Social Psychology

Chapter Preview

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another.

In thinking about others' behavior and its possible causes, we tend to underestimate the influence of the situation, thus committing the fundamental attribution error. Attitudes affect behavior when external influences are minimal, especially when the attitude is stable, specific to the behavior, and easily recalled. Our actions can also modify our attitudes, especially when we feel responsible for those actions.

Research on social influence indicates that behavior is contagious, beginning with the norms of our culture. When we are unsure about our judgments, we are likely to adjust them toward the group standard. Sometimes, social influences are even strong enough to make people conform to falsehoods or capitulate to cruelty.

The presence of others can arouse individuals, boosting their performance on easy tasks but hindering it on difficult ones. When people pool their efforts toward a group goal, individuals may free-ride on others' efforts. Sometimes, group experiences arouse people and make them anonymous, and thus less self-aware and self-restrained. Within groups, discussions can enhance members' prevailing attitudes and produce groupthink. A minority committed to a position can, however, influence a majority.

Prejudice can be both overt and subtle. As overt prejudice wanes, subtle prejudice lingers. Social barriers and biases are often unconscious. Prejudice arises from social inequalities, social divisions, and emotional scapegoating. Prejudice also has cognitive roots.

Aggression is a product of nature and nurture. In addition to genetic, neural, and biochemical influences, aversive events heighten people's hostilities. Aggressive behavior is also learned through rewards and by observing role models and media violence.

Geographical proximity, physical attractiveness, and similarity of attitudes and interests influence our liking for one another. Passionate love is an aroused state we cognitively label as love. Companionate love often emerges as a relationship matures and is enhanced by equity and self-disclosure.

Altruism is the unselfish regard for the welfare of others. The presence of others at an emergency can inhibit helping. The bystander effect is most apparent in situations where the presence of others inhibits one's noticing an event, interpreting it as an emergency, or assuming responsibility for offering help. Many factors influence our willingness to help someone in distress, including cost-benefit analysis and social norms or expectations.

Conflicts are fueled by social traps and by enemies forming mirror-image perceptions of one another. Enemies become friends when they work toward superordinate goals, communicate clearly, and reciprocate conciliatory gestures.

Chapter Guide

Introductory Exercise: Fact or Falsehood?

The correct answers to Handout 13–1 are as follows: 1. T 2. T 3. T 4. F 5. T 6. F 7. F 8. T 9. F 10. T

▶ Lecture: Social Psychology's Most Important Lessons

Social Thinking

▶ Lecture: Attribution and Models of Helping (p. 856)
▶ Exercises: The Fundamental Attribution Error (p. 854); Students' Perceptions of You (p. 855)
▶ Exercise/Critical Thinking Break: Biases in Explaining Events (p. 855)
▶ Feature (Short) Film: *The Lunch Date* (p. 856)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *The Actor-Observer Difference in Attribution: Observe a Riot in Action*

13-1. *Identify what social psychologists study, and discuss how we tend to explain others' behavior and our own.*

Social psychology scientifically studies how (1) we *think about,* (2) *influence,* and (3) *relate to* one another.

Attribution theory states that we tend to give a causal explanation for someone's behavior. We may explain people's behavior in terms of internal *dispositions* or in terms of the external *situation*. For example, a teacher may explain a child's hostility in terms of an aggressive personality or as a reaction to stress or abuse. The ***fundamental attribution error***—our tendency to overestimate personality influences and to underestimate situational influences—can lead us to unwarranted conclusions about others' personality traits. For example, we may blame the poor and the unemployed for their own misfortune.

▶ Lectures: The Looking Glass Effect (p. 856); The Theory of Reasoned Action (p. 857); Actions Influence Attitudes (p. 857); The Justification of Effort (p. 858); Self-Persuasion (p. 859); Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment (p. 859); Abu Ghraib Prison and Social Psychology (p. 860)
▶ Exercise: Introducing Cognitive Dissonance Theory (p. 858)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment*; *The Stanford Prison Experiment: The Power of the Situation*

13-2. *Describe how attitudes and actions interact.*

Attitudes are feelings, often influenced by our beliefs, that predispose us to respond in a particular way to objects, people, and events. For example, we may *feel* dislike for a person because we *believe* he or she is mean, and, as a result, act unfriendly toward that person.

Attitudes often predict our behavior. Activists on both sides of the debate about the reality and dangers of climate change know that public attitudes affect public policies, and so are aiming to persuade. ***Peripheral route persuasion*** occurs when people are influenced by incidental cues, such as a speaker's attractiveness. ***Central route persuasion*** occurs when interested people focus on the arguments and respond with favorable thoughts. Attitudes affect actions when external influences on what we say and do are minimal, and when the attitude is stable, specific to the behavior, and easily recalled.

