

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Social Psychology

The "Homeless" Man

A few years ago, Fern and Erv got two free plane tickets when they were bumped from an overbooked flight. They decided to visit a city they had always wanted to see—San Francisco. Even though Fern was excited about the trip, she was also anxious about visiting the earthquake zone. Erv wasn't especially worried about earthquakes, but he was worried about whether his old army buddy could still beat him at penny poker. Mostly, they both wanted to see the famous sights, eat seafood, wander through shops, and explore used bookstores, which was Erv's favorite hobby.

As it turned out, Fern and Erv were both quite taken by the beauty and charm of San Francisco. But they were also disturbed by the number of homeless people they saw on the city streets, sometimes sleeping in the doorways of expensive shops and restaurants. This was especially disturbing to Fern, who has a heart of gold and is known among her family and friends for her willingness to help others, even complete strangers.

On the third morning of their San Francisco visit, Erv and Fern were walking along one of the hilly San Francisco streets near the downtown area. That's when Fern saw a scruffy-looking man in faded jeans sitting on some steps, holding a cup. Something about his facial expression struck Fern as seeming lost, maybe dejected. Surely this was one of San Francisco's less fortunate, Fern thought to herself. Without a moment's hesitation, Fern rummaged through her purse, walked over to the man, and

dropped a handful of quarters in his cup. "Hey, lady! What the hell d'ya think you're doing!?!!" the man exclaimed, jumping up.

"Oh, my! Aren't you homeless!?" Fern asked, mortified and turning bright red.

"Lady, this *is* my home," the man snapped, motioning with his thumb to the house behind him. "I live here! And that's my cup of coffee you just ruined!"

Fortunately, the "homeless" man also had a sense of humor. After fishing Fern's quarters out of his coffee and giving them back to her, he chatted with the out-of-towners, enlightening them on the extraordinary cost of San Francisco real estate. As they parted, the not-so-homeless man ended up recommending a couple of his favorite seafood restaurants.

Like Fern, we all try to make sense out of our social environment. As we navigate the world, we constantly make judgments about the traits, motives, and goals of other people. And, like Fern, sometimes we make mistakes!

In this book, we will look at how we interpret our social environment, including how we form impressions of other people and explain their behavior. We'll explore how our own behavior, including our willingness to help others, is influenced by the social environment and other people. In the process, we'll come back to Erv and Fern's incident with the "homeless" man to illustrate several important concepts.

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>> Introduction: What Is Social Psychology?

Why did Fern think the man on the steps was homeless? How did the “homeless” man initially interpret Fern’s efforts to help him? And in contrast to Fern, not everyone who feels compassion toward homeless people acts in accordance with that attitude. Why did Fern do so?

These are the kinds of issues that social psychologists study. **Social psychology** investigates how your thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by the presence of other people and by the social and physical environment. The social situations can include being alone, in the presence of others, or in front of a crowd of onlookers.

Like other psychology specialty areas, social psychology emphasizes certain concepts. For example, one important social psychology concept is that of your *self*. Your **sense of self** involves you as a social being that has been shaped by your interactions with others and by the social environments, including the culture, in which you operate. Thus, your sense of self plays a key role in how you perceive and react to others.

Some social behaviors, such as helping others, are displayed *universally*—that is, they take a consistent form in diverse cultures. When a specific social behavior is universal, social psychologists will often use insights from evolutionary psychology to understand how the behavior is adaptive.

Evolutionary psychology is based on the premise that certain psychological processes and behavior patterns evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. Those patterns evolved because in some way they were adaptive, increasing the odds of survival for humans who displayed those qualities. In turn, this survival advantage increased the genetic transmission of those patterns to subsequent generations.

Social psychology research focuses on many different topics. In this textbook, we’ll focus on two key research areas in social psychology. We’ll start with an area that has been greatly influenced by the experimental methods and findings of *cognitive psychology*. **Social cognition** refers to how we form impressions of other people, how we interpret the meaning of other people’s behavior, and how our behavior is affected by our attitudes. As you’ll see, sometimes those mental processes are conscious and deliberate but, at other times, they occur automatically and outside of our awareness.

Later we’ll look at **social influence**, which focuses on how our behavior is affected by other people and by situational factors. The study of social influence includes such questions as why we conform to group norms, what compels us to obey an authority figure, and under what circumstances people will help a stranger.

social psychology

Branch of psychology that studies how a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by the presence of other people and by the social and physical environment.

sense of self

An individual’s unique sense of identity that has been influenced by social, cultural, and psychological experiences; your sense of who you are in relation to other people.

social cognition

The mental processes people use to make sense out of their social environment.

social influence

The effects of situational factors and other people on an individual’s behavior.

Person Perception

Forming Impressions of Other People

Key Theme

- **Person perception refers to the mental processes we use to form judgments about other people.**

Key Questions

- **What four principles are followed in the person perception process?**
- **How do social categorization, implicit personality theories, and physical attractiveness affect person perception?**

Consider the following scenario. You’re attending a college in the middle of a big city and commute from your apartment to the campus via the subway. Today you stayed on campus a bit later than usual, so the rush hour is pretty much over. As a seasoned

subway rider, you know you're safer when the subway is full of commuters. So as you step off the platform into the subway car, you're feeling just a bit anxious. The car is more than half full. If you want to sit down, you'll have to share a seat with some other passenger. You quickly survey your fellow passengers. In a matter of seconds, you must decide which stranger you'll share your ride home with, elbow to elbow, thigh to thigh. How will you decide?

Even if you've never ridden on a subway, it doesn't matter. You could just as easily imagine choosing a seat on a bus or in a crowded movie theater. What these situations have in common is a task that most of us confront almost every day: On the basis of very limited information, we must quickly draw conclusions about the nature of people who are complete strangers to us. We also have to make some rough predictions as to how those strangers are likely to behave. How do we arrive at these conclusions?

Person perception refers to the mental processes we use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics of other people. Person perception is an active, interactive, and subjective process that always occurs in some *interpersonal context*. In the interpersonal context of a subway car, you evaluate people based on minimal interaction.

Initially, you form very rapid *first impressions* based largely on looking at the other people's faces. In glancing at another person's face for a mere tenth of a second, you evaluate the other person's attractiveness, likeability, competence, trustworthiness, and aggressiveness. In addition to glancing at the other person's face, who you decide to sit next to in the subway car is going to be influenced by four key components:

1. the characteristics of the person you are trying to size up;
2. your own self-perception;
3. your goals in the situation; and
4. the specific situation in which the process occurs.

Each component plays a role in some basic principles that guide person perception. Let's illustrate those principles using the subway scenario.

Principle 1. Your reactions to others are determined by your perceptions of them, not by who or what they really are. Put simply, you treat others according to how you perceive them to be. So, as you step inside the subway car, you quickly choose not to sit next to the big, burly guy with a scowl on his face. Why? Because *you* perceive Mr. Burly-Surly as potentially threatening. This guy's picture is probably on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list for being an axe murderer, you think. Of course, he could just as easily be a burly florist who's surly because he's getting home late. It doesn't matter. You move past him. Your behavior toward him is determined by your subjective perception of him as potentially threatening.

Principle 2. Your self-perception also influences how you perceive others and how you act on your perceptions. Your decision about where to sit is also influenced by how you perceive your self. For example, if you think of yourself as looking a bit intimidating (even though you're really a mild-mannered marketing major), you may choose to sit next to the 20-something text-messaging guy wearing a T-shirt rather than the anxious-looking middle-aged woman who's clutching her purse with both hands.

Principle 3. Your goals in a particular situation determine the amount and kinds of information you collect about others. Your goal in this situation is simple: You want to share a subway seat with someone who will basically leave you alone. Hence, you focus your attention on the characteristics of



Making Split-Second Decisions About Strangers? Deciding where to sit in a subway car or on a bus involves making rapid evaluations and decisions about people who are complete strangers. What kinds of factors do you notice in forming your first impressions of other people? Do the impressions you form seem to be the result of deliberate or automatic thoughts? Do you think your first impressions are generally accurate?

person perception

The mental processes we use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics and motives of other people.



"Goodbye everybody."

other people that seem to be relevant to your goal, ignoring details that are unrelated to it. After all, you're not looking for a date for Saturday night, a plumber, or a chemistry lab partner. If you were, you'd focus on very different aspects of the other people in the situation.

Principle 4. In every situation, you evaluate people partly in terms of how you expect them to act in that situation. Whether you're in a classroom, restaurant, or public restroom, your behavior is governed by **social norms**—the "rules," or expectations, for appropriate behavior in that social situation. Riding a subway is no exception to this principle. For example, you don't sit next to someone else when empty seats are available, you don't try to borrow your seatmate's newspaper, and you avoid eye contact with others.

These "subway rules" aren't posted anywhere, of course. Nevertheless, violating these social norms will draw attention from others and probably make them uneasy. So as you size up your fellow subway passengers, you're partly evaluating their behavior in terms of how people-riding-the-subway-at-night-in-a-big-city should behave.

What these four guiding principles demonstrate is that person perception is not a one-way process in which we objectively survey other people and then logically evaluate their characteristics. Instead, the perceptions we have of others, our self-perceptions and goals, and the specific context all interact. Each component plays a role in the split-second judgments we form of complete strangers.

In the subway example, like other transient situations, it's unlikely that you'll ever be able to verify the accuracy of those first impressions. But in situations that involve long-term relationships with other people, such as in a classroom or at work, we fine-tune our impressions as we acquire additional information about the people we come to know.

Social Categorization

Using Mental Shortcuts in Person Perception

Along with person perception, the subway scenario illustrates our natural tendency to group people into categories. **Social categorization** is the mental process of classifying people into groups on the basis of common characteristics. In many social situations, you're consciously aware of the mental processes you go through in forming impressions of and categorizing other people. Social psychologists use the term **explicit cognition** to refer to deliberate, conscious mental processes involved in perceptions, judgments, decisions, and reasoning.

So how do you socially categorize people who are complete strangers, such as the other passengers in the subway car? To a certain extent, you consciously focus on easily observable features, such as the other person's gender, age, race, clothing, and other physical features. So you glance at a person, then socially categorize him as "Asian male, 20-something, backpack next to him on the seat, iPod, reading book, probably a college student."

However, your social perceptions and evaluations are not always completely conscious and deliberate considerations. In many situations, you react to another person with spontaneous and automatic social perceptions, categorizations, and attitudes. At least initially, these automatic evaluations tend to occur *implicitly* or outside of your conscious awareness. Social psychologists use the term **implicit cognition** to describe the mental processes associated with automatic, nonconscious social evaluations.

What triggers such automatic, implicit evaluations of other people? People often evaluate others without thinking based on the social category they automatically associate with the other person.

social norms

The "rules," or expectations, for appropriate behavior in a particular social situation.

social categorization

The mental process of categorizing people into groups (or *social categories*) on the basis of their shared characteristics.

explicit cognition

Deliberate, conscious mental processes involved in perceptions, judgments, decisions, and reasoning.

implicit cognition

Automatic, nonconscious mental processes that influence perceptions, judgments, decisions, and reasoning.

To illustrate, glance at the margin photo of people crossing a street. Each person in the photo is a unique individual with a unique background and life experiences.

Nevertheless, you probably made several rapid judgments about the people in the photograph. That's because prior experiences and beliefs about different social categories can trigger implicit social reactions ranging from very positive to very negative.

Without consciously realizing it, your reaction to another person can be swayed by the other person's age, gender, ethnicity, skin tone, physical attractiveness, weight, and clothing. Less obvious social categories that can trigger implicit reactions include sexual orientation as well as political or religious beliefs.

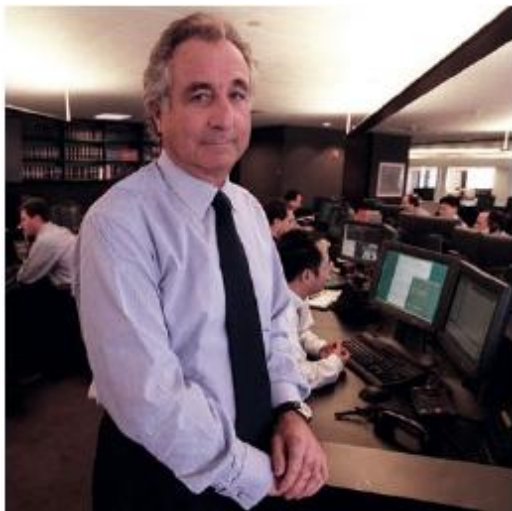
In everyday life, people often assume that certain types of people share certain traits and behaviors. This is referred to as an **implicit personality theory**. Different models exist to explain how implicit personality theories develop and function. But in general terms, your previous social and cultural experiences influence the cognitive *schemas*, or mental frameworks, you hold about the traits and behaviors associated with different "types" of people. So when you perceive someone to be a particular "type," you assume that the person will display those traits and behaviors.

For example, your choice of a seatmate on the subway might well reflect some of your own implicit personality theories. You might feel comfortable sitting next to the silver-haired man who's reading the *Wall Street Journal*, wearing an expensive suit, and carrying what looks like a leather laptop case. Why? Because these superficial characteristics lead you to assume that he's a particular type of person—a conservative businessman. And on the basis of your implicit personality theory for a "conservative businessman," you conclude that he's probably a "law-abiding citizen" who is not likely to try to pick your pocket or whip out a gun and rob you.

Physical appearance cues play an important role in person perception and social categorization. Particularly influential is the implicit personality theory that most people have for physically attractive people. Starting in childhood, we are bombarded with the cultural message that "what is beautiful is good." In myths, fairy tales, cartoons, movies, and games, heroes are handsome, heroines are beautiful, and the evil villains are ugly. As a result of such cultural conditioning, most people have an implicit personality theory that associates physical attractiveness with a wide range of desirable characteristics.



Using Social Categories We often use superficial cues such as clothing and context to assign people to social categories and draw conclusions about their behavior. For example, you might characterize some people in this crowd as belonging to the category of "businessmen" because they are wearing dress shirts and ties—and conclude that they are on their way to work. What other sorts of social categories are evident here?



