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# **Social Psychology**

**Elliot Aronson**

**Timothy D. Wilson**

**Samuel R. Sommers**



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**Composer:** Integra Publishing Services, Inc.  
**Printer/Binder:** R. R. Donnelley Roanoke  
**Cover Printer:** Lehigh Phoenix Color/Hagerstown  
**Cover Design:** Lumina Datamatics  
**Cover Credit:** Noma Bar, Pentagram

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Aronson, Elliot, author. | Wilson, Timothy D., author. | Sommers, Sam, author.

Title: Social psychology / Elliot Aronson, Timothy D. Wilson, Samuel R. Sommers.

Description: Tenth edition. | New York, NY : Pearson, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017037187 | ISBN 9780134641287 (softcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Social psychology.

Classification: LCC HM1033 .A78 2019 | DDC 302—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017037187>

1 18

#### **Rental Edition**

ISBN-10: 0-13-464128-0

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-464128-7

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ISBN-13: 978-0-13-467840-5



*To my grandchildren: Jacob, Jason, Ruth, Eliana, Natalie, Rachel, and Leo. My hope is that your capacity for empathy and compassion will help make the world a better place.*

—E.A.

*To my family, Deirdre Smith, Christopher Wilson, and Leigh Wilson*

—T.D.W.

*To my students—past, present, and future—for making coming to work each morning fun, educational, and unpredictable.*

—S.R.S.

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# Preface

When we began writing this book, our overriding goal was to capture the excitement of social psychology. We have been pleased to hear, in many kind notes and messages from professors and students, that we succeeded. One of our favorite responses was from a student who said that the book was so interesting that she always saved it for last, to reward herself for finishing her other work. With that one student, at least, we succeeded in making our book an enjoyable, fascinating story, not a dry report of facts and figures.

There is always room for improvement, however, and our goal in this, the tenth edition, is to make the field of social psychology an even better read. When we teach the course, there is nothing more gratifying than seeing the sleepy students in the back row sit up with interest and say, “Wow, I didn’t know that! Now *that’s* interesting.” We hope that students who read our book will have that same reaction.

## What’s New in This Edition?

First a word about what has *not* changed. As mentioned, we have done our best to tell the story of social psychology in an engaging way that will resonate with students. We also have retained features that help students learn and retain the material. As before, each chapter begins with learning objectives, which are repeated in the sections of the chapter that are most relevant to them and in the chapter-ending summary. All major sections of every chapter end with review quizzes. Research shows that students learn material better when they are tested frequently; thus, these section quizzes, as well as the test questions at the end of every chapter, should be helpful learning aids. In the Revel version of the text, instructors have the option of assigning these quizzes and giving course credit for correct answers. Each chapter also has our Try It! feature that invites students to apply what they have learned to their own lives. Several of these Try It! features have been updated.

We are pleased to add several new features to the tenth edition that we believe will appeal to students and make it even easier for them to learn the material. The first is called #SurvivalTips which are brief videos recorded by students who have taken a social psychology class. Each one tells a personal story relaying how the student applied social psychology to better navigate or “survive” a real situation in their lives. For example,

one video in Chapter 9 tells the story of how a student learned to avoid process loss in her study groups. These videos are in the Revel version of the text, placed alongside the relevant concepts.

A second new feature, called #trending, is a brief analysis of a current event that illustrates a key principle in each chapter. In Chapter 11 on Prosocial Behavior, for example, we describe an incident in which a White dentist from Texas, in town for Donald Trump’s inauguration, left a \$450 tip for an African American waitress. Students are asked to think about how concepts in the chapter might help explain why the man acted so generously, such as Batson’s empathy-altruism hypothesis. Importantly, these examples will be updated frequently in the Revel version of the text, such that students will always be able to connect what they are reading to current, real-world events.

Third, every chapter now begins with a feature called, “What do YOU think?” where students answer a survey question designed to illustrate a concept in that chapter. In Chapter 6, for example, students are asked, “Have you ever joined a group that required you to do something humiliating or dangerous in order to gain membership?” In the Revel version of the text, students get immediate feedback on how other students have answered (23% said yes to this question). Then, at the end of the chapter, there is a writing exercise tied to the survey question that instructors can assign if they wish. In Chapter 6, for example, the question is, “How does justification of effort help explain why hazing and initiation rites are common across so many different group types?”

Lastly, we have expanded a feature that proved to be very popular with users of the Revel version of the previous edition, namely videos that recreate classic experiments in social psychology. These videos, recorded exclusively for this book, give students a vivid and contemporary look at how an experiment was done and what it found.

And, of course, we have updated the tenth edition substantially, with numerous references to new research. Here is a sampling of the new research that is covered:

- Chapter 1: This chapter contains updated examples, a new Try It!, and a new section on the role of biological approaches and evolutionary theory in social psychology.
- Chapter 2: A signature of our book continues to be a readable, student-friendly chapter on research methods in social psychology. This chapter has been updated

for the tenth edition with new references and examples and a discussion of the replication debate in social psychology.