Attitudes also follow behavior. For example, the ***foot-in-the-door phenomenon*** is the tendency for people who first agree to a small request to comply later with a larger request. Because doing becomes believing, a trivial act makes the next act easier. Similarly, the behaviors associated with a new ***role*** may initially feel phony. However, they soon seem to reflect our true self as we adopt

attitudes in keeping with our roles. *Cognitive dissonance theory,* proposed by Leon Festinger, argues that people feel discomfort when their actions conflict with their attitudes; they reduce the discomfort by bringing their attitudes more in line with their actions.

Social Influence

 ▶ Lectures: Understanding Culture Differences in Relation to Individual Differences (p. 204); The Geography of Time (p.205); Differences in Cultural Norms (p. 205)
 ▶ Exercise: Intercultural Learning Activities (p. 205)
 ▶ Exercise/Project: Cross-Cultural Dialogues (p. 206)

13-3. *Describe how cultural norms affect our behavior.*

Culture is the behaviors, ideas, attitudes, values, and traditions shared by a group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture enables the preservation of innovation and the efficient division of labor.

All cultural groups evolve their own *norms*—rules that govern their members' behaviors. Although these rules sometimes seem oppressive, they also grease the social machinery. When cultures collide, their differing norms often befuddle.

Over time, cultures change. For example, with greater economic independence, today's women are less likely to endure abusive relationships out of economic need. Most minority groups enjoy expanded human rights. Not all culture change is positive. For example, within the last 40 years or so, the United States has seen sharply increased rates of divorce and depression. Changes in the human gene pool evolve far too slowly to account for these rapid cultural changes.

 ▶ Lectures: Mimicry and Prosocial Behavior (p. 861); Social Exclusion and Mimicry (p. 861); The Seattle Windshield Pitting Epidemic (p. 862)
 ▶ Exercises: Suggestibility (p. 862); Social Influence (p. 863)
 ▶ Project: Violating a Social Norm (p. 863)
 ▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Social Influence; Liking and Imitation: The Sincerest Form of Flattery*

13-4. *Describe automatic mimicry, and explain how conformity experiments reveal the power of social influence.*

The *chameleon effect* refers to our natural tendency to mimic others. Unconsciously mimicking others' expressions, postures, and voice tones helps us feel what they are feeling *(empathize).* This helps explain why we feel happier around happy people and why research has revealed a *mood linkage,* a sharing of ups and downs. Research participants in an experiment tend to rub their own face when confederates rub their face; similarly, the participants shake their own foot when they are with a foot-shaking person. The most empathic people mimic and are liked the most.

Conformity is adjusting our behavior or thinking toward some group standard. Solomon Asch found that under certain conditions, people will conform to a group's judgment, even when it is clearly incorrect. Experiments indicate that conformity increases when we feel incompetent or insecure, admire the group's status and attractiveness, have made no prior commitment to a response, are being observed by other group members, come from a culture that encourages respect for social standards, and are in a group with at least three people who are unanimous in their judgment.

We are sensitive to social norms and so we sometimes conform to gain social approval (*normative social influence*). At other times, we accept information about reality provided by the group (*informational social influence*).

 ▶ Lecture: Obedience in Everyday Life (p. 865)
 ▶ Lecture/Critical Thinking Break: Milgram Returns . . . This Time on TV! (p. 864)
 ▶ Exercises: Obedience and Conformity (p. 864); Would You Obey? (p. 864); Wolves or Sheep? (p. 866)
 ▶ Exercise/Project: Applying Research on Conformity, Obedience, and Role Playing (p. 866)
 ▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Milgram's Obedience Studies; Obedience and Authority: A Laboratory Demonstration*

13-5. *Describe what we learned about the power of social influence from Milgram's obedience experiments.*

In the Milgram studies, the experimenter ordered "teachers" to deliver shocks to a "learner" for wrong answers. Torn between obeying the experimenter and responding to the learner's pleas, the people usually chose to obey orders, even though it supposedly meant harming the learner. Obedience was highest when the person giving the orders was close at hand and was perceived to be a legitimate authority, when the authority figure was supported by a prestigious institution, when the victim was depersonalized or at a distance, and when there were no role models for defiance.

