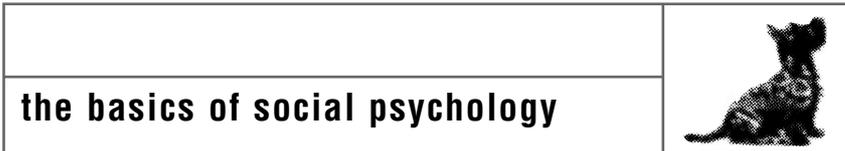


## part one



The overall aim of this section is to familiarise you with the basics of social psychology. It will:

- define social psychology as a topic
- look at social psychology and its related disciplines
- give you a brief history of social psychology
- look briefly at the cultural differences
- introduce the founding figures and their core ideas
- encourage you to think like a social psychologist
- help you to understand the general principles of assessment and expected learning outcomes when studying this area of psychology
- provide tips and examples of the running themes you will find throughout the forthcoming text.

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### 1.1

### definition



Social psychology is about understanding individual behaviour in a social context. Baron, Byrne & Suls (1989) define it as “the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior in social situations”. (p. 6). It therefore looks at human behaviour as influenced by other people and the context in which this occurs.

*It is **social** psychology because it looks at the interaction between people.*

Social psychologists therefore deal with the factors that lead us to behave in a given way in the presence of others, and look at the conditions under which certain behaviour/actions and feelings occur. Social psychology is to do with the way these feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions and goals are constructed and how such psychological factors, in turn, influence our interactions with others.

*Behaviour or interaction can be measured objectively (an individual has not placed their own views, preconceived ideas or prejudices on an argument or data collection; it is “value free”).*

*Because behaviour can be observed, hypotheses about the possible interaction between factors can be tested and the results/data can be collected and analysed, which gives this area of psychology credibility.*

Topics examined in social psychology include: the self, social cognition, attribution theory, social influence, group processes, prejudice and discrimination, interpersonal processes, aggression and prosocial behaviour.

1.2	
social psychology and related disciplines/theories	

*Cognitive psychology*

Sees human beings as information processors, but influences social psychology as processes such as memory, attention and perception can be applied to understanding social behaviour.

*Behaviourism*

States that behaviour can be shaped by positive, negative or no reinforcement such that desirable behaviour can be produced and undesirable behaviour discouraged.

*Evolutionary social psychology*

Assumes that behaviour is simply the result of biological/innate factors and that social behaviour occurs because it has helped us to adapt, survive and therefore evolve over time.

*Individual psychology*

Considers that all psychology focuses on the human mind and behaviour, but social psychology is a specific subsection as it looks at how processes occur in the presence of others/within the social context.

*Sociology*

Differs from social psychology because it focuses on how groups behave – for example, families, juveniles – and emphasises actions of a collective group rather than looking at the individual psychology of people who make up that group.

*Although social psychology draws on the contributions and assumptions of individual, cognitive, behaviourist and evolutionary psychology, and on sociology, it is unique in its consideration of all of these disciplines when looking at behaviour in a social context.*

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### 1.3

### history of social psychology



In any examination or essay you will be expected to know something about where social psychology comes from. This may simply be a matter of demonstrating a general understanding or not getting your origins muddled, but you may well be asked to write directly on the history of the discipline.

*Understanding something of the history of social psychology will be crucial in helping you think like a social psychologist.*

### Early Influences

Aristotle believed that humans were naturally sociable, a necessity which allows us to live together (an individual centred approach), whilst Plato felt that the state controlled the individual and encouraged social responsibility through social context (a socio-centred approach).

Hegel (1770–1831) introduced the concept that society has inevitable links with the development of the social mind. This led to the idea of a group mind, important in the study of social psychology.

Lazarus & Steinthal wrote about Anglo-European influences in 1860. “Volkerpsychologie” emerged, which focused on the idea of a collective mind. It emphasised the notion that personality develops because of cultural and community influences, especially through language, which is both a social product of the community as well as a means of encouraging particular social thought in the individual. Therefore Wundt (1900–1920) encouraged the methodological study of language and its influence on the social being.

### Early Texts

Texts focusing on social psychology first emerged at the start of the 20th century. The first notable book in English was published by McDougall

in 1908 (*An Introduction to Social Psychology*), which included chapters on emotion and sentiment, morality, character and religion, quite different to those incorporated in the field today. He believed that social behaviour was innate/instinctive and therefore individual, hence his choice of topics. This belief is not the principle upheld in modern social psychology, however.

