What Does a Social Psychologist Actually Do?

Social psychologists specialize in the factors influencing human behavior in groups. In other words, they rely on scientific research to explain why people behave and think the way they do in social settings.  
  
Although differences exist between psychologists and sociologists, social psychologists utilize research and analytical methods used by both types of specialists. Social psychologists examine factors such as prejudice, aggression, conformity, nonverbal behavior, leadership, social perception, and group behavior. In addition to examining these social influences, they also evaluate social interaction and perception while studying behavior.  
  
**How Is Social Psychology Different From Other Disciplines?**  
  
People often confuse sociology, personality psychology, and folk wisdom with social psychology. However, social psychologists rely on empirical and subjective research to draw conclusions; whereas, folk wisdom is based on anecdotal and subjective evaluations.  
  
Additionally, social psychologists evaluate how people interact in social situations, while personality psychologists examine individual personality characteristics. Social psychologists also attempt to understand how social settings affect behaviors and thoughts.  
  
There are similarities between the fields of sociology and social psychology, but sociologists typically focus on group behavior, culture, community, and institutions, while social psychologists typically focus on why individuals behave the way they do in social settings. In other words, they focus on similar topics from different viewpoints.  
  
**What Do Social Psychologists Do?**  
  
Certain social psychologists spend all their time conducting and evaluating research. They typically work at universities or government agencies. Some social psychologists utilize their expertise developing solutions to current social problems. Some examine educational programs to determine their effectiveness, assist companies hire and train workers, and organize public awareness campaigns, such as efforts to improve public health. These professionals can specialize in such fields as perception, leadership, and group behavior.  
  
**Where Do Social Psychologists Work?**  
  
In addition to teaching and conducting research at colleges and universities, social psychologists also work at consulting firms, market research companies, and elementary and secondary schools. Opportunities are also available at private companies, social welfare organizations, hospitals, and non-profits.  
  
**What Training Is Needed to Become a Social Psychologist?**  
  
Job opportunities are available for social psychologists holding master’s degrees, but many organizations that hire them prefer applicants with doctorate degrees. College students interested in this field should obtain a bachelor’s degree in psychology or a related field and then earn a graduate degree in social psychology. Some universities permit students to bypass master’s programs and directly enroll into doctorate programs. It typically requires 4-5 years to obtain a doctorate degree in social psychology.  
  
**Job Outlook for Social Psychologists**  
  
Social psychologists with doctorate degrees enjoy the best job opportunities. Since these specialists are employed in various industries, job prospects are good for social psychologists.