

XVII. Social Psychology

When we read the newspaper, listen to the TV news, or browse an online news site, we see hundreds of examples of how people affect others. The media tells us which Hollywood actors are beautiful. The public reacts when a fifty-six-year-old woman gives birth to twins. A former janitor amasses a fortune and leaves it to the school where he worked.

Social psychologists try to explain how other people influence our thoughts, feelings, and behavior; how we form impressions of other people; and why stereotypes and prejudice flourish. They study how people manage to persuade, influence, and attract us. Obedience to authorities, group functioning, and helpfulness are part of social psychology as well. Social psychology acknowledges that we move in and out of one another's lives, directly and indirectly, and all parties are, in some way, affected.

A) Impressions

People form impressions, or vague ideas, about other people through the process of **person perception**.

The Influence of Physical Appearance

Physical appearance has a strong effect on how people are perceived by others. Two aspects of physical appearance are particularly important: attractiveness and baby-faced features.

Attractiveness

Research shows that people judge attractive-looking people as having positive personality traits, such as sociability, friendliness, poise, warmth, and good adjustment. There is, however, little actual correlation between personality traits and physical attractiveness.

People also tend to think that attractive-looking people are more competent. Because of this bias, attractive people tend to get better jobs and higher salaries.

Baby-Faced Features

People's attractiveness does not have much influence on judgments about their honesty. Instead, people tend to be judged as honest if they have baby-faced features, such as large eyes and rounded chins. Baby-faced people are often judged as being passive, helpless, and naïve. However, no correlation exists between being baby-faced and actually having these personality traits.

Evolutionary theorists believe the qualities attributed to baby-faced people reflect an evolved tendency to see babies as helpless and needing nurture. Such a tendency may have given human ancestors a survival advantage, since the babies of people who provided good nurturing were more likely to live on to reproduce.

Cognitive Schemas

When people meet, they form impressions of each other based on their **cognitive schemas**. People use cognitive schemas to organize information about the world. Cognitive schemas help to access information quickly and easily.

Social schemas are mental models that represent and categorize social events and people. For example, certain social schemas tell people what it means to be a spectator at a baseball game. There are also social schemas for categories of people, such as *yuppie* or *geek*. These social schemas affect how people perceive events and others. Once a social schema is activated, it may be difficult to adjust a perception of a person or event.

B) Stereotypes and Prejudice

Cognitive schemas can result in stereotypes and contribute to prejudice.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are beliefs about people based on their membership in a particular group. Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral. Stereotypes based on gender, ethnicity, or occupation are common in many societies.

Examples:

People may stereotype women as nurturing or used car salespeople as dishonest.

The Stability of Stereotypes

Stereotypes are not easily changed, for the following reasons:

- When people encounter instances that disconfirm their stereotypes of a particular group, they tend to assume that those instances are atypical subtypes of the group.

Example:

Ben stereotypes gay men as being unathletic. When he meets Al, an athletic gay man, he assumes that Al is not a typical representative of gay people.

- People's perceptions are influenced by their expectations.

Example:

Liz has a stereotype of elderly people as mentally unstable. When she sees an elderly woman sitting on a park bench alone, talking out loud, she thinks that the woman is talking to herself because she is unstable. Liz fails to notice that the woman is actually talking on a cell phone.

- People selectively recall instances that confirm their stereotypes and forget about disconfirming instances.

Example:

Paul has a stereotype of Latin Americans as academically unmotivated. As evidence for his belief, he cites instances when some of his Latin American classmates failed to read required class material. He fails to recall all the times his Latin American classmates did complete their assignments.

Functions

Stereotypes have several important functions:

- They allow people to quickly process new information about an event or person.
- They organize people's past experiences.
- They help people to meaningfully assess differences between individuals and groups.
- They help people to make predictions about other people's behavior.

Everyday Use of Stereotypes

The word stereotype has developed strong negative connotations for very good reasons. Negative stereotypes of different groups of people can have a terrible influence on those people's lives. However, most people do rely on stereotypes nearly every day to help them function in society. For example, say a woman has to work late and finds herself walking home alone on a dark city street. Walking toward her is a group of five young men talking loudly and roughhousing. The woman crosses the street and enters a convenience store until the young men pass, then continues on her way. Most people would say she acted prudently, even though she relied on a stereotype to guide her behavior.

