

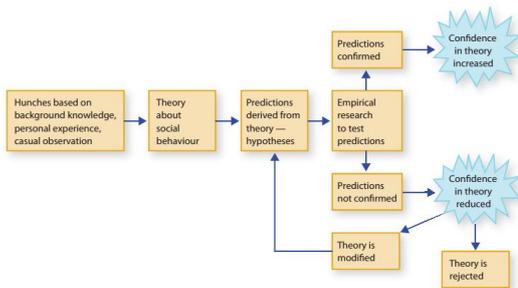
## Lecture Notes – Introduction

### **What is Social Psychology?**

- Social psychology is the scientific study of feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of individuals in social situations.
- How do social situations differ around the world? How do feelings, thoughts and behaviours of individuals vary around the world?

### **Scientific Method**

- Observation -> formulate theory -> predictions -> design study -> collect data -> theory supported or not supported -> theory modified.



### **How Do We Understand the Holocaust?**

- Ask people involved (e.g., interview).
- **Individual difference approach:** want to understand if there are any personality differences, e.g. Hitler.
- **Sociological approach:** may be interested in characteristics of German society in 1930s/40s.
- **Social psychological approach:** simulate controlled, laboratory holocaust-type situations and behaviours.
  - What were the characteristics of social situations that led people to do x, y, z.
  - Attempt to reproduce the same behaviour in laboratory.

### **Obedience to Authority (Milgram, 1963)**

- “Learning and memory experiment” conducted at Yale University in the 1960’s.
- A man in a white lab coat told participants that the study investigates the effects of punishment on learning.
- “Learner” would memorise combinations of words; “teacher” would punish each incorrect answer with electronic shocks, from 15 to 450 volts.
- Participants were always assigned as a “teacher”. The “learner” was a confederate and was not actually shocked.
- About 2/3 of the participants went all the way to 450 volts.
- Most of the participants became concerned (sweating, nervous laughter, etc.) as the shock levels increased but did not stop.
- Predicted and actual levels of shock administered were very different.
- Experts failed to see how powerful these situations can be.
- Cross-cultural explanation = Germany different to the U.S.
- **Reasons level of obedience was so high:**
  - Misplaced/reduced responsibility.
  - Tendency to obey and conform, particularly to authority.
  - Trust in authority; “this person knows what they are doing”.
- **Ethics debate.**
  - Importance of the research?
  - Potential harm?
  - Free to withdraw?
  - Informed consent?
- **Tuning out the experimenter.**
  - Baseline = 65% participants delivered maximum shock.
  - Absent experimenter = 20%.
  - Ordinary person experimenter = 20%.

- Contradictory experimenters = close to 0%.
- Tuning in the learner.
  - Remote feedback = 65% participants delivered maximum shock.
  - Voice feedback = 62%.
  - Proximity = 40%.
  - Touch proximity = 30%.

### Factors of Obedience

- Immediacy: how close or obvious the victim or the authority figure was to the participant.
  - When the victim was visible in the same room, 40% obeyed to the limit.
  - Obedience was reduced to 20% when the experimenter was absent from the room and relayed directions by telephone.
- Gradual escalation of behaviour = if first shock was 450v participants much less likely to start; once people say 'yes' it is much harder to pull out or say no.
- Release from responsibility; the experimenter assumed the responsibility.

### Obedience Across Cultures

- Milgram's experiment has been replicated in Italy, Germany, Australia, Britain, Jordan, Spain, Austria, and the Netherlands. Complete obedience ranged from over 90% in Spain and the Netherlands, through over 80% in Italy, Germany and Austria, to a low of 40% among Australian men and only 16% among Australian women.

### Social Psychology Around the World

#### Evolutionary Perspective

- Human minds are rooted in physical and psychological predispositions that helped our ancestors survive and reproduce.
- Certain commonalities in psychological processes around the world reflecting survival issues that were common to our ancestors.
- If everyone, all over the world, is behaving in a similar way then it must be human nature or innate.

#### Cross-Cultural Perspective

- Human behaviours are rooted in influences from culture, which is a collection of beliefs, values, rules, and customs that are shared among a group of people.

#### *Individualistic Culture*

- Cultures in which people tend to think of themselves as distinct social entities, tied to each other by voluntary bonds of affection and organisational membership but essentially separate from other people and having attributes that exist in the absence of any connection to others; e.g. U.S., Canada, Australia.
- Be unique; express self; realise internal attributes; promote own goals; be direct, 'say what's on your mind'.

#### *Collectivist Culture*

- Cultures in which people tend to think of themselves as part of a collective, inextricably tied to others in their group, and in which they have relatively little personal control over their lives but do not necessarily want or need these things; e.g. Asia, South America.
- Belong, fit in; occupy one's proper place; engage in appropriate action; promote others' goals; be indirect, 'read others' mind'.

- Does level of education attained influence music preference? Yes.
  - Rock music = individualist themes.
    - Higher education = rock music = tendency for individualism.
  - Country music = collectivist themes.
    - Lower education = country music = tendency for collectivism.

- Similarities = evolutionary perspective.
- Differences = cross-cultural perspective.

## Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – What is Social Psychology?

- **Social psychology** has been defined as ‘the scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others’.
- Social psychologists are interested in explaining **human behaviour** and generally do not study animals. Some general principles of social psychology may be applicable to animals, and research on animals may provide evidence for processes that generalise to people (e.g. social facilitation). Furthermore, certain principles of social behaviour may be general enough to apply to humans and, for instance, other primates. As a rule, however, social psychologists believe that the study of animals does not take us very far in explaining human social behaviour, unless we are interested in its evolutionary origins.
- Social psychologists study **behaviour** (what people actually do that can be objectively measured) because behaviour can be observed and measured. However, behaviour refers not only to obvious motor activities but also to more subtle actions such as a raised eyebrow, a quizzical smile or how we dress, and, critically important in human behaviour, what we say and what we write. In this sense, behaviour is publicly verifiable. However, the meaning attached to behaviour is a matter of theoretical perspective, cultural background or personal interpretation.
- Social psychologists are interested not only in behaviour, but also in feelings, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, intentions and goals. These are not directly observable but can, with varying degrees of confidence, be inferred from behaviour; and to a varying extent may influence or even determine behaviour. The relationship between these unobservable processes and overt behaviour is in itself a focus of research; for example, in research on attitude-behaviour correspondence and research on prejudice and discrimination. Unobservable processes are also the psychological dimension of behaviour, as they occur within the human brain. However, social psychologists almost always go one step beyond relating social behaviour to underlying psychological processes – they almost always relate psychological aspects of behaviour to more fundamental cognitive processes and structures in the human mind and sometimes to neuro-chemical processes in the brain.
- What makes social psychology **social** is that it deals with how people are affected by other people who are physically present (e.g. an audience) or who are imagined to be present (e.g. anticipating performing in front of an audience), or even whose presence is implied. This last influence is more complex and addresses the fundamentally social nature of our experiences as humans. For instance, we tend to think with words; words derive from language and communication; and language and communication would not exist without social interaction. Thought, which is an internalised and private activity that can occur when we are alone, is thus clearly based on implied presence. As another example of implied presence, consider that most of us do not litter, even if no one is watching and even if there is no possibility of ever being caught. This is because people, through the agency of society, have constructed a powerful social convention or norm that proscribes such behaviour. Such a norm implies the presence of other people and ‘determines’ behaviour even in their absence.
- Social psychology is a **science** because it uses the scientific method to construct and test theories. Social psychology has concepts such as dissonance, attitude, categorisation and identity to explain social psychological phenomena. The scientific method dictates that no **theory** is ‘true’ simply because it is logical and seems to make sense. On the contrary, the validity of a theory is based on its correspondence with fact. Social psychologists construct theories from **data** and/or previous theories and then conduct empirical research, in which data are collected to test the theory.

## **Social Psychology and Its Close Neighbours**

- Social psychology is poised at the crossroads of a number of related disciplines and subdisciplines. It is a subdiscipline of general psychology and is therefore concerned with explaining human behaviour in terms of processes that occur within the human mind. It differs from individual psychology in that it explains **social** behaviour. For example, a general psychologist might be interested in perceptual processes that are responsible for people overestimating the size of coins. However, a social psychologist might focus on the fact that coins have value (a case of implied presence, because the value of something generally depends on what others think), and that perceived value might influence the judgement of size. A great deal of social psychology is concerned with face-to-face interaction between individuals or among members of groups, whereas general psychology focuses on people’s reactions to stimuli that do not have to be social.
- The boundary between individual and social psychology is approached from both sides. For instance, having developed a comprehensive and highly influential theory of the individual human mind, Sigmund Freud set out to develop a social psychology. Freudian, or psychodynamic, notions have left an enduring mark on social psychology,

in particular in the explanation of prejudice. Since the late 1970s, social psychology has been strongly influenced by cognitive psychology, in an attempt to employ its methods (e.g. reaction time) and its concepts (e.g. memory) to explain a wide range of social behaviours. In fact, what is called social cognition is the dominant approach in contemporary social psychology, and it surfaces in almost all areas of the discipline. In recent years, the study of brain biochemistry and neuroscience has also influenced social psychology.

- Social psychology also has links with sociology and social anthropology, mostly in studying groups, social and cultural norms, social representations, and language and intergroup behaviour. In general, sociology focuses on how groups, organisations, social categories and societies are organised, how they function and how they change. The unit of analysis (i.e. the focus of research and theory) is the group as a whole rather than the individual people who make up the group. Sociology is a **social science** whereas social psychology is a **behavioural science** – a disciplinary difference with far-reaching consequences for how one studies and explains human behaviour.

