

alarming number of subjects may voice suspicion when strongly encouraged to do so, but if the deception has been successful, their descriptions of the nature of the deception and the true purpose of the experiment typically lapse into vague generalities. Once satisfied that the subjects have not actually seen through the specific deceptions used in this particular experiment, the experimenter can help the subjects save face by guiding them gradually toward the discovery of these deceptions and the purpose of the experiment.

SUMMARY

Throughout this chapter, we have sounded a simple yet important theme, one that is true for all varieties of psychological experimentation, but that is often ignored in other fields of psychology. Although important for all areas of psychology, it reaches its maximum salience for research in social psychology. That theme really just recognizes that the typical subject in psychological research is a thinking, problem-solving organism and that it is important that the subject is attending to the same problem (responding to a communication, learning a list of nonsense syllables, deciding whether X is an example of Y) that you are interested in studying. A "stage," or more generally an experimental setting and (sometimes deceptive) procedure, that does not ensure that the subject is concentrating on the same set of issues the experimenter is concerned about is doomed to failure.

THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

In the preceding chapter we wrote of the problems and concerns addressed by experimenters as they attempt to find or create settings for conducting experiments. Once a suitable setting has been chosen or created, it is the task of the experimenter to translate the abstract causal construct in his or her hypothesis into a concrete set of operations—to administer the independent variable to subjects. In this chapter, we discuss the "nuts and bolts" of just how that is accomplished.

TYPES OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS

A waitress in her mid-20's moved from table to table in a restaurant in a small southern town. At each table, she took orders, brought food and drinks to the patrons, left the bill and returned change to the customers after they had paid for their meals. When she returned to deliver change, the waitress approached the paying customer from the side or from slightly behind, leaned forward, and without making eye contact, said in a friendly yet firm tone, "Here's your change." She then left a blank survey that patrons were to complete and leave in an envelope on the table before they left the restaurant. Finally, once the customer had left, she returned to the table, secured the restaurant rating questionnaire, and collected her tip.

In fact, the waitress was a carefully trained and rehearsed confederate of April Crusco and Christopher Wetzel (1984), two experimenters interested in the effects of being touched. Throughout this field experiment, waitress confederates served customers as they normally would. However, just prior to