exists, and the services of a medical professional are clearly required. Unlike the medical professional, the social psychologist's choice of whether or not to intervene in a situation always involves personal values. Consider the example

of affirmative action programs attempting to overcome the historical disadvantages experienced by certain minorities by requiring employers to hire members of these groups. The basic value underlying affirmative action is equality. However, some people argue that affirmative action is unfair because giving preferential treatment to selected groups may exclude more qualified people from consideration. The value underlying this second line of reasoning is merit. Whether or not an employer decides to voluntarily implement an affirmative action program is based partly on his or her values. Similarly, the applied social psychologist who contributes to the development of affirmative action initiatives also is promoting a specific set of values.

So, interventions developed by applied social psychologists are value laden in that the psychologists' values play a role in determining what social and practical problems to address, including which people should be targeted for change and what should constitute change. As Mayo and La France (1980) noted, "Improving quality of life may entail social changes [that are] not always to everyone's liking" (p. 85). For example, not all organizational interventions, such as redesigning people's jobs may meet the needs or wishes of all employees. Thus, the goal of control through intervention is sometimes controversial.

Historical Context of Applied Social Psychology

The scientific foundation of applied social psychology can be traced at least as far back as the 1930s to the thinking and work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1936). Lewin conducted research on a variety of practical issues and social problems, such as how to get people to eat healthier diets and how interpersonal relations and productivity are affected by different supervisory styles. For instance, in the latter case, Lewin and his colleagues Lippitt, and White (1939) conducted an experiment in which

they had groups of schoolboys work on hobbies under the direction of a male adult who varied his leadership in one of three ways: autocratic (controlling, gave orders, made the decisions), democratic (asked for input, allowed boys to make choices), or laissez-faire (interacted little with boys, mainly observed). The results for interpersonal relations and productivity generally favored the democratic style. For example, compared with boys under the laissez-faire leadership style, boys under autocratic and democratic leaders spent more time working; however, when the leader left the room, the amount of work done by the autocratic groups dropped sharply, whereas this did not happen in the democratic groups.

It is important to recognize that Lewin's goal was not only to further the scientific understanding of these topics, but also to contribute to their solutions. Very important to him was linking psychological theory to application, and the following words of Lewin (1944/1951) represent probably the most commonly cited quotation in social psychology

Many psychologists working in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished in psychology, as it has been accomplished in physics, if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. (p. 169)

Lewin left a solid scientific legacy for applied social psychology in his emphasis on the integration of theory, research, and practice.

Among social psychologists like Lewin, the 1930s and 1940s witnessed a flurry of concern with applied issues and practical problems, much of which stemmed from the rise of Nazism and World War II (Jones, 1998). In fact, Brehm, Kassin, and Fein (1999) went so far as to suggest that Adolf Hitler had more influence on the field of social psychology than did any other person, including leading social psychologists

Hitler's rise to power and the ensuing turmoil caused people around the world to become desperate for answers to social psychological questions about what causes violence, prejudice and genocide, conformity and obedience, and a host of other social problems and behaviors. (pp. 12–13)

Reich (1981) observed that the foundation of applied social psychology was set by 1950 because the potential of using scientific methods to address social problems had been demonstrated successfully, for instance, by Lewin and colleagues' (1939) work on the effects of autocratic leadership, and Sherif's (1966b) work on conflict resolution. It seemed as though an applied psychology centered in the field of social psychology was poised to take off. Yet the "takeoff" did not occur for another 20 years or so. In fact, in social psychology, there occurred a backlash to applied developments. The negative reaction emanated largely from a widespread concern that "applied" was synonymous with low quality, and thus threatened the scientific integrity of the discipline (Reich, 1981; Streufert & Suedfeld, 1982). During the late 1940s and the 1950s, social psychology experienced a concerted movement away from applied concerns to a "pure science" emphasis on theory and laboratory experiments focused on basic social processes (e.g., processes of attitude formation and change, group structure, impression formation). In fact, the relationship between research on basic processes and applied research was described with terms, such as *estrangement* and *schism*.

Just as the events around World War II sparked interest in applied social psychology, so too did the events of the 1960s. A host of powerful social and political occurrences (e.g., assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., war in Vietnam, race riots, campus protests, civil rights movement, women's liberation movement) forced increased attention on a variety of pressing social issues endemic to American society (Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010). Many of the problems were the same as those that had come to a focus during the 1930s and

1940s (e.g., violence, prejudice), and some were new (e.g., social injustice). There were increased cries—both within psychology (including from students) and in the broader society—for psychology to become more socially relevant (Jones, 1998; Reich, 1981). At the same time, many social psychologists had begun to criticize the overreliance on laboratory experiments, pointing out that the field would benefit from methodological approaches that also included field research and a variety of nonexperimental research methods. Very instrumental in setting the stage for the emergence of a clearly defined field of applied social psychology was a 1969 series of articles in *American Psychologist* that focused on the interface between science and social issues. Some of the titles of the articles reflected the emerging applied emphasis of the field: “Psychology as a Means of Promoting Human Welfare” (Miller, 1969); “Social Psychology in an Era of Social Change” (Weick, 1969); “Socially Relevant Science: Reflections on Some Studies of Interpersonal Conflict” (Deutsch, 1969); “Experimental Psychology and Social Responsibility” (Walker, 1969); and “Reforms as Experiments” (Campbell, 1969).

