

# Social Psychology



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**Social Psychology**  
FIFTH EDITION



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*We dedicate this book to*

Karen, Ilana, and Rebecca Dashiff Gilovich

Mollie McNeil and Natalie and Serafina Keltner-McNeil

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# PREFACE

## A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology illuminates the nature of everyday social life. It's a science that offers novel insights into the foundations of moral sentiments, the origins of violence, and the reasons people fall in love. It provides basic tools for understanding racial bias and how we might curb it, how people persuade one another, why people trust and cooperate with each other, and how people rationalize their undesirable actions. Social psychology offers scientifically grounded answers to questions human beings have been thinking about since we started to reflect on who we are: Are we rational creatures? How can we find happiness? What is the proper relationship of the individual to the larger society? How are we shaped by the culture in which we are raised?

After decades of collective experience teaching social psychology, we decided at the turn of the twenty-first century to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write our own vision of this fascinating discipline. It was an ideal time to do so. Many new developments in the field were reshaping social psychology. Exciting new research had revealed how different kinds of culture—country of origin, regional culture, social class—shape human thought, feeling, and action. Evolutionary theory was helping to guide how social psychologists study things such as homicide, morality, and cooperation. Social psychologists were making inroads into the study of the brain. Specific areas of interest to us—the self, judgment and decision making, emotion, relationships, and well-being—had emerged as well-defined areas of investigation that were producing important insights about human behavior. The lure of writing a textbook, and the challenge in doing so, was to capture all of these new developments and integrate them with the timeless classics of social psychology that make it such a captivating discipline.

It's a bit shocking to us to think that this is the fifth edition of the text; it seems like just yesterday when we first got together in Berkeley, California, to map out what an informative survey of social psychology

might look like. Our work on all five editions has been deeply rewarding. Our fascination with the field, and our pride in being a part of it, has been rekindled and magnified with each edition. It is gratifying to have this book reach the minds of the next generation of social psychology students.

Whether students end up as teachers, health care providers, or talent agents or as software designers, forest rangers, or book editors, other people are going to be the center of their lives. All of us grow up dependent on the members of our nuclear family (and, in many cultural contexts, a larger extended family); we go through adolescence obsessed with our social standing and intensely focused on our prospects for romance and sexuality; and as adults we seek out others in the workplace, at clubs, in places of worship, and in our recreational activities. Social psychologists spend their professional lives studying this intense sociality, examining how we act, think, and feel in all of these social encounters—and *why* we act, think, and feel that way. Above all, we want our book to capture the fundamentally social nature of human life and to present the clever, informative, and sometimes inspiring methods that social psychologists have used to study and understand the social life around us.

In our teaching, we have found that many great studies in social psychology are simple narratives: the narrative of the person who felt compelled to harm another person in the name of science, the narrative of the clergyman who did not help someone in need because he was in a hurry, the narrative of the Southerner whose blood pressure rose when he was insulted in a hallway, the narrative of the young researcher who lived among hunter-gatherers in New Guinea to discover universal facial expressions. In our experience, teaching social psychology brings forth so many “Aha!” moments because of these stories that are embedded within, and inspire, our science.

## **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD, AND CRITICAL THINKING**

These narratives are different, however, from others that try to capture something important about the human condition: the story of the tortoise and the hare, the tale of the boy who cried wolf, and the anecdote of the child down the street who “took candy from a stranger” and paid a high price for doing so. The tales we tell in this book are all grounded in empirical evidence. It’s the scientific foundation of their claims that

distinguish social psychologists from other astute observers of the human condition, such as novelists, playwrights, film directors, and parents, teachers, clergymen, and coaches. The methods of social psychology are every bit as important as the insights they reveal.

In fact, we believe that social psychology is unmatched as a means of teaching critical thinking. Accordingly, our text makes explicit the power of social psychology's methods and habits of thought for understanding the world and assessing the likely truth of what friends and the media tell us. To make sure students hone their critical thinking skills, we approach the subject matter of social psychology—and the *study* of social psychology—in several ways.

First, in [Chapter 2](#), The Methods of Social Psychology, we present an overview of the most important elements of conducting research. We tie the methods of social psychology together by showing how many of them can be applied to a single problem: the nature of the “culture of honor.” That chapter, and much of the rest of the book, is oriented toward providing the critical thinking skills that are the hallmark of social psychology. We show how the tools of social psychology can be used to critique research in the behavioral and medical sciences that students encounter online and in magazines and newspapers. More importantly, we show how the methods of social psychology can be used to understand everyday life and to figure out how to navigate new situations.

Second, our “Not So Fast” feature in each chapter highlights how easy it is to be fooled by the evidence we encounter in our lives and to draw conclusions that seem solid but in fact don't stand up to scientific scrutiny. They show how even the smartest among us can be misled by what we experience and what we read or hear unless we've learned some fundamental principles of the scientific method. Many of these lessons are reinforced at the end of each chapter with a set of open-ended “Think about It” questions that challenge students to think critically in the context of a research-related or real-life scenario.

Third, we embed discussions of methodological issues throughout the book in the context of many programs of research. This melds the content of social psychology with the principles that underlie research that can be used to understand ordinary events in people's lives.

Fourth, a new feature of this edition is a set of full-page infographics that examine social psychological topics of contemporary interest. These

infographics give students an inside view of experimentation in social psychology and help them understand how to read data graphics and distill the take-away points of research. We have tried to make sure that all our field's varied methods—such as archival analyses, randomized controlled experiments, neuroimaging studies, and participant observation—are represented and that the infographics shed light on important trends and questions in everyday life.

Much of the subject matter of social psychology—relationships, media, conformity, prejudice—readily engages the student's attention and imagination. The material sells itself. But in most social psychology textbooks, the presentation comes across as a list of unconnected topics—as one intriguing fact after another. As a result, students often come away thinking of social psychology as all fun and games. That's fine up to a point. Social psychology *is* fun. But it is much more than that, and we have tried to show how the highlights of our field—the classic findings and the exciting new developments—are part of a scientific study of human nature that can sit with pride next to biology, chemistry, and physics and that is worthy of the most serious-minded student's attention.

## **THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO EVERYDAY LIFE**

Possibly the easiest part of writing a social psychology textbook is pointing out the enormous applied implications of what the field has to offer. We do a great deal of this throughout the text. Each chapter begins with events in the real world that drive home the themes and wisdom of social psychology. For example, [Chapter 3](#), The Social Self, begins with the story of Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, who you and the world know as Lady Gaga. [Chapter 6](#), Emotion, begins with the story of how Pixar director Pete Docter relied on the science of emotion to create the highly regarded film *Inside Out*. [Chapter 12](#), Groups, begins with the harrowing story of how Pelican Bay inmate Todd Ashker united different gangs in prison to lead a protest against solitary confinement. What better way for the student to ponder the findings of social psychology than by relying on them to understand current events? Interspersed throughout the text are Focus On boxes that profile real-world applications of the wisdom of social psychology—for example, in understanding how black uniforms make professional athletes more aggressive or how meditation might shift a person's brain chemistry.

To bring into sharper focus the relevance of social psychology to daily living, we have three applied mini-chapters, or modules, at the end of the book. These modules bring science-based insight to bear on three areas of great importance to just about everyone: the latest findings on health and how science-based, practical techniques can help us cope with stress during difficult times; the latest discoveries in the study of human intelligence and education; and a review of social psychological insights into how the legal system functions and how it can be improved. These modules constitute dramatic evidence of the relevance of social psychological findings to advancing human welfare.

## NEW CONTENT IN THE FIFTH EDITION

The cumulative nature of science requires that revisions do justice to the latest discoveries and evolving views of the field. This new edition has much to offer in this regard.