A Charitable Guy? As a highly successful Wall Street financial adviser, Bernie Madoff managed money for individuals, financial institutions, and numerous charitable foundations, including director Steven Spielberg's Wunderkinder Foundation. A well-known philanthropist, he also gave substantial amounts of his own money to charities. But Bernie Madoff was actually a crook, swindling his clients out of billions of dollars over a period of more than 20 years. In what ways could implicit personality theories help explain how Madoff got away with his crimes for so long?

implicit personality theory

A network of assumptions or beliefs about the relationships among various types of people, traits, and behaviors.

What Is Beautiful Is Good We are culturally conditioned to associate beauty with goodness and evil with ugliness—an implicit personality theory that has been dubbed the “what is beautiful is good” myth. One example of this cultural conditioning is the classic Disney film *Snow White*. In the scene shown, the wicked stepmother is disguised as an old woman, complete with a wart on her nose. She offers the poisoned apple to the innocent and virtuous heroine, Snow White. (The Walt Disney Co.)



ious in social situations—all characteristics related to the advantage that their physical attractiveness seems to confer on them in social situations. But as you’ll read in the Focus on Neuroscience, there also seems to be a brain-based explanation for the greater social success enjoyed by physically attractive people.

So what general conclusion can we make about the process of person perception? Both deliberate and automatic thought processes influence our impressions, especially our first impressions. To quickly evaluate others, we often rely on easily

For example, good-looking people are perceived as being more intelligent, happier, and better adjusted than other people. Are they?

After analyzing dozens of studies, psychologist Alan Feingold (1992) found very few personality differences between beautiful people and their plainer counterparts. Physical attractiveness is *not* corre-

lated with intelligence, mental health, or even self-esteem. Overall, attractive people tend to be less lonely, more popular, and less anx-

FOCUS ON NEUROSCIENCE

Brain Reward When Making Eye Contact with Attractive People

How does physical attractiveness contribute to social success? A study by neuroscientist Knut Kampe and his colleagues (2001) at University College London may offer some insights. In their functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study, participants were scanned while they looked at color photographs of 40 different faces, some looking directly at the viewer (eye-contact) and some glancing away (non-eye-contact). After the fMRI scanning session, participants rated the attractiveness of the faces they had seen.

The results showed that when we make direct eye contact with a physically attractive person, an area on each side of the brain called the *ventral striatum* is activated (yellow areas in fMRI scan). When the attractive person’s eye gaze is shifted away from the viewer, activity in the ventral striatum decreases. What makes this so interesting is that the ventral striatum is a brain area that predicts reward.

Neural activity in the ventral striatum increases when an unexpected reward, such as food or water, suddenly appears. Conversely, activity in the ventral striatum decreases when an expected reward fails to appear.

As Kampe (2001) explains, “What we’ve shown is that when we make eye contact with an attractive person, the brain area that predicts reward starts firing. If we see an attractive person but cannot make eye contact with that person, the activity in this region goes down, signaling disappointment. This is the first study to show that the brain’s ventral striatum processes rewards in the context of human social interaction.”

Other neuroscientists have expanded on Kampe’s findings and identified additional brain reward areas that are responsive to facial attractiveness. Of particular note is an area called the *orbital frontal cortex*, which is a region of the *frontal cortex* located just above the orbits (or sockets) of your eyes. Another region is the *amyg-*

dala. Both the orbital frontal cortex and the amygdala are selectively responsive to the reward value of attractive faces.

“Facial beauty evokes a widely distributed neural network involving perceptual, decision-making, and reward circuits. [It] may serve as a neural trigger for the pervasive effects of attractiveness in social interactions,” writes neuroscientist Anjan Chatterjee and his colleagues (2009). Clearly, then, the social advantages associated with facial attractiveness are reinforced by reward processing in the brain.

Eye-Contact Face



Non-Eye-Contact Face



observable features, including cues we discern from the other person's face, gender, age, and race. We also use mental shortcuts, such as social categories and implicit personality theories. Whether we react positively or negatively to the particular social category or implicit personality we associate with another person is influenced by our previous social and cultural experiences.

Obviously, there are advantages and disadvantages to this process. On the one hand, relegating someone to a social category on the basis of superficial information ignores that person's unique qualities. In effect, you're jumping to sweeping conclusions about another person on the basis of very limited information. Sometimes these conclusions are wrong, as Fern's was when she categorized the scruffy-looking San Francisco man with a cup in his hand as homeless.

On the other hand, relying on social categories is a natural, adaptive, and efficient cognitive process. Social categories provide us with considerable basic information about other people. Knowing that basic information helps us organize and remember information about others more effectively. And from an evolutionary perspective, the ability to make rapid judgments about strangers is probably an evolved characteristic that conferred survival value in our evolutionary past.

Attribution

Explaining Behavior

Key Theme

- Attribution refers to the process of explaining your own behavior and the behavior of other people.

Key Questions

- What are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias?
- How do attributional biases affect our judgments about the causes of behavior?
- How does culture affect attributional processes?

As you're studying in the college library, the activities of two workers catch your attention. The two men are getting ready to lift and move a large file cabinet. "Okay, let's tip it this way and lift it," the first guy says with considerable authority. The second guy sheepishly nods agreement. In unison, they heave and tip the file cabinet. When they do, the top two file drawers fly out, smashing into the first guy's head. As the file cabinet goes crashing to the floor, you bite your lip to keep from laughing and think to yourself, "What a pair of 40-watt bulbs."

Why did you arrive at that conclusion? After all, it's completely possible that the workers are not dimwits. Maybe the lock on the file drawers slipped or broke when they tipped the cabinet. Or maybe someone failed to empty the drawers.

Attribution is the process of inferring the cause of someone's behavior, including your own. Psychologists also use the word *attribution* to refer to the explanation you make for a particular behavior. The attributions you make strongly influence your thoughts and feelings about other people.

If your explanation for the file cabinet incident was that the workers were a couple of clumsy doofuses, you demonstrated a common cognitive bias. The **fundamental attribution error** is the tendency to spontaneously attribute the behavior of others to internal, personal characteristics, while ignoring or underestimating the role of external, situational factors. Even though it's entirely possible that situational forces were behind another person's behavior, we tend to automatically assume that the cause is an internal, personal characteristic.

attribution

The mental process of inferring the causes of people's behavior, including one's own. Also refers to the explanation made for a particular behavior.

fundamental attribution error

The tendency to attribute the behavior of others to internal, personal characteristics, while ignoring or underestimating the effects of external, situational factors; an attributional bias that is common in individualistic cultures.

blaming the victim

The tendency to blame an innocent victim of misfortune for having somehow caused the problem or for not having taken steps to avoid or prevent it.

hindsight bias

The tendency to overestimate one's ability to have foreseen or predicted the outcome of an event.

just-world hypothesis

The assumption that the world is fair and that therefore people get what they deserve and deserve what they get.

self-serving bias

The tendency to attribute successful outcomes of one's own behavior to internal causes and unsuccessful outcomes to external, situational causes.

Notice, however, that when it comes to explaining our *own* behavior, we tend to be biased in the opposite direction. Rather than internal, personal attributions, we're more likely to explain our own behavior using *external, situational* attributions. He dropped the file cabinet because he's a dimwit; you dropped the file cabinet because there wasn't a good way to get a solid grip on it. Some jerk pulled out in front of your car because she's a reckless, inconsiderate moron; you pulled out in front of her car because an overgrown hedge blocked your view. And so on.

Why the discrepancy in accounting for the behavior of others as compared to our own behavior? Part of the explanation is that we simply have more information about the potential causes of our own behavior than we do about the causes of other people's behavior. When you observe another driver turn directly into the path of your car, that's typically the only information you have on which to judge his or her behavior. But when *you* inadvertently pull in front of another car, you perceive your own behavior in the context of the various situational factors that influenced your action. You're aware of such factors as visual obstacles, road conditions, driving distractions, and so forth. You also know what motivated your behavior and how differently you have behaved in similar situations in the past. Thus, you're much more aware of the extent to which *your* behavior has been influenced by situational factors.

The fundamental attribution error plays a role in a common explanatory pattern called **blaming the victim**. The innocent victim of a crime, disaster, or serious illness is blamed for having somehow caused the misfortune or for not having taken steps to prevent it. For example, many people blame the poor for their dire straits, the sick for bringing on their illnesses, and battered women and rape survivors for somehow "provoking" their attackers.

The blame the victim explanatory pattern is reinforced by another common cognitive bias. **Hindsight bias** is the tendency, after an event has occurred, to overestimate one's ability to have foreseen or predicted the outcome. In everyday conversations, this is the person who confidently proclaims *after* the event, "I could have told you that would happen" or "I can't believe they couldn't see that coming." In the case of blaming the victim, hindsight bias makes it seem as if the victim should have been able to predict—and prevent—what happened.

Why do people often resort to blaming the victim? People have a strong need to believe that the world is fair—that "we get what we deserve and deserve what we get." Social psychologist Melvin Lerner (1980) calls this the **just-world hypothesis**. Blaming the victim reflects the belief that, because the world is just, the victim must have done something to deserve his or her fate. Collectively, these cognitive biases and explanatory patterns help psychologically insulate us from the uncomfortable thought "It could have just as easily been me".

Blaming the Victim Fifteen-year-old Shawn Hornbeck is shown at a press conference, shortly after being reunited with his family. Four years earlier, Shawn had been kidnapped and held captive. When the FBI suspected Shawn's kidnapper in the abduction of another boy, both boys were rescued. As details of Shawn's captivity became public, many people asked why Shawn hadn't tried to escape or call the police while his kidnapper was at work. As it turned out, the kidnapper had abused and terrorized Shawn for months. At one point, he tried to strangle Shawn. When Shawn pleaded for his life, the kidnapper made the boy promise that he would never try to escape. "There wasn't a day when I didn't think that he'd just kill me," Shawn later recalled. Why do people often "blame the victim" after crimes, accidents, or other tragedies?



The Self-Serving Bias

Using Explanations That Meet Our Needs

If you've ever listened to other students react to their grades on an important exam, you've seen the **self-serving bias** in action. When students do well on a test, they tend to congratulate themselves and to attribute their success to how hard they studied, their intelligence, and so forth—all *internal* attributions. But when a student bombs a test, the *external* attributions fly left and right: "They were all trick questions!" "I couldn't concentrate because the guy behind me kept coughing".

In a wide range of situations, people tend to credit themselves for their success and to blame their failures on external circumstances. Psychologists explain the self-serving bias as resulting from an attempt to save face and protect self-esteem in the face of failure.

Although common in many societies, the self-serving bias is far from universal, as cross-cultural psychologists have discovered. The various attributional biases are summarized in Table 1.1 on the next page.



Armstrong, who crashed after his handlebars snagged on a plastic bag held by a spectator. Armstrong went on to win the Tour de France.

Explaining Misfortune: The Self-Serving Bias

Given the self-serving bias, is this bicyclist likely to explain his accident by listing internal factors such as his own carelessness or recklessness? Or is he more likely to blame external factors, such as swerving to miss a spectator or catching his tire in a rut? Just so you know, the fallen rider wearing orange is American Lance

Explaining Failure and Murder: Culture and Attributional Biases

Although the self-serving bias is common in individualistic cultures such as Australia and the United States, it is far from universal. In collectivistic cultures, such as Asian cultures, an opposite attributional bias is often demonstrated. Called the *self-effacing bias* or *modesty bias*, it involves blaming failure on internal, personal factors, while attributing success to external, situational factors.

For example, compared to American students, Japanese and Chinese students are more likely to attribute academic failure to personal factors, such as lack of effort, instead of situational factors. Thus, a Japanese student who does poorly on an exam is likely to say, "I didn't study hard enough." When Japanese or Chinese students perform poorly in school, they are expected to study harder and longer. In contrast, Japanese and Chinese students tend to attribute academic *success* to *situational* factors. For example, they might say, "The exam was very easy" or "There was very little competition this year".

Psychologists Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama (1991) believe that the self-effacing bias reflects the emphasis that interdependent cultures place on fitting in with other members of the group. As the Japanese proverb goes, "The nail that sticks up gets pounded down." In collectivistic cultures, self-esteem does not rest on doing better than others in the group. Rather, standing out from the group is likely to produce psychological discomfort and tension.

Cross-cultural differences are also evident with the fundamental attribution error. In general, members of collectivistic cultures are less likely to commit the fundamental attribution error than are members of individualistic cultures. That is, collectivists are more likely to attribute the

causes of another person's behavior to external, situational factors rather than to internal, personal factors—the exact *opposite* of the attributional bias that is demonstrated in individualistic cultures.

To test this idea in a naturally occurring context, psychologists Michael Morris and Kaiping Peng (1994) compared articles reporting the same mass murders in Chinese-language and English-language newspapers. In one case, the murderer was a Chinese graduate student attending a U.S. university. In the other case, the murderer was a U.S. postal worker. Regardless of whether the murderer was American or Chinese, the news accounts were fundamentally different depending on whether the *reporter* was American or Chinese.

The American reporters were more likely to explain the killings by making personal, internal attributions. For example, American reporters emphasized the murderers' personality traits, such as the graduate student's "bad temper" and the postal worker's "history of being mentally unstable."

In contrast, the Chinese reporters emphasized situational factors, such as the fact that the postal worker had recently been fired from his job and the fact that the graduate student had failed to receive an academic award. The Chinese reporters also cited social pressures and problems in U.S. society to account for the actions of the killers.

Clearly, then, how we account for our successes and failures, as well as how we account for the actions of others, is yet another example of how human behavior is influenced by cultural conditioning.

Haughtiness invites ruin; humility receives benefits.