In response to such developments, applied social psychology surfaced during the 1970s as a clearly identifiable field (Reich, 1981; Streufert & Suedfeld, 1982). There were several notable benchmarks, including in 1970–1971, the establishment of a journal devoted specifically to applied issues and research, the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, as well as the founding of the first doctoral program in applied social psychology at Loyola University of Chicago in 1974 (Bickman, 1981). These soon were followed by other developments that reinforced the identity of applied social psychology, including another journal (*Basic and Applied Social Psychology*) in 1980 and the first textbook in applied social psychology (Fisher’s *Social Psychology: An Applied Approach*) in 1982. So, after some delay, the field of applied social psychology finally took off—“an actualization of long-term fundamental trends in the science” (Reich, 1981, p. 65). Now, here we are

some 40 or so years later, and in our view, a lot has happened that has reinforced the initial promise of Lewin’s legacy of integrating theory, research, and practice. Applied social psychology is firmly entrenched as a branch of social psychology.

A Problem Focus

Social problems. At the very heart of applied social psychology is a regard for addressing social problems. Morawski (2000) observed that since its very early days around the turn of the 20th century, social psychology has had “an appreciation of its immediate connectedness with pulsing social conditions—crises, dysfunctions, or tensions” (p. 427). In 2002, social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, then president of the American Psychological Association, affirmed the central role of psychology in the solution of many of the most serious problems facing the United States. Zimbardo (2002a) discussed problems, such as AIDS, substance abuse, prejudice and discrimination, minority student dropout rates, crime and juvenile delinquency, and “lethal hostility” (e.g., gang fighting, war). According to Zimbardo, the “solutions and prevention require changes in attitudes, values, behavior, and lifestyles” (p. 5). Although Zimbardo was extolling the potential contributions of psychology in general, the centrality of the field of social psychology is readily apparent: In order to ameliorate many of the most serious problems facing us today, changes must occur in the very phenomena that constitute the core subject matter of the field of social psychology—people’s attitudes, values, and behaviors/lifestyles.

For instance, for health-related problems, a very big part of the solution often comes down to behavioral (i.e., lifestyle) changes. Here are some behaviors that are serious candidates for modification if one’s goal is good health and longevity: live as a couch potato and avoid regular exercise, smoke cigarettes, abuse drugs, overeat, eat unhealthy foods, drive recklessly, ride with drunk drivers, fail to comply with doctors’ orders, sunbathe, live in an abusive relationship, survive on

little sleep, and do not use sunscreen, seatbelts, life jackets, or condoms.

Let us consider in more detail one of the problems mentioned by Zimbardo (2002a), a problem for which the news now is more optimistic than what we reported in the first edition of this book—AIDS. Without a doubt, the AIDS epidemic is one of the most serious crises facing humanity. Table 1.1 shows some of the terrifying statistics, which are taken from the 2010 UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic (United Nations Global Report, 2010). The table compares 2001 with 2009 on three key criteria for the world as a whole and also for two regions of the world: North America and sub-Saharan Africa (the region that has been most severely devastated by the AIDS epidemic). Table 1.1 reveals that across the world in 2009 alone 1.8 million people—adults and children—died from AIDS and 33.3 million people were living with HIV. This represents a staggering amount of deaths and suffering, yet the figures in Table 1.1, as well as other data collected by UNAIDS, lead to the conclusion that the tide finally has begun to turn in the worldwide multibillion dollar (US\$15.9 billion was allocated in 2009) United Nations response to the epidemic: “On the cusp of the fourth decade of the AIDS epidemic, the world has turned the corner—it has halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV” (United Nations Global Report, 2010, p. 8). For one thing, AIDS-related deaths were no greater in 2009 than in 2001. More important is that the actual peak year was 2004 when 2.1 million died (not shown in Table 1.1), meaning the lower 2009 figure represents a substantial decrease. The increased availability and application of antiretroviral therapy and increased care and support for people who live with HIV are the main factors contributing to the decline in death rates. The same factors also underlie the increase from 2001 to 2009 in the number of people who are living with HIV.

The most telling comparison is the one that indicates a substantial decrease (16%) in the incidence of new infections between 2001 and 2009.

In fact, in 33 countries (22 from sub-Saharan Africa), the rate of new infections declined more than 25%. And while declines in deaths and increases in those living with HIV are primarily attributable to medical treatment and care, the declines in new infections are the result of *prevention efforts*: “HIV prevention works—new HIV infections are declining in many countries most affected by the epidemic” (United Nations Global Report, 2010, p. 8). Moreover, in line with Zimbardo’s assertion about the centrality of behavior/lifestyle change, “behavior change is the most important factor accounting for these encouraging declines in new HIV infections” (United Nations Global Report, 2010, p. 64). The most successful prevention efforts have focused on promoting safer sexual behavior in young people, including for example increased condom use, delay of first sexual experience, and reduction in number of sexual partners (see Maticka-Tyndale & Brouillard-Coyle [2006] for a review of interventions with young people in developing countries).

Now, let us bring the issue of AIDS prevention closer to the personal lives of many readers—to applied research on the college campus. As the figures in Table 1.1 show, the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to pillage many lives in our region of the world and represents a potential threat to any sexually active individual. Hodges, Klaaren, and Wheatley (2000) investigated ways in which to increase the likelihood of females engaging in “safe sex” discussions, a critical aspect of AIDS prevention behavior. They noted that college students know the risks of unprotected sex and know that they are supposed to discuss condom use with their partners, but too often fail to carry out such discussions. The researchers observed that students “generally find it easier to have unsafe sex than to discuss safe sex” (p. 332) and noted the paucity of safe-sex role models in the media, where most “couples collapse onto the nearest horizontal surface in the heat of passion without broaching issues of safe sex” (p. 332). In brief, the research of Hodges and her colleagues suggests that the willingness of females to have safe-sex

Table 1.1 Worldwide and Regional HIV and AIDS Statistics, 2001 and 2009

	<i>AIDS-Related Deaths</i>	<i>People Living With HIV</i>	<i>People Newly Infected With HIV</i>
World Total 2001	1,800,000	28,600,000	3,100,000
2009	1,800,000	33,300,000	2,600,000
Sub-Saharan Africa 2001	1,400,000	20,300,000	2,200,000
2009	1,300,000	22,500,000	1,800,000
North America 2001	30,000	1,200,000	66,000
2009	26,000	1,500,000	70,000

SOURCE: United Nations Global Report (2010). Based on data collected from 182 countries. Figures represent best estimates.

conversations with males would increase if they were provided with a positive experience in actually discussing safe-sex practices with a male, and if they were informed that such discussions become easier with repeated occurrences. The implications of the findings for the development of AIDS prevention campaigns are fairly straightforward.

