CHAPTER 3
Social Learning and Culture

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Summary
B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) was the most influential spokesperson for behaviorism in the 20th century. Skinner championed an approach that emphasized observable behavior over thoughts and feelings, that focused on the ways that environments shape behavior, and that prioritized the study of learning through rewards and punishments. (SOURCE: John Wiley and Sons photo by Kathy Bendo)

Shortly after World War II, famous psychologist B. F. Skinner wrote a novel in which he imagined a utopian society built on the principles of behaviorism. In Walden Two, Skinner (1948/1962) depicted a community of about 1,000 people who lived “together without quarreling, in a social climate of trust rather than suspicion, of love rather than jealousy, of cooperation rather than competition” (1979, p. 346). From birth onward, the citizens of Skinner’s mythical society were enrolled in an elaborate educational program that systematically reinforced positive behaviors. Infants and children were trained to restrain negative emotions, practice self-control, and care for themselves and for each other by eschewing jealousy, rivalry, fighting, and pride. The training was accomplished without punishment but instead through positive reinforcement. By rewarding socially desirable behavior, the educational system at Walden Two gently and gradually instilled behaviors compatible with a good life for all its citizens.

Skinner’s novel put into story form a strong impulse that has run through American psychology from its very beginning. We are created equal, Americans want to believe. Given the right kind of environment, anybody can rise to the top, or at least to a position of individual respectability. If a person’s behavior is bad or problematic, we can fix it, we can improve, we can change others and ourselves by changing the environments in which we live. For much of the 20th century, mainstream American psychology tended to downplay inherent or biologically ingrained differences between people and emphasized instead the power of social environments to shape human behavior. Espoused most passionately by Skinner, the behaviorist tradition exemplifies how American psychologists have tended to understand the role of social context and learning in the development of personality. How did you become the person you are? What explains why you do what you do? In Walden Two and in the real world where you and I live, Skinner argued, human behavior and persons’ lives are primarily the products of social learning in culture.

If human nature is the first fundamental context for understanding human individuality, then the social environment and all it entails—family, neighborhood, community, culture, and history—is the second. Beginning with Skinner’s behaviorist view, we turn our attention in this chapter to the role of social learning and culture in the making of persons. We begin with the particular mechanisms of learning that are spelled out in the behaviorist tradition. We then consider influential theories of social learning as they bear upon human personality. Next, we consider the multilayered social ecology of everyday human behavior, how it is that our actions, thoughts, and feelings are always situated in a multitude of overlapping contexts. Moving from the smallest to the most encompassing contexts, we consider social situations, social class and gender, and finally culture and history as determinants of human behavior and shapers of persons’ lives. Our central theme in this chapter is the social environment. Our focus is on those factors and forces that we tend to see as outside our bodies, in the social worlds we inhabit, in the interpersonal and cultural landscape across which we move over time and situations. Our goal is to appreciate the tremendous power of the environment in determining who we are and the intricate ways in which virtually every aspect of our lives is situated in a complex social and cultural context.

**Behaviorism and Social-learning Theory**

**American Environmentalism: The Behaviorist Tradition**

Behaviorism is a brand of psychology that explores the ways in which observable behavior is learned and shaped by the environment. B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) was arguably behaviorism’s most ardent
enthusiast and eloquent spokesman. John B. Watson launched the behaviorist movement in the
United States in 1913 with the publication of “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It.” Behaviorism
was the dominant force in American academic psychology from about 1920 through the 1950s, and
its principles are still influential today. Through the 1950s, a number of very different behaviorist
theories were developed, such as Clark Hull’s (1943) biological-drive theory and Edwin Tolman’s
(1948) cognitively oriented “purposive behaviorism.”

John Watson, the founder of behaviorism, was not a humble man. In a famous claim, he once
bragged that he could take virtually any human infant at random and raise him or her to become
any kind of adult you might imagine. Just let me create the right kind of environment, Watson
maintained, and I can make any kind of human being you want:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in
and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might
select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief and, yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of
his talents, penchant, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. There is no such
thing as an inheritance of capacity, talent, temperament, mental constitution, and behavioral
charaacteristics. (1924, p. 104)

Though overstated, Watson was asserting a position about human life that goes back at least as far
as British philosopher John Locke, who in 1690 set forth the doctrine of the tabula rasa, or “blank
slate.” For the newborn, Locke believed, the mind is like a blank slate, or clean piece of paper.
Nothing is written on the slate; it is completely clean and empty. Over time, experience “writes”
upon the slate, giving the mind its characteristic content. Locke rejected the notion of innate ideas
and argued instead that the environment shapes the person. If the human mind is originally a
blank slate, then all humans are born psychologically equal. From this view, individual differences
in personality are a function of different environmental exposures. Personality is made (by the
environment), not inborn. As Skinner (1971) put it, “a person does not act upon the world, the
world acts upon him” (p. 211). Therefore, if the environment shapes the person, then a just and
happy society should produce just and happy citizens.

How does the environment shape behavior? Through learning, answered the behaviorists. Each
of us is who we are because of what we have learned. According to the behaviorists, our environments
teach us to be who we are; we are what we learn to be. But why do we learn to be anything at all?
What motivates us to learn? The behaviorist answer was that we learn in order to obtain pleasure and
avoid pain.

That the ultimate determinants of behavior reside in pleasure and pain is an idea at least as old
as the teachings of Aristotle, but it found its earliest flowering in the ancient school of thought called
Epicureanism. Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) was a Greek philosopher who preached that freedom from
pain and the pursuit of gentle pleasures and peace of mind were the hallmarks of the Good Life.
Not only do optimal pleasure and minimal pain make men and women happy, they also serve as
the foundations for ethical action, according to Epicurus. In an ethical or moral sense, the world is
constructed so that, in general, what is good is what eventually brings pleasure and peace of mind;
what is ethically or morally bad is what ultimately brings displeasure or pain. Through the ages, this
doctrine has been adapted to play a central role in many different philosophical systems, including
that of Locke.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the philosophy of utilitarianism put forth the idea that the
“good” society should make for the greatest happiness or pleasure for the greatest number of people.
Utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) argued that
this could be accomplished if societies were structured in a more egalitarian fashion. Thus, the
utilitarians advocated equality for all, woman’s suffrage, abolition of discrimination on the basis of
religion and race, and redistribution of society’s wealth (Russell, 1945). They tended to distrust the
authority of king and church and to glorify democratic education as the answer to many of life’s
problems. In ethics, the utilitarians were pragmatic and nondogmatic, insisting that principles need
to be flexible to accommodate changing ethical circumstances. Behaviorism, in all its different forms,
was steeped in a utilitarian ideology. Like its philosophical forerunner, behaviorism was egalitarian, pragmatic, and supremely optimistic about the possibility of changing the person’s life for the better through education—that is, through learning or training in social contexts. Ultimately, learning is shaped by pleasure and pain. And learning should, in turn, make for the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain.

According to Mill and other utilitarians, a great deal of learning occurs through the association of actions with either positive (pleasurable) or negative (painful) events. The doctrine of associationism purports that various objects and ideas that are contiguous in time or space come to be connected, or associated, with each other into meaningful units. Simple forms of learning proceed via associations.

**Classical conditioning** represents one such form of simple learning. In Pavlov’s well-known examples of classical conditioning, a hungry dog learns to salivate in response to a neutral stimulus (a tone) because that neutral stimulus has become associated with a stimulus (meat) that typically elicits salivation naturally. In the terminology of classical conditioning, the meat is an *unconditioned stimulus* that naturally gives rise to salivation, which is the *unconditioned response*. When, in a number of experimental trials, the dog hears the neutral stimulus of the tone immediately preceding the presentation of meat, the dog learns to salivate (*conditioned response*) to the tone, now called a *conditioned stimulus*, even when no meat is present. The tone (conditioned stimulus) and meat (unconditioned stimulus) therefore become associated with each other because of their contiguity in time. Figure 3.1 illustrates the process.

Watson believed that classical conditioning was a cornerstone of human learning. In the legendary case study of Little Albert, Watson and Raynor (1920) showed how an 11-month-old infant could be conditioned to fear white rats by being repeatedly exposed to a white rat (a presumably neutral conditioned stimulus) and a loud, frightening noise (unconditioned stimulus) at about the same time. The loud noise naturally gave rise to an unconditioned fear response (Albert would cry and avoid the stimulus), but the previously neutral stimulus of the rat also came to elicit fear (*conditioned response*) by virtue of its repeated association with the unconditioned stimulus. Although the results of this study are murky, there is some evidence that little Albert’s fear of rats may have naturally expanded over time to include other white, furry objects, an example of what behaviorists have called *stimulus generalization*.

Classical conditioning may be implicated in the development of certain neurotic symptoms, especially phobias, and in the ontogeny of more complex attitudes and behavior systems. In some

![Figure 3.1 Classical Conditioning](image-url)

A neutral stimulus becomes conditioned through its association with an unconditioned stimulus, and as a result, the conditioned stimulus eventually produces the same kind of response produced by the unconditioned stimulus. In the case of Pavlov’s dog, the tone elicits salivation because the tone is consistently paired with meat.
cases, such complex associations are achieved through higher-order conditioning. In higher-order conditioning, conditioned stimuli, which have obtained their eliciting power through associations with unconditioned stimuli, come to be associated with other neutral stimuli, which themselves become conditioned stimuli by virtue of the association. Therefore, a young man may develop an aversion to a particular brand of women’s cologne because that was the cologne his mother wore the summer he broke up with his girlfriend. In other words, the aversion is a higher-order conditioned response to the conditioned stimulus of the previously neutral cologne, now associated with “mother that summer,” which is itself a conditioned stimulus by virtue of its association with the aversive unconditioned stimulus of the end of a love affair. Higher-order conditioning could also produce emotionally positive associations, as might be the case if the young man’s sister wore the cologne on the day he found out that he had been named his high school’s outstanding student.

Traditionally, classical conditioning has been viewed as an extremely simple, low-level form of learning whereby two stimuli become associated because they appear together at the same time. Recent thinking about the phenomenon, however, suggests a more complicated and high-level process. Rescorla (1988) argues that contiguity in time and place is not what makes conditioning work. Instead, classical conditioning enables the organism to form an accurate representation of the world. In the standard Pavlovian example, the tone becomes associated with the bell not because the two arrive on the scene at about the same time but rather because one stimulus (the tone) provides information about another (the meal). Rescorla summarizes his cognitive interpretation of classical conditioning by saying:

> Pavlovian conditioning is not a stupid process by which the organism willy-nilly forms associations between any two stimuli that happen to co-occur. Rather, the organism is better seen as an information seeker using logical and perceptual relations among events, along with its own preconceptions, to form a sophisticated representation of the world. (p. 154)

Since the time of Pavlov’s dog, psychologists have garnered research support for the importance of classical conditioning in the development of some aspects of personality. For example, there is evidence that people acquire some particular feelings and attitudes about certain objects and groups of people through classical conditioning (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). For example, one experiment indicated that when research participants were shown words supposedly representing names of groups of people they had not heard of before, they tended to express liking for those group names that were paired with positive words (e.g., “happy”) and dislike for those group names paired with negative words (e.g., “dumb”) (Lohr & Staats, 1973). Classical conditioning would also appear to be involved in the development of certain phobias, which are intense fear responses to particular stimuli (Comer, 1995). Behaviorally oriented therapists sometimes apply principles of classical conditioning to help patients with phobias deal with their fears. If phobias are learned responses, the logic goes, they can be unlearned through the same kinds of processes that established them in the first place.

A second form of learning is instrumental conditioning, termed by Skinner operant conditioning. (The basic principles of operant conditioning are outlined in Table 3.1.) In operant conditioning, behavior is modified by its consequences. Positive consequences for a behavior increase the likelihood of its recurrence, thus reinforcing the association between the behavior and the various stimuli in the environment present at the time the behavior occurred. Negative consequences decrease the likelihood the behavior will recur, thus weakening stimulus–response connections.