—CHINESE PROVERB

Table 1.1

Common Attributional Biases and Explanatory Patterns

Bias	Description
Fundamental attribution error	We tend to explain the behavior of other people by attributing their behavior to internal, personal characteristics, while underestimating or ignoring the effects of external, situational factors. Pattern is reversed when accounting for our own behavior.
Blaming the victim	We tend to blame the victims of misfortune for causing their own misfortune or for not taking steps to prevent or avoid it. Partly due to the <i>just-world hypothesis</i> .
Hindsight bias	After an event has occurred, we tend to overestimate the extent to which we could have foreseen or predicted the outcome.
Self-serving bias	We have a tendency to take credit for our successes by attributing them to internal, personal causes, along with a tendency to distance ourselves from our failures by attributing them to external, situational causes. Self-serving bias is more common in individualistic cultures.
Self-effacing (or modesty) bias	We tend to blame ourselves for our failures, attributing them to internal, personal causes, while downplaying our successes by attributing them to external, situational causes. Self-effacing bias is more common in collectivistic cultures.

The Social Psychology of Attitudes

Key Theme

- An attitude is a learned tendency to evaluate objects, people, or issues in a particular way.

Key Questions

- What are the three components of an attitude?
- Under what conditions are attitudes most likely to determine behavior?
- What is cognitive dissonance?

Should high school graduation requirements include a class on basic sex education, birth control methods, and safe sex? Should there be a compulsory military or community service requirement for all young adults? Should there be national health care coverage for all U.S. citizens? Should affordable, high-quality day care centers be a national priority? Should affordable, high-quality elder care centers be a national priority?

On these and many other subjects, you've probably formed an attitude. Psychologists formally define an **attitude** as a learned tendency to evaluate some object, person, or issue in a particular way. Attitudes are typically positive or negative, but they can also be *ambivalent*, as when you have mixed feelings about an issue or person.

As shown in Figure 1.1, attitudes can include three components. First, an attitude may have a *cognitive component*: your thoughts and conclusions about a given topic or object. For example, one of our colleagues, Aaron, is a staunch environmentalist. On more than one occasion, Aaron has said, "In my opinion, cars and trucks need to be much more fuel-efficient so that we can reduce or eliminate air pollution in our cities." Second, an attitude may have an emotional or *affective component*, as when Aaron starts ranting about drivers he sees on the highway: "It makes me furious to see people driving those huge SUVs to work, especially when they don't even have passengers!" Finally, an attitude may have a *behavioral component*, in which attitudes are

attitude

A learned tendency to evaluate some object, person, or issue in a particular way; such evaluations may be positive, negative, or ambivalent.

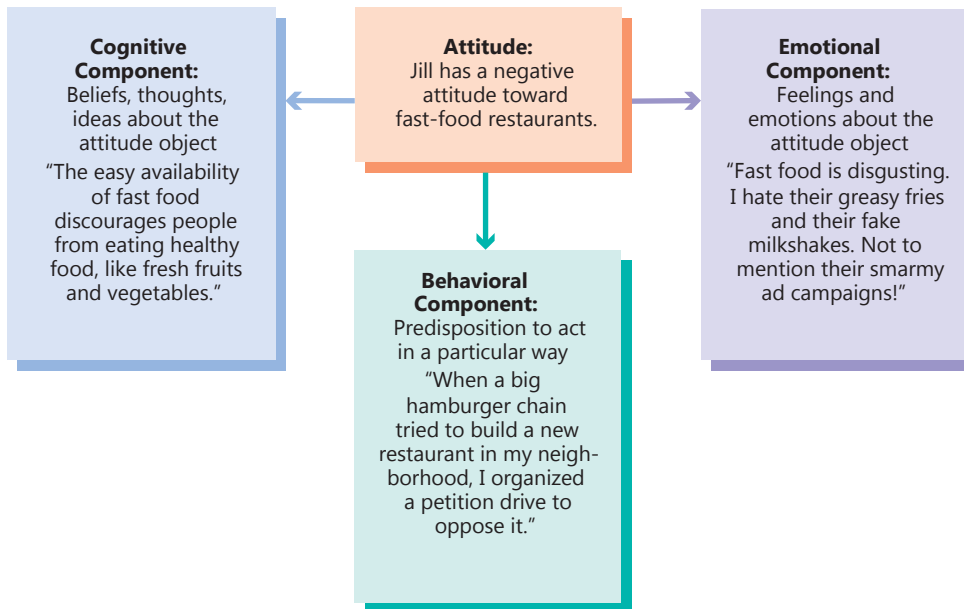


Figure 1.1 The Components of Attitudes An attitude is a positive or negative evaluation of an object, person, or idea. An attitude may have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components.

reflected in action. In Aaron's case, he bought a hybrid gasoline/electric car that gets 60 miles to the gallon, even in the city. Even so, he frequently rides his bicycle to campus rather than drive.

The Effect of Attitudes on Behavior

Intuitively, you probably assume that your attitudes tend to guide your behavior. But social psychologists have consistently found that people don't always act in accordance with their attitudes. For example, you might disapprove of cheating, yet find yourself peeking at a classmate's exam paper when the opportunity presents itself. Or you might strongly favor a certain political candidate, yet not vote on election day.

When are your attitudes likely to influence or determine your behavior? Social psychologists have found that you're most likely to behave in accordance with your attitudes when:

- You anticipate a favorable outcome or response from others for behaving that way.
- Your attitudes are extreme or are frequently expressed.
- Your attitudes have been formed through direct experience.
- You are very knowledgeable about the subject.
- You have a vested interest in the subject and personally stand to gain or lose something on a specific issue.

Clearly, your attitudes do influence your behavior in many instances. When you feel strongly about an issue, have a personal stake in the issue, and anticipate a positive outcome in a particular situation, your attitudes will influence your behavior. Now, consider the opposite question: Can your behavior influence your attitudes?

The Effect of Behavior on Attitudes

Fried Grasshoppers for Lunch?!

Suppose you have volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment. At the lab, a friendly experimenter asks you to indicate your degree of preference for a variety of foods, including fried grasshoppers, which you rank pretty low on the list. During the experiment, the experimenter instructs you to eat some fried grasshoppers. You

Attitudes and Behavior These Greenpeace activists have set up a symbolic wind turbine in front of the Castle Peak coal power station in Hong Kong. They are demonstrating their commitment to renewable energy and their opposition to coal plants in Asia that contribute to global warming. People who hold strong opinions and express them frequently, like these Greenpeace activists, are most likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes.



Fried Grasshoppers: Tasty or Disgusting? Most Americans do not rate fried grasshoppers as one of their favorite foods. Suppose you agreed to eat a handful of grasshoppers after being asked to do so by a rude, unfriendly experimenter. Do you think your attitude toward fried grasshoppers would improve more than a person who ate grasshoppers after being asked to do so by a friendly, polite experimenter? Why or why not?



manage to swallow three of the crispy critters. At the end of the experiment, your attitudes toward grasshoppers as a food source are surveyed again.

Later in the day, you talk to a friend who also participated in the experiment. You mention how friendly and polite you thought the experimenter was. But your friend had a different experience. He thought the experimenter was an arrogant, rude jerk.

Here's the critical question: Whose attitude toward eating fried grasshoppers is more likely to change in a positive direction? Given that you interacted with a friendly experimenter, most people assume that *your* feelings about fried grasshoppers are more likely to have improved than your friend's attitude. In fact, it is your friend—who encountered the obnoxious experimenter—who is much more likely to hold a more positive attitude toward eating fried grasshoppers than you.

At first glance, this finding seems to go against the grain of common sense. So how can we explain this outcome? The fried grasshoppers story represents the basic design of a classic experiment by social psychologist **Philip Zimbardo** and his colleagues (1965). Zimbardo's experiment and other similar ones underscore the power of cognitive dissonance. **Cognitive dissonance** is an unpleasant state of psychological tension (*dissonance*) that occurs when there's an inconsistency between two thoughts or perceptions (*cognitions*). This state of dissonance is so unpleasant that we are strongly motivated to reduce it.

Cognitive dissonance commonly occurs in situations in which you become uncomfortably aware that your behavior and your attitudes are in conflict. In these situations, you are simultaneously holding two conflicting cognitions: your original attitude versus the realization your behavior contradicts that attitude. If you can easily rationalize your behavior to make it consistent with your attitude, then any dissonance you might experience can be quickly and easily resolved. But when your behavior *cannot* be easily justified, how can you resolve the contradiction and eliminate the unpleasant state of dissonance? Since you can't go back and change the behavior, *you change your attitude to make it consistent with your behavior.*

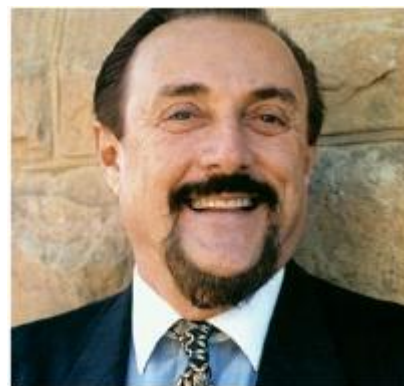
Let's take another look at the results of the grasshopper study, this time from the perspective of cognitive dissonance theory. Your attitude toward eating grasshoppers did *not* change, because you could easily rationalize the conflict between your attitude ("Eating grasshoppers is disgusting") and your behavior (eating three grasshoppers). You probably justified your behavior by saying something like, "I ate the grasshoppers because the experimenter was such a nice guy and I wanted to help him out."

However, your friend, who encountered the rude experimenter, can't use that rationalization to explain the contradiction between disliking grasshoppers and voluntarily eating them. Thus, he experiences an uncomfortable state of cognitive dissonance. Since he can't go back and change his behavior, he is left with the only part of the equation that can be changed—his attitude (see Figure 1.2). "You know, eating those grasshoppers wasn't *that* bad," your friend comments. "In fact, they were kind of crunchy." Notice how his change in attitude reduces the dissonance between his previous attitude and his behavior.

Attitude change due to cognitive dissonance is quite common in everyday life. For example, consider the person who impulsively buys a new leather coat that she really can't afford. "It was too good a bargain to pass up," she rationalizes.

Social Psychologist Phil Zimbardo (b. 1933)

Zimbardo grew up in an immigrant family in a poor neighborhood in the South Bronx, an experience that sensitized him to the power of situational influences and the destructive nature of stereotypes and prejudice (Zimbardo, 2005, 2007). Much of Zimbardo's research has investigated "the subtle but pervasive power of situations to influence human behavior." Zimbardo's research has ranged from attitude change to shyness, prison reform, and the psychology of evil. As Zimbardo observes, "The joy of being a psychologist is that almost everything in life is psychology, or should be, or could be. One can't live mindfully without being enmeshed in the psychological processes that are around us." Later we'll encounter the controversial experiment for which Zimbardo is most famous—the Stanford Prison Experiment.



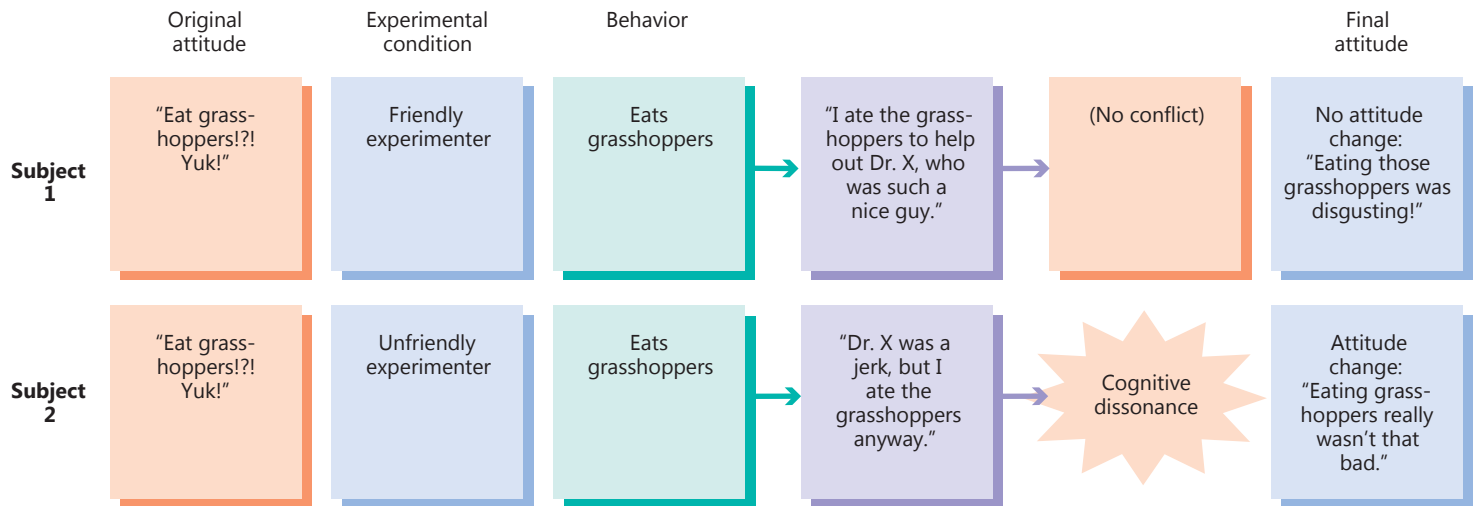


Figure 1.2 How Cognitive Dissonance Leads to Attitude Change When your behavior conflicts with your attitudes, an uncomfortable state of tension is produced. However, if you can rationalize or explain your behavior, the conflict (and the tension) is eliminated or avoided. If you *can't* explain your behavior, you may change your attitude so that it is in harmony with your behavior.

Cognitive dissonance can also change the strength of an attitude to make it consistent with some behavior that has already been performed. For example, people tend to be much more favorably inclined toward a given political candidate *after* they have voted for him or her than just before.

A similar example of cognitive dissonance in action involves choosing between two basically equal alternatives, especially if the decision is important and difficult to undo. Suppose you had to choose between two colleges, two houses, or two cars. Each choice has desirable and undesirable features, creating dissonance. But once you actually make the choice, you immediately bring your attitudes more closely into line with your commitment, reducing cognitive dissonance. In other words, *after* you make the choice, you emphasize the negative features of the choice you've rejected, which is commonly called a "sour grapes" rationalization. You also emphasize the positive features of the choice to which you have committed yourself—a "sweet lemons" rationalization.

