

Social Psychology

* the scientific study of how we think about, influence, and relate to one another

I. Social Thinking

A. Attributing Behavior to Persons or to Situations

1. **attribution theory** – the theory that we tend to give a causal explanation for someone's behavior, often by crediting either the situation (external) or the personality (internal).

- a. consistency – does the behavior occur repeatedly in a particular situation?
- b. consensus – do others also regularly behave this way in this situation?
- c. distinctiveness – does the behavior occur in many other types of situations?

2. **fundamental attribution error** – the tendency for observers, when analyzing another's behavior, to *underestimate* the impact of the situation and to *overestimate* the impact of personal disposition.

a. **self-serving bias** – our tendency to attribute our successes to self and failures to situational pressures

b. **actor-observer discrepancy** – we commonly attribute our actions to the situation, but as observers we attribute their actions to their personalities.

B. **Attitudes** and Actions – a belief and feeling that predisposes one to respond in a particular way to people, events, and objects.

1. **foot-in-the-door phenomenon** – the tendency for people who have first agreed to a small request to comply later with a larger request.

2. **cognitive dissonance theory** – the theory that we act to reduce the discomfort (*dissonance*) we feel when our thoughts (*cognitions*) and behaviors are *inconsistent*.

“Assume a virtue, if you have it not,” says Hamlet to his mother. *“For use can almost change the stamp of nature.”*

- when our awareness of our attitudes and of our actions clash, we can reduce the resulting dissonance by changing our attitudes.

- Festinger (1959)

II. Social Influence

A. **Conformity** – adjusting one's behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard; Asch (1955)

1. Reasons for Conforming

a. **normative social influence** – influence resulting from a person's desire to gain approval or avoid disapproval

b. **informational social influence** – influence resulting from one's willingness to accept others' opinions about reality; Sherif (1936)

2. Conditions that Strengthen Conformity

a. group has at least three people

- b. group is unanimous (the support of a dissenting ally greatly reduces conformity)
- c. one admires the group's status and attractiveness
- d. others in the group observe one's behavior
- e. one is made to feel incompetent or insecure
- f. perception that group members are acting independently

B. **Obedience** – compliance with a direct order or request.

* Milgram (1964) – conducted social psychology's most famous and controversial experiments

“The most fundamental lesson of our study is that ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process.”

C. Group Influence

1. Individual Behavior in the Presence of Others

- a. **social facilitation** – improved performance of tasks in the presence of others; occurs with simple or well-learned tasks but not with tasks that are difficult or not yet mastered.
- b. **social loafing** – the tendency for people in a group to exert less effort when pooling their efforts toward attaining a common goal than when individually accountable
- c. **deindividuation** – the loss of self-awareness and self-restraint occurring in group situations that foster arousal and anonymity; increases situational power over behavior; Zimbardo (1973) Stanford Prison Experiment

2. Effects of Group Interaction

- a. **group polarization** – the enhancement of a group's prevailing attitudes through discussion within the group; example: prejudice, terrorists
- b. **groupthink** – the mode of thinking that occurs when the desire for harmony in a decision-making group overrides a realistic appraisal of alternatives
 - coined by Janis (1982) after studying Kennedy's failed Bay of Pigs invasion
 - is fed by *overconfidence, conformity, self-justification, and group polarization*

III. Social Relations

A. **Prejudice** - an unjustifiable (and usually negative) attitude toward a group and its members. Prejudice generally involves *stereotyped* beliefs, negative feelings, and a predisposition to discriminatory action; **stereotype** - a generalized belief about a group of people

1. Social Roots of Prejudice
 - a. social inequalities - haves vs. have-nots
 - b. us and them: ingroup and outgroup
 - i. **ingroup** - "Us" - people with whom one shares a common identity
 - ii. **outgroup** - "Them" - those perceived as different or apart from one's ingroup
 - iii. **ingroup bias** - the tendency to favor one's own group; cliques
 - c. **scapegoat theory** - prejudice offers an outlet for anger by providing someone to blame
2. Cognitive Roots of Prejudice
 - a. categorization - may bias our perceptions
 - b. **just-world phenomenon** - the tendency of people to believe the world is just and that people therefore get what they deserve and deserve what they get.

B. **Aggression** - any physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt or destroy.

1. The Biology of Aggression
 - a. genetic influences - twin studies
 - b. neural influences - frontal lobe inhibits aggression
 - c. biochemical influences - aggression correlates with high testosterone levels
2. The Psychology of Aggression
 - a. aversive events
 - i. **frustration-aggression principle** - the blocking of an attempt to achieve some goal creates anger, which can generate aggression
 - b. learning to express and inhibit – the extent to which an organism is rewarded or punished for aggressive behavior

C. Attraction

1. The Psychology of Attraction
 - a. *proximity* - physical nearness - the most powerful predictor of friendship
 - i. **mere-exposure effect** - repeated exposure to novel stimuli increases liking of them.
 - b. physical attractiveness
 - c. similarity & reciprocity
2. Romantic Love
 - a. **passionate love** - an aroused state of intense, positive absorption in another, usually present at the beginning of a relationship.
 - b. **companionate love** - the deep affectionate attachment we feel for those with whom our lives are intimately intertwined.
 - i. **equity** - people receive from a relationship in proportion to what they give to it.
 - ii. **self-disclosure** - revealing intimate aspects of oneself to others.

D. **Altruism** – the unselfish regard for the welfare of others

- became a major concern of social psychologists after an especially vile act of sexual violence in 1964
 - the story of Kitty Genovese
- Darley and Latané (1968) noted we will only help in a situation if:
 1. We *Notice* the incident
 2. *Interpret* it as an emergency
 3. and *Assume Responsibility* for helping

- **bystander effect** – the tendency for any given person to be less likely to give aid if other people are present
- **social exchange theory** – our social behavior is an exchange process, the aim of which is to maximize benefits and minimize costs
 - when benefits outweigh costs, we are more likely to help