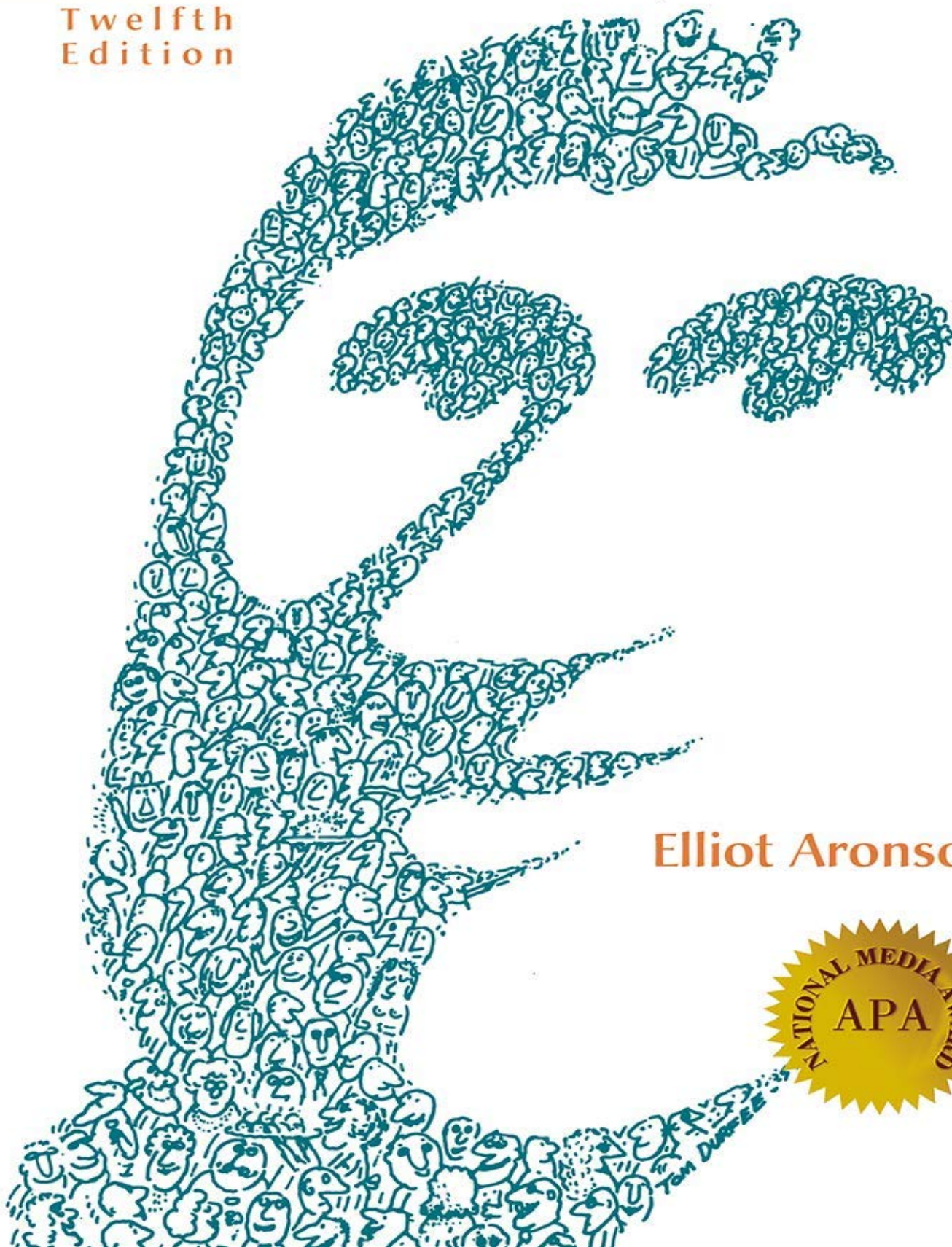


# The Social Animal

Twelfth  
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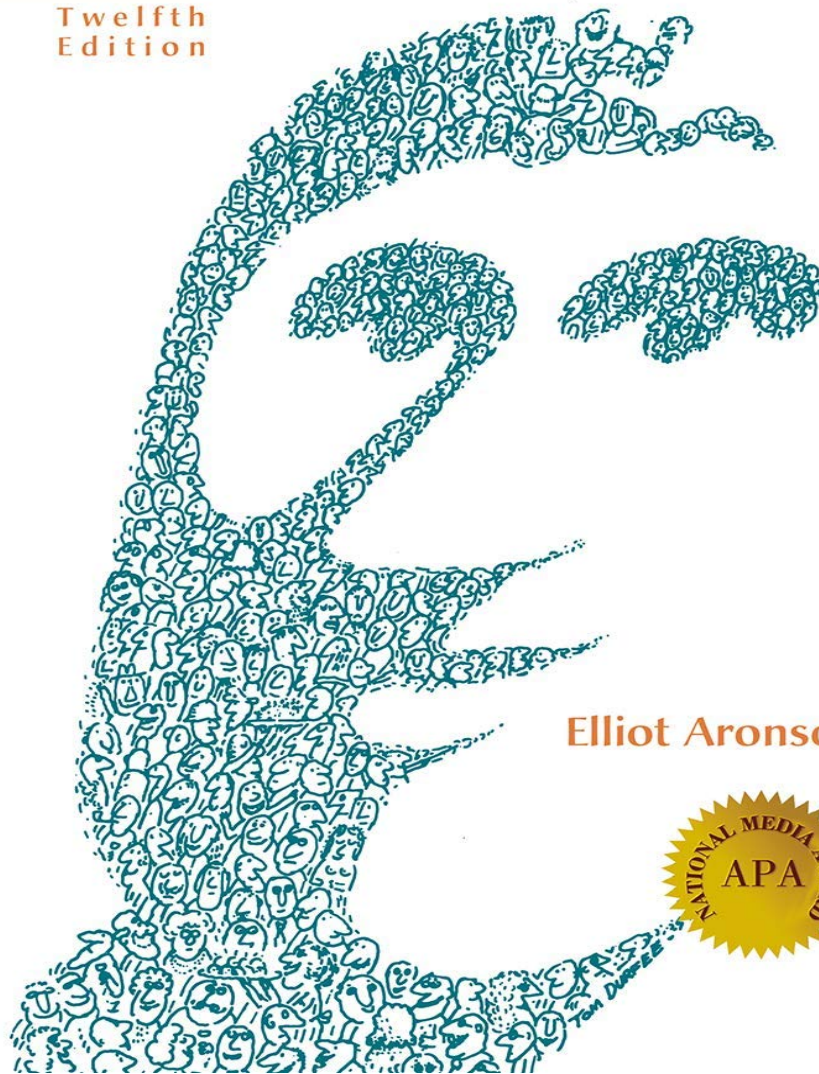
Elliot Aronson





# The Social Animal

Twelfth  
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Elliot Aronson





Text on top of the front cover reads, Twelfth Edition

The Social Animal Elliot Aronson with Joshua Aronson

An illustration shows an outline of a human face drawn with hundreds of human face outlines.

Text within a star reads National Media Award APA

# **The Social Animal**

## ***Books by Elliot Aronson***

*Handbook of Social Psychology* (with G. Lindzey), 2nd ed., 1968–1969

*Theories of Cognitive Consistency* (with R. Abelson et al.), 1968

*Voices of Modern Psychology*, 1969

*The Social Animal*, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2008, 2011, 2018

*Readings About The Social Animal*, 2019, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2008, 2011

*Social Psychology* (with R. Helmreich), 1973

*Research Methods in Social Psychology* (with M. Carlsmith & Ellsworth), 1976

*The Jigsaw Classroom*, 1978

*Burnout: From Tedium to Personal Growth* (with A. Pines & D. Kafry), 1981

*Energy Use: The Human Dimension* (with P. C. Stern), 1984

*The Handbook of Social Psychology* (with G. Lindzey), 3rd ed., 1985

*Career Burnout* (with A. Pines), 1988

*Methods of Research in Social Psychology* (with Ellsworth, M. Carlsmith, & Gonzales), 1990