- Social anthropology is much like sociology but historically has focused on 'exotic' societies. Social psychology deals with many of the same phenomena but seeks to explain how individual human interaction and human cognition influence 'culture' and, in turn, are influenced or constructed by culture. The unit of analysis is the individual person within the group. In reality, some forms of sociology (e.g. microsociology, psychological sociology, sociological psychology) are closely related to social psychology.

- Just as the boundary between social and individual psychology has been approached from both sides, so has the boundary between social psychology and sociology. From the sociological side, for example, Karl Marx's theory of cultural history and social change has been extended to incorporate a consideration of the role of individual psychology. From the social psychological side, intergroup perspectives on group and individual behaviour draw on sociological variables and concepts. Contemporary social psychology abuts sociolinguistics and the study of language and communication, and even literary criticism. It overlaps with economics, where behavioural economists have recently 'discovered' that economic behaviour is not rational, because people are influenced by other people – actual, imagined or implied. Social psychology also draws on and is influenced by applied research in many areas, such as sports psychology, health psychology and organisational psychology.

- Social psychology's location at the intersection of different disciplines is part of its intellectual and practical appeal. However, it is also a cause of debate about what precisely constitutes social psychology as a distinct scientific discipline. If we lean too far towards individual cognitive processes, then perhaps we are pursuing individual psychology or cognitive psychology. If we lean too far towards the role of language, then perhaps we are being scholars of language and communication. If we overemphasise the role of social structure in intergroup relations, then perhaps we are being sociologists. The issue of exactly what constitutes social psychology provides an important and ongoing metatheoretical debate (i.e. a debate about what sorts of theories are appropriate for social psychology), which forms the background to the business of social psychology.

## Topics of Social Psychology

- One way to define social psychology is in terms of what social psychologists study. Social psychologists study an enormous range of topics, including conformity, persuasion, power, influence, obedience, prejudice, prejudice reduction, discrimination, stereotyping, bargaining, sexism and racism, small groups, social categories, intergroup relations, crowd behaviour, social conflict and harmony, social change, overcrowding, stress, the physical environment, decision making, the jury, leadership, communication, language, speech, attitudes, impression formation, impression management, self-presentation, identity, the self, culture, emotion, attraction, friendship, the family, love, romance, sex, violence, aggression, altruism and prosocial behaviour (acts that are valued positively by society).

- One problem with defining social psychology solely in terms of its topics is that this does not properly differentiate it from other disciplines. For example, 'intergroup relations' is a focus not only of social psychologists but also of political scientists and sociologists. The family is studied not only by social psychologists but also by clinical psychologists. What makes social psychology distinct is a combination of **what** it studies, **how** it studies it and what **level of explanation** is sought.

## Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Methodological Issues

### Scientific Method

- Social psychology employs the scientific method to study social behaviour. Science is a **method** for studying nature, and it is the

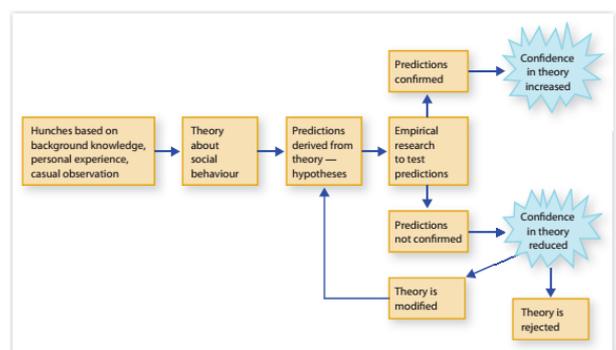


Figure 1.2 A model of the scientific method employed by social psychologists

method – not the people who use it, the things they study, the facts they discover or the explanations they propose – that distinguishes science from other approaches to knowledge. In this respect, the main difference between social psychology and, say, physics is that the former studies human social behaviour, while the others study non-organic phenomena.

- Science involves the formulation of **hypotheses** (predictions) on the basis of prior knowledge, speculation and casual or systematic observation. Hypotheses are formally stated predictions about what factor or factors may cause something to occur; they are stated in such a way that they can be tested empirically to see if they are true. For example, we might hypothesise that ballet dancers perform better in front of an audience than when dancing alone. This hypothesis can be tested empirically by assessing their performance alone and in front of an audience. Strictly speaking, empirical tests can falsify hypotheses (causing the investigator to reject the hypothesis, revise it or test it in some other way) but not prove them. If a hypothesis is supported, confidence in its veracity increases and one may generate more finely tuned hypotheses. For example, if we find that ballet dancers do indeed perform better in front of an audience, we might then hypothesise that this occurs only when the dancers are already well rehearsed; in science-speak, we have hypothesised that the effect of the presence of an audience on performance is conditional on (moderated by) the amount of prior rehearsal. An important feature of the scientific method is replication: it guards against the possibility that a finding is tied to the circumstances in which a test was conducted. It also guards against fraud.

- The alternative to science is dogma or rationalism, where understanding is based on authority: something is true because an authority says it is so. Valid knowledge is acquired by pure reason and grounded in faith: that is, by learning well, and uncritically accepting and trusting, the pronouncements of authorities. Even though the scientific revolution occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries, dogma and rationalism still exist as influential alternative paths to knowledge.

- As a science, social psychology has at its disposal an array of different methods for conducting empirical tests of hypotheses. There are two broad types of method, **experimental** and **non-experimental**: each has its advantages and its limitations. The choice of an appropriate method is determined by the nature of the hypothesis under investigation, the resources available for doing the research (e.g. time, money, research participants) and the ethics of the method. Confidence in the validity of a hypothesis is enhanced if the hypothesis has been confirmed a number of times by different research teams using different methods. Methodological pluralism helps to minimise the possibility that the finding is an artefact of a particular method, and replication by different research teams helps to avoid **confirmation bias** – which occurs when researchers become so personally involved in their own theories that they lose objectivity in interpreting data.

## Experiments

- An experiment is a hypothesis test in which something is done to see its effect on something else. For example, if I hypothesise that my car greedily guzzles too much petrol because the tyres are under-inflated, then I can conduct an experiment. I can note petrol consumption over an average week, then I can increase the tyre pressure and again note petrol consumption over an average week. If consumption is reduced, then my hypothesis is supported. Casual experimentation is one of the commonest and most important ways in which people learn about their world. It is an extremely powerful method because it allows us to identify the causes of events and thus gain control over our destiny.

- Not surprisingly, systematic experimentation is the most important research method in science. Experimentation involves **intervention** in the form of **manipulation** of one or more **independent variables**, and then measurement of the effect of the treatment (manipulation) on one or more focal **dependent variables**. In the example above, the independent variable is tyre inflation, which was manipulated to create two experimental conditions (lower versus higher pressure), and the dependent variable is petrol consumption, which was measured on refilling the tank at the end of the week. More generally, independent variables are dimensions that the researcher hypothesises will have an effect and that can be varied (e.g. tyre pressure in the present example). Dependent variables are dimensions that the researcher hypothesises will vary (petrol consumption) as a consequence of varying the independent variable. Variation in the dependent variable is **dependent** on variation in the independent variable.

- Social psychology is largely experimental, in that most social psychologists would prefer to test hypotheses experimentally if at all possible, and much of what we know about social behaviour is based on experiments. Indeed, one of the most enduring and prestigious scholarly societies for the scientific study of social psychology is the Society for Experimental Social Psychology.

- A typical social psychology experiment might be designed to test the hypothesis that violent television programs increase aggression in young children. One way to do this would be to assign 20 children randomly to two conditions in which they individually watch either a violent or a non-violent program, and then monitor the amount of

aggression expressed immediately afterwards by the children while they are at play. Random assignment of participants reduces the chance of systematic differences between the participants in the two conditions. If there were any systematic differences, say, in age, gender or parental background, then any significant effects on aggression might be due to age, gender or background rather than to the violence of the television program. That is, age, gender or parental background would be **confounded** with the independent variable. Likewise, the television program viewed in each condition should be identical in all respects except the degree of violence. For instance, if the violent program also contained more action, then we would not know whether subsequent differences in aggression were due to the violence, the action, or both. The circumstances surrounding the viewing of the two programs should also be identical. If the violent programs were viewed in a bright red room and the non-violent programs in a blue room, then any effects might be due to room colour, violence, or both. It is critically important in experiments to avoid **confounding**: the conditions must be identical in all respects except for those represented by the manipulated independent variable.

- We must also be careful about how we measure effects: that is, the dependent measures that assess the dependent variable. In our example it would probably be inappropriate, because of the children's age, to administer a questionnaire measuring aggression. A better technique would be unobtrusive observation of behaviour, but then what would we code as 'aggression'? The criterion would have to be sensitive to changes: in other words, loud talk or violent assault with a weapon might be insensitive, as all children talk loudly when playing (there is a **ceiling effect**), and virtually no children violently assault one another with a weapon while playing (there is a **floor effect**). In addition, it would be a mistake for whoever records or codes the behaviour to know which experimental condition the child was in: such knowledge might compromise objectivity. The coder(s) should know as little as possible about the experimental conditions and the research hypotheses.