Allport's work (1924) underpins current thinking to a greater degree, as he acknowledged that social behaviour results from interactions between people. He also took a methodological approach, discussing actual research and emphasising that the field was one of a "science ... which studies the behaviour of the individual in so far as his behaviour stimulates other individuals, or is itself a reaction to this behaviour" (1942: p. 12). His book also dealt with topics still evident today, such as emotion, conformity and the effects of an audience on others.

*Allport's work really did help current thinking develop if we look back to our initial definition at the start of the chapter the emphasis was on the three key concepts of social, behaviour and science.*

Murchison (1935) published The first handbook on social psychology was published by Murchison in 1935. Murphy & Murphy (1931/37) produced a book summarising the findings of 1,000 studies in social psychology. A text by Klineberg (1940) looked at the interaction between social context and personality development by the 1950s a number of texts were available on the subject.

### Journal Development

- 1950s – *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*
- 1963 – *Journal of Personality, British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*
- 1965 – *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*
- 1971 – *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, European Journal of Social Psychology*
- 1975 – *Social Psychology Quarterly, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*
- 1982 – *Social Cognition*
- 1984 – *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*
- Others now include: *Personality and Social Psychology Review, Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, Social Cognition and European Review of Social Psychology.*

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### Early Experiments

There is some disagreement about the first true experiment, but the following are certainly among some of the most important.

Triplet (1898) applied the experimental method to investigate the performance of cyclists and schoolchildren on how the presence of others influences overall performance – thus how individual's are affected and behave in the social context.

By 1935 the study of social norms had developed, looking at how individuals behave according to the rules of society. This was conducted by Sherif (1935).

Lewin et al. then began experimental research into leadership and group processes by 1939, looking at effective work ethics under different styles of leadership.

### Later Developments

Much of the key research in social psychology developed following World War II, when people became interested in the behaviour of individuals when grouped together and in social situations. Key studies were carried out in several areas.

Some studies focused on how *attitudes* are formed, changed by the social context and measured to ascertain whether change has occurred. Amongst some of the most famous work in social psychology is that on *obedience* conducted by Milgram in his "electric shock" study, which looked at the role an authority figure plays in shaping behaviour. Similarly, Zimbardo's prison simulation notably demonstrated *conformity* to given roles in the social world.

Wider topics then began to emerge, such as *Social perception, aggression, relationships, decision making, prosocial behaviour* and *attribution*, many of which are central to today's topics and will be discussed throughout this text.

Thus the growth years for social psychology occurred during the decades following the 1940s.

1.4	
cultural differences in psychology	

As we have seen, social psychology has roots in both European and American academia. Initially influences came from Europe (Volker psychologie), however, the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s resulted in a shift to American dominance. By the 1950s America aided the restoration of social psychology in Europe, although the ideas still remained largely American.

In 1966 the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology was formed to allow discussion of different cultural ideas and, as seen above, international and European journals began to emerge.

European Social Psychology tends to focus on intergroup behaviour, social identity and collective phenomena (including social representations).

However, American social psychology tends to be more individualistic, ethnocentric and experimental, focusing on topics such as intergroup relations, social identity and social influence.

1.5	
founding figures and their core ideas	

Inevitably, much of the discussion in this section concerning the founding figures and their core ideas overlaps with the preceding section detailing the history of the discipline. Core ideas had either a philosophical influence (their ideas and beliefs impacted on thinking about social psychology) or a methodological influence (their ways of working and research studies influenced the development and thinking about social psychology).

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### Philosophical Influences

The two most important figures concerned with philosophical influences were Hegd and Wundt. They introduced the concept that society has inevitable links with the development of the social mind. This led to the idea of a group mind, important in the study of social psychology.

Wundt – highly encouraged the methodological study of language and its influence on the social being.

### Methodological Influences

#### *Allport (1920) – social facilitation*

Allport introduced the notion that the presence of others (the social group) can facilitate certain behaviour. It was found that an audience would improve an actors' performance in well learned/easy tasks, but lead to a decrease in performance on newly learned/difficult tasks due to social inhibition.

#### *Bandura et al (1963) – social learning theory*

Bandura introduced the notion that behaviour in the social world could be modelled. Three groups of children watched a video where an adult was aggressive towards a 'bobo doll', and the adult was either just seen to be doing this, was rewarded by another adult for their behaviour or were punished for it. Children who had seen the adult rewarded were found to be more likely to copy such behaviour.