Dangers

Stereotypes can lead to distortions of reality for several reasons:

- They cause people to exaggerate differences among groups.
- They lead people to focus selectively on information that agrees with the stereotype and ignore information that disagrees with it.
- They tend to make people see other groups as overly homogenous, even though people can easily see that the groups they belong to are heterogeneous.

Evolutionary Perspectives

Evolutionary psychologists have speculated that humans evolved the tendency to stereotype because it gave their ancestors an adaptive advantage. Being able to decide quickly which group a person belonged to may have had survival value, since this enabled people to distinguish between friends and enemies.

Xenophobia

Some evolutionary psychologists believe that xenophobia, the fear of strangers or people different from oneself, has genetic roots. They argue that humans are to some extent programmed by their genes to respond positively to genetically similar people and negatively to genetically different people.

Prejudice

A **prejudice** is a negative belief or feeling about a particular group of individuals. Prejudices are often passed on from one generation to the next.

Functions

Prejudice is a destructive phenomenon, and it is pervasive because it serves many psychological, social, and economic functions:

- Prejudice allows people to avoid doubt and fear.

Example:

Rachel's parents came from a working-class background but are now wealthy business owners. Rachel might develop a dislike of the working class because she does not want to be identified with working-class people. She believes such an association would damage her claim to upper-class social status.

- Prejudice gives people scapegoats to blame in times of trouble.

Example:

Glen blames his unemployment on foreign nationals whom he believes are incompetent but willing to work for low wages.

- Prejudice can boost self-esteem.

Example:

A poor white farmer in the nineteenth-century South could feel better about his own meager existence by insisting on his superiority to African-American slaves.

- Evolutionary psychologists suggest that prejudice allows people to bond with their own group by contrasting their own groups to outsider groups.

Example:

Most religious and ethnic groups maintain some prejudices against other groups, which help to make their own group seem more special.

- Prejudice legitimizes discrimination because it apparently justifies one group's dominance over another.

Example:

Pseudoscientific arguments about the mental inferiority of African Americans allowed whites to feel justified in owning slaves.

Measuring Prejudice

Researchers find it difficult to measure prejudice. One reason for this is that people differ in the type and extent of prejudice they harbor. For example, a person who makes demeaning comments about a particular ethnic group may be bigoted or just ignorant. Also, people often do not admit to being prejudiced.

People may often have implicit unconscious prejudices even when they do not have explicit prejudices. Researchers assess implicit prejudice in three ways:

- Some researchers assess attitudes that suggest prejudice, such as a strong emotional objection to affirmative action.
- Some researchers observe behavior rather than assess attitudes. People's behavior in stressful situations may be particularly useful at revealing implicit prejudice.
- Some researchers assess the unconscious associations people have about particular groups.

Ingroups and Outgroups

People's social identities depend on the groups they belong to. From a person's perspective, any group he belongs to is an **ingroup**, and any group he doesn't belong to is an **outgroup**. People generally have a lower opinion of outgroup members and a higher opinion of members of their own group. People who identify strongly with a particular group are more likely to be prejudiced against people in competing outgroups.

People tend to think that their own groups are composed of different sorts of people. At the same time, they often think that everyone in an outgroup is the same. According to the **contact hypothesis**, prejudice declines when people in an ingroup become more familiar with the customs, norms, food, music, and attitudes of people in an outgroup. Contact with the outgroup helps people to see the diversity among its members.

Competition and Cooperation

Hostility between an ingroup and an outgroup increases when groups compete. Researchers have found that hostility between groups decreases when those groups have to cooperate in order to reach a shared goal. In such a situation, people in the two groups tend to feel that they belong to one larger group rather than two separate groups.

Reducing Prejudice

Research shows that prejudice and conflict among groups can be reduced if four conditions are met:

- The groups have equality in terms of legal status, economic opportunity, and political power.
- Authorities advocate equal rights.
- The groups have opportunities to interact formally and informally with each other.
- The groups cooperate to reach a common goal.

Kurt Lewin and the AJC

Kurt Lewin is widely considered the father of social psychology. He developed many concepts that both psychologists and the general public now take for granted, including his "field theory" that a person's behavior is determined both by that person's character and by his current environment. Lewin also did important work in the area of majority-minority relations. In the mid-1940s, the American Jewish Council (AJC) began talking with Lewin about ways to reduce anti-Semitism. Shortly before his death in 1947, Lewin became chief consultant for the AJC's Commission on Community Interrelations, a groundbreaking organization designed to combat prejudice through community intervention.