Chapter	Changes in the Fifth Edition
1. An Invitation to Social Psychology	A new section called “The Uses of Social Psychology” has been added, covering social psychology and critical thinking, the uses and abuses of social media, and social psychology and the “good life.”
2. The Methods of Social Psychology	We have added an extensive discussion of the issue that has commanded so much of the field’s attention and sparked so much commentary—the replicability of research findings. Our discussion highlights the importance of replication, presents the results of research investigating the replication rate for prominent social psychological findings, and details why some failures to

	<p>replicate are inevitable. Also new to this chapter is the infographic “Threats to Internal Validity.”</p>
<p>3. The Social Self</p>	<p>We have incorporated additional theory and research on how the self influences and is influenced by the use of social media. In addition, we now include a section covering classic and recent research that reveals how shifts in construals and perspectives can play a critical role in effective self-regulation.</p>
<p>4. Social Cognition: Thinking about People and Situations</p>	<p>We have added a section that discusses the phenomenon of “fake news” and how influential it may be in shaping people’s beliefs, as well as another section on “information bubbles” and how they can contribute to belief polarization. The latter section also contains some “quick tips” about what readers can do to burst their own information bubbles. A new infographic, “Overconfidence: A Pervasive Bias of Human Judgment,” has been added as well.</p>
<p>5. Social Attribution: Explaining Behavior</p>	<p>We revised our discussion of the fundamental attribution error to highlight its significance to several recent trends in society, such as growing income inequality.</p>
	<p>We have added new material on the communication of emotion through emoji in social media, further advances in the understanding of how emotions</p>

6. Emotion	guide moral judgment, and more tips for finding happiness. Additionally, this chapter features an infographic called “The Game of Happiness.”
7. Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization	We continue to cover key findings and theories on the relationship between attitudes and behavior, honing our discussion of cognitive dissonance theory and the principles that determine whether and how people reduce dissonance. Dissonance is also illustrated through the infographic “How Cognitive Dissonance Can Make You Like What You Buy.”
8. Persuasion	We continue to cover the latest in social psychological approaches to political ideology, as well as recent findings on barriers to persuasion. New topics include the role of social media in persuasion, particularly in the realm of political opinions.
9. Social Influence	We discuss new research showing how school bullying can be reduced by utilizing key members of social networks to change students’ beliefs about prevailing norms about bullying.
	In the domain of relationships, we continue to cover both classic and more contemporary approaches to understanding different types of relationships and a range of relationship

<p>10. Relationships and Attraction</p>	<p>processes, including commitment, self-concept change, and conflict. In terms of attraction, we have covered the latest thinking about mere exposure and proximity. An infographic called “(Don’t Wanna Be) All By Myself: The Health Effects of Loneliness” has been added as well.</p>
<p>11. Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination</p>	<p>We now discuss the extent to which an analysis of Internet search traffic yields a different picture of the extent of strong racial prejudice compared with self-reports and other, more traditional data sources. An infographic, “Reducing Racial Disparities in the U.S. School System,” has also been added to this chapter.</p>
<p>12. Groups</p>	<p>To our chapter covering the timeless study of groups we have added material on new approaches to collective intelligence, new thinking about power, and more work on social class. In addition, the chapter features an infographic, “Taking It to Extremes: Politics and Group Polarization.”</p>
<p>13. Aggression</p>	<p>In our coverage of aggression, we consider new studies on movie violence and aggression, the neural underpinnings of social rejection, inequality, and sexual violence.</p>
	<p>We start <a href="#">Chapter 14</a> with a new story—</p>

## 14. Altruism and Cooperation

*Woman*—and cover new discoveries on religion and altruism and the cultural conditions that promote cooperation. An infographic called “How Selfish Are We?” is also featured.

In making these changes, we have preserved the approach in the previous editions that each chapter can stand alone and that chapters can be read in any order. We have done so stylistically by writing chapters that are complete narratives in their own right. Our chapters stand on their own theoretically as well, being organized around social psychology’s emphasis on situationism, construal, and automaticity and highlighting important issues addressing what is universal about human behavior and what is variable across cultures. Although our table of contents suggests a particular order of covering the material, instructors will find it easy to present the topics in whatever order best suits their own preferences or needs.

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out a few of our blind spots and saved us from an occasional embarrassing error.

Beth Ammerman, our talented developmental editor for the third edition, worked with us to create the new infographics for the fifth edition, and they would not have come together without her patience and insight. We'd like to thank Arianna Benedetti and Amanda Wang for researching the infographic topics and providing first-draft copy. Karen Blair, Alexander Czopp, Patrick Ewell, Jessica Remedios, and Heike Winterheld reviewed infographic ideas at every stage, and their feedback was invaluable in making these features engaging and relevant.

Maya Kuehn, Juliana Breines, and Anna Luerssen contributed the Think about It questions in each chapter and provided insightful reviews of the Not So Fast features and the test bank. Juliana and Anna also led the effort to revise and improve the test bank for the fourth and fifth editions. Jennifer Chmielewski authored the coursepack for our new edition, and Ashley Emmerich and Cornelius Sullivan contributed the InQuizitive questions.

We are indebted to Jon Durbin, Vanessa Drake-Johnson, and Paul Rozin for bringing us together on this project in the first place. And we owe enormous thanks to Sheri Snavelly, who has steered us through chapter by chapter for all but the first edition. The book would not be where it is today without her insights, talent, and sense of humor, not to mention her well-timed and well-calibrated nudges. We would also like to thank Eve Sanoussi for her valuable photo suggestions and assistance in keeping the project on track, including keeping us and everyone at Norton sane when the inevitable difficulties of putting a four-author book together arise. We also owe a great deal to our developmental editor for the fifth edition, Emily Stuart, who literally read every line of every page with an eagle eye and a talented red marker. Thanks are also due to our tireless project editor Jennifer Barnhardt, photo editor Cat Ableman, and production manager Sean Mintus. Our media editors, Scott Sugarman and Kaitlin Coats, together with associate editor Tori Reuter, worked diligently to develop modern and high-quality media for our book, including the interactive instructors' guide, student eBook, InQuizitive adaptive assessment, and video. We also are grateful for the marketing efforts of Ashley Sherwood and the Norton travelers who have worked to make this book a success.

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Cornelius Sullivan, *Fresno City College*. Ashley Emmerich, *University of Texas at San Antonio*.

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Heike Winterheld, *California State East Bay*.

The Interactive Instructor's Guide includes class activity and discussion ideas to engage students in both small and large class settings, new Concept Videos that connect key concepts to everyday scenarios, and “Beyond the Citation” Teaching Videos in which the authors talk to students about what conducting research is all about—including insider

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Anna Luerssen, *Lehman College*. Joyce Ehrlinger, *Washington State University*.

The Test Bank provides over 1,100 multiple choice and short answer questions that are classified by section, Bloom’s taxonomy, and difficulty, making it easy for instructors to construct tests and quizzes that are meaningful and diagnostic. The Test Bank is available in Word, RTF, PDF, and *ExamView*® Assessment Suite format.



Lecture and “Beyond the Text” PowerPoints

Heike Winterheld, *California State East Bay*. Tom Gilovich, *Cornell University*. Dacher Keltner, *University of California, Berkeley*. Serena Chen, *University of California, Berkeley*.

This edition of the book features three sets of PowerPoints. Lecture PowerPoints follow the order of the text, feature images, and instructor notes, and are designed to be adaptable in order to fit the needs of each individual classroom. “Beyond the Text” PowerPoints were created by the authors to provide additional examples for use in their own courses. In addition, all of the art and tables from the textbook are available in PPT and JPEG formats.



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Jennifer Chmielewski, *Cuny Graduate Center*. Kimberly Mannahan, *College of Coastal Georgia*.

Norton Coursepacks work within your existing Learning Management System to add rich, book-specific digital materials to your course—at no cost to your students. The Coursepack for *Social Psychology* is customizable and includes three additional quizzes per chapter: “Think about It” Quizzes that help students engage with their reading and apply the concepts they have learned, “Not So Fast” Quizzes that emphasize critical thinking and supplement the “Not So Fast” boxes from the book,

and Chapter Review Quizzes.