Skinner conducted the best-known experiments in operant conditioning. In these laboratory studies, he employed the basic principles of reinforcement and punishment to teach animals, such as rats and pigeons, to perform complex behaviors. Typically, the animal was placed in a tightly controlled laboratory setting and allowed to do whatever it pleased. When, in its random activity, the animal happened to behave approximately as the experimenter wanted it to, the animal was rewarded—often with a small amount of food. The experimenter thus selectively reinforced the desired behavior, and over time the animal exhibited the reinforced behavior with increasing
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td>Positive reinforcer</td>
<td>Any stimulus that, because of its presentation after a response, strengthens (increases the probability of) the response. In effect, the organism is rewarded for the response.</td>
<td>A first grade teacher’s praise for a child’s obedient behavior leads to increased obedience in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative reinforcer</td>
<td>Any stimulus that, because of its removal after a response, strengthens (increases the probability of) the response. In effect, the organism experiences relief (a kind of reward) after the response.</td>
<td>Criticism from one’s mother-in-law about smoking cigarettes ceases when the individual quits smoking. Removal of criticism is reinforcing, serving as a reward for giving up cigarettes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive punishment</td>
<td>Any stimulus that, because of its presentation after a response, weakens (decreases the probability of) the response. Positive punishments are aversive or painful stimuli that reduce the behavior they follow.</td>
<td>A speeding motorist on his way to the Indianapolis 500 is pulled aside by a state patrolman and given a $200 citation. The traffic ticket serves as a punishment, which leads to less speeding by the motorist in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative punishment</td>
<td>Any stimulus that, because of its removal after a response, weakens (decreases the probability of) the response. Negative punishments remove pleasurable stimuli.</td>
<td>A teenager who repeatedly breaks curfew is “grounded” by her parents for a week. A positive reinforcer (going out with her friends) is therefore removed. In subsequent weeks the teenager comes home at the correct time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extinction</td>
<td>A previously reinforced behavior is no longer reinforced; eventually the behavior decreases and drops to baseline levels.</td>
<td>A child no longer says “please” and “thank you” at the dinner table because the parents no longer reinforce the behavior with smiles and compliments.</td>
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<td>Shaping</td>
<td>Getting the organism to emit a complex response by reinforcing successive approximations to the behaviors that make up the complex response. A complex, final response may be shaped by rewarding the organism for the simple component responses that make it up.</td>
<td>A Little League coach teaches a child to hit a ball by praising a number of simple behaviors of batting. Early on, the child is reinforced for standing in the appropriate way, then for level swinging of the bat. Then the child is praised when bat actually strikes ball. Finally, praise is delivered only when the child shows the entire proper batting stance and swing and hits the ball solidly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous reinforcement</td>
<td>Delivering reinforcement after every instance of a particular response. Behavior submitted to a continuous reinforcement schedule is learned rapidly.</td>
<td>Every time a man tells his girlfriend he loves her, she kisses him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial reinforcement</td>
<td>Not reinforcing every instance of the behavior, but rather delivering reinforcement intermittently according to a particular schedule. Interval reinforcement schedules administer reinforcement after a particular period of time. Ratio reinforcement schedules administer reinforcement after a particular number of responses. Behavior submitted to partial reinforcement schedules, either interval or ratio, is more resistant to extinction than behavior that is reinforced continually.</td>
<td>Interval schedule: An office worker receives a paycheck once every 2 weeks. Ratio schedule: A computer salesman receives a bonus after he sells 100 computers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
frequency. The process of reinforcing closer and closer approximations to a desired behavior in an attempt to elicit that behavior is called shaping. Shaping was a central practice in the educational regimen of Walden Two.

Operant conditioning is more than merely a matter of increasing certain behaviors through reinforcement and decreasing others through punishment or lack of reinforcement. Organisms must also learn when and where to perform or refrain from certain behaviors. Quiet activity, therefore, may be reinforced in the classroom but not on the playground. The school child may learn to discriminate between these two environmental settings and to perform the appropriate behaviors for each. Thus, the classroom desks and the teacher may serve as discriminant stimuli for the child: When these stimuli are present in the environment, certain behaviors (reading, writing, being quiet) are likely to be reinforced, while others (running and playing ball) are likely not to be reinforced and may even be punished. Certain response patterns, however, may be reinforced in a great variety of environmental settings. In this case, generalization occurs. For example, the child may be rewarded for telling the truth at home, in school, and on the playground. Ideally, he or she would learn that such behavior is virtually always appropriate and that it should therefore be shown in the presence of a great variety of stimuli.

Concepts of reinforcement and punishment are both intuitively obvious and paradoxical. Most people know that behavior can be shaped through the judicious use of rewards and punishments. Indeed, parents employ basic principles of operant conditioning routinely in daily child care and discipline. However, they employ them wrongly in many cases, Skinner would argue. For instance, many parents rely much too heavily on punishment. Because punishing a response merely alerts the person to what should not be done while providing no example of a constructive alternative, punishment is generally a rather weak form of behavioral control, Skinner maintains. Overt punishment played virtually no role in the educational program in Walden Two.

Parents also routinely underestimate the power of partial reinforcement. In partial reinforcement a particular response is reinforced intermittently, whereas in continuous reinforcement the response is reinforced every time it occurs. When behavior is no longer reinforced, extinction might eventually occur. The behavior decreases in frequency and eventually dies out. However, behavior that has been partially reinforced is much more difficult to extinguish than continuously reinforced behavior. Therefore, a parent who occasionally rewards a child's temper tantrums may unwittingly be establishing a partial reinforcement schedule for the tantrums, making it difficult to eliminate this undesirable behavior. Particularly thorny problems can arise when the same undesirable behavior—such as a temper tantrum, physical aggression, or immature dependence—is occasionally reinforced, occasionally punished, and occasionally ignored.

Reinforcement comes in many different forms. Although experiments with animals routinely employ such basic reinforcers as food and drink, human beings are typically subject to a multitude of positive consequences that subtly shape behavior. Some of the most powerful reinforcers are called conditioned generalized reinforcers—reinforcers that acquire their power because of their association with a variety of other reinforcers. The best example of a conditioned generalized reinforcer is money, which enables one to purchase a great variety of other reinforcers. Many human reinforcers, moreover, are highly social in nature. Arnold Buss (1986) divides social reinforcers into two general classes: stimulation rewards and affective rewards. Stimulation rewards include receiving attention from others; affective rewards include receiving respect, praise, and affection. Affective rewards constitute an emotional response from others; stimulation rewards merely indicate that others are responding in some way to the self.

Although American psychology is no longer dominated by the behaviorist perspective, the radical science of behavior launched by John Watson and dramatized by B. F. Skinner in Walden Two has left a powerful legacy. Some of the strongest features of behaviorism have been incorporated into the mainstream of American psychology, such as its pragmatic and functional spirit and its emphasis on empirical rigor and quantification. Behaviorism has also had a major impact on clinical
practice and has led to a wide variety of practical techniques for changing problematic behaviors, loosely grouped under such labels as “behavior modification,” “behavior therapy,” or “cognitive behavior therapy” (CBT). With respect to personality theory, behaviorism has spawned a number of influential approaches that fall under the name of social-learning theories. These theories retain some of behaviorism’s emphasis on environment and learning, while adopting a broader view of human behavior that incorporates important cognitive variables that cannot be directly observed.

EXPECTANCIES AND VALUES
One of the first psychologists to introduce cognition into behaviorist accounts of human personality was Julian Rotter. Rotter’s eclectic viewpoint broadened the traditional boundaries of behaviorism to account for certain aspects of learning that appeared to be unique to human beings. Rotter (1954, 1972) viewed the person as actively constructing his or her own reality, rather than merely passively responding to it. Most human learning, furthermore, occurs in a social context, as people learn to anticipate what others will do and then act on those anticipations.

A key concept in Rotter’s social-learning theory is expectancy, a subjectively held probability that a particular reinforcement will occur as the outcome of a specific behavior. Over time and across different situations, each of us learns to expect that we will probably be reinforced for certain behaviors in certain situations but not in others. For instance, a college student may expect that working hard in her psychology class will earn her a high grade. On the other hand, she may also expect that working hard at improving her relationship with her boyfriend is not likely to earn her much satisfaction. In this case, the woman holds very different subjective expectancies as to the probability that “hard work” will pay off in two very different situations. Over time, furthermore, people develop generalized expectancies about the nature of reinforcement in the world at large. Rotter classified these generalized expectancies in terms of locus of control. People with an internal locus of control expect reinforcements and rewards to follow their own actions. In other words, they believe that their own behavior controls the consequences that follow—subsequent reinforcing events are contingent on their behavior. By contrast, the person with an external locus of control expects that his or her behavior will not lead to predictable reinforcement. Rather, reinforcements are dispensed by external sources of control, such as powerful others, chance, luck, and so forth. Reinforcing events do not appear to be contingent on his or her behavior.

Many self-report scales have been developed to measure locus of control (Phares, 1978). The most well-known measure is the I-E Scale (Rotter, 1966), which contains 29 items asking people to choose between internal and external options. Rotter’s scale assumes that locus of control is a broad, generalized factor that cuts across many different domains in which expectancies might reveal themselves. In the past 20 years, however, psychologists have developed a number of specialized scales designed to assess beliefs about control in specific domains. These include scales to assess locus of control as it pertains to one’s understanding of marriage (Miller, Lefcourt, Holmes, Ware, & Saleh, 1986), affiliation situations (Lefcourt, Martin, Fick, & Saleh, 1985), intellectual functioning (Lachman, 1986), and health (Wallston & Wallston, 1981).

The I-E Scale has been used in literally thousands of research studies, and the massive literature suggests that locus of control is an extremely important social-cognitive variable in personality. The research suggests that, in general, internal locus of control is associated with many positive outcomes in life, from better academic achievement to better interpersonal relationships. For example, people with an internal locus of control tend to show less compliance and conformity, greater perceived competence and independence, greater efforts to acquire information from the environment, greater knowledge about their own health and sicknesses, more positive attitudes about physical exercise, lower levels of cigarette smoking, lessened susceptibility to hypertension and heart attack, and greater levels of overall psychological adjustment, compared with people who have an external locus of control (Lachman, 1986; Phares, 1978). People with an internal locus of control tend to be healthy...
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and independent information seekers who adapt well to many of life’s challenges. However, internal locus of control is not always an asset. In nonresponsive environments, wherein efforts to exert personal control are repeatedly thwarted, the person with an internal locus of control may encounter many difficulties and report lower levels of satisfaction, compared with people who have an external locus of control (Janoff-Bulman & Brickman, 1980; Rotter, 1975). Believing that reinforcements will come from your own efforts can work against you when you find yourself in an environment that does not value personal agency and individual effort.

Another key concept for Rotter is reinforcement value. Reinforcement value refers to the subjective attractiveness of a particular reinforcement. For the college student I described at the beginning of this section, the reinforcement value of improving her relationship may be much higher than the reinforcement value of obtaining a high grade in her psychology course. Therefore, she may work hard at mending the relationship and may neglect her psychology course, even though her expectancies dictate that she will be more “successful” if she acts in an opposite manner. To predict how a person will behave, the psychologist must take into account that person’s particular combination of expectancy and reinforcement value for a particular goal-directed action in a given situation. In Rotter’s terminology, behavioral potential (BP), that is, the likelihood that a particular person will perform a given behavior, equals the combination of the expectancy (E) and the reinforcement value (RV) that the behavior holds for that person: 

\[ BP = E + RV \]

People are most likely to act to obtain goals for which (a) they expect to be reinforced (high E) and (b) the expected reinforcements are highly valued (high RV). They are least likely to act to obtain goals for which (a) they do not expect to be reinforced (low E) and (b) the reinforcements they might obtain are not especially valued (low RV).

Walter Mischel (1973, 1979) extended Rotter’s social learning conception of personality by incorporating cognitive/social learning/person variables. These are characteristic strategies or styles of approaching situations, and are thought to grow out of the individual’s previous experiences with both situations and rewards. In addition to expectancies and values, Mischel described other cognitive/social learning variables such as competencies, encoding strategies, and self-regulating systems and plans. Competencies refer to what a person knows and can do. Each person approaches a situation with his or her own set of skills or competencies. One person may be particularly adept at showing empathy for other people; another person is extremely skillful in analyzing social problems in a cool and dispassionate manner; and a third person has a gift for making small talk. Each skill is likely to influence what each person in fact does in a particular situation.

Encoding strategies deal with the manner in which people interpret information. Each person sees a particular situation from a different point of view. Imagine, for a moment, that 2 weeks into the semester a professor explodes at his students, chastising them all in class for their poor performance on a written assignment. He tells them that he has been too easy on them for the first 2 weeks and that the class is now going to be a lot tougher. For one student, this professor’s “no more Mr. Nice Guy” lecture is interpreted as a legitimate threat that may motivate the student to work harder (or perhaps to drop the course and find a less stressed-out professor). Another student may interpret the outburst as a carefully orchestrated bluff designed to scare students: underneath it all, the professor didn’t really mean what he said. A third student may conclude that the professor did mean it at the time, but that he was simply having a bad day and, therefore, there is no need to worry. People clearly behave according to their own characteristic ways of interpreting, or “encoding,” information—a theme we return to in some detail in Chapter 8.

Self-regulatory systems and plans refer to the ways we regulate and guide our own behavior through self-imposed goals and standards. Monisha’s plans to attend law school and eventually work for a large law firm in New York City clearly influence the way she approaches situations. Such a plan dictates that she spend a good deal of her time studying to obtain high grades, that she take certain courses as an undergraduate that best prepare her for law school, and that she discuss with her fiancé, who thinks he might like to be a psychology professor, how the two of them hope...
ultimately to merge their careers and their lives. Plans provide our lives with guidelines and agendas. They specify how we might achieve important goals, and they help us determine what is worth doing and what is not worth doing at particular times and in particular situations.

**BANDURA’S SOCIAL-LEARNING THEORY**

The most wide-ranging and influential social-learning theorist today is probably Albert Bandura. As a graduate student at the University of Iowa, Bandura came under the influence of prominent behaviorist Kenneth Spence. He received training as a clinical psychologist at Wichita Guidance Center in Kansas and then assumed a faculty position at Stanford University, where he still teaches today. Bandura provides an especially inclusive social-learning perspective, which greatly expands the domain of learning to encompass observational learning and cognitive processes and which pays close attention to the complex and recursive ways in which person variables, environmental variables, and behavior itself influence one another.

**Observational Learning**

The traditional principles of learning that are derived from behaviorism—such as the laws of reinforcement and punishment—have more to do with performance than with learning per se. Rewards and punishments directly shape what people will do, Bandura argues, but they may not always be implicated in what people learn. Behaviorist theories cannot explain why people learn in the absence of reinforcement and/or the satisfaction of biological needs. Taking issue with the legacy of Epicurus, Bandura contends that certain learning occurs outside the bounds of pleasure and pain. We do not need to be rewarded in order to learn. Rather, human beings learn a great deal simply by watching other people behave, reading about what other people do, and generally observing the world. This deceptively simple process is called *observational learning*. People routinely learn by observing, and they often perform (behave) by imitating what they see.