C) Attribution

Attributions are inferences that people make about the causes of events and behavior. People make attributions in order to understand their experiences. Attributions strongly influence the way people interact with others.

Types of Attributions

Researchers classify attributions along two dimensions: internal vs. external and stable vs. unstable. By combining these two dimensions of attributes, researchers can classify a particular attribution as being internal-stable, internal-unstable, external-stable, or external-unstable.

Internal vs. External

Attribution theory proposes that the attributions people make about events and behavior can be classed as either internal or external. In an **internal**, or dispositional, **attribution**, people infer that an event or a person's behavior is due to personal factors

such as traits, abilities, or feelings. In an **external**, or situational, **attribution**, people infer that a person's behavior is due to situational factors.

Example:

Maria's car breaks down on the freeway. If she believes the breakdown happened because of her ignorance about cars, she is making an internal attribution. If she believes that the breakdown happened because her car is old, she is making an external attribution.

Stable vs. Unstable

Researchers also distinguish between stable and unstable attributions. When people make a **stable attribution**, they infer that an event or behavior is due to stable, unchanging factors. When making an **unstable attribution**, they infer that an event or behavior is due to unstable, temporary factors.

Example:

Lee gets a D on his sociology term paper. If he attributes the grade to the fact that he always has bad luck, he is making a stable attribution. If he attributes the grade to the fact that he didn't have much time to study that week, he is making an unstable attribution.

Attribution Bias

When people make an attribution, they are guessing about the causes of events or behaviors. These guesses are often wrong. People have systematic biases, which lead them to make incorrect attributions. These biases include the fundamental attribution error, the self-serving bias, and the just world hypothesis.

The Fundamental Attribution Error

The **fundamental attribution error** is the tendency to attribute other people's behavior to internal factors such as personality traits, abilities, and feelings. The fundamental attribution error is also called the correspondence bias, because it is assumed that other people's behavior corresponds to their personal attributes. When explaining their own behavior, on the other hand, people tend to attribute it to situational factors.

Example:

Alexis falls asleep in class. Sean attributes her behavior to laziness. When he fell asleep in class last week, however, he attributed his own behavior to the all-nighter he pulled finishing a term paper.

The Self-Serving Bias

The **self-serving bias** is the tendency to attribute successes to internal factors and failures to situational factors. This bias tends to increase as time passes after an event. Therefore, the further in the past an event is, the more likely people are to congratulate themselves for successes and to blame the situation for failures.

Example:

Chad wins a poetry competition but fails to get the poem published in a magazine he sent it to. He attributes his success in the competition to his talent. He attributes his failure to get it published to bad luck.

The Just World Hypothesis

The **just world hypothesis** refers to the need to believe that the world is fair and that people get what they deserve. The just world hypothesis gives people a sense of security and helps them to find meaning in difficult circumstances.

People are less generous about other people than about themselves. Other people's successes tend to be attributed to situational factors and their failures to internal factors.

Example:

Chad's friend Diana does manage to get a poem published in a magazine. However, she did not receive a prize in a poetry competition she entered. Chad attributes Diana's publication success to good luck and her failure to her underdeveloped writing abilities.

Unfortunately, the just world hypothesis also leads to a tendency to blame the victim. When something tragic or terrible happens to someone, people often reassure themselves by deciding that the person must have done something to provoke or cause the event.

Example:

Anthony gets into a car wreck. His friends believe that Anthony must have been driving drunk.

Cultural Influences on Attribution Style

Research suggests that cultural values and norms affect the way people make attributions. In particular, differences in attribution style exist between individualist and collectivist cultures. People in individualist cultures place a high value on uniqueness and independence, believe in the importance of individual goals, and define themselves in terms of personal attributes. People in collectivist cultures, on the other hand, place a high value on conformity and interdependence, believe in the importance of group goals, and define themselves in terms of their membership in groups. North American and Western European cultures tend to be individualistic, while Asian, Latin American, and African cultures tend to be collectivist.

People in collectivist cultures tend to be less susceptible to the fundamental attribution error than people in individualist cultures. People from collectivist cultures are more likely to believe that a person's behavior is due to situational demands rather than to personal attributes. People from collectivist cultures are also less susceptible to the self-serving bias.

