Social Psychology

TENTH EDITION

Elliot Aronson • Timothy D. Wilson • Samuel R. Sommers

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Global Edition

Elliot Aronson

Timothy D. Wilson

Samuel R. Sommers

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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 two incidents where a woman and a child, respectively, were left bleeding on the road and passers-by walk by them as if nothing had happened. Students are asked to think about how concepts in the chapter might help explain why the passers-by were unmotivated to help a wounded stranger, such as Latané and Darley's (1970) hypothesis about the bystander effect and decision model of helping. 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 added videos that recreate classic experiments in social psychology. These videos, recorded exclusively for this book's Revel product, 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—icluding 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.

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 .pearsonglobaleditions.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.

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 semiformed 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.

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

Elliot Aronson
elliot@cats.ucsc.edu

Tim Wilson
tdw@virginia.edu

Sam Sommers
sam.sommers@tufts.edu

Global Edition Acknowledgments

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 starting 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.

Sam Sommers earned his BA from Williams College and his PhD from the University of Michigan. Since 2003 he has been a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. His research examines issues related to stereotyping, prejudice, and group diversity, with a particular interest in how these processes play out in the legal domain. He has won multiple teaching awards at Tufts, including the Lerman-Neubauer Prize for Outstanding Teaching and Advising and the Gerald R. Gill Professor of the Year Award. He was also inducted into the Tufts Hall of Diversity for his efforts to promote an inclusive climate on campus for all students. He has testified as an expert witness on issues related to racial bias, jury decision making, and eyewitness memory in criminal trial proceedings in eight states. He has written two general audience books related to social psychology: Situations Matter: Understanding How Context Transforms Your World *(2011) and* This Is Your Brain on Sports: The Science of Underdogs, the Value of Rivalry, and What We Can Learn from the T-shirt Cannon *(2016). He is also co-author of* Invitation to Psychology *(7th edition), along with Carole Wade, Carol Tavris, and Lisa Shin.*

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 shorthand 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?

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?

○ Yes

○ No

Revel Interactive

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 interpersonal pressures. For example, your close friends would like you to do one thing (for e.g., watching a movie), but your romantic partner would like you to do something entirely different (for e.g., going out for dinner). Have you found yourself in such situations in which conflicting pressures from your partner 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.

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.

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.

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

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Try It!

Social Situations and Shyness

1. Think of a friend who is known to be shy because they do not talk much at social gatherings. Now, instead of viewing this friend as "a shy person," try to think of this friend as someone who is afraid that their words might be misunderstood by people.

2. List the situations that you think are most likely to bring out your friend's shy behavior.

3. List the situations that might bring forth a more outgoing behavior 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 might 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

1. A social psychologist would tend to look for explanations of a young man's violent behavior *primarily* in terms of:
   a. his aggressive personality traits.
   b. possible genetic contributions.
   c. how his peer group behaves.
   d. what his father taught him.

2. Social psychologists would be interested in all of the following topics except:
   a. Whether conscientious individuals are more responsive to punishment.
   b. How behaviors of one's peer group might affect the way they act.
   c. How the presence of others may shape the way we think about ourselves.
   d. How performance of a group task can be influenced by the members in that group.

3. Which of the following is true about evolutionary psychology?
   a. Most of our behaviors are rooted in biology and are unaffected by social situations.
   b. Though inspirational, evolutionary theories can hardly be tested by conducting experiments.
   c. Social behaviors do not have an evolutionary origin at all.
   d. Many unexplained social phenomena can be explained by evolutionary hypotheses.

4. Which of the following is true about social psychology and personality psychology?
   a. Personality psychology tests how situations influence individuals, whereas social psychology examines how individuals affect the situations.
   b. Social psychology focuses on individual differences, whereas personality psychology focuses on how people behave in different situations.
   c. Social psychology focuses on the influence of situations, which is typically not the main focus of personality psychology.
   d. Social psychology is more closely related to clinical psychology, whereas personality psychology is more closely related to evolutionary psychology.

5. Which of the following is NOT one of the goals of social psychology?
   a. To understand how people affect each other's behavior.
   b. To understand people's construal processes in social situations.
   c. To understand the biological roots for individual differences.
   d. To understand how people from different cultures and social backgrounds think and behave.

6. Social psychology appears to have the largest overlap with which one of the following disciplines?
   a. Biology and Neuroscience
   b. Personality Psychology
   c. Clinical Psychology
   d. Sociology

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.

Underestimating the Power of the Situation

Fundamental Attribution Error

The tendency to overestimate the extent to which people's behavior is due to internal, dispositional factors and to underestimate the role of situational factors

The social psychologist is up against a formidable barrier known as the **fundamental attribution error**, which is the tendency to explain our own and other people's behavior entirely in terms of personality traits and to underestimate the power of social influence and the immediate situation. We are going to give you the basics of this phenomenon here, because you will be encountering it throughout this book.

Explaining behavior in terms of personality can give us a feeling of false security. When people try to explain repugnant or bizarre behavior, such as the people of Jonestown taking their own lives and killing their own children, they find it tempting and, in a strange way, comforting to write off the victims as flawed human beings. Doing so gives them the feeling that it could never happen to them. Ironically, this way of thinking actually increases our vulnerability to destructive social influences by making us less aware of our own susceptibility to them. Moreover, by failing to fully appreciate the power of the situation, we tend to oversimplify the problem, which can lead us to blame the victim in situations where the individual was overpowered by social forces too difficult for most of us to resist, as in the Jonestown tragedy.

To take a more everyday example, imagine a situation in which two people are playing a game and they must choose one of two strategies: They can play competitively and try to win as much money as possible and make sure their partner loses as much as possible, or they can play cooperatively and try to make sure they both win some money. How do you think each of your friends would play this game?

Few people find this question hard to answer; we all have a feeling for the relative competitiveness of our friends. Accordingly, you might say, "I am certain that my friend Jennifer, who is a hard-nosed business major, would play this game more competitively than my friend Anna, who is a soft-hearted, generous person." But how accurate are you likely to be? Should you be thinking about the game itself rather than who is playing it?

To find out, researchers at Stanford University conducted the following experiment (Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004). They described the game to resident assistants (RAs) in a student dorm and asked them to come up with a list of undergrads whom they thought were either especially cooperative or especially competitive. As expected, the RAs easily identified students who fit each category. Next, the researchers invited these students to play the game in a psychology experiment. There was one added twist: The researchers varied a seemingly minor aspect of the social situation—what the game was called. They told half the participants that they would be playing the Wall Street Game and the other half that they would be playing the Community Game. Everything else about the game was identical. People who were judged as either competitive or cooperative played a game that was called either the Wall Street Game or the Community Game, resulting in four conditions: cooperative people playing the Wall Street Game, cooperative people playing the Community Game, competitive people playing the Wall Street Game, or competitive people playing the Community Game.

Again, most of us go through life assuming that what really counts is an individual's true character, not something about the individual's immediate situation and certainly not something as trivial as what a game is called, right? Not so fast! As you can see in Figure 1.1, the name of the game made a tremendous difference in how people behaved. When it was called the Wall Street Game, approximately two-thirds of the students responded competitively; when it was called the Community Game, only a third responded competitively. The name of the game sent a powerful message about how the players should behave. But a student's alleged personality trait made no measurable difference in the student's behavior. The students labeled *competitive* were no more likely to adopt the competitive strategy than those who were labeled *cooperative*. We will see this pattern of results throughout this book: Aspects of the social

Figure 1.1 Why the Name of the Game Matters

In this experiment, when the name of the game was the "Community Game," players were far more likely to behave cooperatively than when it was called the "Wall Street Game"—regardless of their own cooperative or competitive personality traits. The game's title conveyed social norms that trumped personality and shaped the players' behavior.

(Data from Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004)
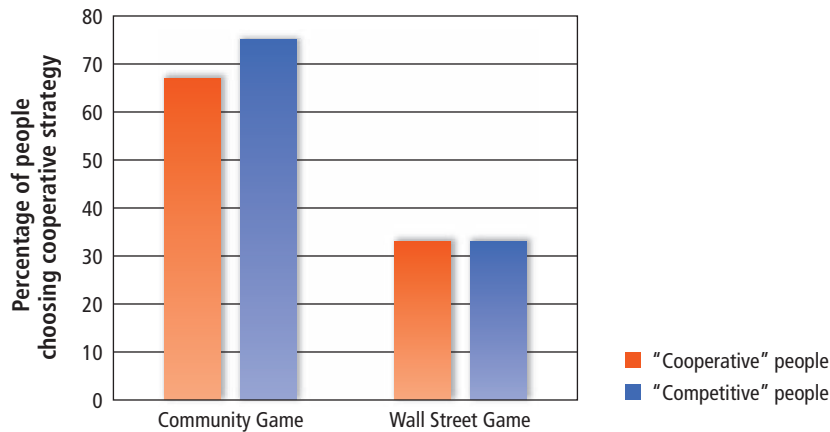
situation that may seem minor can overwhelm the differences in people's personalities (Ross & Ward, 1996).

If merely assigning a name to a game in a psychology experiment has such a large impact on the behavior of the players, what do you think the impact would be conveying to students in a classroom that the activity they were doing was competitive or cooperative? Suppose you are a seventh-grade history teacher. In one of your classes, you structure the learning experience so that it resembles the situation implied by the term "Wall Street Game." You encourage competition, you tell your students to raise their hands as quickly as possible and to jeer at any incorrect answers given by other students. In your other class, you structure the learning situation such that the students are rewarded for cooperating with one another, for listening well, for encouraging one another and pulling together to learn the material. What do you suppose the effect these different situations might have on the performance of your students, on their enjoyment of school, and on their feelings about one another? Such an experiment will be discussed in Chapter 13 (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011).

Of course personality differences do exist and frequently are of great importance, but social and environmental situations are so powerful that they have dramatic effects on almost everyone. This is the domain of the social psychologist.

The Importance of Construal

It is one thing to say that the social situation has profound effects on human behavior, but what exactly do we mean by the social situation? One strategy for defining it would be to specify the objective properties of the situation, such as how rewarding it is to people, and then document the behaviors that follow from these objective properties.

This is the approach taken by **behaviorism**, a school of psychology maintaining that to

Behaviorism

A school of psychology maintaining that to understand human behavior, one need only consider the reinforcing properties of the environment

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understand human behavior, one need only consider the reinforcing properties of the environment: When behavior is followed by a reward (such as money, attention, praise, or other benefits), it is likely to continue; when behavior is followed by a punishment (such as pain, loss, or angry shouts), it is likely to stop, or become extinguished. Dogs come when they are called because they have learned that compliance is followed by positive reinforcement (e.g., food or petting); children memorize their multiplication tables more quickly if you praise them, smile at them, and paste a gold star on their foreheads following correct answers. Behavioral psychologists, notably the pioneering behaviorist B. F. Skinner (1938), believed that all behavior could be understood by examining the rewards and punishments in the organism's environment.

Behaviorism has many strengths, and its principles explain some behavior very well. (See Chapter 10.) However, because the early behaviorists did not concern themselves with cognition, thinking, and feeling—concepts they considered too vague and mentalistic and not sufficiently anchored to observable behavior—they overlooked phenomena that are vital to the human social experience. Most especially, they overlooked the importance of *how people interpret their environments.*

Gestalt Psychology

A school of psychology stressing the importance of studying the subjective way in which an object appears in people's minds rather than the objective, physical attributes of the object

For social psychologists, people's behavior is not influenced directly by the situation but rather, as we mentioned earlier, by their construal of it (Griffin & Ross, 1991; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). For example, if a person approaches you, slaps you on the back, and asks you how you are feeling, your response will depend not on what that person has done, but on how you *construe* (i.e., interpret) that behavior. You might construe these actions differently depending on whether they come from a close friend who is concerned about your health, a casual acquaintance who is just passing the time of day, or a car salesperson attempting to be nice for the purpose of selling you a used car. And your answer will vary also, even if the question about your health were worded the same and asked in the same tone of voice. You would be unlikely to say, "Actually, I'm feeling pretty worried about this kidney pain" to a salesperson, but you might tell your close friend.