Figure 3.2 presents Bandura’s (1971, 1977) conceptual scheme for observational learning and imitation. Bandura views the process as four sequential component steps through which a person observes another person’s behavior (the model) and eventually imitates what the model does. Step 1 specifies the attentional processes involved in observing the model. Certain features of the model may increase the likelihood that the person will notice or pay attention to what the model is doing. For instance, a highly distinctive model, or one who is especially attractive, familiar, or even strange, may capture the observer’s attention better than a less distinctive model. Conversely, attentional processes can also refer to characteristics of the observer. A person must have the capacity to observe the model. (A blind person cannot imitate what he or she cannot see, but can rely on other sensory modalities in observational learning.) A person must also be motivated to observe. It may not matter how distinctive or attractive a particular model is, for if the observer is too tired to notice the model, no observational learning will occur.

The second step in observational learning is retention processes. The person must be able to encode, remember, and make sense of what he or she observes if learning is to occur. However much you present addition and subtraction flashcards to a newborn infant, the infant will not learn basic arithmetic, because newborns cannot encode this kind of symbolic information.

Bandura’s third step—motor reproduction processes—concerns the capabilities of performing what is observed and the availability of such performance in the observer’s repertoire of behavior. My brother and I spent hours—years, in fact—of our youth carefully observing Ernie Banks hit baseballs for the Chicago Cubs. In his glorious career, Ernie hit 512 home runs, and I think we saw most of them on TV. My brother and I obsessively and repeatedly attended to the model (Bandura’s...
FIGURE 3.2  
FOUR STEPS OF OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING

The person must proceed through attentional, retention, motor reproduction, and motivational processes in order for observational learning to produce successful imitation.


Step 1, and both of us can remember Banks’ beautiful swing with perfect clarity (Step 2). Yet between the two of us, we hit only two home runs in our many years of playing Little League.

Finally, Step 4 in Bandura’s scheme is motivational processes. An observer must want to imitate behavior if imitation is to occur. It is at this point in Bandura’s scheme that rewards and punishments play their strongest roles. Assuming the person has attended to the model’s behavior, has encoded the behavior, and is capable of reproducing the behavior, the person is now most likely to imitate the model if reinforced for doing so. Reinforcement in this case might come directly from the external environment, from the individual observer him- or herself (what is called “self-reinforcement”), or by seeing or imagining someone else being reinforced for the behavior (“vicarious reinforcement”).

Observational learning is everywhere in your life. Try to imagine some important aspect of the way you characteristically behave that has not been influenced in some way or another by your observations of other people. It is difficult to do so. Researchers have displayed the power of observational learning through studies of language development, impulse control, friendship, competition and cooperation, persuasion, and altruism. An especially influential line of research has examined the relation between observation of violence and aggressive behavior (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks, 2003; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961; Berkowitz & Powers, 1978; Eron, 1982, 1987; Geen, 1997; Huesmann & Miller, 1994). Researchers have paid...
special attention to violence in the media, especially violent television shows, movies, and song lyrics. The take-home message from these studies is twofold: First, people can learn to act in an aggressive manner by imitating aggressive models of many kinds; second, the more a person observes violence, the greater the likelihood that he or she will become an especially aggressive person, displaying high levels of cruel and destructive behavior toward others. At the same time, there is also evidence to suggest that people who hold aggressive tendencies in the first place tend to expose themselves to more violent media displays. In the case of television violence, therefore, individuals who are more aggressive to begin with tend to watch more television violence, which in turn increases their characteristic aggressiveness, and so on. In other words, media violence and aggression may be related to each other in a reciprocal or circular manner. Each serves as the cause and effect of the other.

Bandura’s views on observational learning underscore the profoundly social quality of human learning and performance. Observational learning occurs within a particular interpersonal context. Observer and model are involved in a complex personal relationship, the nature of which can profoundly influence how learning occurs and the extent to which imitation will be shown. Empirical literature on imitation in children, for instance, shows that a number of characteristics of the model and of the relationship between the model and the child may promote or hinder imitation. In general, children are more likely to imitate models of their own sex (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961), models who are perceived as powerful (Bandura et al., 1963), and models whose behavior is observed to be reinforced by others (Bandura, 1965; Parke & Walters, 1967).

**Self-Efficacy**

A central concept in Bandura’s social-learning theory is **self-efficacy** (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is a person’s belief that he or she can successfully carry out “courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements” (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, p. 587). In other words, self-efficacy is our belief in our own behavioral competence in a particular situation. High self-efficacy is reflected in a strong belief that I can perform a particular behavior; low self-efficacy is reflected in the belief that I cannot perform the behavior (Table 3.2).

Self-efficacy should be distinguished from outcome expectancies, which refer to a person’s belief about what the outcome of a particular action is likely to be in a given situation. A positive outcome expectancy means that I believe that a behavior will produce a desired result; a negative outcome expectancy means that I suspect the behavior will not produce a desired result. It is theoretically possible, therefore, that I might have a high self-efficacy expectation in a given situation

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**TABLE 3.2 FOUR SOURCES OF SELF-EFFICACY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Accomplishments</th>
<th>Vicarious Experience</th>
<th>Verbal Persuasion</th>
<th>Emotional Arousal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past experiences of success and failure in attempts to accomplish goals are the most important regulators of self-efficacy.</td>
<td>Witnessing other people’s successes and failures provides one with a basis of comparison by which to estimate one’s own personal competence in similar situations.</td>
<td>Being told by others that one can or cannot master a task may also increase or decrease self-efficacy, though the effect of such persuasion is usually weak.</td>
<td>A person’s feelings of self-efficacy are influenced by the degree and quality of emotional arousal he or she feels in a given performance situation. The degree of anxiety felt provides important information about the perceived degree of difficulty, stress, and persistence that a task represents. Very high levels of anxiety signal to the person that he or she is not feeling very masterful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but a low outcome expectancy. For example, I might be certain that I can explain logically and forcefully to my good friend why I think that he should not divorce his wife (high self-efficacy), but I might also be sure that any explanation of this sort will nonetheless do very little good (low outcome expectancy).

Research has suggested that self-efficacy judgments help determine whether we undertake particular goal-directed activities, the amount of effort we put into them, and the length of time we persist in striving for goals in particular situations. Manning and Wright (1983) conducted a representative empirical study of the relation between self-efficacy judgments and behavior. These researchers studied 52 pregnant women who were attending childbirth classes designed to teach them how to master the pain of labor and delivery without medication. The women completed self-efficacy questionnaires before and during labor. The questionnaires asked them to assess how well they thought they would be able to handle the pain of childbirth without medication. Outcome expectancy was also assessed before and during labor through a questionnaire that asked the women to rate the extent to which they believed that the pain-control techniques they learned in their childbirth classes were generally effective in enabling a woman to go through labor and delivery without medication. After their babies were born, the women were interviewed to assess the timing and amount of medication used in labor and delivery. The results of the study showed that women who manifested high self-efficacy judgments were ultimately able to cope with pain better during labor and delivery and to resist the use of medication, compared with women scoring low in self-efficacy.

The development of self-efficacy is a key mechanism whereby people are able to exercise control over threatening events. Bandura conceives of "threat" as a "relational property concerning the match between perceived coping capabilities and potentially hurtful aspects of the environment" (Ozer & Bandura, 1990, p. 473). A person experiences a situation as threatening when he or she perceives that the personal resources at hand are not adequate to meet the strong demands of the environment. In these situations, the person feels highly anxious and is likely to experience a flood of negative thoughts about the extreme hazards of the situation and his or her personal inadequacies in dealing with the hazards. Heightened self-efficacy reduces anxiety and moves the person's thinking processes in the direction of effective interactions with the environment. In this way, self-efficacy exerts "empowering effects" (Ozer & Bandura, 1990).

Research on self-efficacy has highlighted its clinical applications and possible health benefits. Bandura and his colleagues have designed intervention strategies for promoting self-efficacy among people facing various kinds of environmental threats. For example, Ozer and Bandura (1990) documented increases in self-efficacy among women who participated in a program in which they mastered the physical skills to defend themselves successfully against unarmed sexual assaults. The "mastery modeling" program enhanced self-efficacy, decreased perceived vulnerability to assault, and reduced the incidence of intrusive negative thinking and anxiety arousal in encounters with men.

Another group of researchers focusing on self-efficacy implemented a program to reduce anxiety about snakes among 20 individuals whose snake phobias were so severe that they were unable to engage in camping, hiking, gardening, swimming in lakes, or traveling to rustic areas (Wiedenfeld et al., 1990).
In this study, increases in self-efficacy were associated with enhanced functioning of the body’s immunological system, as measured by the concentration of lymphocytes and “helper” and “suppressor” T cells in the blood. When the subjects participated in the “guided mastery” program, which involved gradual mastery of progressively more threatening forms of interactions with snakes, they initially experienced a great deal of anxiety. But this stress activated in the process of gaining coping mastery, and thus increasing self-efficacy, proved to be immuno-enhancing rather than immuno-suppressing. In other words, whereas stress often weakens the body’s powers to fight off illness and disease, stress experienced in the process of building up mastery and self-efficacy may actually strengthen the body’s immune system. Put simply, heightened immune system functioning, and thus better health, is associated with high levels of self-efficacy, but the benefits of self-efficacy training begin to show up even before self-efficacy has had a chance to improve. The sometimes stressful process of building up one’s self-efficacy in the face of threat may enhance the body’s defenses. This kind of stress—stress in the service of promoting self-efficacy—is a good kind of stress to have.

The Social Ecology of Human Behavior

The behaviorists and social-learning theorists have traditionally accounted for human behavior in terms of the environment’s influence upon the person. We learn to behave as we do through interaction with the world around us. The world “teaches” us to act in particular ways. Through classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning, we accumulate a repertoire of behaviors that more or less reflect the learning history we have each experienced. Whether we are learning to act in destructive and aggressive ways or in accord with society’s most exalted standards of socialization, we are learning what to do, how to do it, when to do it, why we do it, and who we are according to the ways in which our environments are set up—according to the rewards and punishments we experience, the contingencies of reinforcement we encounter in different situations, the associations we form as a result of our perceptions of environmental stimuli, the models we imitate, and the lessons we learn from our parents, teachers, peers, and so on. The behaviorists and the social-learning theorists underscore the extent to which each of us is a reflection of our environment—how our behavior and indeed our very lives sit within and are defined by the environment around us.

But what is the nature of that environment? What are those environmental contexts that influence our behavior and shape who we are? At first glance, these questions seem simple. We might say that at any given moment our “environment” is the situation that we find ourselves in. As I am writing this paragraph, I am sitting in my office at home, on the third floor of an old house in a suburb of Chicago. It is early morning—the best time for me to get writing done. I can hear my wife downstairs; it sounds as if she is about to get in the shower. My younger daughter is still sleeping, but she is due to get up soon so that she can make it to her summer job on time. These things are all part of my current situation. As you read this chapter, you may be sitting in your dormitory room or in the library. You may be studying with a friend. It may be late at night, and you may be facing an examination in the morning. These factors may all be part of your current situation.

But as we think more about our respective situations—mine and yours—we soon realize that each of us is currently acting within and with respect to a number of different situations or contexts that define our respective environments. For me at this moment, it is June 13, 2007, and I have promised my publisher that I will finish revising this textbook by the end of the summer—that is, in about 3 months. Quite frankly, I don’t think I am going to make it. This is all part of my current situation, as is the fact that I am 53 years old, married with two children, a white male, was raised in the Baptist church, and went to college at Valparaiso University in the early 1970s. I don’t know you, but I am sure that you can spell out similar information about your life—about what is going
**FEATURE 3.A**

**How Should Parents Raise Their Children?**

Because all of us have been children and many of us will have children, we tend to formulate our own pet theories about how parents should raise them—how to enforce rules and carry out discipline, how and when to show affection, how to deal with conflicts between children, and what mistakes not to make. As generally optimistic Americans in the great empiricist tradition of John Locke, we tend to hold highly environmentalistic views of child development: We sincerely believe that what we do to, and for, our children really matters, that patterns of childrearing actually make a difference in the child’s ultimate adjustment to the world. Like the behaviorists and social-learning theorists, we believe that parents create environments for their children within which crucial learning takes place and personalities are formed. Therefore, we read with great interest the many child-rearing manuals written by child psychologists, pediatricians, and others whose expertise we consider to be even greater than our own.

Over the past 60 years, child psychologists and other researchers have amassed a huge volume of literature on patterns of childrearing and their effects on personality development. It is impossible to summarize this body of study with any hope of being accurate, comprehensive, and detailed—even textbooks in developmental psychology only skim the surface. Nonetheless, there are a few extremely general conclusions that we can draw from this body with some degree of assurance.

One general conclusion is that most of the informed advice offered by experts in childrearing—whether or not such advice is based on scientific evidence—reflects a cultural ideal about what it means to be a good (healthy, happy) child and a good (healthy, happy) adult. This cultural ideal in the United States and in a number of other Western industrialized nations emphasizes individualism, freedom, and the autonomous self. To be healthy, happy, and well adjusted, we believe, the child and the adult should be self-sufficient and able to cope with challenges on their own. Thus, we idealize such personality traits as “competence,” “mastery,” and “independence,” and we seek to nurture such characteristics in our children.

Keeping in mind, therefore, our very limited scientific understanding of childrearing and our cultural bias toward individualism, we can draw a second general conclusion about childrearing and personality: A broad and coherent collection of literature on family patterns points to four basic styles of parenting: the authoritative-reciprocal, authoritarian, indulgent–permissive, and neglecting styles. The four types can be organized according to the two basic dimensions of “demanding/unde manding” and “accepting/rejecting” (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Figure 3.A.1 illustrates the four types and the two dimensions. A consistent body of research favors the authoritative-reciprocal pattern as the style most likely to promote competence and mastery in children.