- Chapter 3, “Social Cognition: How We Think About the Social World,” has been updated with more than 40 new references. There is a new section on the planning fallacy and discussions of recent research findings, such as a study on counterfactual thinking and people’s belief in God.
- Chapter 4, “Social Perception: How We Come to Understand Other People,” now includes several new features, including a new opening drawing on the *Black Mirror* television series, an interactive photo gallery on using first impressions to your advantage, a discussion of cross-cultural attitudes regarding karma and beliefs in a just world, and a reorganized discussion of Kelley’s covariation model.
- Chapter 5, “The Self: Understanding Ourselves in a Social Context,” has been updated with more than 35 new references. The chapter headings have also been reorganized into three major sections, which should make the material clearer to students. There is a new opening example about children raised by animals and how they might have influenced their sense of self. Lastly, the section on self-esteem has been updated and moved to Chapter 6.
- Chapter 6, “Cognitive Dissonance and the Need to Protect Our Self-Esteem,” is one of the most extensively revised chapters in this edition. This chapter has always been a signature of the book; we are the only text to devote an entire chapter to cognitive dissonance theory and self-esteem maintenance. We proudly retain this chapter in our tenth edition, continuing to present classic work in cognitive dissonance in a highly readable manner with compelling examples designed to draw students in. At the same time we have updated the chapter, adding a major new section on advances and extensions of dissonance theory that includes discussions of self-affirmation theory and self-evaluation maintenance theory. There is also a section on narcissism and self-esteem, which previously appeared in Chapter 5. Lastly the chapter has two new Try It! exercises that students will enjoy: In one they complete a values affirmation writing exercise, and in another they can take a short version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and get feedback on their score.
- Chapter 7, “Attitudes and Attitude Change: Influencing Thoughts and Feelings,” includes a new opening story, new examples from Election 2016 in the discussion of affectively based attitudes, and new discussion of how implicit versus explicit attitudes can vary in predicting outcomes when it comes to evaluation of job résumés based on applicant name. A new interactive feature is also included to explain the formula for persuasion according to the Yale Attitude Change approach.
- Chapter 8, “Conformity and Obedience: Influencing Behavior,” now opens with a more positive focus on social influence, in the form of Pete Frates and the ALS ice bucket challenge. We have added a discussion of the proliferation of “fake news” in the section on informational social influence. The chapter also features a new interactive video demonstrating students employing various social influence techniques and added discussion of contemporary criticism of Milgram’s research.
- Chapter 9, “Group Processes: Influence in Social Groups,” now opens with an analysis of problematic group decision making and strategizing in Hilary Clinton’s 2016 campaign team. We have also added coverage of recent research on combating the problematic effects on deindividuation online and group polarization via social media feeds. The chapter also includes expanded and updated discussion of the prisoner’s dilemma and a new photo gallery regarding resource dilemmas.
- Chapter 10, “Attraction and Relationships: From Initial Impressions to Long-Term Intimacy,” has a new title to better reflect the balanced focus between initial attraction and relationship trajectory/satisfaction. A new interactive photo gallery explores the relationship between mere exposure and liking, and a new interactive video illustrates the matching hypothesis in attraction. We have added coverage (including an interactive figure) of Sternberg’s triangular theory of love and have reorganized and updated the concluding section on relationship satisfaction and breaking up.
- In Chapter 11, “Prosocial Behavior: Why Do People Help?” includes more than 30 new references, expanded discussions of empathy and altruism and volunteerism, and a revised discussion of religion and prosocial behavior.
- Chapter 12, “Aggression: Why Do We Hurt Other People? Can We Prevent It?,” has significant content updates in addition to covering new research. Our discussion of testosterone and aggression is more nuanced, disentangling some aspects of gender and hormones and introducing the other sex hormone related to aggression, estradiol. We also introduce and evaluate two formal evolutionary theories of aggression: the challenge hypothesis and dual-hormone theory. We also streamlined the section on sexual assault to make this important section clearer. Overall, the

chapter narrative now emphasizes the convergent evidence for the role of impulsivity in aggression across biological and psychological evidence.

- In Chapter 13, “Prejudice: Causes, Consequences, and Cures,” has undergone a major organizational and content update. We generalized the discussion of prejudice from the strong focus on Black-White and male-female relations to relate more generally to other ethnic, gender, and stigmatized identities. Nonetheless, we maintain an important dialog on anti-Blackness, including a discussion of police shootings and activist groups. We expanded the discussion of emotions as a core component of prejudice, through which we included more physiological research on prejudice into the chapter. Under the ways to reduce prejudice, we have extended the discussion of intergroup contact to teach students about *indirect* contact, and we have streamlined the discussion of the jigsaw classroom. The entire chapter was updated with new examples from recent popular culture and interactive components in Revel.
- Social Psychology in Action chapters—“Using Social Psychology to Achieve a Sustainable and Happy Future,” “Social Psychology and Health,” and “Social Psychology and the Law”—have been updated with many references to new research, but remain shorter chapters. When we teach the course, we find that students are excited to learn about these applied areas. At the same time, we recognize that some instructors have difficulty fitting the chapters into their courses. As with the previous edition, our approach remains to maintain a shortened length for the applied chapters to make it easy to integrate these chapters into different parts of the course in whatever fashion an instructor deems best. SPA1, “Using Social Psychology to Achieve a Sustainable and Happy Future,” includes an updated opening example about the effects of climate change and new examples of ways in which students can both act in sustainable ways and maximize their well-being. In SPA2, “Social Psychology and Health,” we updated coverage on perceived control interventions among nursing home residents and included a new interactive on coping with stress. SPA3, “Social Psychology and Law,” has a new video about attentional blindness and an interactive feature on best practices in eyewitness identification procedures.

## Revel for Social Psychology

Revel™

When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple

fact inspired the creation of Revel: an interactive learning environment designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn. Built in collaboration with educators and students nationwide, Revel is the newest, fully digital way to deliver respected Pearson content. Revel enlivens course content with media interactives and assessments—including an interactive figure) of ntegrated directly within the authors’ narrative—that provide opportunities for students to read about and practice course material in tandem. This immersive educational technology boosts student engagement, which leads to better understanding of concepts and improved performance throughout the course.

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Rather than simply offering opportunities to read about and study social psychology, Revel facilitates deep, engaging interactions with the concepts that matter most. By providing opportunities to improve skills in analyzing and interpreting sources of psychological evidence, for example, Revel engages students directly and immediately, which leads to a better understanding of course material. A wealth of student and instructor resources and interactive materials can be found within Revel. Some of our favorites are mentioned in the information that follows.

For more information about all the tools and resources in Revel and access to your own Revel account for Social Psychology, go to [www.pearsonhighered.com/revel/](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/revel/).

## Instructor Resources

We know that instructors are “tour guides” for their students, leading them through the exciting world of social psychology in the classroom. As such, we have invested tremendous effort in the creation of a world-class collection of instructor resources that will support professors in their mission to teach the best course possible.

Coauthor Sam Sommers guided the creation of this supplements package, which has been reviewed and updated for the tenth edition. Here are the highlights of the supplements we are pleased to provide:

### PRESENTATION TOOLS AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- **Social Psychology PowerPoint Collection (0134700732)**  
The PowerPoints provide an active format for presenting concepts from each chapter and incorporating relevant figures and tables. Instructors can choose from three PowerPoint presentations: a lecture presentation set that highlights major topics from the chapters, a highly visual lecture presentation set with **embedded videos**, or a PowerPoint collection of the complete art files from the text. The



PowerPoint files can be downloaded from [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

- **Instructor’s Resource Manual** (0134700694) The Instructor’s Manual includes key terms, lecture ideas, teaching tips, suggested readings, chapter outlines, student projects and research assignments, Try It! exercises, critical-thinking topics and discussion questions, and a media resource guide. It has been updated for the tenth edition with hyperlinks to ease facilitation of navigation within the Instructor’s Resource Manual.

#### ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

- **Test Bank** (0134700740) Each of the more than 2,000 questions in this test bank is page-referenced to the text and categorized by topic and skill level. Each question in the test bank was reviewed by several instructors to ensure that we are providing you with the best and most accurate content in the industry.
- **MyTest Test Bank** (0134677897) This Web-based test-generating software provides instructors “best in class” features in an easy-to-use program. Create tests and easily select questions with drag-and-drop or point-and-click functionality. Add or modify test questions using the built-in Question Editor, and print tests in a variety of formats. The program comes with full technical support.

## Acknowledgments

Elliot Aronson is delighted to acknowledge the collaboration of Carol Tavris. He would also like to acknowledge the contributions of his best friend (who also happens to be his wife of 60 years), Vera Aronson. Vera, as usual, provided inspiration for his ideas and acted as the sounding board for and supportive critic of many of his semiformal notions, helping to mold them into more sensible analyses.

Tim Wilson would like to thank his graduate mentor, Richard E. Nisbett, who nurtured his interest in the field and showed him the continuity between social psychological research and everyday life. He also thanks the many students who have taken his course in social psychology over the years, for asking fascinating questions and providing wonderful examples of social psychological phenomena in their everyday lives. Lastly, he thanks the many graduate students with whom he has had the privilege of working for joining him in the ever-fascinating discovery of new social psychological phenomena.

Sam Sommers would like to acknowledge, first and foremost, the Sommers ladies, Marilyn, Abigail, and Sophia, for being patient with round-the-clock revision sessions, for tolerating the constantly expanding mass of papers and books on the floor of the study (he promises to clean them up before

work starts on the eleventh edition), and for frequently providing excellent real-life examples that illustrate social psychological concepts. He also gives special thanks to all of his teachers of social psychology, for introducing him to the field, for continued support, and for serving as role models as instructors, mentors, researchers, and writers.

No book can be written and published without the help of many people working with the authors behind the scenes, and our book is no exception. We need to give a special thanks to Elizabeth Page-Gould for her tremendous help in revising two of the chapters. Her deep knowledge of social psychology and wonderful writing style contributed greatly to this edition. We would also like to thank the many colleagues who read one or more chapters of this edition and of previous editions of the book.

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*Fairleigh Dickinson University; Mark Stewart, American River College; Lori Stone, University of Texas at Austin; JoNell Strough, West Virginia University; T. Gale Thompson, Bethany College; Scott Tindale, Loyola University of Chicago; David M. Tom, Columbus State Community College; David Trafimow, New Mexico State University; Ruth Warner, St. Louis University; Anne Weiher, Metropolitan State College of Denver; Gary L. Wells, Iowa State University; Jackie White, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Paul L. Wienir, Western Michigan University; Kipling D. Williams, University of Toledo; Tamara Williams, Hampton University; Paul Windschitl, University of Iowa; Mike Witmer, Skagit Valley College; Gwen Wittenbaum, Michigan State University; William Douglas Woody, University of Northern Colorado; Clare Zaborowski, San Jacinto College; William H. Zachry, University of Tennessee–Martin; Leah Zinner, University of Wisconsin–Madison*

We also thank the wonderful editorial staff of Pearson for their expertise and professionalism, including Dickson Musslewhite (Editorial Director), Cecilia Turner (Content Producer), Christopher Brown (Executive Product Marketing Manager), Louis Fierro (Editorial Assistant), and Angel Chavez (Project Manager). We would especially like to thank Thomas Finn (Developmental Editor), who provided expert guidance with constant good cheer and insight even through barrages of e-mail exchanges and attachments, and Amber Chow (Portfolio Manager), whose smart vision for the book, and commitment to making it as good as it can be, have truly made a difference. Finally, we thank Mary Falcon, but for whom we never would have begun this project.

Thank you for inviting us into your classroom. We welcome your suggestions, and we would be delighted to hear your comments about this book.

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# About the Authors

## Elliot Aronson

When I was a kid, we were the only Jewish family in a virulently anti-Semitic neighborhood. I had to go to Hebrew school every day, late in the afternoon. Being the only youngster in my neighborhood going to Hebrew school made me an easy target for some of the older neighborhood toughs. On my way home from Hebrew school, after dark, I was frequently waylaid and roughed up by roving gangs shouting anti-Semitic epithets.

I have a vivid memory of sitting on a curb after one of these beatings, nursing a bloody nose or a split lip, feeling very sorry for myself and wondering how these kids could hate me so much when they didn't even know me. I thought about whether those kids were taught to hate Jews or whether, somehow, they were born that way. I wondered if their hatred could be changed—if they got to know me better, would they hate me less? I speculated about my own character. What would I have done if the shoe were on the other foot—that is, if I were bigger and stronger than they, would I be capable of beating them up for no good reason?

I didn't realize it at the time, of course, but eventually I discovered that these were profound questions. And some 30 years later, as an experimental social psychologist, I had the great good fortune to be in a position to answer some of those questions and to invent techniques to reduce the kind of prejudice that had claimed me as a victim.

*Elliot Aronson is Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Santa Cruz and one of the most renowned social psychologists in the world. In 2002, he was chosen as one of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century. Dr. Aronson is the only person in the 120-year history of the American Psychological Association to have received all three of its major awards: for distinguished writing, distinguished teaching, and distinguished research. Many other professional societies have honored his research and teaching as well. These include the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which gave him its highest honor, the Distinguished Scientific Research award; the American Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, which named him Professor of the Year of 1989; the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, which awarded him the Gordon Allport prize for his contributions to the reduction of prejudice among racial and ethnic groups; and the William James Award from the Association for Psychological Science. In 1992, he was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A collection of papers and tributes by his former students and colleagues, *The Scientist and the Humanist*, celebrates his contributions to social psychological theory and its application to*

*real-world problems. Dr. Aronson's own recent books for general audiences include *Mistakes Were Made (but not by ME)*, with Carol Tavris, and a memoir, *Not by Chance Alone: My Life as a Social Psychologist*.*

## Tim Wilson

One day when I was 8, a couple of older kids rode up on their bikes to share some big news: They had discovered an abandoned house down a country road. "It's really neat," they said. "We broke a window and nobody cared!" My friend and I hopped onto our bikes to investigate. We had no trouble finding the house—there it was, sitting off by itself, with a big, jagged hole in a first-floor window. We got off of our bikes and looked around. My friend found a baseball-sized rock lying on the ground and threw a perfect strike through another first-floor window. There was something exhilarating about the smash-and-tingle of shattering glass, especially when we knew there was nothing wrong with what we were doing. After all, the house was abandoned, wasn't it? We broke nearly every window in the house and then climbed through one of the first-floor windows to look around.