A point that we wish to underscore with regard to the AIDS issue is that although, at the most basic level, HIV/AIDS is a biological and medical problem, it is also very much a social problem. The virus is spread by people relating to people; therefore, as the work of Hodges and colleagues (2000) suggests prevention efforts necessarily must have a very strong social psychological component. This, of course, applies to many other health-based problems (e.g., smoking is very much a socially precipitated and sustained behavior). There are other critical problems that at one level clearly are the domain of the nonsocial sciences (e.g., biology, geology, physics, and engineering) yet are strongly rooted in social behavior, and thus are amenable to social science-based solutions. As Bjork (2000) affirmed, the answers to many of the most complex problems rest with the behavioral sciences

Overcoming the problems that beset our schools, for example, does not lie with making computers and associated devices better, faster, and more

available. . . . Overcoming the violence in our society does not lie in more and better metal detectors or surveillance cameras. (p. 27)

A prime example is what many people regard as the most serious crisis facing humanity—the continuing devastation of the earth’s environment by factors, such as acid rain, global warming, ozone layer destruction, and the depletion of forests, fisheries, agricultural land, and water supplies. Many scientists believe that on our current course, our planet will be “irretrievably mutilated” (Union of Concerned Scientists, 1993, p. 1) and the earth “will be nearly uninhabitable for future generations” (Oskamp, 2000, p. 496). These environmental threats can be addressed in part by physical science initiatives (e.g., increasing agricultural productivity, decreasing toxic emissions). Nonetheless, a strong case can be made for the idea that escape from ecological disaster requires social science-based solutions because the causes of the most critical environmental problems are directly traceable to human choice and behavior, particularly to two categories of behavior: overpopulation and overconsumption (Oskamp, 2000). Toward this end, in his 2008 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, Alan Kazdin outlined a variety of ways in which psychology can contribute to fostering environmentally sustainable behaviors through its psychosocial research and

knowledge base in the areas of education, message framing, feedback, decision making, the media, incentives and disincentives, the integration and understanding of multiple influences, and social marketing (Kazdin, 2009). As he so aptly stated,

There are multiple disciplines already participating [in fostering a sustainable environment], and their impact could be enhanced by our participation because, of all things, changing behavior at multiple levels and understanding the domains in which behavior is embedded . . . are our specialty. (p. 353)

Practical problems. Beyond any doubt, applied social psychology has enormous potential in the prevention and reduction of social problems. However, a singular focus on social problems misrepresents the past and current accomplishments and potential contributions of the field. As you will discover as you read this book, the applicability of the field extends well beyond social problems. Applied social psychology addresses other undesirable or unsatisfactory circumstances that do not qualify as social problems in the conventional sense. For example, in Chapter 6, improvements to sports team cohesiveness and communication are considered as a means of dealing with the problem of poor team performance, and in Chapter 10, decision making is addressed in the context of improving both individual work performance and organizational functioning. Although poor team performance and ineffective decision making are not typically defined as social problems, they are certainly social in that they occur in the context of groups, organizations, and people interacting with other people. We refer to such unsatisfactory circumstances that people (e.g., groups, organizations) face as *practical problems* to distinguish them from conventional social problems and to acknowledge their centrality to the field of applied social psychology.

Without wanting to confuse you, we should also put a positive spin on the focus of applied social psychology in that application can be extended to the improvement of an already

acceptable or even very favorable situation. For instance in sports, strategies may be implemented to improve the goal-focused communications of a team that already has an outstanding record of wins versus losses. In organizations, measures can be taken to develop flourishing work cultures even in the absence of any performance problems. This take on applied social psychology is consistent with recent developments in psychology that focus more on the positive aspects of life than the negative aspects. We touch on this in Chapter 17 when we discuss *positive social psychology* and how a more “balanced” view of things may be more appropriate than either an exclusively negative or positive view.

Personal uses. Also, with respect to issues in everyday life, individuals can look to social psychology for assistance. Murphy (1998) referred to *personal uses* of social psychology, meaning how each of us can use social psychological knowledge to improve his or her own life. For instance, to improve the size of a tip, a restaurant server might draw on the research on server behavior (e.g., Rind & Strohmets, 2001; Seiter & Weger, 2010). This research shows that higher tips tend to be given when servers engage in positive verbal communication (e.g., introduce themselves by name, mention that tomorrow’s weather is expected to be beautiful, compliment a customer’s meal choice) and also engage in positive nonverbal behavior (e.g., smile, draw a smiley face on the check, and briefly touch the customer’s shoulder). A customer interested in receiving attentive service might be sure to use the server’s name given the evidence that when others use their names, people regard this as a rewarding stimulus—as complimentary—and tend to respond with positive acts in kind (Howard, Gengler, & Jain, 1997). These would be personal uses/applications of social psychology. One can wonder what social psychological theories and knowledge might have been used by someone at Ken and Kim’s party to bring the heated argument to a peaceful end and allow the people to return to having a good time together.

Approaches to Applied Social Psychology

Research and practice in all areas of science are influenced by paradigms. Filstead (1979) defines paradigms as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world” (p. 34). Paradigms reflect the different rationales that underlie the various research methods scientists use (Madill & Gough, 2008), and have a significant influence on the approaches adopted by researchers and practitioners.