#### *Festinger et al. (1950) – cognitive dissonance*

Festinger, Schacter and Black brought the idea that when we hold beliefs, attitudes or cognitions which are different, then we experience dissonance – this is an inconsistency that causes discomfort. We are motivated to reduce this by either changing one of our thoughts, beliefs or attitudes or selectively attending to information which supports one of our beliefs and ignores the other (selective exposure hypothesis). Dissonance occurs when there are difficult choices or decisions, or when people participate in behaviour that is contrary to their attitude. Dissonance is thus brought about by effort justification (when aiming to reach a modest goal), induced compliance (when people are forced to comply contrary to their attitude) and free choice (when weighing up decisions).

*Tajfel et al. (1971) – minimal group paradigm and social identity theory*

When divided into artificial (minimal) groups, prejudice results simply from the awareness that there is an “outgroup” (the other group). When boys were asked to allocate points to others (which might be converted to rewards) who were either part of their own group or the outgroup, they displayed a strong ingroup preference. That is, they allocated more points on the set task to boys who they believed to be in the same group as themselves. This can be accounted for by Tajfel & Turner’s social identity theory, which states that individuals need to maintain a positive sense of personal and social identity: this is partly achieved by emphasising the desirability of one’s own group, focusing on distinctions between other “lesser” groups.

*Weiner (1986) – attribution theory*

Weiner was interested in the attributions made for experiences of success and failure and introduced the idea that we look for explanations of behaviour in the social world. He believed that these were made based on three areas: locus, which could be internal or external; stability, which is whether the cause is stable or changes over time: and controllability.

*Milgram (1963) – shock experiment*

Participants were told that they were taking part in a study on learning, but always acted as the teacher when they were then responsible for going over paired associate learning tasks. When the learner (a stooge) got the answer wrong, they were told by Milgram that they had to deliver an electric shock. This did not actually happen, although the participant was unaware of this as they had themselves a sample (real!) shock at the start of the experiment. They were encouraged to increase the voltage given after each incorrect answer up to a maximum voltage, and it was found that all participants gave shocks up to 300v, with 65 per cent reaching the highest level of 450v. It seems that obedience is most likely to occur in an unfamiliar environment and in the presence of an authority figure, especially when covert pressure is put upon people to obey. It is also possible that it occurs because the participant felt that someone other than themselves was responsible for their actions.

*Haney, Banks, Zimbardo (1973) – prison study*

Volunteers took part in a simulation where they were randomly assigned the role of a prisoner or guard and taken to a converted university basement resembling a prison environment. There was some basic loss of rights for the prisoners, who were unexpectedly arrested, given a uniform

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and an identification number (they were therefore deindividuated). The study showed that conformity to social roles occurred as part of the social interaction, as both groups displayed more negative emotions and hostility and dehumanisation became apparent. Prisoners became passive, whilst the guards assumed an active, brutal and dominant role. Although normative and informational social influence had a role to play here, deindividuation/the loss of a sense of identity seemed most likely to lead to conformity.

Both this and Milgram's study introduced the notion of social influence, and the ways in which this could be observed/tested.

1.6

thinking like a social  
psychologist



The key to success in your social psychology module is to learn how to think like a social psychologist, including how to speak the language of academic psychology, using their terms and phrases in a relevant way, and understanding how to make links between topics and common themes. This book will give you hints and tips to guide you. It will ensure that you become confident about when and how to use this language and the ways of thinking about the world that come with this language.

The first section introduced some of the basics of social psychology by helping you understand that social psychology involves looking at behaviour in a social context. It also emphasised the notion that this needs to be done in a scientific way, and so to understand truly how to think like a social psychologist you will need first to understand more about this.

The *scientific method* means that you need to test a hypothesis to examine variables that influence behaviour. Thus the hypothesis states that two variables are related in some way and that if you alter one of them, this may cause the participant to alter the other. In psychology we are trying to show that our results are significant and due to the thing we have changed (called the independent variable), rather than due to chance.

In order to think like a social psychologists you therefore need clearly to understand what a hypothesis is and what the role of variables are.



*A hypothesis should be a precise, testable statement of a relationship between two or more variables.*

There are two types of variables that should be included in each hypothesis. An **independent variable** is the thing that the researcher deliberately manipulates, so it is the thing that she purposely changes. A **dependent variable** is what one hopes will alter as a result of what is changed (so the DV measures any changes the IV has produced).

Generally, one variable (the IV) is altered to see what effect it has on another variable (the DV). This means that *cause* and *effect* are being measured.



*The IV is the thing you are changing.  
The DV is the thing you are measuring.*

You also need to be aware that your hypothesis can be tested using both experimental and non-experimental methods.

The principle difference is that experiments involve looking at whether manipulating one variable (the IV) has an effect on what you are measuring (the DV) and can involve laboratory experiments or field experiments. For example, in the laboratory the researcher deliberately manipulates variables using standardised procedures (the same method each time), whereas in a field experiment the researcher also deliberately manipulates the IV but does so in the participant's own natural environment.