It was then that we realized something was terribly wrong. The house certainly did not look abandoned. There were pictures on the wall, nice furniture, books in shelves. We went home feeling frightened and confused. We soon learned that the house was the home of an elderly couple who were away on vacation. Eventually, my parents discovered what we had done and paid a substantial sum to repair the windows. For years, I pondered this incident: Why did I do such a terrible thing? Was I a bad kid? I didn't think so, and neither did my parents. How, then, could a good kid do such a bad thing? Even though the neighborhood kids said the house was abandoned, why couldn't my friend and I see the clear signs that someone lived there? How crucial was it that my friend was there and threw the first rock? Although I didn't know it at the time, these reflections touched on several classic social psychological issues, such as whether only bad people do bad things, whether the social situation can be powerful enough to make good people do bad things, and the way in which our expectations about an event can make it difficult to see it as it really is. Fortunately, my career as a vandal ended with this one incident. It did, however, mark the beginning of my fascination with basic questions about how people understand themselves and the social world—questions I continue to investigate to this day.

*Tim Wilson did his undergraduate work at Williams College and Hampshire College and received his PhD from the University of Michigan. Currently Sherrell J. Aston Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, he has published numerous articles in the areas of introspection, attitude change, self-knowledge, and affective forecasting, as well as a recent book, Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change. His research has received the support of the National Science Foundation and the National Institute for Mental Health. He has been elected twice to the Executive Board of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology and is a Fellow in the American Psychological Society and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. In 2009, he was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2015 he received the William James Fellows Award from the Association for Psychological Science. Wilson has taught the Introduction to Social Psychology course at the University of Virginia for more than 30 years. In 2001 he was awarded the University of Virginia All-University Outstanding Teaching Award, and in 2010 was awarded the University of Virginia Distinguished Scientist Award.*

## Sam Sommers

I went to college to major in English. I only found myself in an Intro to Psychology course as a second-semester freshman because, well, it just seemed like the kind of thing you did as a second-semester freshman. It was when we got to the social psychology section of the course that a little voice in my head started whispering something along the lines of, *Hey, you've gotta admit this is pretty good stuff. It's a lot like the conversations you have with your friends about daily life, but with scientific data.*

As part of the class, we had the opportunity to participate in research studies for course credit. So one day I found myself in an interaction study in which I was going to work on solving problems with a partner. I walked in and it was clear that the other guy had arrived earlier—his coat and bag were already hanging on the back of a chair. I was led to another, smaller room and shown a video of my soon-to-be partner. Then I was given a series of written questions about my perceptions of him, my expectations for our upcoming session together, and so forth. Finally, I walked back into the main area. The experimenter handed me a chair and told me to put it down anywhere next to my partner's chair, and that she would go get him (he, too, was presumably completing written questionnaires in a private room).

So I did. I put my chair down, took a seat, and waited. Then the experimenter returned, but she was alone. She told me the study was over. There was no other participant; there would be no problem solving in pairs. The video I

had watched was of an actor, and in some versions of the study he mentioned having a girlfriend. In other versions, he mentioned a boyfriend. What the researchers were actually studying was how this social category information of sexual orientation would influence participants' attitudes about the interaction.

And then she took out a tape measure.

The tape measure was to gauge how close to my partner's chair I had placed my own chair, the hypothesis being that discomfort with a gay partner might manifest in terms of participants placing their chairs farther away. Greater comfort with or affinity for the partner was predicted to lead to more desire for proximity.

And at that, I was hooked. The little voice in my head had grown from a whisper to a full-throated yell that this was a field I could get excited about. First of all, the researchers had tricked me. That, alone, I thought was, for lack of a better word, *cool*. But more important, they had done so in the effort to get me and my fellow participants to reveal something about our attitudes, preferences, and tendencies that we never would have admitted to (or perhaps even would have been aware of) had they just asked us directly. Here was a fascinatingly creative research design, being used in the effort to study what struck me as an incredibly important social issue.

Like I said, I was hooked. And I look forward to helping to introduce you to this field that caught me by surprise back when I was a student and continues to intrigue and inspire me to this day.

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# Special Tips for Students

“There is then creative reading as well as creative writing,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1837, and that aptly sums up what you need to know to be a proficient student: Be an active, creative consumer of information. How do you accomplish that feat? Actually, it’s not difficult. Like everything else in life, it just takes some work—some clever, well-planned, purposeful work. Here are some suggestions about how to do it.

## Get to Know the Textbook

Believe it or not, in writing this book, we thought carefully about the organization and structure of each chapter. Things are presented as they are for a reason, and that reason is to help you learn the material in the best way possible. Here are some tips on what to look for in each chapter.

**Key terms are in boldface type in the text so that you’ll notice them.** We define the terms in the text, and that definition appears again in the margin. These marginal definitions are there to help you out if later in the chapter you forget what something means. The marginal definitions are quick and easy to find. You can also look up key terms in the alphabetical Glossary at the end of this textbook.

**Make sure you notice the headings and subheadings.** The headings are the skeleton that holds a chapter together. They link together like vertebrae. If you ever feel lost, look back to the previous heading and the headings before it—this will give you the “big picture” of where the chapter is going. It should also help you see the connections between sections.

**The summary at the end of each chapter** is a succinct short-hand presentation of the chapter information. You should read it and make sure there are no surprises when you do so. If anything in the summary doesn’t ring a bell, go back to the chapter and reread that section. Most important, remember that the summary is intentionally brief, whereas your understanding of the material should be full and complete. Use the summary as a study aid before your exams. When you read it over, everything should be familiar. When you have that wonderful feeling of knowing more than is in the summary, you’ll know that you are ready to take the exam.

**Be sure to do the Try It! exercises.** They will make concepts from social psychology concrete and help you see how they can be applied to your own life. Some of the Try It! exercises replicate social psychology experiments. Others reproduce self-report scales so you can see where you stand in relation

to other people. Still others are short quizzes that illustrate social psychological concepts.

**Watch the videos.** Our carefully curated collection of interviews, news clips, and research study reenactments is designed to enhance, and help you better understand, the concepts you’re reading. If you can see the concept in action, it’s likely to sink in a little deeper.