As will be demonstrated in this book, work in applied social psychology tends to adopt one of three approaches, each with its own paradigm: 1) the social cognition approach, 2) the engaged research approach, or 3) the critical approach. As an example of the dominance of these three approaches we may note that the program in Applied Social Psychology at the University of Guelph in Canada has structured itself around these three approaches.

The **social cognition approach** is the traditional approach to research in which the researcher is regarded as a dispassionate chronicler of social psychological phenomena whose job is to report generalizable results in a manner that is as impartial, neutral, and objective as possible. The paradigm underlying this approach is positivism, which regards the researcher as separate from that being researched, and which emphasizes the reduction of bias when studying participants and topics (Ponterotto, 2005). Researchers working within this tradition will primarily concern themselves with traditional forms of validity and reliability in their research. That is, they will want to make sure that their work accurately sheds light on genuine social psychological phenomena that can be replicated by other researchers. An example of work within this tradition is a study by Terrier and Marfaing (2015), which demonstrated that hotel guests can be encouraged to reuse their towels by placing cards in their rooms indicating that 75% of guests choose to do so the same. Note that in this

study, the researchers were trying to objectively report on an effect that was independent of their involvement.

By contrast, in the **engaged research approach**, the researcher is not regarded as a dispassionate observer neutrally reporting objective data, but is instead regarded as an active agent, enthusiastically engaging with community groups and other parties to address issues that can serve as a basis for social change. The paradigm underlying this approach is the advocacy/participatory worldview (Creswell, 2009), in which the goal is to assist in producing change among marginalized people. Although not ignoring traditional forms of validity and reliability, researchers within this tradition may concern themselves more with impact validity, “the extent to which research has the potential to play an effective role in some form of social and political change or is useful as a tool for advocacy or activism” (Massey & Barreras, 2013, p. 616). An example of work within this tradition is a study by Shura, Siders, and Dannefer (2011) which explored changes that needed to be implemented to improve the living conditions among residents in a long-term care facility. Instead of conducting focus groups and interviews and then offering recommendations based on their own analyses, the researchers worked in conjunction with experts, residents of the facility, and their families to formulate the research questions, goals, and to stimulate needed changes in the facilities. Note that in this study, the researchers were active participants working in close collaboration with those who had a stake in the potential changes.

The final approach, called the **critical approach**, emphasizes power and liberation from oppression. The paradigm underlying this approach is critical theory which focuses on how the distribution of power shapes the way people construct their experiences. Similar in some ways to the engaged research approach, a fundamental goal of the critical approach is emancipation from oppression and the production of a more egalitarian society (Ponterotto, 2005). Researchers within this tradition use their work as a form of

social criticism (Ponterotto, 2005). An example of work in this approach is a paper by Prilleltensky (2008) which presents a critical discussion of how subtle forms of power affect wellness, oppression, and liberation.

Although all three approaches to applied social psychology are discussed in this book, consistent with the dominant approach in the field, the social cognition approach is emphasized. It is beyond the scope of this book to delve into the various worldviews adopted by each approach; however, you should be aware that although each approach is based on a different paradigm, the paradigms are not necessarily incompatible (Madill & Gough, 2008). More information about the research methods employed within these approaches can be found in Chapter 3.

Social Influences on Behavior: The Power of the Situation

A core assumption of the field of social psychology is that *the behavior of individuals is strongly influenced by the social situation or context*. Both social psychological theory and research focus on understanding how and why people are influenced by social factors.

Research demonstrations of the powerful influence of situations. Examples of the powerful role of situational determinants abound in social psychological research, including the results of some of the classic and best-known studies. We saw the power of social influence in the work of Sherif (1966b), where competition between groups of campers led to a marked deterioration in relations. In his research on independence and conformity, Asch (1955) demonstrated that on a very simple judgment task (e.g., distinguishing between the lengths of lines) in which the correct judgment was perfectly obvious, many participants chose to go along with the erroneous judgments of others rather than to publicly disagree with them. Depending on the particular study, 50% to 80% of participants

conformed at least once over a series of trials. Dozens of bystander intervention studies—laboratory and field—that contrast the behavior of individual bystanders when alone and when with other bystanders have demonstrated that an individual's tendency to intervene in an emergency is sharply inhibited by the presence of others (Latané & Nida, 1981).

Stanley Milgram's obedience research is perhaps the most widely recognized illustration of the power of the situation. In Milgram's (1974) research, each participant was told by the experimenter that the study was about the role of punishment in learning. The participant had to administer apparently painful shocks to a learner (an experimental accomplice who only pretended to receive the shocks) every time the learner made a mistake on a learning task. The learner (accomplice) made a total of 30 mistakes in 40 opportunities. In a series of studies, Milgram examined the effects of different situational variables on people's compliance with the experimenter's insistent directives to increase the shock intensity with each successive error made by the learner up to the maximum shock level of 450 volts. The 30 shock levels ranged from a low of 15 volts, labeled "slight shock," to a high of 450 volts, which was beyond the label of "danger, severe shock."

Table 1.2 shows that for seven of the situations manipulated by Milgram, the percentages of the participants who obeyed completely by shocking the learner all the way up to the 450-volt maximum. The numbers showing maximum obedience ranged, depending on the situation, from nobody (0%) to a strong majority (65%). This clearly is a striking demonstration of what may be called situational control. Although all of the participants in the situations in the table were adult male volunteers from the community (in Connecticut), a replication of the first situation with females showed exactly the same level of maximum obedience (65%). Further attesting to the power of the situation was a control condition in which participants were not directed by the experimenter to increase the severity of shocks and were free to choose any shock level.

In this situation—with pressure from the experimenter removed—only one participant of 40 (2.5%) chose the maximum shock intensity, and the mean (average) level selected by participants across all 30 learner errors was level 4 of 30 levels (in the slight shock range).