Sample

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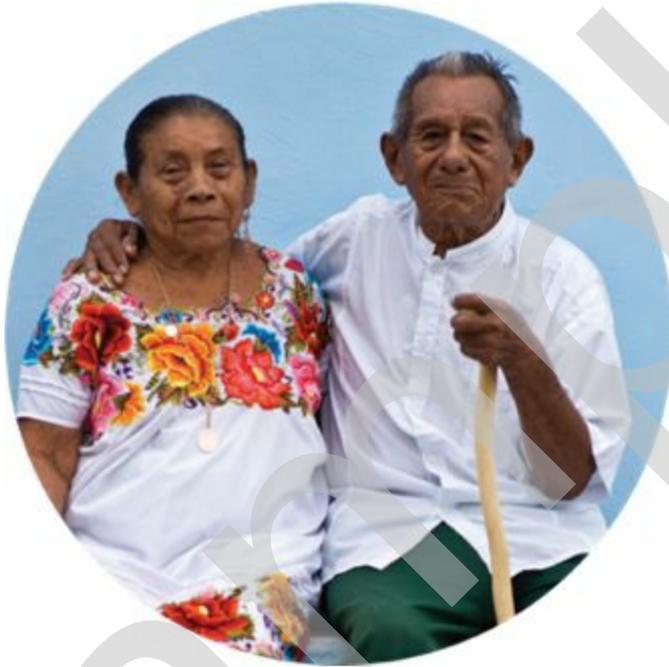
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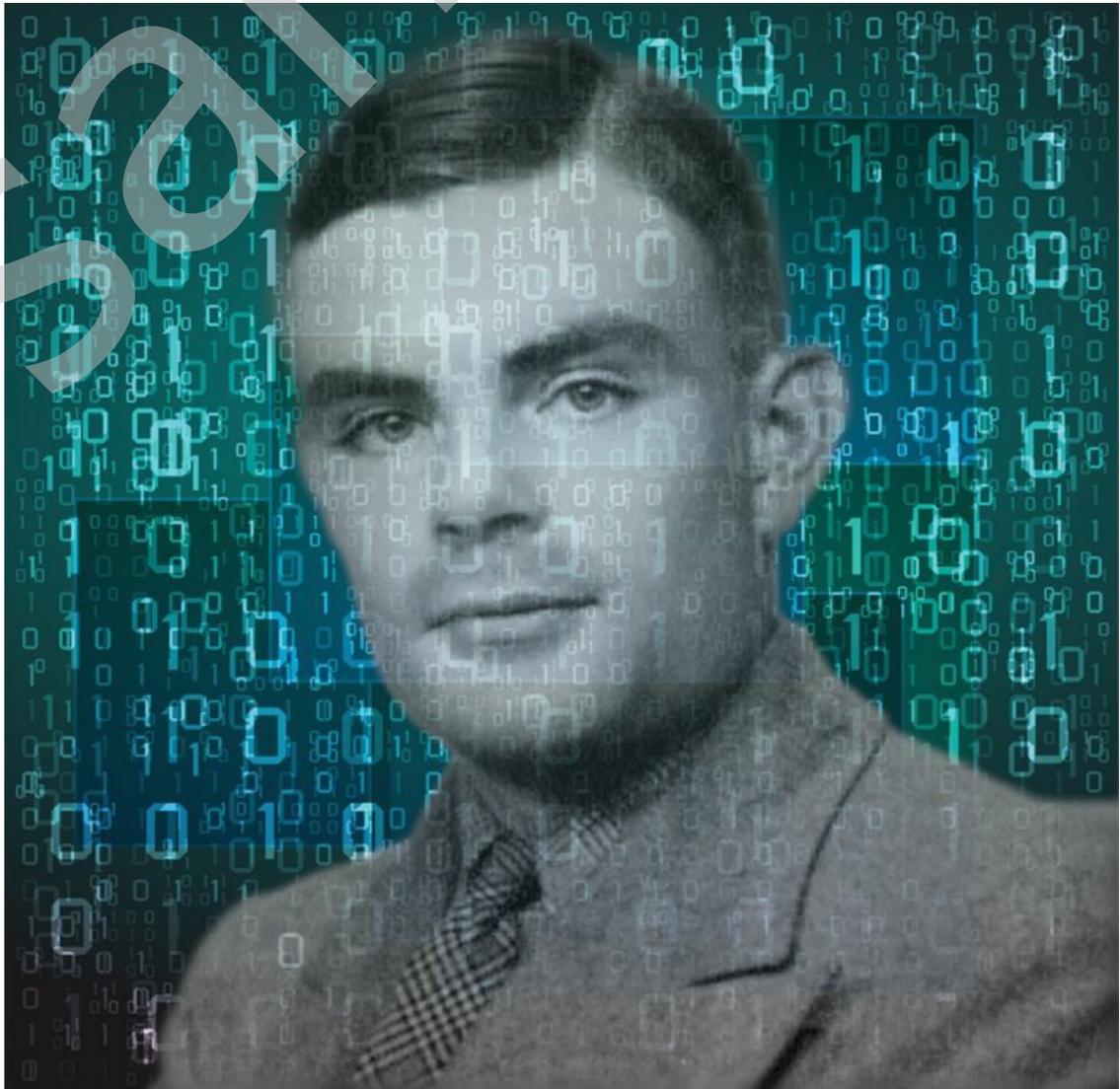
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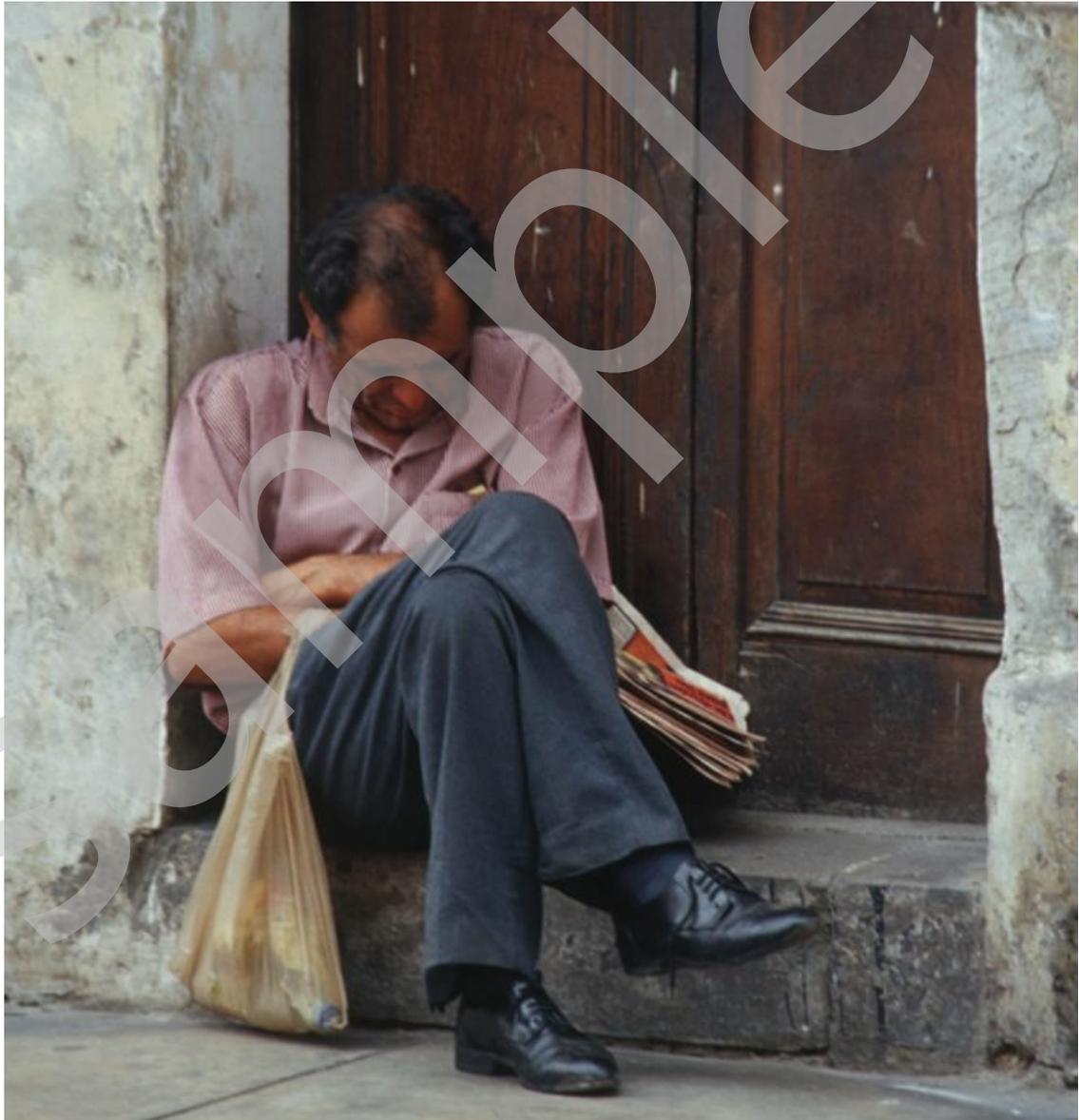
# Chapter

## 1

# An Invitation to Social Psychology



Why have social attitudes toward sexual orientation changed over time?



Why are we quicker to blame a person's behavior on their dispositions than on situational influences?

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Why would people follow orders to mistreat others?

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## Outline

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ALAN TURING, A BRITISH MATHEMATICIAN, logician, and philosopher, is generally considered to be the founder of computer science. During World War II, Turing was head of Hut 8, the British government

agency responsible for breaking the Enigma code of the German Navy, an accomplishment that contributed greatly to the Allied war effort.