## Just Say No to the Couch Potato Within

Because social psychology is about everyday life, you might lull yourself into believing that the material is all common sense. Don’t be fooled. The material presented in this book is more complicated than it might seem. Therefore, we want to emphasize that the best way to learn it is to work with it in an active, not passive, fashion. You can’t just read a chapter once and expect it to stick with you. You have to go over the material, wrestle with it, make your own connections to it, question it, think about it, interact with it. Actively working with material makes it memorable and makes it your own. Because it’s a safe bet that someone is going to ask you about this material later and you’re going to have to pull it out of memory, do what you can to get it into memory now. Here are some techniques to use:

- Go ahead and highlight lines in the text—you can do so in Revel by clicking and dragging the cursor over a sentence; you can even choose your own color, and add a note! If you highlight important points, you will remember those important points better and can scroll back through them later.
- Read the chapter before the applicable class lecture, not afterward. This way, you’ll get more out of the lecture, which will likely introduce new material in addition to what is in the chapter. The chapter will give you the big picture, as well as a lot of detail. The lecture will enhance that information and help you put it all together. If you haven’t read the chapter first, you may not understand some of the points made in the lecture or realize which points are most important.
- Here’s a good way to study material: Write out a key concept or a study in your own words, without looking at the book or your notes. Or say it out loud to yourself—again in your own words, with your eyes

closed. Can you do it? How good was your version? Did you omit anything important? Did you get stuck at some point, unable to remember what comes next? If so, you now know that you need to go over that information in more detail. You can also study with someone else, describing theories and studies to each other and seeing if you're making sense.

- If you have trouble remembering the results of an important study, try drawing your own version of a graph of the findings (you can use our data graphs for an idea of how to proceed). You will probably find that you remember the research results much better in pictorial form than in words. Draw the information a few times and it will stay with you.
- Remember, the more you work with the material, the better you will learn and remember it. Write it in your own words, talk about it, explain it to others, or draw visual representations of it.
- Last but not least, remember that this material is a lot of fun. You haven't even started reading the book yet, but we think you're going to like it. In particular, you'll see how much social psychology has to tell you about your real, everyday life. As this course progresses, you might want to remind yourself to observe the events of your daily life with new eyes—the eyes

of a social psychologist—and try to apply what you are learning to the behavior of friends, acquaintances, strangers, and, yes, even yourself. In each chapter you will see how other students have done this in brief videos called #SurvivalTips. Make sure you use the Try It! exercises. You will find out how much social psychology can help us understand our lives. When you read the news, think about what social psychology has to say about current events and behaviors; we believe you will find that your understanding of daily life is richer. If you notice a news article that you think is an especially good example of “social psychology in action,” please send it to us, with a full reference to where you found it and on what page. If we decide to use it in the next edition of this book, we'll list your name in the Acknowledgments.

We realize that 10 years from now you may not remember all the facts, theories, and names you learn now. Although we hope you will remember some of them, our main goal is for you to take with you into your future a great many of the broad social psychological concepts presented herein—and, perhaps more important, a critical and scientific way of thinking. If you open yourself to social psychology's magic, we believe it will enrich the way you look at the world and the way you live in it.

# Chapter 1

# Introducing Social Psychology



## Chapter Outline and Learning Objectives

### Defining Social Psychology

**LO 1.1** Define social psychology and distinguish it from other disciplines.

Social Psychology, Philosophy, Science, and Common Sense

How Social Psychology Differs From Its Closest Cousins

### The Power of the Situation

**LO 1.2** Summarize why it matters how people explain and interpret events, as well as their own and others' behavior.

Underestimating the Power of the Situation

The Importance of Construal

### Where Construals Come From: Basic Human Motives

**LO 1.3** Explain what happens when people's need to feel good about themselves conflicts with their need to be accurate.

The Self-Esteem Motive: The Need to Feel Good About Ourselves

The Social Cognition Motive: The Need to Be Accurate

### Why Study Social Psychology?

**LO 1.4** Explain why the study of social psychology is important.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Revel Interactive	Survey What Do You Think?	
	SURVEY	RESULTS
	Do you consider yourself good at predicting how people around you will behave and react under different circumstances?	
	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	

It is a pleasure to be your tour guides as we take you on a journey through the world of social psychology. As we embark on this journey, our hope is to convey our excitement about social psychology—what it is and why it matters. Not only do we, the authors, enjoy teaching this stuff (which we’ve been doing, combined, for more than 100 years), we also love contributing to the growth and development of this field. In addition to being teachers, each of us is a scientist who has contributed to the knowledge base that makes up our discipline. Thus, not only are we leading this tour, we also helped create some of its attractions. We will travel to fascinating and exotic places like prejudice, love, propaganda, education, conformity, aggression, compassion... all the rich variety and surprise of human social life. Ready? OK, let’s go!

Let’s begin with a few examples of the heroic, touching, tragic, and puzzling things that people do:

- Jorge Munoz is a school bus driver during the day but works a different “job” at night: Feeding the hungry. When he gets home from his last school bus run, he and his family cook meals for dozens of people using donated food and their own money. They then serve the food to people down on their luck who line up at a street corner in Queens, New York. Over a 4-year period Munoz has fed more than 70,000 people. Why does he do it? “When they smile,” Munoz says, “That’s the way I get paid.” (<http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=1606>)
- Kristen has known Martin for 2 months and feels that she is madly in love with him. “We’re soul mates!” she tells her best friend. “He’s the one!” “What are you thinking?” says the best friend. “He’s completely wrong for you! He’s as different from you as can be—different background, religion, politics; you even like different movies.” “I’m not worried,” says Kristen. “Opposites attract. I know that’s true; I read it on Wikipedia!”
- Janine and her brother Oscar are arguing about fraternities. Janine’s college didn’t have any, but Oscar is at a large state university in the Midwest, where he has joined Alpha Beta. He went through a severe and scary hazing ritual to join, and Janine cannot understand why he loves these guys so much. “They make the pledges do such stupid stuff,” she says. “They humiliate you and force you to get sick drunk and practically freeze to death in the middle of the night. How can you possibly be happy living there?” “You don’t get it,” Oscar replies. “Alpha Beta is the best of all fraternities. My frat brothers just seem more fun than most other guys.”
- Abraham Biggs Jr., age 19, had been posting to an online discussion board for 2 years. Unhappy about his future and that a relationship had ended, Biggs announced on camera that he was going to commit suicide. He took an overdose of drugs and linked to a live video feed from his bedroom. None of his hundreds of observers called the police for more than 10 hours; some egged him on. Paramedics reached him too late, and Biggs died.