You should be careful not to dismiss Milgram's findings as reflecting a bygone era given that research during the intervening years has indicated similar levels of obedience (Blass, 2004; Burger, 2009). Social psychologists have drawn parallels between the obedient behavior of Milgram's participants and actual examples of "destructive obedience," including military personnel following "orders" in Nazi Germany, in Bosnia, and at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Everyday life abounds with examples of the strong influence of the power of the situation on people's behavior; for example, when we turn on our best behavior when we enter a place of worship or begin a job interview and then may turn the good behavior sharply off when we are horsing around with friends or imbibing at a local bar.

Nonetheless, we must be cautious in interpreting the results of contemporary social psychological studies that attempt to shed light on research conducted decades ago because social conditions change, and the social forces acting on modern participants may be different from those that were acting on participants in prior eras, thus producing results that are not entirely commensurate (Haney & Zimbardo, 2009). For example, people were generally much more deferent to authority in past years. Therefore, the results of research conducted today that examines how people respond to situations demanding obedience are not necessarily equivalent to the results of research conducted in earlier eras. We always need to think critically about what studies reveal to us. For example, some recent research has suggested that in following the orders they were given, participants in Milgram's studies weren't demonstrating obedience so much as identification with the experimenter's goals (Haslam, Reicher, & Birney, 2014). However, this interpretation still underscores the power of social

processes on individual behavior. Studies, such as those conducted by Milgram, Sherif, and others demonstrate that when we alter the structure of social situations, we can change people's behavior in striking ways (Reicher, Haslam, & Miller, 2014).

Recognizing the role of individual differences.

You may be thinking something like, "Sure, people are influenced by the situations they are in, but not everybody is influenced the same way." If you are, you have a good point. After all, the amount of conformity in Asch's (1955) experiments varied greatly, with some participants showing no conformity at all. Likewise, in each of the other classic studies described earlier, people differed in how they reacted to the situation. For instance, we can see in Table 1.2 that in every condition in the obedience research, there were some participants who resisted the authority of the experimenter. What is being suggested here is the relevance of individual differences.

Individual differences refer to characteristics or qualities of an individual (as opposed to characteristics of a situation) and include things, such as personality variables, attitudes, values, and abilities as well as demographic variables, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and age.

Although social psychology is primarily concerned with social determinants and explanations of behavior, the field recognizes the important role of individual difference variables in understanding the behavior of people. The idea that behavior is a function of both the person and the situation was advanced by Lewin (1936): "Every psychological event depends upon the state of the person and at the same time on the environment, although their relative importance is different in different cases" (p. 12). That is, at any given moment, what we are doing usually is a reflection of our personalities and the surrounding social and physical contexts. This position also was expressed aptly by Myers and colleagues (2009): "The great truth about the power of social influence is but half the truth if separated from its complementary truth: the power of the person" (p. 292). Social influences

Table 1.2 The Milgram Experiments: How Variations in the Experimental Situation Influenced Levels of Obedience to Authority

	<i>Experimental Situation</i>	<i>Percentage of Participants Who Showed Maximum Obedience</i>
1.	Learner is in adjacent room; participant cannot see learner, but can hear his protests about the shocks and complaints about having a heart condition	65.0
2.	Similar to No. 1 except that there is no mention of the learner having a heart condition	62.5
3.	Participant is a few feet away from learner and can readily see and hear his protests; no mention of a heart condition	40.0
4.	Participant is beside learner and must hold (force) learner's hand onto shock plate; no mention of a heart condition	30.0
5.	Same as No. 1 except that, after giving initial instructions, experimenter departs and directs participant by telephone	20.5
6.	Same as No. 1 except that participant and two other participants (actually accomplices) jointly teach learner; the others begin to defy the experimenter	10.0
7.	Same as No. 1, but involves two experimenters; one begins to direct participant to stop shocking the learner, whereas the other one encourages him to continue	0.0

SOURCE: Based on Milgram (1974).

on behavior and personal influences on behavior should not be viewed as incompatible. Instead, social psychologists commonly view them as demonstrating an *interactive relationship* (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). This interactionism between the person and the situation has become well established in social psychology (Carnahan & McFarland, 2007). One way in which personal and social influences interact with each other is that social situations may have different effects on different people. For example, people with different personalities may react to a situation differently because they do not construe it in the same way (Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Shoda, 2004), as would have been the case if some of Milgram's (1974) participants had viewed the experimenter as a powerful authority figure, whereas others had not.

Generally, personal characteristics are thought to exert a greater effect on behavior in “weak” situations—those that place few constraints on people's behavior—compared to “strong” situations—those that place powerful constraints on behavior (Kenrick & Funder, 1988). For example, your personality is more likely to influence your behavior when you're playing video games at home with your friends (weak situation) than it is when you're participating in a military procession (strong situation). However, as we note above, sometimes even in strong situations personal characteristics exert a powerful influence on behavior. For our purposes, the key point to remember is that the power of situations in influencing behavior can be as strong as the power of dispositions (Funder & Ozer, 1983).

Underestimating the role of situational influences.

When we observe people's behavior, we explain it by making internal attributions, external attributions, or a combination of the two. **Internal** (dispositional) attributions explain behavior by focusing on factors within the person who has been observed. **External** (situational) attributions explain behavior by focusing on factors in the observed person's social environment. Despite the fact that behavior results from both personal and social influences, we have a tendency to underestimate the role of situational factors in influencing other people's behavior. For example, imagine showing up for the first day of class and meeting your new psychology professor. Imagine further that your new professor is dressed in a dirty suit, speaks in a monotone voice, does not seem to care about the lecture material, and is short with you when you ask a simple question about the format of the exams. In this situation, you are likely to infer that the professor is a bitter curmudgeon, and because of that you might even consider dropping the course. Notice that in this situation, you would have made an internal attribution for the professor's behavior; you explained his behavior by inferring something about his personality. However, it is entirely possible that the professor is in fact a pleasant, caring, and helpful individual who had a flat tire and ruined his favorite suit on the way to class. Had you known this, you would have been more likely to make an external attribution of the professor's behavior. You would have chalked up his poor mood to unfortunate circumstances.