In January 1952, when Turing was 39, he was arrested for “gross indecency,” a term the British used for homosexual conduct. Turing was convicted of the charge and allowed to choose between imprisonment and chemical castration to reduce his libido and cause impotence. He chose the latter punishment, which involved the administration of female hormones. Turing attempted to come to the United States but was considered a security risk and not allowed to enter. Until 1974, the American Psychiatric Association held that homosexuality was a mental illness. On June 8, 1954, Turing was found dead from cyanide poisoning in his apartment. The death was ruled a suicide.

At the time of Turing’s death, homosexuality was illegal in most U.S. states. It wasn’t until 2003 that the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a previous decision and declared that homosexual conduct was permitted under the “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Thereupon, all laws in the United States criminalizing homosexual acts became invalid.

Until 1994, homosexuality was a sufficient cause for discharge from the American military. President Clinton issued an order prohibiting discrimination against homosexual members of the armed forces, but also barring openly gay people who “demonstrate a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts” from serving in the armed forces. This “don’t ask, don’t tell” ruling was overturned in 2011 by President Obama, and openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals can now serve in the armed forces.

For years, public opinion ran strongly against same-sex marriage until a recent and surprisingly rapid shift toward it. In 1996, a small minority of Americans favored gay marriage. Less than 20 years later, a solid majority supported the Supreme Court’s decision to legalize marriage equality nationwide.

The American public went from viewing homosexuality as an illegal act and a mental illness possibly requiring surgical intervention to acceptance of marriage equality in scarcely more than a generation. This fact and many others concerning homosexuality in relation to social norms and individual psychology are the kinds of topics that deeply interest social psychologists.

Why was homosexuality seen as such a threat to people in modern Western societies? In many cultures, homosexuality never was considered abnormal or reprehensible or even particularly worthy of notice; in others it has been punishable by death since time immemorial. Why has homosexuality in women in virtually every society always been more tolerated than homosexuality in men? To what degree is same-sex attraction, or sexual orientation in general, influenced by social norms and institutional settings? How is it possible for an entire society to significantly change its attitudes toward a salient social issue in less than 20 years? What are the effects on sexual minorities of societal rejection versus the effects of acceptance? How and why do stereotypes of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people change over time? How do sexual-minority cultures and subcultures change over time, and what are the factors that influence such changes?



### **Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality**

Same-sex marriage is now legal in the United States, and adoption of children by same-sex couples is legal in many states. Openly gay, bisexual, and lesbian politicians, such as Tammy Baldwin, are being elected to national political office.

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In this chapter, we explain what social psychology is and what social psychologists study. We also present some of the basic concepts of social psychology, especially the surprising degree to which social situations can influence behavior; the role of construal, or the interpretive processes people use to understand situations; and how two different kinds of

thinking—one rapid, intuitive, and nonconscious and the other slower, analytical, and conscious—both contribute to understanding what is happening in social situations. We also describe some relatively recent developments in social psychology that have changed the field—namely, the application of evolutionary concepts to human behavior, the use of the tools of neuroscience, and the discovery of some significant variations in human cultures that frequently lead people in diverse societies to respond to the “same” situation in very different ways. ■

# Characterizing Social Psychology

People have always sought explanations for human behavior. Stories, parables, and folk wisdom have been passed from generation to generation to explain why people do what they do and to prescribe behaviors to avoid or follow. Social psychologists go beyond folk wisdom and try to establish a scientific basis for understanding human behavior. [Social psychology](#) can be defined as the scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

Why are people inclined to stereotype members of different groups? Why do people risk their lives to help others? Why do some marriages flourish and others fail? How do orderly crowds turn into violent mobs? These sorts of questions lie at the heart of social psychology, and careful research has provided at least partial answers to all of them. Some of the answers probably won't surprise you. For example, we tend to like people who like us, and the people we like generally have attitudes and interests that are similar to ours. When experimental findings reflect what our intuitions and folk wisdom say will happen, social psychologists go further, seeking to discover what lies behind the phenomenon in question. In contrast, other answers have been so counterintuitive that they surprised even the social psychologists who conducted the research. As you will see throughout this book, many of our most strongly held folk theories or intuitions fail to give complete answers to important questions, and others are just plain wrong. Social psychologists test these intuitions by devising studies and crafting experiments that reveal the causes of behavior in social situations.

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“The test of learning psychology is whether your understanding of situations you encounter has changed, not whether you have learned a new fact.”

—NOBEL PRIZE–WINNING PSYCHOLOGIST DANIEL  
KAHNEMAN

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# Explaining Behavior

In April 2004, more than a year after the start of the war in Iraq, CBS broadcast a story that exposed American atrocities against Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. CBS showed photos of naked prisoners with plastic bags over their heads, stacked up in a pyramid and surrounded by laughing American soldiers. Other photos showed hooded prisoners standing on narrow pedestals with their arms stretched out and electric wires attached to their bodies. CBS also reported that prisoners had been required to simulate sexual acts.

The reaction on the part of many Iraqis and others in the Arab world was to regard the soldiers' behavior as evidence that the United States had malevolent intentions toward Arabs (Hauser, 2004). Most Americans, too, were appalled at the abuse and ashamed of the behavior of the U.S. soldiers. Many people assumed that the soldiers who had perpetrated these acts were bad apples—exceptions to a rule of common decency prevailing in the military and the general population.



## Prison Situations and Intimidation

(A) Military guards at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq used torture, humiliation, and intimidation to try to obtain information from the prisoners. This included stripping them and making them lie naked in the prison corridors. (B) Such degradation echoes what happened in the Zimbardo prison study, as shown in this photo of a “guard” seeking to humiliate one of his prisoners at the simulated prison.

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Social psychologists, however, weren't so quick to make such an assumption. Indeed, 30 years before the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, Philip

Zimbardo and his colleagues paid 24 Stanford University undergraduate men, chosen for their good character and mental health, to be participants in a study of a simulated prison (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). The researchers flipped a coin to determine who would be a “guard” and who would be a “prisoner.” The guards wore green fatigue uniforms and reflective sunglasses. The prisoners wore tunics with nylon stocking caps and had a chain locked around one ankle. The “prison” was set up in the basement of the psychology department, and the researchers anticipated that the study would last 2 weeks. Right away, the guards turned to verbal abuse and physical humiliation, requiring the prisoners to wear bags over their heads, stripping them naked, and requiring them to engage in simulated sex acts. As a result, the study had to be terminated after 6 days because the behavior of the guards produced extreme stress reactions in several of the prisoners.

Zimbardo today maintains that the balance of power in prisons is so unequal that they tend to be brutal places unless the guards observe strict regulations curbing their worst impulses. Thus, at both Abu Ghraib and Stanford, “It’s not that we put bad apples in a good barrel. We put good apples in a bad barrel. The barrel corrupts anything that it touches” (quoted in Schwartz, 2004). Some might contend that the soldiers in Iraq were only following orders and that, left to their own devices, they would not have chosen to behave as they did. That may be the case, but it then leads us to ask, Why did they follow such orders?

Social psychologists try to find answers to just such questions. They study situations in which people exert influence over one another, as well as the ways people respond to various attempts to influence them. Social psychologists are also interested in how people make sense of their world—how they decide what and whom to believe; how they make inferences about the motives, personalities, and abilities of other people; and how they reach conclusions about the causes of events. Social psychologists apply their knowledge to important questions concerning individuals and society at large: how to reduce stereotyping and prejudice in the classroom and workplace; how to make eyewitness testimony more reliable; how physicians can best use diverse sources of information to make a correct diagnosis; what goes wrong in airplane cockpits when there is an accident or near accident; and how businesses, governments, and individuals can make better decisions.

By the time you finish this book, you will have acquired a greater

understanding of yourself and others. You will also have knowledge you can apply in your education, your career, and your relationships. Your reasoning and the quality of your life will improve accordingly.

**Glossary:**

- [\*social psychology\*](#)  
The scientific study of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals in social situations.

# The Power of the Situation

Kurt Lewin, the founder of modern social psychology, was a Jewish Berliner who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and became a professor at the University of Iowa and then at MIT. Lewin was knowledgeable about physics, and he applied a powerful idea from physics to an understanding of psychological existence. He believed that the behavior of people, like the behavior of objects, is always a function of the field of forces in which they find themselves (Lewin, 1935). To understand how fast a solid object will travel through a medium, for example, we must know such things as the viscosity of the medium, the force of gravity, and any initial force applied to the object. In the case of people, the forces are psychological as well as physical.



### **Kurt Lewin**

Lewin is generally considered the founder of modern social psychology. He emphasized the importance of situational factors external to the individual and showed that social psychologists could make use of experiments.