- In the mid-1970s, several hundred members of the Peoples Temple, a California-based religious cult, immigrated to Guyana under the guidance of their leader, the Reverend Jim Jones, where they founded an interracial community called Jonestown. But within a few years some members wanted out, an outside investigation was about to get Jones in trouble, and the group's solidarity was waning. Jones grew despondent and, summoning everyone in the community, spoke to them about the beauty of dying and the certainty that everyone would meet again in another place. The residents willingly lined up in front of a vat containing a mixture of Kool-Aid and cyanide, and drank the lethal concoction. (The legacy of this massacre is the term “drinking the Kool-Aid,” referring to a person's blind belief in ideology.) A total of 914 people died, including 80 babies and the Reverend Jones.

Why do many people help complete strangers? Is Kristen right that opposites attract or is she just kidding herself? Why did Oscar come to love his fraternity brothers despite the hazing they had put him through? Why would people watch a troubled young man commit suicide in front of their eyes, when, by simply flagging the video to alert the website, they might have averted a tragedy? How could hundreds of people be induced to kill their own children and then commit suicide?

All of these stories—the good, the bad, the ugly—pose fascinating questions about human behavior. In this book, we will show you how social psychologists go about answering them.

## Defining Social Psychology

### LO 1.1 Define social psychology and distinguish it from other disciplines.

The task of the psychologist is to understand and predict human behavior. To do so, social psychologists focus on the influence other people have on us. More formally, **social psychology** is the scientific study of the way in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people (Allport, 1985). When we think of social influence, the kinds of examples that readily come to mind are direct attempts at persuasion, whereby one person deliberately tries to change another person's behavior or attitude. This is what happens when advertisers use sophisticated techniques to persuade us to buy a particular brand of deodorant, or when our friends try to get us to do something we don't really want to do (“Come on, have another beer!”), or when the bullies use force or threats to get what they want.

The study of direct attempts at **social influence** is a major part of social psychology and will be discussed in our chapters on conformity, attitudes, and group processes. To the social psychologist, however, social influence is much broader than attempts by one person to change another person's behavior. Social influence shapes

### Social Psychology

The scientific study of the way in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people

### Social Influence

The effect that the words, actions, or mere presence of other people have on our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behavior



Our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by our immediate surroundings, including the presence of other people—even mere strangers.

## Try It!

### Conflicting Social Influences

Think of situations in which you feel conflicting pressures: your parents (or other influential adults in your life) would like you to do one thing, but your friends would like you to do something

altogether different. Are there situations like this in which you feel conflicting pressures from your parents versus your friends? How do you decide how to act in these situations?

our thoughts and feelings as well as our overt acts, and takes many forms other than deliberate attempts at persuasion. For example, we are often influenced merely by the *presence* of other people, including perfect strangers who are not interacting with us. Other people don't even have to be present: We are governed by the imaginary approval or disapproval of our parents, friends, and teachers and by how we expect others to react to us. Sometimes these influences conflict with one another, and social psychologists are especially interested in what happens in the mind of an individual when they do. For example, conflicts frequently occur when young people go off to college and find themselves torn between the beliefs and values they learned at home and the beliefs and values of their professors or peers. (See the Try It! above) We will spend the rest of this introductory chapter expanding on these issues, so that you will get an idea of what social psychology is, what it isn't, and how it differs from other, related disciplines.

### Social Psychology, Philosophy, Science, and Common Sense

Throughout history, philosophy has provided many insights about human nature. Indeed, the work of philosophers is part of the foundation of contemporary psychology. Psychologists have looked to philosophers for insights into the nature of consciousness (e.g., Dennett, 1991) and how people form beliefs about the social world (e.g., Gilbert, 1991). Sometimes, however, even great thinkers find themselves in disagreement with one another. When this occurs, how are we supposed to know who is right?

We social psychologists address many of the same questions that philosophers do, but we attempt to look at these questions scientifically—even questions concerning that great human mystery, love. In 1663, the Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza offered a highly original insight. In sharp disagreement with the hedonistic philosopher Aristippus, he proposed that if we fall in love with someone whom we formerly hated, that love will be stronger than if hatred had not preceded it. Spinoza's proposition was beautifully stated, but that doesn't mean it is true. These are *empirical* questions, meaning that their answers should be derived from experimentation or measurement rather than by personal opinion (Aronson, 1999; Wilson, 2015).

Now let's take another look at the examples that opened this chapter. Why did these people behave the way they did? One way to answer would simply be to ask them. We could ask Jorge Munoz why he spends so much time and money feeding the poor; we could ask the people who observed Abraham Biggs's suicide why they didn't call the police; we could ask Oscar why he enjoys fraternity life. The problem with this approach is that people are often unaware of the reasons behind their own responses and feelings (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, 2002). People might come up with plenty of justifications for not calling the police to rescue Biggs, but those justifications might not be the *reason* they did nothing.

Another approach is to rely on common sense or folk wisdom. Social psychologists are not opposed to folk wisdom—far from it. The primary problem with relying

entirely on such sources is that they often disagree with one another. Consider what folk wisdom has to say about the factors that influence how much we like other people. We know that “birds of a feather flock together.” Of course, we say, thinking of the many examples of our pleasure in hanging out with people who share our backgrounds and interests. But folk wisdom also tells us—as it persuaded lovestruck Kristen—that “opposites attract.” Of course, we say, thinking of all the times we were attracted to people with different backgrounds and interests. Well, which is it? Similarly, are we to believe that “out of sight is out of mind” or that “absence makes the heart grow fonder”?

Social psychologists would suggest that there are some conditions under which birds of a feather do flock together, and other conditions under which opposites do attract. Similarly, in some conditions absence does make the heart grow fonder, and in others “out of sight” does mean out of mind. But it’s not enough to say both proverbs can be true. Part of the job of the social psychologist is to do the research that specifies the *conditions* under which one or another is most likely to take place.

