



# Social Psychology

*By Elliot Aronson, Timothy D. Wilson, Robin M. Akert*

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Updated with the latest research findings and revised chapter-opening vignettes, this renowned book maintains its infamous story-telling approach to convey the science of social psychology in a fascinating, memorable, and entertaining manner. Complete with a video CD-ROM, the authors bring the material life through real-world examples that capture readers' attention and motivate further exploration. New research findings, integrated coverage of culture and gender, and a chapter on methodology are included. For professionals with a career or interest in social psychology and/or social work.

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## **Social Psychology By Elliot Aronson, Timothy D. Wilson, Robin M. Akert Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

**Elliot Aronson** is 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. He is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Santa Cruz and Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stanford University.

Dr. Aronson is the only person in the 110-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. In 1992, he was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has served as President of the Western Psychological Association as well as President of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology.

**Tim Wilson** did his undergraduate work at Williams College and Hampshire College and received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. Currently Sherrell F. 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 the recent book, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. His research has received the support of the National Science Foundation and the National Institute for Mental Health. He has been associate editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and a member of the Social and Groups Processes Review Committee at the National Institute of 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. Wilson has taught the Introduction to Social Psychology course at the University of Virginia for more than twenty years. He was recently awarded an All University Outstanding Teaching Award.

**Robin Akert** graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she majored in psychology and sociology. She received her Ph.D. in experimental social psychology from Princeton University. She is currently a professor of psychology at Wellesley College, where she was awarded the Pinanski Prize for Excellence in Teaching early in her career. She publishes primarily in the area of nonverbal communication and recently received the AA UW American Fellowship in support of her research. She has taught the social psychology course at Wellesley College every semester for over twenty years.

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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 letters and e-mail messages from professors and students, that we succeeded. One of our favorites 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 fifth 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 very same reaction.

Social psychology comes alive for students when they understand the whole context of the field: how theories inspire research, why research is performed as it is, how further research triggers yet new avenues of study. We have tried to convey our own fascination with the research process in a down-to-earth, meaningful way and have presented the results of the scientific process in terms of the everyday experience of the reader. However, we did not want to "water down" our presentation of the field. In a world where human behavior can be endlessly surprising and where research results can be quite counterintuitive, students need a firm foundation on which to build their understanding of this challenging discipline. Here, in more detail, is how we present a rigorous, scientific approach to social psychology in a way that, we hope, engages and fascinates most students.

## **A STORYTELLING APPROACH**

Social psychology is full of good stories, such as how the Holocaust inspired investigations into obedience to authority, how reactions to the marriage of the crown prince of Japan to Masako Owada, a career diplomat, illustrates cultural differences in the self-concept, and how Lance Armstrong's successful battle with cancer, and his incredible athletic feats (five consecutive victories in the Tour de France), illustrate social psychological approaches to health. By placing research in a real-world context, we make the material more familiar, understandable, and memorable.

### **Opening Vignettes**

Each chapter begins with a real-life vignette that illustrates the concepts to come. We refer to this event at several points in the chapter, clarifying to students the relevance of the material they are learning. Examples of the opening vignettes include the tragic death of Amadou Diallo, who was shot forty-one times by four white police officers, as he reached for his wallet in the vestibule of his New York apartment building (Chapter 3, "Social Cognition: How We Think about the Social World"), some amazing acts of altruism at the sites of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Chapter 11, "Prosocial Behavior: Why do People Help?"), and a murder trial in which an innocent man was sentenced to death because of faulty eyewitness testimony (Social Psychology in Action 3, "Social Psychology and the Law").

### **"Mini-Stories" in Each Chapter**

Our storytelling approach is not limited to these opening vignettes. There are several "mini-stories" woven into each chapter that both illustrate specific concepts and bring the material to life. For each one, first, we describe an example of a real-life phenomenon that is designed to pique students' interest. These stories are taken from current events, literature, and our own lives. Second, we describe an experiment that attempts to explain the phenomenon. This experiment is typically described in some detail, because we believe that students should not only learn the major theories in social psychology but also understand and appreciate the methods used to test those theories. We often invite the students to pretend that they were participants in the experiment, to give them a better feel for what it was like and what was found. Here are a few examples of our "mini-stories" (if you thumb through the book, you will come across many others):