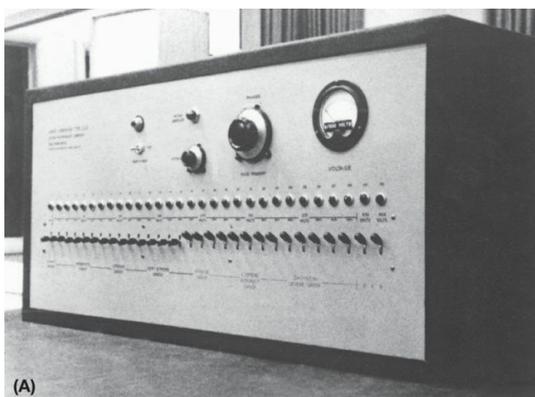
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The field of forces in the case of human behavior is the situation, especially the social situation. Of course, a person's attributes are also

important determinants of behavior, but these attributes always interact with the situation to produce the resulting behavior. The main situational influences on our behavior are the actions—and sometimes just the mere presence—of other people. Friends, romantic partners, even total strangers can cause us to be kinder or meaner, smarter or dumber, lazier or more hardworking, bolder or more cautious. They can produce drastic changes in our beliefs and behavior not only by what they tell us explicitly, but also by showing through their actions what we should think and do, by subtly implying that our acceptability as a friend or group member depends on adopting their views or behaving as they do. All these effects have been shown in numerous studies demonstrating the power of the situation.

## The Milgram Experiment

One of the most striking demonstrations of the power of the situation is a classic experiment by psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974). Milgram advertised in the local newspaper for men to participate in a study on learning and memory at Yale University in exchange for a modest amount of money. (In subsequent experiments, women also participated; the results were similar.) When the volunteers—a mix of laborers, middle-class individuals, and professionals ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s—arrived at the laboratory, a man in a white lab coat told them they would be participating in a study about the effects of punishment on learning. There would be a “teacher” and a “learner,” and the learner would try to memorize word pairs such as *wild/duck*. The volunteer and another man, a somewhat heavysset, pleasant-looking man in his late 40s, drew slips of paper to determine who would play which role. But things were not as they seemed: the pleasant-looking man was actually an accomplice of the experimenter, and the drawing was rigged so that he was always the learner.



## The Milgram Experiment

To examine the role of social influence, Stanley Milgram set up a study in which participants believed they were testing a learner (actually a confederate) and punishing him with shocks when he gave the wrong answer. (A) Milgram's "shock machine." (B) The participant and experimenter attaching electrodes to the "learner" before testing begins.

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The participant "teacher" was then instructed to administer shocks—from 15 to 450 volts—to the "learner" each time the learner made an error. Labels under the shock switches ranged from "slight shock" through "danger: severe shock" to "XXX." The experimenter explained that the teacher was to administer shocks in ascending 15-volt magnitudes: 15 volts the first time the learner made an error, 30 volts the next time, and so on. The teacher was given a 45-volt shock so he would have an idea of how painful the shocks would be. What he didn't know was that the learner, who was in another room, was not actually being shocked.

Most participants became concerned as the shock levels increased and turned to the experimenter to ask what should be done, but the experimenter insisted they go on. The first time a teacher expressed reservations, he was told, "Please continue." If the teacher balked, the experimenter said, "The experiment requires that you continue." If the teacher continued to hesitate, the experimenter said, "It's absolutely essential that you continue." If necessary, the experimenter escalated to, "You have no other choice. You must go on." If the participant asked whether the learner could suffer permanent physical injury, the experimenter said, "Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on."

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"Evil is obvious only in retrospect."

—GLORIA STEINEM

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In the end, despite the learner's groans, pleas, screams, and eventual silence as the intensity of the shocks increased, 80 percent of the participants continued past the 150-volt level—at which point the learner mentioned that he had a heart condition and screamed, "Let me out of

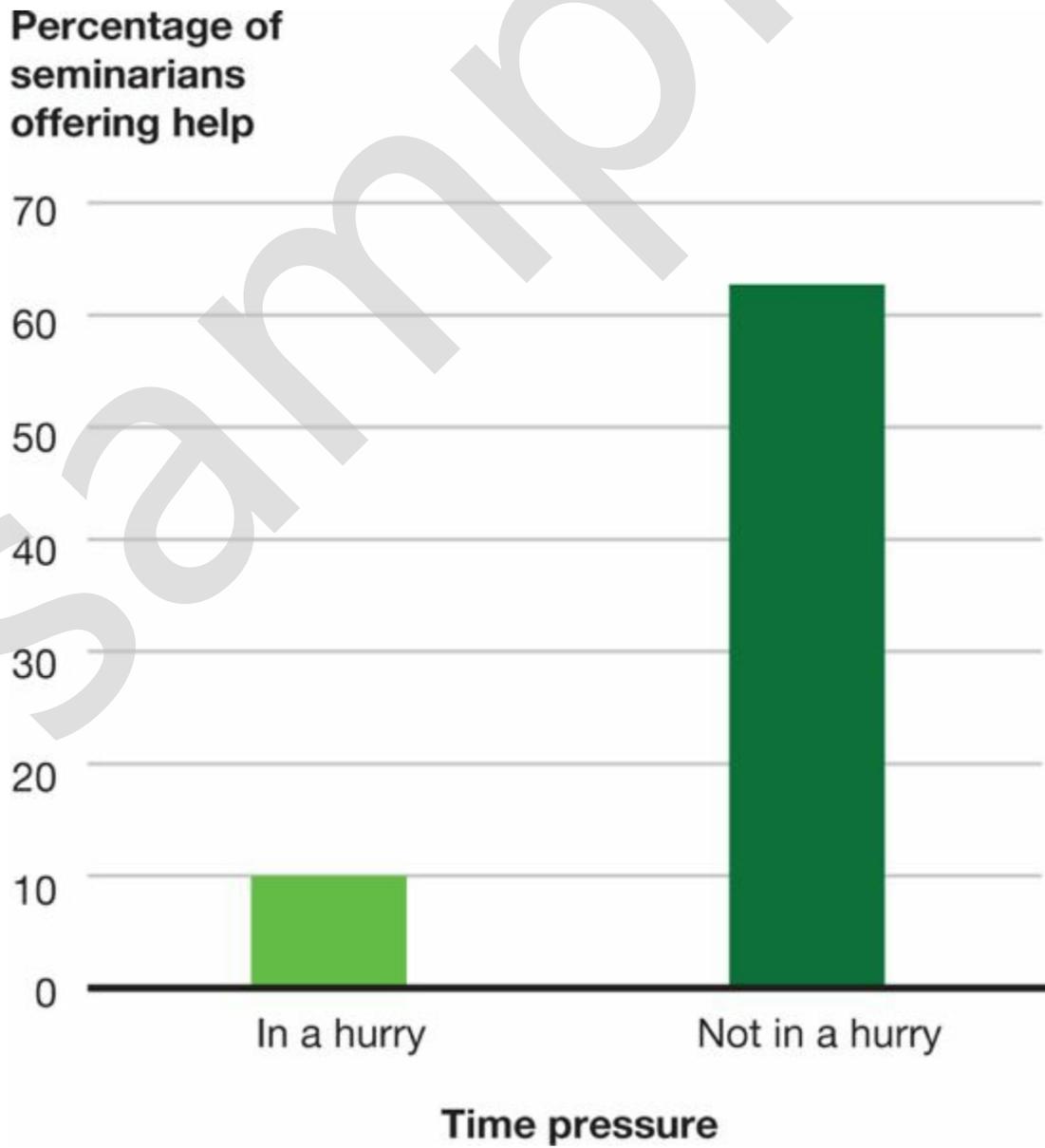
here!” Fully 62.5 percent of the participants went all the way to the 450-volt level, delivering everything the shock generator could produce. The average amount of shock given was 360 volts, *after* the learner let out an agonized scream and became hysterical.

Milgram and other experts did not expect nearly as many participants to continue to administer shocks as long as they did. A panel of 39 psychiatrists predicted that only 20 percent of the participants would continue past the 150-volt level and that only 1 percent would continue past the 330-volt level. Milgram’s study and its implications are described in more detail in [Chapter 9](#). For now, the important question is, What made the participants in Milgram’s study engage in behavior that they believed was causing another person immense physical pain and, despite the experimenter’s insistence, possible permanent harm as well? Milgram’s participants were not heartless fiends. Instead, the situation was extraordinarily effective in getting them to do something that would normally fill them with horror. The experiment was presented as a scientific investigation—an unfamiliar situation for most participants. The experimenter explicitly took responsibility for what happened. (Adolf Hitler frequently made similar pledges during the years he marched his nation into a world war and the Holocaust.) Moreover, participants could not have guessed at the outset what the experiment involved, so they were not prepared to resist anyone’s demands. And as Milgram stressed, the step-by-step nature of the procedure was undoubtedly crucial. If the participant didn’t quit at 225 volts, then why quit at 255? If not at 420, then why at 435?