The authoritative-reciprocal pattern of childrearing is one in which “children are required to be responsible to parental demands, and parents accept a reciprocal responsibility to be as responsive as possible to their children’s reasonable demands and points of view” (Maccoby & Martin, 1983, p. 46). In the authoritative-reciprocal pattern, parents establish clear standards for appropriate behavior in the family, but they are open to and accepting of the points of views of the children. Thus, parents are both highly controlling and highly responsive in their relations with their children. A number of studies have shown that the authoritative-reciprocal pattern of childrearing is positively associated, though at generally moderate statistical levels, with children’s independence and autonomy in both cognitive and social realms, with ability to control aggression, with social responsibility, and with self-esteem (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995). The authoritarian pattern of childrearing, on the other hand, is high on demands but low on responsiveness. Authoritarian parents may be autocratic and rigid. Strict rules are enforced as if they were divine edicts; the reasons behind rules are rarely explained and virtually never discussed. These parents strongly value obedience and discourage spontaneous give-and-take between children and their elders. Research has shown that children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence with their peers; they are somewhat withdrawn and lacking in spontaneity; and they tend to show relatively low levels of self-esteem. Some studies also suggest that authoritarian styles may retard the development of an internalized conscience in children.

(Continues)
FIGURE 3.A.1 A TWO DIMENSIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF PARENTING PATTERNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Accepting (responsive, child-centered)</th>
<th>Rejecting (unresponsive, parent-centered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authoritative—reciprocal</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indulgent—permissive</td>
<td>Neglecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demanding (controlling)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undemanding (low in control attempts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Children of authoritarian parents are more likely to make moral decisions based on what external authorities tell them to do; other children may rely more on internalized standards.

The indulgent-permissive parenting style is the opposite of the authoritarian style. In this case, parents fail to set high standards for behavior but tend to be highly responsive to the demands of children. Indulgent parents take a tolerant and accepting attitude toward the child’s impulses, including sexual and aggressive impulses. They use little punishment and avoid, whenever possible, asserting authority or imposing control and restrictions, making few demands for mature behavior. Children raised in these highly egalitarian and freewheeling families tend to be relatively impulsive, aggressive, and lacking in independence or the ability to take responsibility for their behaviors. While certain benefits of highly permissive parenting have also been identified, the indulgent-permissive pattern appears “on the whole to have more negative than positive effects” (Maccoby & Martin, 1983, pp. 45–46).

Finally, the most seriously flawed parenting style is the neglecting and uninvolved pattern shown by parents who are unresponsive to their children and who place few demands on them. The neglecting pattern comes in different forms, ranging from passive neglect and emotional indifference to active child abuse. Children growing up in these families may show a variety of negative characteristics—from low self-esteem to poor impulse control to high levels of aggression.

on in your life now, where you came from, and vital statistics depicting your own demographic profile. All of this is, in a sense, part of the context within which you are currently situated. All of this defines your environment.

When we study the “environment” in the biological sciences, we learn to think about the complex “ecology” of the natural world. Making up that ecology are a number of interrelated environmental systems that define the natural world at a given place and time. In a similar way, we can think about the environments that situate human behavior in terms of a social ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Moen, Elder, & Luscher, 1995). The social ecology consists of the many different environmental contexts that influence a person’s behavior and shape his or her life. The social ecology includes those immediate and close-in contexts such as the particular social situation within which one finds oneself at a given point in time. Personality psychologists who have been strongly influenced by behaviorism and social-learning theories are especially interested...
in the immediate situational factors that shape behavior at a given time and in a given place. Social situations make up the microcontexts of social ecology—the immediate environmental influences for behavior.

Beyond these immediate situations, however, are larger and more distal contexts for behavior, such as our families, neighborhoods, schools, and churches. Take the family, for instance. A family can be a context for behavior in at least two different ways. In the first sense, a person is likely to act in different ways when he or she is in the presence of his or her family than at other times. Psychologists who study family systems speak of how each member of the family regularly assumes a particular role in that family and displays behavior that is consistent for that role (e.g., Minuchin, 1974). In my family of origin, I am typically a kind of authority figure who is supposed to know all the answers and provide guidance for my brother, sister, and mother. (In other contexts, however, I am much less likely to assume this role.) In a second sense, a family is a context in that patterns of behavior and values learned in the family may sometimes generalize to other parts of a person’s life. The fact that I am currently writing this chapter rather than sleeping in on this beautiful morning is perhaps partly due to how I learned to be a conscientious student and hard worker growing up in my family. As such, the legacy of my family is part of my current environment. You can develop similar ideas for your own life with respect to your family, the neighborhood you grew up in, and perhaps the schools and churches of which you have been a member in the past.

The most encompassing and distal contexts for behavior are what we will call macrocontexts, and these include social class, gender, race, culture, and the historical context within which we live. At any given time, a person’s life is situated within a hierarchy of contexts, ranging from the microcontext of the immediate social situation to the macrocontexts of class, culture, and history. A full understanding of behavior and of the person who displays any given behavior requires our situating that behavior and that person’s life in a number of overlapping contexts, ranging from the micro to the macro. Therefore, defining the environment for our behavior is a very ambitious task, for that environment is many different things at many different levels, all operating at the same time. Let us, then, briefly consider some aspects of the social ecology of human behavior, beginning with immediate social “situations” and moving toward the macrocontexts of class, culture, and history.

MICROCONTEXTS: THE SOCIAL SITUATION

What is a situation? Many years ago, Rudolph Moos (1973, 1974, 1976) provided a useful starting point for considering this surprisingly difficult question. Moos formulated a six-part taxonomy of human environments, identifying the various features that can be taken into consideration in conceptualizing a particular situation. The six categories of human environments identified by Moos are (1) dimensions of the physical ecology, (2) behavior settings or episodes, (3) organizational structure, (4) characteristics of persons in the situation, (5) organizational climate, and (6) functional and reinforcement properties. Table 3.3 summarizes the scheme and provides examples.

Barbara Krahe (1992) offered an alternative outline that arranges situational characteristics into a nested hierarchy. At the lowest level of the hierarchy are the situational stimuli—single objects or acts inherent in a situation that are meaningful in their own right. For example, in the situation “taking an examination at the end of the term,” situational stimuli would include a specific array of tables and chairs, pens and paper, fellow students sitting in the room, and so on. At the second level, we may view situational events or episodes. In the examination example, these might include “being told to begin the exam” and “answering the essay questions at the end of the exam.” At the third level, events combine into an overall picture, or total situation. What is characteristic of the total situation is its unique occurrence in time and space. The examination might be the first one a student takes in her college career, or, say, the only examination she has ever taken in a psychology course. At the fourth level, situations are defined in generalized terms, such as “exams
in general." While each exam may be unique, most may share certain features defining the essence of "examness." Finally, at the fifth and most encompassing level, we may talk about life situations.

According to Krahe, these are "the totality of social and physical factors which affect the person and are affected by his or her actions at a certain stage of development" (p. 196). The life situation pertaining to our example of the college examination might be defined as "being an undergraduate in her first year at college," encompassing all the particular circumstances associated with this point in life.

You might think that since situations are "out there" in the environment, we might easily classify them in terms of objective properties that are outside the self-properties such as air temperature, room size, and number of people present. When psychologists have asked people to classify social situations, however, they have found that people do not typically focus on these kinds of objective external qualities. Instead, people tend to perceive situations in terms of their own subjective criteria, classifying environments in terms of what those environments can make possible for them. People tend to perceive situations in psychological rather than physical terms (Krahe, 1992). As such, situations reside as much in the minds of the observers as in the external environment itself. Writes Ball (1972), "the definition of the situation may be conceived as the sum of all recognized information, from the point of view of the actor, which is relevant to his locating himself and others, so that he can engage in self-determined lines of action and interaction" (p. 63).

People often characterize particular situations in terms of their psychological affordances—what opportunities for behavior and experience the situations afford or offer for the participant (Dworkin & Goldfinger, 1985). For example, Magnusson (1971) asked persons to evaluate 36 heterogeneous situations and found that the key dimensions upon which the situations could be ordered included how rewarding the situation was, the extent to which the situation induced negative feelings, how passive a person might be in the situation, the amount of social interaction afforded in the situation, and level of activity. Forgas (1978) identified four dimensions that organize 15 different kinds of interpersonal environments: the amount of anxiety the situation elicits, the extent to which a person feels involved in the situation, overall goodness versus badness of the situation, and the extent to which the situation involves accomplishing tasks versus socioemotional interaction. Other studies have arrived at different schemes. There are a dauntingly large number of dimensions upon which immediate situations can be compared and contrasted and little agreement about which dimensions are the most important.

If situations are best defined in terms of people’s subjective psychological affordances, then it becomes extremely difficult to separate what’s "really" in the situation from what’s "really" in the person. Furthermore, if a person’s personality shapes his or her perceptions, then it would seem to

### Table 3.3  Six General Categories of Human Environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Climate, geography, type of building one lives in, physical characteristics of the setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior settings</td>
<td>Church, football game, kitchen, classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>Population density in an organization, degree of hierarchic structure, student-teacher ratio in a school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of inhabitants</td>
<td>Age, sex, abilities, status, talents, etc., of people in the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational climate</td>
<td>Social morale, nature and intensity of personal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional properties</td>
<td>Reinforcement consequences for particular behaviors in the situation, such as whether aggressive acts are rewarded or encouraged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In their efforts to analyze the many different kinds of social contexts that influence behavior, personality psychologists sometimes focus on situational prototypes, which are typical kinds of situations in which people often find themselves and within which people typically follow a standard set of expectations for behavior. A family dinner at a restaurant is one example of a situational prototype in middle-class American society.

SOURCE: Bananastock/Jupiter Images Corp

be equally difficult to separate internal personality variables from external situations, for personality characteristics may determine how a person interprets the environment. In support of this idea, Forgas (1983) found that introverted people tended to organize information about situations in terms of a self-confidence dimension. Extraverts, by contrast, categorized situations in terms of how pleasant the situations were and how strongly they afforded interpersonal involvement. Put simply, introverts and extroverts are usually in different situations (in terms of their subjective perceptions), even when it appears from the outside that they are in the same situations.

Whether introvert or extravert, however, the average person appears to possess a “vast and varied expertise about situations” that can be tapped and translated into behavioral guidelines (Cantor, Mischel, & Schwartz, 1982, p. 70). According to one approach to the understanding of situations, people may routinely formulate elaborate personal taxonomies specifying situational prototypes (Cantor et al., 1982; Schutte, Kenrick, & Sadalla, 1985). A situational prototype is an abstract set of features about a given class of situations. It serves as a working model for the person, telling him or her what to expect and how to behave in situations of a particular type. A situational prototype may include information about the physical setting, the physical features of the people involved, and common behaviors exhibited by the people in the situation.

For example, the situation of “party” may suggest a large number of features typically associated with parties. Perhaps the prototypical party generally occurs in the evening and involves a large number of people congregating in a circumscribed space, informal dress, eating and drinking, lively conversation, laughing, music and dancing, and lots of noise. Of course, parties vary, and each party contains its own constellation of defining features. Nonetheless, we extract from our experience a core of “partyness” that represents for each of us the “best example” or “ideal case” for defining the situation we call “party.” Subsequently, each party we encounter may be evaluated in terms of this implicit categorization. A large dance party at a sorority house may, therefore, appear to us to be a highly prototypical party, embodying many of the features that parties tend to have in common. On the other hand, a poetry-reading party at the home of a college English professor may seem less prototypical, farther away from what we typically think of when we think of the party situation.

MACROCONTEXTS: SOCIAL STRUCTURE

There are no perfectly egalitarian human societies on earth. In all societies and in virtually all human groups, power and resources are unevenly distributed. We can debate why this is so and whether or not it has always been so, but it is surely true today that some people have more access to those resources most valued in society than do others. In American society, those resources include especially money and education, each of which can directly or indirectly confer prestige, status, and power. The unequal distribution of resources creates complex relationships among members of society and exerts pervasive influences on how people develop over time, what they strive for, and how they understand themselves and the world. The term social structure, therefore, refers to those conditions of society that differentiate people along the lines of power and resources. Social structure provides an encompassing macrocontext for human behavior (Pettigrew, 1997). The impact of this macrocontext on personality is evident when we look at the relation between personality and social class.

In a classic review of social stratification research in different countries, Inkeles (1960) found that people in higher socioeconomic classes (those with higher-paying, professional jobs and with
higher levels of education) showed different patterns of attitudes and behavior than people from lower classes. For example, Inkeles found that individuals in higher classes tended to report higher job satisfaction compared with individuals in lower social classes. Social class was also associated with attitudes about one’s job and about human nature. Individuals from higher social classes tended to express greater concern that their job be interesting and fulfilling rather than merely a source of steady income, and they tended to believe in the possibility of changing human nature for the better. By contrast, lower-class individuals valued security first and foremost in their work and tended to be much more fatalistic and pessimistic about human nature.

Over the past 35 years, Melvin Kohn and his colleagues have undertaken a series of influential studies examining social structure and personality (Kohn, 1969; Kohn, Naoi, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Slomczynski, 1990; Kohn & Schoolder, 1969, 1973). Kohn argues that the impact of social class on personality can be seen both in the demands of the workplace and the dynamics of the family. Professional, higher-status occupations place significant cognitive demands upon workers. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, and other white-collar professionals are challenged to exercise initiative and independent judgment in their work to a greater extent than are blue-collar factory employees and other workers in lower-status jobs. Higher-status employees, therefore, enjoy and cultivate greater levels of self-direction at work. By contrast, lower-status employees find fewer cognitive challenges in their work, are given fewer opportunities to exercise initiative, and must typically obey the orders of their superiors. Consequently, lower-status employees are socialized to value obedience to authority. Kohn et al. (1990) found that American, Japanese, and Polish men from higher social classes all had a more self-directed orientation, encompassing higher internal control and higher trust, compared with men of lower social classes. Higher social class was also associated with lower conformity, lower anxiety, and greater intellectual flexibility.