The emphasis on construal has its roots in an approach called **Gestalt psychology**. First proposed as a theory of how people perceive the physical world, Gestalt psychology holds that we should study the subjective way in which an object appears in people's minds (the *gestalt*, or whole) rather than the way in which the objective, physical attributes of the object combine. An illustration of this point is

Figure 1.2

An illustration of the Gestalt approach to perception is optical illusions, such as the one shown in the picture below. Is this a picture of a duck looking to the left or a rabbit looking the right? Objectively it is neither; rather, it is how you are *construing* it at any particular point in time.

how people perceive optical illusions like the one shown in Figure 1.2. What do you see in that figure? Do you see a duck looking to the left or a rabbit looking the right? Objectively it is neither; rather, it is how you are *construing* it at any particular point in time. That is, according to Gestalt psychology, one must focus on the phenomenology of the perceivers—on how an object appears to them—instead of on its objective components.

The Gestalt approach was formulated by German psychologists in the first part of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, several of these psychologists fled to the United States to escape the Nazi regime. Among the émigrés was Kurt Lewin, generally considered the founding father of modern experimental social psychology. As a young German Jewish professor in the 1930s, Lewin experienced the anti-Semitism rampant in Nazi Germany. The experience profoundly affected his thinking, and once he moved to the United States, Lewin helped shape American social psychology, directing it toward a deep interest in exploring the causes and cures of prejudice and ethnic stereotyping.

As a theorist, Lewin took the bold step of applying Gestalt principles beyond the perception of objects—such as the duck/rabbit picture above—to how we perceive the social world. It is often more important to understand how people perceive, comprehend, and interpret each other's behavior, he said, than it is to understand its objective properties (Lewin, 1943). "If an individual sits in a room trusting that the ceiling will not come down," he said, "should only his 'subjective probability' be taken into account for predicting behavior or should we also consider the 'objective probability' of the ceiling's coming down as determined by engineers? To my mind, only the first has to be taken into account" (p. 308).

Social psychologists soon began to focus on the importance of how people construe their environments. Fritz Heider (1958), another early founder of social psychology, observed, "Generally, a person reacts to what he thinks the other person is perceiving, feeling, and thinking, in addition to what the other person may be doing" (p. 1). We are busy guessing all the time about the other person's state of mind, motives, and thoughts. We may be right—but often we are wrong.

That is why construal has major implications. In a murder trial, when the prosecution presents compelling evidence it believes will prove the defendant guilty, the verdict always hinges on precisely how each jury member construes that evidence. These construals rest on a variety of events and perceptions that often bear no objective relevance to the case. During cross-examination, did a key witness come across as being too remote or too arrogant? Did the prosecutor appear to be smug, obnoxious, or uncertain?

A special kind of construal is what Lee Ross calls **naïve realism**, that is, the conviction that we perceive things "as they really are," underestimating how much we are interpreting or "spinning" what we see. People with opposite political views, for example, often can't even agree on the facts; both sides think that they are "seeing as it really is," when in fact both are probably letting their beliefs color their interpretation of the facts. We tend to believe, therefore, that if other people see the same things differently, it must be because *they* are biased (Ehrlinger, Gilovich, & Ross, 2005; Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004; Ross, 2010). Ross has been working closely with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators who are trying to resolve the decade's long conflict between Israel and Palestine. These negotiations frequently run aground because of naïve realism; each side assumes that other reasonable people see things the same way they do. "[E]ven when each side recognizes that the other side perceives the issues differently," says Ross, "each thinks that the other side is biased while they themselves are objective and that their own perceptions of reality should provide the basis for settlement" (Ross, 2010). So both sides resist compromise, fearing that their "biased" opponent will benefit more than they.

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947).

Naïve Realism

The conviction that we perceive things "as they really are," underestimating how much we are interpreting or "spinning" what we see

In a simple experiment, Ross took peace proposals created by Israeli negotiators, labeled them as Palestinian proposals, and asked Israeli citizens to judge them. The Israelis liked the Palestinian proposal attributed to Israel more than they liked the Israeli proposal attributed to the Palestinians. Ross (2010) concludes, "If your own proposal isn't going to be attractive to you when it comes from the other side, what chance is there that the *other* side's proposal is going to be attractive when it comes from the other side?" The hope is that once negotiators on both sides become fully aware of this phenomenon and how it impedes conflict resolution, a reasonable compromise will be more likely.

Research by social psychologists on construal shows why negotiation between nations can be so difficult: Each side thinks that it sees the issues clearly but that the other side is "biased."

You can see that construals range from the simple (as in the question "How do you see it?") to the remarkably complex (international negotiations). And they affect all of us in our everyday lives. Imagine that Jason is a college student who admires Maria from afar. As a budding social psychologist, you have the job of predicting whether or not Jason will ask Maria to have dinner with him. To do this, you need to begin by viewing Maria's behavior through Jason's eyes—that is, by seeing how Jason interprets her behavior. If she smiles at him, does Jason construe her behavior as mere politeness, the kind of politeness she would extend to any of the dozens of nerds and losers in their class? Or does he view her smile as an encouraging sign that inspires him to ask her out? If she ignores him, does Jason figure that she's playing hard to get, or does he take it as a sign that she's not interested in him? To predict what Jason will do, it is not enough to know Maria's behavior; we must know how Jason construes her behavior. But how are these construals formed? Stay tuned.

#trending

Medals for Sustainability!

Countries have time and again recognized the power of construal in getting their citizens to interpret proposed initiatives in a favorable light by putting positive labels on initiatives they wish to implement. Recently, Japan, the host country of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, introduced the "Tokyo 2020 Medal Project" as the official "Nationwide Participation Programme" and promised the world to deliver the "most innovative Olympic games ever organized". The ingenious idea of using precious metals extracted from used or discarded electronics to create the Olympic medals was soon revealed and collections toward this project started in April 2017. In a span of two years, the citizens of the country willfully donated approximately 6.21 million used mobile phones and other electronics, which in turn also saved Japan millions in operating costs. With a total of 1,621 municipalities participating in this initiative, over 5,000 gold, silver, and bronze medals were produced using 100 percent of the metals contributed by the people of Japan.

The obvious explanation for this successful recycling effort is related to how the Japanese construed these solicitations by the authorities who hoped that this initiative would raise awareness about the amount of e-waste generated annually all around the world. Instead of publicizing the donation drive in dull formal statements, the "Everyone's Medal" program was promoted as a community effort which would enable Japanese citizens to contribute to the Games and a successful hosting of the event in a much more personal manner. As a result, the campaign boasted of a 90 percent nationwide participation rate, which further went to prove how a tiny tweak in communication can bolster an altered construal and ultimately one's willingness to help.

Review Questions

1. You are crossing the road when a car jumps the red light and almost hits you. You assume that the person is a reckless driver, but the driver is actually on his way to the hospital with a sick person in his car. Your assumption about the other person is an example of
   a. Personality construction.
   b. Fundamental attribution error.
   c. Random guess.
   d. None of the above.

2. Which of the following statements is true about Wall Street Game?
   a. Calling it "Community Game" makes people more cooperative and calling it "Wall Street Game" makes people more competitive.
   b. Calling it either "Community Game" or "Wall Street Game" has minimal effects on people's cooperative behaviors.
   c. Calling it "Community Game" does not make people more cooperative while calling it "Wall Street Game" makes people more competitive.
   d. Calling it "Community Game" makes people more co-operative while calling it "Wall Street Game" does not make people more competitive.

3. A person approaches you at the bus stop. He asks you if you would be willing to give him $2 for taking the next bus as he has just lost his wallet. According to social psychologists, which of the following reasons will most likely influence your decision?
   a. The person's physical appeal.
   b. The person's gender.
   c. The person's age.
   d. Your construal about the situation.

4. Gestalt psychology states that:
   a. Our views on most objects are biased.
   b. We tend to construe situations objectively.
   c. We perceive the world through subjective phenomenology.
   d. All of the above.

5. "Naïve Realism" refers to:
   a. A type of bias observed primarily in younger people.
   b. Our tendency to misbelieve that our views are always objective.
   c. A notion that most people are unrealistic.
   d. A tendency to naively believe things are accurate when in fact they are not.

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.**

How will Jason determine why Maria smiled at him? If it is true that subjective and not objective situations influence people, we need to understand how people arrive at their subjective impressions of the world. What are people trying to accomplish when they interpret the social world? Are they concerned with making an interpretation that places them in the most positive light (e.g., Jason's deciding that "Maria is ignoring me just to make me jealous") or with making the most accurate interpretation, even if it is unflattering (e.g., "Painful as it may be, I must admit that she would rather go out with a sea slug than with me")? Social psychologists seek to understand the fundamental motives that determine why we construe the social world the way we do.

   We human beings are complex organisms. At any given moment, various intersecting motives underlie our thoughts and behaviors, including hunger, thirst, fear, a desire for control, and the promise of love and other rewards. (See Chapters 10 and 11.) Social psychologists emphasize the importance of two central motives in steering people's construals: *the need to feel good about ourselves* and *the need to be accurate.* Sometimes, each of these motives pulls us in the same direction. Often, though, these motives tug us in opposite directions, where to perceive the world accurately requires us to admit that we have behaved foolishly or immorally.

   Leon Festinger, one of social psychology's most innovative theorists, realized that it is precisely when these two motives pull in opposite directions that we can gain our most valuable insights into the workings of the mind. To illustrate, imagine that you are the president of the United States and your country is engaged in a difficult and costly war. You have poured hundreds of billions of dollars into that war, and it has

Leon Festinger (1919–1989) wrote: "If the empirical world looks complicated, if people seem to react in bewilderingly different ways to similar forces, and if I cannot see the operation of universal underlying dynamics, then that is my fault. I have asked the wrong questions; I have, at a theoretical level, sliced up the world incorrectly. The underlying dynamics are there, and I have to find the theoretical apparatus that will enable me to reveal these uniformities" (Festinger, 1980, p. 246). Finding and illuminating those underlying dynamics is the goal of social psychology.
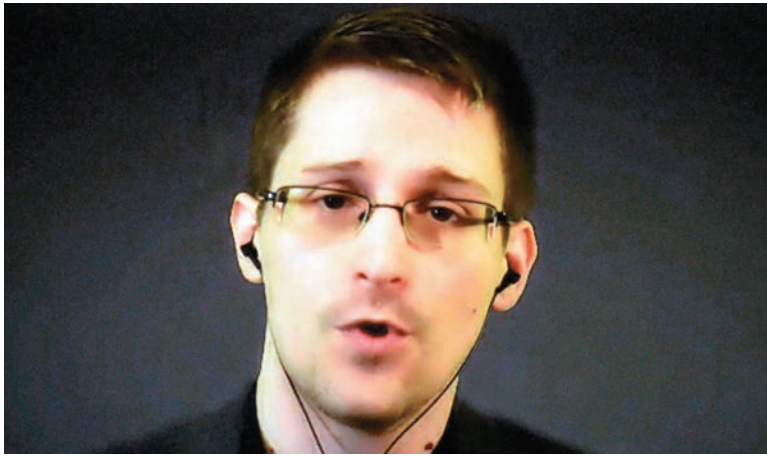
This is Edward Snowden, a former computing contractor for the National Security Agency. Snowden's release in 2013 of thousands of classified documents related to the U.S. government's surveillance programs led the Department of Justice to charge him with espionage. Some have argued that Snowden is a spy, a traitor, and a criminal who should be brought back to the United States from his asylum in Russia to face trial. Others view him as a whistle-blower, a patriot, and a hero fighting to protect privacy rights and inform the American public of what its government is up to (in fact, here you see him pictured receiving a German peace prize, a prize he was only able to accept via Skype). Each side is sure that they are right. Where do differing construals come from, and what are their consequences?

consumed tens of thousands of American lives as well as thousands more lives of innocent civilians. The war seems to be at a stalemate; no end is in sight. You frequently wake up in the middle of the night, bathed in the cold sweat of conflict: On the one hand, you deplore all the carnage that is going on; on the other hand, you don't want to go down in history as the first American president to lose a war.