Thus, in explaining why two people like each other—or any other topic of interest—social psychologists would want to know which of many possible explanations is the most likely. To do this, we have devised an array of scientific methods to test our assumptions, guesses, and ideas about human social behavior, empirically and systematically rather than by relying on folk wisdom, common sense, or the opinions and insights of philosophers, novelists, political pundits, and our grandmothers. Doing experiments in social psychology presents many challenges, primarily because we are attempting to predict the behavior of highly sophisticated organisms in complex situations. As scientists, our goal is to find objective answers to such questions as: What are the factors that cause aggression? What causes prejudice, and how might we reduce it? What variables cause two people to like or love each other? Why do certain kinds of political advertisements work better than others? In Chapter 2 we discuss the scientific methods social psychologists use to answer questions such as these.

## How Social Psychology Differs From Its Closest Cousins

Social psychology is related to other disciplines in the physical and social sciences, including biology, neuroscience, sociology, economics, and political science. Each examines the determinants of human behavior, but important differences set social psychology apart—most notably in its level of analysis. For biologists and neuroscientists, the level of analysis might be genes, hormones, or physiological processes in the brain. Although social psychologists sometimes draw on this approach to study the relationship between the brain and social behavior, their emphasis is, as we will see, more on how people interpret the social world.

Other social psychologists draw on the major theory of biology—evolutionary theory—to generate hypotheses about social behavior. In biology, evolutionary theory is used to explain how different species acquired physical traits, such as long necks.



NATO-led soldiers inspect the site of a suicide attack in Afghanistan. What causes a person to become a suicide bomber? Popular theories say such people must be mentally ill, alienated loners, or psychopaths. But social psychologists would try to understand the circumstances and situations that drive otherwise healthy, well-educated, bright people to commit murder and suicide for the sake of a religious or political goal.

In an environment where food is scarce, giraffes that happened to have long necks could feed on foliage that other animals couldn't reach. These giraffes were more likely to survive and reproduce offspring than were giraffes with shorter necks, the story goes, such that the "long neck" gene became dominant in subsequent generations.

But what about social behaviors, such as the tendency to be aggressive toward a member of one's own species or the tendency to be helpful to others? Is it possible that social behaviors also have genetic determinants that evolve through the process of natural selection, and if so, is this true in human beings as well as other animals? These are the questions posed by **evolutionary psychology**, which attempts to explain social behavior in terms of genetic factors that have evolved over time according to the principles of natural selection. The core idea is that evolution occurs very slowly, such that social behaviors that are prevalent today, such as aggression and helping behavior, are a result, at least in part, of adaptations to environments in our distant past (Brown & Cross, 2017; Buss, 2005; Neuberg, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2010). We will discuss in upcoming chapters how evolutionary theory explains social behavior (e.g., Chapter 10 on interpersonal attraction, Chapter 11 on prosocial behavior, and Chapter 12 on aggression).

We note here that a lively debate has arisen over the testability of evolutionary hypotheses. Because current behaviors are thought to be adaptations to environmental conditions that existed thousands of years ago, psychologists make their best guesses about what those conditions were and how specific kinds of behaviors gave people a reproductive advantage. But these hypotheses are obviously impossible to test with the experimental method. And just because hypotheses sound plausible does not mean they are true. For example, some scientists now believe that giraffes did not acquire a long neck to eat leaves in tall trees. Instead, they suggest, long necks first evolved in male giraffes to gain an advantage in fights with other males over access to females (Simmons & Scheepers, 1996). Which of these explanations is true? It's hard to tell. Evolutionary explanations can't be tested directly, because after all, they involve hypotheses about what happened thousands of years ago. They can, however, suggest novel hypotheses about why people do what they do in today's world, which can then be put to the test, as we will see in later chapters.

Well, if we aren't going to rely solely on an evolutionary or biological approach, how else might we explain why people do what they do, such as in the examples that opened this chapter? If you are like most people, when you read these examples you assumed that the individuals involved had some weaknesses, strengths, and personality traits that led them to respond as they did. Some people are leaders and others are followers; some people are public-spirited and others are selfish; some are brave and others are cowardly. Perhaps the people who failed to get help for Abraham Biggs were lazy, timid, selfish, or heartless. Given what you know about their behavior, would you loan them your car or trust them to take care of your new puppy?

Explaining people's behavior in terms of their traits is the work of personality psychologists, who generally focus on *individual differences*, that is, the aspects of people's personalities that make them different from others. Research on personality increases our understanding of human behavior, but social psychologists believe that explaining behavior primarily through personality traits ignores a critical part of the story: the powerful role played by social influence.

Consider again the tragedy at Jonestown. Remember that it was not just a handful of people who committed suicide there, but almost 100% of them. It is highly improbable that they were all mentally ill or had the same constellation of personality traits. If we want a richer, more thorough explanation of this tragic event, we need to understand what kind of power and influence a charismatic figure like Jim Jones possessed, the nature of the impact of living in a closed society cut off from other points of view, and other factors that could have caused mentally healthy people to obey him. In fact, as social psychologists have shown, the social conditions at Jonestown were such

## Evolutionary Psychology

The attempt to explain social behavior in terms of genetic factors that have evolved over time according to the principles of natural selection

that virtually anyone—even strong, nondepressed individuals like you or us—would have succumbed to Jones’s influence.

Here is a more mundane example. Suppose you go to a party and see a great-looking fellow student you have been hoping to get to know better. The student is looking uncomfortable, however—standing alone, not making eye contact, not talking to anyone who comes over. You decide you’re not so interested; this person seems pretty aloof, even arrogant. But a few weeks later you see the student again, now being super social and witty, the center of attention. So what is this person “really” like? Aloof and arrogant or charming and welcoming? It’s the wrong question; the answer is both and neither. All of us are capable of being shy in some situations and outgoing in others. A much more interesting question is: What factors were different in these two situations that had such a profound effect on the student’s behavior? That is a social psychological question. (See the Try It!)

For personality and clinical psychologists, the level of the analysis is the individual. For the social psychologist, the level of analysis is the individual in the context of a social situation—particularly the individual’s **construal** of that situation. The word *construal*, which means how people perceive, comprehend, and interpret the social world, is a favorite among social psychologists, because it conveys how important it is to get inside people’s heads and understand how they see the world, and how those construals are shaped by the social context. For example, to understand why people intentionally hurt one another, the social psychologist focuses on how people construe a specific social situation: Do they do so in a way that makes them feel frustrated? Does frustration always precede aggression? If people are feeling frustrated, under what conditions will they vent their frustration with an aggressive act and under what conditions will they restrain themselves? (See Chapter 12.)