This tendency for us to underestimate the influence of situational factors and focus on individual factors in explaining other people's behavior is called the **fundamental attribution error** (Ross, 1977). Because people themselves are more salient to us than their situations when we are observing them, we tend to focus on people rather than situations when explaining their conduct. You can see from the data provided earlier the great extent to which situational factors influenced the behavior of participants in Milgram's (1974) studies. However, if you had been an observer in one of Milgram's sessions, you probably would have made an internal

attribution for the participants' behavior (e.g., that the participants who administer high-voltage shocks are aggressive individuals or perhaps even sadists). If so, such a conclusion would have been inaccurate. As we mentioned earlier, in one version of his experiment, Milgram gave participants the opportunity to administer whatever voltage shock they desired. Under this experimental condition, the vast majority of participants chose to administer very low-voltage shocks. Clearly, situational factors (e.g., the demanding experimenter) played the primary role in prompting participants to administer high-voltage painful shocks. However, if you did not know about the results of Milgram's "free choice" condition, and thus had not been made aware of the power of the situation, you would likely explain participants' cruel behavior in terms of the participants' character rather than the situation.

Haney and Zimbardo (2009) suggest that another reason we tend to focus on people instead of situations when explaining behavior includes the fact that blaming other people for undesirable behavior absolves from blame the people who may have engineered the situational forces that contributed to the behavior. Of course, they go on to note, doing this diminishes any motive for broad-based social change or reform. For example, if a prison warden blames prisoners for bad behavior there is no need for the warden to examine or revise the structures and policies in the prison.

In their treatise on the history of social psychology, Ross and colleagues (2010) identify the general tendency for people to fail to recognize the extent to which situational forces control social behavior as one of four foundational contributions ("insights" or "pillars") "that constitute cumulative lessons and continue to guide contemporary analysis, research, and application" (p. 3). Applied social psychology, by focusing on effecting change in people's social environments as a means of bringing about changes in their behavior, helps us to counteract a person's propensity to fall victim to the fundamental attribution error, and instead

helps him or her to be attentive to the importance of social influences on behavior. More will be said about the fundamental attribution error in subsequent chapters.

Intervention strategies as social influence.

Consider the intervention strategies that we have mentioned so far: Sherif (1966b) using superordinate goals to reduce intergroup conflict, and Hodges and colleagues (2000) providing positive safe-sex discussion experiences to increase college females' tendencies to engage in such discussions prior to having sex. Notice how each strategy involves introducing the target individuals to a social situation devised for the purpose of effecting changes in their attitudes and/or behavior. Thus, each strategy entails a social influence attempt, that is, an attempt on the part of some social agent (e.g., person, group, organization) to induce changes in behavior that will contribute to more effective functioning (e.g., more harmonious intergroup interaction, safer sex). The focus of this book is on how social psychological understanding of social influence processes can be applied to improving the lives of people. In essence, we are saying that the field of applied social psychology rests on the power of the situation. That is, fundamental to the field is the assumption that the systematic exercise of situational control (i.e., intervention strategies) can be employed to improve the functioning of people.

Levels of Analysis

We have underscored that the social psychological perspective emphasizes the importance of social influences on people—that how we think, feel, and behave is greatly affected by aspects of the social situation or context. To explore further what may be viewed as constituting one's social situation, let us consider your current activity, which is reading this chapter. As you review this section of the chapter, what is the social situation that is possibly causing you to read the material with more or less motivation and diligence? Is it a social stimulus in the immediate situation? For

instance, are you being encouraged by a motivated friend with whom you are reading and studying the material—at this very moment—or perhaps by other students earnestly studying around you in the library? Also, it might be helpful to look beyond your immediate situation to the broader social context to understand your current level of motivation on this task. Are you reading intently because you are concerned that the instructor may call on you during the upcoming class? Or, are the perceived expectations of significant others, in addition to your instructor, having an influence on you? For instance, are you applying yourself because your family or close friends expect this of you, or (conversely) is your heart not really in this task because of the pull of friends who really want you to be out having fun with them? Beyond the influence of significant others, are you working hard (or not so hard) because the academic standards at your school are quite high (or not so high) and you feel a lot of pressure (or little pressure) to do your best?

From this personal example, you can see that the social situation can be conceived broadly, ranging from the direct influence of specific others to the influence of more general factors. The social situational determinants of an individual's behavior may be viewed as falling into the following categories: interpersonal, group, organizational, community, and societal/cultural. Based on categorizations similar to this one, in social psychology we refer to *levels of analysis* (or explanation) that correspond with the various categories of determinants. For example, we seek to explain a person's behavior (e.g., studying) by investigating the effect of individuals on him or her (explanation at the interpersonal level), or by investigating the effect of groups on him or her (explanation at the group level). Of course, what is missing is the possible role of individual difference variables. In the example of studying, a dispositional explanation would suggest that your current level of diligence stems from your personality; for instance, you have (or do not have) a high drive to achieve. It is customary to combine

personal determinants with situational determinants to come up with a more complete list of explanatory variables. It is also important to understand that the term *level* does not imply “superior” in any way; all levels may be important in establishing a thorough understanding of a phenomenon, although the relative importance of explanatory levels may vary from phenomenon to phenomenon.

