

THIRD EDITION

# Individual and Society

## SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Lizabeth A. Crawford and Katherine B. Novak



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# *Individual and Society*

Unlike other texts for undergraduate sociological social psychology courses, *Individual and Society* covers each of the three research traditions in sociological social psychology—symbolic interactionism, social structure and personality, and group processes and structures. With this approach, the authors make clear the link between sociological social psychology, theory, and methodology. Students will gain a better understanding of how and why social psychologists trained in sociology ask particular kinds of questions; the types of research they are involved in; and how their findings have been, or can be, applied to contemporary societal patterns and problems.

This new, third edition makes the emphasis on social inequality within sociological social psychology, a key theme in earlier versions of the book, more salient throughout the text by including new or expanded discussions of intersectionality, positionality, the experiences of gender and sexual minorities, racial microaggression, contemporary social movements, and the complexities of allyship. Other additions to the text address the ubiquity of the Internet and social media, where the authors consider how these phenomena have shaped the experiences of Generation Z, the first “digital natives,” and altered individuals’ self-concepts and social relationships. Engaging exercises and group activities are also embedded within each chapter to enhance students’ readiness to reflect and think critically about the social world around them and to improve their understanding of the different dimensions of sociological social psychology and how they relate to everyday life.

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# *Individual and Society*

Sociological Social Psychology

Third Edition

*Lizabeth A. Crawford  
and Katherine B. Novak*

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To Dee, Bill, and Martin  
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To Mark, Anna, Alexandria, and Oscar  
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## P R E F A C E

As we reflected upon our experiences as students, we realized that our initiation into social psychology and the discipline of sociology was remarkably similar. We both started our college careers as psychology majors and were intrigued by classic studies on perception and behavior covered in our undergraduate social psychology courses. Later, as we discovered sociology, we became sensitive to the pervasiveness of social inequality within the U.S. and how societal, as well as individual-level, factors shape people's social experiences. This orientation was solidified in our graduate coursework in social psychology in our sociology program, at which point we found ourselves considering our experiences and how sociological theories and concepts applied to our personal biographies as well as to various social issues and problems.

When we were in college there wasn't a widely used textbook on sociological social psychology that was broad in focus and covered all of the different kinds of research done in the field and its applications. In writing this text we sought to synthesize the literature in sociological social psychology in a way that conveys both its eclectic nature and its utility as a tool for enhancing people's understandings of the relationship between individuals and the larger society. Moreover, we wanted to do so in a manner that is accessible to college undergraduates and spurs their curiosity about how and why people think and act in particular ways.

### WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK UNIQUE

This book covers each of the three research traditions in sociological social psychology: symbolic interactionism (SI), social structure and personality (SSP), and group processes and structures (GPS). When defining the field in the early 1980s, sociologist James House described two types, or "faces," of sociological social psychology—SI and SSP. The third face, GPS, emerged later, in the 1990s.

Other sociology textbooks make distinctions between the different "faces" of social psychology. However, unlike these books, our initial chapters are organized by research tradition (or "face" of sociological social psychology), rather than by topic, and they emphasize the different theoretical frameworks within which social psychological analyses are conducted within each orientation. We also make clear the link between "face" of sociological social psychology, theory, and methodology.

Qualitative research (favored by symbolic interactionists) and quantitative research (typically used within SSP and GPS) serve very different purposes. We provide a more detailed discussion of the distinctions between these two kinds of research than other textbooks and identify when, and why, particular methods are used by sociological social psychologists. Here, and throughout the rest of the book, we give examples of both classic and contemporary studies from within



each of the three “faces” of sociological social psychology so that students gain a full understanding of the diverse nature of research in the field.

As we describe the different faces of sociological social psychology and the research they have generated, we emphasize core sociological ideas and their applications. At various points in each chapter we ask students to step back from the academic discussion to consider how particular theoretical perspectives and concepts within a given face of sociological social psychology apply to their personal experiences or the lives of others.

Once students have learned about the different types of sociological social psychology, the breadth of the research they have generated, and how it can be applied to everyday situations, we discuss the utility of integrating research from across traditions when studying specific topics. By starting with the foundations of each of the three research orientations or faces, and their unique foci, this book is structured to provide students with an in-depth and thorough understanding of the field of sociological social psychology; how and why social psychologists trained in sociology ask particular kinds of questions; the types of research they are involved in; and how their findings have been, or can be, applied to contemporary societal patterns and problems.

Although this book does not focus on psychological social psychology, we discuss some classic studies within this tradition that are relevant to the topics and issues addressed by sociological social psychologists. Moreover, by making clear the distinction between sociological and psychological social psychology in our introductory chapter, we show how the research questions asked, and answered, by social psychologists working within all three research orientations within sociological social psychology (symbolic interactionism, social structure and personality, and group processes and structures) reflect the key themes of their home discipline, especially its focus on social inequality.

Like the previous edition, the book’s chapters are cumulative in their organization, such that theoretical frameworks, concepts, and methods that appear early on in the text are revisited and applied in the later chapters, which focus on the various topics studied by sociological social psychologists (socialization, self and identity, emotion, deviance, mental health, personal relationships, prejudice and discrimination, social influence, and collective behavior). In teaching our social psychology courses, we have found that this integrated approach to knowledge building works well, especially when it comes to the discussion of theories and research findings that are complex or in opposition to common ways of viewing the world.

## NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

### Updated Content

We have integrated recent studies, published since the release of the book’s last edition, into the text across chapters. In particular, discussions of topics related to current events and changing societal patterns pertaining to immigration, race relations, the experiences of gender and sexual minorities, the division of

household labor, young adults' relationships, and determinants of mental health have been modified to include the latest research findings. We have also updated statistics from the Census and other governmental sources, the General Social Survey, and polls measuring the population's attitudes on various social issues throughout the book.

## **New and Expanded Content**

In addition, we have made the emphasis on social inequality within sociological social psychology, a key theme in earlier editions of the book, more salient throughout the text. Of particular note are the following changes.

- In the first set of chapters, on theoretical perspectives, *we added text highlighting the distinct ways that each of the three faces, or research traditions, within sociological social psychology addresses issues related to social inequality.* Then, through the application of key concepts and study results, *we draw attention to the manner in which current research on each of the topics of interest to social psychologists covered in the second part of the text enhances our understanding of the consequences of social inequality based on social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics associated with access to societal resources and (unfounded) beliefs about people's characteristics and competence; the social processes through which social inequality is reproduced; and potential avenues for social change.* The key points to know at the end of each chapter reflect these changes, and each chapter includes an additional Review and Reflection question that focuses on one or more of the issues covered related to social inequality.
- As in earlier versions of the text, we introduce the concept of *intersectionality* in the introductory chapter. However, in this new edition, we give greater attention to the literature on intersectionality throughout the book, with more detailed discussions of how status characteristics combine to shape people's experiences in the chapters on socialization (Chapter 6), self and identity (Chapter 7), emotions (Chapter 8), mental health (Chapter 10), prejudice and discrimination (Chapter 12), and social influence and collective behavior (Chapter 13).
- We also added a section to Chapter 2, on research methods, on *positionality* and *reflexivity*, after which students are asked to consider how their status characteristics, identities, values, and experiences have shaped their views on one of a number of social issues. Similarly, in later chapters, students are encouraged to reflect on their positionality in relation to some of the issues raised as they respond to one or more questions within the context of an individual or group activity.
- In Chapter 6, on socialization, we expanded, as well as updated, the section on *conceptualizing gender* and the *experiences of gender and sexual minorities* to reflect the focus of current research. The concepts described there

are, then, applied throughout the text as we discuss children's early experiences (Chapter 6), self and identity (Chapter 7), the resistance of stigma (in Chapter 9, on deviance); and personal relationships (Chapter 11), focusing on how individuals' everyday interactions reflect, reproduce, and, in some instances, challenge, existing social inequalities.

- In Chapter 12 (Prejudice and Discrimination) we expanded our discussion of racial microaggressions, in order to illustrate their nature and pervasiveness, by including student accounts of their experiences with this type of behavior. We also extended our coverage of *contemporary social movements* (Chapter 13) by adding a more detailed discussion of the *Black Lives Matter* movement and its consequences, as well as information pertaining the *#MeToo* and the *NoDAPL* movements. Moreover, we included an in-depth discussion of *allyship* and what makes this such a complex issue for activists, which is new to this edition.

Other modifications to the text also reflect shifts in people's experiences, and thus in the social psychological literature, in the years since the publication of the previous edition of the book. A number of these changes pertain to the increase in the use of social media and other communication technologies and the unique experiences of Generation Z, the first "digital natives."