- The example used here is of a simple experiment that has only two levels of only one independent variable – called a one-factor design. Most social psychology experiments are more complicated than this. For instance, we might formulate a more textured hypothesis that aggression in young children is increased by television programs that contain realistic violence. To test this hypothesis, a two-factor design would be adopted. The two factors (independent variables) would be (1) the violence of the program (low versus high) and (2) the realism of the program (realistic versus fantasy). The participants would be randomly assigned across four experimental conditions in which they watched (1) a non-violent fantasy program, (2) a non-violent realistic program, (3) a violent fantasy program, or (4) a violent realistic program. Of course, independent variables are not restricted to two levels. For instance, we might predict that aggression is increased by moderately violent programs, whereas extremely violent programs are so distasteful that aggression is actually suppressed. Our independent variable of program violence could now have three levels (low, moderate, extreme).

### The Laboratory Experiment

- The classic social psychology experiment is conducted in a **laboratory** in order to be able to control as many potentially confounding variables as possible. The aim is to isolate and manipulate a single aspect of a variable, an aspect that may not normally occur in isolation outside the laboratory. Laboratory experiments are **intended** to create artificial conditions. Although a social psychology laboratory may contain computers, wires and flashing lights, or even medical equipment and sophisticated brain imaging technology, often it is simply a room containing tables and chairs. For example, our ballet hypothesis could be tested in the laboratory by formalising it to one in which we predict that someone performing any well-learned task performs the task more quickly in front of an audience. We could unobtrusively time individuals, for example, taking off their clothes and then putting them back on again (a well-learned task) either alone in a room or while being scrutinised by two other people (an audience). We could compare these speeds with those of someone dressing up in unusual and difficult clothing (a poorly learned task).

- Social psychologists have become increasingly interested in investigating the biochemical and brain activity correlates, consequences and causes of social behaviour. This has generated an array of experimental methods that makes social psychology laboratories look more like biological or physical sciences laboratories. For example, a psychologist might wish to know why stress or anxiety sometimes occurs when we interact with other people, and so might measure the change in the level of the hormone cortisol in our saliva. Research in social neuroscience using functional magnetic resonance imaging (**fMRI**) has become popular. This involves participants being placed in a huge and very expensive magnetic cylinder to measure their electro-chemical brain activity.

- Laboratory experiments allow us to establish cause-effect relationships between variables. However, laboratory experiments have a number of drawbacks. Because experimental conditions are artificial and highly controlled, particularly social neuroscience experiments, laboratory findings cannot be generalised directly to the less 'pure' conditions that exist in the 'real' world outside the laboratory. However, laboratory findings address **theories** about human social behaviour, and on the basis of laboratory experimentation we can generalise these theories to apply to

conditions other than those in the laboratory. Laboratory experiments are intentionally low on **external validity** or **mundane realism** (i.e. how similar the conditions are to those usually encountered by participants in the real world) but should always be high on **internal validity** or **experimental realism** (i.e. the manipulations must be full of psychological impact and meaning for the participants).

- Laboratory experiments can be prone to a range of biases. There are **subject effects** that can cause participants' behaviour to be an artefact of the experiment rather than a spontaneous and natural response to a manipulation. Artefacts can be minimised by carefully avoiding **demand characteristics**, **evaluation apprehension** and **social desirability**. Demand characteristics are features of the experiment that seem to 'demand' a particular response: they give information about the hypothesis and thus inform helpful and compliant participants about how to react to confirm the hypothesis. Participants are thus no longer naive or **blind** regarding the experimental hypothesis. Participants in experiments are real people, and experiments are real social situations. Not surprisingly, participants may want to project the best possible image of themselves to the experimenter and other participants present. This can influence spontaneous reactions to manipulations in unpredictable ways. There are also **experimenter effects**. The experimenter is often aware of the hypothesis and may inadvertently communicate cues that cause participants to behave in a way that confirms the hypothesis. This can be minimised by a **double-blind** procedure, in which the experimenter is unaware of which experimental condition they are running.

- Since the 1960s, laboratory experiments have tended to rely on psychology under- graduates as participants. The reason is a pragmatic one – psychology undergraduates are readily available in large numbers. In almost all major universities there is a research participation scheme, or 'subject pool', whereby psychology students act as experimental participants in exchange for course credits or as a course requirement. Critics have often complained that this overreliance on a particular type of participant may produce a somewhat distorted view of social behaviour – one that is not easily generalised to other sectors of the population. In their defence, experimental social psychologists point out that theories, not experimental findings, are generalised, and that replication and methodological pluralism ensures that social psychology is about people, not just about psychology students.

### The Field Experiment

- Social psychology experiments can be conducted in more naturalistic settings outside the laboratory. For example, we could test the hypothesis that prolonged eye contact is uncomfortable and causes 'flight' by having an experimenter stand at traffic lights and either gaze intensely at the driver of a car stopped at the lights or gaze nonchalantly in the opposite direction. The dependent measure would be how fast the car sped away once the lights changed. Field experiments have high external validity and, as participants are usually completely unaware that an experiment is taking place, are not reactive (i.e. no demand characteristics are present). However, there is less control over extraneous variables, random assignment is sometimes difficult, and it can be difficult to obtain accurate measurements or measurements of subjective feelings (generally, overt behaviour is all that can be measured).

### **Non-Experimental Methods**

- Systematic experimentation tends to be the preferred method of science, and indeed it is often equated with science. However, there are all sorts of circumstances where it is simply impossible to conduct an experiment to test a hypothesis. For instance, theories about planetary systems and galaxies can pose a real problem: we cannot move planets around to see what happens! Likewise, social psychological theories about the relationship between biological gender and decision making are not amenable to experimentation, because we cannot manipulate biological gender experimentally and see what effects emerge. Social psychology also confronts ethical issues that can proscribe experimentation. For instance, hypotheses about the effects on self-esteem of being a victim of violent crime are not easily tested experimentally – we would not be able to assign participants randomly to two conditions and then subject one group to a violent crime and see what happened!

- Where experimentation is not possible or not appropriate, social psychologists have a range of non-experimental methods from which to choose. Because these methods do not involve the manipulation of independent variables against a background of random assignment to condition, it is almost impossible to draw reliable causal conclusions. For instance, we could compare the self-esteem of people who have been victims of violent crime with those who have not. Any differences could be attributed to violent crime but could also be due to other uncontrolled differences between the two groups. We can only conclude that there is a **correlation** between self-esteem and being the victim of violent crime. There is no evidence that one causes the other (i.e. being a victim may lower self-esteem or having lower self-esteem may increase the likelihood of becoming a victim). Both could be **correlated** or co-occurring effects of some third variable, such as chronic unemployment, which independently lowers self-esteem and increases the probability that one might become a victim. In general, non-experimental methods involve the

examination of correlation between naturally occurring variables and as such do not permit us to draw causal conclusions.

### Archival Research

- **Archival research** is a non-experimental method that is useful for investigating large-scale, widely occurring phenomena that may be remote in time. The researcher assembles data collected by others, often for reasons unconnected with those of the researcher. For instance, Janis used an archival method to show that overly cohesive government decision-making groups may make poor decisions with disastrous consequences because they adopt poor decision-making procedures (called 'groupthink'). Janis constructed his theory on the basis of an examination of biographical, autobiographical and media accounts of the decision-making procedures associated with, for example, the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, in which the United States futilely tried to invade Cuba.

- Archival methods are often used to make comparisons between different cultures or nations regarding things such as suicide, mental health or child-rearing strategies. Archival research is not reactive, but it can be unreliable because the researcher usually has no control over the primary data collection, which might be biased or unreliable in other ways (e.g. missing vital data). The researcher has to make do with whatever is there.

### Case Studies

- The **case study** allows an in-depth analysis of a single case (either a person or a group) or a single event. Case studies often employ an array of data collection and analysis techniques involving structured and open-ended interviews and questionnaires, and the observation of behaviour. Case studies are well suited to the examination of unusual or rare phenomena that could not be created in the laboratory: for instance, bizarre cults, mass murderers or disasters. Case studies are useful as a source of hypotheses, but findings may suffer from researcher or subject bias (the researcher is not blind to the hypothesis, there are demand characteristics and participants suffer evaluation apprehension), and findings may not easily be generalised to other cases or events.

### Qualitative Research and Discourse Analysis

- Closely related to case studies is a range of non-experimental methodologies that analyse largely naturally occurring behaviour in great detail. Among these are methods that meticulously unpack **discourse**, what people say to whom and in what context, in order to identify the underlying narrative that may reveal what people are thinking, what their motivations are and what the discourse is intended to do. **Discourse analysis** (a set of methods used to analyse text—in particular, naturally occurring language—in order to understand its meaning and significance) draws on literary criticism and the notion that language is a performance and is often grounded in a generally critical orientation towards mainstream social psychology. Discourse analysis is both a language-based and communication-based methodology and approach to social psychology that has proven particularly useful in a number of areas including the study of prejudice.

### Survey Research

- Another non-experimental method is data collection by **survey**. Surveys can involve structured interviews, in which the researcher asks participants a number of carefully chosen questions and notes the responses, or a questionnaire, in which participants write their own responses to written questions. In either case the questions can be open-ended (i.e. respondents can give as much or as little detail in their answers as they wish) or closed-ended (where there is a limited number of predetermined responses, such as circling a number on a nine-point scale). For instance, to investigate immigrant workers' experiences of prejudice, one could ask respondents a set of predetermined questions and summarise the gist of their responses or assign a numerical value to their responses. Alternatively, respondents could record their own responses by writing a paragraph, or by circling numbers on scales in a questionnaire.