## **Seminarians as Samaritans**

A classic experiment by John Darley and Daniel Batson (1973) demonstrates the power of the situation even more simply. These investigators asked students at the Princeton Theological Seminary about the basis of their religious orientation to determine whether particular students were primarily concerned with religion as a means toward personal salvation or were more concerned with religion for its other moral and spiritual values. After determining the basis of their religious orientation, the psychologists asked each young seminarian to go to another building to deliver a short sermon. The seminarians were told what route to follow to get there most easily. Some were told that they had plenty of time to get to the building where they were to deliver the sermon,

and some were told that they were already late and should hurry. On the way to deliver their sermon—on the topic of the Good Samaritan, by the way—each of the seminarians passed a man who was sitting in a doorway with his head down, coughing and groaning and in apparent need of help.



**Figure 1.1**

**The Power of the Situation and Helping**

Princeton seminarians usually helped a “victim” if they were not in a hurry, but rarely helped if they were in a rush.

Source: Darley & Batson, 1973.

It turned out that the nature of religious orientation was of no use in predicting whether the seminarians would offer assistance. But as you can see in Figure 1.1, whether seminarians were in a hurry or not was a very powerful predictor. The seminarians were pretty good Samaritans as a group—but only when they weren't in a rush.

## **The Fundamental Attribution Error**

People are thus governed by situational factors—such as whether they are being pressured by someone or whether they are late—more than they tend to assume. At the same time, internal factors—the kind of person someone is—have much less influence than most people assume they do. You may be surprised by many of the findings reported in this book because most people underestimate the power of the external forces that operate on an individual and tend to assume, often mistakenly, that the causes of behavior can be found mostly within the person.



## **The Fundamental Attribution Error**

If you knew that a theology student had come across this person, who

was coughing and groaning, and passed the person by without offering to help, what would you think of the student? Would you regard the student as an uncaring person, or would you assume that some situational factor, such as being late for an appointment, caused the student to rush past without stopping to help? If you're like most people, you would probably jump to an unfavorable conclusion about the student's personality.

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Psychologists call internal factors [dispositions](#)—that is, beliefs, values, personality traits, and abilities that guide behavior. People tend to think of dispositions as the underlying causes of behavior, but that's not necessarily true. Seeing an acquaintance give a dollar to a beggar may prompt us to assume that the person is generous, but subsequent observations of the person in different situations might show that we had overgeneralized from a single act. Noticing a stranger in the street behaving angrily, we might assume that the person is aggressive or ill tempered. Such judgments are valid far less often than we think.

The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, together with the tendency to overemphasize the importance of dispositions, was labeled the [fundamental attribution error](#) by Lee Ross (1977). Many findings in social psychology indicate that people should look for situational factors that might be affecting someone's behavior before assuming that the person has dispositions that match the behavior. As you read this book, you will become more attuned to situational factors and less inclined to assume that behavior can be fully explained by characteristics inherent in the individual. The ultimate lesson of social psychology is thus a compassionate one. Social psychology encourages us to look at another person's situation—to try to understand the complex field of forces acting on the individual—in order to fully understand the person's behavior.

## **Nudge, Don't Push**

Kurt Lewin (1952) introduced the concept of “channel factors” to help explain why certain circumstances that appear unimportant on the surface can have great consequences for behavior, either facilitating it or blocking it. The term is also meant to reflect that such circumstances can sometimes guide behavior in a particular direction by making it easier to follow one

path rather than another. The concept has been borrowed by behavioral economics, a new field at the intersection of social psychology and economics. Behavioral economists refer to the concept as “nudges”—small, innocuous-seeming prompts that can have big effects on behavior.

Consider a study by Howard Leventhal and his colleagues on how to motivate people to take advantage of preventive care (Leventhal, Singer, & Jones, 1965). They attempted to persuade Yale students to get tetanus inoculations. To convince them that the inoculation was in their best interest, the researchers had them read scary materials about the number of ways a person could get tetanus (in addition to the proverbial rusty nail). To make sure they had the students’ full attention, the team showed them photos of people in the last stages of lockjaw. But not to worry—the students could avoid this fate simply by going to the student health center at any time and getting a free inoculation. Interviews showed that most participants formed the intention to get an inoculation, but only 3 percent did so. Other participants were given a map of the Yale campus with a circle around the health center and were asked to review their weekly schedule and decide on a convenient time to visit the center and the route they would take to get there. Bear in mind that these were seniors who knew perfectly well where the health center was. Nevertheless, the nudge increased the percentage of students getting an inoculation ninefold, to 28 percent.

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“If you are like most people, then like most people, you don’t know you’re like most people.”

—SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST DAN GILBERT

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The tetanus shot nudge was employed in the Obama campaign’s “Get Out the Vote” phone drive on election eve in 2008. Voters were asked, “Where will you be just before you vote?” And after the voter’s answer, “What route do you plan to use to get there?” This procedure is now considered “best practice,” and both Republicans and Democrats use it.

As we’ve noted, the nudge concept is central to behavioral economics. For example, economists have encouraged businesses to get as many of their employees as possible to participate in retirement plans in which the employer puts money away for the employee’s retirement. Rather than

have their employees “opt in” to their retirement programs by checking a box or signing a statement saying they wish to be enrolled in the retirement plan, employers create an easy channel for participation by having it be automatic. Employees must check a box or sign a statement saying they *don’t* want the retirement plan; otherwise they are automatically enrolled (Figure 1.2). This trivial-seeming nudge creates far more participation (and far happier retirements) than when the nudge conspires against participation (Choi, Laibson, & Madrian, 2009; Madrian & Shea, 2001). And did you know that 99 percent of Austrians allow for harvesting their organs for transplant, whereas only 12 percent of Germans allow harvesting? Before you commit the fundamental attribution error, we hasten to tell you that Germans have to check a box if they want to have their organs harvested; Austrians have to check a box if they don’t want their organs harvested.

If you do not wish to take part in the retirement plan funded in part by the company, please indicate that by checking the box below.  <input type="checkbox"/>	If you wish to take part in the retirement plan funded in part by the company, please indicate that by checking the box below.  <input type="checkbox"/>
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**Figure 1.2**

### **How to Have a Happy Retirement**

If the box on your new employee form asks the question on the left, you are much more likely to be enrolled in the company’s retirement plan than if the box asks the question on the right.

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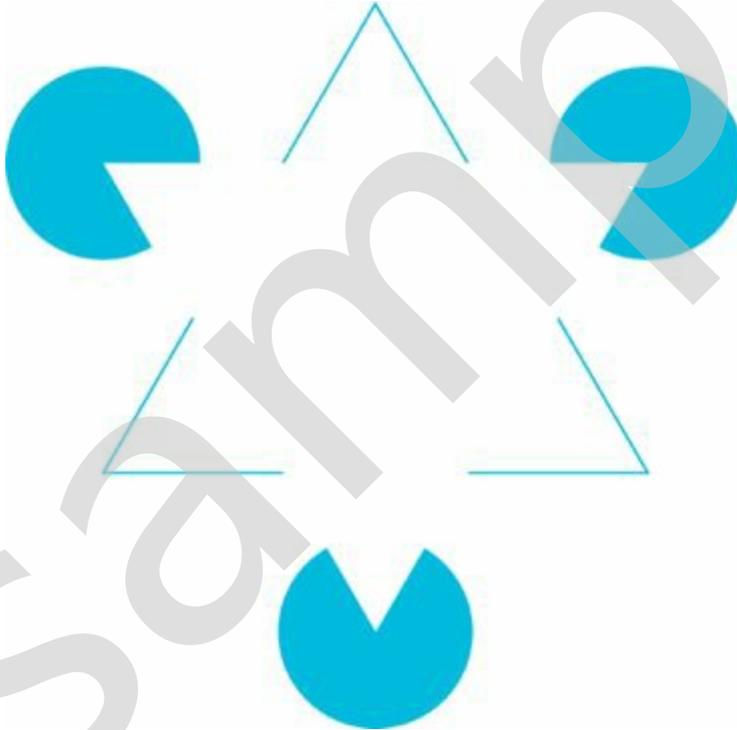
## **← LOOKING BACK**

Situations are often more powerful in their influence on behavior than we realize. Whether or not people are kind to others and whether or not they take action in their own best interest can depend on subtle aspects of the situation. We often overlook such situational factors when we try to understand our own behavior or that of others, and we often mistakenly attribute behavior to presumed dispositions (the fundamental attribution error).