- Throughout the text, we review the results of current studies of the impact of the *Internet* and *social media* on individuals' social development (Chapter 6), self-concepts (Chapter 7), emotions (Chapter 8), psychological well-being (Chapter 10), social networks, friendships, and romantic relationships (Chapter 11). Overall, the results of these studies suggest that there may be some truth to earlier predictions that the Internet and other communication technologies would change the nature of people's social relationships and, thus, how they view, and feel about, themselves, issues of key interest to social psychologists.
- We expanded the discussion of *generational differences in perception and behavior* in the sections on life course research (Chapter 4) and cohort differences in individuals' socialization experiences (Chapter 6). We also added sections on *Generation Z* and how its members tend to define their *real, or authentic, self* (Chapter 7); the state of their *mental health* (Chapter 10); and their *relationship expectations*, with an emphasis on how they are challenging traditional dating norms (Chapter 11).
- Given its effects on people's relationships and routines, the literature on the social and psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has grown rapidly. To convey key findings in these areas, we incorporated *research on the pandemic* into discussions of the social structure and personality face of social psychology (Chapter 4), identity (Chapter 7), emotion (Chapter 8), and mental health (Chapter 10).
- Research on conspiracy theories has also increased. Thus, we extended the section in Chapter 13 (on collective behavior, including social movements)

on this topic. Here, we describe the characteristics of contemporary *conspiracy theories*, many of which have political themes, and consider their origin and their consequences at both the individual and societal level.

Consistent with the book's original format, many of the sections of text new to the third edition are followed by an activity or exercise designed to facilitate students' reflection upon, or application, of the material presented. In order to enhance their appeal and relevance to students many of the new activities and exercises, as well as those retained from the book's second edition, focus on the experiences of college undergraduates.

## Teaching Resources for Instructors

Instructional support features include updated PowerPoint slides for each chapter, copies of the tables and figures used in the book, and a revised test bank that has different tiers of multiple-choice and written questions, which vary in scope and difficulty. The online Instructors' Manual that accompanied the second edition of the text has also been updated to reflect recent developments in the field. Like its predecessor, it includes detailed chapter summaries; a variety of in-class exercises (including an updated version of the culminating activity, on the application of social psychological perspectives, included in the final chapter of the previous edition of the book); written assignments; and links to online resources, including news articles, videos, and podcasts.

## HOW TO USE THE BOOK

This book has a number of features that can be used either in or outside of the classroom to enhance students' understanding of research within sociological social psychology and how it pertains to people's everyday lives. Within each chapter there are multiple individual and group exercises that facilitate the application of social psychological perspectives, concepts, methodologies, and research findings. These can be used as the basis for in-class activities or discussions, written assignments or reflections, or by students who want to check their understanding of the material covered prior to class or an upcoming quiz/exam. In many chapters, we also present news articles, or links to online news articles, podcasts or videos, which discuss, or illustrate, the concepts and studies covered.

In addition, throughout the book, we have included standard measures of key social psychological concepts (e.g., self-esteem, embarrassability, perspective taking, delinquency, social support, passionate love, relationship commitment, color-blind racial attitudes, and ethnic identity) for students to complete. Benchmark scores from one or more studies within the literature are included, with which students can compare their own results. Providing samples of commonly used measures is a strategy we have found to be effective in cultivating student interest in the field and in increasing their understanding of the relevance of social psychological research to their lives.

Grounding concepts and theories in examples and applications, and embedding questions, exercises and activities designed to encourage and assess student learning into the text throughout all of the chapters, should enhance comprehension and the retention of information. This makes this textbook ideal for online courses as well as for more traditional classes. The initial chapters on methods and theory provide a framework for the analysis of specific topics later in the book, but portions of this text can be dropped, deemphasized, or highlighted to fit the structure of a particular course, which is something we tend to do in our social psychology classes. Moreover, the topical chapters can be used out of sequence, or omitted, to meet particular instructors' needs and pedagogical goals.

The exercises and activities described earlier are also optional. While they are designed to stimulate students' interest in certain topics, and to facilitate their application of the material presented to other situations, patterns and social problems, their completion is not required for them to gain an understanding of the information presented in the body of the chapter.

The same is true for the studies used to illustrate different theories and methods, or to highlight especially interesting or insightful results pertaining to particular topics. Students might be required to have a full understanding of these analyses. However, some instructors, given the pace at which material must be covered during the course of the semester, might choose to focus on the bigger picture. The Key Points to Know, listed at the end of each chapter, provide a succinct overview of main chapter themes. Moreover, each chapter ends with a list of important concepts and terms, along with a set of questions for review and reflection designed to help students to synthesize, apply, and critically evaluate the material presented in the chapter. These questions are relatively broad in focus and touch upon the most important aspects of each chapter. Thus, they should be of use to students seeking to solidify their understanding of the core concepts, theories, methods, and bodies of literature within sociological social psychology.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout the book when discussing gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and other dimensions of stratification as bases of social inequality, and other topics of interest to social psychologists, we employ the terms currently in use within the research literature we review. There are some nuances to this, though, as researchers working in different areas, or within the different theoretical traditions, may use somewhat different language. With this in mind, you might notice some shift in terminology across topics at times. However, important concepts are always defined in the text of the chapter in which they are introduced and then, as a review, listed at the end of that chapter under Terms and Concepts for Review.

## PRIMARY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In acknowledgment of the diversity of the field, its methods, and applications, this book is designed to:

- familiarize students with the three “faces” of sociological social psychology and the kinds of research they have generated;
- make clear how the three “faces” of sociological social psychology, and the research they have generated, address different aspects of social inequality within society and how it is reproduced or challenged;
- illustrate the utility of applying multiple perspectives, and methods, to particular topics;
- introduce students to the social psychological literature pertaining to a number of topics of interest to sociologists;
- facilitate students’ abilities to apply social psychological perspectives and findings to various topics and social problems; and
- provide students with the tools needed to analyze their own experiences from a sociological perspective.

Students: When the semester is over, and you have finished this book and your social psychology course, you might go back and think about how your perspective has changed over the course of the semester. What have you gained from learning about sociological social psychology?

As you begin reading this book, you will see the relevance of sociological social psychology to yourself and the people with whom you share your life. As human beings we balance multiple levels of expectations (self, others, societal) and plan patterns of action within this context. Sociological social psychology provides us with frameworks for identifying and understanding the nature of these expectations and their consequences, and how the characteristics of the larger society and, in particular, patterns of social inequality, filter into individuals’ lives and shape their perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and actions. Thus, there is no field of study more relevant to our day-to-day experiences. Together, the three “faces” of sociological social psychology yield substantial insight into the nature of human social behavior at both a general and a personal level.

*Lizabeth A. Crawford and Katherine B. Novak*



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**PART I**

Theoretical Perspectives and  
Research Methods in Sociological  
Social Psychology



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## CHAPTER 1

# What Is Sociological Social Psychology?

The following letters are from Annie's Mailbox, a "life advice" column published daily in newspapers across the country. They reflect the conflict over housework experienced by many couples today.

**Dear Annie:** *I am fed up. Every time my family gets together, the women spend the entire time working while the men sit around and watch TV. I am so angry about this sexism that I am ready to stop attending these functions. I don't believe that women who work full-time jobs should be expected to slave away in the kitchen doing prep and cleanup, while the men show up, eat a delicious meal, and then relax on the couch. I've voiced my objections to my mother and sister, but while they agree with me, they do nothing to back up my request for help from my father and brother. My brother-in-law will give us a hand, but his son plays on the computer. What advice do you have for me other than to stop participating?*

—"On Strike"

**Dear "On Strike":** *If you want the menfolk to help out, you have to insist on it, since they obviously aren't considerate enough to do it voluntarily. Hand your nephew the silverware, and tell him to set the table. Give your brother the plates. Enlist your brother-in-law as an ally. Ask him to inform the guys that they will be clearing the table and putting leftovers away. Tell him it is good training for his son. Your mother and sister may still choose to do most of the work, but it's a start.*

### What Do You Think?

- How do "On Strike's" family get-togethers compare with yours?
- Do you think "On Strike's" family is the same as or different from most families in the United States? Explain.
- How do women and men learn what their roles are (what's expected of them) in family get-togethers?
- To what degree have these roles changed over time?
- What advice would you give "On Strike"?

This book is an introduction to the field of social psychology from a sociological perspective. Social psychologists would say that the notion that men do not help with cooking and cleaning because they are inconsiderate is overly simplistic.