- Surveys can be used to obtain a large amount of data from a large sample of participants; hence, generalisation is often not a problem. However, it is a method that, like case studies and qualitative methods, is subject to experimenter bias, subject bias and evaluation apprehension. Anonymous and confidential questionnaires may minimise experimenter bias, evaluation apprehension and some subject biases, but demand characteristics may remain. In addition, poorly constructed questionnaires may obtain biased data due to 'response set'—that is, the tendency for some respondents to agree unthinkingly with statements, or to choose mid-range or extreme responses.

## Field Studies

- The final non-experimental method is the field study. We have already described the field experiment: the field study is essentially the same but without any interventions or manipulations. Field studies involve the observation, recording and coding of behaviour as it occurs. Most often, the observer is non-intrusive by not participating in the behaviour, and 'invisible' by not having an effect on the ongoing behaviour. For instance, one could research the behaviour of students in the student cafeteria by concealing oneself in a corner and observing what goes on. Sometimes 'invisibility' is impossible, so the opposite strategy can be used – the researcher becomes a full participant in the behaviour. For instance, it would be rather difficult to be an invisible observer of gang behaviour. Instead, you could study the behaviour of a street gang by becoming a full member of the gang and surreptitiously taking notes. Field studies are excellent for investigating spontaneously occurring behaviour in its natural context but are particularly prone to experimenter bias, lack of objectivity, poor generalisability and distortions due to the impact of the researcher on the behaviour under investigation. Also, if you join a gang there is an element of personal danger!

## **Data and Analysis**

- Social psychologists absolutely love data, and are prepared to collect it in a variety of different ways. Recently, the internet has provided a wonderful new opportunity for data collection that is becoming increasingly popular because it is an inexpensive, fast and efficient way to collect data from a large and diverse population. One particularly popular web-based resource is Amazon's mechanical turk (MTurk), which if used carefully allows a range of methods that can generate high-quality data.

- Research provides data, which are analysed to draw conclusions about whether hypotheses are supported. The type of analysis undertaken depends on at least:

- **The type of data obtained** – for example, binary responses such as 'yes' versus 'no', continuous variables such as temperature or response latency, defined positions on nine-point scales, rank ordering of choices and open-ended written responses (text).
- **The method used to obtain data** – for example, controlled experiment, open-ended interview, participant observation, archival search.
- **The purposes of the research** – for example, to describe in depth a specific case, to establish differences between two groups of participants exposed to different treatments, to investigate the correlation between two or more naturally occurring variables.

- Overwhelmingly, social psychological knowledge is based on statistical analysis of quantitative data. Data are obtained as, or are transformed into, numbers (i.e. quantities), and these numbers are then compared in various formalised ways (i.e. by **statistics**). For example, to decide whether women are more friendly interviewees than are men, we could compare transcripts of interviews of both men and women. We could then code the transcripts to count how often participants made positive remarks to the interviewer, and compare the mean count for, say, 20 women with the mean for 20 men. In this case, we would be interested in knowing whether the difference between men and women was 'on the whole' greater than the difference among men and among women. To do this, we could use a simple statistic called the **t test**, which computes a number called the t statistic that is based on both the difference between the women's and men's mean friendliness scores and the degree of variability of scores within each sex. The larger the value of *t*, the larger the between-gender difference relative to the within-gender difference.

- The decision about whether the difference between groups is psychologically significant depends on its **statistical significance**. Social psychologists adhere to the arbitrary convention that if the obtained value of *t* has less than a 1 in 20 (i.e. 0.05) probability of occurring simply by chance (that is, if we randomly selected 100 groups of 10 males and 10 females, only 5 times or fewer would we obtain a value of *t* as great as or greater than that obtained in the study), then the obtained difference is statistically significant and there really is a difference in friendliness between male and female interviewees.

- The *t* test is very simple. However, the principle underlying the *t* test is the same as that underlying more sophisticated and complex statistical techniques used by social psychologists to test whether two or more groups differ significantly. The other major method of data analysis used by social psychologists is correlation, which assesses whether the co-occurrence of two or more variables is significant. Again, although the example below is simple, the underlying principle is the same for a range of correlational techniques.

- To investigate the idea that rigid thinkers tend to hold more politically conservative attitudes, we could have 30 participants answer a questionnaire measuring cognitive rigidity (dogmatism: a rigid and inflexible set of attitudes) and political conservatism (e.g. endorsement and espousal of right-wing political and social policies). If we rank the 30 participants in order of increasing dogmatism and find that conservatism also increases, with the least dogmatic

person being the least conservative and the most dogmatic the most conservative, then we can say that the two variables are positively correlated. If we find that conservatism systematically decreases with increasing dogmatism, then we say that the two variables are negatively correlated. If there seems to be no systematic relationship between the two variables, then they are uncorrelated. A statistic can be calculated to represent correlation numerically: for instance, the statistical measure known as Pearson's  $r$  varies from  $-1$  for a perfect negative to  $+1$  for a perfect positive correlation. Depending on, among other things, the number of persons, we can also know whether the correlation is statistically significant at the conventional 5 per cent level.

- Although statistical analysis of quantitative data is the bread and butter of social psychology, some social psychologists find that this method is unsuited to their purposes and prefer a more **qualitative analysis**. For example, analysis of people's explanations for unemployment or prejudice may sometimes benefit from a more discursive, non-quantitative analysis in which the researcher tries to unravel what is said in order to go beyond surface explanations and get to the heart of the underlying beliefs and reasons. As noted earlier, one form of qualitative analysis is **discourse analysis**. Discourse analysis treats all 'data' as 'text' – that is, as a communicative event that is replete with multiple layers of meaning but that can be interpreted only by considering the text in its wider social context. For example, discourse analysts believe that we should not take people's responses to attitude statements in questionnaires at face value and subject them to statistical analysis. They believe, instead, that we should interpret what is being communicated. This is made possible only by considering the response as a complex conjunction of social-communicative factors embedded in both the immediate and wider sociohistorical context. However, discourse analysis is more than a research method: it is also a systematic critique of 'conventional' social psychological methods and theories.

### **Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Research Ethics**

- As researchers, social psychologists confront important ethical issues. Clearly, it is unethical to fake data or to report results in a biased or partial manner that significantly distorts what was done, what was found, and how the hypotheses and theory under examination now fare. As in life, scientists do sometimes cheat, and this not only disrupts scientific progress but has dreadful career and life consequences for those involved. However, cheating is very rare. The largely team-based nature of social psychological research probably helps prevent academics and their postgraduate students, who are all under enormous pressure to publish, taking, to put it euphemistically, scientific shortcuts.

- Research ethics is also all about treatment of research participants. For instance, is it ethical to expose experimental participants to a treatment that is embarrassing or has potentially harmful effects on their self-concept? If such research is important, what are the rights of the person, what are the ethical obligations of the researcher, and what guidelines are there for deciding? Although ethical considerations surface most often in experiments, they can also confront non-experimental researchers. For example, is it ethical for a non-participant observer investigating crowd behaviour to refrain from interceding in a violent assault?

- These principles are reflected in the ethics codes of national societies of psychology in Australia and New Zealand. Researchers design their studies with these guidelines in mind and then obtain official approval from a university or departmental research ethics committee. There are five ethical principles that have received most attention: protection from harm, right to privacy, deception, informed consent, and debriefing.

- The Australian Psychological Society also provides a set of principles for ethical conduct (most recently updated in 2007) that apply to clinical practice.

### **Physical Welfare of Participants**

- Clearly, it is unethical to expose people to physical **harm**. For example, the use of electric shocks that cause visible burning would be difficult to justify. However, in most cases it is also difficult to establish whether non-trivial harm is involved and, if so, what its magnitude is, and whether debriefing deals with it. For instance, telling experimental participants that they have done badly on a word-association task may have long-term effects on self-esteem and could therefore be considered harmful. On the other hand, the effects may be so minor and transitory as to be insignificant.

### **Respect for Privacy**

- Social psychological research often involves invasion of **privacy**. Participants can be asked intimate questions, can be observed without their knowledge, and can have their moods, perceptions and behaviour manipulated. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether the research topic justifies invasion of privacy. At other times, it is more straightforward – for example, intimate questions about sexual practices are essential for research into behaviour that may put people at risk of contracting HIV and developing AIDS. Concern about privacy is usually satisfied by

ensuring that data obtained from individuals are entirely **confidential**: that is, only the researcher knows who said or did what. Personal identification is removed from data (rendering them **anonymous**), research findings are reported as statistical means for large groups of people, and data no longer useful are usually destroyed.

### Use of Deception

- Laboratory experiments, as we have seen, involve the manipulation of people's cognition, feelings or behaviour in order to investigate the spontaneous, natural and non-reactive effect of independent variables. Because participants need to be naive regarding hypotheses, experimenters commonly conceal the true purpose of the experiment. A degree of **deception** is often necessary. Between 50 and 75% of published experiments involve some degree of deception. Because the use of deception seems to imply 'trickery', 'deceit' and 'lying', it has attracted a frenzy of criticism – for example, Baumrind's attack on Milgram's obedience studies. Social psychologists have been challenged to abandon controlled experimental research in favour of role playing or simulations if they cannot do experiments without deception.

- This is probably too extreme a request, as social psychological knowledge has been enriched enormously by classic experiments that have used deception. Although some experiments have used an amount of deception that seems excessive, in practice the deception used in the overwhelming majority of social psychology experiments is trivial. For example, an experiment may be introduced as a study of group decision making when in fact it is part of a program of research into prejudice and stereotyping. In addition, there has been no evidence of long-term negative consequences of the use of deception in social psychology experiments, and experimental participants themselves tend to be impressed, rather than upset or angered, by cleverly executed deceptions, viewing deception as a necessary withholding of information or a necessary ruse.