- In Chapter 4, on social perception, we introduce the concept of internal and external attributions by discussing public reaction to domestic doyen, Martha Stewart's 2003 indictment on nine counts of conspiracy, obstruction of justice and securities fraud by the federal government. In the initial days after

her indictment, journalists (and the members of the public they interviewed) formed attributions to explain the mess in which this multimillionaire and CEO found herself. Her detractors made strong internal attributions: Her alleged stock-trading behavior was indicative of her personality, for example, her controlling nature, avarice, and over attention to detail. Her supporters made strong external attributions: It was nothing about her but aspects of her situation such as her gender and occupational success that caused her to be unfairly targeted by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

- In Chapter 8, on conformity, we discuss the tragic explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger in 2003. A piece of insulating foam broke off the Shuttle as it launched and gashed the wing, allowing superheated gases to enter the Shuttle during re-entry. While pieces of foam had broken off in prior launches, this was not perceived as a problem by NASA but instead, as an acceptable "anomaly." When people are faced with an ambiguous situation, social influence leads them to conform to other people's judgments of the situation (Sherif, 1936). Recent research has found that the group members' judgments can converge to create a risky strategy (Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000). An independent investigating panel came to just this conclusion about the NASA managers in charge and NASA culture in general. As a group, they completely failed to label this ambiguous situation—the disintegrating foam—as a problem, but instead conformed to each other's perception of it as an odd but inconsequential event.
- In Chapter 9, on group processes, we introduce the topic of deindividuation with a description of a scene from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In this scene, we see a potential lynch mob through the eyes of the novel's protagonist, 8-year-old Scout. The mob has gathered to lynch Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of rape. The mob meets many of the conditions identified by social psychological research for deindividuation: It is dark, the men are dressed alike, and they have hats pulled over their ears. Then Scout unwittingly performs a brilliant social psychological intervention by singling out one of the men she recognizes, calling him by name, and asking after his son, who is her classmate. She succeeded in turning a faceless mob into a collection of individual citizens, thereby defusing a very dangerous situation.
- In Chapter 12, on aggression, we present an interesting historical observation: For hundreds of years, the Iroquois lived a peaceful existence, rarely, if ever, engaging in aggressive behavior. All of this changed in the seventeenth century when the newly arrived Europeans brought the Iroquois into direct competition with their neighbors, the Hurons. Within a short time, the Iroquois developed into fierce warriors. What does this say about the causes of aggression and its roots in culture? This story leads into a discussion of research on the cultural and economic roots of violence.

## **Social Psychological Methods: Another Good Story**

It might seem that a storytelling approach would obscure the scientific basis of social psychology. On the contrary, we believe that part of what makes the story so interesting is explaining to students how to test hypotheses scientifically. In recent years, the trend has been for textbooks to include only short sections on research methodology and to provide only brief descriptions of the findings of individual studies. In this book, we integrate the science and methodology of the field into our story, in a variety of ways.

## **Separate Chapter on Methodology**

Unlike most texts, we devote an entire chapter to methodology (Chapter 2). "But wait," you might say, "how can you maintain students' interest and attention with an entire chapter on such dry material?" The answer is by integrating this material into our storytelling approach. Even the "dry" topic of methodology can come alive by telling it like a story. We begin by presenting two pressing real-world problems related to violence and aggression: Does pornography promote violence against women? Why don't bystanders intervene more to help victims of violence? We then use actual research studies on these questions to illustrate the three major scientific methods (observational research, correlational research, and experimental research). Rather than a dry recitation of methodological principles, the scientific method unfolds like a story with a "hook" (What are the causes of real-world aggression and apathy toward violence?) and a moral (Such interesting,

real-world questions can be addressed scientifically). We have been pleased by the reactions to this chapter in the previous editions.

## **Detailed Descriptions of Individual Studies**

We describe prototypical studies in more detail than most texts. We discuss how a study was set up, what the research participants perceived and did, how the research design derives from theoretical issues, and the ways in which the findings support the initial hypotheses. We often ask readers to pretend that they were participants in order to understand the study from the participants' point of view. Whenever pertinent, we've also included anecdotal information about how a study was done or came to be; these brief stories allow readers insights into the heretofore hidden world of creating research. See, for example, the description of how Nisbett and Wilson (197...

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Eunice Buckley:**

Do you among people who can't read pleasurable if the sentence chained in the straightway, hold on guys this kind of aren't like that. This Social Psychology book is readable by means of you who hate the straight word style. You will find the data here are arrange for enjoyable reading through experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to provide to you. The writer of Social Psychology content conveys objective easily to understand by many individuals. The printed and e-book are not different in the content material but it just different as it. So , do you still thinking Social Psychology is not loveable to be your top collection reading book?

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**Shirley Davenport:**

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