The Self-Effacing Bias

Research suggests that people who are from a collectivist culture, such as the Japanese culture, tend to have a **self-effacing bias** when making attributions. That is, they tend to attribute their successes to situational factors rather than to personal attributes, and, when they fail, they blame themselves for not trying hard enough.

D) Attitudes

Attitudes are evaluations people make about objects, ideas, events, or other people. Attitudes can be positive or negative. **Explicit attitudes** are conscious beliefs that can guide decisions and behavior. **Implicit attitudes** are unconscious beliefs that can still influence decisions and behavior. Attitudes can include up to three components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

Example:

Jane believes that smoking is unhealthy, feels disgusted when people smoke around her, and avoids being in situations where people smoke.

Dimensions of Attitudes

Researchers study three dimensions of attitude: strength, accessibility, and ambivalence.

- **Attitude strength:** Strong attitudes are those that are firmly held and that highly influence behavior. Attitudes that are important to a person tend to be strong. Attitudes that people have a vested interest in also tend to be strong. Furthermore, people tend to have stronger attitudes about things, events, ideas, or people they have considerable knowledge and information about.
- **Attitude accessibility:** The accessibility of an attitude refers to the ease with which it comes to mind. In general, highly accessible attitudes tend to be stronger.
- **Attitude ambivalence:** Ambivalence of an attitude refers to the ratio of positive and negative evaluations that make up that attitude. The ambivalence of an attitude increases as the positive and negative evaluations get more and more equal.

The Influence of Attitudes on Behavior

Behavior does not always reflect attitudes. However, attitudes do determine behavior in some situations:

- If there are few outside influences, attitude guides behavior.

Example:

Wyatt has an attitude that eating junk food is unhealthy. When he is at home, he does not eat chips or candy. However, when he is at parties, he indulges in these foods.

- Behavior is guided by attitudes specific to that behavior.

Example:

Megan might have a general attitude of respect toward seniors, but that would not prevent her from being disrespectful to an elderly woman who cuts her off at a stop sign. However, if Megan has an easygoing attitude about being cut off at stop signs, she is not likely to swear at someone who cuts her off.

- Behavior is guided by attitudes that come to mind easily.

Example:

Ron has an attitude of mistrust and annoyance toward telemarketers, so he immediately hangs up the phone whenever he realizes he has been contacted by one.

The Influence of Behavior on Attitudes

Behavior also affects attitudes. Evidence for this comes from the foot-in-the-door phenomenon and the effect of role playing.

The Foot-in-the-Door Phenomenon

People tend to be more likely to agree to a difficult request if they have first agreed to an easy one. This is called the **foot-in-the-door phenomenon**.

Example:

Jill is more likely to let an acquaintance borrow her laptop for a day if he first persuades her to let him borrow her textbook for a day.

Social Norms and Social Roles

Social norms are a society's rules about appropriate behavior. Norms exist for practically every kind of situation. Some norms are explicit and are made into laws, such as the norm *While driving, you may not run over a pedestrian*. Other norms are implicit and are followed unconsciously, such as *You may not wear a bikini to class*.

Social roles are patterns of behavior that are considered appropriate for a person in a particular context. For example, gender roles tell people how a particular society expects men and women to behave. A person who violates the requirements of a role tends to feel uneasy or to be censured by others. Role requirements can change over time in a society.

The Effect of Role Playing and the "Prison Study"

People tend to internalize roles they play, changing their attitudes to fit the roles. In the 1970s, the psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted a famous study called the **prison study**, which showed how roles influence people. Zimbardo assigned one group of college student volunteers to play the role of prison guards in a simulated prison environment. He provided these students with uniforms, clubs, and whistles and told them to enforce a set of rules in the prison. He assigned another group of students to play the role of prisoners. Zimbardo found that as time went on, some of the "guard" students became increasingly harsh and domineering. The "prisoner" students also internalized their role. Some broke down, while others rebelled or became passively resigned to the situation. The internalization of roles by the two groups of students was so extreme that Zimbardo had to terminate the study after only six days.

Attitude Change

Researchers have proposed three theories to account for attitude change: learning theory, dissonance theory, and the elaboration likelihood model.