## Glossary:

- *[dispositions](#)*  
Internal factors, such as beliefs, values, personality traits, and abilities, that guide a person's behavior.
- *[fundamental attribution error](#)*  
The failure to recognize the importance of situational influences on behavior, along with the corresponding tendency to overemphasize the importance of dispositions on behavior.

# The Role of Construal



**Figure 1.3**

## **Gestalt Principles and Perception**

When viewing this figure, known as the Kanizsa triangle, people fill in the empty spaces in their mind and perceive a white triangle.

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Look at Figure 1.3. Do you see a white triangle? Most people do, but in fact there is no white triangle. We construct a triangle in our mind out of the *gaps* in the picture. The gaps are located just where they would be if a triangle were laid over the outlined triangle and a portion of each of the three circles. That makes a good, clear image, but it's entirely a creation of our perceptual apparatus and our background assumptions about the visual world. Both the perceptual process and the assumptions are automatic and nonconscious—that is to say, we're not consciously aware of them. Now look at *Slave Market with Disappearing Bust of Voltaire*, the above painting by surrealist artist Salvador Dali. Dali was a master at using the mind's tendency to construct meaningful figures from the gaps in an image. He created a number of well-known double images—pictures that

could be perceived in two different ways, as in this painting.



### Gestalt Principles in Art

In his *Slave Market with Disappearing Bust of Voltaire*, Salvador Dalí confronts the viewer with the bust of the French philosopher Voltaire (at center of painting). But on closer inspection, Voltaire’s head consists of the gap in the wall behind the two Dutch women in the marketplace (what artists refer to as “negative space”) and his face consists of the women themselves.

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“We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.”

—ANAIS NIN

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## Interpreting Reality

Our perceptions normally bear a resemblance to what the world is really like, but perception requires substantial interpretation on our part and is

subject to significant bias under certain conditions. What we see is not necessarily what is actually there but what is plausible—what makes a good, predictable “figure” in light of the stored existing representations we have of the world and in light of the context in which we encounter something. German psychologists in the early part of the twentieth century convincingly argued for this view in the case of visual perception. The theoretical orientation of those psychologists centered on the concept of *gestalt*, German for “form” or “figure.” The basic idea of [Gestalt psychology](#) is that objects are perceived not by means of some passive and unbiased perception of objective reality, but by active, usually nonconscious interpretation of what the object represents. The belief that we see the world directly, without any complicated perceptual or cognitive machinery “doctoring” the data, is referred to by philosophers and social psychologists as “naive realism” (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004; Ross & Ward, 1996).

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First umpire: “I call ’em as I see ’em.”

Second umpire: “I call ’em as they are.”

Third umpire: “They ain’t nothin’ till I call ’em.”

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What’s true for visual perception is even truer for judgments about the social world. Our judgments and beliefs are actively constructed from perceptions and thoughts. They are not simple readouts of reality. In his study of obedience (discussed earlier), Milgram manipulated his participants’ understanding of the situation they found themselves in by lulling them with soothing interpretations of events that were designed to throw them off the scent of anything that could be regarded as sinister. A “study participant” who had “chosen” to be in the “experiment” was “learning” a list of words with “feedback” that was given by the real participant in the form of electric shock. A *participant* is someone who is acting freely; *learning* is a normal activity that often depends on *feedback*, generally an innocuous form of information. All this was taking place in the context of an *experiment*, a benign activity carried out by trustworthy scientists. Participants in the Milgram experiment weren’t simply registering what the situation was; they were interpreting it in ways that the experimenter was encouraging.

Our [construal](#) of situations and behavior refers to our interpretation of them and to the inferences, often nonconscious, that we make about them. Whether we regard people as free agents or victims, as freedom fighters or terrorists, as migrant workers or illegal aliens, will affect our perceptions of their actions. And our perceptions drive our behavior toward them.

## Schemas

How do we know how to behave in different kinds of situations? For example, suppose you're riding on an uncrowded train and someone asks you to give up your seat so she can sit. What prompts you to respond in a particular way? Do you refuse, ask for an explanation, pretend not to hear, or promptly surrender the seat? For that matter, how do you know how to behave in even the most ordinary situations, such as attending a college seminar?

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“Without a profound simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions. . . . We are compelled to reduce the knowable to a schema.”

—NOVELIST PRIMO LEVI

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### Schemas

A fast food restaurant and a fancy restaurant.

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Although it usually seems as though we understand social situations immediately and directly, we actually depend on elaborate stores of

systematized knowledge to understand even the simplest and most “obvious” situation. These knowledge stores are called [schemas](#), generalized knowledge about the physical and social world, such as what kind of behavior to expect when dealing with a minister, a sales clerk, a professor, or a panhandler and how to behave in a seminar, at a funeral, at a McDonald’s or a four-star restaurant, or when riding on a crowded or empty subway. There is even a schema—alleged to be universal—for falling in love. Schemas capture the regularities of life and lead us to have certain expectations we can rely on so we don’t have to invent the world anew all the time.

## Stereotypes

Much work in social psychology has been dedicated to the study of [stereotypes](#)—schemas that we have for people of various kinds. Research on stereotyping examines the content of these person schemas and how they are applied and sometimes misapplied in order to facilitate—or derail—the course of interaction. We tend to judge individuals based on particular person schemas we have—stereotypes about a person’s nationality, gender, religion, occupation, neighborhood, or sorority. Such summaries may be necessary to function efficiently and effectively, but they’re often unfounded. They can be applied in the wrong way and to the wrong people, and they can be given too much weight in relation to more specific information we have about a particular person (or would have if we didn’t assume that the stereotype is all we need to know). The frequently pernicious role of stereotypes is the subject of an entire chapter of this book ([Chapter 11](#)).



## **Stereotypes and Construal**

Stereotypes are schemas about people of a certain kind. We construe people in light of the stereotypes they call up. Would you be surprised to know that the fellow in this picture is a wealthy lawyer who plays polo and frequents trendy bars in Manhattan? None of these things is true, and you relied on your stereotypes to prevent you from entertaining those possibilities.

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## **← LOOKING BACK**

Although our understanding of situations often seems to be the result of a direct, unmediated registration of meaning, our comprehension of even the simplest physical stimulus is the result of construal processes that make use of well-developed knowledge structures. Such structures are called schemas when they summarize commonly encountered situations, and they are called stereotypes when they describe different types of people.

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## **Glossary:**

- *Gestalt psychology*  
Based on the German word *gestalt*, meaning “form” or “figure,” an approach that stresses the fact that people perceive objects not by means of some automatic registering device but by active, usually nonconscious interpretation of what the object represents as a whole.
- *construal*  
One’s interpretation of or inference about the stimuli or situations that one confronts.
- *schema*  
A knowledge structure consisting of any organized body of stored information that is used to help in understanding events.
- *stereotype*  
A belief that certain attributes are characteristic of members of a particular group.

# Automatic vs. Controlled Processing

How would you react if you saw a stranger at an airport carrying a backpack, looking agitated, and sweating profusely? In the post-9/11 world, you might fear that such a person might be carrying a bomb and that you could become a victim of a terrorist attack. The mind processes information in two ways when you encounter a social situation. One is automatic and nonconscious, often based on emotional factors, and the other is conscious and systematic and more likely to be controlled by deliberative thought. Often, emotional reactions occur before conscious thought takes over. Thus, your fearful reaction to the person with the backpack might automatically kick in without any special thought on your part. But when you start thinking systematically, you realize that he might have just come in from the summer heat, that he might be agitated because he's late for his flight, and that there's no reason to suspect he might be carrying a bomb or threatening your safety in any way.

Automatic and controlled processing can result in quite different attitudes in the same person toward members of outgroups (Devine, 1989a, 1989b; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002). People with low expressed prejudice toward an outgroup may nevertheless reveal feelings toward people in that outgroup that are almost as prejudiced as those of people who confess to explicit disliking of the group. For example, experimenters asked some white participants to read words stereotypically associated with African-Americans (for example, jazz, busing) and then read a brief description of someone whose race was not specified. Those participants were more likely to report that the individual was hostile than were participants who hadn't read such words. And this was true whether or not they were willing to express anti-black attitudes in a questionnaire—in other words, whether or not they were openly prejudiced. The judgments of the “unprejudiced” people were found to be just as prejudiced as their explicitly prejudiced counterparts when it came to nonconscious processing of information.

