

Social/Personality Psychology

What is Social/Personality Psychology?

How do people come to be who they are? How do people think about, influence, and relate to one another? These are the broad questions that personality and social psychologists strive to answer. By exploring forces within the person (such as traits, attitudes, and goals) as well as forces within the situation (such as social norms and incentives), personality and social psychologists seek to unravel the mysteries of individual and social life in areas as wide-ranging as prejudice, romantic attraction, persuasion, friendship, helping, aggression, conformity, and group interaction. Although personality psychology has traditionally focused on aspects of the individual, and social psychology on aspects of the situation, the two perspectives are tightly interwoven in psychological explanations of human behavior.

Personality and social psychologists contribute to areas as diverse as health, business, law, the environment, education, and politics. For example, personality and social psychologists have designed, implemented, and evaluated programs to help employers hire and train better workers; to make it easier for people with cancer to cope successfully with their challenge; to increase the likelihood that people will reduce pollution by relying on public transportation; to reduce prejudices and intergroup conflict in the classroom and in international negotiations; to make computers and other technologies more user-friendly; and to make many other societal contributions as well.

How do I learn more about the field of Social/Personality Psychology?

The best place for information on this field is the websites of the Social Psychology Network and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology:

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/>

<http://www.spsp.org/>

What undergraduate courses are most helpful?

Foundation Courses:

Psychology of Personality

Social Psychology

Cognition

Motivation

Psychological Science Electives

Organizational Psychology

Psychology of Human Resources

Socio-emotional and Personality Development

Independent Study (ideally a student research project or involvement in faculty research)

Free Electives (Non-Psychology Courses)

Intro to Sociology

Career Options

Because personality and social psychologists combine an understanding of human behavior with training in sophisticated research methods, they have many opportunities for employment. Many personality and social psychologists are employed in the private sector as consultants, researchers, marketing directors, managers, political strategists, technology designers, and so on. Personality and social psychologists also work in government and nonprofit organizations, designing and evaluating policy and programs in education, conflict resolution, environmental protection, and the like. Finally, social and personality psychologists teach and do research in universities and colleges, housed mostly in departments of psychology but also in departments of business, education, political science, justice studies, law, health sciences, and medicine. The research of such individuals may be based in the laboratory, in the field, in the clinic, or in historical archives.

Individuals with a B.A. or B.S. concentrating in Personality and Social Psychology may be qualified to work as market researchers, advertising sales agents, public relations specialists, human resource specialists, or even in social services.

Although some personality and social psychologists go to graduate school to earn a terminal masters degree (M.S. or M.A.), most seek a doctoral degree (Ph.D.). For some careers, a masters degree may be sufficient. Generally, however, the doctorate is preferred by employers and is usually necessary for employment as a professor at a university or college. Individuals with a graduate degree in Personality and Social Psychology may be qualified to work as policy or marketing consultants, project managers, university faculty, researchers, and educational administrators.

Graduate School

Most Ph.D. programs in personality and social psychology require 4-5 years of training and study. The goal of most programs is similar: To prepare each student to become an independent, professional researcher. As a result, most programs teach the conceptual foundations and knowledge of the discipline, develop the student's ability to think theoretically, and train the student in research methodology, data analysis, and research writing and presentation. Programs differ, however, in the areas of research they focus on and in their emphasis on training students for academic versus nonacademic careers. Because graduate training revolves around research, it is important that students pay particular attention to the specific faculty members with whom they are likely to work. Prospective students should give full consideration not only to the perspectives and research activities of a potential graduate program on the whole, but also to those of their probable faculty mentors.

Although requirements vary, most graduate programs look for students who have:

- Earned high grades while completing their bachelors degree at an accredited college or university (typically, though not necessarily, as an undergraduate psychology major)
- Demonstrated strong quantitative, verbal, and analytic abilities, as reflected in their scores

on the [Graduate Record Exam](#)

- Been evaluated positively in three confidential [letters of recommendation](#) written by undergraduate teachers, advisors, or research supervisors
- Had experience doing psychological research

In addition, graduate applicants are usually asked to write a short essay describing their career aspirations, research interests, or other related topics. When writing this essay, applicants should know enough about the program they are applying to that they can discuss the fit between their interests and the program's specific features (e.g., the research that is being done at that school).

Most personality and social psychology programs provide financial assistance to their graduate students in the form of teaching or research assistantships, and many schools waive tuition and fees at the graduate level. This, too, varies from school to school.

For More Information

Students seeking admission into graduate school have several useful sources of information available to them. The American Psychological Association publishes annually a list of graduate programs in Graduate Study in Psychology and Associated Fields. In addition, [Social Psychology Network](#) maintains links to graduate programs with web pages. Each graduate program will mail program descriptions by request. By reading journals such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, students can expose themselves to cutting-edge research in personality and social psychology.

Additional information regarding a career in Social Psychology can be found at <http://www.careersinpsychology.org/>

This document contains text and material from the following sources:

<http://www.spsp.org/what-socialpersonality-psychology>

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/facq.htm>