Moreover, they would suggest that Annie's advice is not likely to be effective on a long-term basis. We will discuss the reasons for this, and how roles in the United States have changed, in a later chapter. The point we want to make here is that the letter from "On Strike" presents the kind of social issue that social psychologists address in their research. Social psychological studies often provide substantial insights into the causes of common problems by placing them within the context of the larger society.

People rarely regard a particular individual's problems as a reflection of broader societal patterns. They are not trained to do so. This is why we need social psychology.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

**Social psychology** is a field of study that focuses on understanding two kinds of phenomena: (1) the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals; and (2) the relationship of these feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to the social context in which they occur. It is a field that bridges two disciplines: sociology and psychology.

### Box 1.1 Have You Ever Wondered?

Social psychologists trained as sociologists ask the following kinds of questions. The chapter in which we provide an answer, based on a review of the relevant research literature, is indicated in parentheses after each question.

1. Should high school students have jobs? Do teenagers who work have different characteristics and experiences than teens without jobs? (Chapter 1)
2. Why don't college students talk more in class? (Chapter 3)
3. Most people don't like housework, so why do women still do more of it than men? (Chapter 4)
4. As a college student you have probably worked on a number of group projects. Why do men talk more than women in these situations? (Chapter 5)
5. Whether people go to college is not necessarily related to how smart they are. What social factors make some high school students more likely than others to go on to college? (Chapters 4 and 6)
6. Have you ever done something that made you feel really guilty? When do people experience guilt, and how does this emotion influence our behaviors? (Chapter 8)
7. Do you know someone who partied a lot in high school? Why do some adolescents drink alcohol, use drugs, or skip school? (Chapters 1 and 9)
8. What causes stress? (Chapters 4 and 10)
9. Why does racial prejudice increase when the economy is bad? (Chapter 12)
10. What can people do to change the way society operates? (Chapter 13)

*Note:* The Sociological Abstracts, an electronic database with abstracts (summaries) of articles published in all national and some international sociology journals, is an excellent source of information on these and other topics of interest to social psychologists who are also sociologists. You should be able to access this database, or a similar one such as the SocINDEX, through your school's library.

**Psychology** focuses on the characteristics and behaviors of individuals. Social psychologists trained in psychology study individuals in group settings when trying to understand social behavior. Social psychologists trained in **sociology** also study individuals in groups, but they locate these groups within the context of the larger society. This shapes the kind of questions they ask about people and their social experiences (see Box 1.1). Sociologists, in general, focus on the ways that society influences our perceptions and behaviors.

## SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Don't worry if you haven't had a class in sociology. We cover what you need to know in the next page or so. We give a brief overview of the focus of the discipline of sociology and define some important concepts before we talk more in depth about sociological social psychology.

### The Sociological Perspective

The **sociological perspective** is a way of viewing the world that places people's experiences within their social and historical context. Sociologists believe that forces outside of the individual (e.g., common patterns of thought and behavior within a given society) play a much larger role than idiosyncratic individual characteristics (e.g., personality) do in shaping behavior. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1895) called these broader societal patterns social facts. **Social facts** are properties of the collective environment that are not dependent upon the perceptions or behaviors of any one individual. Nonetheless, they shape people's behaviors. Social norms and stratification are important social facts in every society.

#### *Social Norms*

**Social norms** tell individuals how to behave, or not to behave, in specific situations. For example, social norms concerning the appropriate style of dress within a society are not dependent on any one person's action, but they affect what people wear on any given day. Look around you. The students on your campus probably dress in somewhat unique ways. Some wear jeans and sweatshirts, whereas others prefer somewhat more formal attire, but probably not too formal. No one wears a ball gown or tuxedo to class. No one appears in public in underwear or naked. We don't even see these as options.

#### *Social Stratification*

Social stratification is another social fact that shapes people's lives in important ways. The concept of social stratification is based on the work of Karl Marx and others who have focused on conflict between different groups within society. Sociologists use the term **social stratification** to refer to the rank ordering of groups from low to high in terms of their access to important societal resources such as money, power, and prestige. As such, it is the source of social inequality. **Social inequality** refers to group differences within a given society (or more

globally) in access to societal resources (money, power, and prestige), which have substantial effects on people's life chances (their physical and mental health, opportunities, aspirations, beliefs, values, and experiences).

Sociologists are especially interested in the causes and consequences of social inequality and, within sociology, social psychologists typically study how social stratification affects people's everyday lives. Here, we discuss three important dimensions of stratification in the United States and most other societies, which are examined in many social psychological studies conducted by sociologists. They include social class, race and ethnicity, and gender.

**Social class** reflects individuals' access to resources, including money and power. Social class is typically measured as **socioeconomic status**, or SES, using indicators of education, occupational prestige, and income.

A **race** is a group perceived as genetically distinct. We use the term *perceived* because race is not really a biological construct.

You might be thinking, but racial groups differ in visible physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair texture, and eye shape). How can you say that race is not biologically based when this is the case?

The answer is that these physical characteristics are not what defines race or makes it important within a society. What constitutes different racial groups, and the salience of race in people's lives, changes across social and historical contexts. Thus, who is considered a member of a particular racial group, and what this means, is socially rather than biologically determined (Bobo et al. 2012). Because they are socially constructed, definitions of race have changed substantially in the United States over time.

Whereas race reflects perceived biological differences, **ethnicity** is rooted in perceived cultural differences. An ethnic group is a category of individuals perceived as distinct due to cultural characteristics, including customs, language, and a shared heritage.

**Gender**, another dimension of stratification, refers to the characteristics and behaviors associated with biological sex within a given cultural context (American Psychological Association 2015). Thus, like race and ethnicity, gender is a social construction. This means that what defines gender, and what gender means in terms of people's characteristics, feelings, and behaviors, varies significantly across cultures and changes over time within any given society.

### Take a Break

Check out the following online resources for additional information about the social basis of race and of gender.

- Go to the following Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) website for a timeline (Go Deeper: Race Timeline) showing changes in definitions of race in the United States: [www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_03\\_b-godeeper.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_03_b-godeeper.htm) (search terms: PBS and explore the evolution of an idea).
- Then, read about gender fluidity on the following British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) website: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220914-gender-fluidity-the-ever-shifting-shape-of-identity> (search terms: BBC and gender fluidity).

Historically, social psychologists used the term **sex** to refer to biological differences between males and females, while noting that the criteria (e.g., genitalia) used to establish sex and an individual's placement into the sex category male or female are socially determined (West and Zimmerman 1987). Contemporary conceptualizations of sex are more inclusive. They recognize that sex is broader than just male or female, as individuals may have varying combinations of physical/biological characteristics and may be defined by others or think of themselves as intersex.

There is also variation in how people understand and enact, or express, their gender, which is distinct from and not wholly tied to their sex. Current understandings of gender reflect this diversity and acknowledge that gender has both a psychological and behavioral component. These and other aspects of gender are discussed in greater detail on pp. 189–202 of Chapter 6. Here, we focus on gender more generally as a dimension of stratification (as a basis of social inequality) within society.

Gender, as well as race/ethnicity and social class, are statuses. Sociologists define **statuses** as the positions people occupy within a society. Class, race/ethnicity, and gender are statuses of particular interest to sociologists because they affect the way people are perceived and treated across social settings in ways that reflect broader, macro-level (societal) inequalities.

Some sociological social psychologists use the term **status characteristics** to refer to statuses like class, race/ethnicity, and gender, because they are dimensions of stratification in this society. Being White and being male are generally associated with worthiness and competence. Racial/ethnic minorities, women, transgender individuals, and people who don't define themselves as male or female are not viewed as favorably. The same is true of lower-, versus middle- or upper-class individuals. Social psychologists do not believe that Whites are superior to other racial/ethnic groups or that men are superior to other groups. Nor do they regard people toward the high end of the class hierarchy as superior to individuals with fewer socioeconomic resources. In fact, they absolutely reject these notions. However, people in this society tend to hold these views because they are consistent with the existing power structure and patterns of inequality at the societal level (Correll and Ridgeway 2006).

### ***How Statuses Combine to Shape People's Experiences***

In recent years, social psychologists have become increasingly interested in how statuses combine to shape people's social experiences. They focus on what sociologists call intersectionality.

**Intersectionality** is an "orienting concept" that sensitizes social psychologists, and social scientists more generally, to the fact that statuses such as class, race/ethnicity, and gender do not necessarily operate independent of one another. They come together, or intersect, in their effects on individuals' social relationships, resources, psychological states, and behaviors (Lancianese 2014). Being a woman, for instance, has different consequences for African Americans and Whites, and the social experiences of working-class Black women are distinct from those of middle-class Black women (as well as from working- and middle-class Black or White men) (Collins 1993; Juan and Syed 2016). Other statuses that serve as bases of inequality with society and intersect in their effects on



individuals' social experiences include age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, citizenship, and country of origin.