In general, automatic processes give rise to *implicit* attitudes and beliefs that can't be readily controlled by the conscious mind; and controlled,

conscious processing results in *explicit* attitudes and beliefs that we're aware of—though these may become implicit or nonconscious over time. It's important to recognize, too, that participants in this experiment weren't necessarily dissembling when they reported being unprejudiced. They likely were genuinely unaware of the extent of the bias that was revealed by the implicit measures of attitude.



### **Automatic Processing**

People often react quickly to frightening situations so that they can take immediate action to save themselves from danger. The girl is handling the snake under the supervision of her teacher, but an automatic reaction is still visible. If the girl were to come across a snake in the grass, she would probably have a stronger automatic fear reaction.

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“If you press me to say why I loved him, I can say no more than because he was he, and I was I.”

—FRENCH RENAISSANCE ESSAYIST MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

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A variety of social categories, not just race, have considerable impact on judgments and behavior. Other easily discernible personal features, such as gender and age, also tend to trigger stereotypes that a person uses in forming judgments about other people, even when the person is unaware that these social categories have influenced the judgment in question (Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004; Brewer, 1988; Macrae, Stangor, & Milne, 1994).

## **Types of Nonconscious Processing**

Social psychologists have shown that much of our cognitive activity is hidden from us. In solving problems, sometimes we're well aware of the relevant factors we're dealing with and the procedures we're using to work with them. For example, when we solve a math problem ("Take half the base, multiply it by the height and . . ."), we generally know exactly what formula we're using. But these sorts of cognitive processes—where we are conscious of most of what is going on in our head—are rarer than you might think. Often we can't correctly explain the reasons for our judgments about other people, our understanding of the causes of physical and social events, or what led us to choose one job applicant over another (or one romantic partner over another, for that matter).

In one experiment making this point about awareness, researchers asked customers in a mall to evaluate the quality of four pairs of nylon stockings laid out in a row on a table (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Customers were four times as likely to give the highest rating to the last pair of stockings they examined as to give it to the first pair of stockings. Yet in response to whether the position of the stockings had influenced their judgments about quality, they were astonished that the questioner could think they might have been influenced by such a trivial, irrelevant factor!



## **Types of Nonconscious Processing**

We subconsciously imitate other people's body language. This is

called “ideomotor mimicry.”

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Often we can't even identify some of the crucial factors that affect our beliefs and behavior. John Bargh and Paula Pietromonaco presented words on a computer screen for one-tenth of a second (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982). Some participants were exposed to words with a hostile meaning and some to neutral words. The participants then read about a man named Donald, whose behavior was ambiguous as to whether it could be construed as hostile. (“A salesman knocked at the door, but Donald refused to let him enter.”) Participants exposed to the hostility-related words rated Donald as being more hostile than did participants exposed to the neutral words. Immediately after reading the paragraph, participants were unable to distinguish words they had seen from those they hadn't seen and didn't even know that words had been flashed at all.

By now there have been hundreds of demonstrations of influences on important judgments and behavior which people are unaware of.

- When people are surrounded by greenery, they are less aggressive than when in an environment with lots of red in it (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001).
- When people read a persuasive communication in a room with a fishy smell, they are less likely to be persuaded by it than if there is no distinctive smell present or if there is an unpleasant smell that isn't fishy (Lee & Schwarz, 2012). (This works, though, only in cultures where dubious propositions are described as “fishy.”)
- And here's something you can try for yourself. Have a conversation with someone in which you deliberately change your body position from time to time. Fold your arms for a couple of minutes. Shift most of your weight to one side. Put one hand in a pocket. Watch what your conversation partner does after each change and try not to giggle when your partner mimics your body language. “Ideomotor mimicry” is something we engage in quite nonconsciously. When people don't do it, the encounter can become awkward and unsatisfying.

You will read countless examples in this book of the effects of various stimuli and situations that exert their effects without our conscious awareness. Indeed, if the effects in a given study were consciously produced, you wouldn't have to read about it in this book; you would already know about it.

# Functions of Nonconscious Processing

Why does so much mental processing take place outside of our awareness? Partly, it's a matter of efficiency. Conscious processes are generally slow and can run only serially—one step at a time. Automatic processes are typically much faster and can operate in parallel. When we recognize a face as belonging to a fourth-grade classmate, we have done so by processing numerous features (forehead, eyes, chin, coloring, and so on) holistically and in a fraction of a second. Recognizing each feature one step at a time would leave us hopelessly mired in computation. And it's quite handy to be able to drive a car on autopilot while enjoying the scenery or carrying on a conversation. (You may sometimes have been startled to realize that you've reached your destination without being completely aware of how you got there.)

We're not conscious of many of the stimuli that influence us, and we're not fully aware of the cognitive processes that underlie our judgments and behaviors. A very important implication of nonconscious processing is that research on human behavior should not normally depend on people's verbal reports about why they believe something or why they engaged in a particular behavior. Instead, social psychologists have to craft experiments to isolate the true causes of people's behavior.

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“There is grandeur in this view of life. . . . Whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”

—CHARLES DARWIN

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## ← LOOKING BACK

Much of our behavior and many kinds of construal processes occur without our awareness, sometimes without awareness of even the stimuli to which we are responding. We tend to overestimate how accessible our mental processes are to our consciousness.

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# Evolution and Human Behavior: How We Are the Same

Why do human beings generally live in family groups, assign roles to people on the basis of age and gender, enjoy sharing food, adorn their bodies, classify flora and fauna, and have rites of passage and myths? Evolution may explain such behaviors (Conway & Schaller, 2002).

Evolutionary theory has been around for about 150 years, ever since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin discovered many modifications in animal and plant characteristics that had occurred over time in the Galápagos Islands. Evolutionary theory has proved invaluable in understanding why organisms of all kinds have the properties they do and how they come to have them. The key idea is that a process of [natural selection](#) operates on animals and plants, so that adaptive traits—those that enhance the probability of survival and reproduction—are passed on to subsequent generations. Organisms that die before they reproduce may be unlucky or may possess characteristics that are less than optimal in their particular environment. And when these organisms don't reproduce, they don't pass on such nonadaptive characteristics (through their genes) to a new generation. Those that do survive and reproduce give their genes a chance to live on in their offspring, along with the possibility that their characteristics will be represented in at least one more generation. Disadvantageous characteristics are selected against; characteristics better adapted to the environment are selected for.



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Darwin himself assumed that natural selection operates for behavioral inclinations, just as it does for physical characteristics such as size, coloring, or susceptibility to parasites. In addition, that many of our traits and behaviors are found in all human groups is consistent with the idea that much of what we share is at least partly the result of natural selection and is encoded in our genes. Recent developments in evolutionary theory and comparative biology, together with anthropological findings and studies by psychologists, have shown that the theory of evolution can be quite helpful in explaining why people behave the way they do.

## Human Universals

One fact that's consistent with evolutionary theory is that many human behaviors and institutions are universal, or very nearly so (Schaller, Simpson, & Kenrick, 2006). In the process of human evolution, we've acquired basic behavioral tendencies, much as we've acquired physical features like bipedalism (walking upright on two legs), that help us adapt to the physical and social environment.

Table 1.1 contains a list of reputed universals. Two things are worth noting about the practices listed in the table, aside from their alleged universality. One is that humans share some of these characteristics with other animals, especially the higher primates. These include facial expressions, dominance and submission, food sharing, group living, greater aggressiveness on the part of males, preference for own kin, and wariness

around snakes. The other, even more striking aspect of Table 1.1 is that the number of universals we share with other animals is quite small.

**TABLE 1.1 UNIVERSAL BEHAVIORS, REACTIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS**

Sex, Gender, and the Family		
Copulation normally conducted privately	Sexual jealousy	Sexual regulation
Live in family (or household)	Marriage	Husband usually older than wife
Sexual modesty	Division of labor by gender	Males more physically aggressive
Females do more child care	Mother-son incest unthinkable	Incest prevention and avoidance
Preference for own kin	Sex differences in spatial cognition	
Social Differentiation		
Age statuses	Classification of kin	Leaders
Ingroup distinguished	Division of labor by	

from outgroup	age	
Social Customs		
Baby talk	Pretend play	Group living
Dance	Rites of passage	Law (rights and obligations)
Dominance/submission	Taboo foods	Feasting
Practice to improve skills	Body adornment	Property
Hygienic care	Death rites	Rituals
Magic to sustain and improve life	Etiquette	Taboo utterances
Magic to win love	Gossip	Toys
Decorative art	Food sharing	
Emotion		
Childhood fear of strangers	Wariness around snakes	Rhythm