CHAPTER 15 SUMMARY

Behavior depends on how people define a situation and adopt relevant personal goals, showing considerable flexibility. Sometimes self-regulation proceeds consciously by making explicit goals and plans, even-handedly deliberating alternatives, but then implementing too optimistically. Nonetheless, cognitions serve goal pursuit, affecting persistence and ultimate achievement. Other goal-related self-regulation occurs automatically. However, people change from conscious deliberation to automatic behavior in part by forming explicit if–then implementation intentions that use situational cues to shift action control into automaticity.

Automatic evaluation of situational cues (including significant others) can occur rapidly and evoke complex action sequences. Sometimes we assimilate our behavior to situational cues, for example, becoming more achievement oriented when others do. But contrast effects also occur when people do the opposite of situational cues.

The cognition–behavior relationship has been especially explored by research on attitude–behavior consistency. Attitudes fit behaviors that are prototypic and measured at a comparable level of specificity. Attitudes formed from direct experience, accessible, and reflecting self-interest or values predict behavior. Focusing on the reasons underlying one's attitudes can reduce attitude–behavior consistency.

How behavior is labeled influences attitude–behavior consistency. Actions may be identified at relatively low levels or higher levels. High-level behaviors tend to seem dispositionally based, but also behaviorally flexible. Low-level actions, in contrast, show stability across situations but may not seem to reflect underlying dispositions. Situational factors moderate cognition–behavior consistency by making such factors as social norms or prior attitudes salient. Finally, individual differences in how people approach social situations (e.g., self-monitoring and self-consciousness) influence attitude salience and link to behavior.

People manage others' impressions of them. Typically, people strive to convey positive impressions through matching others' behaviors, flattering them, self-promoting, or conforming to situational norms. When a poor impression seems likely, people make excuses or self-handicap, engaging in or claiming liabilities to account for their failure.

Behavior can test hypotheses about both self and others, but people are often biased, seeking confirmatory information; even tentative hypotheses may look more true than they really are. Testing a hypothesis can lead even targets to confirm the hypothesis in self-fulfilling prophecies. Potential self-fulfilling prophecies can be undermined if perceivers compensate or targets resist.