Other social sciences are more concerned with social, economic, political, and historical factors that influence events. Sociology, rather than focusing on the individual,



Personality psychologists study qualities of the individual that might make a person shy, conventional, rebellious, and willing to wear a turquoise wig in public or a yellow shirt in a sea of blue. Social psychologists study the powerful role of social influence on how all of us behave.

### Construal

The way in which people perceive, comprehend, and interpret the social world

## Try It!

### Social Situations and Shyness

1. Think about one of your friends or acquaintances whom you regard as shy. (You may use yourself!) Try not to think about him or her as “a shy person,” but rather as someone who has difficulty relating to people in some situations but not others.
2. List the situations you think are most likely to bring out your friend’s shy behavior.
3. List the situations that might bring forth more outgoing behaviors on your friend’s part. Being with a small group of friends he or she is at ease with? Being with a new person, but one who shares your friend’s interests?
4. Set up a social environment that you think would make your friend comfortable. Pay close attention to the effect that it has on your friend’s behavior—or yours.



The people in this photo can be studied from a variety of perspectives: as individuals or as members of a family, a social class, an occupation, a culture, or a region. Sociologists study the group or institution; social psychologists study the influence of those groups and institutions on individual behavior.

focuses on such topics as social class, social structure, and social institutions. Of course, because society is made up of collections of people, some overlap is bound to exist between the domains of sociology and those of social psychology. The major difference is that in sociology, *the level of analysis is the group, institution, or society at large*, whereas the level of analysis in social psychology is the individual within a group, institution, or society. So although sociologists, like social psychologists, are interested in causes of aggression, sociologists are more likely to be concerned with why a particular society (or group within a society) produces different levels of violence in its members. Why is the murder rate in the United States so much higher than in Canada or Europe? Within the United States, why is the murder rate higher in some geographic regions than in others? How do changes in society relate to changes in aggressive behavior?

Social psychology differs from other social sciences not only in the level of analysis, but also in what is being explained. *The goal of social psychology is to identify psychological properties that make almost everyone susceptible to social influence, regardless of social class or culture.* The laws governing the relationship between frustration and aggression, for example, are hypothesized to be true of

most people in most places, not just members of one gender, social class, culture, age group, or ethnicity.

However, because social psychology is a young science that developed mostly in the United States, some of its findings have not yet been tested in other cultures to see if they are universal. Nonetheless, our goal is to discover such laws. And increasingly, as methods and theories developed by American social psychologists are adopted by European, Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and South American social psychologists, we are learning more about the extent to which these laws are universal, as well as cultural differences in the way these laws are expressed, as well as cultural influences on how people interpret the social world (see Chapter 2). *Cross-cultural research* is therefore extremely valuable, because it sharpens theories, either by demonstrating their universality or by leading us to discover additional variables that help us improve our understanding and prediction of human behavior. We will offer many examples of cross-cultural research in this book.

In sum, social psychology is located between its closest cousins, sociology and personality psychology (see Table 1.1). Social psychology and sociology share an interest in the way the situation and the larger society influence behavior. Social psychology and personality psychology share an interest in the psychology of the individual. But social psychologists work in the overlap between those two disciplines: They emphasize the psychological processes shared by most people around the world that make them susceptible to social influence.

**Table 1.1** Social Psychology Compared to Related Disciplines

Biology and Neuroscience	Personality Psychology	Social Psychology	Sociology
The study of genes, hormones, or physiological processes in the brain	The study of the characteristics that make individuals unique and different from one another	The study of the psychological processes people have in common that make them susceptible to social influence	The study of groups, organizations, and societies, rather than individuals

## Review Questions

- A social psychologist would tend to look for explanations of a young man's violent behavior *primarily* in terms of:
  - his aggressive personality traits.
  - possible genetic contributions.
  - how his peer group behaves.
  - what his father taught him.
- The topic that would most interest a social psychologist is:
  - how the level of extraversion of different presidents affected their political decisions.
  - whether people's decision about whether to cheat on a test is influenced by how they imagine their friends would react if they found out.
  - the extent to which people's social class predicts their income.
  - what passers-by on the street think of global warming.
- Which of the following is true about evolutionary psychology?
  - Natural selection works differently in humans than other animals.
  - It is easy to test evolutionary hypotheses by doing experiments.
  - Most social behaviors are genetically determined with little influence by the social environment.
  - Evolutionary approaches can generate novel hypotheses about social behavior that can then be tested with experiments.
- How does social psychology differ from personality psychology?
  - Social psychology focuses on individual differences, whereas personality psychology focuses on how people behave in different situations.
  - Social psychology focuses on the shared processes that make people susceptible to social influence, whereas personality psychology focuses on individual differences.
  - Social psychology provides general laws and theories about societies, whereas personality psychology studies the characteristics that make people unique.
  - Social psychology focuses on individual differences, whereas personality psychology provides general laws and theories about societies.
- What is the "level of analysis" for a social psychologist?
  - The individual in the context of a social situation.
  - The social situation itself.
  - A person's level of achievement.
  - A person's level of reasoning.
- Which of the following research topics about violence is one that a social psychologist might investigate?
  - How rates of violence change over time within a culture
  - Why murder rates vary across cultures
  - Brain abnormalities that produce aggression when a person is provoked
  - Why some situations are more likely to provoke aggression than others

## The Power of the Situation

**LO 1.2** Summarize why it matters how people explain and interpret events, as well as their own and others' behavior.

Suppose you go to a restaurant with a group of friends. The server comes over to take your order, but you are having a hard time deciding which pie you want. While you are hesitating, she impatiently taps her pen against her notepad, rolls her eyes toward the ceiling, scowls at you, and finally snaps, "Hey, I haven't got all day!" Like most people, you would probably think that she is a nasty or unpleasant person.

But suppose, while you are deciding whether to complain about her to the manager, a regular customer tells you that your "crabby" server is a single parent who was kept awake all night by the moaning of her youngest child, who was terribly sick; that her car broke down on her way to work and she has no idea where she will find the money to have it repaired; that when she finally arrived at the restaurant, she learned that her coworker was too drunk to work, requiring her to cover twice the usual number of tables; and that the short-order cook keeps screaming at her because she is not picking up the orders fast enough. Given all that information, you might now conclude that she is not a nasty person but an ordinary human under enormous stress.

This small story has huge implications. Most Americans will explain someone's behavior in terms of personality; they focus on the fish, and not the water the fish swims in. The fact that they fail to take the situation into account has a profound impact on how human beings relate to one another—such as, in the case of the server, whether they feel sympathy and tolerance or impatience and anger.