Some of your advisers tell you that they can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and that if you intensify the bombing or add thousands more troops, the enemy will soon capitulate and the war will be over. This would be a great outcome for you: Not only will you have succeeded in achieving your military and political aims, but history will consider you to have been a great leader as well. Other advisers, however, believe that intensifying the bombing will only strengthen the enemy's resolve; they advise you to sue for peace.

Which advisers are you likely to believe? President Lyndon Johnson faced this exact dilemma in the 1960s, with the war in Vietnam; so did George W. Bush in 2003, when the war in Iraq did not end in 6 weeks as he had predicted; so did Barack Obama and Donald Trump, in 2009 and 2017, respectively, in deciding whether to invest more troops in the war in Afghanistan. Most presidents have chosen to believe their advisers who suggest escalating the war, because if they succeed in winning, the victory justifies the human and financial cost; but withdrawing not only means going down in history as a president who lost a war, but also having to justify the fact that all those lives and all that money have been spent in vain. As you can see, the need to feel good about our decisions can fly in the face of the need to be accurate, and can have catastrophic consequences (Draper, 2008; McClellan, 2008; Woodward, 2010). In Johnson's case, the decision to increase the bombing *did* strengthen the enemy's resolve, thereby prolonging the war in Vietnam.

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

Self-Esteem

People's evaluations of their own self-worth—that is, the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent, and decent

Most people have a strong need to maintain reasonably high **self-esteem**—that is, to see themselves as good, competent, and decent (Aronson, 1998, 2007; Baumeister, 1993; Tavris & Aronson, 2007). Given the choice between distorting the world to feel good about themselves and representing the world accurately, people often take the first option. They put a slightly different spin on the matter, one that puts them in the best possible light. You might consider your friend Roger to be a nice guy but an awful slob—somehow he's always got stains on his shirt and empty food cartons all over his kitchen. Roger, though, probably describes himself as being casual and "laid back."

Self-esteem is obviously a beneficial thing, but when it causes people to justify their actions rather than learn from them, it can impede change and self-improvement. Suppose a couple gets divorced after 10 years of a marriage made difficult by the husband's irrational jealousy. Rather than admitting the truth—that his jealousy and possessiveness drove his wife away—the husband blames the breakup of his marriage on her; she was not responsive enough to his needs. His interpretation serves a purpose: It makes him feel better about himself (Simpson, 2010). The consequence of this distortion, of course, is that learning from experience becomes unlikely. In his next

marriage, the husband will probably recreate the same problems. Acknowledging our deficiencies is difficult, even when the cost is failing to learn from our mistakes.

SUFFERING AND SELF-JUSTIFICATION   Moreover, the need to maintain our self-esteem can have paradoxical effects. Let's go back to one of our early scenarios: Oscar and the hazing he went through to join his fraternity. Personality psychologists might suggest that only extraverts who have a high tolerance for embarrassment would want to be in a fraternity. Behavioral psychologists would predict that Oscar would dislike anyone or anything that caused him pain and humiliation. Social psychologists, however, have found that the major reason that Oscar and his fellow pledges like their fraternity brothers so much was *because* of the degrading hazing rituals.

Here's how it works. Suppose Oscar freely chose to go through a severe hazing to become a member of the fraternity but later discovers unpleasant things about his fraternity brothers. If he were completely honest with himself he would conclude, "I'm an idiot; I went through all of that pain and embarrassment only to live in a house with a bunch of jerks." But saying "I'm an idiot" is not exactly the best way to maintain one's self-esteem, so instead Oscar puts a positive spin on his situation. "My fraternity brothers aren't perfect, but they are there when I need them and this house sure has great parties." He justifies the pain and embarrassment of the hazing by viewing his fraternity as positively as he can.

An outside observer like his sister Janine, however, can see the downside of fraternity life more clearly. The fraternity dues make a significant dent in Ocar's budget, the frequent parties take a toll on the amount of studying he can do, and consequently his grades suffer. But Oscar is motivated to see these negatives as trivial; indeed, he considers them a small price to pay for the sense of brotherhood he feels. He focuses on the good parts of living in the fraternity, and he dismisses the bad parts as inconsequential.

The take-home message is that human beings are motivated to maintain a positive picture of themselves, in part by justifying their behavior, and that under certain specifiable conditions, this leads them to do things that at first glance might seem surprising or paradoxical. They might prefer people and things for whom they have suffered to people and things they associate with ease and pleasure.

These first-year students are being "welcomed" to their university by seniors who subject them to hazing. Hazing is sometimes silly, but it is often dangerous as well (and even fatal), leading college campuses to crack down on the practice. One difficulty faced by such efforts is that for all of its downsides, hazing can also build group cohesiveness. Does this explanation sound far-fetched? In Chapter 6 we will see a series of laboratory experiments that indeed show that people often come to love what they suffer for.

The Social Cognition Motive: The Need to Be Accurate

Even when people are bending the facts to see themselves as favorably as they can, most do not live in a fantasy world. After all, it would not be advisable to sit in our rooms thinking that it's simply a matter of time before we become a movie star, lead singer in a rock band, the best player on a World Cup soccer team, or President of the United States, all the while eating, drinking, and smoking as much as we want because surely we will live to be 100. We might say that people bend reality but don't completely break it. Yes, we try to see ourselves in a favorable light, but we are also quite good at scoping out the nature of the social world. That is, we are skilled at **social cognition**, which is the study of how people select, interpret, remember, and use information to make judgments and decisions (Fiske & Taylor, 2017; Markus &

Social Cognition
How people think about themselves and the social world; more specifically, how people select, interpret, remember, and use social information to make judgments and decisions

We rely on a series of expectations and other mental short-cuts in making judgments about the world around us, from important life decisions to which cereal to buy at the store, a conclusion with which advertisers and marketers are very well aware.

Zajonc, 1985; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Researchers who investigate processes of social cognition begin with the assumption that all people try to view the world as accurately as possible. They regard human beings as amateur sleuths who are doing their best to understand and predict their social world.

Just as the need to preserve self-esteem can occasionally run aground, however, so too can the need to be accurate. People are not perfect in their effort to understand and predict, because they almost never know all the facts they need to judge a given situation completely accurately. Whether it is a relatively simple decision, such as which breakfast cereal offers the best combination of healthfulness and tastiness, or a slightly more complex decision, such as our desire to buy the best car we can for under $20,000, or a much more complex decision, such as choosing a partner who will make us deliriously happy for the rest of our lives, it is usually impossible to gather all the relevant information in advance. Moreover, we make countless decisions every day. No one has the time and stamina to gather all the facts for each of them.

Does this sound overblown? Aren't most decisions fairly easy? Let's take a closer look. Which breakfast cereal is better for you, Lucky Charms or Quaker Granola with oats and raisins? If you are like most of our students, you answered, "Quaker Granola." After all, Lucky Charms is a kids' cereal, full of sugar and cute little marshmallows, with a picture of a leprechaun on the box. Quaker Granola cereal boxes have pictures of healthy granola and fruit, and doesn't *natural* mean "good for you"? If that's the way you reasoned, you have fallen into a common cognitive trap: You have generalized from the cover to the product. A careful reading of the ingredients in small print will reveal that, per one cup serving, Quaker Granola has 400 calories, 20 grams of sugar, and 12 grams of fat. In contrast, a cup of Lucky Charms has 147 calories, 13 grams of sugar, and 1 gram of fat. Even in the simple world of cereals, things are not always what they seem.

Thus, even when we are trying to perceive the social world as accurately as we can, there are many ways in which we can go wrong, ending up with the wrong impressions.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following is true about social cognition?
   a. Most people would rather ignore reality completely to feel better about themselves.
   b. Most people try to have an accurate view of the world but often do not have enough information to make accurate judgments.
   c. Most people try to have an accurate view of the world, and most people's world view is close to a 100 percent accurate.
   d. Most people are not concerned with having accurate information when they make decisions or interpret a situation.

2. Which of the following is most true about people with high self-esteem?
   a. Most people change the way they interpret events in order to preserve their self-esteem.
   b. Few people care about maintaining their high self-esteem.
   c. Most people will do things that are against their morals or against the law in order to preserve their self-esteem.
   d. Most people prefer to see the world accurately, even if this means damaging their self-esteem.

3. According to the social cognition approach,
   a. People almost always form accurate impressions about the social world.
   b. People rarely form accurate impressions of the social world.
   c. When viewing the social world, people's main goal is to feel good about themselves.
   d. Even when people are trying to perceive the social world as accurately as they can, there are many ways in which they can go wrong, ending up with the wrong impressions.

Why Study Social Psychology?

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

We defined social psychology as the scientific study of social influence. But why do we want to understand social influence in the first place? What difference does it make whether our behavior has its roots in the desire to be accurate or to bolster our self-esteem?

The basic answer is simple: We are curious. Social psychologists are fascinated by human social behavior and want to understand it on the deepest possible level. In a sense, all of us are social psychologists. We all live in a social environment, and we are all more than mildly curious about such issues as how we become influenced, how we influence others, and why we fall in love with some people, dislike others, and are indifferent to still others. You don't have to be with people literally to be in a social environment. Social media is a social psychologist's dream laboratory because it's all there: love, anger, bullying, bragging, affection, flirting, wounds, quarrels, friending and unfriending, pride and prejudice.

Many social psychologists have another reason for studying the causes of social behavior: to contribute to the solution of social problems. This goal was present at the founding of the discipline. Kurt Lewin, having barely escaped the horrors of Nazi Germany, brought to the United States his passionate interest in understanding how the transformation of his country had happened. Ever since, social psychologists have been keenly interested in their own contemporary social challenges, as you will discover reading this book. Their efforts have ranged from reducing violence and prejudice to increasing altruism and tolerance (Chapters 11 and 13). They study such pressing issues as how to induce people to conserve natural resources like water and energy, practice safe sex, or eat healthier food (Chapter 7). They study the effects of violence in the media (Chapter 12). They work to find effective strategies to resolve conflicts within groups—whether at work or in juries—and between nations (Chapter 9). They explore ways to raise children's intelligence through environmental interventions and better

Social psychology can help us study social problems and find ways to solve them. Social psychologists might study whether children who watch violence on television become more aggressive themselves—and, if so, what kind of intervention might be beneficial.