*Age of Propaganda* (with A. R. Pratkanis), 1992, 2000

*Social Psychology: Volumes 1, 2, & 3* (with A. R. Pratkanis), 1992

*Social Psychology: The Heart and the Mind* (with T. Wilson & R. Akert), 1994

*Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine*, 2000

*Social Psychology: An Introduction* (with T. Wilson, R. Akert, & S. Sommers), 2002, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016

*The Adventures of Ruthie and a Little Boy Named Grandpa* (with Ruth Aronson), 2006

*Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)* (with Carol Tavris), 2007, Rev. ed., 2015

*Not By Chance Alone: My Life as a Social Psychologist*, 2010

## ***Books by Joshua Aronson***

*Improving Academic Achievement*, 2002

*The Scientist and The Humanist* (with M. H. Gonzales and C. Tavris) 2010



Twelfth Edition

# **The Social Animal**

**Elliot Aronson**

University of California, Santa Cruz

**with Joshua Aronson**

New York University

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*To Vera, of course*

# Contents

[The Story of This Book](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[1 What Is Social Psychology?](#)

[2 Social Cognition](#)

[3 Self-Justification](#)

[4 Conformity](#)

[5 Mass Communication, Propaganda, and Persuasion](#)

[6 Human Aggression](#)

[7 Prejudice](#)

[8 Liking, Loving, and Connecting](#)

[9 Social Psychology as a Science](#)

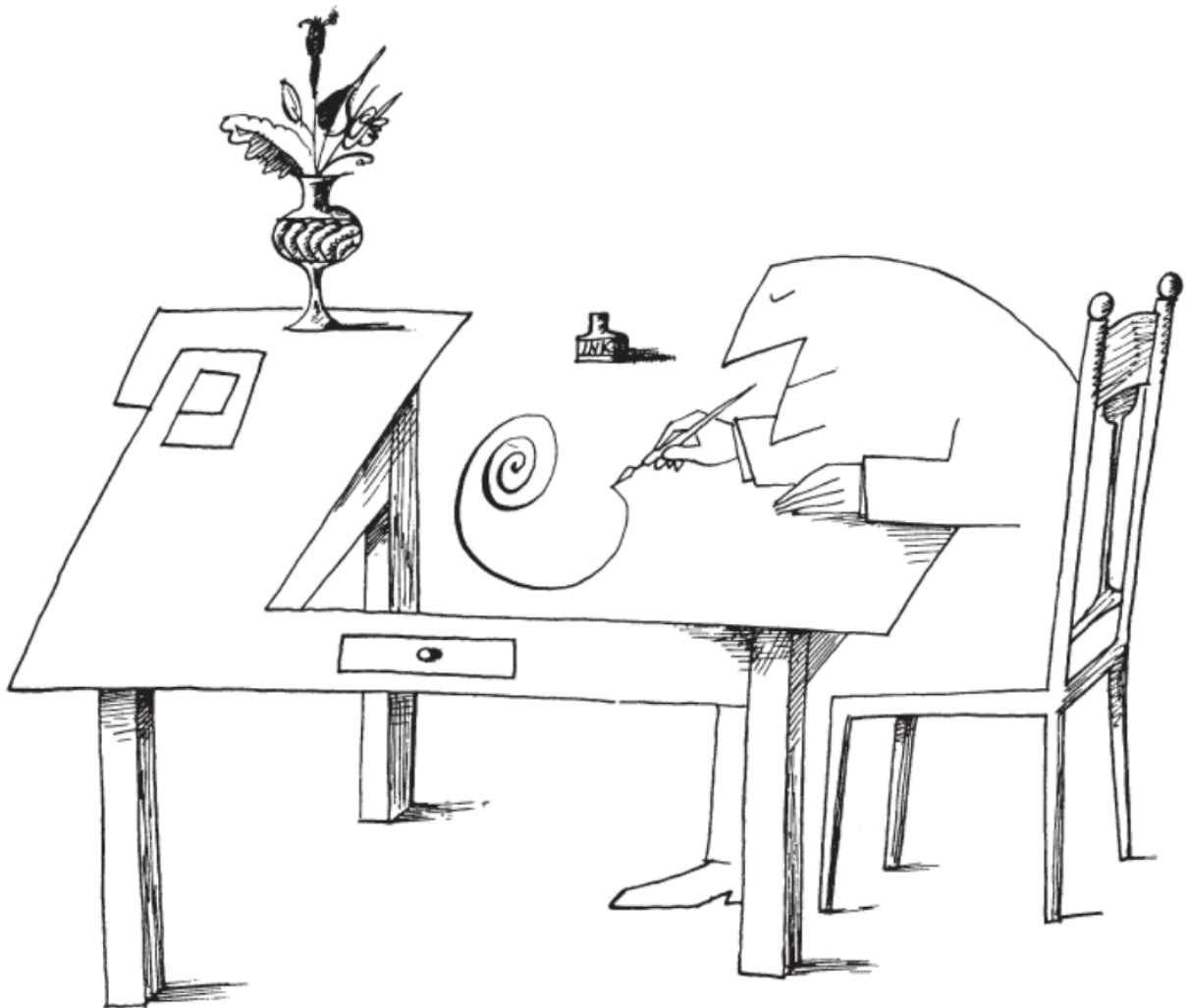
[Glossary](#)