### What Do You Think?

How does the concept of intersectionality pertain to your life?

Add your status characteristics (characteristics you have that are associated with social inequality within this society, regardless of whether or not you believe that they influence how you are perceived and treated) to the diagram in Figure 1.1a. Note that status characteristics associated with societal-level inequalities can result in either advantage or disadvantage (e.g., on average, men are advantaged when it comes to socioeconomic resources and how they are perceived and treated, while women are disadvantaged). Figure 1.1b is provided as an example of what someone's diagram might look like.

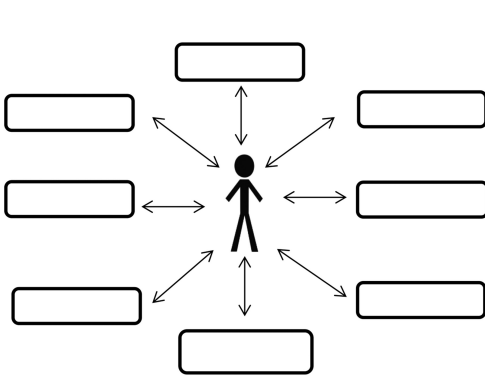
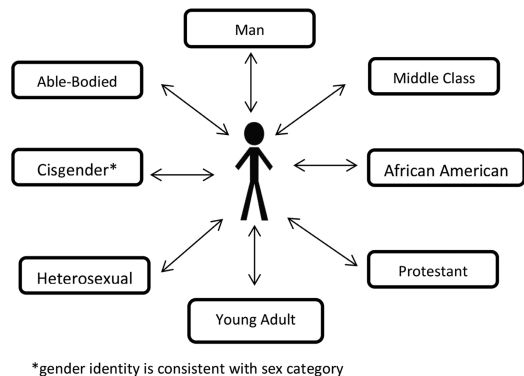


FIGURE 1.1 a



\*gender identity is consistent with sex category

FIGURE 1.1 b

Consider how your combination of status characteristics has affected your social experiences (e.g., college attendance, choice of major, and friendships). Keep in mind that it is often not evident to members of advantaged groups (e.g., Whites, men, and individuals who are heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, and so forth) that their status characteristics shape how they are perceived and treated by others. Why might this be?

### *The Individual in Society: Constraint and Agency*

As discussed in the previous section, sociologists are interested in the effects of inequalities associated with class, race/ethnicity, gender, and other statuses on a variety of outcomes (behaviors, attitudes, and opportunities). They are also interested in the factors that perpetuate systems of stratification in any given society. This does not, however, mean that sociologists overlook the individual. Although sociologists emphasize **constraint** by studying how society shapes people's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors, they also recognize the dependence of society on individuals. It is only through social interaction that existing societal patterns

are reproduced, and it is through social interaction that individuals reshape society (Giddens 1984).

People can and sometimes do act in unique and creative ways. Individuals' capacity to resist broader social forces and to act in a self-directed manner is called **agency**. Within any social setting, people make choices, which have the potential to shape the perceptions and behaviors of others (Blumer 1969). For instance, what happens when you decide to ask a question in class? First the professor comments, and then another student comments, and maybe another and another. As the interaction unfolds, the focus of the conversation is likely to change as one of many potential topics becomes the focal point of people's attention. The direction the conversation takes, and how the material being discussed is perceived, may reflect the unique characteristics or interests of the individuals present in the encounter.

## MICRO VERSUS MACRO LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

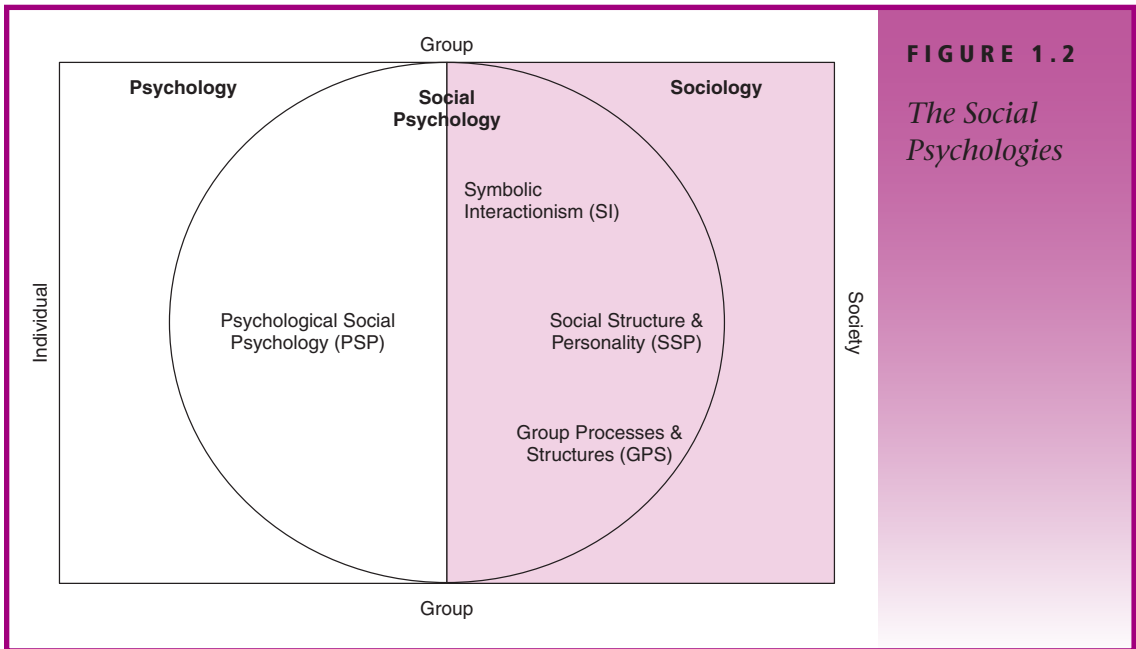
A **unit of analysis** refers to what a researcher studies. A unit of analysis can be either **micro** (small) or **macro** (large). In micro-level studies, the unit of analysis is the individual. Psychologists often study how micro-level attributes (e.g., personality characteristics such as openness or conscientiousness) affect people's emotions and behaviors. Some sociological social psychologists study people's social interactions at the micro level (e.g., in a college classroom). However, sociologists tend to conduct macro-level analyses that focus on aspects of society that exist above and beyond the individual, at the collective or aggregate level. The units of analysis in macro-level studies include the group, the county, the city, the state, the country, or the world. For example, sociologists have studied the relationship between divorce rates and suicide rates at the county, state, and societal level.

## THE DIFFERENT FACES OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In his classic 1977 article, the sociologist James House identifies what he refers to as the three "faces" of social psychology: psychological social psychology, symbolic interactionism, and social structure and personality. The latter two orientations are part of **sociological social psychology**.

Most social psychologists agree that House's description still holds true. However, since House published his article, a fourth face of social psychology has emerged: group processes and structures. This fourth face of social psychology encompasses research conducted mainly by sociologists (Berger 1992; Harrod, Welch, and Kushkowski 2009).

Each face of sociological social psychology highlights a different aspect of the relationship between individuals and society. Together, they help us understand a broad range of social phenomena and the thoughts and behaviors of others. They also serve as lenses through which we can view our own experiences. Thus, learning about the three faces of sociological social psychology and their applications should give you a new perspective on your life.



The different faces of social psychology are summarized in Figure 1.2. Note that the first face, **psychological social psychology (PSP)**, is included here only for comparative purposes because it deals mainly with individuals and is not part of sociological social psychology. Following are the three faces of sociological social psychology, and each will be covered in more depth in Chapters 3–5.

### Psychological Social Psychology (PSP)

Social psychologists trained in psychology study individuals and work at the micro level. They use laboratory experiments to test the effectiveness of techniques designed to increase compliance, to identify the characteristics of effective group leaders, and to study how the presence of others influences people's behaviors. In general, these analyses emphasize individuals' perceptions of and reactions to immediate social situations.

#### *Research on the Bystander Effect*

Studies of the bystander effect provide an excellent example of research within psychological social psychology. As recounted by Cialdini (1988), the impetus behind this research was an incident that occurred in New York City in 1964. A woman, Kitty Genovese, was returning home from work late at night when she was attacked outside her apartment. Many neighbors heard her screams and observed the assault through their windows. When the attacker became aware that there were witnesses, he ran away. Despite what they had just observed, no one called the police. The assailant returned and killed Kitty Genovese.