What is especially fascinating about the distinction between higher-class self-direction and lower-class obedience to authority is that it tends to generalize to the family realm as well. Kohn (1969) showed that in both the United States and Italy, middle-class parents more often stressed intent and self-direction while lower- and working-class parents more often stressed obedience to authority in the family. Children whose parents enjoy professional, high-status jobs, therefore, tend to be socialized in such a way as to encourage self-direction, which itself becomes a valuable asset for those children when they grow up and pursue professional positions themselves. By contrast, children whose parents work in lower-status occupations tend to be socialized toward obedience to authority. While such a socialization pattern fits the demands of lower-class work and family life, it may not prepare these children well for their later efforts to move up into higher-status occupations.

Developmental psychologist Jerome Kagan emphasizes how lower- and working-class families value security first and foremost and seek to instill in their children those qualities that have historically reinforced stability and stasis in the occupational world. Kagan (1984) writes:

Parents who have not attended college, who see themselves and their children as part of the working class, and who live with chronic financial insecurity, often attribute their personal anger to economic stress, which they view as being not completely under their control. These families assign a high priority to job security, and a central goal in socializing their child is to ensure that he or she will develop the qualities that guarantee a secure job. Two key qualities are acceptance by peers and the ability to resist being exploited by those with more power. (p. 249)

In contrast, middle-class families are likely to be better educated and better off financially. The parents are likely to have professional positions, and the children are likely to be socialized within a much different macrosystem of values, beliefs, and worldviews:

College-educated parents, especially those with professional vocations, regard freedom of choice, intellectual challenge, and the status of one’s work as more important than job security. They believe that anxiety over peer rejection or disapproval obstructs the attainment of these goals, and they try to inoculate their youngsters against the anxiety that accompanies peer rejection, while emphasizing autonomous choice and competition. (Kagan, 1984, p. 249)
Studies carried out in the United States and in England have shown that middle-class adolescents and adults use more complex and less stereotyped language than do lower-class people, even when their intelligence test scores are similar (Hess & Shipman, 1965). Bernstein (1970) has argued that lower-class parents adopt a restricted linguistic code in communicating with their children, which means that they limit their verbal exchanges to direct expressions of concrete statements and commands. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, tend to use an elaborated linguistic code consisting of complex syntax, conditional statements, and the expression of abstract ideas. Critical of this characterization, Labov (1972) argues that middle-class psychologists are not sensitive to the nuance and range of meaning in lower-class speech. Both Bernstein and Labov would agree, however, that language reflects context, and that differences in verbal behavior between lower- and middle-class people reflect different systems for making meaning in the world and thus different contexts within which behavior can be understood.

While psychologists have long been interested in the relation between social class and personality dispositions, they have only recently begun to examine in depth the effects of extreme poverty on the development of personality and well-being. Children in extremely poor families—in both "developed" and "third world" countries—confront widespread environmental disadvantages, many of which are difficult to fathom from the standpoint of the comfortable middle class (Evans, 2004). Compared to more economically advantaged children, poor children are exposed to more family turmoil, violence, separation from their families, instability, and chaotic households. They experience less social support from their parents, are read to less frequently, have less access to books and computers, and watch substantially more TV. Low-income parents are less involved in their children’s school activities. In addition, the air and water that poor children consume are more polluted, their homes are noisier and more crowded, their neighborhoods are more dangerous and deteriorated, their daycare centers are inferior, and they benefit from fewer municipal services. Poverty is a macrocontext of awesome and tragic proportions. Its effects on personality are likely to be both broad and subtle.

**GENDER AS A MACROCONTEXT**

If social structure refers to those conditions of society that differentiate people along the line of resources and power, then one of the great structural divides in human life is gender. Gender encompasses all those social and personal characteristics, constructions, and roles typically associated with one or another of the two biological sexes in human life. As a product of social learning, we come to expect that women and men will differ from each other in a number of important ways. In the extreme, we may form gender role stereotypes, which are relatively inflexible ideas about how males and females do and should act. For example, we may expect that, overall, men should be relatively more assertive and aggressive than women, while women should be more nurturing, affectionate, and gentle (Spence, 1985). Social psychologists have documented the pervasiveness of gender role stereotypes in American society, as well as in other societies, and have shown how such stereotyping is at the root of sexism and prejudice.

Like social class, gender has profound implications for power and prestige. In many if not most societies (including contemporary American society), men generally have more access to social and economic power than do women. Men control more public resources, make more decisions about the society as a whole, and enjoy more freedom and autonomy. While moves toward equality have accelerated in the past 30 years, American men (especially white men) still occupy most of the highest positions of societal power and prestige. For example, they vastly outnumber women at the levels of top corporate executives and government leaders, and they still make considerably more money than do women, even when their professional positions are roughly comparable. Within the family, men typically occupy the most dominant roles; in many American families women and children are expected to defer to the man of the house when it comes to major life decisions, especially those
involve how the money should be spent. On a more brutal and insidious level, men harass, rape, and kill women to a much greater extent than the other way around. While such behavior may spring as much from frustration and rage as it does from social dominance, physical aggression constitutes yet another mechanism through which males can exert power and control over females.

Gender role stereotypes typically reinforce the power differential between men and women. Stereotypically masculine attributions such as "dominant," "assertive," and "controlling" reinforce the idea that men have the power in society, whereas stereotypically feminine attributions of "submissive," "nurturing," and "gentle" suggest that women occupy subservient positions. From an early age, children learn that such characteristics are differentially applicable to human beings as a function of biological sex. Little girls may be rewarded for cooperative and friendly play, while little boys may receive reinforcement for rambunctious outbursts (instrumental conditioning). Both little girls and boys see that women occupy the primary caregiving roles in society, while men tend to be both the breadwinners and the action heroes (observational learning). Gender socialization is pervasive in contemporary American society—in ways both obvious and subtle, well meaning and invidious. Through rewards, punishments, and observational learning, males and females become intimately familiar with society's expectations as to gender-appropriate behavior (Brody, 1999).

Of course, not everybody follows the stereotypical path. But virtually everybody is aware of the expectations, even as those expectations continue to change and as many men and women work hard to change them.

Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (1991, 1999) argue that socialization into gender roles accounts for most of the general sex differences that are observed in human social behavior. Reviews of the empirical literature indicate, for example, that the sexes typically differ in a variety of social behaviors, including aggression, helping, nonverbal behavior, and interactions in groups (Eagly, 1987). From an early age onward, males tend to be more aggressive than females (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), a difference that becomes especially apparent by the teenage years, when boys exhibit markedly higher levels of antisocial activity, including violent crime. On the flip side of the coin, men also exhibit higher levels of altruistic, helping behavior in short-term interactions with strangers (e.g., when a stranger is in distress; Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Women, however, show considerably higher levels of daily helping behavior, as in acts of caring for and tending to the needs of others, primarily in close or long-term relationships. In a fascinating study of heroism and gender, Becker and Eagly (2004) showed that men are overrepresented among winners of the Carnegie medal for outstanding bravery in life-threatening situations but that women tend to show equal or higher levels of heroism under less dangerous conditions as expressed in living kidney donations and volunteering for organizations such as the Peace Corps and Doctors for the World.

Compared with men, women tend to be more sensitive to nonverbal cues in social interaction. In social situations, women smile and laugh more than do men, use their faces and bodies more expressively, show more involvement with others' behavior, touch other people more, and approach them more closely (Hall, 1984; Stier & Hall, 1984). Women also report greater empathy for others' emotional experiences (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). These sex differences are generally consistent with the widespread belief in our society that women are more socially skilled, emotionally sensitive, and expressive than men, as well as more concerned with personal relationships. In group discussions, women, more than men, act friendly and agree with other group members (Anderson & Blanchard, 1982). In contrast, men, more than women, contribute behaviors that are strictly oriented to accomplishing the task that the group was assigned. In leadership roles, women adopt a more democratic and participatory style than men; men tend to lead in a more authoritarian manner (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Although the sex differences that have been documented for social behavior are not always large in magnitude, they tend to be consistent with society's expectations about gender roles. On a most general level, these expectations can be summarized in terms of the constructs of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966). Agency refers to the tendency of an individual to assert the self
in a powerful and expansive manner and is associated with such characteristics as being aggressive, independent, masterful, and instrumentally competent. Communion refers to the tendency of an individual to merge with other individuals and is associated with such characteristics as being friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive. In a nutshell, gender roles suggest that men should be slightly more agentic and women slightly more communal. Empirical research into social behavior provides modest support for these expectations. In other words, men and women do seem to behave in accord with gender role expectations, though the tendencies are moderate. Eagly and Wood (1991) maintain that sex differences in agentic and communal qualities are mainly the result of social learning over the lifespan. Socialization practices and cultural norms reflect the uneven distribution of women and men into different societal roles. Of particular importance in this regard is the traditional assignment of women to the roles of childrearing and domestic work as well as the tendency for men and women to carry out different types of paid employment in a largely sex-segregated economy.

Now, there are at least two very different ways to interpret the empirical literature on sex differences in social behavior and their relation to gender roles and gender socialization. The more upbeat and innocent interpretation is to say that gender roles reflect those differences between men and women that have arisen through a beneficent blending of nature and choice. One variation on this line of argument purports that because women are biologically fit to bear children and because men tend on the average to be somewhat larger and stronger than women, women and men have gravitated toward different but equally valuable (and valued) roles in society. Separate but equal, in a sense. A second, less sanguine interpretation emphasizes hegemony, or the expression of power by one group over another. According to this second line of thinking, gender roles are the result of unequal power between the sexes. In patriarchal societies, men have assumed the most dominant roles. In both conscious and unconscious ways and through both overt and covert means, men’s power has worked to subjugate women into those roles that afford less status, impact, and freedom. Why, then, are women somewhat more communal than men? According to arguments that emphasize power and hegemony, women have assumed more communal orientations and developed interpersonal skills as strategies for survival and success in subservient roles. It is incumbent upon girls and women to hone their skills in interpersonal relations as a way of exerting what little

Gender is a powerful macrocontext for human behavior. For better and for worse, women and men engage in activities that fit neatly with society’s expectations and stereotypes for sex-role behavior. (SOURCE: iStockphoto (left) and Jacom Stephens/iStockphoto (right))
power they are able to summon forth in a patriarchal society. By contrast, men do not need to be as interpersonally sensitive and communally oriented because they can generally achieve their ends through direct, agentic means.

Whatever interpretation you wish to make of why it is that men and women show differences in social behavior and how those differences relate to gender roles and gender role stereotypes, you are likely to conclude, as you should, that gender is a pervasive macrocontext for human behavior. One of the first things, if not the first thing, we learn about a person is whether that person is male or female. That knowledge shapes our expectations as to how that person should behave, who that person is, and how we should interact with that person. Gender roles inform our approaches to a vast array of social situations, everything from what we do on a first date to how we act as a leader of a group. Even when we act in defiance of gender roles, we are acknowledging our understanding that such roles exist, even as we hope to transcend them. Therefore, while gender roles may not control our lives and do not necessarily leave us powerless to engage in role-incongruent behavior, they are nonetheless formidable forces to confront across the human lifespan. Put another way, gender is a ubiquitous category for human experience. It is fair to say that personality is itself gendered. A human life is, to a certain extent, a gendered construction. And each of us lives in a gendered world.

CULTURE

Among the 1,500 students attending Chicago’s Nicholas Senn High School in 2006–07 were 227 immigrants from Mexico, 44 from Pakistan, 33 from Ethiopia, 25 from Ghana, 18 from Vietnam, 13 each from Bosnian and the Philippines, 8 from Russia, and teenagers from 53 other countries, including 819 born in the United States (Brotman, 2007). All told, students at Senn High School speak 46 different languages. Graduating near the top of her senior class in 2007, Amna Khan, age 19, studied the Quran in her native Pakistan until the age of 9, but she never attended school until her family moved to the United States. Even at Senn, Amna missed many days (making up for absences through night school and weekend classes) because her parents regularly pulled her out of school to return to Pakistan for family weddings and funerals. Amna is promised in marriage to a man she has never met. She says that she will be happy to marry him, but first she plans to attend college and then complete medical school. Her classmate, Mercy Akomaa, came from Ghana, where the schools were stricter and students never talked back to their teachers. Mercy loves Senn High School, but she is bothered by the efforts of some of her African friends to adopt popular American music and mannerisms. “I don’t like when the Africans try to be like the Americans,” she says (Brotman, 2007, p. 23). “They forget their culture.”

The confluence and the clash of cultures are front and center at Senn High School these days, and increasingly in many other places in the United States and around the world. For students like Amna and Mercy, the challenge is to make a meaningful life by drawing from very different cultures. Like some of the brightest and most talented young women in the United States today, Amna aspires to be a physician. But she has also agreed to an arranged marriage. Mercy is ambivalent about her experience in the United States: She very much wants to make the most of her African friends to adopt popular American music and manners. “I don’t like when the Africans try to be like the Americans,” she says (Brotman, 2007, p. 23). “They forget their culture.”