[Notes](#)

[Name Index](#)

[Subject Index](#)

# The Story of This Book



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Saul Steinberg, *Untitled drawing*, ink on paper.

Originally published in *The New Yorker*, May 29, 1965.

In 1970, when I was a relatively young professor at the University of Texas, I received an offer I couldn't refuse. I was invited to spend the year in a beautiful location, while being awarded my full academic salary and doing absolutely nothing—not a bad deal!

The location was a rustic hilltop on the edge of the Stanford University campus, a short drive from San Francisco, my favorite city in the world. The institution on the gorgeous hill is a think tank called the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. In addition to a year's salary, the good folks at the Center for Advanced Study provided me with an office, all the secretarial help I might need, access to a very good library, free lunch, and the opportunity to schmooze with a couple of dozen distinguished scholars, if I chose to or not—in case I preferred to hang out in the theater district of San Francisco or go skiing in the High Sierras. There were no strings attached.

So there I was, with a whole year in which to do anything my heart desired, and what did I do? I chose to barricade myself in my office on the hill and write this book. How come? If there's a single reason, it's that, a few months earlier, I heard myself tell 600 students in my introductory social psychology class that social psychology is a young science—and, in retrospect, that semi-apology made me feel like a coward.

Let me explain: We social psychologists are fond of saying that social psychology is a young science—and, relative to most scientific disciplines (e.g., biology, astronomy), that is an accurate statement. Of course, astute observers have been making interesting pronouncements and proposing exciting hypotheses about social phenomena at least since the time of Aristotle, but these pronouncements and hypotheses were not seriously tested until well into the twentieth century. The first systematic social psychological experiment was conducted by Norman Triplett in 1898 (he measured the effect of competition on performance), but it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that experimental social psychology really



took off, primarily under the inspiration of Kurt Lewin and his talented students.

In a deeper sense, however, for me to have stated that social psychology is a young science was something of a cop-out—a way of pleading with my students not to expect too much from us. Specifically, it was my way of dodging the responsibility for, and avoiding the risks inherent in, applying our findings to the problems of the world we live in. In this sense, stating that social psychology is a young science was akin to confessing that we might not be ready to say anything important, useful, or relevant to the lives of my students.

But after reflecting on that statement for a while, I came to realize that it was not only cowardly, but it was also misleading; in fact, I didn't really believe that social psychology was irrelevant to our lives. I didn't believe it in 1970, and I certainly don't believe it now. So, when I was handed that wonderful opportunity to take time off, I was determined to set the record straight. The purpose of this book was and still is to spell out the relevance that social psychological research might have for helping us understand and perhaps begin to solve some of the most important problems besetting contemporary society.