Learning Theory

Learning theory says that attitudes can be formed and changed through the use of learning principles such as classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning:

- **Classical conditioning:** The emotional component of attitudes can be formed through classical conditioning. For example, in a billboard ad, a clothing company pairs a sweater with an attractive model who elicits a pleasant emotional response. This can make people form a positive attitude about the sweater and the clothing company.
- **Operant conditioning:** If someone gets a positive response from others when she expresses an attitude, that attitude will be reinforced and will tend to get stronger. On the other hand, if she gets a negative response from others, that attitude tends to get weaker.
- **Observational learning:** Seeing others display a particular attitude and watching people be reinforced for expressing a particular attitude can make someone adopt those attitudes.

Dissonance Theory

Leon Festinger's dissonance theory proposes that people change their attitudes when they have attitudes that are inconsistent with each other. Festinger said that people experience **cognitive dissonance** when they have related cognitions that conflict with one another. Cognitive dissonance results in a state of unpleasant tension. People try to reduce the tension by changing their attitudes.

Example:

Sydney is against capital punishment. She participates in a debate competition and is assigned to a team that has to argue for capital punishment. Subsequently, she is more amenable to the idea of capital punishment.

The phenomenon called justification of effort also results from cognitive dissonance. **Justification of effort** refers to the idea that if people work hard to reach a goal, they are likely to value the goal more. They justify working hard by believing that the goal is valuable.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model holds that attitude change is more permanent if the elaborate and thought-provoking persuasive messages are used to change the attitude. Basically, if someone can provide a thorough, thought-provoking persuasive message to change an attitude, he is more likely to succeed than if he provides a neutral or shallow persuasive message.

Example:

Ten teenagers who smoke are sent to an all-day seminar on the negative consequences of smoking. Many of the students subsequently give up the habit.

E) Social Influence

People influence each other constantly, in a variety of different ways.

Social Influence Strategies

One social influence strategy is the foot-in-the-door technique (see the "Attitudes" section for a complete explanation). Three other strategies include manipulating the reciprocity norm, the lowball technique, and feigned scarcity.

Manipulation of the Reciprocity Norm

The **reciprocity norm** is an implicit rule in many societies that tells people they should return favors or gifts given to them. A person or group can manipulate this norm to make it more likely that people will buy a product or make a donation.

Example:

If a wildlife preservation organization sends Harry a pad of notepaper personalized with his name, he may feel obligated to send them the donation they want.

The Lowball Technique

The **lowball technique** involves making an attractive proposition and revealing its downsides only after a person has agreed to it.

Example:

A car salesperson tells Sheila that a car she is interested in buying costs \$5,000. After she has committed to buying the car, the salesperson points out that adding a stereo, an air conditioner, and floor mats will cost an extra \$3,000.

Feigned Scarcity

Researchers have found that when something is hard to get, people want it more. This observation is often manipulated by groups and people who want to sell something. They imply that a product is in scarce supply, even when it is not, in order to increase demand for it.

Example:

A grocery store advertises a brand of yogurt for a reduced price, noting in the ad that there is a limited supply.

Elements of Persuasion

People often try to change others' attitudes through persuasion. There are four elements involved in persuasion: the source, the receiver, the message, and the channel.

The Source

The person who sends a communication is called the source. Persuasion is most successful when a source is both likable and credible. Credible sources are those that are trustworthy or that have expertise.

An expert source is particularly likely to increase persuasion when a communication is ambiguous.

Sources are considered less trustworthy if they seem to have a vested interest in persuading people. On the other hand, sources seem more trustworthy if they provide counterarguments for their position.

The Message

A message is the content of a piece of communication. Some messages are more persuasive than others:

- Messages that provide both arguments and counterarguments for a position are more persuasive than one-sided messages.
- Messages that arouse fear are likely to be persuasive if people think that rejecting the message will bring about a highly undesirable consequence and that accepting the message will prevent a highly undesirable consequence.

The Receiver

The target of a persuasive message is called a receiver. Certain factors influence the persuasiveness of a message for receivers:

- If receivers are forewarned about a message, they are less likely to be persuaded by it.

- Receivers are more likely to be persuaded by messages that are compatible with their own existing attitudes.
- Receivers are less likely to be persuaded by messages that try to alter a strongly held attitude.

The Channel

The channel is the medium used to send the message. Newspapers, television, the Internet, radio, movies, direct mail, word of mouth, magazines, and billboard advertisements are just a few of the different media through which people might encounter a persuasive message. The medium can influence the persuasiveness of the message.