In contrast, non-experimental methods may be more viable within the social context since, often, studying behaviour in the real world becomes unnatural if transferred to the laboratory and therefore a range of other methods may be required including:

- *Case studies*, which focus on one individual and their behaviour, thoughts, feelings and experiences.
- *Correlations*, which measure the strength of the relationship between two variables; for example, it tests if there is a relationship between two things. It does *not*, however, test cause and effect – so it does not say that one thing causes the other, but simply says there is some relationship between two things.
- *Questionnaires*, which use various types of questions to make a quick and efficient assessment of people's attitudes and which contain fixed or open-ended questions (or both).

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- *Observations*, which look at the behaviour of participants in various situations and sees “a relatively unconstrained segment of a persons freely chosen behaviour as it occurs” (Coolican, H. (1990) pp. 60). These can be structured or unstructured, but can be carried out in the participant’s natural environment.

Such work also needs to be carried out according to ethical guidelines and special note needs to be made of those concerning deception, informed consent, withdrawal, debriefing and protection of participants from harm. When much of the social influence research was originally conducted, the guidelines did not exist and the psychologists conducted their work within a different framework, which subsequent led to consideration being given to the welfare of participants. It is clear from the work of Milgram, Zimbardo and many others that much was learnt about the processes of conformity and obedience; for example, that humans have the potential to obey blindly and follow the instructions of authority figures, or indeed conform to the wider social group. What has been vitally highlighted, therefore, is that psychologists have a double obligation dilemma – to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of their individual participants and to show a responsibility to wider society. Often these two factors may be opposed and you therefore need to consider this when thinking like a social psychologist.

*Thinking like a social psychologist involves weighing up the costs and benefits of research to determine if anything valuable will be found for society as a whole by using unethical procedures, or if in fact this is the only way to ensure that knowledge about social behaviour progresses.*

Once you understand what social psychology is and how it can be investigated, you are half way to understanding the key principles that underpin this module.

So how do you think like a social psychologist?

You need to focus on how behaviour is influenced by others when interacting with them in the social context. You must consider how an individual behaves, acts or feels in social situations. It is not a discipline that looks at how you behave in a collective way (as a group, such as “students”), but instead takes an individual slant.

To be a successful social psychologist you will need to learn how to consider the theories presented as a scientist, that is, to talk about social behaviour in the context of the research studies. You will also need to be aware that social psychologists use scientific methods when studying people, and that they can test their hypotheses in an experimental or non-experimental way provided that ethical guidelines are always met.

Furthermore, not only do you need to understand what social psychology actually is and how to research it, but you also require a knowledge of its different types of theories. Each of the following therefore influence the way you might think about this field.

People are not passive in the social situation so you must think about the way cognitive theories apply; for example, the central idea that people use their memory, perception, attention and other means of information processing to interpret and process information about the social situation and others around them.

Since behaviourists believe that our behaviour can be shaped by positive or negative outcomes (reinforcement), then consideration must be given to the way in which the social situation provides this in order to influence behaviour. It is also possible that social behaviour has evolved over time and is an innate response to ensure survival.

*When studying any topic in social psychology, you need to be aware of how the above theories have influenced their thinking, as this will help you understand their perspective/explanation of behaviour.*

*You must also consider the methodology and the advantage/disadvantages of their methods used, as this will help you evaluate their work.*

1.7

learning outcomes and  
assessment



### Learning Outcomes

At the end of your social psychology module you should be able to:

- understand and describe the major theories and areas of research in social psychology
- think critically about the key studies/theories

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- understand and be able to evaluate the methods used to research social psychology
- relate the theories and thinking of social psychologists to contemporary social issues
- discuss the contribution that social psychology makes to understanding the individual, the social context and the relationship between the two
- understand the basic history and development of social psychology
- understand the relationship between social psychology and other psychological approaches.

### Assessment

You will be assessed in a number of ways, including essay writing, projects and discussion work. Put simply, there are two basic skills that you need to be a good psychologist, and it is these that your examiners will be looking for when assessing you:

- Your **knowledge and understanding** of psychological theories, concepts and studies: to demonstrate this you might give a definition of a psychological term, outline a theory or a particular study carried out.
- Your **evaluation** of a psychological theory/argument/study: this essentially requires you to say what is good or bad about a theory/argument/study and focuses on *how* a theory or idea can be supported by research and *how* it can be criticised by research.