Revel Video

Sam Sommers
Tufts University
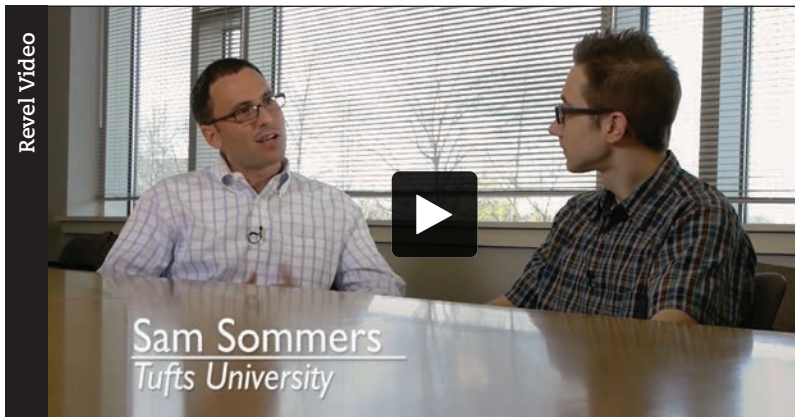
school programs, and reduce the high school dropout rate of minority students. They study happier topics, too, such as passion, liking, and love—and what sustains them (Chapter 10).

Throughout this book, we will examine many other examples of the application of social psychology to real-world problems. For interested readers, we have included three final chapters on health, the environment, and law. We hope that by understanding the fundamental causes of behavior as social psychologists study them, you will also be better able to change your own self-defeating or misguided behavior, improve your relationships, and make better decisions.

We are now ready to begin our tour of social psychology in earnest. So far, we have been emphasizing the central theme of social psychology: the enormous power of most social situations. As researchers, our job is to ask the right questions and to find a way to capture the power of the social situation and bring it into the laboratory for detailed study. If we are adept at doing that, we will arrive at truths about human behavior that are close to being universal. And then we may be able to bring our laboratory findings into the real world—for the ultimate betterment of our society.

Summary

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

- **Defining Social Psychology** Social psychology is defined as 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 psychologists are interested in understanding how and why the social environment shapes the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the individual.

  - **Social Psychology, Philosophy, Science, and Common Sense** Social psychologists approach the understanding of social influence differently from philosophers, journalists, or the layperson. Social psychologists develop explanations of social influence through empirical methods, such as experiments in which the variables being studied are carefully controlled. The goal of the science of social psychology is to discover universal laws of human behavior, which is why cross-cultural research is often essential.

  - **How Social Psychology Differs From Its Closest Cousins** Some social psychologists attempt to explain social behavior in terms of genetic factors that have evolved over time according to the principles of natural selection, adopting the approach of *evolutionary psychology*. Such ideas are hard to

test experimentally but can generate novel hypotheses about social behavior that can be tested scientifically. When trying to explain social behavior, personality psychologists explain the behavior in terms of the person's individual character traits. Although social psychologists would agree that personalities vary, they explain social behavior in terms of the *power of the social situation* to shape how one acts. *The level of analysis for social psychology is the individual in the context of a social situation.* In contrast, the level of analysis for sociologists is the group, institution, or society at large. Social psychologists seek to identify universal properties of human nature that make everyone susceptible to social influence regardless of their social class, gender, or culture.

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

- **The Power of the Situation** Individual behavior is powerfully influenced by the social environment, but many people don't want to believe this.

  - **Underestimating the Power of the Situation** Social psychologists must contend with the *fundamental attribution error*, the tendency to explain

our own and other people's behavior entirely in terms of personality traits and to underestimate the power of social influence. But social psychologists have shown time and again that social and environmental situations are usually more powerful than personality differences in determining an individual's behavior.

- **The Importance of Construal** Social psychologists have shown that the relationship between individuals and situations is a two-way street, so it is important to understand not only how situations influence individuals, but also how people *perceive and interpret* the social world and the behavior of others. These perceptions are more influential than objective aspects of the situation itself. The term *construal* refers to the world as it is interpreted by the individual.

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

- **Where Construals Come From: Basic Human Motives** The way in which an individual construes (perceives, comprehends, and interprets) a situation is largely shaped by two basic human motives: *the need to feel good about ourselves* and *the need to be accurate.* At times these two motives tug in opposite directions; for

example, when an accurate view of how we acted in a situation would reveal that we behaved selfishly.

- **The Self-Esteem Motive: The Need to Feel Good About Ourselves** Most people have a strong need to see themselves as good, competent, and decent. People often distort their perception of the world to preserve their self-esteem.

- **The Social Cognition Motive: The Need to Be Accurate** Social cognition is the study of how human beings think about the world: how they select, interpret, remember, and use information to make judgments and decisions. Individuals are viewed as trying to gain accurate understandings so that they can make effective judgments and decisions that range from which cereal to eat to whom they marry. In actuality, individuals typically act on the basis of incomplete and inaccurately interpreted information.

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

- Why do social psychologists want to understand social influence? Because they are fascinated by human social behavior and want to understand it on the deepest possible level. Many social psychologists also want to contribute to the solution of social problems.

Revel Interactive

Shared Writing   **What Do You Think?**

In this chapter you read about the fundamental attribution error. How might understanding the FAE help you do a better job predicting the future behavior of those around you?

Test Yourself

1. Social psychology is the scientific study of

   a. feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of people in social situations.

   b. individual differences such as personality.

   c. how people's social behaviors are shaped by their survival needs.

   d. our cognitive processes such as memory and sensation.

2. For social psychologists, one of the likely explanations for why people in different cultures behave differently is because they

   a. have different genetic makeup.

   b. are influenced by different social factors.

   c. have different evolutionary origins.

   d. possess different personality traits.

3. Which one of the following statements is FALSE?

   a. Personality psychology investigates individual differences.

   b. Evolutionary psychology explains why we behave differently in social situations.

   c. Biology and neuroscience focus on individuals in a social context.

   d. All of the above.

4. Which of the following is an example of fundamental attribution error?

   a. "He is a lazy person and therefore he is late."

   b. "He is late to work due to heavy traffic congestion on the roads."

   c. "He did not talk during the party because he did now know anyone there."

   d. None of the above.

5. What are the main differences between what social psychologists and personality psychologist examine?

   a. Social psychology focuses on what makes one person unique, while personality psychology focuses on the shared features that make cultures different or similar to each other.

   b. Social psychology focuses on individual differences. Personality psychology looks at how most people would behave in a situation.

   c. Social psychology examines similarities in the ways that social influences can affect most people, whereas personality psychology examines the differences between individuals.

   d. Social psychology focuses on personality traits whereas personality psychology examines the reasons that these personality traits came to be.

6. What do social psychology and sociology have in common?

   a. They both examine demographic trends in society.

   b. They both study national institutions.

   c. They both are concerned with personality differences.

   d. They both are concerned with group processes.

7. Construal refers to the way in which

   a. People objectively deconstruct social reality.

   b. People communicate and exchange information.

   c. People perceive, comprehend, and interpret the social world.

   d. People test their own subjective theories.

8. Which of the following about Gestalt psychology is TRUE?

   a. It was first proposed as a theory of how people perceive social world.

   b. It was first proposed as a theory of how people learn information.

   c. It was first proposed as a theory of how people develop mental modals.

   d. None of the above.

9. Which of the following statements about self-esteem is TRUE?

   a. We tend to interpret social situations in a way that helps us preserve our self-esteem.

   b. Self-esteem is primarily a personality psychology concept.

   c. Self-esteem is the main factor driving fundamental attribution error.

   d. None of the above.

10. Kimberly is late for a company meeting. To predict whether her supervisor will be angry at her, which question would a social psychologist be most likely to ask Kimberly's supervisor?

   a. Are you an extraverted person?

   b. Was Kimberly late in the previous week?

   c. What do you think is the reason for Kimberly being late?

   d. Is Kimberly generally a likeable individual?

Chapter 2
Methodology
How Social Psychologists Do Research

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Survey	**What Do You Think?**
SURVEY	RESULTS

You hear a news story describing the following research finding: the more fast food children eat, the lower their scores on reading, math, and science tests. Even though this study was with kids, does it make you want to cut down on the amount of fast food you eat?

○ Yes

○ No

In this information age, when pretty much anything can be found on the internet, pornography is more available than ever before. One survey found that 46% of men and 16% of women between the ages of 18 and 39 looked at pornography in the past week (Regnerus, Gordon, & Price, 2016). Another found that a quarter of all employees who have access to the internet visit porn sites during their workdays ("The Tangled Web of Porn," 2008). It is thus important to ask whether exposure to pornography has harmful effects. Is it possible, for example, that looking at graphic sex increases the likelihood that men will become sexually violent?

Over the past several decades there has been plenty of debate about the right answer to these questions. Legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon (1993) argued that "Pornography is the perfect preparation—motivator and instruction manual in one—for … sexual atrocities" (p. 28). In 1985, a group of experts, appointed by the attorney general of the United States, voiced a similar opinion, concluding that pornography is a cause of rape and other violent crimes. But in 1970, another commission reviewed much of the same evidence and concluded that pornography does *not* contribute significantly to sexual violence. Who are we to believe? Is there a scientific way to determine the answer? We believe there is, and in this chapter we will discuss the kinds of research methods social psychologists employ, using research on pornography as an example.

Social Psychology: An Empirical Science

LO 2.1   **Describe how researchers develop hypotheses and theories.**

A fundamental principle of social psychology is that many social problems, such as the causes of violence, can be studied scientifically (Reis & Gosling, 2010; Reis & Judd, 2000; Wilson, Aronson, & Carlsmith, 2010). Before we discuss how social psychological research is done, we begin with a warning: The results of some of the experiments you encounter will seem obvious because social psychology concerns topics with which we are all intimately familiar—social behavior and social influence (Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2001). This familiarity sets social psychology apart from other sciences. When you read about an experiment in particle physics, it is unlikely that the results will connect with your personal experiences. We don't know about you, but we have never thought, "Wow! That experiment on quarks was just like what happened to me while I was waiting for the bus yesterday," or "My grandmother always told me to watch out for positrons and antimatter." When reading about the results of a study on helping behavior or aggression, however, it is quite common to think, "Come on, I could have predicted that! That's the same thing that happened to me last Friday."

Watch SURVIVAL TIPS! ADMIT YOU DIDN'T KNOW IT ALL ALONG

Try It!

Social Psychology Quiz: What's Your Prediction?

Answer the following questions, each of which is based on social psychological research.

1. Suppose an authority figure asks college students to administer near-lethal electric shocks to another student who has not harmed them in any way. What percentage of these students will agree to do it?
2. If you give children a reward for doing something they already enjoy doing, they will subsequently like that activity (a) more, (b) the same, or (c) less.
3. When a business or governmental agency is faced with an important choice it is always better to have a group of people make the decision, because "two heads are better than one": (a) true (b) false.
4. Repeated exposure to a stimulus—such as a person, a song, or a painting—will make you like it (a) more, (b) the same, or (c) less.
5. You ask an acquaintance to do you a favor—for example, to lend you $10—and he or she agrees. As a result of doing you this favor, the person will probably like you (a) more, (b) the same, or (c) less.
6. Who do think would be *least* likely to help a stranger who drops a bunch of papers all over the ground? Someone who is in a (a) good mood (b) neutral mood, or (c) bad mood?
7. In the United States, female college students tend not to do as well on math tests as males do. Under which of the following circumstances will women do as well as men: (a) when they are told that there are no gender differences on the test, (b) when they are told that women tend to do better on a difficult math test (because under these circumstances they rise to the challenge), or (c) when they are told that men outperform women under almost all circumstances?
8. Which statement about the effects of advertising is most true? (a) Subliminal messages implanted in advertisements are more effective than normal, everyday advertising; (b) normal TV ads for painkillers or laundry detergents are more effective than subliminal messages implanted in ads;

(c) both types of advertising are equally effective; or
(d) neither type of advertising is effective.
9. What effect, if any, does playing violent video games have on how likely people are to act aggressively in everyday life? (a) playing the games increases the likelihood that they will act aggressively; (b) they become less aggressive because the games "get it out of their system"; (c) playing the games has no effect on how aggressive people are.
10. Students walking across campus are asked to fill out a questionnaire on which they rate the degree to which student opinion should be considered on a local campus issue. Which group do you think believed that students should be listened to the most? (a) Those given a light clipboard with the questionnaire attached; (b) those given a heavy clipboard with the questionnaire attached; (c) the weight of the clipboard made no difference in people's ratings.