The general perception at the time of the incident was that people in urban areas do not care about their fellow human beings. Kitty Genovese's murder was

considered evidence of this apathy. Two social psychologists trained in psychology, John Darley and Bibb Latané, were skeptical. They suspected that there was something about the situation—not urban apathy—that caused this event. In order to assess their view scientifically, they created a fake emergency in their laboratory. Then they observed the responses of their study participants, who were led to believe that the situation was authentic (Cialdini 1988).

The results of their experiment, as well as those of a number of subsequent studies, suggest that the likelihood that a victim of an accident or an emergency will receive assistance decreases as the number of observers increases. Often help is offered, but it takes longer for witnesses to respond when others are present. When they are alone, most people will readily help someone in need of assistance. But when multiple people are present, the responsibility for helping is borne by all of them, which makes it relatively easy for each witness to do nothing and assume that others will take over. This process, called diffusion of responsibility, may result in nobody helping or a substantial delay before assistance is given (Darley and Latané 1968a).

It is also likely that people have difficulty defining emergency situations, given their novelty. Is this really an emergency? Is offering help appropriate?

What do we do when we are not sure how to act? We look at others to see what they are doing. The problem is that the other people present are looking at us to see how we are responding (or, in the case of the Kitty Genovese incident, not responding). This results in a spiral of nonintervention. When people are confused and unsure of what to do in an emergency, they take others' inactivity as evidence that the situation does not call for any direct action. So, even if people

### PHOTO 1.1

People may be slow to respond when someone in a public setting needs help because they assume others will intervene. However, once one person offers assistance, others will typically follow their lead.



Source: hollandfoto/Shutterstock.

are highly concerned about the victim, they may fail to act because others' inaction reinforces their perception that the situation does not require intervention (Darley and Latané 1968b).

### What to Do in an Emergency

So, what should you do if you are a victim? You are in a public setting, you need help, and no one stops. According to the psychologist Robert Cialdini, you should do two things: (1) define the situation as an emergency by yelling, "Help! This is an emergency!" and (2) select a particular person and request their assistance. It is, as Cialdini notes, very difficult for someone to refuse this kind of request. Once one person responds, the cycle is broken. As a result, others passing by will be much more likely to stop and offer to help you (Cialdini 1988).

The next three orientations or research traditions belong to sociological social psychology.

### Symbolic Interactionism (SI)

Working within **symbolic interactionism (SI)**, sociological social psychologists study face-to-face interactions in natural settings and focus on the meanings constructed among individuals through their social interactions. Symbolic interactionists emphasize agency over constraint by documenting how people create their realities (including their perceptions, beliefs, and plans of action) through their relationships with others. SI research is often similar in method to the ethnographic studies anthropologists have traditionally conducted in cultures outside of the United States. SI analyses are highly detailed and give one a sense of what it is like to be a member of a particular group.

#### *Research on Teenagers Working in Coffee Shops*

A study by Yasmine Besen (2006) illustrates research within the SI face of sociological social psychology. Besen's study focuses on the experiences of affluent suburban teenagers (ages 16–19) working in two coffee shops. Although lower-level service jobs are often regarded as undesirable, Besen found that the teenagers she studied viewed their work as a positive experience. In general, the teens she observed used the coffee shop as a sort of social hub.

Of course, basic societal rules governing the business of purchasing coffee (e.g., waiting in line, exchanging pleasantries) were in play in the coffee shops where Besen observed the teen workers' behaviors. However, as they interacted with one another over time, these employees and their customers constructed norms pertaining to other social relations within the coffee shops. Where customers sat and how much attention they were likely to get from the staff reflected these group norms. Romantic partners and good friends usually sat next to the bar that separates the coffee preparation and seating areas. They often talked extensively

**PHOTO 1.2**

Teenagers and young adults enjoy working in environments where they can connect with others and express themselves in unique ways.



Source: Ryan J. Lane/Getty Images.

with employees in front of and behind the counter, and they sometimes helped out with simple tasks. Less-intimate friends typically sat in the lounge area, where employees would stop by for short conversations while they were working. More casual acquaintances stood by the bar and consumed their drinks while talking to employees for briefer periods. Through all of these interactions, information was exchanged and outside social activities were coordinated.

Besen's one- to two-hour interviews with college students (all 19 or younger) working in the coffee shops revealed additional social functions of their work experience. Many reported that the coffee shop was a place where they were free to express their individuality. Their alternative styles of dress and accessories, which were likely to generate criticism at home and in other settings, were readily accepted by customers and fellow employees. Participants also indicated that the coffee shop provided a space where they could socialize and meet new people without being observed by parents and other authority figures.

Although job-related tasks such as making drinks and cleaning equipment were highly scripted, participants reported substantial latitude in other areas. For many of the study participants, the selection of music and scheduling of shifts (often done so they could work with friends) were important positive aspects of the job. Most of the workers' direct supervisors were similar in age and were regarded as friends rather than adversaries. Instead of being perceived as coercive, work was viewed as a place where employees could hang out with friends they may not otherwise have time to see, given their busy schedules.

Besen contrasts her findings with the results of research studies that characterize all lower-level service jobs as exploitive because of their low pay and repetitive nature. The authors of these analyses failed to look at the work experience from the perspectives of affluent, suburban teenagers, like the individuals Besen



studied. For many of the teens Besen encountered, money was not a motivating factor: they worked for social reasons.

You might be wondering whether Besen's findings apply to other teenagers who work. They may not. SI research focuses on understanding the unique experiences of a particular group of individuals, not on documenting patterns that apply across individuals and social settings. Certainly, the experiences of less-affluent teens and adults who work in coffee shops and other low-tier service jobs (individuals often exploited given their economic need and lack of alternatives) are different from those of Besen's study participants. Nonetheless, as Besen notes, it is important to acknowledge the experiences and motivations of the individuals in her analysis. As she points out, entering their world makes it clear that situations that appear to be negative and exploitive to sociologists and other social scientists may actually be experienced as worthwhile and enjoyable by some of their participants.

Not surprisingly, companies seeking to hire affluent, attractive adolescents and young adults have capitalized on this. Their recruitment ads often emphasize that working for them is fun, cool, and provides individuals with opportunities to work alongside friends in an environment with a party-like atmosphere (Besen-Cassino 2013).

### What Do You Think?

With a partner or a small group, create a list of ten or so questions that you can use to interview one or more fellow students who have part-time jobs. You might start by asking interviewees *why* they are working (what their motivation is), what they do, and whether they feel they are fairly paid. After you finish your interviews, compare your findings with those of your classmates. How do your results compare with Besen's findings? To what extent do financial concerns or constraints shape how college students feel about their jobs?

## Social Structure and Personality (SSP)

**Social structure and personality** is more oriented toward the study of (macro) societal patterns than the SI perspective. SSP researchers focus on the effects of statuses (structural positions), such as social class, race/ethnicity, and gender. They study how these statuses affect individuals' thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, emotions, and patterns of social interaction. Their studies are quantitative in orientation and almost always involve the analysis of survey data. Thus, unlike the research done by SI researchers, SSP studies require some number crunching.

### *Research on the Consequences of Teenage Employment*

The literature on the consequences of adolescent employment provides a good example of research within the SSP tradition. Because there are numerous studies on this topic, we summarize the results of a series of articles rather than a single

**TABLE 1.1**

*Percentage of  
Teens Employed  
by Gender  
and by Race/  
Ethnicity, 2022*

AGE	GENDER (%)		RACE/ETHNICITY (%)		
	MALE	FEMALE	WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN	LATINO/HISPANIC
16–19	36.3	37.2	39.0	29.8	33.2

*Source:* adapted from the 2022 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

study. This is the approach we took when reviewing the voluminous psychological literature on the bystander effect.

Although teen employment decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has returned to its pre-pandemic level (Wilson and Patterson 2023). However, adolescents are less likely to be working today than they were 20 years ago (Staff, Freelin, and Mortimer 2023).

As shown in Table 1.1, among adolescents, females are slightly more likely than males to work for pay, and more White than African-American and Latino teenagers are in the labor market. This latter difference may be due to social class differences across race and ethnicity. In general, African-American and Latino families are less well off financially than White families, and teenagers whose parents have few socioeconomic resources are less likely to have jobs than those from affluent families (Staff et al. 2014). This is presumably the result of the limited number of jobs available in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (McLoyd and Hallman 2020).