A study by Riksheim and Chermak (1993) allows us to consider further the meaning of the social situation as a determinant of behavior and clearly illustrates the notion of levels of analysis. Riksheim and Chermak were interested in examining factors that lead police officers to engage in various behaviors, such as providing service (e.g., assisting motorists), making arrests, and employing force on suspects. They distinguished among four categories of determinants of police behavior: (a) immediate situational variables like characteristics of the incident (e.g., seriousness of crime) and of the parties involved (e.g., demeanor of the suspect); (b) organizational variables like differences among police units in policing style and enforcement strategy; (c) community variables like the crime rate and ethnic makeup of the neighborhood; and (d) officer individual difference variables like gender and racial attitudes. Riksheim and Chermak’s classification of variables divides the determinants of police behavior into three situational categories and one individual difference category.

Table 1.3 summarizes what Riksheim and Chermak (1993) found in their review of 40 studies that examined factors that predict police officer use of force (use of fists, firearms, stun guns, pepper spray, etc.). The researchers pointed out the importance of understanding the determinants of officer use of force because of its potential alienating and inflammatory effects on communities. For each category of variable (level of explanation), Table 1.3 illustrates those variables reported by Riksheim and Chermak that showed a relationship to use of force. For instance, under the immediate situation, use of force was related to the number of officers present (occurring more often with more officers

present) and the suspect’s conduct (occurring more often with antagonistic suspects).

Further inspection of Table 1.3 clearly shows that to gain a more complete understanding, it is also necessary to investigate police use of force from the perspective of the three other levels of analysis—individual difference, organizational, and community—because variables at these levels likewise are shown to be related to use of force. The distinction among levels of analysis is an especially important one for applied social psychology because it begs the question of toward what level(s) and toward what variable(s) intervention

Table 1.3 Variables Found to Predict Police Use of Force

<p><i>Individual differences (officer characteristics)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender (male) Racial attitudes (prejudicial) Skilled in handling overt conflict (most skilled)
<p><i>Immediate interpersonal situation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of officers (more officers) Suspect’s conduct (e.g., antagonistic, consumed alcohol) Bystanders (not present) Weapon (used by citizen)
<p><i>Organizational</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department policy (less restrictive about use of force) Assignment/nonassignment to specialized unit (assignment) Supervisory review process (not in place)
<p><i>Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnic composition of community (more non-White) Racial heterogeneity (more heterogeneous) Transience of population (less transient)

SOURCE: *Journal of Criminal Justice* Vol 21(4). Riksheim et al “Causes of police behavior revisited” pp. 371–372. Printed with permission from Elsevier.

strategies should be directed. Given the results in Table 1.3, what do you think? One possibility is to intervene at the organizational level by ensuring the consistent application of supervisory review of questionable incidents involving force, thereby ensuring greater accountability of officers for their actions. We imagine that you can see some other intervention possibilities, perhaps especially at the organizational and individual difference levels.

The Need for a Broad Approach

As we noted earlier, applied social psychology can be relevant to addressing social and practical problems in virtually *all areas of life*. Although the field certainly does not have all of the answers, it already has provided useful information, important insights, and fresh approaches with respect to many different areas of life (Sadava, 1997). It is clear to us that applied social psychology will be more effective in achieving its potential to the extent that the field embraces the value of taking a broad approach to the solution of problems. Here we underscore three interrelated aspects of such a broad approach: the use of multiple research methods, the emphasis on collaboration in research and application with representatives of other disciplines, and the recognition of the potential contributions of other relevant perspectives.

In order to optimally understand and address social and practical problems in diverse groups, organizations, and communities, applied social psychologists must have the expertise and readiness to draw on research strategies and analytical procedures that are particularly suitable for dealing with the relevant problem(s), including those that are more common to allied disciplines. For example, such disciplines include cognitive science, communication studies, sociology, education, political science, criminal justice, program evaluation, marketing, organizational studies, and public health (Crano & Brewer, 2002). Chapter 3 reviews basic research strategies employed by applied social psychologists; additionally, there are examples of a variety of research methods found throughout the book.

With respect to addressing social and practical problems, applied social psychologists limit their effectiveness if they fail to draw on the knowledge and expertise of representatives of other fields. Not only must we be informed about the research contributions and knowledge bases of other disciplines, we must increasingly pursue cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and practice. For instance, the design, implementation, and evaluation of an anti-bullying program in a school system would clearly benefit from the input of several professionals, including teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, police officers, and of course program designers and evaluators. Likewise, recall the earlier observation that many medical conditions (e.g., HIV/AIDS) are also biological, medical, and social problems. By implication, successful intervention efforts require the involvement and collaboration of individuals with expertise in those areas and other pertinent areas, not the least of which is the cultural context (see below) in which an intervention is enacted.

Although social psychologists devote primary attention to the role of the social context/situational factors in understanding and explaining the complexities of human social behavior, we appreciate that a richer and more thorough understanding of many aspects of social behavior must also take into account other relevant perspectives. We noted earlier that individual difference variables (e.g., personality) have a substantial influence on how people think, feel, and behave in a social context. The evolutionary perspective, which focuses on inherited tendencies to respond to the social environment in ways that enabled our ancestors to survive and reproduce, has been used to explain a diverse array of social behaviors and attitudes, including genetic influences on interpersonal attraction, job satisfaction, and aggression.