The experiments demonstrate that social influences can be strong enough to make people conform to falsehoods or capitulate to cruelty. The studies, because of their design, also illustrate how great evil sometimes grows out of people's compliance with lesser evils. Evil does not require monstrous characters but ordinary people corrupted by an evil situation. By understanding the processes that shape our behavior, we may be less susceptible to external social pressures in real-life situations that lead us to violate our own internal standards.

▶ Lecture: Deviance in the Dark (p. 867)
▶ Exercise: Deindividuation (p. 867)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Schachter's Affiliation Experiment*
▶ Feature Films: *Lord of the Flies* and Deindividuation (p. 867)

13-6. *Describe how our behavior is affected by the presence of others.*

Experiments on ***social facilitation*** reveal that the presence of observers can arouse individuals, strengthening the most likely response and so boosting their performance on easy or well-learned tasks but hindering it on difficult or newly learned ones. When people pool their efforts toward a group goal, ***social loafing*** may occur as individuals exert less effort. When a group experience arouses people and makes them anonymous, they become less self-aware and self-restrained, a psychological state known as ***deindividuation.***

▶ Lectures: Understanding Terrorism (p. 868); Groupthink (p. 868)
▶ Exercises: Group Polarization (p. 867); The Wisdom of Crowds (p. 869)
▶ Feature Film: *Twelve Angry Men (p. 869)*
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *The Wisdom of Groups*

13-7. *Explain group polarization and groupthink, and discuss the power of the individual.*

Within groups, discussions among like-minded members often produce ***group polarization,*** an enhancement of the group's prevailing tendencies. Group polarization can have beneficial results, as when it reinforces the resolve of those in a self-help group. But it can also have dire consequences, as it can strengthen a terrorist mentality. Sometimes, group interaction distorts important decisions. In ***groupthink,*** the desire for harmony overrides a realistic appraisal of alternatives.

It is important to remember that *social control* and *personal control* interact. A minority that consistently holds to its position can sway the majority *(minority influence).* This is especially true if the minority's self-confidence stimulates others to consider why the minority reacts as it does. Even when a minority's influence is not yet visible, it may be convincing members of the majority to rethink their views.

Social Relations

▶ Exercises: Social Transmission of a Narrative (p. 870); Subtle Prejudice and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (p. 871); Positions of Privilege and Institutional Racism (p. 872); Institutional Discrimination (p. 873); Belief in a Just World (p. 873); Ingroup Bias (p. 874)
▶ Exercise/Project: Measuring Stereotypes (p. 871)
▶ Project: A Personal Cultural History (p. 869)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Prejudice; Attitudes and Prejudicial Behavior; Hidden Prejudice: The Implicit Association Test; Being Gay: Coming Out in the 21st Century*
▶ Feature Film: *Crash* (p. 871)

13-8. *Define* prejudice, *and identify its social and emotional roots.*

Prejudice is a mixture of *beliefs* (often overgeneralized and called ***stereotypes***), *emotions* (hostility, envy, or fear), and predispositions to *action* (to discriminate). Prejudice is a negative attitude; ***discrimination*** is a negative behavior.

Judging by what people say, overt prejudice has decreased dramatically in the last half-century. However, subtle (implicit, automatic) prejudice, such as that reflected in people's facial-muscle responses and in the activation of their amygdala to viewing Black and White faces, lingers. Researchers found that 9 in 10 White respondents took longer to identify pleasant words (such as peace and paradise) as "good" when presented with Black-sounding names rather than White-sounding names. Priming people with a flashed Black face rather than a White face also makes them more likely to misperceive a flashed tool as a gun. Nevertheless, overt prejudice persists in many places.

When some people have money, power, and prestige and others do not, the "haves" usually develop attitudes that justify things as they are. The ***just-world phenomenon*** reflects the idea that good is rewarded and evil is punished. Victims of discrimination may react with either self-blame or anger. Either reaction can feed prejudice through the classic *blame-the-victim* dynamic.

Through our social identities, we also associate ourselves with some groups and contrast ourselves with others. Mentally drawing a circle that defines "us" (the ***ingroup***) also excludes "them" (the ***outgroup***). Such group identifications promote an ***ingroup bias,*** that is, a favoring of one's own group. Even creating an "us-them" distinction by the toss of a coin leads people to show ingroup bias.

Facing the fear of death tends to heighten patriotism and produce loathing and aggression toward those who threaten one's world. ***Scapegoat theory*** suggests that prejudice offers an outlet for anger by providing someone to blame. To boost our own sense of status, it also helps to have others to denigrate.