In thinking about personality, we must be careful not to forget culture, either. And yet it is often too easy to do just that. For those many Americans who rarely encounter people outside their own cultural groups, and even for those who do but who still think that most other people are just like them, or should be, the problem of culture is no problem at all. People are people, we like to say. Everybody wants pretty much the same things in life—happiness, for example, success, love, excitement, challenge, and on and on. As we saw in Chapter 2, there is considerable truth in this claim. Evolution has designed human beings to meet certain universal challenges, and human beings the world over must meet them, regardless of their particular customs, mores, and beliefs. Yet evolution designed the human mind in such a way as to afford awesome diversity in the ways
whereby human beings meet their challenges and live their lives. You do not have to attend Senn High School to understand that cultures vary the world over, that different cultures compete with each other for influence, that many different cultures coexist in any given society, and that many, many people today, like Amna and Mercy, struggle to reconcile competing cultures in their own lives.

The most encompassing and far-reaching macrocontext for human behavior is culture. Social scientists have formulated many different definitions of culture. Robert LeVine (1982) views culture as a tradition of rules embraced by a particular society of people. According to LeVine, culture is an organized body of rules concerning the ways in which individuals in a population should communicate with one another, think about themselves and their environments, and behave toward one another and toward objects in their environments. The rules are not universally or constantly obeyed, but they are recognized by all and they ordinarily operate to limit the range of variation in patterns of communication, belief, value, and social behavior in the population. (p. 4)

When we think of culture as an organized body of rules that binds people together in a society, we may assume that culture exists outside the person as a coherent and encompassing whole. In the 1930s and 1940s, social scientists who examined the relations between culture and personality tended to exhibit just this emphasis (LeVine, 2001). Their work was based on the assumption that people’s lives corresponded in a coherent manner to the rules of their culture. Therefore, particular cultures might produce distinctive character types or “modal personalities” (e.g., Benedict, 1934). In more recent times, however, anthropologists and other social scientists who examine the intersection of culture and individual lives have come to emphasize the inconsistencies and diversities in any given culture and the inevitable mismatches and incongruencies that follow from the relations between culture and individual lives. For example, Geertz (1973) argues that culture should not be seen as a tightly constructed, rule-governed system. Culture consists of many different elements, some in conflict with each other (Gjerde, 2004; Holland, 1997). Furthermore, people do not match up neatly to the culture wherein they reside. Instead, each person makes use of the cultural resources that are available to him or her. Each culture provides “a tool kit of habits, skills, styles, perspectives, norms, roles, and values out of which each individual can construct a potentially unique strategy of action” (Triandis, 1997, p. 443). People act and think selectively and strategically within culture.

In a fundamental sense, culture is as much inside the person as it is in the world surrounding the person. Culture provides a way of knowing and construing the self, the world, and others (Bruner, 1990). Cushman (1990) writes that culture “is not indigenous clothing that covers the universal human; it infuses individuals, fundamentally shaping and forming them and how they conceive of themselves and the world, how they see others, and how they engage in structures of mutual obligation” (p. 31). The idea of culture as the meanings that infuse human lives is central to the conception of culture offered by Shweder and Sullivan (1993), who write that a culture is “that subset of possible or available meanings, which by virtue of enculturation—informal or formal, implicit or explicit, unintended or intended—has become so active in giving shape to the psychological processes of individuals in a society that those meanings have become, for those individuals, indistinguishable from experience itself” (p. 29). As a complex macrocontext for human behavior, culture offers up a rich mix of meanings, practices, and discourses that shape individual lives (Holland, 1997). But individuals do not passively submit to culture. Instead, like Amna and Mercy, each of us appropriates certain cultural meanings and ignores others, and each of us is likely to do battle with those aspects of culture that we find disagreeable or even repugnant. Culture infuses us with meanings, but as active agents in the world, we each participate in culture and leave our mark on those meanings, making for a dynamic and evolving interplay between culture and self (Gjerde, 2004; Holland, 1997).
Individualism and Collectivism

A major theme in the literature on cross-cultural psychology is that while some cultures emphasize the autonomy of individual selves, other cultures provide meanings organized around the interdependence of selves within communities. On a cultural level, individualism is a meaning system that exalts the autonomy of the individual over and against the interdependence of the group. People in individualist cultural contexts typically give priority to their own personal goals, even when the goals are in conflict with the goals of family, work group, or country (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Triandis, 1997; Triandis & Suh, 2002). By contrast, cultural collectivism is a meaning system that gives priority to the in-group or collective over and against the individual. People in collectivist cultural contexts typically put the interests and values of their groups (e.g., family, community, nation) ahead of their own personal agendas (Triandis, 1997). On self-report scales designed to measure collectivism, people living in collectivist societies tend to endorse such items as, "I stick with my group even through difficulties" and "I am prepared to do things for my group at any time, even though I have to sacrifice my own self-interests" (Kashima et al., 1995).

Among those societies that appear to express the most individualist cultural meanings are the United States, Canada, Australia, and the democracies of northern and western Europe (e.g., Great Britain, Germany). The emphasis on competition, autonomy, individualism, and the self is generally considered to be a hallmark of industrial and postindustrial Western culture. The emphasis is complexly determined and has historical roots in Western religion, philosophy, economy, and government (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, 1991; Bloom, 1987). This pervasive ideological context for behavior suggests that we as Westerners tend to see people as potentially self-sufficient agents endowed with fundamental and even inalienable individual rights—such as the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the right of free speech, and the right of assembly. We view society as comprising autonomous agents who freely choose to behave as they do. This position contrasts starkly with the view of persons espoused in, say, a traditional Hindu village in India. Miller (1984) has shown that children in American society tend to explain everyday social events in terms of the personal dispositions of individual persons. Hindu children, on the other hand, tend to explain everyday events in terms of the pressures of the environment and the influences of society on persons.

The emphasis on collectivism is especially strong in many traditional societies and in Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa (Triandis, 1997). Collectivist values are at the heart of Eastern Asian religious and cultural traditions, as evidenced in Buddhism and Confucianism. The Buddha taught self-renunciation as a goal of human life, through which the person transcends the limits of the individual self and finds connection to others and the cosmos. Confucius codified a social doctrine of familial and community obligations. In the Confucian tradition, social order takes precedence over individual expression. A person needs to know his or her proper place in the hierarchical order of things. Special emphasis is placed on the vertical (cross-generation) relationships between parents and children. Sons and daughters are obligated to serve their parents and show them considerable deference (filial piety); the same obligations are to be expressed toward the authority of the state. Markus et al. (1998) write that the idea of assuming one’s proper place within a social hierarchy is so pervasive in some Asian cultures that it shapes language. The earliest language learning by children in Western Samoa contains a set of important assumptions about authority—who can speak when and who can express certain ideas. Children are taught to look for the hidden meanings behind words so that they do not need to ask their parents and teachers the many questions that might ultimately lead them to challenge authority. In Japan, it is said that before asking a question, it is essential—Confucian style—to ask oneself, "Does this question need to be asked?" and if yes, "Am I the right person to ask it?" (Markus et al., 1998, p. 876). In talking about personality and social life, the Japanese often invoke the concept of amae (Doi, 1962). Amae roughly translates as “depending on or presuming another’s benevolence.” While dependency may seem to be an immature childhood characteristic from an individualistic standpoint, the Japanese conceive of the...
entire lifespan in terms of amae. Both Japanese children and adults view themselves as being linked to others in a social hierarchy through bonds of benevolent interdependency.

The distinction between individualism and collectivism should not be drawn too sharply but should instead be seen as a matter of degree. Any given culture is not completely individualist or collectivist as a whole. Instead, every culture has both individualist and collectivist meanings. Regardless of what society they live in, most people are capable of construing their own selves in either independent or interdependent terms (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). For example, in American society people speak easily about the development of an autonomous self (individualism) as well as their obligations and commitments to families and other groups (collectivism) (Holland, 1997). Therefore, cultures tend to differ from one another in terms of their relative emphasis on individualism and collectivism. These relative differences can be further spelled out in terms of four defining attributes of individualism and collectivism—goals, relationships, determinants of social behavior, and construals of the self (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

The first attribute concerns goals. From an individualist standpoint, personal goals are more important than the goals of the in-group (e.g., family, community, state), whereas from a collectivist standpoint the in-group goals are more important. It is important to note that a collectivist perspective connects the person to a particular in-group rather than, say, to all humankind in general. From a collectivist standpoint, one is loyal to one’s own group, and such loyalty may put one in strong opposition to other groups. A second attribute concerns relationships. From an individualist standpoint, rational exchange is the norm in relationships; separate and autonomous selves come together to “trade” resources (e.g., money, help, love), and social life resembles, in many ways, a marketplace. From a collectivist standpoint, people relate to one another more from the standpoint of communal obligations and bonds of loyalty. A third attribute concerns the determinants of social behavior. From an individualist standpoint, the person’s own attitudes take precedence over group norms in motivating and guiding behavior. Individualist cultures emphasize the ideas of “standing up for what you think is right” and “being true to your own convictions.” By contrast, the collectivist meaning system elevates social norms above the opinions or attitudes of individuals. People are encouraged to act in accord with the standards of the in-group. Finally, individualist and collectivist cultures suggest rather different construals of the self. The individualist self-construal is defined over and against others as an autonomous and independent agent. The collectivist self-construal, by contrast, is viewed as highly interdependent and embedded within the community.

The differences between construals of an independent self, so characteristic of individualist cultures, and the contrasting construals of an interdependent self, more common in collectivist cultures, have been described in detail by Markus and Kitayama (1991). As spelled out in Table 3.4, Markus and Kitayama propose that in Western, especially North American, middle-class cultures, there is a strong belief in the independence of the self from others. The self is defined in terms of internal attributes such as motives, abilities, talents, or “personalities,” and a major cultural task is to discover, actualize, or confirm these personal attributes of the self. The independent way of being is widely elaborated in a variety of cultural practices, such as conversational styles that emphasize individual choice and self-fulfillment over and against conformity to social norms, and in such cultural institutions as the merit pay system. By contrast, many non-Western, especially Asian, cultures (and to an important extent some non-European groups in the United States) do not value such a strict separation or independence of the self. These cultures, instead, believe in the fundamental connectedness or interdependence among those within an in-group. The self is made in reference to the relationships of which it is part. The major cultural task is to fit in, adjust to the relationship, while constraining, taming, or otherwise conditioning internal desires or wishes so as to facilitate the paramount goal of interpersonal harmony and unity. The interdependent way of being is elaborated in such cultural practices as conversational styles emphasizing sympathy and kindness to others and in such cultural institutions as the seniority system.
TABLE 3.4  KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT CONSTRUALS OF SELF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Separate from social context</td>
<td>Connected with social context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Bounded, unitary, stable</td>
<td>Flexible, variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Internal, private (abilities, thoughts, relationships)</td>
<td>External, public (statuses, roles, feelings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>Be unique</td>
<td>Belong, fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Express self</td>
<td>Occupy one’s proper place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realize internal attributes</td>
<td>Engage in appropriate action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote own goals</td>
<td>Promote others’ goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of others</td>
<td>Be direct: “Say what’s on your mind”</td>
<td>Be indirect: “Read other’s mind”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-evaluation: others are important for social comparison, reflected</td>
<td>Self-definition: relationships with others in specific contexts define the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of self-esteem</td>
<td>Ability to express self, validate internal attributes</td>
<td>Ability to adjust, restrain self, maintain harmony with social context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Markus and Kitayama’s distinction between independent and interdependent self-construals neatly parallels the distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures, and both distinctions share conceptual space with a contrast we considered earlier when we discussed gender—the distinction between agency and communion (Bakan, 1966). With respect to gender, we suggested that some of the sex differences in psychological processes that have been identified in the empirical literature paint a portrait of men as somewhat more agentic (power oriented, striving for autonomy) than women, and women as somewhat more communal (intimacy oriented, striving for connection) than men. An important study by Kashima et al. (1995), however, warns against equating cultural and gender differences. The authors examined self-construals in five cultures—Australia, the United States, Hawaii, Japan, and Korea. Their findings showed that differences among these cultures were indeed captured by measures of individualism and collectivism. But the same measures did not capture differences between men and women. Instead, gender differences showed up on measures of the extent to which people feel emotionally related to others (a concept that is not related to collectivism), with women scoring higher on these measures than men. Both men and women in individualist cultures (e.g., the United States, Australia), therefore, tended to view their actions and attitudes as expressing their own self-strivings, whereas both men and women in collectivist cultures (e.g., Hawaii, Japan, Korea) tended to view their actions and attitudes as expressing their connections to family and social group. With respect to gender, women in both individualist and collectivist cultures reported greater levels of empathy and emotional connection to other people than did men in both individualist and collectivist cultures. In simple terms, the data suggest that “women are not like Asians” (Kashima et al., 1995, p. 932), and men are not like Americans. The individualist/collectivist distinction applies more to cultural differences than gender differences. Put another way, saying that Asians espouse a more collectivist viewpoint than Americans, overall, does not mean that Asians are more emotionally connected to other people than are Americans. If Kashima’s findings are valid, it would appear that emotional connection to others is more tied up with gender than it is with culture.

In recent years, psychologists have conducted many empirical studies to test the extent to which differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures may impact personality. The results
suggest that in some ways cultural individualism is associated with independent self-construals and cultural collectivism is associated with interdependent self-construals, consistent with the original claims made by Markus and Kitayama (1991). Reviewing a large number of studies, Oyserman and colleagues (2002) showed that European Americans tend to value independence more and interdependence less than people living in certain other cultures, although the statistical differences were not large.