Example:

An article in a newspaper about the dangers of a popular herbal supplement may be more persuasive than a website devoted to the same topic.

Means of Persuasion

Some effective means of persuading people include:

- Repetition of the message
- Endorsement of the message by an admired or attractive individual
- Association of the message with a pleasant feeling

Coercive Persuasion

Persuasion is coercive when it limits people's freedom to make choices that are in their best interest and prevents them from reasoning clearly. Cults use coercive techniques to persuade their members to adopt ideas and practices. Coercive persuasion often involves practices such as placing people in emotionally or physically stressful situations, telling people their problems all stem from one cause, having a leader who is expected to be adored and obeyed, encouraging people to identify strongly with a new group, entrapping people so that they have to increase their participation in the group, and controlling people's access to outside information.

F) Attraction

Interpersonal attraction refers to positive feelings about another person. It can take many forms, including liking, love, friendship, lust, and admiration.

Influences

Many factors influence whom people are attracted to. They include physical attractiveness, proximity, similarity, and reciprocity:

- **Physical attractiveness:** Research shows that romantic attraction is primarily determined by physical attractiveness. In the early stages of dating, people are more attracted to partners whom they consider to be physically attractive. Men are more likely to value physical attractiveness than are women.
- 1. People's perception of their own physical attractiveness also plays a role in romantic love. The **matching hypothesis** proposes that people tend to pick partners who are about equal in level of attractiveness to themselves.
- **Proximity:** People are more likely to become friends with people who are geographically close. One explanation for this is the mere exposure effect. The **mere exposure effect** refers to people's tendency to like novel stimuli more if they encounter them repeatedly.
- **Similarity:** People also tend to pick partners who are similar to themselves in characteristics such as age, race, religion, social class, personality, education, intelligence, and attitude.
- 1. This similarity is seen not only between romantic partners but also between friends. Some researchers have suggested that similarity causes attraction. Others acknowledge that people may be more likely to have friends and partners who are similar to themselves simply because of accessibility: people are more likely to associate with people who are similar to themselves.
- **Reciprocity:** People tend to like others who reciprocate their liking.

Romantic Love

Many researchers focus on one particular form of attraction: romantic love.

Kinds of Romantic Love

Researchers have proposed that romantic love includes two kinds of love: passionate love and compassionate love. These two kinds of love may occur together, but they do not always go hand in hand in a relationship:

- **Passionate love:** Involves absorption in another person, sexual desire, tenderness, and intense emotion.
- **Compassionate love:** Involves warmth, trust, and tolerance of another person. Compassionate love is sometimes considered to have two components: intimacy and commitment. **Intimacy** is the warm, close, sharing aspect of a relationship. **Commitment** is the intent to continue the relationship even in the face of difficulties. Researchers believe commitment is a good predictor of the stability of a relationship.

Attachment Styles

Some researchers study the influence of childhood attachment styles on adult relationships. Many researchers believe that as adults, people relate to their partners in the same way that they related to their caretakers in infancy. (See Chapter 4 for more information on attachment styles.)

Cultural Similarities and Differences

There are both similarities and differences among cultures in romantic attraction. Researchers have found that people in many different cultures place a high value on mutual attraction between partners and the kindness, intelligence, emotional stability, dependability, and good health of partners.

However, people in different cultures place a different value on romantic love within a marriage. People in individualistic cultures often believe romantic love is a prerequisite for marriage. In many collectivist cultures, people often consider it acceptable for family members or third parties to arrange marriages.

Evolutionary Perspectives

Evolutionary psychologists speculate that the tendency to be attracted to physically attractive people is adaptive. Many cultures value particular aspects of physical attractiveness, such as facial symmetry and a small waist-to-hip ratio. Evolutionary psychologists point out that facial symmetry can be an indicator of good health, since many developmental abnormalities tend to produce facial asymmetries. A small waist-to-hip ratio, which produces an “hourglass” figure, indicates high reproductive potential.

As predicted by the parental investment theory described in Chapters 2 and 12, men tend to be more interested in their partners' youthfulness and physical attractiveness. Evolutionary psychologists think that this is because these characteristics indicate that women will be able to reproduce successfully. Women, on the other hand, tend to value partners' social status, wealth, and ambition, because these are characteristics of men who can successfully provide for offspring.