Understanding Prejudice

Key Theme

- **Prejudice refers to a negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group, while stereotypes are clusters of characteristics that are attributed to people who belong to specific social categories.**

Key Questions

- **What is the function of stereotypes, and how do they relate to prejudice?**
- **What are in-groups and out-groups, and how do they influence social judgments?**
- **What is ethnocentrism?**

In this section, you'll see how person perception, attribution, and attitudes come together in explaining **prejudice**—a negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group.

Prejudice is ultimately based on the exaggerated notion that members of other social groups are very different from members of our own social group. So as you read this discussion, it's important for you to keep two well-established points in mind. First, *racial and ethnic groups are far more alike than they are different*. And second, any differences that may exist *between* members of different racial and ethnic groups are far smaller than differences *among* various members of the same group.

cognitive dissonance

An unpleasant state of psychological tension or arousal (dissonance) that occurs when two thoughts or perceptions (cognitions) are inconsistent; typically results from the awareness that attitudes and behavior are in conflict.

prejudice

A negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group.



"The first six are for bullets.
This one's for lip balm."

Overcoming and Combating Prejudice

The self-described "son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas," Barack Obama seemed an unlikely presidential candidate. Obama's ability to build a political coalition among people of different racial, ethnic, economic, and age groups led to his winning the White House. In a speech on racial politics in the United States, Obama declared, "I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together—unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction—towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren."



From Stereotypes to Prejudice: In-Groups and Out-Groups

As we noted earlier, using social categories to organize information about other people seems to be a natural cognitive tendency. Many social categories can be defined by relatively objective characteristics, such as age, language, religion, and skin color. A specific kind of social category is a **stereotype**—a cluster of characteristics that are attributed to members of a specific social group or category. Stereotypes are based on the assumption that people have certain characteristics *because* of their membership in a particular group.

Stereotypes typically include qualities that are unrelated to the objective criteria that define a given category.

For example, we can objectively sort people into different categories by age. But our stereotypes for different age groups may include qualities that have little or nothing to do with "number of years since birth." Associations of "impulsive and irresponsible" with teenagers, "forgetful and incompetent" with elderly people, and "boring and conservative" with middle-aged adults are examples of associating unrelated qualities with age groups—that is, stereotyping.

Like our use of other social categories, our tendency to stereotype social groups seems to be a natural cognitive process. Stereotypes simplify social information so that we can sort out, process, and remember information about other people more easily. But like other mental shortcuts, relying on stereotypes can cause problems. Attributing a stereotypic cause for an outcome or event can blind us to the true causes of events.

For example, a parent who assumes that a girl's poor computer skills are due to her gender rather than a lack of instruction might never encourage her to overcome her problem.

Research by psychologist Claude Steele has demonstrated another detrimental effect of stereotypes, particularly derogatory stereotypes, which he calls *stereotype threat*. Simply being aware that your social group is associated with a particular stereotype can negatively impact your performance on tests or tasks that measure abilities that are thought to be associated with that stereotype. For example, even mathematically gifted women scored lower on a difficult math test when told that the test tended to produce gender differences than when told that the test did not produce gender differences.

Once they are formed, stereotypes are hard to shake. One reason for this is that stereotypes are not always completely false. Sometimes they have a kernel of truth, making them easy to confirm, especially when you see only what you expect to see. Even so, there's a vast difference between a kernel and the cornfield. When stereotypic beliefs become expectations that are applied to *all* members of a given group, stereotypes can be both misleading and damaging.

Consider the stereotype that men are more assertive than women and that women are more nurturant than men. This stereotype does have evidence to support it, but only in terms of the *average* difference between men and women. Thus, it would be inappropriate to automatically apply this stereotype to every individual man and woman. Doing so would be an example of prejudice.

Equally important, when confronted by evidence that contradicts a stereotype, people tend to discount that information in a variety of ways.

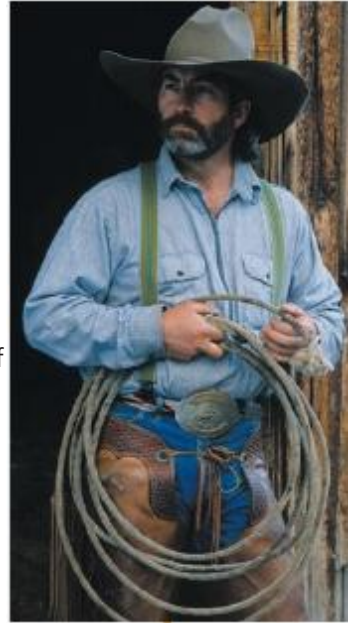
For example, suppose you are firmly convinced that all "Zeegs" are dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy. One day you absentmindedly leave your wallet on a store's checkout counter. As you walk into the parking lot, you hear a voice calling, "Hey, you forgot your wallet!" It's a Zeeg running after you and waving your wallet in the air. "I was behind you in line and thought you might need this," the Zeeg smiles, handing you your wallet.

Will this experience change your stereotype of Zeegs as dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy? Probably not. It's more likely that you'll conclude that this individual

Zeeg is an *exception* to the stereotype. If you run into more than one honest Zeeg, you may create a mental subgroup for individuals who belong to the larger group but depart from the stereotype in some way. By creating a subcategory of “honest, hardworking Zeegs,” you can still maintain your more general stereotype of Zeegs as dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy.

Creating exceptions allows people to maintain stereotypes in the face of contradictory evidence. Typical of this exception-that-proves-the-rule approach is the person who says, “Hey, I’m not prejudiced! In fact, I’ve got a couple of good friends who are Zeegs.”

Stereotypes are closely related to another tendency in person perception. People have a strong tendency to perceive others in terms of two very basic social categories: “us” and “them.” More precisely, the **in-group** (“us”) refers to the group or groups to which we belong, and **out-groups** (“them”) refer to groups of which we are not a member. In-groups and out-groups aren’t necessarily limited to racial, ethnic, or religious boundaries. Virtually any characteristic can be used to make in-group and out-group distinctions: Mac versus PC users, Cubs versus White Sox fans, Northsiders versus Southsiders, math majors versus English majors, and so forth.



The Power of Stereotypes American movies have made the image of the cowboy almost universally recognizable. What kinds of qualities are associated with the stereotype of the cowboy? How might that stereotype be an inaccurate portrayal of a person working on a cattle ranch today?

The Out-Group Homogeneity Effect

They’re All the Same to Me

Two important patterns characterize our views of in-groups versus out-groups. First, when we describe the members of our *in-group*, we typically see them as being quite varied, despite having enough features in common to belong to the same group. In other words, we notice the diversity within our own group.

Second, we tend to see members of the *out-group* as much more similar to one another, even in areas that have little to do with the criteria for group membership. This tendency is called the **out-group homogeneity effect**. (The word *homogeneity* means “similarity” or “uniformity.”)

For example, what qualities do you associate with the category of “engineering major”? If you’re *not* an engineering major, you’re likely to see engineering majors as a rather similar crew: male, logical, analytical, conservative, and so forth. However, if you *are* an engineering major, you’re much more likely to see your in-group as quite *heterogeneous*, or varied. You might even come up with several subgroups, such as studious engineering majors, party-animal engineering majors, and electrical engineering majors versus chemical engineering majors.

In-Group Bias

We’re Tactful—They’re Sneaky

In-group bias is our tendency to make favorable, positive attributions for behaviors by members of our in-group and unfavorable, negative attributions for behaviors by members of out-groups. We succeeded because we worked hard; they succeeded because they lucked out. We failed because of circumstances beyond our control; they failed because they’re stupid and incompetent. We’re thrifty; they’re stingy. And so on.

One form of in-group bias is called **ethnocentrism**—the belief that one’s culture or ethnic group is superior to others. You’re engaging in ethnocentrism when you use your culture or ethnic group as the yardstick by which you judge other cultures or ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, ethnocentric thinking contributes to the formation of negative stereotypes about other cultures whose customs differ from our own.

In combination, stereotypes and in-group/out-group bias form the *cognitive* basis for prejudicial attitudes. But, as with many attitudes, prejudice also has a strong *emotional* component. In the case of prejudice, the emotions are intensely negative—hatred, contempt, fear, loathing. *Behaviorally*, prejudice

stereotype

A cluster of characteristics that are associated with all members of a specific social group, often including qualities that are unrelated to the objective criteria that define the group.

in-group

A social group to which one belongs.

out-group

A social group to which one does not belong.

out-group homogeneity effect

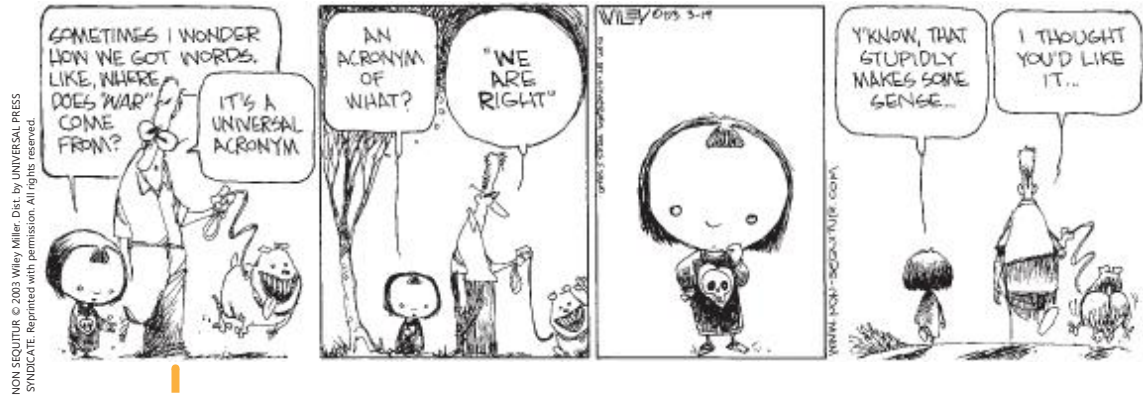
The tendency to see members of out-groups as very similar to one another.

in-group bias

The tendency to judge the behavior of in-group members favorably and out-group members unfavorably.

ethnocentrism

The belief that one’s own culture or ethnic group is superior to all others and the related tendency to use one’s own culture as a standard by which to judge other cultures.



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can be displayed in some form of *discrimination*—behaviors ranging from privately sneering at to physically attacking members of an out-group.

How can we account for the extreme emotions that often characterize prejudice against out-group members? One theory holds that prejudice and intergroup hostility increase when different groups are competing for scarce resources, whether jobs, acreage, oil, water, or political power. Prejudice and intergroup hostility are also likely to increase during times of social change.

However, prejudice often exists in the absence of direct competition for resources, changing social conditions, or even contact with members of a particular out-group. What accounts for prejudice in such situations? Research by psychologist Victoria Esses and her colleagues (1993, 2005) has demonstrated that people are often prejudiced against groups that are perceived as threatening important in-group norms and values. For example, a person might be extremely prejudiced against gays and lesbians because he feels that they threaten his in-group's cherished values, such as a strong commitment to traditional sex roles and family structure.

Overcoming Prejudice

Key Theme

- Prejudice can be overcome when rival groups cooperate to achieve a common goal.

Key Questions

- How has this finding been applied in the educational system?
- What other conditions are essential to reducing tension between groups?
- How can prejudice be overcome at the individual level?

How can prejudice be combated at the group level? A classic series of studies headed by psychologist **Muzafer Sherif** helped clarify the conditions that produce intergroup conflict and harmony. Sherif and his colleagues (1961) studied a group of 11-year-old boys in an unlikely setting for a scientific experiment: a summer camp located at Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma.

The Robbers Cave Experiment

Pretending to be camp counselors and staff, the researchers observed the boys' behavior under carefully orchestrated conditions. The boys were randomly assigned to two groups. The groups arrived at camp in separate buses and were headquartered in different areas of the camp. One group of boys dubbed themselves the Eagles, the other the Rattlers. After a week of separation, the researchers arranged for the groups to meet in a series of competitive games. A fierce rivalry quickly developed, demonstrating the ease with which mutually hostile groups could be created.



The rivalry became increasingly bitter. The Eagles burned the Rattlers' flag. In response, the Rattlers trashed the Eagles' cabin. Somewhat alarmed, the researchers tried to diminish the hostility by bringing the two groups together under peaceful circumstances and on an equal basis—having them go to the movies together, eat in the same dining hall, and so forth. But contact alone did not mitigate the hostility. If anything, these situations only served as opportunities for the rival groups to berate and attack each other. For example, when the Rattlers and Eagles ate together in the same dining hall, a massive food fight erupted!

How could harmony between the groups be established? Sherif and his fellow researchers created a series of situations in which the two groups would need to *cooperate to achieve a common goal*. For example, the researchers secretly sabotaged the water supply. Working together, the Eagles and the Rattlers managed to fix it. On another occasion, the researchers sabotaged a truck that was to bring food to the campers. The hungry campers overcame their differences to join forces and restart the truck. After a series of such joint efforts, the rivalry diminished and the groups became good friends.

Sherif successfully demonstrated how hostility between groups could be created and, more important, how that hostility could be overcome. However, other researchers questioned whether these results would apply to other intergroup situations. After all, these boys were very homogeneous: white, middle class, Protestant, and carefully selected for being healthy and well-adjusted. In other words, there were no *intrinsic* differences between the Rattlers and the Eagles; there was only the artificial distinction created by the researchers.

The Jigsaw Classroom

Promoting Cooperation

Social psychologist Elliot Aronson (1990, 1992) tried adapting the results of the Robbers Cave experiments to a very different group situation—a newly integrated elementary school. Realizing that mere contact between black and white children was not dissipating tension and prejudice, Aronson reasoned that perhaps the competitive schoolroom atmosphere was partly at fault. Perhaps tension between racial groups might decrease if cooperation replaced competition.