Cultural differences regarding individualism and collectivism may be linked to emotions, in ways supporting the distinction between independent and interdependent selves. For example, Kitayama, Mesquita, and Karasawa (2006) found that Japanese men and women showed a pervasive tendency to report experiences of socially engaging emotions, such as friendly feelings and guilt. These social emotions signal the extent to which a person feels meaningfully connected to a group. By contrast, Americans reported more experiences of socially disengaging emotions such as pride and anger, which signal success and frustration in expressing the self. Furthermore, the authors found that psychological well-being among Japanese participants was closely associated with the extent to which participants experienced positive, socially engaging emotions, such as friendly feelings, whereas well-being among Americans was more closely tied to experiencing positive, socially disengaging emotions, such as pride. In another study examining emotions, Tsai, Knutson, and Fung (2006) found that Hong Kong Chinese individuals valued low-arousal, positive emotions indicative of social harmony (e.g., feelings of “calm”) to a greater extent than did European Americans. By contrast, European Americans valued high-arousal, positive emotions indicative of individual self-expression (e.g., excitement) to a greater extent than did the Hong Kong Chinese. Interestingly, for both groups, the discrepancy between culturally valued emotions (e.g., calm for the Chinese and excitement for the Americans) and the actual emotions experienced in everyday life was associated with depression. In other words, depressed Chinese participants reported relatively few experiences of calm in their lives (compared to nondepressed Chinese), whereas depressed Americans reported relatively few experiences of excitement (compared to nondepressed Americans).

Social psychologist Richard Nisbett (2003) and his colleagues have conducted a series of studies showing that cultural individualism and collectivism may influence the way people perceive and explain events. Nisbett argues that Americans typically process information in an analytic way, separating objects from their contexts and detecting differences between objects. In contrast, Japanese typically process information in a more holistic manner, paying careful attention to relationships between objects and how objects are integrated within a context. When observing animated scenes of fish swimming through water amidst rocks and ocean plants, for example, Americans tend to focus on the behavior and characteristics of the fish, whereas Japanese detect relationships between the fish and their surroundings (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). These simple differences in how people process the information in scenes may indicate different cultural values and patterns of education. Nisbett argues that whereas American children are taught to pay attention to individual objects and how they separate themselves out from the background, Japanese children are taught to detect how objects relate to the collective context. In addition, the different physical settings of life in the United States and Japan may have an impact. To examine the impact of physical environment on perception, researchers took photographs of typical scenes in small, medium, and large cities in both the United States and Japan and found that the Japanese scenes were consistently rated by observers as more ambiguous and laden with details (Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006). The researchers argued that more detailed scenes drew the observers’ eye toward the context of the picture and the ways in which the parts relate to the whole. In support of this claim, they found that when both American and Japanese participants were given quick glimpses of these scenes, typical Japanese scenes evoked more attention to contextual elements compared to typical American scenes. In other words, both Americans and Japanese participants in this study processed information in a contextual and holistic manner when presented with the Japanese scenes. By contrast, both groups showed lower levels of holistic information processing in response to the pictures of typical American scenes (Miyamoto et al., 2006).
Modernity

Another cultural concept that is related to the distinction between individualism and collectivism is modernity. Modernity refers most generally to the economic, political, and cultural systems spawned in the 19th and 20th centuries by the Industrial Revolution; the expansion of capitalism and the proliferation of markets and trade; the increasing domination of science and technology; and the rising power of rationalist states, especially democracies, beginning in Western Europe and America and eventually spreading to parts of Asia (e.g., Japan) as well. Although there remain substantial cultural differences among those societies that have been impacted by modernity, modern societies still tend to share certain features and outlooks. For example, modernity is often perceived as encouraging a rationalistic and scientifically minded approach to the world (Gergen, 1991).

Modernity is associated with growing skepticism toward religion and other traditional sources of authority (such as the monarchy) and the spreading belief that progress and human betterment reside in the advances of science, technology, and economic and political development (Harvey, 1990). The cultures that prevail in modern societies tend to value reason, objectivity, rational discourse, and developmental progress in accord with scientific laws and other consensually validated systems of knowledge and belief. As societies become more modern, values and attitudes of people change. In a study of six developing countries, Inkeles and Smith (1974) found that the move toward modern industrialization was accompanied by an increase in all of the following aspects of personality and social life: (a) openness to new experiences, (b) assertion of independence from traditional authorities, (c) belief in scientific efficacy rather than fatalism, (d) ambitious occupational and educational goals for one’s self and children, (e) concern for punctuality and planning, (f) interest and participation in local politics, and (g) interest in national and international news.

Cultural modernity tends to promote individualism. The value systems that promote and are promoted by science, democracy, and free trade tend to celebrate the virtues of self-initiative, self-expression, and independence. But modernity and individualism are not the same concepts. For example, modern societies vary considerably with respect to their emphasis on individualism, with some modern societies, such as Japan and South Korea, tending toward collectivism rather than individualism. Still, it is probably fair to say that as traditionally collectivist societies become more modern they move somewhat in the direction of cultural individualism. Modernity appears to bring with it certain characteristic problems and opportunities in the development of the self (Baumeister, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Langbaum, 1982; McAdams, 1996b; Taylor, 1989). In modern societies, people tend to view the self as a project that they “work on,” develop, improve, and strive to perfect. In contemporary American society, for example, there is no shortage of advice and instruction on how to improve the self—lessons can be gleaned from television talk shows, popular self-help books and Internet sites, therapists, counselors, advisors, and virtually anybody else who feels the need or qualifications to instruct another person on how to “make the most” of life, to “live up to one’s potential,” to reach self-fulfillment or self-actualization. Self-making is a veritable industry in many modern societies, and people invest a tremendous amount of psychic energy and real cash into their own projects of self-construction. The modern view of the self tends to emphasize the extent to which the self is complex and multilayered. Even before Sigmund Freud proclaimed the power of the unconscious, 19th-century Europeans were keenly aware of and fascinated by the distinction between the public and private selves. The advent of industrialization in Europe moved men and some women off the family farm to factories—new public spaces where work was to be done. The public experience of modern work came to be separated from the private experience of family life. A person could develop a public self that was very different from the private self. Furthermore, each of the many selves that a person might develop would itself possess significant depth and complexity. Modernity ushered in the idea that there is a great deal about the self that is hidden, buried, or even disguised. The exploration of the deep, inner regions of the self has become an especially appealing psychological adventure in the modern world (Gay, 1984; Taylor, 1989). For many modern people,
Ever since Europeans imported African men and women to the New World as slaves, race has served to divide Americans into different economic and cultural camps. Slavery was abolished in the United States more than 140 years ago, but African Americans and European Americans continue to inhabit somewhat separate cultural worlds. African Americans are still disproportionately represented in the lower economic classes. Therefore, race and class cannot be readily separated from each other. Nonetheless, many sociologists and other scholars insist that a person’s racial background, regardless of social class, exerts a marked influence on that person’s development and relationships with others. In a provocative and enterprising analysis of psychological research comparing African Americans and white Americans, Jones (1983) remarks:

Over the past few decades, psychological analysis of race has identified an unending stream of dysfunctions, maladaptations, deficient social organization, poor intellectual performance, inadequate motivation, restricted ego domains, doubts, stresses, and fears. One wonders, on the basis of this extensive literature, how black Americans have managed to survive. The genetic versions of these negativistic analyses are based on the assumption that deficient genes explain the poor adaptation to American society; the environmentalists often accuse the geneticists of racism, black psychologists cannot help noticing that neither position recognizes a single attribute, capacity, or contribution of black people that could be considered positive, desirable, or worth preserving. An essential goal of black psychology, then, is to go beyond the reactive conception of black Americans’ history to develop a cultural-evolutionary perspective that recognizes African origins, and more recent developments in the United States (and other countries), and the effects of prolonged oppression. The new perspective should include what is distinctively good and useful in the Afro-or African-American experience. (p. 142)

Jones indicts American social scientists for failing to understand the macrocontext of black culture. Cole (1976) identifies three principal components of black culture: (1) an “American mainstream” component shared with white Americans and espousing such values as individualism and materialism; (2) a “minority sense” component shared with other disadvantaged minorities in American society, reinforcing the sense that being black is likely to make one the subject of discrimination; and (3) a unique “blackness” component that incorporates certain African and African-American values, mannerisms, and styles. The blackness component includes what Cole terms “soul”—a sense of people facing hardship together as a spirited and vital community—and “style,” which refers to characteristic ways of talking, walking, dressing, and thinking.

Many black scholars draw sharp contrasts between European-American philosophical orientations (which provide a foundation for the American white culture) and African philosophical orientations (which are more instrumental in the black culture) (e.g., Akbar, 1991; Dixon, 1976; White & Parham, 1990). The differences suggest that black heritage is highly social rather than individualistic, oriented toward the present rather than the future, and focused on subjective emotional experience over and against objective rationality. These are cultural rather than personal differences. They represent contrasts in the implicit philosophical contexts behind behavior rather than differences in behavior per se. Again, we see that different contexts imbue a person’s behavior with different meanings.

Social psychologist Philip Bowman (1989, 1990) is one of a small but growing number of researchers who are working to understand the complex influences of racial macrocontexts on the development of personality. Bowman underscores both the risks and the resiliency inherent in African American family life today. According to Bowman, African American families exhibit at least four distinctive qualities that serve as adaptive cultural resources. First, compared to the European American majority, African American families tend to incorporate extended kin networks. The many aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other relatives living close to one another create a community of support that is...
especially significant for the rearing of children. Second, family roles are likely to be especially flexible in the African American community. For example, black men and women tend to assume both agentic and communal roles in the family, rather than specializing along sex-stereotypic lines (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Third is the powerful role of religion and spirituality among African Americans. Blacks in the United States have traditionally attended church more often and reported more significant religious involvements than whites. The church has traditionally been an extraordinarily integrative and sustaining force in the black community, functioning as a source of spiritual guidance, agency for social service, and catalyst for societal change. Finally, black racial consciousness can be viewed as an adaptive cultural resource. To the extent that African American children identify proudly with a distinctive cultural heritage, they can eventually draw on that heritage for shaping their own identities and leading productive and fulfilling lives.

Adopting the frameworks of cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Triandis, 1997), Bowman argues that different cultural groups often have a great deal in common. For example, blacks in the United States tend to want the same kinds of successes and fulfillments for themselves and their children that whites want. They tend to hold very similar values with respect to social and political issues. These commonalities comprise what anthropologists call etic dimensions across cultures, or ways in which different cultures share similar means and goals. Nonetheless, every culture also has its own emic dimensions, or those characteristics that serve to distinguish it from other cultures. A sensitive and productive approach to understanding the macrocontext of race in the United States must, therefore, focus both on those etic aspects of culture that most all Americans share and those emic features—especially adaptive cultural resources—that are unique to particular cultural groups.

such an inner voyage promises to reveal some form of personal truth or moral conviction. Modernity teaches us that it is especially important to be “true to one’s self.”

From the modern perspective, not only does the self possess significant depth and complexity, but the self is also changing constantly over time. Modern men and women routinely use developmental ideas and metaphors to make sense of their lives (Bellah et al., 1985). As the advances of modern medicine have significantly lengthened the expected lifespan, modern men and women increasingly expect to live through a long, full life, growing, changing, and moving through and living out their own unique life’s journey. Over time, therefore, modern people expect to “make progress,” “to move ahead, to develop to higher or better stages and levels. Yet amidst the constant change and growth, modern adults also seek to create some kind of coherence in the self. How can a deep and constantly changing self—a self that I work on day in and day out—come together to provide me with a sense of unity, purpose, and coherence? This is perhaps the most challenging question for the making of the self in modern societies. It is a problem that we will return to in Chapter 10 of this book when we consider how modern adults work on their selves by formulating life stories in order to create a narrative identity.

Finally, modern societies in the 21st century are increasingly multicultural. As people immigrate from one society to another and as more and more people are exposed to a wide range of lifestyles, religions, customs, and worldviews, many modern societies experience the rich mixture of different cultures as well as the tension and conflict that inevitably arise when people from very different backgrounds try to live with each other. The United States is now home to very large numbers of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries, Chinese and Korean Americans, and recently arrived people from many other places around the globe, whose first language is not English and whose cultural mores may seem at variance to those of the European American majority. Cultural diversity poses many challenges for modern societies. In the United States, for example, should different ethnic groups continue to live in accord with their own cultural values and practices or should they try to assimilate into a general American “melting pot”?

On a psychological level, multiculturalism reinforces the problem of identity. Many people feel torn between two different cultures as they try to carve out a bicultural identity. If my parents
are Mexican immigrants but I now attend an English-speaking school in Los Angeles, who am I?

Research suggests that some bicultural individuals feel as if they have two distinct personalities—one for each of the two cultures in their lives. In one study, when bilingual Mexican Americans were asked to think about themselves in English they endorsed different personality traits than when they were asked to think about themselves in Spanish (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martínez, Potter, & Pennebaker, 2006). Yet other bilingual individuals see their identities in more integrative terms. Veronica Benet-Martínez has conducted a number of studies on bicultural identity integration (BII), which is the extent to which bicultural individuals are able to combine their different cultural influences into a coherent single identity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Benet-Martínez has shown that bicultural individuals who score high on BII see themselves as members of a combined or emergent joint culture—as neither “Mexican” nor “American,” for example, but as “Mexican American,” in a way that comfortably combines traditions, values, and practices of both cultures. By contrast, individuals who score low on BII tend to see the two cultures as in conflict with each other, and they may experience a good deal of stress as a result of this conflict.

Culture infuses virtually every aspect of human personality. As we will see in later chapters, culture is implicated in our understanding of dispositional personality traits (Chapter 4), beliefs and values (Chapter 8), and the stories we construct to make sense of our lives (Chapters 10 and 11). As modern societies become increasingly multicultural, personality itself becomes more and more culturally nuanced. In ways that are both trivial and profound, culture serves as arguably the most important and pervasive context for understanding who people are and why people do what they do.