When it comes to the effects of teen employment, there is a consensus among researchers that work at this age increases adolescents' autonomy and exposes them to new people and lifestyles. This may, however, result in negative outcomes, such as substance use (Rocheleau and Swisher 2016), skipping class (Schoenhals, Tienda, and Schneider 1998), poor grades, and dropping out of school (Staff et al. 2020).

In addition, working a lot (more than 20 hours a week) while in high school can lower college aspirations, but this effect may be specific to White youth. Black parents are often less able than White parents to pay for their children's college, due to racial stratification in the larger society. Thus, when they are in high school, Black students may be more likely than their White counterparts to expect that they will have to work when they're in college (McLoyd and Hallman 2020). This may explain why high-intensity work (more than 20 hours per week) is associated with low levels of educational attainment post-high school among White, but not among Black, youth, as indicated in a study by Hwang and Domina (2017).

Low-intensity work, on the other hand, increases educational attainment across racial/ethnic groups. High school students who work fewer than five hours a week are more likely than individuals who aren't employed to earn a four-year college degree (Hwang and Domina 2017).

Research also suggests that working increases adolescents' optimism about the future. Students who work steadily throughout high school are more confident



than individuals who work less regularly that they will have a good family life, good friends, respect from others, and a job they like that pays well (Cunnie, MartinRogers, and Mortimer 2009; Purtell and McLoyd 2013). There may be some validity to these assessments, as numerous studies indicate that youth employment has a positive effect on later earnings and reduces individuals' likelihood of having contact with the criminal justice system (Rodgers 2019).

All jobs are not, however, equally valuable, and those that tend to be low-pay and offer minimal opportunities for skill development, such as positions in food service, personal care, and sales, are more heavily populated by adolescent females. In contrast, adolescent males are more likely to work in construction, maintenance, transportation and materials moving, protective services, and production (DeSilver 2022).

Gender differences in teens' work experiences, which are notable, are significant in that they set the stage for gender inequality in relation to work during adulthood (Besen-Cassino 2017). They may not be perceived as significant, though. On average, adolescents' emotional states are not affected by work-related factors important to adults, such as pay, opportunities for advancement, and job security (Shanahan et al. 1991).

Does this sound familiar? Perhaps teens, in general, tend to be more concerned with the social aspects of their jobs, much like the coffee shop workers in Besen's SI analysis described earlier. This comparison, between the participants in the survey research described in the preceding paragraphs and the teens Besen studied, shows us a clear difference between the research goals of SI and SSP. Besen's SI study provides a detailed account of the experiences of a particular subset of individuals (wealthy suburban teenagers working in coffee shops). SSP researchers aim to obtain information that is generalizable to one or more groups or all of society, because their goal is to identify and explain broader patterns of perception and behavior. Moreover, they examine group differences in people's experiences, such as variations in teen employment and its consequences by class, race/ethnicity, and gender, and the ways in which they reflect social inequality within society. Their analyses, however, provide notably less detailed descriptions of people's experiences than those within the SI tradition.

## **Group Processes and Structures (GPS)**

Sociologists who work within the **group processes and structures (GPS)** tradition focus on the effects of power on the exchange of resources, on relations between groups, and on the effects of social stratification on perception and behavior in group encounters. Much of their research focuses on small, task-oriented groups. GPS research is unique from a sociological standpoint because it often involves the use of experiments. (SSP research usually involves surveys, whereas SI research relies primarily on direct observation.)

### ***Research on Gender Bias***

Within the GPS tradition, researchers use controlled laboratory experiments to study how status characteristics influence group interactions. The example used

here to illustrate GPS research focuses on gender, a status characteristic, and its effects on group members' behaviors. Research suggests that gender differences in influence, participation, evaluations, and expected rewards (all of which favor men in mixed-sex groups) are due to differences in the relative status of males and females within the larger society (Wagner and Berger 1997).

In their classic study on gender and influence, M. D. Pugh and Ralph Wahrman (1983) evaluated the effectiveness of strategies designed to eliminate this type of bias. In their experiment, different-sex pairs of college student volunteers completed the Contrast Sensitivity task. This task required participants to determine whether visual representations of a series of geometric shapes were predominantly black or predominantly white in color. The task was designed to be highly ambiguous, so there were no obviously right or wrong answers.

On 25 out of 40 trials (where each trial was a slide showing the geometric shapes), study participants were told that their partner gave a different answer from their own. For example, individuals who said the geometric shapes were predominantly black were told that their partners said that the shapes were predominantly white. Thus, every person's responses were ostensibly challenged by his or her partner at a standard rate (no matter what answers the partner, who was in a different room, actually gave). On each trial during which a challenge occurred, participants could either change their answer to match that of their partner or stay with their initial response.

In the first (nonintervention, baseline) condition, 44 study participants completed the Contrast Sensitivity task. As is typical, the women in mixed-sex pairs were more likely than men to change their answers to match those of their partner. On average, the women in the baseline condition deferred to men 7 out of 25 times, whereas the men deferred to women 5 out of 25 times.

Pugh and Wahrman (1983) tested the effectiveness of three interventions designed to reduce this gender difference.

**Intervention 1:** Before they viewed any of the slides with the geometric shapes, the 44 participants who received the first intervention were told by the experimenter that there were no gender differences in performance on the Contrast Sensitivity task. Despite this intervention, the results were similar to those obtained in the baseline condition: women yielded to their partner more frequently than men did. Telling that men and women are equally competent at the experimental task did not reduce gender differences in susceptibility to influence.

**Intervention 2:** The 46 study participants who received the second intervention completed a preliminary task (finding hidden objects in a picture) and were told that it required abilities similar to the Contrast Sensitivity task. The preliminary task was easy enough that everyone (both men and women) exhibited superior performance. After they finished the preliminary task, participants completed the Contrast Sensitivity task. Showing them that women and men were equally competent at a task similar to the experimental task failed to reduce gender differences susceptibility to influence. Women were as likely to give in to their male partners on the Contrast Sensitivity task as they were in the baseline condition.

***Intervention 3:*** The 40 study participants who received the third intervention completed the preliminary (hidden objects) task, which was now rigged so that the woman in each mixed-sex pair always performed better than her male partner. After this, they completed the Contrast Sensitivity task. This intervention worked. Showing individuals that women were better than men at a task similar to the experimental (Contrast Sensitivity) task eliminated gender differences in the frequency with which participants yielded to their different-sex partners.

Pugh and Wahrman's (1983) study suggests that the perception that women are less competent than men was the reason that women were more susceptible than men to their partners' influence. This widespread, albeit often unconscious, belief affected study participants' behaviors unless they had firsthand evidence that women were likely to outperform men on the task at hand. When women were perceived as more competent than men due to their performance on the preliminary task (Intervention 3), gender differences in influence disappeared.

It is important to note that showing study participants that men and women were equally competent at the experimental task (Intervention 2) was not enough to eliminate preconceived notions about gender and ability. To reduce gender bias in mixed-sex pairs, women had to be perceived as better than men (Pugh and Wahrman 1983).

You might be saying, "Well, yes, but this was in 1983. Surely things have changed since then when it comes to gender and perceived competence." They have somewhat, but numerous experiments suggest that the type of gender bias documented by Pugh and Wahrman (1983) still exists. They also suggest that this bias is due to the way society is organized and not the characteristics or intentions of individuals. We discuss these studies, as well as research on race/ethnicity and small-group dynamics, in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The point we want to make here is that Pugh and Wahrman (1983) found a way to reduce gender bias in mixed-sex pairs. This is important because it shows that it is possible to alter the effects of inequality at the macro level on people's interactions within small-group settings. Patterns of inequality at the societal level persist only insofar as they are reinforced through social interactions. Therefore, disrupting the micro-level social processes through which inequalities between groups (e.g., men and women) are reproduced may also help to create a more egalitarian society. Research within the GPS tradition is geared toward facilitating this type of social change. Can we say the same about the first set of studies we discussed, on the bystander effect (pp. 10–12)?

### ***Experiments in GPS Versus Experiments in PSP***

Both of the relevant literatures (on the bystander effect and on gender, performance expectations, and influence in task-oriented groups) are based on laboratory experiments and yield results that are presumed to generalize to real-world encounters. Beyond the similarity in research method (experiment), these literatures are very different.



effect). Because the unit of analysis in these studies is the individual, PSP is also at the left end of the continuum.

The next three traditions on the continuum are all within sociological social psychology.