Moreover, to understand behavior in a social context, we must consider the influence of culture—the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people. Culture plays a subtle, but powerful role in our lives. As Triandis (1994) pointed out, people are often

not aware of their own cultures until they come into contact with other cultures. Arnett (2008) observed that the dominant focus of American psychology is the American population, despite the fact that the American population represents only about 5% of the population of the world. Arnett affirms that American psychology should become less American given the evidence that the conditions (e.g., income, education, physical health) under which the vast majority of the people in the world live differ dramatically from those of Americans (and people in other Western countries). Arnett argues “that American psychology can no longer afford to neglect 95% of the world given that many of the problems psychology can potentially address are worse among the neglected 95% than in American society” (p. 602). In concurrence with Arnett’s perceptions about the focus of American psychology, issues in this book are discussed primarily from a North American vantage point. However, also consistent with Arnett’s main message—that more attention must be devoted to the rest of the world, we recognize that this perspective may not always be relevant to the consideration of problems in other cultures. Therefore, in order to help all of us maintain awareness of the importance of considering the role of culture in understanding and addressing social and practical problems, most of the chapters include a section called “Culture Capsule” designed to draw our attention to cultural variations in social psychological phenomena.

Various Roles of Applied Social Psychologists

Whereas the goal of social psychology in general is to develop and empirically test theories of social behavior, applied social psychology is concerned more specifically with understanding and finding solutions to social and practical problems by drawing on the knowledge base of existing theory and research, conducting research, and developing intervention strategies.

Within these broad objectives, applied social psychologists may assume many different roles. For example, Sadava (1997) listed several roles, including planner, organizer, evaluator, consultant, advocate, and activist. Fisher (1982) grouped many of these roles into two major categories: applied scientist and professional practitioner. Drawing on the thinking of both Sadava and Fisher, we see at least six major roles for applied social psychologists: researcher, program designer, evaluation researcher, consultant, action researcher, and advocate.

Researcher. The applied social psychologist conducts research on social and practical problems. That is, the applied social psychologist seeks to understand social and practical problems through the application of both the core values and research strategies embodied in the scientific method. Thus, in the role of researcher, the applied social psychologist functions in a manner similar to other social scientists.

Program designer. Using existing theory and research evidence, the applied social psychologist may be involved in developing or improving interventions designed to resolve or ameliorate social and practical problems. As noted by Fisher (1982), this role combines theory, research, and practice; therefore, in the tradition of Lewin and colleagues (1939), it embraces a true scientist/practitioner model. The role of program designer is a central focus of Chapter 4.

Evaluation researcher. As an evaluation researcher (or a program evaluator), the applied social psychologist applies social science research methods to evaluate the process and outcomes of interventions (e.g., social programs and policies). The role of program evaluation also is addressed more fully in Chapter 4.

Consultant. During their careers, many (if not most) applied social psychologists will serve in some capacity as consultants to various groups, organizations, or communities. In the role of consultant, the applied social psychologist

provides his or her expertise in social process and social theory to help clients resolve particular difficulties they are experiencing.

Action researcher. In the capacity of action researcher, the applied social psychologist works closely with an organization or a community group to resolve a particular issue or problem. This is accomplished through a collaborative cycle of data collection and interpretation leading to the development of appropriate action strategies. Action research is discussed in Chapter 12 in particular.

Advocate. In the role of advocate, the applied social psychologist functions within the political arena. As stated by Fisher (1982), “The advocate uses his or her expertise to press for social change, usually in collaboration with a specific group, lobby, or institution that is working to change some aspect of the sociopolitical system” (p. 19).

OVERVIEW OF BOOK

This textbook serves as an introduction to the field of applied social psychology, which focuses on understanding social and practical problems and on developing intervention strategies directed at the amelioration of such problems. Part 1 sets the context of the field. In order to examine the nature of social psychological theory, it includes the present chapter and three other chapters that review basic research methods used by social psychologists, and explore the design of interventions and the evaluation of their effectiveness. These chapters help you to more fully appreciate the ten chapters in Part 2 that focus on content areas of the field (e.g., team sports, health, organizations, and criminal justice). Each content chapter introduces you to research that seeks to develop understanding of relevant social and practical problems as well as the application of social psychological knowledge to the design of intervention strategies. Each content chapter covers

a selection of important topics; however, the chapters are not meant to be comprehensive in their coverage of these topic areas. Part 3 includes three chapters that focus on how readers can apply social psychological knowledge to improve their own lives in the following areas: personal relationships, classroom interaction, and well-being.

SUMMARY

Applied social psychology is the branch of the science of social psychology that focuses on (a) developing social psychological understanding of social and practical problems, and (b) drawing on that understanding to design intervention strategies for the amelioration of social and practical problems. As scientists, applied social psychologists are guided by a core set of values (e.g., accuracy, objectivity, skepticism, open-mindedness, ethics), and by the scientific method that includes specific research methods used to provide empirical tests of hypotheses. Scientific understanding of phenomena, including social and practical problems, entails the accomplishment of five goals: description, prediction, determining causality, explanation, and control.

The embracement of the goal of control (manipulation of conditions to cause changes in phenomena) particularly distinguishes applied social psychology as a separate branch of social psychology. That is, at the heart of applied social psychology is a concern with developing social influence strategies (i.e., interventions) to improve people’s functioning with respect to social and practical problems. Although the field is particularly concerned with addressing social and practical problems on a general level (e.g., education, environment), individuals also can use social psychology to improve their own lives.

The core assumption of the field of social psychology and applied social psychology is that people’s attitudes and behavior are greatly influenced by situational factors. In fact, intervention strategies may be viewed as involving the use of

knowledge about social situational influence to effect improvements in people's functioning. However, applied social psychology also recognizes that to understand and address problems, individual difference variables (e.g., personality) must be considered. Moreover, the social situation can be viewed as reflecting different levels of analysis (e.g., interpersonal, group, community); accordingly, interventions may be directed at different levels.

Applied social psychology requires a broad approach to social and practical problems, including the use of multiple research methods, an interdisciplinary orientation, and recognition of the value of other perspectives (e.g., evolutionary, personality, cultural). In his or her work, the applied social psychologist can assume several roles, some of which include researcher, program designer, evaluation researcher, consultant, action researcher, and advocate.

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