HISTORY

The role of macrocontexts in human behavior usually becomes apparent to us when we notice differences. For example, should we encounter people from a culture very different from our own, we may begin to think about how our own culture’s values and norms have shaped us to be the people we are. When we witness the great inequalities in economic resources that characterize modern societies today, we cannot help but be struck by the social–structural dimension of class and how it is that different people in the same nation grow up under radically different material circumstances. In noticing cultural and social–structural differences in a given society, we may begin to imagine how our own lives and our very personalities might be rather different if we had grown up in a different set of macrocontexts—if I were black instead of white, for example, rich instead of poor, male instead of female, and so on. But there is a different kind of macrocontext that infuses our lives but that we may rarely think about because we are rarely confronted with differences regarding it. This is the macrocontext of history. Given that everybody reading this book is alive and functioning at the very same historical moment, we are not likely to think about how all of our lives are profoundly shaped by the simple fact that we all live today—here and now at the beginning of the 21st century. Things would be very different, would they not, if this were the year 1901, 1776, or 200 B.C.E.?

The historical context for human behavior situates our lives in time. As people get older, they tend to have a greater sense of the role of history in the shaping of lives. Your grandparents may have told you stories about the good (or not-so-good) old days when they were children, how the world was very different then, before computers, before the existence of hundreds of television channels, when the Soviet Union was the great enemy of “the free world,” when Americans fought the Japanese in a ferocious war. It is perhaps in our interactions with people from other generations, as well as in our history classes, that we become most cognizant of how life was once very different than it is today, and how it is likely to be very different in the future. Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928/1952) argued that different generations of people develop along different paths because of their different historical experiences. For Mannheim, a generation consists of those people who are
born at the same point in historical time and thereby develop a shared understanding of the world, common beliefs and aims, and a shared generational style. Mannheim maintained that social and historical events occurring during a person’s late adolescence and young adulthood are especially likely to shape his or her personality for the future (see also Rogler, 2002).

Abigail Stewart and Joseph Healy (1989) developed a theory to account for the ways in which history and social events are incorporated into personality. The theory is summarized in Table 3.5. Following Mannheim, Stewart and Healy argue that the influence of history is strongly contingent on a person’s age or place in the life course. A major historical event, such as a world war, will have one kind of impact on a 10-year-old child and quite a different impact on a midlife adult. According to Stewart and Healy, historical events occurring during a person’s childhood are likely to shape his or her fundamental expectations about how the world works. At a very basic level, for example, a child whose family suffers the poverty that comes from a severe economic downturn (e.g., the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s) may come to assume implicitly that scarcity is the norm in life and that the world is a place where there will never be enough for everybody. Historical events experienced in late adolescence and early adulthood, by contrast, may shape life opportunities and choices, especially in the area of occupational identity. One of the outgrowths of the Watergate scandals of the early 1970s, for example, was the rise in prestige of investigative journalism in the United States. The newspaper reporters who exposed the Watergate scandals surrounding President Richard Nixon at that time helped to glorify the profession of journalism, which enhanced the appeal of journalism as a vocation for adolescents and young adults like myself. Many college students in my generation were quite taken with the idea of becoming investigative reporters.

In the early middle-adult years, Stewart and Healy argue, historical events are less likely to shape fundamental values and vocational identity since adults in their 30s and early 40s have likely consolidated a viewpoint of the world and their place in it. But events can still have a significant impact on what people actually do—that is, on behavior. The eruption of a major war may dramatically change the lifestyle of a 35-year-old homemaker, who may now seek paid employment because of the labor shortage that has resulted from young men being drafted into military service. In a fundamental sense, she may not be changing her values or her identity, but her daily actions are now very different than they were before the war. Finally, events occurring during a person’s later years (midlife and beyond) may offer new opportunities and stimulate revisions in a person’s identity. Adults whose children have now grown up and established their own families may feel freed up to explore new possibilities in lifestyle, occupation, and even personal ideology. Major historical events or social movements may therefore feed into this new readiness for change. The women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s afforded new opportunities for women across the life course (Duncan & Agronick, 1995). For mature women who had already brought up their children, the women’s movement provided them with new modes of expression and new ways to think about themselves.

### Table 3.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age When Event is Experienced</th>
<th>Focus of Impact of Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood and early adolescence</td>
<td>Fundamental values and expectations (e.g., family values, assumptive frameworks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late adolescence/early adulthood</td>
<td>Opportunities and life choices; identity (e.g., vocational identity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early–middle adulthood</td>
<td>Behavior (e.g., labor force participation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlife and later</td>
<td>New opportunities and choices; revision of identity</td>
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Historical events may exert subtle and long-term effects on personality. One theory suggests that dramatic historical events and broad social movements witnessed in childhood and early adolescence may influence fundamental values and expectations about life; those experienced in late adolescence and young adulthood may influence identity and life choices; and those experienced later in life may have impacts on behavior and on identity revision. (SOURCE: Helene Seligman/AFP/Getty Images)

Historical time is perhaps the most complex and subtle macrocontext for human behavior. It is clear that history has an impact on people’s lives. But the impact depends, in part, on the particular timing of a life, as Stewart and Healy’s theory shows. Therefore, historical time (history) and personal time (biography) interact in very complex ways (Elder, 1995; Mills, 1959). The impact of history, furthermore, is filtered through the macrocontexts of race, class, gender, and culture. For example, many African Americans who lived through the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s report that the economic hardships they experienced were not much worse than what they were used to all along (Angelou, 1970). The economic downturn hit middle- and upper-class whites especially hard because they had much more to lose and were not used to the economic privations that most blacks had known from birth onward. To take another example, wars have traditionally affected men and women in very different ways: Men traditionally fight the wars; women work to keep the homefront strong. Moreover, different cultural groups articulate different interpretations of the same historical events. The antiwar protests that rocked American college campuses in the late 1960s shaped the consciousness of many politically liberal and radical young people. The same movement, however, also galvanized politically conservative forces and set the stage for a shift toward political conservatism in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s.

Beyond all of these complications, it is also true that the impact of any historical event or movement is in large part mediated by a person’s own, idiosyncratic interpretation of that event. For example, Duncan and Agronick (1995) found that the women’s movement of the 1960s and early 1970s certainly had an impact on the lives of many women who were college-age at the time. But the impact depended on just how “meaningful” a woman considered this historical movement to be. Those women who saw the women’s movement to be especially meaningful and important for their own lives ultimately attained higher education levels, work status, and income levels; were employed in upwardly mobile careers by midlife; and reported significant increases in self-confidence and assertiveness in the years following college. For those women in the same generation who did not see the women’s movement as especially meaningful, however, these trends did not occur.

We will return to the issue of historical time and the timing of lives in Chapter 6 when we consider the extent to which personality dispositions are either stable or changing over the human life course. Our take-home message at this point is that historical time is an especially complex and encompassing macrocontext for human behavior. Human lives are time-structured and historically contingent. Like social class, gender, race, and culture, historical time situates a human life within a set of complex and overlapping environments. The social ecology of human behavior incorporates those many contexts within which we learn to be who we are. From the microcontexts of social situations to the macrocontexts of culture and history, personality is always situated in context. You cannot take the person out of that context; you cannot talk meaningfully about “personality” without examining the context in which personality is embedded. Human individuality is a thoroughly contextualized phenomenon. Only when we understand the worlds in which we live, therefore, can we fully appreciate the ways in which each of us is a singular human being.
SUMMARY

1. A dominant movement in American psychology in the first half of the 20th century, behaviorism focused on how environments shape the observable behavior of organisms. Although behaviorism’s presence has faded considerably in recent decades, its fundamental emphases have lived on in social-learning theories of personality and in the widespread recognition that individual lives must be understood in terms of the environmental contexts within which they are situated.

2. According to the behaviorist view, behavior is learned in the environment. Two fundamental forms of learning are classical and instrumental (operant) conditioning. In classical conditioning, an organism forms associations between different stimuli that are contiguous in time. In instrumental conditioning, learning occurs through rewards and punishments, as behavior is shaped by its consequences. From an operant standpoint, personality characteristics are shaped primarily by reward and punishment, learning that occurs in particular social situations over time. The determinants of any particular behavior, therefore, can be found both in the current situation and in similar situations in the past to which the person has learned similar responses.

3. Behaviorism spawned a number of different social-learning theories that have been and continue to be influential in the field of personality psychology. Social-learning theories incorporate cognitive variables, such as expectancies and values, competencies, encoding strategies, and self-regulatory systems and plans. These variables help to specify how a person will approach and respond to a given situation.

4. Especially influential has been Albert Bandura’s social-learning theory. Bandura emphasizes the roles of observational learning and self-efficacy in human behavior. While reinforcement and need satisfaction may be instrumental in behavioral performance, Bandura shows that learning does not necessarily require reinforcement and may proceed instead through simple observation and imitation. As people observe and learn new responses over time, and as they obtain experience in the performance of those responses, they develop beliefs about their abilities to carry out particular behaviors in particular situations, producing characteristic levels of self-efficacy. The development of self-efficacy is a key mechanism whereby people are able to exercise control over threatening events in the environment.

5. Social learning is a pervasive phenomenon in human life. Psychologists have documented the power of social learning in many different areas of human functioning. An especially provocative area in this regard is the study of aggression. Research documents the powerful role of observation in the formation and performance of aggressive responses.

6. People learn and perform behaviors within a social ecology. The social ecology consists of the many different environmental contexts that influence a person’s behavior and shape his or her life. The social ecology ranges from the microcontexts of the immediate social situation, to larger contexts of family, neighborhood, and community. At the largest, most distal, and encompassing levels are the macrocontexts of social class, gender, race, culture, and history. At the level of microcontext, psychologists have sought to define the different kinds of situations that people encounter in daily life. Research suggests that situations are best characterized in terms of their subjective psychological affordances, or what people perceive as the opportunities for behavior and expression in a particular situation. People form situational prototypes or scripts for certain sorts of stock situations, such as prototypes for “party,” “classroom,” and “sporting event.”

7. Social structure defines an important macrocontext for human behavior. Research documents significant relations between social class variables on the one hand and aspects of personality and social life on the other. Individuals in lower socioeconomic strata report lower job satisfaction, greater concerns for security and stability, and more fatalistic and pessimistic views of human nature, compared with individuals in the middle and upper classes. Professional, high-status occupations place significant cognitive demands on workers and encourage them to take initiative and cultivate self-direction at work. By contrast, lower-status employees find fewer cognitive challenges and opportunities for initiative in their work and are strongly urged to follow the demands of supervisors. Research has shown that in both work and family life, higher social class is associated with greater self-direction and internal control whereas lower social class is associated...
with an emphasis on obedience to authority and conformity.

8. Like social class, gender constitutes a powerful macrocontext, in part because it tends to differentiate individuals on the basis of social power and resources. In many if not most societies, men control more public resources, make more decisions about the society as a whole, and enjoy more freedom and autonomy than do women. Gender role stereotypes reinforce this power differential, as men are expected to be dominant and assertive while women are expected to be caring and nurturant. Socialization into gender roles may account for many of the sex differences that have been observed in human social behavior. Among the most well-established findings are that men tend to be more aggressive than women, to be somewhat more directive in leadership and group behavior, and to be more instrumental in public acts of helping; by contrast, women report higher levels of empathy and interpersonal intimacy, show better skills in encoding and decoding nonverbal interpersonal behavior, and express higher levels of friendliness and care in leadership and group roles. On the most general level, gender-congruent behaviors tend to fall along the dimensions of agency (masculine) and communion (feminine). Whatever the source of these differences between men and women, it is quite clear that social environments and social life for human beings are highly gendered.

9. The most encompassing and far-reaching context for human behavior is culture. Among other things, culture is a system of rules and norms that binds people together in a given society or group, providing a tool kit of habits, skills, styles, perspectives, roles, and values out of which the person can construct a life. Culture infuses human lives with meanings. Two major dimensions upon which different cultures can be organized are individualism and collectivism. Individualist cultures give priority to personal goals, individual attitudes and opinions, exchange relationships, and the efficacy of the autonomous and independent self. By contrast, collectivist cultures give priority to the goals and norms of the in-group or community, communal relationships, and the development of an interdependent construal of the self. While some societies tend to exhibit individualist cultures (e.g., North America) and others exhibit collectivist cultures (e.g., Asia), differences in individualism/collectivism are a matter of relative degree, with all societies having concepts and ideas that pertain to both individual agency and collective harmony. A related cultural concept is modernity, which refers to the economic, political, and cultural systems established by the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the proliferation of democracy and capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Modern cultures tend to be individualist (though there are exceptions), and they tend to articulate a view of the self as a complex and evolving project that a person develops, expands, improves, and generally “works on” over time.

10. History situates lives in time. People from different generations have different historical experiences, which influence the development of personality. One theory links individual development with historical events by proposing that the timing of an event in terms of a person’s life course partly determines the way in which that event will influence the person. Historical events (such as wars, economic downturns, and social movements) experienced when a person is a child help to shape the person’s basic values and assumptions about how the world works. Events that occur in late adolescence and young adulthood, by contrast, may impact one’s developing vocational identity as well as important life choices. Events that occur in early- to mid-adulthood may not have a profound influence on values and identity but are still likely to affect what a person does—that is, behavior. Finally, historical events experienced at midlife and after hold the potential to offer new opportunities for identity change and the revision of one’s sense of self. The impact of any historical event on a person’s life is largely determined by how that person actively makes sense of the event.