2. Research within the SI tradition also focuses on social interaction at the micro level. SI researchers believe that reality is socially constructed in that meanings are created and reproduced within the context of individuals' interactions with others. For example, college students continually negotiate and renegotiate what it means to be a student as they interact with peers, teachers, office staff, and other individuals on their campus. Thus, whereas social psychologists trained in psychology focus on individual perception and behavior, SI researchers emphasize the meanings that emerge within social encounters. SI researchers such as Besen (teens working in coffee shops) note how these emergent meanings are shaped by the social context within which the interaction occurs. Often, meanings are also shaped by the characteristics of the actors in relation to other groups within society. As a result, symbolic interactionism is more macro than psychological social psychology. Thus, SI is toward, but not at, the left end of Figure 1.3.
3. Research within the GPS tradition, the newest face of sociological social psychology, is toward the right end of the micro–macro continuum. GPS researchers focus on group differences (typically with gender or race serving as the unit of analysis), on performance expectations, and on task-related outcomes. They do not, however, examine differences in perception or performance within status categories (e.g., among women or among men, among racial/ethnic minorities, or among Whites).
4. Research within the SSP tradition is also toward the right end of this continuum. The unit of analysis in these studies is the group (e.g., employed vs. unemployed youth) and is more often than not based on socioeconomic class, gender, or race/ethnicity. This type of research is considered SSP because many of the outcomes examined occur within the individual (e.g., optimism about the future, as in the studies on adolescent employment). However, unlike psychological research, the focus of SSP is on the differences in outcomes between, but not within, groups.

SSP is the most macro of the three faces of sociological social psychology because of its emphasis on the effects of statuses (e.g., employment status, class, race/ethnicity, and gender) on perception and behavior across social contexts. Much of the research within the GPS tradition is similar in orientation to studies in SSP. However, GPS research often focuses on micro-level interactions in the lab, working under the assumption that these interactions mirror patterns within the larger society. Thus, the GPS perspective is slightly closer to the center of our continuum.

General sociology is at the far right end of the continuum because of its macro orientation. Studies in sociology emphasize aggregate patterns and tend

not to delve into the minds (thoughts, motivations, concerns, and emotions) of individuals.

## The Faces of Sociological Social Psychology and Social Inequality

As indicated earlier, sociologists are especially interested in how stratification based on social class, race/ethnicity, and gender shapes people's experiences. Although this emphasis on social inequality is reflected in all of the three faces of social psychology within sociology shown in Figure 1.3 (symbolic interactionism, group processes and structures, and social structure and personality), there are some differences in how central social inequality is to each of these research traditions.

In general, social inequality and its consequences are at the forefront of research in social structure and personality. As you will see throughout this book, researchers working within the social structure and personality face of social psychology frequently seek to determine how social inequality rooted in social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and other status characteristics affects people's experiences in families, in schools, at work, and in other social settings. Similarly, in the group processes and structures tradition, social psychologists focus on social inequality based on status characteristics and its effects on people's group interactions.

Social psychologists working in the symbolic interactionist face of social psychology also focus on social inequality. For example, they frequently study how members of disadvantaged groups (defined based on status characteristics like social class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or whether one has a disability) manage their lack of access to societal resources as they construct their realities through interaction with others. However, since these studies are micro-level in orientation, and tend to emphasize agency (people's capacity to act in a manner not determined by society) over constraint, the attention given to social inequality may be less salient than it is in, for instance, research in social structure and personality. Nonetheless, social inequality and its consequences are issues addressed in most symbolic interactionist studies because symbolic interactionists are sociologists and understanding the nature, and effects, of social inequality is central to the field of sociology. Given this, attention is given to social inequality, to one degree or another, in research across the three faces of sociological social psychology.

This is in contrast to research in psychological social psychology, which focuses on individuals (vs. groups or social categories, like differences across classes, racial/ethnic groups, or genders), on cognitive (psychological) processes, and on how the characteristics of the immediate social setting affect perception and behavior (as in the case of research on the bystander effect). This is not to say that psychological social psychologists don't study social inequality. Sometimes they do. In fact, over the years, there has been an increase in the attention given to status characteristics such as gender and race/ethnicity within psychological social psychology (Eagly et al. 2012; Roberts et al. 2020), and a number of recent studies in psychological social psychology consider social class in relation

to people's social experiences (e.g., Emery and Finkel 2022; Phillips and Lowery 2020). However, the focus of much of the research in psychological social psychology is on cognitive processes and on how the social setting in which behavior occurs (e.g., how many people are present during an emergency) shapes people's actions. While sociologists may study psychological factors, and how situational characteristics affect what people think and how they act, when they do this, they tend to look at variations in perception and behavior at the group, rather than at the individual, level (e.g., between people who are working-class and those who are middle-class). Moreover, when considering the effects of status characteristics such as class, race/ethnicity, and gender on various outcomes, they tend to look for causal factors outside of, rather than within, the individual, from within the larger society, as illustrated in the following section.

### APPLICATION: STUDYING THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS

Immigration is a highly contentious subject these days as communities change because of an increase in their foreign-born population. As of 2021, about 43.3 million immigrants resided in the United States, making up 13.6% of the U.S. population. Although the percentage of U.S. residents born in China and India has increased substantially in the past decade, Mexican Americans are the largest immigrant group in the United States, making up 24% of the foreign-born population in 2021. Other top countries of origin of the U.S. foreign-born population (following Mexico, India and China) include the Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Korea (Ward and Batalova 2023).

Social psychologists are especially interested in learning about the social experiences of immigrants. What kinds of issues would you want to know about if you were going to study immigrants from one country or across countries of origin?

In the following sections, we illustrate the types of questions about immigrants' lives that have been addressed within sociological social psychology. As with any topic, the kinds of questions social psychologists ask about immigrants and their experiences, and what they discover, are shaped by the face of social psychology within which they are working.

#### Box 1.2 Americans' Feelings about Immigration

Immigration was a central issue in the 2016 presidential election. Although U.S. adults were less likely in 2020 than in 2016 to say that being born in the U.S. is a sign of who is "truly American" (Connaughton 2021), satisfaction with the level of immigration into the country has been decreasing. In January of 2022, Americans who responded to a phone survey by Gallup Inc., a reputable polling firm, indicated that they were less satisfied with the level of immigration into the country than they were with a number of other policy or life areas, including the



quality of medical care, the position of women, and the acceptance of gays and lesbians in the U.S. Overall, among Republicans, immigration was identified as the least satisfying of 20 policy/life areas examined. Among both Democrats and Independents, how the country was handling poverty and homelessness generated the least amount of satisfaction, followed by gun laws for Democrats and the state of the economy for Independents (Saad 2023). Thus, as is often the case, political affiliation was related to people's social attitudes.

### PHOTO 1.3

Immigrants walk along the border wall along the U.S.–Mexico border in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, Mexico (May 11, 2023).



Source: Gary Coronado/Getty Images.

## Studies by SI Researchers

Focusing on micro-level social processes, SI researchers have studied members of particular immigrant groups and their unique social experiences in relation to, or as distinct from those of, other groups within society. Using data based on observations of immigrants' behaviors in natural settings or detailed interviews, they have addressed the following research questions with members of one or more immigrant groups. How do male immigrants from Latin America struggling to find work maintain positive views of themselves (Purser 2009)? How do immigrant service workers, and their employers, construct a sense of community in an affluent urban neighborhood (Miller 2015)? How does public storytelling by undocumented youth activists cultivate a sense of empowerment (Cabaniss and Shay 2020), and how do members of particular immigrant groups (e.g., Lebanese Americans or Indian Americans) integrate racial/ethnic and religious identities (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007; Kurien 2005)? These latter studies, which examine multiple status characteristics, focus on intersectionality.

For example, Kurien (2005) discusses how second-generation Indian American college students (students whose parents were born in India) negotiated



understandings of what it means to be Indian American and Hindu through their interactions during meetings of a Hindu student organization. The organization was known for its militant nationalist stance in support of the synthesis of Hinduism and Indian culture.

In general, males from elite families whose Hindu identity was highly prominent embraced this nationalist stance. Other group members, who reported that they joined the organization mainly to learn about their heritage, exhibited a very different orientation. Given their lack of knowledge about Hinduism, the Hindu identity was less salient and emotionally laden for these students, and prior events involving racial discrimination or attacks on their religion were less likely to be framed as identity relevant. Thus, they had a much more moderate view of what it meant to be Hindu than the more extremist faction and were dissatisfied with the direction the Hindu student organization was taking.

The experiences of the Indian American students Kurien studied illustrate the often-contentious nature of identity negotiation within the context of competing personal histories and motivations. Documenting the social processes through which group members construct identities is a common theme within the SI literature. Some of these studies, including Kurien's analysis, also emphasize how statuses (e.g., race/ethnicity and religion) intersect to influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors.