If you simply write out the relevant study and state that it does support/criticise a theory, you will not gain marks. Your essay questions test more than your ability to memorise and rewrite information. Rather, you are expected to show that you have considered both sides of an argument and are able to draw an overall conclusion – you therefore explicitly need to show *how* a piece of evidence supports or criticises a theory/idea. It is the “why” that will gain you the higher marks, both on this particular question and the paper generally. Put bluntly, this skill demonstrated in your answer is the single factor that will make a difference to achieving the lower or higher grades in your psychology degree.

With regard to achieving the degree you are aiming for, the following broad criteria should apply:

- **70+ marks will give you a first class honours degree** whereby you show a clear, coherent and logical argument that (most importantly) shows an excellent demonstration of the key arguments, concepts and studies and an ability critically to evaluate these. Such analysis needs to reflect original thought, must be related to the set question and must be well supported by scientific evidence gained by the application of your wider reading.

- **60–69 marks will give you an upper second class honours degree** and will require that you show a clear, coherent and logical argument with good performance in the areas above. The main difference here is that you display less originality of thought than of that required for a first class honours. So you will show a good grasp of concepts, the relationship between them, and support your arguments accordingly with the application of wider reading.
- **50–59 marks will give you a lower second class degree**, which means that you demonstrate an organised argument but one that has irrelevant material or omissions, with a general grasp of concepts and logical argument shown. content may not be directly related to the question and evaluations do not reflect original analysis. There is less evidence of wider reading.
- **40–49 marks would result in a third class degree**, whereby you show a basic understanding of the main concepts and arguments in social psychology but there are errors or omissions and debate may be unstructured and irrelevant. There would also be little evidence of original thought, little use of scientific evidence to support arguments and little evidence of wider reading.

As you can see from these criteria, some of the key skills you require in psychology are an important feature of this text. However, remember that this book is not a replacement for the wider reading you need to gain top marks – it will simply supplement what you know.

1.8	
running themes	

There will be a number of common themes that will run throughout this book – no matter what topic you are studying, these “running themes” will recur and it is important that you bear these in mind, mention them when appropriate and think about how they make an impact on the topic you are studying:



- **Compliance:** although a person may privately maintain their own view, they will publicly display the attitudes or behaviour of the majority because they want to be accepted as part of that group and have a desire to be liked (normative social influence).

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- **Identification:** when membership of a group is important to a person in the social setting, then they adopt the value of the majority both publicly and privately, although this changes once the particular group is no longer of importance.
- **Internalisation:** views of the social group are internalised and the behaviour/attitudes of the majority are consistent both publicly and privately.
- **Majority social influence:** people change their behaviour so that they adopt that of the majority. People are most likely to conform because they have a desire to be liked and a desire to be right (normative and informational social influence) and so publicly (although not necessarily privately) display the attitudes and behaviours of the dominant group.
- **Minority influence:** when a minority presents a consistent argument, they may be able to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the majority.
- **Social influence:** where people are influenced by others such that they try to display the attitude or behaviour of the social group either by obeying or conforming to the majority or the minority. Social influence occurs because of the desire to be liked and the desire to be right (normative and informational social influence).
- **Normative social influence:** people have the desire to be liked by the social group and therefore conform to the behaviour and attitudes displayed by the majority.
- **Informational social influence:** people will yield to the majority social influence because they want to be accepted and therefore feel the need to be right/display the correct answer or behaviour in order to gain such acceptance.
- **Collective mind:** the idea that individuals form a “collective” or group mind derived from social norms/the social context.
- **Individual centred approach:** the study of social behaviour that emphasises individual experience/behaviour.
- **Socio-centred approach:** the study of behaviour that emphasises the function and structure of the social context.
- **Social norms:** look at how individuals behave according to the rules of society.
- **Deindividuation:** the individual relinquishes individual responsibility for actions and sees behaviour as a consequence of group norms and expectations.

These running themes will help you when using your textbooks as they underpin most topics in the syllabus and will help you to understand that there is common ground between these topics. When revising material, these themes will also provide you with a way of linking your ideas together and in building up a picture of how social psychology applies to the real world. For example, the rules of society (see social norms) underpin all aspects of social behaviour and we are inevitably subject to social influence, particularly the processes of compliance, identification,

internalisation and majority social influence. As you will see throughout this book such themes can be involved in a whole range of processes, for example, in the construction of self, the attributions we make, prejudice and discrimination to list just a few. At the start of each chapter the themes most important to the topic are listed, and in some cases expanded upon to give you some indication of the lines along which you could develop your thinking in relation to the material you will gain from your texts and indeed the chapters themselves. Expanding upon these when writing your essays will ensure that you engage on a level of critical thinking that is vital if you want to gain the higher marks.