Aronson and his colleagues tried a teaching technique that stressed cooperative, rather than competitive, learning situations. Dubbed the *jigsaw classroom technique*, this approach brought together students in small, ethnically diverse groups to work on a mutual project. Like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each student had a unique contribution to make toward the success of the group. Each student became an expert on one aspect of the overall project and had to teach it to the other members of the group. Thus, interdependence and cooperation replaced competition.

Creating Conflict Between Groups

Psychologist Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues demonstrated how easily hostility and distrust could be created between two groups. Competitive situations, like this tug-of-war, increased tension between the Rattlers and the Eagles.

Overcoming Group Conflict To decrease hostility between the Rattlers and the Eagles at Robbers Cave, the researchers created situations that required the joint efforts of both groups to achieve a common goal, such as fixing the water supply. These cooperative tasks helped the boys recognize their common interests and become friends.



The results? Children in the jigsaw classrooms benefited. They had higher self-esteem and a greater liking for children in other ethnic groups than did children in traditional classrooms. They also demonstrated a lessening of negative stereotypes and prejudice and a reduction in intergroup hostility).

As Aronson (1999) points out, "Cooperation changes our tendency to categorize the out-group from 'those people' to 'us people.'"

Conformity

Following the Crowd

Key Theme

- **Social influence involves the study of how behavior is influenced by other people and by the social environment.**

Key Questions

- **What factors influence the degree to which people will conform?**
- **Why do people conform?**
- **How does culture affect conformity?**

As we noted earlier, *social influence* is the psychological study of how our behavior is influenced by the social environment and other people. For example, if you typically contribute to class discussions, you've probably felt the power of social influence in classes where nobody else said a word. No doubt you found yourself feeling at least slightly uncomfortable every time you ventured a comment or question.

If you changed your behavior to mesh with that of your classmates, you demonstrated conformity. **Conformity** occurs when you adjust your opinions, judgment, or behavior so that it matches other people, or the norms of a social group or situation.

There's no question that all of us conform to group or situational norms to some degree. The more critical issue is *how far* we'll go to adjust our perceptions and opinions so that they're in sync with the majority opinion—an issue that intrigued social psychologist **Solomon Asch**. Asch (1951) posed a straightforward question: Would people still conform to the group if the group opinion was clearly wrong?

To study this question experimentally, Asch (1955) chose a simple, objective task with an obvious answer (Figure 1.3). A group of people sat at a table and looked at a series of cards. On one side of each card was a standard line. On the other side were three comparison lines. All each person had to do was publicly indicate which comparison line was the same length as the standard line.

Asch's experiment had a hidden catch. All the people sitting around the table were actually in cahoots with the experimenter, except for one—the real subject. Had you been the real subject in Asch's (1956) experiment, here's what you would have experienced. The first card is shown, and the five people ahead of you respond, one at a time, with the obvious answer: "Line B." Now it's your turn, and you respond the same. The second card is put up. Again, the answer is obvious and the group is unanimous. So far, so good.

Then the third card is shown, and the correct answer is just as obvious: Line C. But the first person confidently says, "Line A." And so does everyone else, one by one. Now it's your turn. To you it's clear that the correct answer is Line C. But the five people ahead of you have already publicly chosen Line A. How do you respond? You hesitate. Do you go with the flow or with what you know?

The real subject was faced with the uncomfortable situation of disagreeing with a unanimous majority on 12 of 18 trials in Asch's experiment. Notice, there was *no* direct pressure to conform—just the implicit, unspoken pressure of answering differently from the rest of the group.



Life in society requires consensus as an indispensable condition. But consensus, to be productive, requires that each individual contribute independently out of his experience and insight. When consensus comes under the dominance of conformity, the social process is polluted and the individual at the same time surrenders the powers on which his functioning as a feeling and thinking being depends.

—SOLOMON ASCH (1955)

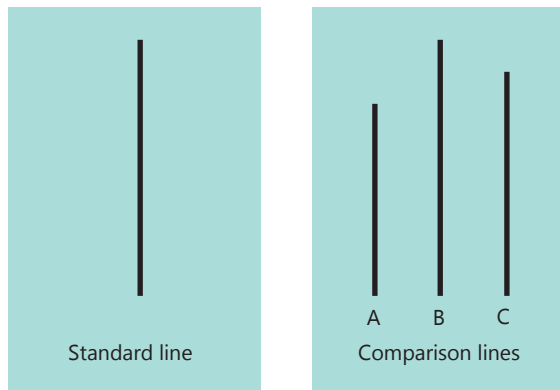


Figure 1.3 The Line Judgment Task Used in the Asch Conformity Studies In Asch's classic studies on conformity, subjects were asked to pick the comparison line that matched the standard line.

Source: Asch (1957).

Over one hundred subjects experienced Asch's experimental dilemma. Not surprisingly, participants differed in their degree of conformity. Nonetheless, the majority of Asch's subjects (76 percent) conformed with the group judgment on at least one of the critical trials. When the data for all subjects were combined, the subjects followed the majority and gave the wrong answer on 37 percent of the critical trials (Asch, 1955, 1957). In comparison, a control group of subjects who responded alone instead of in a group accurately chose the matching line 99 percent of the time.

Although the majority opinion clearly exerted a strong influence, it's also important to stress the flip side of Asch's results. On almost two-thirds of the trials in which the majority named the wrong line, the subjects stuck to their guns and gave the correct answer, despite being in the minority.

Factors Influencing Conformity

The basic model of Asch's classic experiment has been used in hundreds of studies exploring the dynamics of conformity. Why do we sometimes find ourselves conforming to the larger group? There are two basic reasons.

First is our desire to be liked and accepted by the group, which is referred to as **normative social influence**. If you've ever been ridiculed and rejected for going against the grain of a unanimous group, you've had firsthand experience with the pressure of normative social influence. Second is our desire to be right. When we're uncertain or doubt our own judgment, we may look to the group as a source of accurate information, which is called **informational social influence**.

Asch and other researchers identified several conditions that promote conformity, which are summarized in Table 1.2. But Asch also discovered that conformity *decreased* under certain circumstances. For example, having an ally seemed to counteract

conformity

Adjusting your opinions, judgments, or behavior so that it matches the opinions, judgments, or behavior of other people, or the norms of a social group or situation.

normative social influence

Behavior that is motivated by the desire to gain social acceptance and approval.

informational social influence

Behavior that is motivated by the desire to be correct.

Adolescents and Conformity Conformity to group norms peaks in early adolescence, as the similar hairstyles and clothing of these friends show. Think back to your own adolescence. Do you remember how important it was to you to fit in with other adolescents, especially those in your peer group?

Table 1.2

Factors That Promote Conformity

You're more likely to conform to group norms when:

- You are facing a unanimous group of at least four or five people
- You must give your response in front of the group
- You have not already expressed commitment to a different idea or opinion
- You find the task is ambiguous or difficult
- You doubt your abilities or knowledge in the situation
- You are strongly attracted to a group and want to be a member of it

Sources: Asch (1955); Campbell & Fairey (1989); Deutsch & Gerard (1955); Gerard & others (1968); Tanford & Penrod (1984).



obedience

The performance of a behavior in response to a direct command.

the social influence of the majority. Subjects were more likely to go against the majority view if just one other participant did so. Other researchers have found that any dissent increases resistance to the majority opinion, even if the other person's dissenting opinion is wrong. Conformity also lessens even if the other dissenter's competence is questionable, as in the case of a dissenter who wore thick glasses and complained that he could not see the lines very well.

Culture and Conformity

Do patterns of conformity differ in other cultures? British psychologists Rod Bond and Peter Smith (1996) found in a wide-ranging meta-analysis that conformity is generally higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. Because individualistic cultures tend to emphasize independence, self-expression, and standing out from the crowd, the whole notion of conformity tends to carry a negative connotation.

In collectivistic cultures, however, publicly conforming while privately disagreeing tends to be regarded as socially appropriate tact or sensitivity. Publicly challenging the judgments of others, particularly the judgment of members of one's in-group, would be considered rude, tactless, and insensitive to the feelings of others. Thus, conformity in collectivistic cultures does not seem to carry the same negative connotation that it does in individualistic cultures.

Obedience

Just Following Orders

Key Theme

- **Stanley Milgram conducted a series of controversial studies on obedience, which is behavior performed in direct response to the orders of an authority.**

Key Questions

- **What were the results of Milgram's original obedience experiments?**
- **What experimental factors were shown to increase the level of obedience?**
- **What experimental factors were shown to decrease the level of obedience?**

Stanley Milgram was one of the most creative and influential researchers that social psychology has known. Sadly, Milgram died of a heart attack at the age of 51. Though Milgram made many contributions to social psychology, he is best known for his experimental investigations of obedience. **Obedience** is the performance of a behavior in response to a direct command. Typically, an authority figure or a person of higher status, such as a teacher or supervisor, gives the command.

Milgram was intrigued by Asch's discovery of how easily people could be swayed by group pressure. But Milgram wanted to investigate behavior that had greater personal significance than simply judging line lengths on a card. Thus, Milgram posed what he saw as the most critical question: Could a person be pressured by others into committing an immoral act, some action that violated his or her own conscience, such as hurting a stranger? In his efforts to answer that question, Milgram embarked on one of the most systematic and controversial investigations in the history of psychology: to determine how and why people obey the destructive dictates of an authority figure.

Social Psychologist Stanley Milgram (1933–1984) Milgram is best known for his obedience studies, but his creative research skills went far beyond the topic of obedience. To study the power of social norms, for example, Milgram sent his students out into New York City to intrude into waiting lines or ask subway passengers to give up their seats. Milgram often capitalized on the "texture of everyday life" to "examine the way in which the social world impinges on individual action and experience".



Milgram's Original Obedience Experiment

Milgram was only 28 years old when he conducted his first obedience experiments. At the time, he was a new faculty member at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. He recruited participants through direct-mail solicitations and ads in the local paper. Collectively, Milgram's subjects represented a wide range of occupational and educational backgrounds. Postal workers, high school teachers, white-collar workers, engineers, and laborers participated in the study.

Outwardly, it appeared that two subjects showed up at Yale University to participate in the psychology experiment, but the second subject was actually an accomplice working with Milgram. The role of the experimenter, complete with white lab coat, was played by a high school biology teacher. When both subjects arrived, the experimenter greeted them and gave them a plausible explanation of the study's purpose: to examine the effects of punishment on learning.

Both subjects drew slips of paper to determine who would be the "teacher" and who the "learner." However, the drawing was rigged so that the real subject was always the teacher and the accomplice was always the learner. The learner was actually a mild-mannered, 47-year-old accountant who had been carefully rehearsed for his part in the drama. Assigned to the role of the teacher, the real subject would be responsible for "punishing" the learner's mistakes by administering electric shocks.

Immediately after the drawing, the teacher and learner were taken to another room, where the learner was strapped into an "electric chair." The teacher was then taken to a different room, from which he could hear but not see the learner. Speaking into a microphone, the teacher tested the learner on a simple word-pair memory task. In the other room, the learner pressed one of four switches to indicate with which alternative the word had previously been paired. The learner's response was registered in an answer box positioned on top of the "shock generator" in front of the teacher. Each time the learner answered incorrectly, the teacher was to deliver an electric shock.

Just in case there was any lingering doubt in the teacher's mind about the legitimacy of the shock generator, the *teacher* was given a sample jolt using the switch marked 45 volts. In fact, this sample shock was the only real shock given during the course of the staged experiment.

The first time the learner answered incorrectly, the teacher was to deliver an electric shock at the 15-volt level. With each subsequent error, the teacher was told to progress to the next level on the shock generator. The teacher was also told to announce the voltage level to the learner before delivering the shock.

At predetermined voltage levels, the learner vocalized first his discomfort, then his pain, and, finally, agonized screams. Some of the learner's vocalizations at the different voltage levels are shown in Table 1.3 on the next page. After 330 volts, the learner's script called for him to fall silent. If the teacher protested that he wished to stop or that he was worried about the learner's safety, the experimenter would say, "The experiment requires that you continue" or "You have no other choice, you *must* continue."

According to the script, the experiment would be halted when the teacher-subject refused to obey the experimenter's orders to continue. Alternatively, if the teacher-subject obeyed the experimenter, the experiment would be halted once the teacher had progressed all the way to the maximum shock level of 450 volts.

Either way, after the experiment the teacher was interviewed and it was explained that the learner had not actually received dangerous electric shocks. To underscore this point, a "friendly reconciliation" was arranged between the teacher and the learner, and the true purpose of the study was explained to the subject.



The "Electric Chair" With the help of the real subject, who had been assigned to the role of "teacher," the experimenter straps the "learner" into the electric chair. Unbeknownst to the real subject, the learner was actually a 47-year-old accountant who had been carefully rehearsed for his part in the experimental deception. The experimenter told both subjects, "Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage."

Milgram's "Shock Generator" Machine

A young Stanley Milgram sits next to his "shock generator." Milgram went to great lengths to make the shock generator look as authentic as possible. The front panel of the bogus shock generator had been engraved by professional industrial engravers. Whenever the teacher pressed a shock switch, the red light above the switch went on, a buzzing and clicking sound was heard, and the needle on the voltage meter swung to the right. Very convincing details. Do you think you would have been fooled into believing that this was a real shock generator?



This table shows examples of the learner's protests at different voltage levels. If the teacher administered shocks beyond the 330-volt level, the learner's agonized screams were replaced with an ominous silence.

Table 1.3

The Learner's Schedule of Protests in Milgram's Obedience Experiment

120 volts □ Ugh! Hey, *this* really hurts.

150 volts □ Ugh!!! Experimenter! That's all. Get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart's starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart's starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out.

210 volts □ Ugh!! Experimenter! Get me out of here. I've had enough. I *won't* be in the experiment any more.

270 volts □ (*Agonized scream.*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out. Do you hear? Let me out of here.

300 volts □ (*Agonized scream.*) I absolutely refuse to answer any more. Get me out of here. You can't hold me here. Get me out. Get me out of here.

315 volts □ (*Intensely agonized scream.*) I told you I refuse to answer. I'm no longer part of this experiment.