13-9. *Identify the cognitive roots of prejudice.*

One way we simplify the world is to *form categories.* In categorizing others, we often stereotype them, overestimating the similarity of those within another group. The ***other-race effect*** (or *cross-race effect* or *own-race bias*) is the tendency to recall faces of one's own race more accurately than faces of other races. It emerges during infancy, between 3 and 9 months of age. We also estimate the frequency of events by *vivid cases* (violence, for example) that come to mind more readily than the less vivid events involving the same group. Third, impartial observers may blame victims by assuming the world is just and that people therefore get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Finally, *hindsight bias* may contribute to the tendency to blame the victim.

▶ Lectures: Workplace Violence and the Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression (p. 875); Genocide (p. 876); Relational Aggression in the Media (p. 876); Do We Need to Vent Our Rage? (p. 877)
▶ Exercise: Defining *Aggression* (p. 874)
▶ Feature Film: *In Cold Blood* (p. 877)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Competition and Aggression*

13-10. *Explain how psychology's definition of* aggression *differs from everyday usage, and identify the biological factors that make us more prone to hurt one another.*

In psychology, ***aggression*** is any physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt or destroy. This definition of aggression has a more precise meaning than it does in everyday usage where an assertive salesperson or a dentist who make us wince with pain may be described as "aggressive." On the other hand, psychology's definition recognizes a verbally assaultive person or one who spreads a vicious rumor as aggressive.

Biological influences on aggression operate at the genetic, neural, and biochemical levels. Animals have been bred for aggressiveness, and twin studies suggest that genes also influence human aggression. Animal and human brains have neural systems that, when stimulated, either inhibit or

produce aggression. For example, studies of violent criminals have revealed diminished activity in the frontal lobes, which play an important role in controlling impulses. Finally, studies of the effect of hormones (e.g., testosterone), alcohol, and other substances in the blood show that bio-chemical influences contribute to aggression.

13-11. *Outline psychological and social-cultural triggers of aggressive behavior.*

The ***frustration-aggression principle*** states that the blocking of an attempt to reach some goal creates anger, which can generate aggression. Frustration (and aggression) arise less from deprivation than from the gap between reality and expectations. Like frustration, other aversive stimuli—such as physical pain, personal insults, foul odors, cigarette smoke, crowding, and hot temperatures—can also evoke hostility.

Our reactions are more likely to be aggressive in situations where experience has taught us that aggression pays. Also, poor self-control is one of the "strongest known correlates of crime." Parent-training programs advise parents to avoid modeling violence by hitting and screaming.

Different cultures reinforce and evoke different tendencies toward violence. For example, crime rates are higher in countries marked by a great disparity between rich and poor. Social influence also appears in high violence rates among cultures and families that experience minimal father care.

People can learn aggression by observing models who act aggressively, for example, in the family or in the media (watching violence or sexual aggression on TV or in film). Laboratory experiments reveal that repeatedly watching on-screen violence makes sexual aggression seem less serious. Media depictions of violence also trigger aggression by providing ***social scripts*** (mental tapes for how to act provided by our culture).

Playing violent video games can heighten aggressive behavior by providing social scripts and opportunities to observe modeled aggression. Studies have found that playing violent video games increases aggressive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Young adolescents who play a lot of violent video games see the world as more hostile, get into more arguments and fights, and get worse grades.

▶ Lectures: Speed Dating (p. 878); What Is Beautiful Is Good (p. 879); Physical Appearance and Election Success (p. 879)
▶ Lecture/Critical Thinking Break: All the Right Moves? (p. 880)
▶ Exercises: Using Personal Ads to Teach Interpersonal Attraction (p. 877); Assessing Friendship (p. 880); The Pairing Game (p. 881); Matching, the Contrast Effect, and Relationship Satisfaction (p. 882)
▶ Exercise/Project: The Mere Exposure Effect (p. 879)
▶ Feature Films: *Beauty and the Beast* and Physical Attractiveness (p. 879)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Interpersonal Attraction: Clothes Make the Man*

13-12. *Explain why we befriend or fall in love with some people but not others.*

Three factors are known to influence our liking for one another. Geographical proximity is conducive to attraction, partly because of the ***mere exposure effect:*** Repeated exposure to novel stimuli enhances liking of them. Physical attractiveness influences social opportunities and the way one is perceived. We view attractive people as healthier, happier, more sensitive, and more successful. As acquaintanceship moves toward friendship, similarity of attitudes and interests greatly increases liking. The factors that foster attraction are explained by a *reward theory of attraction:* We like those whose behavior is rewarding to us, and we will continue relationships that offer more rewards than costs.