Most of the data discussed in this volume are based on experiments; most of the illustrations and examples, however, are derived from current social problems—including prejudice, propaganda, war, alienation, aggression, unrest, and political upheaval. This duality reflects two of my own biases—biases that I cherish. The first is that the experimental method is the best way to understand a complex phenomenon. It is a truism of science that the only way to really know the world is to reconstruct it. That is, to truly understand what causes what, we must do more than simply observe; rather, we must be responsible for producing the first “what” so that we can be sure that it really caused the second “what.” My second bias is that the only way to be certain

that the causal relations uncovered in experiments are valid is to bring them out of the laboratory and into the real world. Thus, as a scientist, I like to work in a laboratory; as a citizen, however, I like to have windows through which I can look out upon the world. Windows, of course, work in both directions; we often derive hypotheses from everyday life. We can best test these hypotheses under the sterile conditions of the laboratory. At the same time, in order to keep our ideas from becoming sterile, we must take our laboratory findings back out through the window to see if they hold up in the real world.

So, that is how I spent the year doing anything I wanted to do: I wrote this book. From the outset, it has been a personal book, in the sense that it contains a lot of my own ideas about what is most important in our field. This decision made it imperative for me to write in the first person singular, describing, in an intimate way, what I have discovered and what I believe to be the state of our science. (Unlike any textbook at the time, in *The Social Animal* the little word “I” appears over and over again.) Much to my delight, it soon became apparent that students enjoyed reading it. They particularly liked the personal touch, as well as its application to their lives. *The Social Animal* became one of the most popular and enduring texts in the field. As a consequence, my work was not finished—not by a long shot. In order to keep up with research in the field and dramatic changes in the world, I found it necessary to revise and update the book about every four years.

When I first set pen to paper (literally!) in 1970, I was a promising young man, some 38 years old. As I tell you this story, in the summer of 2017, I have magically evolved into a grizzled old geezer (you can do the math). I now must admit that I am too old to revise the book by myself. Fortunately, I found the perfect co-author for this, the twelfth edition. His name is Joshua Aronson, a brilliant, experienced social psychologist who has done impressive research both in the laboratory and in the helter-skelter of the real world. He also happens to be my son. Needless to say, Joshua has his own ideas about

social psychology—and that is how it should be. His contributions are many and varied. They have added a special luster to this edition; as has the work of my long-time collaborator Carol Tavris, who served as developmental editor for this edition and, with her usual delicate touch, seamlessly melded my work and Joshua's. She also not-so-delicately pressed and prodded us to make our deadlines.

And so, what is different in this edition? Joshua and I have reexamined every chapter afresh, removing some of the research and theories that were “hot” years ago but have not stood the test of time and replication; we have reorganized and streamlined every chapter to keep the narrative clear as we integrated new material. Recent studies that inform our understanding of contemporary events have replaced dated ones—for example, how decision-making has been influenced for better and worse by the internet, how the rise of information bubbles and self-confirming media sources shape our nation's polarized beliefs and behavior, the emotional downside of the constant social comparisons generated on Facebook, and the rise of terrorist groups such as ISIS. However, I feel strongly that bringing a book “up to date” does not mean removing the iconic stories of our government's mistakes in Vietnam and Iraq, and of the tragedies at Jonestown, Columbine, and Heaven's Gate. The dates of these events are old, but the social-psychological lessons to be learned from them are not dated. I want students to understand that what happened *then* applies just as powerfully to what is happening *now*.

Elliot Aronson

October 2017

# Acknowledgments

This book is now in its twelfth edition. In the first edition, I was moved to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend and mentor, Leon Festinger. It goes without saying that I still feel gratitude and affection for that good and great man. If anything, these feelings have intensified over the years. I loved being his student—and I guess I will never stop being his student. In 1989, Leon died, marking the end of an important era in social psychology. He is sorely missed, not only by those of us who knew and loved him, but also by anyone who has been influenced by his research and theories; this would include just about anyone who has ever been a student of social psychology.

As this book and I have grown older, I have become increasingly aware of my indebtedness to my own students. Every four years, as I begin revising the book, I am struck by the realization that these are not simply my own ideas—rather, they are ideas I have developed in collaboration with my students. Over the past five decades, I have been blessed with a great many outstanding students, from my very first research assistants in 1960 (Merrill Carlsmith, Tony Greenwald, and John M. Darley) to my students at the University of California, Santa Cruz. They have all taught me a great deal, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to all of them. I have also enjoyed talking with and stealing ideas from some remarkably gifted colleagues. Two of them in particular, Anthony Pratkanis and Carol Tavris, have contributed a great deal to the continued improvement and updating of this book. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their generosity.