10. (b) People given the heavy clipboard thought that student opinion should be weighed the most (see Chapter 3).
9. (a) Playing violent video games increases the likelihood that people will act aggressively (see Chapter 12).
8. (b) There is no evidence that subliminal messages in advertising have any effect; considerable evidence shows that normal advertising is quite effective (see Chapter 7).
7. (a) Research has found that when women think there are sex differences on a test, they do worse, because of the added threat of confirming a stereotype about their gender. When women were told that there were no gender differences in performance on the test, they did as well as men (see Chapter 13).
6. (b) People who are in good moods or bad moods are more likely to help others than people in neutral moods, though for different reasons (see Chapter 11).
5. (a) More (see Chapter 6).
4. (a) Under most circumstances, repeated exposure increases liking for a stimulus (see Chapter 10).
3. (b) False; groups often make worse decisions than individuals (see Chapter 9).
2. (c) Rewarding people for doing something they enjoy will typically make them like that activity less in the future (see Chapter 5).
1. In studies conducted by Stanley Milgram (1974), up to 65% of participants administered what they thought were near-lethal shocks to another subject. (in fact, no real shocks were administered; see Chapter 8.)

The thing to remember is that, when we study human behavior, the results may appear to have been predictable—in retrospect. Indeed, there is a well-known human tendency called the **hindsight bias**, whereby after people know that something occurred, they exaggerate how much they could have predicted it before it occurred (Bernstein, Aßfalg, Kumar, & Ackerman, 2016; Davis & Fischhoff, 2014; Ghrear, Birch, & Bernstein, 2016; Knoll & Arkes, 2016). After we know the winner of a political election, for example, we begin to look for reasons why that candidate won. After the fact, the outcome seems more easily predictable, even if we were quite unsure who would win before the election. The same is true of findings in psychology experiments; it seems like we could have easily predicted the outcomes—after we know them. The trick is to predict what will happen in an experiment before you know how it turned out. To illustrate that not all obvious findings are easy to predict, take the Try It! quiz above.

Hindsight Bias

The tendency for people to exaggerate, after knowing that something occurred, how much they could have predicted it before it occurred

Formulating Hypotheses and Theories

How, then, do social psychologists come up with the ideas for their studies? Research begins with a hunch, or hypothesis, that the researcher wants to test. There is lore in science that holds that brilliant insights come all of a sudden, as when the Greek scholar Archimedes shouted, "Eureka! I have found it!" when the solution to a problem flashed into his mind. Although such insights do sometimes occur suddenly, science is a cumulative process, and people often generate hypotheses from previous theories and research.

INSPIRATION FROM PREVIOUS THEORIES AND RESEARCH Many studies stem from a researcher's dissatisfaction with existing theories and explanations. After reading other people's work, a researcher might believe that he or she has a better way of explaining people's behavior. In the 1950s, for example, Leon Festinger was dissatisfied with the ability of a major theory of the day, behaviorism, to explain why people change their attitudes. He formulated a new approach—cognitive dissonance theory—that made specific predictions about when and how people would change their attitudes. As we will see in Chapter 6, other researchers were dissatisfied with Festinger's explanation of the results he obtained, so they conducted further research to test other possible explanations. Social psychologists, like scientists in other disciplines, engage in a continual process of theory refinement: A theory is developed; specific hypotheses derived from that theory are tested; based on the results obtained, the theory is revised and new hypotheses are formulated.

HYPOTHESES BASED ON PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS Social psychology also deals with phenomena we encounter in everyday life. Researchers often observe something in their lives or the lives of others that they find curious and interesting, stimulating them to construct a theory about why this phenomenon occurred—and to design a study to see if they are right. In the early 1960s, for example, a tragic murder was committed in the Queens section of New York City that led to a major research area in social psychology. Kitty Genovese, a young woman returning to her apartment late one night in 1964, was brutally killed in an attack that lasted 45 minutes. The *New York Times* reported that 38 apartment residents either saw the attack from their windows or heard Genovese's screams, and that no one attempted to help her, not even by calling the police. Although we know now that the *Times* exaggerated the number of eyewitnesses who did nothing (Cook, 2014; Pelonero, 2014), the story vividly captured public fears and, for its time, "went viral." There is no doubt that bystanders often fail to help in emergencies (as we will see in Chapter 11), and the Genovese murder triggered a great deal of soul searching as to why. Some concluded that living in a metropolis dehumanizes us and leads inevitably to apathy, indifference to human suffering, and lack of caring.

Bibb Latané and John Darley, two social psychologists who taught at universities in New York, had another idea. Instead of focusing on "what was wrong with New Yorkers," Latané and Darley thought it would be more interesting and important to examine the social situation in which Genovese's neighbors found themselves. Maybe, they thought, the more people who witness an emergency, the less likely it is that any given individual will intervene. Genovese's neighbors might have assumed that someone else had called the police, a phenomenon Latané and Darley (1968) called the *diffusion of responsibility*. Perhaps the bystanders would have been more likely to help had each thought he or she alone was witnessing the murder. How can we tell whether this hypothesis is true?

In October of 2011, a 2-year-old girl was struck by two vans in a row. A dozen people walked or rode past her. Why didn't they stop to help?

In science, idle speculation will not do; researchers must collect data to test their hypotheses. Let's look at how different research designs are used to do just that.

Research Designs

LO 2.2   **Compare the strengths and weaknesses of various research designs that social psychologists use.**

Social psychology is a scientific discipline with a well-developed set of methods for answering questions about social behavior, such as the one about the effects of pornography with which we began this chapter, and the one about reactions to violence that we just discussed. There are three types of methods: the *observational method*, the *correlational method*, and the *experimental method* (see Table 2.1). Any of these methods could be used to explore a specific research question; each is a powerful tool in some ways and a weak tool in others. Part of the creativity in conducting social psychological research involves choosing the right method, maximizing its strengths, and minimizing its weaknesses.

Here we discuss these methods in detail and try to provide you with a firsthand look at both the joy and the difficulty of conducting social psychological studies. The joy comes in unraveling the clues about the causes of interesting and important social behaviors, just as a sleuth gradually unmasks the culprit in a murder mystery. Each of us finds it exhilarating that we have the tools to provide definitive answers to questions philosophers have debated for centuries. At the same time, as seasoned researchers, we have learned to temper this exhilaration with a heavy dose of humility, because there are formidable practical and ethical constraints involved in conducting social psychological research.

Table 2.1 A Summary of Research Methods

Method	Focus	Question Answered
Observational	Description	What is the nature of the phenomenon?
Correlational	Prediction	From knowing X, can we predict Y?
Experimental	Causality	Is variable X a cause of variable Y?

The Observational Method: Describing Social Behavior

There is a lot to be learned by being an astute observer of human behavior. If the goal is to describe what a particular group of people or type of behavior is like, the **observational method** is very helpful. This is the technique whereby a researcher observes people and records measurements or impressions of their behavior. The observational method may take many forms, depending on what the researchers are looking for, how involved or detached they are from the people they are observing, and how much they want to quantify what they observe.

ETHNOGRAPHY   One example of observational learning is **ethnography**, the method by which researchers attempt to understand a group or culture by observing it from the inside, without imposing any preconceived notions they might have. The goal is to understand the richness and complexity of the group by observing it in action. Ethnography is the chief method of cultural anthropology, the study of human cultures and societies. As social psychology broadens its focus by studying social behavior in different cultures, ethnography is increasingly being used to describe different cultures and generate hypotheses about psychological principles (Fine & Elsbach, 2000; Flick, 2014; Uzzel, 2000).

Consider this example from the early years of social psychological research. In the early 1950s, a small cult of people called the Seekers predicted that the world would come to an end with a giant flood on the morning of December 21, 1954. They were convinced that a spaceship from the planet Clarion would land in the backyard of their leader, Mrs. Keech, and whisk them away before the apocalypse. Assuming that the end of the world was not imminent, Leon Festinger and his colleagues thought it would be interesting to observe this group closely and chronicle how they reacted when their prophecy was disconfirmed (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). To monitor the hour-to-hour conversations of this group, the social psychologists found it necessary to become members and pretend that they too believed the world was about to end. On the fateful morning of December 21, 1954, with no flood waters lapping at the door and no sign of a spaceship, they observed a curious thing: Rather than admitting that she was wrong, Mrs. Keech "doubled down" on her beliefs, announcing that God had spared Planet Earth because of the Seekers' faith, and that it was now time for the group to go public and recruit more members. Based on his observations of Mrs. Keech's tenacious adherence to her beliefs, Festinger formulated one of the most famous theories in social psychology, cognitive dissonance, which we discuss in Chapter 6.

The key to ethnography is to avoid imposing one's preconceived notions on the group and to try to understand the point of view of the people being studied. Sometimes, however, researchers have a specific hypothesis that they want to test using the observational method. An investigator might be interested, for example, in how much aggression children exhibit during school recesses. In this case, the observer would be systematically looking for particular behaviors that are concretely defined before the observation begins. For example, aggression might be defined as hitting or shoving another child, taking a toy from another child without asking, and so on. The observer might stand at the edge of the playground and systematically record how often these behaviors occur. If the researcher were interested in exploring possible sex and age differences in social behavior, he or she would also note the child's gender and age. How do we know how accurate the observer is? In such studies, it is important to establish agreement between two or more people who independently observe and code a set of data. By showing that two or more judges independently come up with the same observations, researchers ensure that the observations are not the subjective, distorted impressions of one individual.

ARCHIVAL ANALYSIS   The observational method is not limited to observations of real-life behavior. The researcher can also examine the accumulated documents, or archives, of a culture, a technique known as an **archival analysis** (Mannes, Soll, &

Observational Method

The technique whereby a researcher observes people and systematically records measurements or impressions of their behavior

Ethnography

The method by which researchers attempt to understand a group or culture by observing it from the inside, without imposing any preconceived notions they might have

Archival Analysis

A form of the observational method in which the researcher examines the accumulated documents, or archives, of a culture (e.g., diaries, novels, magazines, and newspapers)

Larrick, 2014; Oishi, 2014). For example, diaries, novels, suicide notes, music lyrics, television shows, movies, magazine and news articles, advertising, social media, and the ways in which people use the internet all tell us a great deal about human behavior. One study, for example, analyzed millions of Twitter messages sent in 84 countries to examine daily rhythms in people's mood. Judging by the content of the messages they send, most people's positive moods appear to peak at two different times of the day: In the morning, soon after they get up, and late in the evening, before they go to bed (Golder & Macy, 2011). Researchers have also used archival data to answer questions about pornography usage. For example, do you think that people who live in some areas of the United States are especially likely to look at online pornography? Perhaps you guessed that it is those who live in more liberal "blue" states that are the biggest consumers, given that liberals tend to have more permissive attitudes toward social issues. To address this question, a researcher examined credit card subscriptions to pornography sites (Edelman, 2009). Although he was not given access to the names of people who subscribed, he did know their zip codes, which enabled him to estimate regional variations. As it turned out, residents of "blue" states and "red" were equally likely to subscribe to pornography sites (residents of Utah came in first).