### Informed Consent

- A way to safeguard participants' rights in experiments is to obtain their **informed consent** to participate. In principle, people should give their consent freely (preferably in writing) to participate on the basis of full information about what they are consenting to take part in, and they must be entirely free to withdraw without penalty from the research whenever they wish. Researchers cannot lie or withhold information in order to induce people to participate; nor can they make it 'difficult' to say 'no' or to withdraw (i.e. via social pressure or by exercise of personal or institutionalised power). In practice, however, terms such as 'full information' are difficult to define, and, as we have just seen, experiments often require some deception in order that participants remain naive.

### Debriefing

- Participants should be fully **debriefed** after taking part in an experiment. Debriefing is designed to make sure that people leave the laboratory with an increased respect for and understanding of social psychology. More specifically, debriefing involves a detailed explanation of the experiment and its broader theoretical and applied context. Any deceptions are explained and justified to the satisfaction of all participants, and care is taken to make sure that the effects of manipulations have been undone. However, strong critics of deception believe that no amount of debriefing puts right what they consider to be the fundamental wrong of deception that undermines basic human trust.

- Social psychologists often conduct and report research into socially sensitive phenomena, or research that has implications for socially sensitive issues: for example, prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism and ageism. In these sorts of areas the researcher has to be especially careful that both the conducting and reporting of research are done in such a way that they are not biased by personal prejudices and are not open to public misinterpretation, distortion or misuse. For example, early research into gender differences in conformity found that women conformed more than men. This finding is, of course, fuel to the view that women are more dependent than men. Later research discovered that men and women conform equally, and that whether one conforms or not depends largely on how much familiarity and confidence one has with the conformity task. Early research used tasks that were more familiar to men than to women, and many researchers looked no further because the findings confirmed their assumptions.

### Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Theoretical Issues

- Social psychologists construct and test theories of human social behaviour. A social psychological theory is an integrated set of propositions that explains the causes of social behaviour, generally in terms of one or more social psychological processes. Theories rest on explicit assumptions about social behaviour and contain a number of defined concepts and formal statements about the relationship between concepts. Ideally, these relationships are causal ones that are attributed to the operation of social and/or psychological processes. Theories are framed in

such a way that they generate hypotheses that can be tested empirically. Social psychological theories vary greatly in terms of their rigour, testability and generality. Some theories are short-range mini-theories tied to specific phenomena, whereas others are broader general theories that explain whole classes of behaviour. Some even approach the status of 'grand theory' (such as evolutionary theory, Marxism, general relativity theory and psychodynamic theory) in that they furnish a general perspective on social psychology.

- Social identity theory is a good example of a relatively general mid-range social psychological theory. It is an analysis of the behaviour of people in groups and how this relates to their self-conception as group members. The theory integrates a number of compatible (sub)theories that deal with and emphasise:

- intergroup relations and social change
  - motivational processes associated with group membership and group behaviour
  - social influence and conformity processes within groups
  - cognitive processes associated with self-conception and social perception.
- These, and other associated processes, operate together to produce group behaviour, as distinct from interpersonal behaviour.
- Social identity theory generates testable predictions about a range of group phenomena, including stereotyping, intergroup discrimination, social influence in groups, group cohesiveness, social change and even language and ethnicity.

### Theories in Social Psychology

- Theories in social psychology can generally be clustered into types of theory, with different types of theory reflecting different metatheories. Just as a theory is a set of interrelated concepts and principles that explain a phenomenon, a **meta-theory** is a set of interrelated concepts and principles about which theories or types of theory are appropriate. Some theories can be extended by their adherents to account for almost the whole of human behaviour – the 'grand theories' mentioned above.

### Behaviourism

- Behaviourist or learning perspectives derive originally from Ivan Pavlov's early work on conditioned reflexes and B. F. Skinner's work on operant conditioning. **Radical behaviourists** believe that behaviour can be explained and predicted in terms of reinforcement schedules – behaviour associated with positive outcomes or circumstances grows in strength and frequency. However, more popular with social psychologists is **neo-behaviourism**, which maintains that one needs to invoke unobservable intervening constructs (e.g. beliefs, feelings, motives) to make sense of behaviour.
- The behaviourist perspective in social psychology produces theories that emphasise the role of situational factors and reinforcement/learning in social behaviour. One example is the **reinforcement-affect model of interpersonal attraction**: people grow to like those people with whom they associate positive experiences (e.g. we like people who praise us). Another more general example is **social exchange theory**: the course of social interactions depends on subjective evaluation of the rewards and costs involved. **Social modelling** is another broadly behaviourist perspective: we imitate behaviour that is reinforced in others, and thus our behaviour is shaped by vicarious learning. Finally, **drive theory** explains improvement and deterioration of task performance in front of an audience in terms of the strength of a learned response.

### Cognitive Psychology

- Critics have argued that behaviourist theories exaggerate the extent to which people are passive recipients of external influences. **Cognitive theories** redress the balance by focusing on how people actively interpret and change their environment through the agency of cognitive processes and cognitive representations. Cognitive theories have their origins in Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Köhler's Gestalt psychology of the 1930s, and in many ways social psychology has always been very cognitive in its perspective. One of social psychology's earliest cognitive theories was Kurt Lewin's (1951) field theory, which dealt, in a somewhat complicated manner, with the way in which people's cognitive representations of features of the social environment produce motivational forces to behave in specific ways. Lewin is generally considered the father of experimental social psychology.
- In the 1950s and 1960s, cognitive consistency theories dominated social psychology. These theories assumed that cognitions about ourselves, our behaviour and the world, which were contradictory or incompatible in other ways, produced an uncomfortable state of cognitive arousal that motivated people to resolve the cognitive conflict. This perspective has been used to explain attitude change. In the 1970s, attribution theories dominated social psychology. Attribution theories focus on the way in which people explain the causes of their own and other people's behaviour, and on the consequences of causal explanations. Finally, since the late 1970s, social cognition

has been the dominant perspective in social psychology. This is a perspective that subsumes a number of theories dealing with the way in which cognitive processes (e.g. categorisation) and cognitive representations (e.g. schemas) are constructed and influence behaviour.

### Neuroscience and Biochemistry

- A recent development or offshoot of social cognition is a focus in social psychology on neurological and biochemical correlates of social behaviour. Called **social neuroscience**, or social cognitive neuroscience, this approach is predicated on the view that because psychology happens in the brain, cognition must be associated with electro-chemical brain activity. Social neuroscience uses brain imaging methodologies, for example fMRI, to detect and locate brain activity associated with social thinking and social behaviour. This general idea that we are biological entities and that therefore social behaviour has neuro- and bio-chemical correlates surfaces in other theorising that focuses more on biochemical markers of social behaviour – for example, measures of the hormone cortisol in people's blood or saliva as a marker of stress.

### Evolutionary Social Psychology

Another theoretical development is **evolutionary social psychology**. Drawing on 19th-century Darwinian theory, modern **evolutionary psychology** and sociobiology, evolutionary social psychologists argue that much of human behaviour is grounded in the ancestral past of our species. Buss and Reeve suggest that evolutionary processes have shaped 'cooperation and conflict within families, the emergence of cooperative alliances, human aggression, acts of altruism ...'. These behaviours had survival value for the species and so, over time, became a part of our genetic make-up.

- A biological perspective can be pushed to extremes and used as a sovereign explanation for most, even all, behaviour. However, when the human genome had finally been charted in 2003, researchers felt that the 20 000-25 000 genes and 3 billion chemical base pairs making up human DNA were insufficient to account for the massive diversity of human behaviour – context and environment play a significant role. This is, of course, where social psychology steps in. Nevertheless, evolutionary social psychology has relevance for several topics covered in this book – for example, leadership, aggression, prosocial behaviour, interpersonal attraction, and non-verbal and human spatial behaviour.

### Personality

- Social psychologists have often tried to explain social behaviour in terms of enduring (sometimes innate) personality attributes. For instance, good leaders have charismatic personalities, people with prejudiced personalities express prejudice, and people who conform too much have conformist personalities. In general, social psychologists now consider personality to be at best a partial explanation, at worst an inadequate re-description, of social phenomena. There are at least two reasons for this:

- 1. There is actually very little evidence for stable personality traits. People behave in different ways at different times and in different contexts – they are influenced by situation and context.
  - 2. If personality is defined as behavioural consistency across contexts, then rather than being an explanation of behaviour, personality is something to be explained. Why do some people resist social and contextual influences on behaviour? What is it about their interpretation of the context that causes them to behave in this way?
- Overall most contemporary treatments of personality see personality as interacting with many other factors to impact behaviour.

### Collectivist Theories

- Personality theories can be contrasted with collectivist theories. Collectivist theories focus on the way in which people are socially constituted by their location in the matrix of social categories and groups that make up society. People behave as they do, not because of personality or individual predispositions, but because they internally represent socially constructed group norms that influence behaviour in specific contexts. An early collectivist viewpoint was William McDougall's theory of the 'group mind'. In groups, people change the way they think, process information and act, so that group behaviour is quite different from interpersonal behaviour – a group mind emerges.