330 volts □ (*Intense and prolonged agonized scream.*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart's bothering me. Let me out, I tell you. (*Hysterically*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. You have no right to hold me here. Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! Let me out!

The Results of Milgram's Original Experiment

Can you predict how Milgram's subjects behaved? Of the 40 subjects, how many obeyed the experimenter and went to the full 450-volt level? On a more personal level, how do you think *you* would have behaved had you been one of Milgram's subjects?

Milgram himself asked psychiatrists, college students, and middle-class adults to predict how subjects would behave. All three groups predicted that *all* of Milgram's subjects would refuse to obey at some point. They predicted that most subjects would refuse at the 150-volt level, the point at which the learner first protested. They also believed that only a few rare individuals would go as far as the 300-volt level. Finally, *none* of those surveyed thought that any of Milgram's subjects would go to the full 450 volts.

As it turned out, they were all wrong. *Two-thirds of Milgram's subjects—26 of the 40—were fully compliant and went to the full 450-volt level.* And of those who defied the experimenter, *not one stopped before the 300-volt level.* Table 1.4 shows the results of Milgram's original obedience study.

Surprised? Milgram himself was stunned by the results, never expecting that the majority of subjects would administer the maximum voltage. Were his results a fluke? Did Milgram inadvertently assemble a sadistic group of New Haven residents who were all too willing to inflict extremely painful, even life-threatening, shocks on a complete stranger?

The answer to both these questions is no. Milgram's obedience study has been repeated many times in the United States and other countries. And, in fact, Milgram replicated his own study on numerous occasions, using variations of his basic experimental procedure.

In one replication, for instance, Milgram's subjects were 40 women. Were female subjects any less likely to inflict pain on a stranger? Not at all. The results were identical. Confirming Milgram's results since then, eight other studies also found no sex differences in obedience to an authority figure.

Perhaps Milgram's subjects saw through his elaborate experimental hoax, as some critics have suggested. Was it possible that the subjects did not believe that they were really harming the learner? Again, the answer seems to be no. Milgram's subjects seemed totally convinced that the situation was authentic. And they did not behave in a cold-blooded, unfeeling way. Far from it. As the experiment progressed, many subjects showed signs of extreme tension and conflict.

Table 1.4

The Results of Milgram's Original Study

Shock Level	Switch Labels and Voltage Levels	Number of Subjects Who Refused to Administer a Higher Voltage Level
	Slight Shock	
1	15	
2	30	
3	45	
4	60	
	Moderate Shock	
5	75	
6	90	
7	105	
8	120	
9	135	
10	150	
11	165	
12	180	
	Very Strong Shock	
13	195	
14	210	
15	225	
16	240	
	Intense Shock	
17	255	
18	270	
19	285	
20	300	
	Extreme Intensity Shock	
21	315	5
22	330	
23	345	4
24	360	2
	Danger: Severe Shock	
25	375	1
26	390	
27	405	1
28	420	
	XXX	
29	435	
30	450	26

Contrary to what psychiatrists, college students, and middle-class adults predicted, the majority of Milgram's subjects did not refuse to obey by the 150-volt level of shock. As this table shows, 14 of Milgram's 40 subjects (35 percent) refused to continue at some point after administering 300 volts to the learner. However, 26 of the 40 subjects (65 percent) remained obedient to the very end, administering the full 450 volts to the learner.

In describing the reaction of one subject, Milgram (1963) wrote, "I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse."

Making Sense of Milgram's Findings

Multiple Influences

Milgram, along with other researchers, identified several aspects of the experimental situation that had a strong impact on the subjects.

Here are some of the forces that influenced subjects to continue obeying the experimenter's orders:

- **A previously well-established mental framework to obey.** Having volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment, Milgram's subjects arrived at the lab with the mental expectation that they would obediently follow the directions of the person in charge—the experimenter. They also accepted compensation on their

The Aftereffects of Milgram's Study: Were Subjects Harmed?

Milgram's findings were disturbing. But some psychologists found his methods equally upsetting. For example, in one experimental variation, participants were ordered to physically hold the learner's hand on a "shock plate." Thirty percent obeyed. To psychologist Diana Baumrind (1964), it was unethical for Milgram to subject his participants to that level of emotional stress, humiliation, and loss of dignity. But Milgram (1964) countered that he had not set out to create stress in his subjects. It was his unanticipated *results*, not his *methods*, that disturbed people. Who would object to his experiment, he asked, "if everyone had broken off at 'slight shock' or at the first sign of the learner's discomfort?" Concerns were also expressed that participants would experience serious after-effects from the experiment. However, in a follow-up questionnaire, 84 percent of participants in Milgram's experiment indicated that they were "glad to have taken part in the experiment," and only about 1 percent regretted participating.



subjects were afraid that defying the experimenter's orders would make them appear arrogant, rude, disrespectful, or uncooperative.

- **The gradual, repetitive escalation of the task.** At the beginning of the experiment, the subject administered a very low level of shock—15 volts. Subjects could easily justify using such low levels of electric shock in the service of science. The shocks, like the learner's protests, escalated only gradually. Each additional shock was only 15 volts stronger than the preceding one.
- **The experimenter's behavior and reassurances.** Many subjects asked the experimenter who was responsible for what might happen to the learner. In every case, the teacher was reassured that the *experimenter* was responsible for the learner's well-being. Thus, the subjects could believe that they were not responsible for the consequences of their actions. They could tell themselves that their behavior must be appropriate if the experimenter approved of it.
- **The physical and psychological separation from the learner.** Several "buffers" distanced the subject from the pain that he was inflicting on the learner. First, the learner was in a separate room and not visible. Only his voice could be heard. Second, punishment was depersonalized: The subject simply pushed a switch on the shock generator. Finally, the learner never appealed directly to the teacher to stop shocking him. The learner's pleas were always directed toward the *experimenter*, as in "Experimenter! Get me out of here!" Undoubtedly, this contributed to the subject's sense that the experimenter, rather than the subject, was ultimately in control of the situation, including the teacher's behavior. Similarly, when teachers were told to personally hold the learner's hand down on a "shock plate," obedience dropped to 30 percent. Overall, Milgram demonstrated that the rate of obedience rose or fell depending upon the situational variables the subjects experienced.

The individual who is commanded by a legitimate authority ordinarily obeys. Obedience comes easily and often. It is a ubiquitous and indispensable feature of social life.

—STANLEY MILGRAM (1963)

Conditions That Undermine Obedience

Variations on a Theme

In a lengthy series of experiments, Milgram systematically varied the basic obedience paradigm. To give you some sense of the enormity of Milgram's undertaking, approximately 1,000 subjects, each tested individually, experienced some variation of Milgram's obedience experiment. Thus, Milgram's obedience research represents one of the largest and most integrated research programs in social psychology.

By varying his experiments, Milgram identified several conditions that decreased the likelihood of destructive obedience, which are summarized in Figure 1.4. For example, willingness to obey diminished sharply when the buffers that separated the teacher from the learner were lessened or removed, such as when both of them were put in the same room.

arrival, which may have increased their sense of having made a commitment to cooperate with the experimenter.

• **The situation, or context, in which the obedience occurred.** The subjects were familiar with the basic nature of scientific investigation, believed that scientific research was worthwhile, and were told that the goal of the experiment was to "advance the scientific understanding of learning and memory". All these factors predisposed the subjects to trust and respect the experimenter's authority.

Even when subjects protested, they were polite and respectful. Milgram suggested that

Experimental Variations

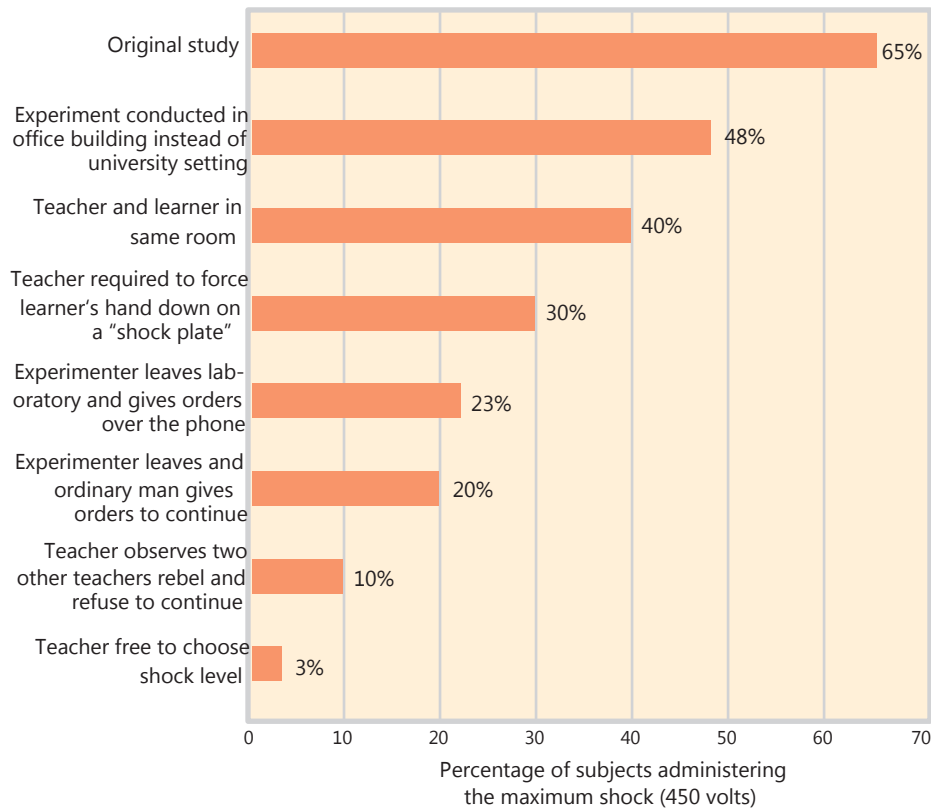


Figure 1.4 Factors That Decrease Destructive Obedience By systematically varying his basic experimental design, Milgram identified several factors that diminish the likelihood of destructive obedience. In this graph, you can see the percentage of subjects who administered the maximum shock in different experimental variations. For example, when Milgram's subjects observed what they thought were two other subjects disobeying the experimenter, the real subjects followed their lead 90 percent of the time and refused to continue.

If Milgram's findings seem to cast an unfavorable light on human nature, there are two reasons to take heart. First, when teachers were allowed to act as their own authority and freely choose the shock level, 95 percent of them did not venture beyond 150 volts—the first point at which the learner protested. Clearly, Milgram's subjects were not responding to their own aggressive or sadistic impulses, but rather to orders from an authority figure.

Second, Milgram found that people were more likely to muster up the courage to defy an authority when they saw others do so. When Milgram's subjects observed what they thought were two other subjects disobeying the experimenter, the real subjects followed their lead 90 percent of the time and refused to continue. Like the subjects in Asch's experiment, Milgram's subjects were more likely to stand by their convictions when they were not alone in expressing them.

Despite these encouraging notes, the overall results of Milgram's obedience research painted a bleak picture of human nature. And, more than 40 years after the publication of Milgram's research, the moral issues that his findings highlighted are still with us. Should military personnel be prosecuted for obeying orders to commit an immoral or illegal act? Who should be held responsible? We discuss a contemporary instance of destructive obedience in the Critical Thinking box, "Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Why Do Ordinary People Commit Evil Acts?" on the next page.

Asch, Milgram, and the Real World

Implications of the Classic Social Influence Studies

The scientific study of conformity and obedience has produced some important insights. The first is the degree to which our behavior is influenced by situational factors. Being at odds with the majority or with authority figures is very uncomfortable for most people—enough so that our judgment and perceptions can be distorted and we may act in ways that violate our conscience.

CRITICAL THINKING

Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Why Do Ordinary People Commit Evil Acts?

When the first Abu Ghraib photos appeared in 2004, Americans were shocked. The photos graphically depicted Iraqi prisoners being humiliated, abused, and beaten by U.S. military personnel at Abu Ghraib prison. In one photo, an Iraqi prisoner stood naked with feces smeared on his face and body. In another, naked prisoners were piled in a pyramid. Military guard dogs threatened and bit naked prisoners. A hooded prisoner stood on a box with wires dangling from his outstretched arms. Smiling American soldiers, both male and female, posed alongside the corpse of a beaten Iraqi prisoner, giving the thumbs-up sign for the camera.

In the international uproar that followed, U.S. political leaders and Defense Department officials scrambled, damage control at the top of their lists. “A few bad apples” was the official pronouncement—just isolated incidents of overzealous or sadistic soldiers run amok. The few “bad apples” were identified and arrested: nine members of an Army Reserve unit that was based in Cresaptown, Maryland.

Why would ordinary Americans mistreat people like that? How can normal people commit such cruel, immoral acts?

Unless we learn the dynamics of “why,” we will never be able to counteract the powerful forces that can transform ordinary people into evil perpetrators.

—PHILIP ZIMBARDO, 2004

What actually happened at Abu Ghraib?

At its peak population in early 2004, the Abu Ghraib prison complex, some 20 miles west of Baghdad, housed more than 6,000 Iraqi detainees. These were Iraqis who had been detained during



Would you have obeyed? “I was instructed by persons in higher rank to ‘stand there, hold this leash, look at the camera,’” Lynndie England (2005) said. Among those calling the shots was her then-lover, Corporal Charles Graner, the alleged ringleader who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his attacks on Iraqi detainees. Graner, England, and one other reservist were convicted of mistreatment and given prison sentences, while the other six reservists made plea deals. No officers were court-martialed or charged with any criminal offense, although some were fined, demoted, or relieved of their command.

the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. The detainees ranged from petty thieves and other criminals to armed insurgents. But also swept up in the detention were many Iraqi civilians who seemed guilty only of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The prison complex was short of food, water, and basic sanitary facilities, understaffed, and poorly supervised.

There had been numerous reports that prisoners were being mistreated at Abu Ghraib, including official complaints by the International Red Cross. However, most Americans had no knowledge of the prison conditions until late April 2004, when the photographs documenting shocking incidents of abuse were shown on national television and featured in the *New Yorker* magazine.