LIMITS OF THE OBSERVATIONAL METHOD   The study that analyzed Twitter messages revealed interesting daily patterns, but it did not say much about *why* moods peak in the morning and at night. Furthermore, certain kinds of behavior are difficult to observe because they occur only rarely or only in private. You can begin to see the limitations of the observational method. Had Latané and Darley chosen this method to study the effects of the number of bystanders on people's willingness to help a victim, we might still be waiting for an answer, given the infrequency of emergencies and the difficulty of predicting when they will occur. And, archival data about pornography, although informative about who is accessing it, tells us little about the effects on their attitudes and behavior of doing so. Social psychologists want to do more than just describe behavior; they want to predict and explain it. To do so, other methods are more appropriate.

The Correlational Method: Predicting Social Behavior

A goal of social science is to understand relationships between variables and to be able to predict when different kinds of social behavior will occur. What is the relationship between the amount of pornography people see and their likelihood of engaging in sexually violent acts? Is there a relationship between the amount of violence children see on television and their aggressiveness? To answer such questions, researchers frequently use another approach: the correlational method.

With the **correlational method**, two variables are systematically measured, and the relationship between them—how much you can predict one from the other—is assessed. People's behavior and attitudes can be measured in a variety of ways. Just as with the observational method, researchers sometimes make direct observations of people's behavior. For example, researchers might be interested in testing the relationship between children's aggressive behavior and how much violent television they watch. They too might observe children on the playground, but here the goal is to assess the relationship, or correlation, between the children's aggressiveness and other factors, such as TV viewing habits, which the researchers also measure.

Researchers look at such relationships by calculating the **correlation coefficient**, a statistic that assesses how well you can predict one variable from another—for example, how well you can predict people's weight from their height. A correlation coefficient can range from –1 to +1. A

Correlational Method

The technique whereby two or more variables are systematically measured and the relationship between them (i.e., how much one can be predicted from the other) is assessed

Correlation Coefficient

A statistical technique that assesses how well you can predict one variable from another—for example, how well you can predict people's weight from their height

Researchers use archival analyses to test psychological hypotheses. One study, for example, analyzed millions of Twitter messages to see how people's moods varied over the course of a day.

positive correlation means that increases in the value of one variable are associated with increases in the value of the other variable. The correlation between people's height and weight is about 0.7, for example, reflecting the fact that the taller people are, the more they tend to weigh. The relationship is strong but not perfect, which is why the correlation is less than 1. A negative correlation means that increases in the value of one variable are associated with decreases in the value of the other. If height and weight were negatively correlated in human beings, we would look very peculiar; short people, such as children, would look like penguins, whereas tall people, such as NBA basketball players, would be all skin and bones! It is also possible, of course, for two variables to be completely unrelated, so that a researcher cannot predict one variable from the other. In that case the correlation coefficient would be 0 (see Figure 2.1).

Surveys

Surveys

Research in which a representative sample of people are asked (often anonymously) questions about their attitudes or behavior

SURVEYS   The correlational method is often used to analyze the results of **surveys**, research in which a representative sample of people are asked questions about their attitudes or behavior. Surveys are a convenient way to measure people's attitudes; for example, people can be telephoned and asked which candidate they will support in an upcoming election or how they feel about a variety of social issues. Psychologists often use surveys to help understand social behavior and attitudes—for example, by seeing whether the amount of pornography men say they read is correlated with their attitudes toward women.

Surveys have a number of advantages, one of which is allowing researchers to judge the relationship between variables that are difficult to observe, such as how often people engage in safer sex. Another advantage is the ability to sample representative segments of the population. The best way to do this is to use a **random selection** of people from the population at large, which is a way of ensuring that a sample of people is representative of a population by giving everyone in the population an equal chance of being selected for the sample. As long as the sample is selected randomly, and is reasonably large, we can assume that the responses are a reasonable match to those of the population as a whole.

There are famous cases of surveys that yielded misleading results by failing to sample randomly. In the fall of 1936, for example, a weekly magazine called the *Literary Digest* conducted a large survey asking people which candidate they planned to vote for in the upcoming presidential election. The magazine obtained the names and addresses of its sample from telephone directories and automobile registration lists. The results of its survey of 2 million people indicated that the Republican candidate, Alf Landon,

Random Selection

A way of ensuring that a sample of people is representative of a population by giving everyone in the population an equal chance of being selected for the sample

Figure 2.1 Types of Correlations

The diagrams show three possible correlations in a hypothetical study of watching violence on television and aggressive behavior in children. The diagram at the left shows a strong positive correlation: The more television children watched, the more aggressive they were. The diagram in the middle shows no correlation: The amount of television children watched is not related to how aggressive they were. The diagram at the right shows a strong negative correlation: The more television children watched, the less aggressive they were.
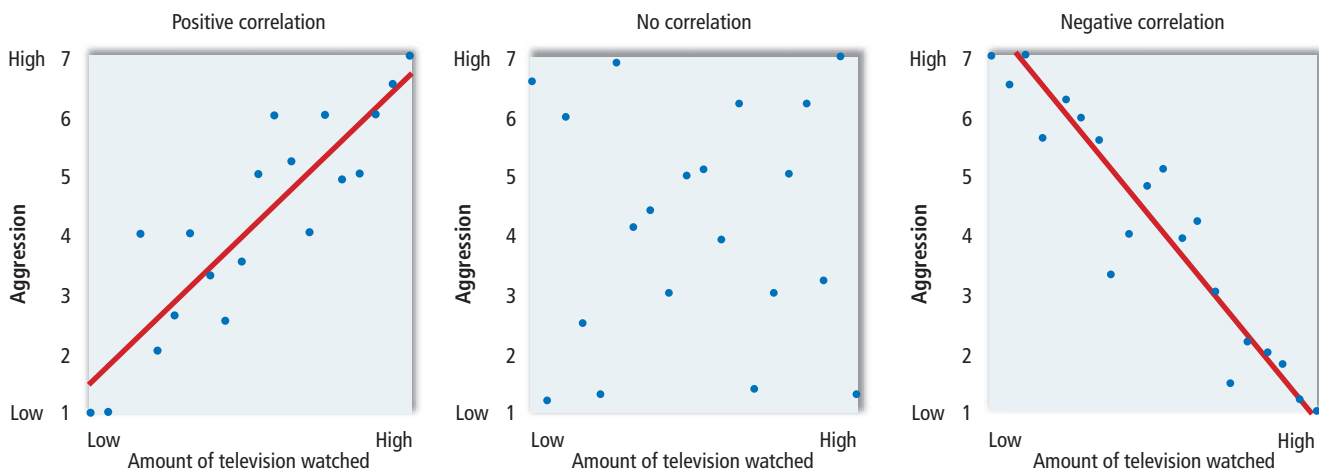
would win by a landslide. Of course, you know that there never was a President Landon; instead, Franklin Delano Roosevelt won every state in the Union but two. What went wrong with the *Literary Digest* poll? In the depths of the Great Depression, many people could not afford telephones or cars. Those who had them were doing well financially; most well-to-do voters were Republican and overwhelmingly favored Alf Landon. However, the majority of the voters were not well off—and overwhelmingly supported the Democratic candidate, Roosevelt. By using a list of names that excluded the less affluent members of the population, the *Literary Digest* surveyed a nonrepresentative sample. (the *Literary Digest* never recovered from this methodological disaster and went out of business shortly after publishing its poll.)

Modern political polls are not immune from such sampling errors. Many polling companies only contact people on their home phones (landlines), because of the difficulty of obtaining directories of cell phone numbers. They do so at their peril, because research shows that Americans who rely solely on cell phones are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates (Silver, 2012). Further, pollsters adjust their results by estimating how likely respondents are to vote and applying other statistical corrections. These adjustments can introduce further bias, which may be why several polls underestimated the percentage of votes Donald Trump would receive in key swing states in the 2016 presidential election (Newkirk, 2016).

Another potential problem with survey data is the accuracy of the responses. Straightforward questions, regarding who people intend to vote for or what they typically do, are relatively easy to answer. But asking survey participants to predict how they might behave in some hypothetical situation or to explain why they behaved as they did in the past is an invitation to inaccuracy (Schuman & Kalton, 1985; Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998). Often people simply don't know the answer—but they think they do. Richard Nisbett and Tim Wilson (1977) demonstrated this "telling more than you can know" phenomenon in a number of studies in which people often made inaccurate reports about why they responded the way they did. Their reports about the causes of their responses pertained more to their theories and beliefs about what should have influenced them than to what actually influenced them. (We discuss these studies at greater length in Chapter 5.)

In the fall of 1936, a magazine called the *Literary Digest* predicted that the Republican candidate for president would win by a landslide, based on a poll they conducted. Instead, Franklin Roosevelt won every state but two, as seen in the map below. What went wrong with the *Literary Digest* poll?
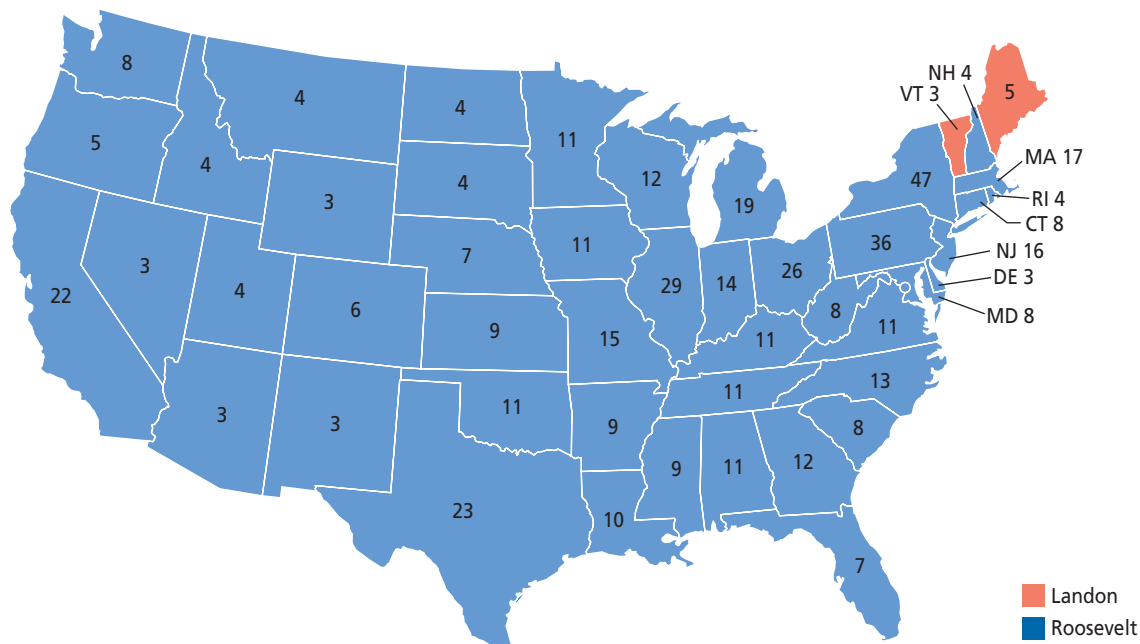
A study conducted in the early 1990s found a correlation between the type of birth control women used and their likelihood of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Those whose partners used condoms were more likely to have an STI than were women who used other forms of birth control. Does this mean that the use of condoms caused the increase in STIs? Not necessarily—see the text for alternative explanations of this research finding.