- More recently, this idea has been significantly elaborated and developed by European social psychologists seeking a perspective on social behaviour that emphasises the part played by the wider social context of intergroup relations in shaping behaviour. Of these, social identity theory is perhaps the most developed. Its explanation of the behaviour of people in groups is strongly influenced by an analysis of the social relations between groups. Collectivist theories adopt a 'top-down' approach, in which individual social behaviour can be properly explained only with

reference to groups, intergroup relations and social forces. Individualistic theories, in contrast, are 'bottom-up': individual social behaviour is constructed from individual cognition or personality.

- It is important to recognise that many social psychological theories contain elements of two or more different perspectives, and also that these and other perspectives often merely lend emphasis to different theories. Metatheory does not usually intentionally reveal itself with prodigious fanfare.

### Social Psychology in Crisis?

- Social psychology occurs against a background of, often latent, metatheoretical differences. In many respects this is an intellectually engaging feature of the discipline. From time to time these differences come to the fore and become the focus of intense public debate. The most recent occurrence was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when social psychology appeared to many to have reached a crisis of confidence. There were two principal worries about social psychology:

- 1. It was overly **reductionist** (i.e. by explaining social behaviour mainly in terms of individual psychology, it failed to address the essentially social nature of the human experience).
- 2. It was overly **positivistic** (i.e. it adhered to a model of science that was distorted, inappropriate and misleading).

### Reductionism and Levels of Explanation

- **Reductionism** is the practice of explaining a phenomenon with the language and concepts of a lower level of analysis. Society is explained in terms of groups, groups in terms of interpersonal processes, interpersonal processes in terms of intrapersonal cognitive mechanisms, cognition in terms of neuropsychology, neuropsychology in terms of biology, and so on. A problem of reductionist theorising is that it can leave the original scientific question unanswered. For example, the act of putting one's arm out of the car window in order to indicate can be explained in terms of muscle contraction, or nerve impulses, or understanding of and adherence to social conventions, and so on. If the **level of analysis** (or **explanation**) does not match the level of the question, then the question remains effectively unanswered. In researching interpersonal relations, to what extent does an explanation in terms of social neuroscience really address interpersonal relations?

- Although a degree of reductionism is possibly necessary for theorising, too great a degree is undesirable. Social psychology has been criticised for being inherently reductionist because it tries to explain social behaviour in terms of asocial intrapsychic cognitive and motivational processes. The recent trends towards social cognitive neuroscience and evolutionary social psychology, explaining behaviour in terms of neural activity and genetic predisposition, can be criticised on the same grounds.

- The problem is most acute when social psychologists try to explain group processes and intergroup relations. By tackling these phenomena exclusively in terms of personality, interpersonal relations or intrapsychic processes, social psychology may leave some of its most important phenomena inadequately explained – for example, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, conformity and group solidarity.

- Willem Doise has suggested that one way around this problem is to accept the existence of different levels of explanation but to make a special effort to construct theories that formally integrate concepts from different levels. This idea has been adopted, to varying degrees, by many social psychologists. One of the most successful attempts is social identity theory, which formally articulates individual cognitive processes with large-scale social forces to explain group behaviour. Doise's ideas have also been employed to reinterpret group cohesiveness, attribution theories and social representations. Organisational psychologists have also advocated articulation of levels of analysis – they use the term cross-level research, but the debate is less developed than in social psychology and little research has been done.

### Levels of Explanation in Social Psychology

- **I Intrapersonal:** Analysis of psychological processes to do with individuals' organisation of their experience of the social environment (e.g. research on cognitive balance).

- **II Interpersonal and situational:** Analysis of interindividual interaction within circumscribed situations. Social positional factors emanating from outside the situation are not considered. The object of study is the dynamics of relations established at a given moment by given individuals in a given situation (e.g. some attribution research, research using game matrices).

- **III Positional:** Analysis of interindividual interaction in specific situations, but with the role of social position (e.g. status, identity) outside the situation taken into consideration (e.g. some research into power and social identity).

- **IV Ideological:** Analysis of interindividual interaction that considers the role of general social beliefs, and of social relations between groups (e.g. some research into social identity, social representations and minority influence; studies considering the role of cultural norms and values).

### Positivism

- **Positivism** is the non-critical acceptance of scientific method as the only way to arrive at true knowledge. Positivism was introduced in the early 19th century by the French mathematician and philosopher Auguste Comte and was enormously popular until the end of that century. The character Mr Gradgrind in Charles Dickens' 1854 novel *Hard Times* epitomises positivism: science as a religion.

- Social psychology has been criticised for being positivistic. It is argued that because social psychologists are ultimately studying themselves they cannot achieve the level of objectivity of, say, a chemist studying a compound or a geographer studying a landform. Since complete objectivity is unattainable, scientific methods, particularly experimental ones, are simply not appropriate for social psychology. Social psychology can only masquerade as a science – it cannot be a true science. Critics argue that what social psychologists propose as fundamental causal mechanisms (e.g. categorisation, attribution, cognitive balance, self-concept) are only 'best-guess' concepts that explain some historically and culturally restricted data – data that are subject to unavoidable and intrinsic bias. Critics also feel that by treating humans as objects or clusters of variables that can be manipulated experimentally we are not only cutting ourselves off from a rich reservoir of subjective or introspective data, we are also dehumanising people.

- These criticisms have produced some quite radical alternatives to traditional social psychology. Examples include social constructionism, humanistic psychology, ethogenics, discourse analysis or discursive psychology, critical psychology, and poststructuralist perspectives. There are marked differences between some of these alternatives, but they share a broad emphasis on understanding people as whole human beings who are constructed historically and who try to make sense of themselves and their world. Research methods tend to emphasise in-depth subjective analysis (often called **deconstruction**) of the relatively spontaneous accounts that people give of their thoughts, feelings and actions. Subjectivity is considered a virtue of, rather than an impediment to, good research. More recently, some authors who have noted that discursive psychology is fundamentally incommensurate with 'mainstream' social psychology have taken a position of relative tolerance, and have sought avenues of cooperative research.

- However, most mainstream social psychologists respond to the problem of positivism in a less dramatic manner, which does not involve abandoning the scientific method. Instead, they deal with the pitfalls of positivism by being rigorous in the use of appropriate scientific methods of research and theorising. Included in this is an awareness of the need for **operational definitions** of social processes such as aggression, altruism and leadership. Operationalism is a product of positivism and refers to a plea that theoretical terms in science be defined in a manner that renders them susceptible to measurement. As scientists, we should be mindful of our own subjectivity, and should acknowledge and make explicit our biases. Our theories should be sensitive to the pitfalls of reductionism and, where appropriate, articulate different levels of analysis. We should also recognise that experimental participants are real people who do not throw off their past history and become unidimensional 'variables' when they enter the laboratory. On the contrary, culture, history, socialisation and personal motives are all present in the laboratory - experiments are social situations. Finally, attention should be paid to language, as that is perhaps the most important way in which people represent the world, think, plan action and manipulate the world around them. Language is also the epitome of a social variable: it is socially constructed and internalised to govern individual social cognition and behaviour.

### Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Historical Context

Social psychology is not a static science. It has a history, and it is invaluable to consider a science in its proper historical context in order to understand its true nature. Although ancient forms of social and political philosophy considered such questions as the nature-nurture controversy, the origins of society and the function of the state, it was mostly a speculative exercise and devoid of fact gathering. An empirical approach to the study of social life did not appear until the latter part of the 19th century.

#### **Social Psychology in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

##### Anglo-European Influences

- An important precursor to the development of social psychology as an independent discipline was the work of a number of scholars in Germany known as the **folk psychologists**. In 1860, a journal devoted to **Völkerpsychologie** was founded by Steinthal and Lazarus. It contained both theoretical and factual articles. In contrast to general

psychology (elaborated later by Wundt) which dealt with the study of the individual mind, folk psychology, which was influenced by the philosopher Hegel, dealt with the study of the **collective** mind. This concept of collective mind was interpreted in conflicting ways by Steinthal and Lazarus, meaning on the one hand a societal way of thinking within the individual and on the other a form of super-mentality that could enfold a whole group of people.

- This concept of a **group mind** became, in the 1890s and early 1900s, a dominant account of social behaviour. An extreme example of it can be found in the work of the French writer Gustav LeBon. LeBon argued that crowds often behave badly because the behaviour of the individual becomes subject to the control of the **group mind**. Likewise, the English psychologist William McDougall subscribed to the group mind explanation when he dealt with collective behaviour, devoting an entire book to the topic. Much later, Asch observed that the basic issue that such writers wanted to deal with had not gone away: that to understand the complexities of an individual's behaviour required us to view the person in the context of group relations.

### Early Texts

- At the turn of the century there were two texts dealing with social psychology, by Bunge (1903) and Orano (1901). Because they were not in English, they received little attention in Britain and the United States. Even earlier, an American, Baldwin, touched on social psychology in a work that dealt mainly with the social and moral development of the child. A book by the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde had clear implications for the kind of data and the level of explanation that social psychology should adopt. He adopted a bottom-up approach, which was offered in debate with Emile Durkheim. Whereas Durkheim argued that the way people behave is determined by social laws that are fashioned by society, Tarde proposed that a science of social behaviour must derive from laws that deal with the individual case. His conception of social psychology is closer in flavour to most current thinking than any of the other early texts.
- The two early texts that caught the attention of the English-speaking world were written by McDougall (1908) and the American sociologist Ross (1908). Neither looks much like a modern social psychology text, but we need to remember that living scientific disciplines continue to be redefined. The central topics of McDougall's book, for example, were the principal instincts, the primary emotions, the nature of sentiments, moral conduct, volition, religious conceptions and the structure of character.