The worst incidents took place in a particular cell block that was controlled by military intelligence personnel rather than regular Army military police. This cell block held the prisoners who were thought to be most dangerous and who had been identified as potential “terrorists” or “insurgents”. The Army Reserve soldiers assigned to guard these prisoners were told that their role was to assist military intelligence by “loosening up” the prisoners for later interrogation.

What factors contributed to the events that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison?

Multiple elements combined to create the conditions for brutality, including *in-group versus out-group thinking*, *negative stereotypes*, *dehumanization*, and *prejudice*. The Iraqi prisoners were of a different culture, ethnic group, and religion than the prison guards, none of whom spoke Arabic. To the American prison guards, the Arab prisoners represented a despised, dangerous, and threatening out-group. Categorizing the prisoners in this way allowed the guards to *dehumanize* the detainees, who were seen as subhuman.

Because the detainees were presumed to be potential terrorists, the guards were led to believe that it was their duty to mistreat them in order to help extract useful information. In this way, aggression was transformed from being inexcusable and inhumane into a virtuous act of patriotism.

Thinking in this way also helped reduce any *cognitive dissonance* the soldiers might have been experiencing by *justifying* the aggression. “I was doing what I believed my superiors wanted me to do,” said Army Reserve Private Lynndie England (2004), a file clerk from West Virginia.

Is what happened at Abu Ghraib similar to what happened in Milgram’s studies?

Milgram’s controversial studies showed that even ordinary citizens will obey an authority figure and commit acts of destructive obedience. Some of the accused soldiers, like England, did claim that they were “just following orders.” The photographs of England with naked prisoners, especially the one in which she was holding a naked male prisoner on a leash, created international outrage and revulsion. But England (2004) testified that her superiors praised the photos and told her, “Hey, you’re doing great, keep it up.”

But were the guards “just following orders”?

During the investigation and court-martials, soldiers who were called as witnesses for the prosecution testified that no *direct* orders were given to abuse or mistreat any prisoners. However, as a classic and controversial experiment by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues (1973) showed, *implied* social norms and roles can be just as powerful as explicit orders.

The Stanford Prison Experiment was conducted in 1971. Twenty-four male college students were randomly assigned to be either prisoners or prison guards. They played their roles in a makeshift, but realistic, prison that had been set up in the basement of a Stanford University building. All of the participants had been evaluated and judged to be psychologically healthy, well-adjusted individuals.

The value of the Stanford Prison Experiment resides in demonstrating the evil that good people can be readily induced into doing to other good people within the context of socially approved roles, rules, and norms . . .

—PHILIP ZIMBARDO, 2000

Originally, the experiment was slated to run for two weeks. But after just six days, the situation was spinning out of control. As Zimbardo (2005) recalls, “Within a few days, [those] assigned to the guard role became abusive, red-necked prison guards. Every day the level of hostility, abuse, and degradation of the prisoners became worse and worse. Within 36 hours the first prisoner had an emotional breakdown, crying, screaming, and thinking irrationally.” Prisoners who did not have extreme stress reactions became passive and depressed.

While Milgram’s experiments showed the effects of *direct authority pressure*, the Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrated the powerful influence of *situational roles* and *conformity to implied social rules and norms*. These influences are especially pronounced in vague or novel situations. In confusing or ambiguous situations, *normative social influence* is more likely. When people are not certain what to do, they tend to rely on cues provided by others and to conform their behavior to those in their immediate group.

At Abu Ghraib, the accused soldiers received no special training and were ignorant of either international or Army regulations regarding the treatment of civilian detainees or enemy prisoners of war.

Lynndie England, for example, was a file clerk, not a prison guard. In the chaotic cell block, the guards apparently took their cues from one another and from the military intelligence personnel who encouraged them to “set the conditions” for interrogation.

Are people helpless to resist destructive obedience in a situation like Abu Ghraib prison?

No. As Milgram demonstrated, *people can and do resist pressure to perform evil actions*. Not all military personnel at Abu Ghraib went along with the pressure to mistreat prisoners. Consider these examples:

- National Guard 1st Lieutenant David Sutton stopped the abuse of a prisoner by other soldiers and immediately reported it to his commanding officer.
- Master-at-Arms William J. Kimbro, a Navy dog handler, adamantly refused to participate in improper interrogations using dogs to intimidate prisoners despite being pressured by the military intelligence personnel.
- When handed a CD filled with digital photographs depicting prisoners being abused and humiliated, Specialist Joseph M. Darby turned it over to the Army Criminal Investigation Division. It was Darby’s conscientious action that finally prompted a formal investigation of the prison.

At the court-martials, army personnel called as prosecution witnesses testified that the abusive treatment shown in the photographs would never be allowed under any stretch of the normal rules for handling inmates in a military prison.

In fact, as General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated forcefully in a November 2005 press conference, “It is absolutely the responsibility of every U.S. service member, if they see inhumane treatment being conducted, to intervene to stop it. . . . If they are physically present when inhumane treatment is taking place, they have an *obligation* to try to stop it.”

Finally, it’s important to point out that understanding the factors that contributed to the events at Abu Ghraib does *not* excuse the perpetrators’ behavior or absolve them of individual responsibility. And, as Milgram’s research shows, the action of even one outspoken dissenter can inspire others to resist unethical or illegal commands from an authority figure.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

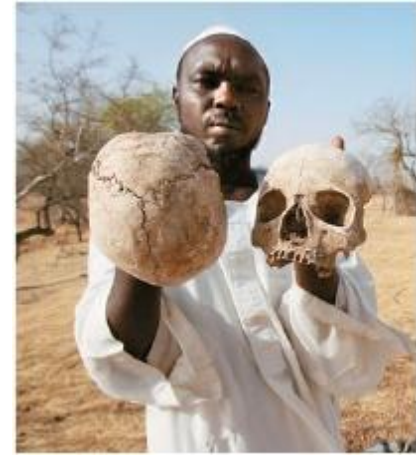
How might the fundamental attribution error lead people to blame “a few bad apples” rather than noticing situational factors that contributed to the Abu Ghraib prison abuse?

Who should be held responsible for the inhumane conditions and abuse that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison?



Accepting Responsibility At her trial, Lynndie England, the file clerk from a small town in West Virginia, apologized for her actions. In an interview after her conviction, England (2005) said that she was still “haunted” by memories of events in the prison. She would always feel guilty, she said, “for doing the wrong thing, posing in pictures when I shouldn’t have, degrading [the prisoners] and humiliating them—and not saying anything to anybody else to stop it.”

Destructive Obedience and Prejudice Blind obedience to authority combined with ethnic prejudice in Germany during World War II led to the slaughter of millions of Jews in concentration camps. When questioned after the war, Nazi officials and soldiers claimed that they were “just following orders.” Over the half-century since the end of World War II, genocide and politically inspired mass killings have occurred in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. Today, in the Sudanese Darfur, more than 300,000 people have been killed and thousands more driven from their homes by armed militia groups.



More important, perhaps, is the insight that each of us *does* have the capacity to resist group or authority pressure. Because the central findings of these studies are so dramatic, it's easy to overlook the fact that some subjects refused to conform or obey despite considerable social and situational pressure. Consider the response of a subject in one of Milgram's later studies. A 32-year-old industrial engineer named Jan Rensaleer protested when he was commanded to continue at the 255-volt level:

EXPERIMENTER: *It is absolutely essential that you continue.*

MR. RENSALEER: *Well, I won't—not with the man screaming to get out.*

EXPERIMENTER: *You have no other choice.*

MR. RENSALEER: *I do have a choice. (Incredulous and indignant) Why don't I have a choice? I came here on my own free will. I thought I could help in a research project. But if I have to hurt somebody to do that, or if I was in his place, too, I wouldn't stay there. I can't continue. I'm very sorry. I think I've gone too far already, probably.*

Like some of the other participants in the obedience and conformity studies, Rensaleer effectively resisted the situational and social pressures that pushed him to obey. So did Sergeant Joseph M. Darby, the young man who turned over the CD with incriminating photos of Abu Ghraib abuse to authorities, triggering the investigation. As Darby later testified, the photos shocked him. “They violated everything that I personally believed in and everything that I had been taught about the rules of war.” Another man who took a stand, stopping and then reporting an abusive incident in the prison, was 1st Lieutenant David Sutton. As he put it, “The way I look at it, if I don't do something, I'm just as guilty.” Table 1.5 summarizes several strategies that can help people resist the pressure to conform or obey in a destructive, dangerous, or morally questionable situation.

How are such people different from those who conform or obey? Unfortunately, there's no satisfying answer to that question. No specific personality trait consistently predicts conformity or obedience in experimental situations such as those Asch and Milgram created. In other words, the social influences that Asch and Milgram created in their experimental situations can be compelling even to people who are normally quite independent.

Finally, we need to emphasize that conformity and obedience are not completely bad in and of themselves. Quite the contrary. Conformity and obedience are necessary for an orderly society, which is why such behaviors were instilled in all of us as children. The critical issue is not so much whether people conform or obey, because we all do so every day of our lives. Rather, the critical issue is whether the norms we conform to, or the orders we obey, reflect values that respect the rights, well-being, and dignity of others.

Table 1.5

Resisting an Authority's Unacceptable Orders

- Verify your own discomfort by asking yourself, “Is this something I would do if I were controlling the situation?”
- Express your discomfort. It can be as simple as saying, “I'm really not comfortable with this.”
- Resist even slightly objectionable commands so that the situation doesn't escalate into increasingly immoral or destructive obedience.
- If you realize you've already done something unacceptable, stop at that point rather than continuing to comply.
- Find or create an excuse to get out of the situation and validate your concerns with someone who is not involved with the situation.
- Question the legitimacy of the authority. Most authorities have legitimacy only in specific situations. If authorities are out of their legitimate context, they have no more authority in the situation than you.
- If it is a group situation, find an ally who also feels uncomfortable with the authority's orders. Two people expressing dissent in harmony can effectively resist conforming to the group's actions.

Sources: Milgram, 1963, 1974a; Asch, 1956, 1957; Haney & others, 1973; Zimbardo, 2000, 2004, 2007; Blass, 1991, 2004; American Psychological Association, 2005.

Helping Behavior

Coming to the Aid of Strangers

Key Theme

- **Prosocial behavior describes any behavior that helps another person, including altruistic acts.**

Key Questions

- **What factors increase the likelihood that people will help a stranger?**
- **What factors decrease the likelihood that people will help a stranger?**
- **How can the lack of bystander response in the Genovese murder case be explained in light of psychological research on helping behavior?**

It was about 3:20 A.M. on Friday, March 13, 1964, when 28-year-old Kitty Genovese returned home from her job managing a bar. Like other residents in her middle-class New York City neighborhood, she parked her car at an adjacent railroad station. Her apartment entrance was only 100 feet away.

As she got out of her car, she noticed a man at the end of the parking lot. When the man moved in her direction, she began walking toward a nearby police call box, which was under a streetlight in front of a bookstore. On the opposite side of the street was a 10-story apartment building. As she neared the streetlight, the man grabbed her and she screamed. Across the street, lights went on in the apartment building. "Oh, my God! He stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!" she screamed.

"Let that girl alone!" a man yelled from one of the upper apartment windows. The attacker looked up, then walked off, leaving Kitty on the ground, bleeding. The street became quiet. Minutes passed. One by one, lights went off. Struggling to her feet, Kitty made her way toward her apartment. As she rounded the corner of the building moments later, her assailant returned, stabbing her again. "I'm dying! I'm dying!" she screamed.

Again, lights went on. Windows opened and people looked out. This time, the assailant got into his car and drove off. It was now 3:35 A.M. Fifteen minutes had passed since Kitty's first screams for help. A New York City bus passed by. Staggering, then crawling, Kitty moved toward the entrance of her apartment. She never made it. Her attacker returned, searching the apartment entrance doors. At the second apartment entrance, he found her, slumped at the foot of the steps. This time, he stabbed her to death.

It was 3:50 A.M. when someone first called the police. The police took just two minutes to arrive at the scene. About half an hour later, an ambulance carried Kitty Genovese's body away. Only then did people come out of their apartments to talk to the police.

Over the next two weeks, police investigators learned that a total of 38 people had witnessed Kitty's murder—a murder that involved three separate attacks over a period of about 30 minutes. Why didn't anyone try to help her? Or call the police when she first screamed for help?



Kitty Genovese (1935–1964) Known as Kitty by her friends, Genovese had grown up in Brooklyn. As a young woman, she managed a sports bar in Queens, shown here.

The Murder Scene At the end of the sidewalk you can see the railroad station where Genovese parked her car. Along the sidewalk are entrances to shops as well as stairways leading to apartments above the shops. After Genovese staggered to the entrance of her apartment, her attacker returned and stabbed her to death. Later investigations suggested that there may have been fewer than 38 witnesses' stories, and that some of those witnesses could not have seen the attacks from their windows. Nevertheless, the essential story is true: Many people heard Genovese's screams, yet no one stepped forward to help.



Prosocial Behavior in Action Everyday life is filled with countless acts of prosocial behavior. Many people volunteer their time and energy to help others. In Modesto, California, Doug Lilly volunteers for “Meals on Wheels.” Along with delivering meals to about 65 elderly residents each week, Lilly also checks to make sure they are safe and healthy.

Coming to the Aid of a Stranger Everyday life is filled with examples of people who come to the aid of a stranger in distress, like this sign posted at the corner of Toronto’s Queen and Palmerston streets. Without knowing any details beyond those written on the sign, can you identify factors that might have contributed to the helping behavior of the bystanders in this situation?



When the *New York Times* interviewed various experts, they seemed baffled, although one expert said it was a “typical” reaction. If there was a common theme in their explanations, it seemed to be “apathy.” The occurrence was simply representative of the alienation and depersonalization of life in a big city, people said.