G) Obedience and Authority

Obedience is compliance with commands given by an authority figure. In the 1960s, the social psychologist **Stanley Milgram** did a famous research study called the obedience study. It showed that people have a strong tendency to comply with authority figures.

Milgram's Obedience Study

Milgram told his forty male volunteer research subjects that they were participating in a study about the effects of punishment on learning. He assigned each of the subjects to the role of teacher. Each subject was told that his task was to help another subject like himself learn a list of word pairs. Each time the learner made a mistake, the teacher was to give the learner an electric

shock by flipping a switch. The teacher was told to increase the shock level each time the learner made a mistake, until a dangerous shock level was reached.

Throughout the course of the experiment, the experimenter firmly commanded the teachers to follow the instructions they had been given. In reality, the learner was not an experiment subject but Milgram's accomplice, and he never actually received an electric shock. However, he pretended to be in pain when shocks were administered.

Prior to the study, forty psychiatrists that Milgram consulted told him that fewer than 1 percent of subjects would administer what they thought were dangerous shocks to the learner. However, Milgram found that two-thirds of the teachers did administer even the highest level of shock, despite believing that the learner was suffering great pain and distress. Milgram believed that the teachers had acted in this way because they were pressured to do so by an authority figure.

Factors That Increase Obedience

Milgram found that subjects were more likely to obey in some circumstances than others. Obedience was highest when:

- Commands were given by an authority figure rather than another volunteer
- The experiments were done at a prestigious institution
- The authority figure was present in the room with the subject
- The learner was in another room
- The subject did not see other subjects disobeying commands

In everyday situations, people obey orders because they want to get rewards, because they want to avoid the negative consequences of disobeying, and because they believe an authority is legitimate. In more extreme situations, people obey even when they are required to violate their own values or commit crimes. Researchers think several factors cause people to carry obedience to extremes:

- People justify their behavior by assigning responsibility to the authority rather than themselves.
- People define the behavior that's expected of them as routine.
- People don't want to be rude or offend the authority.
- People obey easy commands first and then feel compelled to obey more and more difficult commands. This process is called entrapment, and it illustrates the foot-in-the-door phenomenon.

H) Groups

Social psychologists consider a **group** to be composed of two or more people who interact and depend on each other in some way. Examples of groups include a baseball team, an Internet listserv, a college psychology class, and a cult.

Features of Groups

Groups usually have the following features:

- Norms that determine appropriate behavior
- Roles that are assigned to people that determine what behaviors and responsibilities people should take on
- A communication structure that determines who talks to whom within the group
- A power structure that determines how much authority and influence group members have

Example:

A college psychology class has norms, such as when people should arrive for class. The professor's role includes teaching, inviting discussion, and administering exams. The students' role is to attend class, listen to lectures, read materials, and pose questions. The communication structure of the class demands that students listen without talking to each other while the

professor lectures. The power structure gives the professor more authority than any of the students. Some students also may have more authority and influence than other students, such as those who are more familiar with the class material.

Conformity

Conformity is the process of giving in to real or imagined pressure from a group. In the 1950s, the psychologist **Solomon Asch** did a famous study that demonstrated that people often conform.

Asch's Conformity Study

Asch recruited male undergraduate subjects for the study and told them that he was doing research on visual perception. He placed each subject in a room with six accomplices. The subject thought that the six were also subjects. The seven people were then given a series of easy tasks. In each task, they looked at two cards, one with a single line on it and the other with three lines of different lengths. The people were asked to decide which line on the second card was the same length as the line on the first card. On the first two tasks, the accomplices announced the correct answer to the group, as did the subject. On the next twelve tasks, the accomplices picked a line on the second card that was clearly a wrong answer. When put in this situation, more than one-third of the subjects conformed to the choices made by their group.

Factors that Influence Conformity

Asch and other researchers have found that many factors influence conformity:

- **Group size:** Asch found that group size influenced whether subjects conformed. The bigger the group, the more people conformed, up to a certain point. After group size reached a certain limit, conformity didn't increase any further.
- **Group unanimity:** Asch also found that subjects were much more likely to conform when a group agreed unanimously. If even one other person in the group disagreed with the group, a subject was much less likely to conform. This was true even when the other dissenter disagreed with the subject as well as the group.