### **The Rise of Experimentation**

- An influential textbook by Floyd Allport provided an agenda for social psychology that was quickly and enduringly followed by many teachers in psychology departments for years to come. Following the manifesto for psychology as a whole laid out by the behaviourist John Watson, Allport argued strongly that social psychology would flourish only if it became an experimental science. A little later, Murphy and Murphy felt justified in producing a book proudly entitled **Experimental social psychology**. Not all of the studies reviewed were true experiments, but the authors' intentions for the discipline were clear.
- Although the earlier texts had not shown it, the closing decade of the 19th century had set an agenda in which social psychology would be inextricably entwined with the broader discipline of general psychology. As such, social psychology's subsequent development reflects the way in which psychology was defined and taught in university departments of psychology, particularly in the U.S., which rapidly replaced Germany as the leading nation for psychological research. Just as the psychological laboratory at Leipzig founded by Wilhelm Wundt in 1879 had provided an experimental basis for psychology in Germany, the laboratories set up at American universities did likewise in the U.S. In the period 1890-1910, the growth of laboratories devoted to psychological research was rapid. Thirty-one American universities established experimental facilities in those 20 years. The subject taught in these departments was clearly defined as an experimental science. In the U.S., therefore, it is not surprising that social psychology should quite early on view the **experimental method** as a touchstone. By the time Allport produced his 1924 text, this trend was well established.

### When Was Social Psychology's First Experiment?

- This is a natural question to ask, but the answer is clouded. One of the oldest psychological laboratories was at Indiana University. It was here that Norman Triplett conducted a study that some modern textbooks have cited as the first experiment in social psychology and have listed it as an experiment on social facilitation. Gordon Allport implied that what Wundt did in Leipzig for experimental psychology Triplett did in Indiana for a scientific social psychology. A different picture emerges in the literature of that time.
- Norman Triplett was a mature teacher who returned to postgraduate study to work on his master's thesis, published in 1898. His supervisors were two experimental psychologists and the research was conducted in a laboratory that was one of the very best in the world. His interest had been stimulated by popular wisdom that

competitive cyclists go faster when racing or being paced than when riding alone. Cycling as an activity had increased dramatically in popularity in the 1890s and had spectacular press coverage. Triplett listed possible explanations for superior performance by cyclists who were racing or being paced:

- The pacer in front provided suction that pulled the following rider along, helping to conserve energy; or else the front rider provided shelter from the wind.
  - A popular 'brain worry' theory predicted that solitary cyclists did poorly because they worried about whether they were going fast enough. This exhausted their brain and muscles, numbing them and inhibiting motor performance.
  - Friends usually rode as pacers and no doubt encouraged the cyclists to keep up their spirits.
  - In a race, a follower might be hypnotised by the wheels in front and so rode automatically, leaving more energy for a later, controlled burst.
  - A dynamogenic theory – Triplett's favourite – proposed that the presence of another person racing aroused a 'competitive instinct' that released 'nervous energy', similar to the modern idea of arousal. The sight of movement in another suggested more speed, inspired greater effort, and released a level of nervous energy that an isolated rider cannot achieve alone. The energy of the cyclist's movement was in proportion to the idea of that movement.
- In the most famous of Triplett's experiments, schoolchildren worked in two conditions, alone and in pairs. They worked with two fishing reels that turned silk bands around a drum. Each reel was connected by a loop of cord to a pulley two metres away, and a small flag was attached to each cord. To complete one trial, the flag had to travel four times around the pulley. Some children were slower and others faster in competition, while others were little affected. The faster ones showed the effects of both 'the arousal of their competitive instincts and the idea of a faster movement'. The slower ones were overstimulated and 'going to pieces' – a rather modern turn of phrase!
- In drawing on the **dynamogenic theory** of his day, Triplett focused on ideo-motor responses – that is, one competitor's bodily movements acted as a stimulus for the other competitor. Essentially, Triplett highlighted non-social cues to illustrate the idea of movement being used as a cue by his participants.
- The leading journals in the decade after Triplett's study scarcely referred to it. It was catalogued in general sources, but not under any headings with a 'social' connotation. Clearly, Triplett was neither a social psychologist nor considered to be one. If we adopt a revisionist view of history, then the spirit of his experiment emerges as a precursor to the theme of social facilitation research. The search for a founding figure, or a first idea, is not a new phenomenon in the history of science or, indeed, in the history of civilisation. The Triplett study has the trappings of an origin myth. There were other, even earlier, studies that might just as easily be called the 'first' in social psychology. Vaughan and Guerin point out that sports psychologists have claimed Triplett as one of their own.

### Later Influences

- Social psychology's development after the early impact of **behaviourism** was redirected by a number of other important developments, some of which came from beyond mainstream psychology.

### Attitude Scaling

- One of these developments was the refinement of several methods for constructing scales to measure attitudes, two of which were published in sociology journals. Sociology has often championed approaches to social psychology that have been critical of an individual-behaviour level of analysis. Thomas and Znaniecki, for example, defined social psychology as the scientific study of attitudes rather than of social behaviour.

### Studies of the Social Group

- Central to social psychology is an abiding interest in the structure and function of the social group. Kurt Lewin, considered the 'father' of experimental social psychology, put much of his energy into the study of group processes. For example, one of Lewin's imaginative studies was an experiment on the effect of leadership style on small-group behaviour, and by 1945 he had founded a research centre devoted to the study of group dynamics (which still exists, in a different guise and now at the University of Michigan).

- Another important thread in research on the social group came from industrial psychology. A key study carried out in a factory setting showed that work productivity can be more heavily influenced by the psychological properties of the work group and the degree of interest that management shows in its workers than by mere physical working conditions. A significant outcome of research of this kind was consolidation of an approach to social psychology in which theory and application could develop together. Indeed, Lewin is often quoted as saying 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory'. He was a passionate advocate of what he called 'full cycle' research, where symbiosis exists between basic and applied research.

### Popular Textbooks

- The 1930s marked several quite different themes that had a striking impact on the continuing development of the discipline. Murchison produced the first handbook, a weighty tome that proclaimed that here was a field to be taken seriously. A later, expanded edition of the Murphy and Murphy text appeared that summarised the findings of more than 1000 studies, although it was used mainly as a reference work. Perhaps the most widely used textbook of this period was written by LaPiere and Farnsworth. Another by Klineberg was also popular; it featured contributions from cultural anthropology and emphasised the crucial role played by culture in the development of a person's personality. Just after the Second World War, Krech and Crutchfield published an important text that emphasised a **phenomenological approach** to social psychology: that is, an approach focusing on the way in which people actually experience the world and account for their experiences.
- In the 1950s and thereafter, the number of textbooks appearing on the bookshelves increased exponentially. Most have been published in the U.S., with a heavy reliance on both American data and American theory.

### Famous Experiments

- For different reasons, several experiments stand out over the years that have fascinated teachers and students alike. The following have had an impact beyond the immediate discipline, reaching out to the wider perspective of general psychology, and some out further, to other disciplines.
- Muzafer Sherif conducted an experiment on **norm formation**, which caught the attention of psychologists eager to pinpoint what could be 'social' about social psychology. Solomon Asch demonstrated the dramatic effect that **group pressure** can have in persuading an individual to conform. Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif examined the role that competition for resources can have on intergroup conflict. Leon Festinger used his theory of **cognitive dissonance** to show that a smaller reward can change attitudes more than can a larger reward, a finding that annoyed the orthodox reinforcement theorists of the time. Stanley Milgram's study of **destructive obedience** highlighted the dilemma facing a person ordered by an authority figure to perform an immoral act, a study that unwittingly became one focus of critics who questioned the future of the experimental method in social psychology. Henri Tajfel conducted a watershed experiment to show that merely being categorised into groups was sufficient to generate **intergroup discrimination**.
- Finally, Phil Zimbardo set up a simulated prison in the basement of the Stanford University psychology department to study **deindividuation** and the reality of and extremity of **roles**. This study has caught the imagination of a reality-TV oriented society to the extent that two prominent British social psychologists, Alex Haslam and Stephen Reicher, were commissioned as consultants on a 2002 BBC TV program re-running the experiment.

### Famous Programs

- One way of viewing the way in which a discipline develops is to focus on social networks and ask the question 'Who's who?' and then 'Who influenced whom?' Looked at in this way, the group-centred research of the charismatic Kurt Lewin had a remarkable impact on other social psychologists in the U.S. One of his students was Leon Festinger, and one of Festinger's students was Stanley Schachter. The latter's work on the cognitive labelling of emotion is a derivative of Festinger's notion of social comparison (i.e. the way in which individuals use other people as a basis for assessing their own thoughts, feelings and behaviour).
- There have been other groups of researchers whose impact is more obvious by the nature of the concepts emerging from their programs. There were two influential groups whose research concerned questions raised and made urgent by events during and surrounding the Second World War. One group studied the **authoritarian personality**. Inspired by the possibility that an explanation for the rise of German autocracy resided in the personality and child-rearing practices of a nation, the researchers embarked on an ambitious cross-cultural study of authoritarianism in the U.S. Another group studied how to change people's attitudes. The Yale attitude change program, led by Carl Hovland, was designed to uncover the theory and techniques of propaganda.
- John Thibaut and Harold Kelley developed an influential approach to the study of interpersonal relationships, based on an economic model of **social exchange**, which continued to stimulate theories into the 1980s. Likewise, Morton Deutsch's application of exchange theory to interpersonal bargaining subsequently attracted enormous research interest and activity from psychologists. Once again, the long arm of Lewin is clearly evident – all of these innovators (Thibaut, Kelley, Deutsch) were his students.
- The modern period has been dominated by cognitive approaches. **Attribution theory** was set on its path by Ned Jones, who focused attention on the ordinary person's ideas about causality. John Darley and Bibb Latané employed an innovative cognitive model to research **prosocial behaviour** by throwing light on the way in which people interpret an emergency and sometimes fail to help a victim.