Not everyone bought this pat explanation. In the first place, it wasn’t true. As social psychologists **Bibb Latané** and **John Darley** (1970) later pointed out in their landmark book, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn’t He Help?*:

People often help others, even at great personal risk to themselves. For every “apathy” story, one of outright heroism could be cited. . . . It is a mistake to get trapped by the wave of publicity and discussion surrounding incidents in which help was not forthcoming into believing that help never comes. People sometimes help and sometimes don’t. What determines when help will be given?

That’s the critical question, of course. When do people help others? And *why* do people help others?

When we help another person with no expectation of personal benefit, we’re displaying **altruism**. An altruistic act is fundamentally selfless—the individual is motivated purely by the desire to help someone in need. Everyday life is filled with little acts of altruistic kindness, such as Fern giving the “homeless” man a handful of quarters or the stranger who thoughtfully holds a door open for you as you juggle an armful of packages.

Altruistic actions fall under the broader heading of **prosocial behavior**, which describes any behavior that helps another person, whatever the underlying motive. Note that prosocial behaviors are not necessarily altruistic. Sometimes we help others out of guilt. And, sometimes we help others in order to gain something, such as recognition, rewards, increased self-esteem, or having the favor returned.

Factors That Increase the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

Kitty Genovese’s death triggered hundreds of investigations into the conditions under which people will help others. Those studies began in the 1960s with the pioneering efforts of Latané and Darley, who conducted a series of ingenious experiments in which people appeared to need help. Often, these studies were conducted using locations in and around New York City as a kind of open-air laboratory.

Other researchers joined the effort to understand what factors influence a person’s decision to help another. Some of the most significant factors that have been found to increase the likelihood of helping behavior are noted below.

- **The “feel good, do good” effect.** People who feel good, successful, happy, or fortunate are more likely to help others. Those good feelings can be due to virtually any positive event, such as receiving a gift, succeeding at a task, listening to pleasant music, finding a small amount of money, or even just enjoying a warm, sunny day.
- **Feeling guilty.** We tend to be more helpful when we’re feeling guilty. For example, after telling a lie or inadvertently causing an accident, people were more likely to help others.

Even guilt induced by surviving the 9/11 terrorist attacks spurred helping behavior in many people during the aftermath.

- **Seeing others who are willing to help.** Whether it's donating blood, helping a stranded motorist change a flat tire, or dropping money in the Salvation Army kettle during the holiday season, we're more likely to help if we observe others do the same.
- **Perceiving the other person as deserving help.** We're more likely to help people who are in need of help through no fault of their own. For example, people are twice as likely to give some change to a stranger if they believe the stranger's wallet has been stolen than if they believe the stranger has simply spent all his money.
- **Knowing how to help.** Research has confirmed that simply knowing what to do contributes greatly to the decision to help someone else.
- **A personalized relationship.** When people have any sort of personal relationship with another person, they're more likely to help that person. Even minimal social interaction with each other, such as making eye contact or engaging in small talk, increases the likelihood that one person will help the other.

Factors That Decrease the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

It's equally important to consider influences that decrease the likelihood of helping behavior. As we look at some of the key findings, we'll also note how each factor might have played a role in the death of Kitty Genovese.

- **The presence of other people.** People are much more likely to help when they are alone. If other people are present or imagined, helping behavior declines—a phenomenon called the **bystander effect**.

How can we account for this surprising finding? There seem to be two major reasons for the bystander effect. First, the presence of other people creates a **diffusion of responsibility**. The responsibility to intervene is *shared* (or *diffused*) among all the onlookers. Because no one person feels all the pressure to respond, each bystander becomes less likely to help.

Ironically, the sheer number of bystanders seemed to be the most significant factor working against Kitty Genovese. Remember that when she first screamed, a man yelled down, "Let that girl alone!" With that, each observer instantly knew that he or she was not the only one watching the events on the street below. Hence, no single individual felt the full responsibility to help. Instead, there was a diffusion of responsibility among all the bystanders so that each individual's share of responsibility was small indeed.

Second, the bystander effect seems to occur because each of us is motivated to some extent by the desire to behave in a socially acceptable way (*normative social influence*) and to appear correct (*informational social influence*). Thus, we often rely on the reactions of others to help us define a situation and guide our response to it. In the case of Kitty Genovese, the lack of intervention by any of the witnesses may have signaled the others that intervention was not appropriate, wanted, or needed.

- **Being in a big city or a very small town.** Kitty Genovese was attacked late at night in one of the biggest cities in the world, New York. Are people less likely to help strangers in big cities? Researcher Nancy Steblay (1987) has confirmed that this common belief is true—but

altruism

Helping another person with no expectation of personal reward or benefit.

prosocial behavior

Any behavior that helps another, whether the underlying motive is self-serving or selfless.

bystander effect

A phenomenon in which the greater the number of people present, the less likely each individual is to help someone in distress.

diffusion of responsibility

A phenomenon in which the presence of other people makes it less likely that any individual will help someone in distress because the obligation to intervene is shared among all the onlookers.

The Bystander Effect The couple on the left is obviously trying to ignore the heated argument between the man and woman on the right—even though the man is physically threatening the woman. What factors in this situation make it less likely that bystanders will intervene and try to help a stranger? Do you think you would intervene? Why or why not?



persuasion

The deliberate attempt to influence the attitudes or behavior of another person in a situation in which that person has some freedom of choice.

with a twist. People are less likely to help a stranger in very big cities (300,000 people or more) or in very small towns (5,000 people or less). Either extreme—very big or very small—seems to work against helping a stranger.

- **Vague or ambiguous situations.** When situations are ambiguous and people are not certain that help is needed, they're less likely to offer help. The ambiguity of the situation may also have worked against Kitty Genovese. The people in the apartment building saw a man and a woman struggling on the street below but had no way of knowing whether the two were acquainted. "We thought it was a lovers' quarrel," some of the witnesses later said. Researchers have found that people are especially reluctant to intervene when the situation appears to be a domestic dispute or a "lovers' quarrel," because they are not certain that assistance is wanted.

- **When the personal costs for helping outweigh the benefits.** As a general rule, we tend to weigh the costs as well as the benefits of helping in deciding whether to act. If the potential costs outweigh the benefits, it's less likely that people will help. The witnesses in the Genovese case may have felt that the benefits of helping Genovese were outweighed by the potential hassles and danger of becoming involved in the situation.

On a small yet universal scale, the murder of Kitty Genovese dramatically underscores the power of situational and social influences on our behavior. Although social psychological research has provided insights about the factors that influenced the behavior of those who witnessed the Genovese murder, it should not be construed as a justification for the inaction of the bystanders. After all, Kitty Genovese's death probably could have been prevented by a single phone call. If we understand the factors that decrease helping behavior, we can recognize and overcome those obstacles when we encounter someone who needs assistance. If *you* had been Kitty Genovese, how would *you* have hoped other people would react?

>> Closing Thoughts

We began this book with a Prologue about Fern trying to help a stranger in a strange city. As it turned out, Fern's social perceptions of the man were inaccurate: He was not a homeless person living on the streets of San Francisco. As simple as this incident was, it underscored a theme that was repeatedly echoed throughout our subsequent discussions of person perception, attribution, and attitudes. Our subjective impressions, whether they are accurate or not, play a pivotal role in how we perceive and think about other people.

A different theme emerged in our later discussions of conformity, obedience, and helping behavior. Social and situational factors, especially the behavior of others in the same situation, can have powerful effects on how we act at a given moment. But like Fern, each of us has the freedom to choose how we respond in a given situation. When we're aware of the social forces that influence us, it can be easier for us to choose wisely.

In the final analysis, we often influence one another's thoughts, perceptions, and actions, sometimes in profound ways.

ENHANCING WELL-BEING WITH PSYCHOLOGY

The Persuasion Game

Our daughter, Laura, was 3 1/2 years old, happily munching her Cheerios and doodling pictures in the butter on her bread. Don sat across from her at the kitchen table, reading a draft of this chapter. “Don’t play with your food, Laura,” Don said without looking up.

“Okay, Daddy,” she chirped. “Daddy, are you in a happy mood?” Don paused. “Yes, I’m in a happy mood, Laura,” he said thoughtfully. “Are you in a happy mood?”

“Yes, Daddy,” Laura replied as she made the banana peel dance around her placemat. “Daddy, will you get me a Mermaid Barbie doll for my birthday?”

Ah, so young and so clever! From very early in life, we learn the basics of **persuasion**—the deliberate attempt to influence the attitudes or behavior of another person in a situation in which that person has some freedom of choice. Clearly, Laura had figured out one basic rule: She’s more likely to persuade Mom or Dad when they’re in “a happy mood.”

Professional persuaders often manipulate people’s attitudes and behavior using techniques based on two fundamental social norms: the rule of reciprocity and the rule of commitment. Here we’ll provide you with some practical suggestions to avoid being taken in by persuasion techniques.

The Rule of Reciprocity

The *rule of reciprocity* is a simple but powerful social norm. If someone gives you something or does you a favor, you feel obligated to return the favor. So after a classmate lets you copy her lecture notes for the class session you missed, you feel obligated to return a favor when she asks for one.

The “favor” can be almost anything freely given, such as a free soft drink, a free food sample in a grocery store, a free gardening workshop at your local hardware store, a free guide, booklet, planning kit, or trial. The rule of reciprocity is part of the sales strategy used by companies that offer “free” in-home trials of their products. It’s also why department stores that sell expensive cosmetics offer “free” makeovers.

Technically, you are under “no obligation” to buy anything. Nonetheless, the tactic often creates an uncomfortable sense of obligation, so you do feel pressured to reciprocate by buying the product.

One strategy that uses the rule of reciprocity is called the *door-in-the-face technique* (Dillard, 1991; Perloff, 1993; Turner & others, 2007). First, the persuader makes a large request that you’re certain to refuse. For example, Joe asks to borrow \$500. You figuratively “slam the door in his face” by quickly turning him down. But then Joe, apologetic, appears to back off and makes a much smaller request—to borrow \$20. From your perspective, it appears that Joe has made a concession to you and is trying to be reasonable. This puts you in the position of reciprocating with a concession of your own. “Well, I can’t lend you \$500,” you grumble, “but I guess I could lend you 20 bucks.” Of course, the persuader’s real goal was to persuade you to comply with the second, smaller request.

The rule of reciprocity is also operating in the *that’s-not-all technique*. First, the persuader makes an offer. But before you can accept or reject it, the persuader appears to throw in something extra to make the deal even more attractive to you. So as you’re standing there mulling over the price of the more expensive high-definition, flat-panel television, the salesperson says, “Listen, I’m offering you a great price but that’s not all I’ll do—I’ll throw in some top-notch HDMI connector cables at no charge.” From your perspective, it appears as though the salesperson has just done you a favor by making a concession you did not ask for. This creates a sense of obligation for you to reciprocate by buying the “better” package.

The Rule of Commitment

Another powerful social norm is the *rule of commitment*. Once you make a public commitment, there is psychological and interpersonal pressure on you to behave consistently with your earlier commitment. The *foot-in-the-door technique* is one strategy that capitalizes on the rule of commitment. Here’s how it works.

First, the persuader makes a small request that you’re likely to agree to. For example, she might ask you to wear a lapel pin publicizing a fund-raising drive for a charity. By agreeing to wear the lapel pin, you’ve made a *commitment* to the fund-raising effort. At that point, she has gotten her “foot in the door.” Later, the persuader asks you to comply with a second, larger request, such as donating money to the charity. Because of your earlier commitment, you feel psychologically pressured to behave consistently by now agreeing to the larger commitment.

The rule of commitment is also operating in the *low-ball technique*. First, the persuader gets you to make a commitment by deliberately understating the cost of the product you want. He’s thrown you a “low ball,” one that is simply too good to turn down. In reality, the persuader has no intention of honoring the artificially low price.

Here’s an example of the low-ball technique in action: You’ve negotiated an excellent price (the “low ball”) on a used car and filled out the sales contract. The car salesman shakes your hand and beams, then takes your paperwork into his manager’s office for approval. Ten minutes pass—enough time for you to convince yourself that you’ve made the right decision and solidify your commitment to it.

At that point, the salesman comes back from his manager’s office looking dejected. “I’m terribly sorry,” the car salesman says. “My manager won’t let me sell the car at that price because we’d lose too much money on the deal. I told him I would even take a lower commission, but he won’t budge.”

Notice what has happened. The attractive low-ball price that originally prompted you to make the commitment has been pulled out from under your feet. What typically happens? Despite the loss of the original inducement to make the purchase—the low-ball price—people often feel compelled to keep

their commitment to make the purchase even though it is at a higher price.

Defending Against Persuasion Techniques

How can you reduce the likelihood that you'll be manipulated into making a decision that may not be in your best interest? Here are three practical suggestions.

1. Sleep on it.

Persuasive transactions typically occur quickly. Part of this is our own doing. We've finally decided to go look at a new laptop, automobile, or whatever, so we're psychologically primed to buy the product. The persuader uses this psychological momentum to help coax you into signing on the dotted line right then and there. It's only later, of course, that you sometimes have second thoughts. So when you think you've got the deal you want, tell the persuader that you always sleep on important decisions before making a final commitment.

The sleep-on-it rule often provides an opportunity to discover whether the persuader is deliberately trying to pressure or

manipulate you. If the persuader responds to your sleep-on-it suggestion by saying something like, "This offer is good for today only," then it's likely that he or she is afraid that your commitment to the deal will crumble if you think about it too carefully or look elsewhere.

2. Play devil's advocate.

List all of the reasons why you should *not* buy the product or make a particular commitment.

Arguing *against* the decision will help activate your critical thinking skills. It's also helpful to discuss important decisions with a friend, who might be able to point out disadvantages that you have overlooked.

3. When in doubt, do nothing.

Learn to trust your gut feelings when something doesn't feel quite right. If you feel that you're being psychologically pressured or cornered, you probably are. As a general rule, if you feel any sense of hesitation, lean toward the conservative side and do nothing. If you take the time to think things over, you'll probably be able to identify the source of your reluctance.