▶ Exercises: The Passionate Love Scale (p. 883); Love Styles (p. 883); The Trust Scale (p. 884); The Minding Scale (p. 884); Solitude: Bane or Blessing? (p. 885)
▶ Feature Films: *Speed* and the Two-Factor Theory of Passionate Love (p. 882)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Love: The Mind-Body Connection*

13-13. *Describe how romantic love typically changes as time passes.*

We can view ***passionate love*** as an aroused state that we cognitively label as love. The strong affection of ***companionate love,*** which often emerges as a relationship matures, is enhanced by ***equity,*** a condition in which both parties receive in proportion to what they give. Another vital ingredient of loving relationships is mutual ***self-disclosure,*** in which partners reveal to each other intimate details about themselves. A third key to enduring love is *positive support.*

▶ Lectures: Case Studies in Helping (p. 886); Europeans Who Helped Jews Escape (p. 888)
▶ Exercise: Why Do People Volunteer? (p. 887)
▶ Project: A Random Act of Kindness (p. 888)
▶ Worth Video Anthology: *Takooshian's Psychology of Bystanders; Bystander Apathy: Failing to Help Others in Distress; Whom Do We Help?*

13-14. *Identify the times when people are most—and least—likely to help.*

Altruism is unselfish regard for the welfare of others. Risking one's life to save victims of genocide with no expectation of personal reward is an example of altruism.

The ***bystander effect*** is the tendency for any given bystander to an emergency to be less likely to give aid if other bystanders are present. Research on the bystander effects indicates that to decide to help, one must (1) notice the event, (2) interpret it as an emergency, or (3) assume responsibility for helping.

▶ Lectures: Five Dangerous Ideas (p. 889); The Dual Concern Model of Social Conflict (p. 890); The Jigsaw Technique (p. 891)
▶ PsychSim 5: Social Decision Making (p. 889)

13-15. *Discuss how social exchange theory and social norms explain helping behavior.*

Social exchange theory proposes that underlying all behavior, including helping, is the desire to maximize our benefits (which may include our own good feelings) and minimize our costs. For example, we will donate blood if we anticipate that the rewards (e.g., social approval, good feelings) for doing so exceed the costs (e.g., time, discomfort). Social norms may also prescribe altruistic behavior. The ***reciprocity norm*** is the expectation that people will help, not hurt, those who have helped them. The ***social-responsibility norm*** is the expectation that people will help those who are dependent on them.

▶ Exercise: The Missiles Game (p. 890)

13-16. *Explain how social traps and mirror-image perceptions fuel social conflict.*

A ***conflict*** is a perceived incompatibility of actions, goals, or ideas. ***Social traps*** are situations in which conflicting parties may become caught in mutually destructive behavior as they pursue their own ends, thus creating an outcome that no one wants. Psychologists have explored ways to convince people to cooperate for their mutual benefit—through agreed-on *regulations,* through better *communication,* and through *awareness* of our responsibilities toward others. The spiral of conflict also feeds and is fed by distorted ***mirror-image perceptions,*** in which each party views itself as moral and the other as unworthy and evil-intentioned.

13-17. *Discuss how we can transform feelings of prejudice, aggression, and conflict into attitudes that promote peace.*

Research suggests that noncompetitive contact between parties of equal status may help reduce conflict. More important, the discovery of ***superordinate,*** or shared, ***goals*** that require cooperation can turn enemies into friends. Communication, sometimes through a third-party mediator, also promotes mutual understanding. Finally, the ***GRIT*** (*Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction*) strategy suggests that reciprocated conciliatory gestures bring peace.

HANDOUT 13–1

Fact or Falsehood?

T F   1.   Compared with people in Western countries, those in East Asian cultures are more sensitive to situational influences on behavior.

T F   2.   Not only will people stand up for what they believe, they also will believe more strongly in what they have stood up for.

T F   3.   Chimps are more likely to yawn after observing another chimp yawn.

T F   4.   Most people would refuse to obey an authority figure who told them to hurt an innocent person.

T F   5.   Studies of college and professional athletic events indicate that home teams win about 6 in 10 games.

T F   6.   Individuals pull harder in a team tug-of-war than when they pull in a one-on-one tug-of-war.

T F   7.   The higher the morale and harmony of a social group, the more likely are its members to make a good decision.

T F   8.   Researchers project that, other things being equal, global warming of 4 degrees Fahrenheit (or about 2 degrees centigrade) would induce tens of thousands of additional assaults and murders in the United States alone.

T F   9.   From research on liking and loving, it is clear that opposites do attract.

T F   10.   We are less likely to offer help to a stranger if other bystanders are present.