- Following earlier work by Fritz Heider and Solomon Asch in a field loosely described as social perception, a major restructuring reconfigured this field into modern **social cognition**. Several researchers made major contributions to this development, including Walter Mischel, who explored the way that perceived behaviour traits can function as prototypes, and Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, who explored the role of cognitive heuristics (mental shortcuts) in social thinking.

### **The Journals**

- Journals are critical in science as they are the key forum for scientists to exchange ideas and communicate ideas and findings. Early journals that were important up to the 1950s were the **Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology** and the **Journal of Personality**. A sociological journal, **Sociometry**, also catered for social psychological work.

- From the 1960s there was increased demand for outlets. This reflected not only growth in the number of social psychologists around the world but also a demand for regional representation. The **Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology** divided into two, one part devoted to abnormal psychology and the other titled the **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology** (founded in 1965). **Sociometry** was re-titled **Social Psychology Quarterly** (1979) to reflect more accurately its heavy social psychological content. Anglo-European interests were represented by the **British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology** (1963) (which split in 1981 to spin off the **British Journal of Social Psychology**), and the **European Journal of Social Psychology** (1971). Demand for a second, American, journal dedicated to experimental research was realised by the **Journal of Experimental Social Psychology** (1965), and then in 1975 a third major American social psychology journal was launched, **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**. Other journals devoted to the area include **Journal of Applied Social Psychology** (1971), **Social Cognition** (1982) and **Journal of Social and Personal Relationships** (1984). In the last 15 years there has been an explosion of other key journals, including **Personality and Social Psychology Review**, **Social Psychological and Personality Science**, **Group Processes and Intergroup Relations**, **Group Dynamics**, **Social Cognition**, and **Self and Identity**.

- From the point of view of articles published, therefore, there was huge growth of interest in the subject during the decade bridging the 1960s and the 1970s. Since then publication has accelerated. The past decade or two have witnessed a journal crisis in social psychology, and psychology more generally. There is so much published that the task of deciding what to read can seem overwhelming. One important criterion is the quality of the journal (its impact factor and the calibre of its editorial board), but there are now so many journals and such a huge volume of articles submitted that the editorial review process that is essential to quality is creaking under the load. This, in conjunction with the massive potential of electronic access to research, has led to a fiery debate about alternative forms of scientific communication and publication.

## **Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Social Psychology in Australia and New Zealand**

### **Its Origins**

- The parent discipline of psychology in Australia and New Zealand had its origins in Britain. In the early part of the last century, some of the textbooks used here were by British authors, though there were early links as well with Wundt's experimental psychology at psychological laboratories at the Melbourne Teachers College and at the Victoria University of Wellington. At its heart, early Australasian psychology was empirical – a characteristic of British philosophy at that time, which had espoused a doctrine of human knowledge that was derived from experience. In the years after the Second World War, there were departments of psychology at virtually all universities in both countries. The subject quickly proved to be popular among undergraduates, and also among postgraduates as various career paths opened up. This is still the case today. From the 1950s onwards, Australasian psychologists paid increasing attention to theoretical developments and newer methods in the U.S., as well as to the emergence of the American Psychological Association's code of ethics in both academic research and professional practice.

- The history of social psychology in Australia and New Zealand also had its origins in Britain. This is no surprise since it developed as a subdiscipline within existing departments of psychology. In a similar way to general psychology, social psychology in this part of the world was influenced in time by theory and research paradigms developed in the U.S. This was inevitable, given the predominance of American textbooks and journals across nearly all fields of psychology.

### **Later Trends**

We noted in an earlier section a resurgence of European activity in the 1970s that contributed significantly to international social psychology. This has been reflected in parallel research strands – American and European – within Australasian social psychology. Consequently, we are in the enviable position of being able to choose to integrate the best of both without a compulsion to adhere to the metatheoretical and ideological agendas of either.

It is perhaps through this perspective that social psychology in Australia and New Zealand has acquired a special character. However, with a combined population of just over 27 million in 2012, we are naturally and rightly influenced by the social psychology of North America and Western Europe, where about 1.25 billion people live. In this respect, our social psychology is probably more cross-national than that found in the U.S. or Britain.

- This begs the question: in what ways are we somewhat different? Because Australia and New Zealand are recent immigrant countries that strive to practise multiculturalism, it is not surprising that issues to do with ethnicity, communication, language, culture, prejudice and intergroup relations are important areas of research. Another important area has arisen out of our progressive attitude towards HIV, smoking, cancer and sun protection: research into attitudes towards health-protective behaviours has a relatively high profile here.

- Areas of research currently conducted here that have a high international profile are numerous. There is vigorous research in several fields:

- person perception, social cognition, and affect and emotion
- achievement motivation, attitudes and values, and the attitude-behaviour link
- the effects of unemployment, attitudes and values, and the attitude-behaviour link
- group dynamics, group decision making, leadership and the social psychology of organisations
- social identity, self-categorisation theory, intergroup communication, intergroup emotion and ethnolinguistics
- close relationships and marital satisfaction
- self-esteem, body image and applications of discourse analysis
- cross-cultural studies, studies of migrant groups and acculturative stress
- ethnic identity and bicultural identity.

- The list of topics continues to expand. While the longer established universities have served a major role in stimulating such work, the past 20 years has witnessed a distribution of talented people into newer tertiary settings. This is a healthy trend and augurs well for the future of social psychology in this part of the world. Despite this, we could not argue that there is an indigenous social psychology or even a distinctive social psychology in Australia or New Zealand. Feather has noted:

- In the case of social psychology, advances are cumulative, although contributions in Australia and elsewhere [including New Zealand] tend to have a short 'shelf life' unless they capture the imagination of the wider community of social psychologists and are promoted in books and journals by influential figures and by formal and informal networks.

- Today, Australian and New Zealand social psychologists are strongly represented on editorial boards of the top international journals, they publish widely and prolifically, and they pop up in disproportionate numbers at scientific conferences around the world. Most have had sabbatical, postdoctoral or doctoral experience at American or British universities. Some prominent social psychologists have moved here from the U.S. and from Britain, and some Australians and New Zealanders have left to make important contributions overseas. Many of the leading international scientific conferences for social psychologists have been hosted in Australia, and the annual Sydney Symposium on Social Psychology (SSSP), hosted by the University of New South Wales, has become an important venue for leading scientists from around the world. In addition, there is the annual Brisbane Symposium on Social Identity (BSSI), organised by the University of Queensland, which has been running since 1992, and more recently a series of social psychology meetings in Melbourne, hosted by a group of Melbourne universities.

- Social psychology in Australia and New Zealand has been fundamentally invigorated by the establishment in 1995 of the Society of Australasian Social Psychologists (SASP), which has some 300 members. SASP is a formalisation and extension of the annual and peripatetic meeting of Australian social psychologists, with its beginnings in 1972 at Flinders University in Adelaide. Its annual conferences now feature a series of high-profile international speakers, a pre-conference program for postgraduates, and more recently an annual postgraduate summer school at different campuses in Australia.

- It is perhaps significant that 1995 witnessed the inaugural meeting in Hong Kong of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (AASP), in which prominent Australian and New Zealand social psychologists have been active office holders. Close Asia-Pacific ties have developed between SASP and AASP. Indeed, in mid-2001 the SASP and AASP meetings were run together in Melbourne, with a number of overlapping and joint sessions. There is now regular potential for increasing contact between social psychologists in both regions.

- Finally, a report on psychological science in Australia, commissioned by the Australian government and prepared under the auspices of the Australian Academy of Science in 1996, identified social psychology as both an area of special strength and a priority area for further development.

## **Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology – Summary**

- Social psychology can be defined as the scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others. Although social psychology can also be described in terms of what it studies, it is more useful to describe it as a way of looking at human behaviour.
- Social psychology is a science. It employs scientific method to study social behaviour. Although this involves a whole range of empirical methods to collect data to test hypotheses and construct theories, experimentation is usually the preferred method as it is the best way to reveal causal processes. Nevertheless, methods are matched to research questions, and methodological pluralism is highly valued.
- Social psychological data are usually transformed into numbers, which are analysed by a range of formal numerical procedures – that is, statistics. Statistics allow conclusions to be drawn about whether a research observation is a true effect or some chance event.
- Social psychology is enlivened by fierce and invigorating debates about the ethics of research methods, the appropriate research methods for an understanding of social behaviour, the validity and power of social psychology theories, and the type of theories that are properly social psychological.
- Although having origins in 19<sup>th</sup>-century German folk psychology and French crowd psychology, modern social psychology really began in the United States in the 1920s with the adoption of the experimental method. In the 1940s, Kurt Lewin provided significant impetus to social psychology, and the discipline has grown exponentially ever since.
- The origins of psychology as a discipline in Australia and New Zealand are British, but by the 1950s Australasian social psychology and much of general psychology had become increasingly centred on developments in the United States.
- More recently, Australasian social psychologists in this region are now increasingly international in outlook. They collaborate in research programs in Europe, Canada and the United States; and conduct their own regional meetings and shared postgraduate programs, sponsored in great measure by the Society of Australasian Social Psychologists.