Researchers have found that conformity also increases when:

- A person feels incompetent or insecure
- The person admires the group
- The group can see how the person behaves

Reasons for Conforming

People have many reasons for conforming:

- They want to be accepted by the group, or they fear rejection by the group. In this case, the group is exerting **normative social influence**.
- The group provides them with information. In this case, the group is exerting **informational social influence**.
- They want a material or social reward, such as a pay raise or votes.
- They admire the group and want to be like other group members.

Productivity in Groups

Research shows that productivity tends to decline when a group of people are working on a task together. This happens for two reasons: insufficient coordination and social loafing.

Insufficient Coordination

When many people work on a task, their efforts may not be sufficiently coordinated. Several people may end up doing the same portion of the task, and some portions of the task may be neglected.

Social Loafing

Social loafing, which contributes to declines in the productivity of a group, is the reduced effort people invest in a task when they are working with other people. **Diffusion of responsibility** contributes to social loafing. A person does not feel as responsible for working on a task if several others are also present, since responsibility is distributed among all those present.

Social loafing is particularly likely to happen in the following circumstances:

- When the group is large
- When it is difficult to evaluate individual contributions to a task
- When people expect their coworkers to pick up the slack

Social Facilitation

In some circumstances, individuals perform better when other people are present. This phenomenon is called **social facilitation**. Social facilitation is more likely to occur on easy tasks. On difficult tasks, people are likely to perform worse in the presence of others.

Group Decision-Making

Members of a group are often required to make decisions together. Three concepts related to group decision-making are groupthink, group polarization, and minority influence.

Groupthink

Groupthink is the tendency for a close-knit group to emphasize consensus at the expense of critical thinking and rational decision-making. In a groupthink situation, group members squash dissent, exert pressure to conform, suppress information from outside the group, and focus selectively on information that agrees with the group's point of view.

Groupthink is more likely to occur when groups have certain characteristics:

- High cohesiveness. **Group cohesiveness** is the strength of the liking and commitment group members have toward each other and to the group.
- Isolation from outside influences
- A strong leader
- The intent to reach a major decision

Group Polarization

The dominant point of view in a group often tends to be strengthened to a more extreme position after a group discussion, a phenomenon called **group polarization**. When a group starts out with a dominant view that is relatively risky, the group is likely to come to a consensus that is even riskier. This phenomenon is called **risky shift**.

Minority Influence

A committed minority viewpoint can change the majority opinion in a group. Group members are more likely to be influenced by a minority opinion when the minority holds the opinion firmly.

Deindividuation

*When people are in a large group that makes them feel aroused and anonymous, they may experience **deindividuation**. When people become deindividuated, they lose their inhibitions and their sense of responsibility and are not self-conscious about their behavior. Deindividuation is a major reason for the violence that sometimes happens in mobs.*

I) Helping Behavior

Social psychologists study the circumstances in which people offer help to others.

The Bystander Effect

Research shows that people are less likely to offer help to someone in distress if other people are also present. This is called the **bystander effect**. The probability that a person will receive help decreases as the number of people present increases.

Diffusion of responsibility contributes to the bystander effect. A person does not feel as responsible for helping someone if several others are also present, since responsibility is distributed among all those present.

Influences on Helping

Researchers have proposed that bystanders who witness an emergency will help only if three conditions are met:

- They notice the incident.
- They interpret the incident as being an emergency situation.
- They assume responsibility for helping.

Researchers suggest that people are most likely to help others in certain circumstances:

- They have just seen others offering help.
- They are not in a hurry.
- They share some similarities with the person needing help.
- They are in a small town or a rural setting.
- They feel guilty.
- They are not preoccupied or focused on themselves.
- They are happy.
- The person needing help appears deserving of help.

Reasons for Helping Others

Some social psychologists use the **social exchange theory** to explain why people help others. They argue that people help each other because they want to gain as much as possible while losing as little as possible. The social responsibility norm also explains helping behavior. The **social responsibility norm** is a societal rule that tells people they should help others who need help even if doing so is costly.

Another norm that explains helping behavior is the **reciprocity norm**, which is the implicit societal rule that says people must help those who have helped them.

Social Traps

*When people act in their own interest, they can sometimes help others as well. However, in other circumstances, people can harm themselves and others by acting in their own self-interest. This sort of situation is called a **social trap**. Global warming is an example of a social trap: it is occurring because people act in their own self-interest when they buy fuel-inefficient cars.*