LIMITS OF THE CORRELATIONAL METHOD: CORRELATION DOES NOT EQUAL CAUSATION   The major shortcoming of the correlational method is that it tells us only that two variables are related, whereas the goal of the social psychologist is to identify the *causes* of social behavior. We want to be able to say that A causes B, not just that A is correlated with B.

If a researcher finds that there is a correlation between two variables, it means that there are three possible causal relationships between these variables. For example, researchers have found a correlation between the amount of violent television children watch and how aggressive they are (similar to the pattern shown in the graph on the left side in Figure 2.1, though not quite as strong; see Eron, 2001). One explanation of this correlation is that watching TV violence causes kids to become more violent themselves. It is equally probable, however, that the reverse is true: that kids who are violent to begin with are more likely to watch violent TV. Or there might be no causal relationship between these two variables; instead, both TV watching and violent behavior could be caused by a third variable, such as having neglectful parents who do not pay much attention to their kids. (Experimental evidence supports one of these causal relationships; we will discuss which one in Chapter 12.) When using the correlational method, it is wrong to jump to the conclusion that one variable is causing the other to occur. *Correlation does not prove causation.*

Unfortunately, forgetting this adage is one of the most common methodological errors in the social sciences. Consider a study of birth control methods and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in women (Rosenberg, Davidson, Chen, Judson, & Douglas, 1992). The researchers examined the records of women who had visited a clinic, noting which method of birth control they used and whether they had an STI. Surprisingly, the researchers found that women who relied on condoms had significantly more STIs than women who used diaphragms or contraceptive sponges. This result was widely reported in the popular press, with the conclusion that the use of diaphragms and sponges caused a lower incidence of disease. Some news articles urged women whose partners used condoms to switch to other methods.

Can you see the problem with this conclusion? The fact that the incidence of disease was correlated with the type of contraception women used is open to a number of causal interpretations. Perhaps the women who used sponges and diaphragms had sex with fewer partners. (In fact, condom users were more likely to have had sex with multiple partners in the previous month.) Perhaps the partners of women who relied on condoms were more likely to have STIs than were the partners of women who used sponges and diaphragms. There is simply no way of knowing. Thus, the conclusion that the birth control methods protected against STIs cannot be drawn from this correlational study.

As another example of the difficulty of inferring causality from correlational designs, let's return to the question of whether pornography causes aggressive sexual acts against women, such as rape. A recent summary of 22 studies, with more than 20,000 participants in seven countries, found a correlation of 0.28 between looking at pornography and the likelihood of committing acts of sexual aggression (Wright, Tokunaga, & Kraus, 2016). Remember what a correlation of 0.28 means? Because it's positive it means that the more pornography people consumed, the more likely they were to be sexually aggressive; though the relationship was not particularly strong.

Watch SURVIVAL TIPS! CORRELATION DOES NOT EQUAL CAUSATION
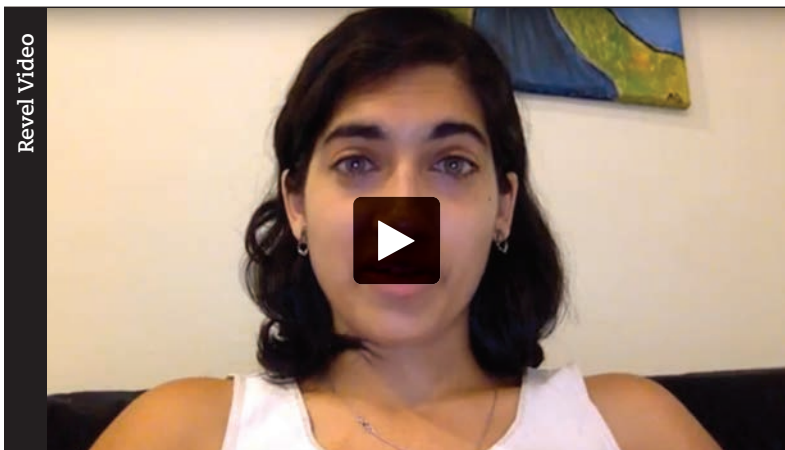
Try It!

Correlation and Causation: Knowing the Difference

It can be difficult to remember that, when two variables are correlated, it doesn't necessarily mean that one caused the other; correlation does *not* allow us to make causal inferences. For each of the following examples, think about why the correlation was found. Even if it seems obvious which variable was causing the other, are there alternative explanations?

1. A study found that, on an average, elderly people who own a pet dog live longer than those who do not own a pet dog. In other words, there is a positive correlation between pet ownership and life expectancy. Can pets replace medical interventions such as medicines and surgeries to increase lifespan?

2. Suppose that a study found a negative correlation between university students' number of Instagram followers and their average grades. Could students improve their grades by reducing their Instagram followers or deleting their accounts altogether?

3. Posting selfies on Instagram correlates positively with being an extrovert. Can introverts change their personalities by posting more pictures of themselves on their social media accounts?

4. A study found that there are more students diagnosed with learning disabilities such as dyslexia in private schools in comparison to public schools. Could the teaching methods in private schools be causing students to develop learning disabilities?

5. A study found positive correlation between people who use one type of web browser over another and being convicted of murder. Could authorities decrease the homicide rate by banning this browser?

6. A study found that a positive correlation exists between people who are frequently late and them being more creative and successful. Could arriving at work late help our careers rather than hurt them?

7. A negative correlation exists between people following practices of certain Eastern religions that favor a vegetarian diet and them having heart attacks. Could people who are prone to the risk of getting a heart attack reduce their risk factors by converting to these religions?

8. There is a negative correlation between annual average global temperatures and the number of pirates sailing the seas. Could we reverse the effects of climate change by adding more pirates to international waters?

9. Parent groups have found that the perpetrators of a school shooting frequently played a certain first-person shooter video game. Should authorities ban these kinds of games to prevent other young people from picking up guns and murdering their peers?

10. A study found out that people who are more intelligent tend to swear more and have messier and more cluttered desks in comparison to those who don't. Could people increase their intelligence by swearing more and tidying their workspaces less often?

10. Probably not—people who are more intelligent tend to have a larger vocabulary. Contrary to popular belief, people who swear more often have a bigger vocabulary than people who purposefully try to limit their swearing. As for the neatness of one's desk, people who are more intelligent may just focus on their work rather than on keeping their space tidy.

9. It is possible that playing this game makes people more likely to act aggressively. However, it is also likely that young people who are aggressive are more drawn to violent video games. In addition, it is difficult to pin the blame on one particular game when the shooters were likely exposed to graphic violence in other games as well as from TV and movies.

8. It is very unlikely that one has to do with the other; this may be a simple random convergence in math. Due to sociopolitical factors, the number of pirates began to steadily decrease around the time of the Industrial Revolution. The increasing human population and lifestyle changes that followed this same period are thought by most experts to be responsible for the increase in global temperatures.

7. Can certain Eastern religious beliefs stave off heart attacks? Not necessarily, but switching to a vegetarian diet would drastically reduce most peoples' risk of heart attack. There may be other factors that coincide which could explain the relationship, such as stress reduction due to meditation or certain outlooks on life.

6. Not likely. There is likely a third variable at play. A study found that optimists tend to be more successful in their careers. They also tend to think they have more time left to complete a task (like travel to work) than they really do. Additionally, people with Type B personalities have been shown to be less accurate in assessing time. They also tend be more optimistic and to be more creative.

5. It is also possible that this correlation is actually something else: that people who own guns are more likely to use one web browser over another. People who own guns may be more anxious about security and privacy and thus choose a web browser that offers better privacy. People who own guns are more likely to commit murder due to the availability of a weapon.

4. Not necessarily. There is likely a third factor involved, which is the presence of a school psychologist, who is more likely to notice and diagnose these learning disabilities. In other words, children in public schools may be equally likely to have a learning disability but less likely to have it identified by school staff.

3. Probably not—it's just that people who are extroverted are more likely to post more pictures of themselves than people who are introverted.

2. Not necessarily. Though it seems obvious that Instagram distracts them from their studies, there might be other factors involved. For example, students who spend less time studying may be more interested in spending time on social media. Alternately, those who are good at taking photographs that others admire may have weaker skills in more traditional academic subjects.

1. There could be a third factor—increased daily exercise due to walking the dog. While pets may help reduce blood pressure and reduce depression and loneliness, other factors such as taking more frequent walks outside might actually be responsible.

But does this prove that using pornography *caused* people to commit sexual violence? That's one of the possible explanations, but can you think of others? Perhaps the causal direction is the other way around—people who are prone to commit sexual violence are more interested in pornography; that is, it is their aggressiveness causing their attraction to pornography, and not the pornography causing their aggressiveness (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000). Alternatively, there could be some third variable, such as something in people's upbringing or subculture, that makes them more likely both to commit sexual violence and look at pornography. Other examples of the difficulty of inferring causality from correlational studies are shown in the following Try It!

The Experimental Method: Answering Causal Questions

The only way to determine causal relationships is with the **experimental method**. Here, the researcher systematically orchestrates the event so that people experience it in one way (e.g., they witness an emergency along with other bystanders) or another way (e.g., they witness the same emergency but are the sole bystander). The experimental method is the method of choice in most social psychological research, because it allows the experimenter to make causal inferences.
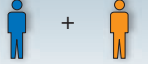
INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES   To illustrate how this is done, let's return to our previous example of Bibb Latané and John Darley, the two social psychologists who came up with the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis, that the more people who witness an emergency, the less likely it is that any one of them will intervene. As with any experiment, they needed to vary the critical aspect of the situation that they thought would have a causal effect, in their case the number of people who witnessed an emergency. This is called the **independent variable**, which is the variable a researcher changes or varies to see if it has an effect on some other variable. The researcher then observes whether the independent variable (e.g., the number of bystanders) has the predicted effect on the outcome of interest, namely the **dependent variable**, which is the variable a researcher measures to see if it is influenced by the independent variable—in this case whether people help in an emergency (see Figure 2.2).

Sound simple? Actually, it isn't. Staging an experiment to test Latané and Darley's hypothesis about the effects of group size involves severe practical and ethical difficulties. What kind of emergency should be used? Ideally (from a scientific perspective), it should be as true to the Genovese case as possible. Accordingly, you would want to stage a murder that passersby could witness. In one condition, you could stage the murder so that only a few onlookers were present; in another condition, you could stage it so that a great many onlookers were present.

Obviously, no scientist in his or her right mind would stage a murder for unsuspecting bystanders. But how could the researchers arrange a realistic situation that is upsetting enough to be similar to the Genovese case without it being too upsetting? In addition, how could they ensure that each bystander experienced the same emergency except for the independent variable whose effect they wanted to test—namely, the number of bystanders?

Let's see how Latané and Darley (1968) dealt with these problems. Imagine that you are a participant in their experiment. You arrive at the scheduled time and find yourself in a long corridor with doors to several small rooms. An experimenter greets you and takes you into one of the rooms, mentioning that five other students, seated out of view in the other rooms, will be participating with you. The experimenter leaves after giving you a pair of headphones with an attached microphone. You put on the headphones, and soon you hear the experimenter explaining to everyone that he is interested in learning about the kinds of personal problems college students experience.

Experimental Method

The method in which the researcher randomly assigns participants to different conditions and ensures that these conditions are identical except for the independent variable (the one thought to have a causal effect on people's responses)

Independent Variable

The variable a researcher changes or varies to see if it has an effect on some other variable

Dependent Variable

The variable a researcher measures to see if it is influenced by the independent variable the researcher hypothesizes that the dependent variable will depend on the level of the independent variable

Figure 2.2 Researchers vary the independent variable (e.g., the number of bystanders people think are present) and observe what effect that has on the dependent variable (e.g., whether people help).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
The variable that is hypothesized to influence the dependent variable. Participants are treated identically except for this variable.	The response that is hypothesized to depend on the independent variable. All participants are measured on this variable.

