cultural anthropologists, and economists also study social interactions. In a large sense, these various disciplines are complementary. They each offer a different perspective on understanding social behavior.

To see how the social psychological approach fits in, let’s consider an example from the newspapers. For some years now, the United States has witnessed a dramatic rise in a particular social problem known as road rage. Road rage occurs when a driver engages in reckless, aggressive, or violent behavior because of some perceived slight or transgression. According to a report by the American Automobile Association, there were more than 10,000 incidents of road rage in the United States between 1990 and 1996, resulting in more than 12,000 injuries and 200 deaths. How are we to understand such behavior?

1. Level of Analysis

The anthropologist would focus on cultural factors. As we will see in Chapter 13, the United States is one of the most violent societies on earth. Road rage occurs in other countries, but it is far more likely to happen in the United States. Why? The anthropologist would note that Americans have had a long-standing love affair with the independent, freewheeling cowboy image. The vigilante who takes the law into his own hands is often revered in American literature, songs, and movies. Clint Eastwood has made a career of portraying such characters, and Michael Douglas starred in one such movie, called *Falling Down*. Anthropologists would trace road rage to a cultural

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**FIGURE 1.2**

Percentage of Seminary Students Who Helped a Victim in Distress as a Function of Whether They Believed They Were Late for an Appointment

While walking across campus to deliver a lecture, seminary students encountered a person who needed help. Those who were behind schedule were much less apt to help than were those who were on time or were ahead of schedule. These data show that a small situational variable—whether one is late for an appointment or not—has a large influence on behavior.

Source: Darley and Batson (1973).