### What Do You Think?

What groups do you identify with? Make a list. What makes these groups important sources of identity for you? Save your responses. We come back to this topic in a later chapter.

## Studies by SSP Researchers

Studies within social structure and personality often compare the perceptions, feelings, and behaviors of individuals in different social categories (e.g., different classes, different racial/ethnic groups, or different genders). Immigrant status (immigrant vs. native born) is a social category, and research on immigration within SSP has focused on differences in the social experiences of immigrants and individuals born in the United States. Because the focus of research in SSP is on patterns of perception and behavior at the group level (e.g., immigrant, native born), most of these studies have involved the analysis of survey data.

SSP research on immigration has addressed the following research questions. Why are immigrants often viewed negatively by native-born Whites (Berg 2009)? Why are immigrants at lower risk for depression than ethnic minorities born in the United States (Mossakowski 2007), and why do immigrant youths exhibit lower levels of delinquency than their American-born counterparts?

Delinquency is the label applied to deviant behaviors enacted by adolescents (youths aged 12–18). Deviant behavior, which may or may not be illegal, refers to actions that violate prevailing social norms. We focus here on the effect of

immigrant status on delinquency because a number of studies within SSP have examined this relationship.

Studies within SSP suggest that immigrant youths exhibit low levels of delinquency in part because they have stronger family bonds, more positive feelings about their family relationships, more attentive parents, fewer friends who engage in deviant behavior, a greater commitment to education, more favorable views of the legal system, and a greater tendency to associate delinquency with negative social outcomes than adolescents from nonimmigrant families (Bui 2009; Chen and Jiang 2020; Dinovitzer, Hagan, and Levi 2009; Piquero et al. 2016). Note that these latter analyses focus on how the social experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of immigrant youths differ from those of their native-born counterparts but not on differences in the social experiences, perceptions, and behaviors among the immigrants themselves.

## Studies by GPS Researchers

As noted earlier, GPS researchers use experiments to study how status characteristics influence the social interactions that occur in small, task-oriented groups. Immigrant is a status characteristic, like race/ethnicity or gender. Thus, one might ask how immigrants are perceived and treated in small-group encounters. What do group members expect from, and how do they evaluate the task performance of, individuals who are immigrants versus those who are native born?

Immigrant status has received little attention from GPS researchers who study interaction in task groups. However, immigrant status is likely to affect performance expectations, evaluations, and behavior in the same manner as race/ethnicity and gender, which are the status characteristics most frequently studied within this research tradition.

Drawing on this literature, GPS researchers might consider how immigrant status impacts susceptibility to influence, discussions in small groups, and the assessment of individuals applying for jobs. Experiments focusing on the evaluation of job applicants could be carried out in a variety of settings (Foschi 2013) and have the potential to provide insight into how country of origin impacts individuals' economic opportunities.

## APPLYING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

There are some instances when a subject of general interest to sociological social psychologists has not been examined within all of the three research orientations. This is because the different faces of social psychology focus on very different aspects of human social behavior.

In other cases, there are studies within all three faces of sociological social psychology that address a particular topic. We demonstrate this in the second part of the book, where we discuss the research literature on a variety of topics of interest to sociological social psychologists. It is through the integration of the information these studies have generated that social psychologists have significantly enhanced our understanding of the human experience and the various facets of social life.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

Social psychology, a highly diverse field of study that bridges sociology and psychology, has four distinct research orientations, or faces. The main features of each of the four faces of social psychology are summarized in Table 1.2. As depicted here, these orientations can be distinguished by their unit of analysis and their underlying assumptions about the nature of social reality. The four faces of social psychology are also distinguished by what researchers seek to learn about human social behavior and how research is generally conducted. Despite

**TABLE 1.2**

*The Four  
Faces of  
Social  
Psychology*

1. Psychological social psychology

Emphasis	The effects of the immediate social situation on group members' perception and behavior
Unit of analysis	Micro level; the individual
Primary method of data collection	Laboratory experiment
Examples	The bystander effect

**Sociological social psychology**

2. Symbolic interactionism

Emphasis	The social construction of meaning; the negotiation of group norms; the uniqueness of social experiences
Unit of analysis	Micro level; the individual or face-to-face social interaction
Primary method of data collection	Observation in natural settings
Examples	Adolescents employed in coffee shops; racial and religious identity among second-generation Indian American college students

3. Social structure and personality

Emphasis	The relationship of status characteristics to perception, emotion, and behavior
Unit of analysis	Macro level; the group (typically social class, gender, or race/ethnicity)
Primary method of data collection	Survey
Examples	Consequences of youth employment; immigrant status and delinquency

4. Group processes and structures

Emphasis	The effects of status characteristics on interaction in small, task-oriented groups
Unit of analysis	Macro level; the group (typically gender or race/ethnicity)
Primary method of data collection	Laboratory experiment
Examples	Gender and susceptibility to influence in mixed-sex pairs

their distinctiveness, the three sociological social psychologies share a common theme: namely, that the groups to which people belong are part of a larger society. These three different orientations and the research they have generated provide substantial insight into the nature of human social behavior and how it reflects broader societal patterns pertaining, in particular, to social inequality.

## Key Points to Know

- **Social psychology focuses on understanding the nature and causes of social behavior and has its roots in both the discipline of psychology and the discipline of sociology. However, sociological social psychologists ask different questions than social psychologists trained as psychologists.** Psychological social psychologists focus on individuals within groups and how the immediate setting affects their perception and behavior. Sociological social psychologists also examine individuals in groups, but they locate these groups within the context of the larger society.
- **The sociological perspective is a way of viewing the world that places individuals within a broad historical and social context in order to understand their perceptions and behaviors.** Sociological social psychologists study the social processes through which people create society and the ways that society influences people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- **Research studies can be classified based upon their unit of analysis.** Micro-level analyses focus on the individual or interactions between individuals. Macro-level analyses focus on aspects of societies that exist above and beyond the individual level. Macro analyses examine aggregate or structural units such as the group, the county, the city, the state, the country, or the world. General sociology is at the macro level. Sociological social psychology is more micro in focus than general sociology, but not as micro in its focus as psychological social psychology.
- **There are four faces of social psychology: psychological social psychology (PSP), symbolic interactionism (SI), social structure and personality (SSP), and group processes and structures (GPS).** The latter three fall within the realm of sociological social psychology and are the focus of this textbook.
- **The social psychologies differ in terms of their unit of analysis (placement on the micro–macro continuum), in terms of their focus (the questions asked), and in terms of their primary method of data collection and analysis.** Thus, while all three of the faces of social psychology within sociology focus on social inequality and its consequences, the selection of topic, research questions, and methodology are shaped by the particular face of social psychology within which a researcher is working. This is the focus of the first part of this textbook.
- **Research from within the three sociological social psychologies has been combined to increase our understanding of particular topics.** This is the focus of the second part of the book.

### Terms and Concepts for Review

Agency	Social inequality
Constraint	Social norms
Ethnicity	Social psychology
Gender	Social stratification
Group processes and structures (GPS)	Social structure and personality (SSP)
Intersectionality	Socioeconomic status (SES)
Macro-level analysis	Sociological perspective
Micro-level analysis	Sociological social psychology
Psychological social psychology (PSP)	Sociology
Psychology	Status
Race	Status characteristics
Sex	Symbolic interactionism (SI)
Social class	Unit of analysis
Social facts	

### Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Although there are some similarities in the behaviors of students and professors in all colleges and universities, every college class has its own tone. What is considered acceptable in one class (e.g., coming in a few minutes late or talking to a peer) may in another course generate a negative response from the professor or from other students. Describe the kinds of interactions that occur in each of the classes you are enrolled in this semester. How might each of your professors respond to a deviant behavior, such as someone speaking loudly on a cell phone during class? Would their responses be identical? How would the other students in the class react? Which face of sociological social psychology would lead you to consider the unique nature of the interactions between students and between students and the professor in each of your current classes?
2. Is working for pay good for high school students? What does the research literature on this topic say? Do you think these patterns extend to college students? Why or why not?
3. How can laboratory experiments be used to study the effects of a status like gender on people's behavior? Are the results of these studies generalizable to everyday social encounters? Why do you take this position? (Note: we discuss this issue in the following chapter.)
4. Choose two of the three faces of sociological social psychology and discuss how a researcher working within each orientation would approach the topic of college student drinking. For each face, develop at least one research question and discuss how relevant information might be gathered.
5. Select one of the studies discussed in this chapter that addresses one or more issues related to social inequality. Briefly describe this research and indicate which face of social psychology it illustrates. Why do you believe this to be the case?