Example: Latané and Darley (1968)	
The number of bystanders	**How many participants helped?**
Participant Victim	85%
Participant Victim Two others	62%
Participant Victim Four others	31%

To ensure that people will discuss their problems candidly, he explains that each participant will remain anonymous and each will stay in his or her separate room and communicate with the others only via the intercom system. The experimenter further says that the discussion will be recorded, but to encourage openness, he will not listen to it "live." Finally, the experimenter asks participants to take turns presenting their problems, each speaking for 2 minutes, after which each person will comment on what the others have said. To make sure this procedure is followed, he says, only one person's microphone will be turned on at a time.

The group discussion begins. You listen as the first participant admits that he has found it difficult to adjust to college. With some embarrassment, he mentions that he sometimes has seizures, especially when under stress. When his 2 minutes are up, you hear the other four participants discuss their problems; then it is your turn. When you have finished, the first person speaks again. To your astonishment, he soon begins to experience one of the seizures he mentioned earlier:

> I—er—um—I think I—I need—er—if—if could—er—er—somebody er—er— er—er—er—er—er—give me a little—er—give me a little help here because— er—I—er—I'm—er—er—h—h—having a—a—a real problem—er—right now and I—er—if somebody could help me out it would—it would—er—er s—s— sure be—sure be good … because—er—there—er—er—a cause I—er—I—uh— I've got a—a one of the—er—sei—er—er—things coming on and—and—and I could really—er—use some help so if somebody would—er—give me a little h—help—uh—er—er—er—er c—could somebody—er—er—help—er—uh— uh—uh (choking sounds) … I'm gonna die—er—er—I'm … gonna die—er— help—er—er—-seizure—er (chokes, then quiet). (Darley & Latané, 1968, p. 379)

What would you have done in this situation? If you were like most of the participants in the actual study, you would have remained in your room, listening to your fellow student having a seizure, without doing anything about it. Does this surprise you? Latané and Darley kept track of the number of people who left their cubicle to find the victim or the experimenter before the end of the victim's seizure. Only 31% of the participants

sought help in this way. Fully 69% of the students remained in their cubicles and did nothing—just as Kitty Genovese's neighbors failed to offer assistance in any way.

Does this finding prove that the failure to help was due to the number of people who witnessed the seizure? How do we know that it wasn't due to some other factor? We know because Latané and Darley included two other conditions in their experiment. In these conditions, the procedure was identical to the one we described, with one crucial difference: The size of the discussion group was smaller, meaning that fewer people witnessed the seizure. In one condition, the participants were told that there were three other people in the discussion group besides themselves (the victim plus two others), and in this case, helping behavior increased to 62%. In a third condition, participants were told that there was only one other person in their discussion group (the victim), and in that case, nearly everyone helped (85%; see Figure 2.2).

These results indicate that the number of bystanders strongly influences the rate of helping, but it does not mean that the size of the group is the only cause of people's decision to help. After all, when there were four bystanders, a third of the participants still helped; conversely, when participants thought they were the only witness, some of them failed to do so. Obviously, other factors influence helping behavior—the bystanders' personalities, their prior experience with emergencies, and so on. Nonetheless, Latané and Darley succeeded in identifying one important determinant of whether people help: the number of bystanders that people think are present.

INTERNAL VALIDITY IN EXPERIMENTS How can we be sure that the differences in help across conditions in the Latané and Darley seizure study were due to the different numbers of bystanders who witnessed the emergency? Could something else have produced this effect? This is the beauty of the experimental method: We can be sure of the causal connection between the number of bystanders and helping, because Latané and Darley made sure that everything about the situation was the same in the different conditions *except* for the independent variable—the number of bystanders. Keeping everything but the independent variable the same in an experiment is referred to as *internal validity.* Latané and Darley were careful to maintain high internal validity by making sure that everyone witnessed the same emergency. They prerecorded the supposed other participants and the victim and played their voices over the intercom system so that everyone heard exactly the same thing.

You may have noticed, however, that there was a key difference between the conditions of the Latané and Darley experiment other than the number of bystanders: Different people participated in the different conditions. Maybe the observed differences in helping were due to characteristics of the participants instead of the independent variable. The people in the sole-witness condition might have differed in any number of ways from their counterparts in the other conditions, making them more likely to help. Maybe they were more likely to know something about epilepsy or to have experience helping in emergencies. If either of these possibilities is true, it would be difficult to conclude that it was the number of bystanders, rather than something about the participants' backgrounds, that led to differences in helping.

Fortunately, there is a technique that allows experimenters to minimize differences among participants as the cause of the results: **random assignment to condition**. This is the process whereby all participants have an equal chance of taking part in any condition of an experiment; through random assignment, researchers can be relatively certain that differences in the participants'

Random Assignment to Condition

A process ensuring that all participants have an equal chance of taking part in any condition of an experiment; through random assignment, researchers can be relatively certain that differences in the participants' personalities or backgrounds are distributed evenly across conditions

Watch THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

Revel Video

personalities or backgrounds are distributed evenly across conditions. Because Latané and Darley's participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of their experiment, it is very unlikely that the ones who knew the most about epilepsy all ended up in one condition. Knowledge about epilepsy should be randomly (i.e., roughly evenly) dispersed across the three experimental conditions. This powerful technique is the most important part of the experimental method.

Even with random assignment, however, there is the (very small) possibility that different characteristics of people did not distribute themselves evenly across conditions. For example, if we randomly divide a group of 40 people into two groups, it is possible that those who know the most about epilepsy will by chance end up more in one group than in the other—just as it is possible to get more heads than tails when you flip a coin 40 times. This is a possibility we take seriously in experimental science. The analyses of our data come with a **probability level (*p*-value)**, which is a number, calculated with statistical techniques, that tells researchers how likely it is that the results of their experiment occurred by chance and not because of the independent variable. The convention in science, including social psychology, is to consider results *significant* (trustworthy) if the probability level is less than 5 in 100 that the results might be due to chance factors rather than the independent variables studied. For example, if we flipped a coin 40 times and got 40 heads, we would probably assume that this was very unlikely to have occurred by chance and that there was something wrong with the coin (we might check the other side to make sure it wasn't one of those trick coins with heads on both sides!). Similarly, if the results in two conditions of an experiment differ significantly from what we would expect by chance, we assume that the difference was caused by the independent variable (e.g., the number of bystanders present during the emergency). The *p*-value tells us how confident we can be that the difference was due to chance rather than the independent variable.

To summarize, the key to a good experiment is to maintain high **internal validity**, which we can now define as making sure that the independent variable, and *only* the independent variable, influences the dependent variable. This is accomplished by controlling all extraneous variables and by randomly assigning people to different experimental conditions (Campbell & Stanley, 1967). When internal validity is high, the experimenter is in a position to judge whether the independent variable causes the dependent variable. This is the hallmark of the experimental method that sets it apart from the observational and correlational methods: Only the experimental method can answer causal questions, such as whether exposure to pornography causes men to commit violent acts.

For example, researchers have tested whether pornography causes aggression by randomly assigning consenting participants to watch pornographic or nonpornographic films (the independent variable) and measuring the extent to which people acted aggressively toward women (the dependent variable). In a study by Donnerstein and Berkowitz (1981), males were angered by a female accomplice and then were randomly assigned to see one of three films: violent pornography (a rape scene), nonviolent pornography (sex without any violence), or a neutral film with no violence or sex (a talk show interview). The men were then given an opportunity to act aggressively toward the woman who had angered them, by choosing the level of electric shock she would receive in an ostensibly unrelated learning experiment (the accomplice did not really receive shocks, but participants believed that she would). The men who had seen the violent pornography administered significantly more intense shocks to the woman than did the men who had seen the nonviolent pornography or the neutral film, suggesting that it is not pornography per se that leads to aggressive behavior, but the violence depicted in some pornography (Mussweiler & Förster, 2000). We review this area of research in more detail in Chapter 12.

EXTERNAL VALIDITY IN EXPERIMENTS For all the advantages of the experimental method, there are some drawbacks. By virtue of gaining enough control over the situation so as to randomly assign people to conditions and rule out the effects of extraneous variables, the situation can become somewhat artificial and distant from

Probability Level (*p*-value)

A number calculated with statistical techniques that tells researchers how likely it is that the results of their experiment occurred by chance and not because of the independent variable or variables; the convention in science, including social psychology, is to consider results *significant* (trustworthy) if the probability level is less than 5 in 100 that the results might be due to chance factors and not the independent variables studied

Internal Validity

Making sure that nothing besides the independent variable can affect the dependent variable; this is accomplished by controlling all extraneous variables and by randomly assigning people to different experimental conditions

real life. For example, it might be argued that Latané and Darley strayed far from the original inspiration for their study, the Kitty Genovese murder. What does witnessing a seizure while participating in a laboratory experiment in a college building have to do with a brutal murder in a densely populated urban neighborhood? How often in everyday life do we have discussions with other people through an intercom system? Did the fact that the participants knew they were in a psychology experiment influence their behavior?

External Validity

The extent to which the results of a study can be generalized to other situations and to other people

These are important questions that concern **external validity**, which is the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized to other situations and other people. Note that two kinds of generalizability are at issue: the extent to which we can generalize from the situation constructed by an experimenter to real-life situations, referred to as generalizability across *situations*, and the extent to which we can generalize from the people who participated in the experiment to people in general, referred to as generalizability across *people*.

When it comes to generalizability across situations, research in social psychology is sometimes criticized for being conducted in artificial settings that cannot be generalized to real life—for example, psychological experiments at a university. To address this problem, social psychologists attempt to increase the generalizability of their results by making their studies as realistic as possible. But this is hard to do in a laboratory setting in which people are placed in situations they would rarely, if ever, encounter in everyday life, such as occurred in Latané and Darley's group discussion of personal problems over an intercom system. Instead, psychologists attempt to maximize the study's **psychological realism**, which is the extent to which the psychological processes triggered in an experiment are similar to psychological processes that occur in everyday life (Aronson, Wilson, & Brewer, 1998). Even though Latané and Darley staged an emergency that in significant ways was unlike those encountered in everyday life, was it psychologically similar to real-life emergencies? Were the same psychological processes triggered? Did the participants have the same types of perceptions and thoughts, make the same types of decisions, and choose the same types of behaviors that they would in a real-life situation? If so, the study is high in psychological realism and we can generalize the results to everyday life.

Psychological Realism

The extent to which the psychological processes triggered in an experiment are similar to psychological processes that occur in everyday life

Cover Story

A description of the purpose of a study, given to participants, that is different from its true purpose and is used to maintain psychological realism

A good deal of social psychological research takes place in laboratory settings. How do social psychologists generalize from the findings of these studies to life outside the laboratory?

Psychological realism is heightened if people feel involved in a real event. To accomplish this, experimenters often tell participants a **cover story**—a disguised version of the study's true purpose. Recall, for example, that Latané and Darley told people that they were studying the personal problems of college students and then staged an emergency. It would have been a lot easier to say to people, "Look, we are interested in how people react to emergencies, so at some point during this study we are going to stage an accident, and then we'll see how you respond." We think you'll agree that such a procedure would be very low in psychological realism. In real life, we never know when emergencies are going to occur, and we do not have time to plan our responses to them. If participants knew that an emergency was about to happen, the kinds of psychological processes triggered would have been quite different from those of a real emergency, reducing the psychological realism of the study.