

ANSWERS TO TEST YOURSELF QUESTIONS

1. What are the major issues in the study of social behaviour?

(1) The person-situation debate: What is the relative importance of the individual's characteristics vs. the situation? That is, is behaviour influenced more by personal characteristics of the individual or by the situation the individual is placed in?

(2) Causation: There are typically multiple causes of any behaviour. Some are immediate causes (proximal) and are often accessible to social psychologists for scientific observation and study. Other causes are more removed from the situation (distal) and are not as accessible, but can only be inferred through case studies and interviews. The five approaches differ in their views of the relative importance of each kind of cause.

2. How do proximal and distal causes differ?

Proximal causes are causes of behaviour that can be observed in the immediate environment. For example, the proximal cause of buying a cup of coffee may be the immediate fatigue of the individual.

Distal causes are more remote and indirect causes of behaviour that often must be inferred. For example, the distal cause of buying a cup of coffee may be the learned societal attitude of associating rest and relaxation ('taking a break') by having a cup of coffee.

3. What can you conclude from the evidence about how media violence affects aggression?

Overall, it seems reasonable to believe that some relationship does exist between observing violence and aggressive behaviour, although this relationship may not be causal, and might involve an interaction between the person and the situation in which viewing occurs. It also seems apparent that observing violence on television is not the only factor in aggression.

4. How does the humanistic approach explain prosocial behaviour?

Humanists believe that individuals engage in genuine altruism rather than ethical hedonism because of their innate drive to grow and self-actualize.

For Rogers, the motivation for altruistic behaviour comes from the actualizing tendency, and hence is a basic human capacity. In part, helping others can be seen as a form of reciprocity which is fostered by empathy; we can recognize others' suffering, just as we recognize their need for positive regard. Thus, Rogers would say we help someone who is in distress because we recognize their distress, not because helping is of direct benefit to us.

Maslow's theory would suggest that self-actualized individuals are the most likely to engage in consistent acts of altruism. Later in his life, Maslow suggested that there may be a level beyond that of self-actualization in which the dichotomy between "me" and "them" is transcended. The person at this level would engage in prosocial or selfless behaviour simply because they identify more with the whole of society than with themselves and their own self-actualization